Understanding the Evolving Diversities and Originalities in Rural Social Movements in the Age of Globalization

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Acronyms

CBO   community-based organization

CPI-M   Communist Party of India-Marxist

NGO   non-governmental organization

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to locate the potential social movements have for development in this age of globalization and, specifically, to trace how the politics of collective action at the local level develop as rural social movements to change and shape national and international development agendas. The paper takes as its starting point the diversities and originalities of local rural politics in which rural poverty is a dominant factor, where the nature and direction of local politics are shaped, influenced and, at times, determined by national and international processes and actors. It argues that in so far as these exogenous (to the local) processes and actors have a direct bearing on the nature and outcomes of local development processes, local social movements can by definition have consequences well beyond their immediate locations as they impact upon or are taken up within national and international development agendas.

The paper sees social movements of the rural poor as being strategic in nature, often possessing a degree of coherence and agreement with respect to their aims and objectives and serving as a means through which to change development processes and outcomes to the greater benefit of the poor. It is also suggested that democratization linked to reforms directed at decentralization, civil society and good governance has created a political space in which the agency of local actors is greater today than previously. The potential for poverty reduction is therefore also greater.

The introduction presents the main arguments of the paper concerning social movements, poverty and collective action. The paper then turns to the study of poverty in India and the problems that have been faced due to limitations in the conceptualizations of rural poverty over the past three decades. The need to reconsider the relationship between poverty and social movements is then taken up in a discussion that links the diversities and complexities of poverty with an analysis of the diversities and originalities of the collective action pursued by the poor.

The paper then proceeds to discuss globalization as a set of diverse forces that act and impact upon the rural poor and their poverty. These forces have an important role in the constitution of the political spaces in which the poor find themselves; as such they constitute a set of processes that can facilitate and support challenges by groups of the poor to dimensions of their poverty. It is suggested that globalization provides access to resources for use in the political strategies of co-operation, negotiation and contestation through which rural groups challenge their poverty. The paper looks at the forms their social movements have taken, the forces behind them at local and macro levels, and the nature of their leaders and organizational forms. The concept of "organizing practices" is introduced to capture both the diversity of forms that collective action can take and the argument that poverty is being contested in many ways and in many public spheres.

Underlying the discussion is a belief in the importance of the potential offered by democratization for a more pro-poor development trajectory. While the paper does not argue that successful poverty reduction lies in the hands and mobilization of the poor alone, it does argue that the agency of the poor is central to achieving changes in the practice of politics and policies at local, meso and macro levels. The ability of the rural poor to assert such political agency is analysed through the concept of citizenship and the contemporary discussion of a rights-based approach to development.

While the paper draws upon experiences of collective action in rural social formations across countries and continents with very different political histories, development trajectories and traditions of agrarian studies, the bias is toward the South Asian sub-continent where the author's own fieldwork has, for the most part, been undertaken.

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Résumé

Cette étude a pour but de localiser le potentiel de développement des mouvements sociaux à l'ère de la mondialisation et, plus spécifiquement, d'expliquer comment une politique d'action collective au niveau local se transforme en mouvements sociaux ruraux pour influer sur l'ordre du jour national et international du développement et le modifier. Elle prend pour point de départ la diversité et l'originalité de la vie politique dans les campagnes, où la pauvreté est le facteur dominant et où la nature et l'orientation de la vie politique locale sont marquées, influencées et parfois déterminées par des processus et acteurs nationaux et internationaux. Son raisonnement est le suivant: dans la mesure où ces processus et acteurs exogènes (par rapport au milieu local) ont une incidence directe sur la nature et les résultats des processus de développement locaux, les mouvements sociaux locaux peuvent, par définition, avoir des retombées bien au-delà de leur ancrage immédiat car ils ont des répercussions sur l'ordre du jour national et international du développement et s'inscrivent eux-mêmes dans cet ordre du jour.

L'auteur considère que les mouvements sociaux des pauvres des campagnes sont de nature stratégique, présentent souvent une certaine cohérence et une certaine adéquation à leurs buts et objectifs et servent à infléchir les processus et résultats du développement dans un sens plus favorable aux pauvres. Il semble indiquer que la démocratisation liée aux réformes de la décentralisation, à la société civile et à la bonne gouvernance a ouvert aux acteurs locaux un espace politique qui, en leur donnant plus de latitude pour agir, leur permet de mieux travailler à la réduction de la pauvreté.

Dans l'introduction, l'auteur présente les principaux arguments de l'étude, qui concernent les mouvements sociaux, la pauvreté et l'action collective. Il passe ensuite à l'étude de la pauvreté en Inde et des problèmes rencontrés au cours des 30 dernières années faute d'une conceptualisation suffisante de la pauvreté rurale. Tout en traitant de la complexité de la pauvreté et de la diversité de ses formes et en rattachant ce discours à une analyse de la diversité et de l'originalité des actions collectives menées par les pauvres, il aborde la nécessité de reconsidérer le rapport entre pauvreté et mouvements sociaux.

Il présente ensuite la mondialisation comme un ensemble de forces diverses qui se répercutent sur les pauvres des campagnes et sur leur pauvreté. Ces forces jouent un rôle important dans la constitution des espaces politiques dans lesquels évoluent les pauvres; ce sont autant de processus susceptibles de favoriser chez les pauvres une interrogation sur telle ou telle dimension de leur pauvreté. Selon l'auteur, la mondialisation donne accès à des ressources qui peuvent ensuite être mises à profit dans les stratégies politiques de coopération, de négociation et de contestation par lesquelles les groupes ruraux remettent en cause leur pauvreté. Il considère les formes prises par les mouvements sociaux, les forces qui se dissimulent derrière eux aux niveaux local et national, leurs dirigeants et la nature de leur autorité et leurs modes d'organisation. Il introduit la notion de "pratiques organisationnelles" pour saisir la diversité des formes que peut revêtir l'action collective et montrer que la pauvreté est combattue de multiples manières et en bien des points de la sphère publique.

Dans son raisonnement, l'auteur laisse apparaître sa foi dans le pouvoir de la démocratisation d'infléchir la trajectoire du développement dans un sens plus favorable aux pauvres. Il prétend, non pas que le recul de la pauvreté tient uniquement aux pauvres et à leur mobilisation, mais que l'action des pauvres a une importance cruciale lorsqu'il s'agit de faire changer la pratique du jeu politique et d'obtenir l'adoption d'autres politiques au plan local ainsi qu'aux méso- et aux macro-niveaux. Il se sert de la notion de citoyenneté et du débat contemporain sur les droits

comme angle d'approche du développement pour analyser l'aptitude des pauvres des campagnes à mener une action politique.

Si l'étude se nourrit des expériences d'action collective faites par des mouvements ruraux dans des pays et des continents dont l'histoire politique, la trajectoire du développement et les traditions en matière d'études agraires sont très différentes, elle s'intéresse plus particulièrement au sous-continent de l'Asie du Sud où l'auteur a mené à bien la plus grande partie de son travail de terrain.

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Resumen

El objetivo del presente documento es identificar el potencial de desarrollo de los movimientos sociales en esta era de mundialización y, en particular, hacer un seguimiento del modo en que la política de la acción colectiva a nivel local se convierte, en movimientos sociales rurales que a su vez, cambian y dan forma a los programas de desarrollo tanto nacionales como internacionales. El documento toma como punto de partida las diversidades y particularidades de la política rural local en la que la pobreza rural es un factor dominante, donde la naturaleza y dirección de la política local está concebida, influenciada y, a veces, determinada por procesos y actores nacionales e internacionales. En él se sostiene que, en la medida en que estos procesos y actores exógenos (para los locales) tengan efectos directos en la naturaleza y los resultados de los procesos de desarrollo local, los movimientos sociales locales pueden tener, por definición, consecuencias que trasciendan su entorno inmediato, ya que repercuten en los programas de desarrollo nacionales e internacionales, o son incorporados a los mismos.

En este documento se considera que los movimientos sociales de la población rural pobre son estratégicos por naturaleza, que suelen ser coherentes y acordes con sus metas y objetivos, y que con frecuencia son un medio para cambiar los procesos y resultados del desarrollo en beneficio de los pobres. También se sugiere que la democratización vinculada con reformas orientadas a la descentralización, la sociedad civil y el buen gobierno ha creado un espacio político en que los actores locales participan más activamente que antaño. En consecuencia, aumenta asimismo el potencial de reducción de la pobreza.

En la introducción se presentan los principales argumentos del documento en relación con los movimientos sociales, la pobreza y la acción colectiva. A continuación se estudia la pobreza en la India y los problemas que han surgido debido a las limitaciones en la formación de conceptos de la pobreza rural en los últimos tres decenios. Luego se aborda la necesidad de reconsiderar la relación entre la pobreza y los movimientos sociales en una discusión que vincula las diversidades y complejidades de la pobreza con un análisis de las diversidades y particularidades de las acciones colectivas emprendidas por los pobres.

A continuación se discute la mundialización, entendida como una serie de fuerzas diversas que actúan y tienen percusiones en la población rural pobre y en su estado de pobreza. Estas fuerzas desempeñan un papel importante en la creación de espacios políticos que propician la participación de los pobres y que, como tales, constituyen una serie de procesos que pueden facilitar y apoyar las iniciativas emprendidas por los pobres para desafiar su situación de pobreza. Se sugiere que la mundialización facilita el acceso a los recursos para su utilización en las estrategias políticas de cooperación, negociación e impugnación que permiten a los grupos rurales luchar

contra la pobreza en que viven. En estas páginas se examinan las formas que han adoptado sus movimientos sociales, las fuerzas que los impulsan en el plano local y a gran escala, y la naturaleza de su liderazgo y de su estructura organizativa. Se introduce el concepto de "prácticas organizadoras" para captar tanto las diversas formas que puede adoptar la acción colectiva, como el argumento de que la pobreza puede combatirse en numerosos aspectos y esferas públicas.

El pensamiento subyacente a la discusión es la creencia en el gran potencial que brinda la democratización para una política de desarrollo que beneficie en mayor grado a los pobres. Si bien no se sostiene que la reducción satisfactoria de la pobreza esté en manos de los pobres únicamente, ni en su movilización, se afirma que la participación de estos últimos es fundamental para lograr que se introduzcan cambios en la política, así como en las políticas locales, y a mediana y gran escala. Se analiza la capacidad de los pobres de reivindicar dicha participación política a través del concepto de ciudadanía y de la discusión contemporánea de un enfoque del desarrollo basado en los derechos.

Si bien el documento se basa en las experiencias de la acción colectiva emprendida en entornos rurales sociales de diferentes países y continentes, cuyas historias políticas, trayectorias de desarrollo y tradiciones de estudios agrarios son muy diferentes; se observa una mayor inclinación hacia el subcontinente surasiático, donde el autor ha realizado la mayor parte de su trabajo en el terreno.

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Introduction

In colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms.

Frantz Fanon (1963:46)

Frantz Fanon was writing of the Algerian peasantry, but in many ways, life for contemporary peasants in much of Nepal would appear on the surface to present the same stark choices, providing an explanation for the "Maoist" insurgency that has swept across most of the country's rural landscape within the space of four to five years. Can there be such continuity across continents and over time?

Hamza Alavi (1973a) introduced his famous article on "Peasants and revolution" with Fanon's citation, but writing only a few years after Fanon, Alavi acknowledged that it begged many questions concerning the constitution of a peasantry and the capacity for different elements to take such revolutionary action. For Alavi it was apparent that revolutionary rural social movements were never simply "do or die" struggles of a peasantry united by exploitation and impoverishment.

Similarly, in the case of the Maoist movement in Nepal today, it must be recognized that the bleak simplicity in the picture presented by Fanon is not adequate to reflect the reality of the rural situation or to explain the nature of and support for the Maoist movement. Far from being one social movement of a homogeneous and polarized rural people, there can be seen to be a range of collective actions by which different rural groups are seeking engagement with the government, making use of diverse organizational forms and political practices. Armed conflict is but one of these forms. So is there any explanatory link across 40 years and two continents to be found in the struggles of Algerian and Nepali peasants? Is there any continuity to be identified in these rural social movements?

One obvious feature held in common is that of poverty: an oppressive, absolute poverty rooted in inequity and exploitation. Low life expectancy, high infant mortality, high illiteracy, a significant minority constantly close to severe malnutrition, the condition of poverty shows close similarities. So continuity in poverty as a condition perhaps, yet closer investigation reveals that the similarities in the appearance of poverty, the poverty conditions affecting a majority of the rural population, are deceptive. The processes involved in producing and reproducing poverty differ significantly and the capabilities of the poor in the face of poverty have also changed: the coping strategies of the poor and the means pursued to exit from poverty are both more apparent and more developed than they were 40 years ago. In particular there are significant changes in the political strategies and practices of the rural poor and of those acting on behalf of the rural poor from those Fanon advocated for the Algerian peasantry—namely, revolt or die.

With respect to rural social movements, two significant developments can be seen to have occurred during this period: first, their nature has changed significantly in terms of their form, objectives and the techniques practised; and second, the way in which rural social movements are defined, located and analysed has changed quite markedly. Both reflect the new context for collective action and a restructured political space[1] that have emerged, enabling groups of the poor in particular to engage in different forms of political action, not least through social movements. It is a situation in which local and global processes have increasingly combined to affect the development trajectories of rural locales. The processes, institutions, organizations and relations that give rise to rural poverty have undergone many changes.

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[1]   Political space is defined in terms of three dimensions: institutional channels linking local politics with national politics; a public discourse that acknowledges poverty as a social problem; and acceptance of the agency of the poor in poverty reduction (see Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2001).

Changed perhaps to a lesser degree have been the poor's perceptions of poverty, its causes and who should be held responsible for their problems. While new forms of rural social movements have emerged, the "enemy" has tended to remain the same, as witnessed in the slogans raised and the banners displayed: land to the tiller, security to the tenant, power away from the money-lender, sack the corrupt official, drop the new tax, kick out the government, oppose international business (as imperialists, foreign price fixers, etc.), and so on.

The semi-spontaneous techniques of resistance and challenge also possess a continuity with the past: administrative officials are still blockaded in their offices, angry crowds gather and proceed in demonstrations against kerosene price rises and reduced subsidies, boycotts of markets are mounted, land is occupied by squatters, non-payment of taxes and duties is practised and government-financed loans are not repaid.

It is in the more general forms of collective action that significant change has occurred. Here, there is a clear break with the rural social movements of the first seven decades or so of the twentieth century; changes in their character, their organizational form, the forms of mobilization, the associated discourses and the forms of actions undertaken. The terminology has changed, too; peasant movements have been replaced with land movements, farmers' movements, forest dwellers' movements, environmental movements, women's movements and indigenous peoples' movements, to name but a few.

Rural social movements whose objectives were previously concerned with the defence of a way of life, of a type of production, of a community from the intrusions and demands of a state have been replaced with social movements that cross spatial boundaries and delineate new political and cultural spaces. Where once the state and its institutions and organizations were to be strategically contested and repelled, now the state is seen as much more fragmented in form and nature, with a diversity of interests held by different stakeholders. Today, government can be contested in elections, politicians lobbied, officials subpoenaed, changes to the constitution challenged and the rights of citizenship demanded. Diverse tactics, both within and outside the formal political and juridical framework, can be used at different levels of society and government, and trans-local and transnational alliances can be forged. The objectives of social movements are to change policies, their implementation and their outcomes, rather than to demand the retreat of state and government from "their" locality. The idyll of a past way of life without incursions by external authorities is no longer at the romanticized core of the associated discourse.

It is also clear that today we need to acknowledge the extent to which social movements seek to contest economic control in markets: the "right" to determine prices of inputs or outputs; the returns to labour; the status of particular forms of labour based on gender, ethnicity and migrant status; and the use of institutional constraints to restrict market opportunities for the poor in rural economies. Again, it is the diversity of rural social movements that needs to be captured, how they have become increasingly disaggregated, more specific and more nuanced in their objectives, in the means they utilize and in the alliances of interests they attract.

In order to understand these changes in the nature of rural social movements and in the rural actors involved, it is necessary to break with the peasantry of Shanin (1971), Alavi (1973a, 1973b) and Wolf (1971, 1990), for example; as rural collective action can no longer be reduced to peasant struggles. The spatial delineation of a peasantry that once existed, has been undermined: through seasonal migration; the mobility of younger generations in finding new employment; the diversification and commodification of agrarian production; the emergence of new patterns of consumption with the cultural, social and economic implications that these bear; and, of course, the access to new forms of cultural transmission with television, radio and, on occasion, the Internet at the forefront.

While some speak of a new peasantry, particularly in the Latin American context, I would propose that the retention of the term peasantry reduces the analytical strength of the concept. Not only is it rendered little more than a descriptive category, but it also imputes a greater

continuity with the past than contemporary rural social formations in reality possess. When viewing the diversity of contemporary rural collective actions involving the poor, it is difficult to include this within a general category of peasant movements without collapsing important analytical dimensions in the process. Attaching the term "new" is merely confusing, as it tends to conflate dimensions of both time and nature with respect to social movements.

Retaining the terminology of peasant and peasantry makes these somewhat loose terms for groups with common characteristics, rather than as concepts to be used in a more precise analysis of rural social formations and production systems. For example, one can ask whether a Peruvian household in the Andes with a son working in an electronics shop in Lima, a father working as a three-year contract shepherd in Texas, and a mother with two sons and a daughter cultivating a small plot of land with cochinchilla for the market and maize for household consumption, is a peasant household. I would argue that it is not. The household might be in extreme poverty, but there the similarities with yesterday's peasant household ends. Without denying the continuity to be found in historical processes, it is necessary to develop our conceptual framework if the challenge of understanding the present rural social formation and its politics is to be met. Therefore, today we cannot frame our approach in terms of a homogeneous peasantry with a common experience of poverty, a common set of coping strategies and a common political objective.

Today, the emphasis is on the multidimensional nature of poverty. Viewing poverty as a condition has led to greater stress on the diverse processes which give rise to poverty, the inclusion of rights and knowledge as central constituent elements of poverty and well-being alongside a household's assets, its consumption, its access to common property resources and government services, and its vulnerability to economic and natural crises. Furthermore the move is toward a concept of poverty in relational terms and thereby the establishment of a basis for a more open discussion of the politics of poverty.

What is essentially a re-conceptualization of poverty has its logical parallel in the reassessment of the approaches with which to pursue poverty reduction and the selection of instruments with which to intervene. Here the shift is toward social mobilization and empowerment and away from a more simplistic focus on the delivery of development through administered projects to targeted beneficiaries. Meeting the claims of sharecroppers for security of tenure or of the landless for land redistributed from large landowners requires a very different type of organization to that required for an income generation project or agricultural extension work: a political party, a social movement of the landless or a radical non-governmental organization (NGO). The presence or not of these organizations, the interests they represent, the leadership they possess, their preparedness to take on different political roles and their different capabilities within the local and national public spheres are some of the factors that compose and define the political and social environment. When the analysis of the nature of the poverty faced by the poor and their capacity to mobilize and take action is linked to an organizational map of this environment, it becomes possible to assess the political space available to the poor. In particular, it becomes possible to identify the public spheres in which negotiation, co-operation and contestation by the poor or their representatives can take place within a locality. The same factors also help to explain why rural collective action takes the form of a social movement at certain points and not at others.

What are the consequences of globalization for both poverty and poverty reduction? What possibilities do global processes provide for social movements to contest poverty? In addressing these questions I wish to begin by stating that globalization is constituted within organizations and institutions, and in their policies and practices. To assess the potential for rural social movements to take advantage of factors and processes rooted in globalization requires that these organizations and institutions be seen as constituting a number of public spheres at local, national and international levels, each of which has a potential for having its political nature contested. The extent to which this potential is present is determined by the actors, their interests, their respective capacities and, not least, the degree to which the arenas can be accessed by social movements in some way.

To view rural social movements in this light is to bring them into the contemporary age of globalization. Previously there was a tendency to locate rural social movements within an analytical framework based upon class, with a central debate being whether the peasantry should be understood as a class or as divided by class. More recently the concern has been with the diversity of rural social movements, the originalities to be found in the organizing principles they draw upon and the complex politics of "naming" and "claiming" that characterizes their social and political relations to other social groups and public authorities.[2]

Politics concerns power; the demarcation of new fault lines within the social formation together with new analytical approaches to these calls for new political strategies on the part of the rural poor. As stated previously, the state is no longer the categorical enemy of the rural (peasant) poor. Its claims and interventions can no longer be denied through its overthrow or by repelling it at the borders of peasant society. This is not to deny the potential within the state for serving the interests of the wealthy against the poor, the city against the countryside, the landowner against the landless. It is, however, to accept that the state is more often than not constituted by diverse and often fragmented interests, that it exists at all levels from the national to the local, in the macro and in the micro and, not least, that it is reproduced and contested through the actions and daily practices of social groups and individuals within rural locales.[3]

The politics and practice of the rural poor today is to engage with the state. Whether by means of conflict and open contestation or through lines of patronage and primordialism, the state is a point of focus for a diverse set of strategies on the part of the poor. While we would not rule out that class might underlie such politics, revolutionary class action is not the characteristic of these politics of the rural poor. If we are to understand and support the rural poor in the politics of poverty reduction, then we must critically assess the potential to be found in public spheres present at different levels. We must also recognize that what characterizes much of the politics in these arenas, at least at national and international levels and increasingly at the local level, are the politics of democratization. What is required, therefore, is an analysis of the democracy and democratization present in the political system, of the nature and role of civil society, and of the condition of citizenship. At the same time, understanding the role and potential of rural social movements with respect to these evolving public spheres requires that we draw on the rich body of knowledge on agrarian politics that has developed within peasant studies and (rural) development studies over the past 50 years.

One final point concerning the analytical approach to social movements in this paper needs to be made. I have already talked of social movements, while at other points used the term "collective action". These are viewed here as neither interchangeable nor mutually exclusive. I propose that social movements be viewed as a specific form of collective action, the rise and demise of which is determined by a range of endogenous and exogenous factors. At the same time, there are many forms of collective action that are not seen to take on the forms of action and organizational practices associated with social movements; later, I stress the importance of organizing practices as pre-institutional forms of collective action. Placing social movements within a broader landscape of collective action permits the development and different forms of social movements to be more easily placed within historical processes of development in a country or region. It also permits the phases of collective action, of which the social movement is one, to be examined, and it counters the tendency to treat social movements as isolated and discrete phenomena. Finally, it permits the link to be made between social movements that seek to challenge and rupture a political order and its associated socioeconomic system, and social mobilization that strives to integrate, to work within and to reform a political order and its policies and practices.

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[2] For example see Amanda Hammar's article on "naming" and "claiming" in contemporary Zimbabwean land politics in Webster and Engberg-Pedersen (2001). One should also note the diversity that is found today in past movements, diversities that were not previously noted or fully understood. For example, the work of Ranajit Guha (1983) and of Subaltern Studies in (re-)discovering the voice of the colonized, the "subalterns" and their "histories".

[3] Michel Foucault's discussion of power as the norm is of particular relevance here (Foucault 1980, 1986).

It is in the case of the latter that reformism can be understood as a logical extension of a radical social movement within a political system experiencing a process of democratisation, rather than as being in some way an ideological break with a revolutionary past. India provides a good example of the transition of rural social movements from revolutionary class movements to struggles for equity and the rights of citizenship in a wide range of different public spheres. It also exemplifies the twin processes of changes in movements and changes in their interpretation and analysis.

Rural Poverty and Social Movements in India

In the 1970s, the study of rural poverty in India could be crudely characterized as following two lines: (i) poverty measured in terms of quantitative indicators such as income, nutritional intake, infant mortality and life expectancy and (ii) poverty understood in terms of relations of exploitation and the accompanying impoverishment that centred upon access to and control over land and the returns to one's labour. While the former reflected the dominant tendency to treat poverty as a condition, the latter reflected the form of reductionism illustrated earlier by the stark brutality apparently facing Fanon's Algerian peasants.

India's rural poverty is recognized as being a more complex affair today, not just because the forms of poverty have changed, but because the factors and processes involved in poverty are no longer seen to be reducible to such simplistic explanations. For many, the quantitative approach to poverty is no longer tenable because of its apolitical nature and a general lack of explanatory capacity. However, the crude Marxist approach is largely rejected today for its reductionism and the negative weight of a history of failed movements launched from a variety of leftist ideological standpoints. The failure of socialism to find a stronger base among its natural rural constituency of poor peasants and agricultural workers in India has to be in itself a strong argument for questioning the explanatory adequacy of such an analysis of poverty and its relevance for the rural poor in India today. History raises similar questions in many African and Latin American countries.

In one sense, therefore, the problem must be seen as a definitional one; theoretical approaches being the basis from which to define and identify the poor, and with which to design and implement poverty reduction. On the surface, poverty as a phenomenon appeared readily apparent two to three decades ago, perhaps its complexities only being recognized at that time by social anthropologists. They alone were prepared to take the time and effort to explore the intricacies of social relations, of institutions' workings, of the meanings found within people's own view of their world and the cognitive maps, institutional practices and social actions to which these gave rise.[4]

For mainstream non-Marxist sociologists, poverty was measured by the data derived from farm management studies, nutritional studies and the occasional village study based primarily on detailed survey work. For Marxist sociologists, the concern with the rural poor was subordinated to the debate over the character and role of the Indian bourgeoisie and of the Indian state, as well as the best political strategy for contesting landlordism in the Indian countryside. The rural condition, and thereby the nature—and political role(s)—of the rural poor, was bound up in systems of land tenure and ownership, the forms and use of family labour and class-based dependencies rooted in credit, irrigation, trade and so on. André Beteille with his studies on class formation in West Bengal was perhaps one of the few notable exceptions of the time (for example, Beteille 1974).

Despite the profound theoretical and ideological differences between these two groups of sociologists, there was a considerable degree of agreement as to what the facts of rural poverty were: pri-

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[4]   Again in the Indian context, the work of anthropologists such as Louis Dumont, F.G. Bailey, M.N. Srinivas and many others provided for many years the richest source of qualitative information on rural life and, indirectly, rural poverty.

marily a lack of access to or control over economic resources, a poor return to their labour and productive activities, little or no access to social services, the result being poor nutrition, illiteracy, high infant mortality, low life expectancy, high indebtedness and similar "problems". The main difference between the two groups lay in the causalities argued for in the explanations of these "facts".

Perhaps one of the most simplistic arguments as to the root causes of poverty came from a particular structuralist perspective with its roots in the powerful arguments of dependency theories emerging from Latin America. In this, the more fundamental contradictions that underlay the condition of the poor were to be found at the national level in the relationship between dominant and dependant nation-states. Yet while factors such as the terms of trade between national economies in the South and the North might well have been a factor in the processes leading to poverty, the solutions proposed reflected a strong faith in the willingness of national elites to pursue an autonomous national development strategy that would also serve the interests of the poor. In Latin America and in India, the history of the past three decades suggests that the politics required for such a change were not adequately understood.

At the time the narrow-mindedness of the analytical approaches, the strictures imposed upon the analytical work through the methodologies used and the neglect of political and cultural issues raised little by way of critical comment. In India, this lack of critical reflection and informed thinking paved the way for a "subaltern backlash" in the attempt to fill these analytical and empirical voids. The backlash came in diverse forms, ranging from the participatory methodologies of Robert Chambers to the rewriting of Indian histories (social movements, etc.) by Ranajit Guha and the subaltern historians. Despite its predictability in hindsight, it remains somewhat ironic that a politics of the "left" that sought to advocate the cause of those "below" could so easily fall prey to a critique that presented itself as coming from "below".

Today we can see that both the "left" and the development orthodoxy have taken the critiques and the subsequent strategies and methodologies that have emerged to good, albeit with varying degrees of procrastination and reluctance. In the field of poverty research, the "voices of the poor" have served to take our understanding beyond the structural dimensions of poverty, enabling a far more nuanced analysis. They have also provided the means for developing political strategies for poverty reduction that involve and engage with the poor. On the one hand, it is now clear that income and nutritional indicators of poverty are insufficient to understand poverty; on the other hand, it is the also apparent that the pursuit of class struggle and national liberation has been insufficient for poverty reduction. The complexities of poverty and the subtleties of states and markets require that alternative ways and means be sought.

The importance of new sources of knowledge and a more nuanced understanding of socio-economic processes is well illustrated by a study of rural poverty undertaken in West Bengal, India. Based upon detailed field research, Tony Beck estimated that between 19 and 29 per cent of the poorest households' incomes came from common property resources (Beck 1994:133). Furthermore, the poor were found to be very active in the share-rearing of cattle, based upon the availability of "free" grazing on paddy fields between cultivation. The impact in recent years of increased cropping of land based upon increased secondary irrigation, high-yielding variety seeds, fertilizers and increased credit for farmers had been to reduce the availability of this grazing, thus seriously affecting the livelihoods of many of the poor. Neither conventional farm management studies nor a range of socioeconomic analyses of the consequences of the green revolution for poverty reduction had recorded such activities or the unintended poverty outcomes of other reform processes. Not only does it reveal the problems with standard assessments of poverty and impact assessments, but it also demonstrates the capacity for observers to completely miss the agency of the poor in finding ways, in this case share-rearing, with which to lessen the poverty condition.

A more frequently cited work that illustrates the importance of qualitative and more detailed research is provided by N.S. Jodha's study of two Rajasthani villages (Jodha 1989). Surveys from 1960–1962 and 1980–1982 found that while real per capita incomes were lower in 1980–

1982 than 20 years earlier, there were nevertheless significant improvements in other qualitative indicators of economic well-being. For example, Jodha observed: (i) expanding economic opportunities, including a broad range of employment activities and sources of credit; (ii) increased consumption of goods with high income elasticities (for example, refined rather than unrefined sugar); (iii) investment in consumer durables; and (iv) a reduced reliance on patrons. Again, it is the need to explore the different dimensions of poverty using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies that such research revealed. Not only does it enhance the understanding of poverty, but it also leads to a finer grasp of the processes giving rise to poverty and the ways in which poverty reduction strategies can build upon the perceptions and actions of the poor themselves. The fact that such appalling poverty persists in India suggests that we have not yet absorbed the lessons from such research. Poverty remains a term of general description rather than signalling the point of entry into a detailed analysis of poverty as process, embracing both local and macro levels of policy and practice.

Famine represents the exceptionalism of poverty and Michael Watts provides an important argument for collapsing our understanding into a generic view of famine, in this case in the context of Africa. Again, the analytical need is to identify the processes leading to famine and, at the local level, "the specific social processes which give famines a particular rhythm, motion and timbre" (Watts 1991:16). This linking of processes at the local level to the broader processes of famine and famine relief, of poverty and poverty reduction, requires a knowledge of the political means present for connecting the local political arena into the higher tiers of politics and policy making. It is to find the connections between political action at local and macro levels and change in a country's overall development trajectory, not least the links between social movements and poverty reduction. If the political environment for development is today characterized by democratization, and if democracy is concerned with rights with respect to control over decision making and rights with respect to the equity of resource distribution, then poverty reduction must be seen as an objective in the struggle for democracy in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and democracy must be seen as a means to poverty reduction.

Linking the Conceptualization of Poverty with Social Movements

Narrowing the discussion on social movements through a focus on the underlying objective of poverty reduction requires that the analysis of poverty can capture both poverty as process and the diversity of poverties if it is to be capable of being linked to the diversities and originalities of social movements. Furthermore, if social movements are to be seen as an expression of poor people's agency, then the analysis of poverty must include poor people's own perceptions of well-being and poverty. Finally, in this age of globalization it must acknowledge the linkages between processes and actors at local and macro levels.

Clearly this makes poverty analysis far more complex, as it must now embrace not only economic dimensions such as income and consumption, but also political dimensions such as those of empowerment and rights together with human and cultural dimensions (health, education, status and dignity). In addition there are crosscutting concerns, such as those of gender and environment, which also have important implications for the poor. Is it possible to bring these factors and dimensions into a coherent analytical framework and link this to the discussion of rural social movements?

Recent work by a network of European institutes led by the Overseas Development Institute in London has stressed four dimensions of livelihoods, resources, knowledge and rights (Cox and Healey 2000). Partly building upon this work, the *DAC Guidelines on Poverty Reduction* speak of economic, human, political, social and protective capabilities to which is added security/ vulnerability (OECD 2001). These are summarized in the box below.

> ### Summary of economic, human, political, social and protective capabilities
>
> **Economic capabilities** — The ability to earn an income, to consume and to have assets, which are all keys to food security, material well-being and social status.
>
> **Human capabilities** — Health, education, nutrition, clean water and shelter, which are core elements of well-being as well as crucial means to improving livelihoods.
>
> **Political capabilities** — Human rights, political freedoms, a voice and some influence over public policies and political priorities. Powerlessness aggravates other dimensions of poverty, the politically weak have neither the voice in policy reforms nor secure access to resources required to rise out of poverty.
>
> **Sociocultural capabilities** — The ability to participate as a valued member of a community; that is, social status, dignity and other cultural conditions for belonging to a society. Geographic and social isolation is the main meaning of poverty for people in many local societies.
>
> **Protective capabilities** — The ability to withstand economic and external shocks. Insecurity and vulnerability may be due to seasonal variations, natural disasters, economic crises and violent conflicts. Dynamic concepts are needed because people move in and out of poverty.

Source: Summarized from OECD (2001).

What is significant within these new attempts to define poverty is first, the multidimensional perspective adopted; second, the tight interlinkages between the different dimensions of poverty; third, the diversity of poverties to be found that not least permits the disaggregation of the poor as a category; and fourth, the acknowledgement of the political side to poverty and poverty reduction by a growing number of the central actors in the field of development and aid strategies. It is especially these last two—the disaggregation of the poor and the politicization of poverty—that are particularly relevant here.

The Politics of the Poor in Rural Social Movements

Some years ago Terry Byres, in an important article on the impact of technology and commercialization on Indian agriculture, argued that the sharecropper and the landless agricultural labourer could not be united in their agrarian struggles, as their (class) interests were too opposed. Interestingly, it is an argument that has long been reflected in the organization of the main communist party in India today, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M): one mass organization for the poor farmers including sharecroppers and another for the agricultural labourers.[5]

The problem with such a narrow class-based approach to poverty is that it predetermines the groups to be mobilized, the basis for mobilization and the principal objectives to be secured. While a degree of flexibility in the nature and form of contestation and negotiation might be permissible at the local level, it is the nature of the anti-poverty agenda at the national level that dominates; it is this that serves to determine the nature and cause of poverty and thereby the nature and organization of any anti-poverty movement. So while a political mobilization might be rooted in a concept of poverty as a relationship (exploitation) and its goals might be to challenge key economic, social and cultural structures and hierarchies (landlords, capitalist industrialists, imperialists, etc.), the actual "ownership" of the movement is not so clear. An exploration of the politics of mobilization, of the roles of leading organizations, the nature of the leadership at different levels, and the location of effective decision making all too often reveal it to be a movement in the name of the poor rather than of the poor.

For its part, the more orthodox approach to poverty, which involves applying poverty lines, identifying and statistically analysing those who fall under these, and following trends in absolute and relative frequency of poverty over time, provides a detailed profile of national pov-

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5   In West Bengal, the CPI-M was allowed to have just one body representing both: the Krisak Samitis at local level was for agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and owner-cultivators.

erty. It also provides an important tool for comparing situations internationally and for pro-poor planning, monitoring and evaluation. But as with the class-based approach to poverty, it only provides one set of answers to the question, who are the poor? Diversity within the poor, between different groups of the poor, and the interconnectedness between types of poverties and groups of the poor at subnational level remain unexplored.

If rural poverty can be examined in its diversity and complexity with a multidimensional approach, the implications for the politics of poverty reduction are considerable. Not least, factors of gender, ethnicity, religion, culture and economic status can be explored for their local implications for social groups located in different political, social and economic contexts.

In the 1980s and 1990s, sociological analyses of rural poverty showed many of the characteristics of the theoretical impasse within the broader field of development studies and the seemingly irreconcilable divisions of the agency-structure debate. Fortunately, the actions and political practices of the rural poor have continued to present a source of information and knowledge with the potential to analyse these failures and to suggest ways in which to take the demand for poverty reduction forward.[6] A growing number of authors have recognized the poor's role and agency;[7] however, the balance between actor and structure in the theoretical approach remains a subject of disagreement in much of the literature.

Recognition of the agency of the poor is only part of the need. It remains the case that there is still a general paucity of research-based knowledge concerning the nature and functioning of local politics with respect to poverty and poverty reduction. Not least in the present climate for promoting local development through decentralization, local NGOs and support to local social capital, the dearth of studies on the functioning and processes behind local politics is a serious lacuna in development studies. It is a problem that systematically undermines the identification, design and implementation of poverty reduction programmes, no matter whether they are rooted in a socioeconomic analysis of class or from within the current orthodoxy of PRSPs[8] and attempts to promote pro-poor economic growth.

The requirement is to capture the diversity of poor people's experiences and interests, and the actions to which these give rise, their political agency, while acknowledging the role of socioeconomic structures in shaping the contexts in which the poor find themselves. Political and developmental interventions can then build upon the diversities and originalities of their actions by making them intrinsic elements in strategies designed to facilitate pro-poor development in countries of the South.

Promoting poor people's agency is not to argue that the poor can bring about poverty reduction on their own. Our concept of poverty as relational does not permit the possibility of the poor "pulling themselves up by their boot straps". Rather, it is to recognize the potential role such agency can have when directed at the institutions, relations and structures that generate and reproduce their poverty, and how certain institutions and organizations can be an integral element in challenging the underlying structures involved in relationship to poverty. This point is returned to later. First it is necessary to explore further the processes involved in constituting the context within which such agency can be located.

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[6] Not least, the fact that many of the poor survive and do so on the basis of quite diverse tactics and strategies. The argument that the need for poor people as workers, credit takers, etc., is the basis for actions by the interests of capital to enable the poor to survive is not adequate in itself, although undoubtedly contains some truth in its logic.

[7] See, for example, Villareal (2001), Long and Villareal (1998), Long and Long (1992), and Nuijten (1998).

[8] Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers currently being produced under the auspices of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in order to obtain debt relief under the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) initiative.

Globalization and Rural Poverty

It has long been acknowledged that rural poverty is not constituted at the local level alone. What has not been so clearly understood is the manner in which poverty at the local level has been constituted by actors, institutions and structures whose roots and logics lie outside a specific rural locale. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state tended to be the critical actor and it was examined for its class nature and its relationship to forces of imperialism on the one hand and to those of progressive nationalism on the other. Today it is clear that the state's role cannot be seen in such deterministic terms, that it is certainly more fragmented than previously argued and that its nature and role are far more open to contest and change. It is also the case that today's global actors and processes are intrinsic to the shaping and structuring of poverty at the local level.[9]

What defines globalization for the purposes of this paper? It is framed by a political economy perspective in which the key features are new forms of internationalization of capital, the emergence of truly global markets, the qualitative shifts occurring in patterns of international trade, direct foreign investment and general flows of financial capital. Accompanying these are the shifts in macroeconomic policies and state reforms and in particular the "third wave" of democratization encompassing Eastern Europe, parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa together with the transition states of the former Soviet bloc (Bernstein 1998). The changes in financial markets, production and technology have been reflected in the reorganization and integration of economies within the international system, where states have a shrinking role in macroeconomic policy and management.[10]

For the developing countries, it is assumed that the promise offered by globalization lies within the possibility of reforming the linkages between domestic economies and international markets, not least through structural adjustment policies. Most recently, political reforms to promote democratization have also been added. Thus we find the drive to redirect domestic investment and production according to principles of comparative advantage in international trade, the subjection of macroeconomic policy and management to the discipline of international market competition, and the pursuit of political liberalism to speed the transition toward democracy.

Viewing globalization in this way may well be to neglect approaches that focus more upon the emergence of new global ethnoscapes and the globalization of the "imagination" rooted in the electronic media and mass migration.[11] However, the argument here is that while these latter dimensions of globalization give rise to means and ideas with which to contest poverty, they do not directly constitute root causes of poverty. So while we do not deny the importance and force that can lie in the revelation of the poverty of one's existence, nor the manner in which ideas and information can suggest ways and provide means through which to pursue new-found aspirations, they do not have a direct role in constituting the poverty of the rural poor. If we are to identify the consequences of globalization on rural social movements, it is important that we can locate the essence of globalization as a process with direct consequence for the more material side of poor people's livelihoods, with the provision that political and civil rights are a part of the globalization agenda.[12]

What does globalization imply for rural poverty today? In countries such as India, liberalization policies were aimed specifically at reversing exchange rate and public investment policies that supported import-substituting industrialization. The effects were to favour imports of mainly

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[9]   In both intellectual and popular discourses, "the global" has a prominence today that has not been matched perhaps since similar intellectual and popular concerns with imperialism and empire in the late nineteenth century. One consequence has been that the concept of globalization has attained a theoretical status that is at times hard to explain or justify.

[10] This has in particular been due to financial market pressures on exchange rates, interest rates and public expenditure, the exposure to international competition with comprehensive trade liberalization (imports), and to imperatives of international competitiveness for domestic industry (exports).

[11] See Appudurai (1998).

[12] It should be noted that the paper does, in fact, locate democratization as an important element characterizing the age of globalization. The argument would remain, however, that democracy and democratization are linked to processes of economic growth and, therefore, to be approached from a political economy perspective.

capital and intermediate goods over exports and incentives to export producers, especially in agriculture. At the same time, the rolling back of the state in terms of its size and economic role has been actively pursued to complement structural adjustment policies. The negative impact on the agricultural economy has been most severe for the poor, not least due to the inequities and disparities in the application and implementation of the national economic policies of neo-liberalism. Utsa Patnaik notes that in the area of subsidies,

> the advanced countries organised in the OECD, paid out 336 million dollars of farm subsidies in 1995, (considerably more than India's entire national income), to less than 20 million farmers. The USA alone paid 75 billion dollars out of its annual budget to 2.7 million full-time farmers, or an average of $28,000 per farmer (Patnaik 2000:20–21).

Patnaik writes of the hypocrisy and political power of the dominant economic powers in the international system, as Western European and North American governments work to reduce the subsidy burden on their own budgets but do not wish to see countries like India and China emerge as global players. In the case of India, she points to the unremitting insistence that the government cut the relatively small subsidies on power and on fertilizers designed to aid the agricultural sector, and not least the rural poor. India is but one example. Across Asia, Africa and Latin America similar stories abound,[13] and it is around these that the analyses of social movements as reactions to globalization's effects are developed.

However, while it is both correct and necessary to point to the inequities found in the domestic and foreign policies of governments in many developed countries, there is a problem when the argument subsequently suggests that globalization itself is the problem, with the corollary argument that the critical boundaries in political terms for contesting and challenging globalization as a process are national ones. Such an argument is to reiterate the argument of dependency scholars concerning the importance of the interface between dominant and dependent national entities. For the rural poor, such boundaries are usually not seen as the most critical for their lives; and from a poverty reduction perspective, they are probably right in most instances.

Support for this view can be found in a number of studies that have examined the political consequences of structural-adjustment-induced liberalization for different groups within developing countries. While they have shown that greater economic efficiency has not been an outcome of opening up to international competition, they have also documented that the benefits stemming from the reforms have gone to particular political and business groups. These groups have frequently been able to augment or adapt prior rent seeking activities, or else have been able to generate new ones, a recurrent example being through the privatization of public sector enterprises (Lewis 1994; Boone 1994), or through changes in the marketing of their production (the case of Egypt in Abdel Aal [1998]; Bush [1998]). As Peter Gibbon (1997:72) describes it, liberalization has expanded the scope for certain, especially parasitic, forms of "African capitalism"—above all those involving export and import—without enhancing the prospects of "capitalism in Africa".

What this is to argue is that it is not so much globalization per se that is at fault, but the political nature of the system responsible for deciding policies, providing services and allocating resources: globalization is part of the context rather than the cause. In this way, we can see that it is the possession of power found in the politics of distribution of gains and benefits, rather than globalization itself, that should be contested. Opposing globalization will not only fail to change the internal policies that reproduce poverty, but it can also promote forms of nationalist politics that serve the vested interests of those with disproportionate control over existing resources and assets within a country. Furthermore, the possibility of building transnational linkages that can serve to strengthen the political capacity of the poor to contest their poverties is lost not least in undermining support for democratization.

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[13] For example, see Abdel Aal (1999) on Egypt, Gibbon (1997) on Tanzania and Villareal (2001) on Mexico.

While juxtaposing the national to the global is somewhat naive from a political economy perspective, it is a tendency that takes considerable strength from certain arguments concerning the cultural politics of globalization. But as with the causal arguments tying economic cost and poverty to globalization, there are problems with the political argument that globalization is undermining or threatening people's cultures. Just as the economic gains and costs of globalization have been unequally shared, the cultural consequences have also been experienced in markedly different ways. Attempts to mobilize around culturally derived demands that globalization should be "rolled back"[14] cannot be assumed to serve the interests of the poor and other marginalized groups in a country. This is not to deny the attraction of populist appeals to national cultural values and to oppose global (that is, Western) cultural hegemony. It is, however, to recognize that the national politics of such movements rarely serve the interests of the poor—least of all, the rural poor—despite leaders' claims to the contrary.[15]

It is not only nationalistic leaders who appeal to such populist ideas that are to blame. On the part of academics and development practitioners, the imperative of capturing voices of the poor and of drawing upon local knowledge, local social institutions and the local community has for some tended to elevate all that is deemed local to a status that subordinates other forms of knowledge and other modes of explanation. While it might be claimed with some credibility that analyses must include the voices and interpretations of the poor within a locality in any study of action and social movement,[16] when these become the principal basis for explanation, then one must question the correctness of the approach. Unfortunately, the recent tendency for it to be politically correct to accept the validity of explanations provided by "subaltern voices" has resulted in support being given to a politics rooted in gender, ethnic or other identity forms that is often more chauvinistic than liberal, promotes exclusion rather than inclusion and is anti-poor in its sectarianism.[17]

Alain Touraine is one author who has documented the rise of such politics over the last hundred years or so, a politics that is characterized by a growing dislocation of political institutions induced by an increasingly global and impersonal economic order on the one hand and an increasingly radical assertion of national identity on the other. It is a process that leads to the replacement of the nation as a free political subject by a nation that is identified with a particular ethnic group, race or population regarding itself as God's elect or its equivalent. A liberal or revolutionary national consciousness thereby gives way to a national consciousness that is extremely aggressive and internally exclusive or homogenizing.

After a long historical period dominated by political objectives associated with progress and development, by voluntaristic, constitutional and juridical models of social organization, the world from Touraine's perspective is entering into a phase "where the appeals to ascription are more audible than the projects of achievement" and with "increased importance being accorded to ethnic, national and religious identity at the very moment when there is so much talk of the internationalisation of the economy, of information and of science" (Touraine 1996:11).

Here lies a fundamental danger in the age of globalization. The globalization of the international economy and the internationalization of flows of production, consumption and communication have prompted the development of defensive nationalisms and social movements that seek to oppose the perceived threats to a specific cultural, social and territorial identity. This is as true for the developing world as it is for the developed. In its extreme form, it has resulted in a national consciousness in which nationalism leads to a country appearing to close in on itself

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[14] The national culturalism in the rhetoric of economic policies by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India is a good example.

[15] There are quite clear links in such movements to the dependency school of thought, and not least to the work of Bill Warren and the argument for national capitalism as providing an alternative development trajectory.

[16] For example in Arturo Escobar's (1995) argument of another development.

[17] For example, the promotion of certain chauvinistic forms of Hindu politics in India has been supported by a legitimacy accorded by intellectual analyses of social movements whose aim was to contest colonial or Western constructions and interpretations. I believe similar criticisms can be made of academic work on peoples' movements in Central and South America and elsewhere.

and to reject those seen to belong to more than one society as "strangers"[18]; they have no unique or central identification but rather manage a plurality of identities. So it is the fear of globalization that is promoting a world increasingly "dominated by the growing dissociation between a global economy and fragmented cultural identities that are mobilized by political authorities which arrogate legitimacy to themselves" (Touraine 1996:16).

At the core of the problem is that globalization is blamed for the impoverishment—cultural and economic—facing national communities which then support social movements that lead to an even greater fragmentation of societies and polities, further exacerbating the existing inequalities and disparities. To break this pattern, the conceptual need is to challenge the presentation of globalization as inherently anti-poor; the political need is to oppose an agenda dominated by the desire to defend national interests. The problem is that national political leaders and organizations often have a vested interest in mobilizing the population behind such agendas. The search for a political exit strategy from radical nationalism has led Touraine to a focus on the potential in civil society as the place in which the articulation of the economy and cultures takes place and where the politics of fragmentation, closure and exclusion can be challenged. The problem is to find ways in which interests can be organized and mobilized to challenge policies that are anti-poor without falling back upon cultural identities that also lead to the promotion of isolationism and difference, exclusion and intolerance.

This raises the fundamental question of whether there is a democratic path out of this particular problem? If we refrain from seeing globalization as an inherently negative factor and accept a certain "historical inevitability", then the political need is somewhat changed. Rather than to counterpoise the national to the global, the task is instead to disaggregate the different processes at work and to identify the public spheres in which institutions and instruments can be contested in order to change outcomes to the advantage of the poor and marginalized groups within a developing country.

For example, while we saw how Utsa Patnaik focused upon the Indian state at the national level and inequities and costs of globalization as experienced at the all-India level, the state of West Bengal illustrates how the introduction of a set of reforms since 1977, designed and implemented from a pro-poor perspective (decentralization of government, land reform, civil service reform and financial decentralization) have enabled the poor to benefit significantly from economic growth in the agricultural sector. Expressed in another way, a new political space for poverty reduction enabled the poor to challenge and change their poverties through a pro-poor state government. In this instance, a development process that embraces and is embraced by globalization in terms of political ideas, changes in production and production technologies, and movements of people and capital, has yielded pro-poor outcomes in terms of the access to and control over the benefits stemming from the resultant economic growth.[19]

The ambiguity of globalization's potential to impact the rural poor can also be found in Latin America. On the one hand, the consequences for market and production systems have undoubtedly been the cause of hardship for the rural poor through the withdrawal of subsidies, detrimental price movements, growing unemployment and underemployment, and migration from countryside to town; these all serve to strengthen inequality within the countries and an increased economic and political marginalization of the rural poor. On the other hand, globalization appears to have opened up opportunities and new possibilities for collective action, including social movements representing the interests of the rural poor, thus creating a new potential for change and improvement.

This latter potential for contesting poverty and pursuing pro-poor social movements in the age of globalization is well illustrated in David Slater's discussion of the ways in which social movements today seek and serve to promote a politics of non-territorial democratization of

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[18]   Strangers as seen in the sociological sense of Georg Simmel and others (again, see Touraine [1996]).

[19]   See Webster (2001).

global issues (Slater 1998). For example, feminist and environmental movements have constructed new forms of organization and solidarity that connect transnationally, thus enabling activities that extend beyond the territorial confines of a given country with the political advantages this brings. How far this is a tendency that can involve other forms of social movements is not yet clear. Feminism and the environment are acknowledged as transnational concerns that offer the basis for movements that can be easily adapted by academics and activists into local struggles and located within local discourses. Furthermore, the accumulated knowledge around these concerns, the fact that they have been so intensively researched, debated and politicized, and the fact that they are now mainstream development concerns has led to such struggles being "found" throughout the developing world. Nevertheless, the struggles are real; they do seek to challenge inequities, and the actors involved do contest, negotiate and collaborate in pursuit of their interests in new as well as old public spheres.

More recently democracy has come to possess a similar high profile, with the "globalization" of empowerment and participation through self-help groups, user groups, local government authorities and similar organizations. It is also characterized by both local and transnational activities involving both indigenous and exogenous actors to the specific locality in which democratization is being pursued—for example, at the national level with demands for democratic structures, regular elections and good governance reforms, or at the local level through decentralization of government and an active local civil society.

Again, the nature and role of a rural social movement pursuing democratic objectives with claims to be global in objectives and/or support is not always clear or obvious to the observer. Only a detailed study of such a social movement can verify whether it is genuinely a movement of the rural poor and for the rural poor on the basis of evidence as to the objectives, activities, content and membership when such a movement reaches the point of being part of a global public sphere, a global civil society.

The need is to understand the local within the global. As Slater argues, the global (transnational) and the local need to be brought together in any analysis of social movements, "the inside and the outside of the geopolitical are not to be realistically seen as separate, but as overlapping and intertwined in a complex set of relations" (Slater 1998:381). This is certainly true if an attempt is to be made to develop a conceptual approach that can capture the complex basis of social movements. It is also necessary for developing a political strategy through which the objectives of a social movement of the poor can be pursued.

On one hand, therefore, we need to keep the analysis of the social movements grounded in the social and economic realities of the poor within their locales. On the other, we need to recognize that the actors, institutions and practices within a specific locale are integrally linked to actions and processes at other levels within the society and economy, involving a diverse range of exogenous actors such as NGOs, donors, intellectuals, activists and others. We need to link this approach with Touraine's argument that the way out of radical nationalism, political fragmentation and isolationism lies in civil society and in democratic contestation where globalization per se is not part of the problem. This raises the possibility of a democratic path on which social movements can both secure the institutions and organizations that can challenge the inequalities and disparities of fragmented societies, and can promote an alternative politics that links and draws upon the progressive processes and forces at local, national and international levels facilitating, enabling or actively pursuing poverty reduction. Then we can speak of the positive side of globalization from the perspective of the rural poor.

Democracy, Civil Society and Social Movements

It is the case today that the social movements of the rural poor that dominate the current development agenda, global and local, are those concerned with democratization.[20] While diverse in nature, not least with respect to the issues raised and the manner of their organization, they have in common a desire for greater equity in the access to and control over decision making in areas that the poor hold central to their situation and condition. Expressed differently, the politics of poverty reduction today has democracy at centre stage.

However, in the current literature on development and democracy there is remarkably little agreement as to what particular form of democracy to advocate: as to whether to pursue it as a normative ideal or more pragmatically as a set of institutional procedures, and not least, as to how much significance to assign it in bringing about development.[21] In his book *Democracy and Human Rights*, David Beetham seeks to cut through the polemic with an argument that there are two defining principles at the core of democracy: popular control over collective decisions and political equality in the exercise of such control, not least in the outcomes. He argues first that these can be seen to underlie the majority of definitions of democracy; second that the struggle to realize these two principles has been at the heart of popular struggles waged under the banner of democracy where the desire has been to extend popular control over decisions about collective rules and policies; and third that the principal objections of the opponents of democracy have always been against any dilution of their exclusive control over such decisions and against the claim that the ordinary person is as entitled to an effective voice in public affairs as the wealthy and privileged.

The argument for a collective sharing in the determination of the rules and policies for the society of which one is a member captures the dimension of self-determination in which one is in control of decisions about one's life, rather than being subject to another. At the same time, it distances itself from libertarian and anarchistic individualisms with their stress on the interdependency of individuals in social living, and it avoids reducing the idea of power to one rooted in structural relations. This permits a degree of (collective) political agency to remain.

Undoubtedly on the surface there is a strong universalism to this position and its notion of progressive historical change. Not surprisingly, postmodernism and the general "anti-foundationalist" current within philosophy and the social sciences argue strongly for the misconceived basis for such an argument. In particular, they oppose the idea that the significance of a historical form of society and the organization of a political system can be found outside its historical and sociocultural boundaries and that there might be a deeper historical determinism to social movements transcending such boundaries. For example, the "equal worth of people" is seen by postmodernists to be an assumption that has no place outside a liberal democratic order and has no independent validity. Consequently it cannot be used to justify such an order. They argue that it comprises "a political conception of the person rooted in the public culture of a liberal society", which "many if not most hierarchical societies might perceive as liberal or democratic, or in some way distinctive of the Western political tradition and prejudicial to other cultures" (Beetham 1999:14).

There is, therefore, a fundamental philosophical and political issue to be faced here with respect to the rural poor and the identification of political strategies for changing poverty, whether it is through co-operation, negotiation or contestation. The argument for challenging poverty within a given historical context can become caught between three sets of philosophical-cum-political arguments: one rooted in liberal concerns with principles of equity, rights and freedom; a second rooted in structuralist and Marxist arguments based upon the irreconcilability of interests where social and economic relations support inequality, oppression and exploitation; a third left in the fluidity and impermanence of actors' own cultural lives and identities. When approaching questions as to how best to pursue poverty reduction, what support to give the poor, what

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[20] Ranging from the World Bank's current interest in social capital, through to more radical advocacy movements led by NGOs, trade unions and others.

[21] See, for example, Törnquist (1999), Leftwich (1995, 2000), and Held (1995).

instruments and institutional means with which to intervene and whither rural social movements in all this, it is important that we are not caught in a debate comprising a crude polemic shaped and restricted by these three arguments.

Our interest in social movements of the rural poor is rooted in powerful contemporary concerns with poverty, its breadth, depth and the general failure to date to reduce significantly the number of the poor or the extent of their poverty. What is important in Beetham's concept of democracy is that it supports the argument that in the longer term, poverty is incompatible with effective and equitable government based upon democracy. Democratization in developing countries can, therefore, begin to change a political system such that a new political space emerges for the poor to engage in strategies of co-operation, negotiation and contestation in order to challenge the different dimensions of their poverty. This is to argue in clear opposition to Samuel Huntington's thesis of more than 30 years ago that the degree of government is more important than the form of government (Huntington 1967).

By now it should be clear that democracy's potential for poverty reduction is not rooted in the simple argument that the rule of the majority will lead to the rule of the poor. The poor are far from being a homogeneous group and are rarely united politically, as their poverties are diverse in nature and their interests are fragmented. It is in democracy's capacity for promoting or enabling inclusion in collective decision making and in the collective ownership of outcomes that the potential for pro-poor development lies in the countries of the South.

Poverty, when viewed as complex and multidimensional, can be seen to be the basis for many practices and forms of action on the part of the poor and of the non-poor, particular dimensions defining and affecting specific groups of the poor and, in turn, giving rise to particular (diverse and original) practices. In so far as poverty is relational, not least in the nature and manner that resources and assets are controlled, utilized and accumulated, then it is political.

The politics of poverty goes beyond questions as to the moral acceptability of poverty to address more fundamental questions concerning the possession and use of power at the heart of the political system. The consequences of the use and abuse of power (from a pro-poor perspective) are to be seen in the outcomes at different levels, from the local to the international. The same processes that secure these outcomes are themselves (re-)produced through the transmission mechanisms that link or divide, include or marginalize individuals, institutions and organizations within and between the different levels of a country's social formation. If women are excluded from decision making in the household, it is but a reflection of their marginalization in the community, their lack of presence and representation in government organizations, their lack of rights in the constitution or judicial system of the country.

Social movements can capture diversity. But more than that, they can capture the interests that cut across dimensions of poverty at a particular historical moment. In this way, a social movement possesses a capacity to go beyond the pursuit of a set of core objectives by bringing groups of the poor into a form of collective action with its roots in one or more dimensions of poverty and its consequences. As stated in the introduction, viewing social movements as a form of collective action counters the tendency of treating a social movement as a discrete and isolated social phenomenon. It permits the rise and demise of a social movement to be understood within the framework of a broader process of challenge and change: for example, in pursuit of poverty reduction through land reform, through rights to access and use forests, through women's rights to own and inherit land. It also recognizes that political activism does not end with the demise of a social movement; not only can it assume new forms of political work, but the lessons and outcomes achieved in one public sphere around a particular set of issues and demands can be transferred into other arenas as the existing political space permits.[22]

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[22] See Webster (2001) for a discussion on how political agency experienced on the part of the poor can be transferred from one public sphere to another.

Finally, democracy, when seen as being rooted in popular control over collective decision-making and political equality in the exercise of this control, must be accepted as being incompatible with widespread poverty. Although there is little substantive evidence for a direct causal relationship between democratization and pro-poor development, it can nevertheless be seen to provide changes in political system, the types and strengths of different actors present at different levels within the system, and generally a new political space for the poor to pursue poverty reduction. The diverse political strategies pursued on the part of the poor might range from broad forms of social movements through to quite localized forms of collective action in pursuit of political favours and support; however, they express new forms of agency in a changing context.

Rural Social Movements and Collective Action

In order to explore further the relationship between social movements and democracy, it is necessary to explore further the concept of collective action used in the paper. This can then help in the identification of some form of order and logic for the diverse forms that rural social movements have taken.

Working with the multidimensional and relational concept of poverty discussed previously, we can limit the range of phenomena we wish to include under collective action to those involving negotiation, collaboration or contestation over resources, assets, rights and access to or control over knowledge. Collective action for poverty reduction is understood here as action that seeks to challenge the situation with respect to these dimensions; it concerns challenges to the control over and distribution of resources, assets and services, including the delineation of rights and thereby of individuals' and/or social groups' status in relation to others within the social formation.

Geof Wood (2000) has suggested that the livelihood condition of an individual involves four sets of institutions: the state, the market, the "community" and the household. Community is in the loose sense of a local social grouping. The assumption is that an individual's relationship to each of these four is central to his or her livelihood condition, but that the relationship to each is problematic, not least in that it is subject to constant challenge and thereby potential change. Livelihood success for the individual requires a degree of effective and functional interrelation between all four corners and it therefore cannot be achieved by breaking relationships with, say, aspects of the state or with international actors found to operate in markets. The figure below expresses the relationship as a diagram.

Livelihood condition of an individual
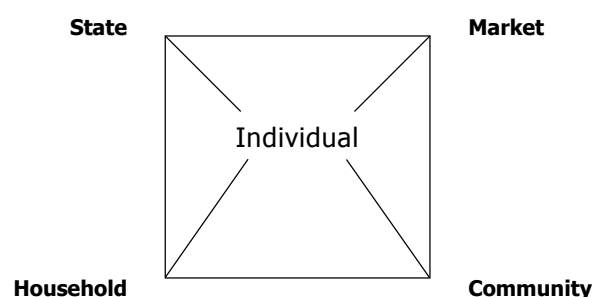
Source: Wood (2000)

To achieve change in an individual's poverty condition requires different forms of action by either the individual or from an actor working on the individual's behalf, such as an NGO or donor agency, or a combination of these. Actions will be based upon the perceived nature of the problem and the means deemed both necessary and acceptable in trying to pursue a solution.

Continuing within this approach, social movements can be seen as a form of collective action that draws upon concepts such as community, ethnicity and common dimensions of poverty, as well as drawing upon more specific associational linkages between households sometimes referred to as forms of social capital. In the majority of cases it is to be found that social movements as collective action seek to challenge aspects of the state's and/or market's relationship to those who constitute the social movement.

As a form of collective action, we find social movements in which individuals share a common orientation toward changing a particular set of social relations, institutional practices or policies. In addition, the individuals have a shared identity that is linked to their situation and the desire to change it, and an associated discourse that includes definitions of their problems and their causes, shared aims and objectives, explanations for the "legitimacy" of their actions and the "illegitimacy" of those of their adversaries, and so on. More often than not, there is a degree of organization to the social movement despite apparent informality. Finally, the apparent homogeneity of a social movement might well obscure a degree of heterogeneity that underwrites numerous tensions within the movement. These might well come to the fore as contexts and circumstances change along the way.[23]

Our argument, therefore, seeks to locate social movements within a broader framework of collective action and to suggest that social movements—their rise, nature and demise—are in some way linked to broader political and longer historical processes. There is, however, a body of thought that speaks of new social movements from a theoretical standpoint and suggests a rupture with any past history of social movements, seeking to treat them instead as unique phenomena. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) critique of the central role of class and class consciousness in traditional Marxist analyses was an important contribution in this theoretical development. The proliferation of "new social movements" was evidence to them of the construction of new cultural identities that informed and shaped the new struggles, breaking with class-based struggles and their mass organizations of workers, peasants, etc. In the development context of the South, these emerging movements were seen to be a demonstration of the failure of the state and of traditional political parties and their mass organizations to counter and offer alternatives to market-based liberalization. New social movements were, therefore, to be understood as attempts to reassert some form of control and autonomy by people over their lives.

Not least these new social movements were seen to counter-pose local culture, local knowledge and local practice to the economics and culture-based knowledge systems and practices of the North and its experts. The role of discourse figures prominently in this theoretical approach to new social movements, for example, in the power of "naming" and in the use of language in claiming rights or demanding change. But it amounts to a body of thinking that ultimately removes social movements from having a role to play in any more general development trajectory and instead views them as reactions to such development. As Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke write: "the new anti-development grassroots movements that emerged in the 1980s, and the analysts that are representing them within academic literature, are not searching for new *development alternatives* but rather *alternatives to development*"(Mohan and Stokke 2000:19).

The role of cultural politics and of identities in social mobilization and both local and national politics is not to be underestimated and certainly not to be ignored. However, approaches that conceptualize (new) social movements as being modern points of resistance to the state and the market and treat local civil society as a relatively autonomous site of material and cultural resistance and empowerment impose an intellectual stricture on the discussion of social movements. As argued above, the rise, nature and demise of social movements must be located within a broader set of political and historical processes and contexts. This, in turn, requires that the conceptual approach to social movements not be limited by attempts to treat them as distinct and isolated social phenomena categorized according to particular points in history and possessing their own autonomous logics.

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[23] The discussion of collective action and social movement is inspired by Anker (2000).

In some ways the problem of treating social movements as isolated and distinctive phenomena can be addressed through the question of whether rural social movements are best seen as peasant movements. As James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2001) point out, while Eric Hobsbawm has proclaimed the death of the peasantry, the postmodernists have turned the peasantry into a postmodern category with its own popular culture, a social identity that is ethnic rather than class based, and an engagement in localized day-to-day struggles in defence of itself. Clearly both of these perspectives argue for a clear break with the past with respect to the nature of rural social movements.

Here we return to aspects of an earlier discussion in the paper in that Petras and Veltmeyer reject the notion of such a break and argue for a class perspective whereby peasant actors' agency "is as much affected by the economic and political structures which constrain them as by the forms of their own consciousness [how they view themselves]". And they continue:

> In these terms, the peasantry is viewed as neither pre- nor postmodern but as a highly modern social class, a catalyst for anti-systemic change and a dynamic force in an ongoing modernization process. In short, they are perceived as engaged in a struggle to create a more just and better form of society, in which they are freed from oppression and in control of an economy that secures for all members of the society a livelihood and a decent standard of living. A respect for their dignity and cultural values is an important aspect of the enhanced position occupied by peasants in this socio-economic framework (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001:91–92).

Again, it is an argument that seeks to restore the peasantry to centre stage in the discussion of rural social movements. While agreeing with the analytical argument concerning the nature of agency involved, this paper has argued that the suggestion that rural households can today constitute a peasantry that acts as class either for itself or in itself is no longer justified or useful when considering poverty reduction and rural social movements. To this it must be added that it is notoriously difficult to mobilize the poorest of the rural poor separately from their immediate employers, wealthier neighbours and kinsfolk, creditors, local shopkeepers, etc. It is notoriously difficult to target the poorest of the rural poor in the design and implementation of development interventions that seek to focus on this group. Finally, the poorest of the rural poor rarely take political action on their own part alone. For these reasons, the poorest of the rural poor should not be analytically collapsed into the broad category of the rural poor and even less into that of "local community".

Therefore, the diversities of poverty to be found within an agrarian society are to be seen as reflecting class distinctions, not only within that society, but within any "peasantry" present as well. Similarly, the diversities found in rural social movements are to be seen as reflecting the diversities in rural poverty. Finally, recognition of social movements as but one form of collective action on the part of the rural poor broadens not just the field of investigation, but also the scope of possibilities considered in the pursuit of poverty reduction.

Therefore, when we observe small cultivators with very similar landholdings and economic interests in northern Zimbabwe that are today in sharp conflict along lines of ethnicity and as to whether they are "newcomers" to the locality, we can analyse the situation through the diversities of the poverty dimensions they face and experience.[24] Similarly when we observe in Mozambique small farmers that have been divided among themselves due to the reallocation of land that occurred usually by default during the civil war, we can again build an understanding of the history of poverty and the politics of inclusion and exclusion that have surrounded households' capabilities in areas such as rights, knowledge and local networks through which they can secure assets such as control over land.[25] Importantly, we can locate the collective actions and social move-

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[24] The creation of Lake Kariba forced large numbers to migrate to neighbouring areas—sometimes with permission from the government and/or local authorities, sometimes not. The ensuing conflicts have often been violent. See Hammar (2001).

[25] See Blom (2001, 2003).

ments with their appeals to ethnicity, traditional leadership institutions and similar within a broader political and historical framework, but one that expresses itself in terms of the possession or lack of certain capabilities at a specific point in time.

In these ways the divisions can be seen as being secured through underlying economic and political structures that shape both the locality and the broader development trajectory of the country. However, they also possess a degree of agency on the part of those involved that is reflected in the forms of mobilization, the discourses used and the actions undertaken. While we can reject the postmodernist argument for isolating and reifying these latter characteristics of social movements, we can also reject the concept of a homogeneous and unified peasantry and approaches that seek to apply the generic nomenclature of peasant movements to contemporary rural social movements.

Support for viewing rural social movements as part of and shaped by their position within a larger development process, while at the same time possessing diversities and originalities that are rooted in the agency of their participants, comes from another source. This source is a comparison of contemporary experiences with social movements in the South with that of the developed North, drawing on the latter's experience with social movements and other forms of collective action in different types of democratic conditions.[26] The comparison is important as much for the similarities to be found as for the differences.

In the developed North, contemporary social movements are less preoccupied with struggles over the production and distribution of material goods and resources and more concerned with the ways in which their societies generate and withhold information, and produce and sustain meanings among themselves. They tend to be characterized not by utopian visions of a changed future, but by the present, by trying to reflect their objectives through their own practices and organizational forms. These means often become ends in themselves. John Keane writes that

> social movements tend to comprise low-profile networks of small groups, organizations, initiatives, local contacts and friendships submerged in the everyday life patterns of civil society. These submerged networks, noted for their stress on solidarity, individual needs and part-time involvement, constitute the laboratories in which new experiments are invented and popularised (Keane 1998:171–172).

They tend to be identity- and issue-based rather than class-based phenomena—contesting aspects of public policy at different levels of society and government, more often than not seeking to (re-)negotiate rights and responsibilities between citizens and the state.

Rural social movements in the South reveal on the surface a somewhat different nature, first in the peasant rebellions of the early and mid-twentieth century, more recently in the movements of farmers (for example, India), bonded labourers (for example, Nepal), landless (for example, Brazil), migrants (for example, Zimbabwe) and similar. There would appear to be little similarity with the types of social movements in the North described by Keane. Obviously the economic condition of rural social formation in the South is characterized by far more extreme forms of poverty and exploitation, and the political spaces for social movements are radically different. However, if we look at the evolution of agrarian studies and histories of agrarian social movements, a more nuanced picture emerges.

Agrarian politics was one of the central concerns to emerge in peasant studies in the 1970s.[27] At first the debate was whether peasant social action was to be explained in class terms or "peas-

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26 Such a comparison is not so common in recent years, not least as rural social movements in the two locations have tended to be treated as separate fields of research despite studies in the South drawing upon intellectual traditions that have their roots very much in the capitalist transitions and democratization in the North.

27 One can take the emergence of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* as representative of the formation of such a body of studies drawing together a number of approaches and lines of work dealing with "peasant questions".

ant-as-a-social-class" terms, but changes in the agrarian politics of the South and the challenge of new theoretical approaches soon broadened the discussion. On the one hand, rural social movements rooted in the politics of pre-capitalist and colonial formations, in national liberation struggles and in the transition to capitalism became less apparent. On the other hand, the politics of culture and identity and the desire to rewrite histories from the "subaltern" perspective have helped to support the postmodern and poststructural tendency in much of today's literature on agrarian societies and their politics. The subsequent polemical debates have brought the study of rural collective action and social movements a long way.

Subaltern studies in the Indian context emerged as a powerful counter to the economism of many analyses of rural social movements. Not least, it brought the insights of Antonio Gramsci's analysis of politics to bear upon the peasant struggles of pre- and postcolonial India. The role of ideology, of popular culture, the need to analyse alternative histories and alternative sources of history and the need to emphasize the (autonomous) agency of peasant actors were all part of a powerful break with a politics rooted in analyses of the mode of production and the organic composition of capital.[28]

Similarly, the insights that James Scott brought to rural social action, revealing the extent and depth of resistance and, in many ways, rediscovering a line of analysis and a sensitivity to peasant households stemming from the neo-populism of A.V. Chayanov, later work by Teodor Shanin and much within the field of agrarian social anthropology (Shanin 1971; Scott 1985). Everyday resistance presented peasants and other culturally and socially subordinated groups as being constantly in a state of resistance to those to whom they were subordinated. Collectively, the many forms of everyday resistance practised are argued to represent a more significant form of rural politics than more open episodes of collective action, rebellion and confrontation.

Theories and analyses of forms of everyday resistance carry an epistemological legacy that has not always been acknowledged by its advocates. It can be traced in the concept of the peasantry, the defence of peasant ideologies and culture, the tendency toward a romanticism of the agrarian poor and the aggregation of peasants into communities in which there are differences in wealth and household condition, but no deeper structural differences in position. These are clear weaknesses. But there are also important lessons as to the realities of peasant politics that must be learned, not least the physical reality of identity politics.

Bernstein writes in the foreword to Arun Sinha's studies of rural struggles in Bihar:

> caste does, indeed, need to be given independent treatment in any serious examination of rural Bihar. It cannot be simply reduced to class. Where there is an opposition of caste Hindus and untouchables (say landlords and sharecroppers, or rich peasants and landless labourers), it possesses a deeply-rooted force which can give rise to social conflict—if it arises—a violence which is startling in its savagery and intensity. That force exists independently of class relationships, but it intensifies class contradictions (Sinha 1991:vii–viii).

Sinha presents in detail five different social movements in rural Bihar. What distinguishes them is not so much the poverty that gives rise to frustrations nor the demands that they present—mostly it is the leadership and the organization that mobilizes, articulates and organizes the movement.

> Exploitation and cruelties produce what, in common parlance, is termed the 'accumulated anger' that causes a revolt to break out. … What, after all, is meant by 'accumulated anger' but accumulated consciousness of oppression? How can consciousness originate in a victim of oppression in a given area without the aid of an external ideology, that is, a greater, higher consciousness? … The ideology gives him direction, courage, tools to analyse his situation, awareness. Yet not all the knowledge he possesses about the conditions

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[28] Arguments as to whether sharecroppers and agricultural labourers could be joined within the same political movement or programme was one of the classic Marxist debates in agrarian politics in India. See Byres (1981).

of his existence can be credited to the ideology; some awareness of these conditions has predated its arrival for, in the absence of such an awareness, the ideology would not have developed in the first place (Sinha 1991:212).

The existence of this pre-ideology awareness of injustice is witnessed in social banditry. This by its nature is neither political, nor informed and disciplined by an ideology. "Considering such cases, the conclusion is not only that awareness of oppression predates the outbreak of revolt, but also that individual rebellion is possible before mass revolt" (Hobsbawm 1965:212).

So here, first, we have a progression in collective action as it moves from one form to another. Second, we have the possibility of diversity in the targeting of such actions (the identification of the "other" the "enemy") that ranges between state, market, certain other "communities", certain other households or any combination of these. Here, control over market outcomes or the distribution of government services is often the immediate focus. And third, there is the role of leadership in mediating, articulating and mobilizing around collective actions.

Leadership in Rural Social Movements

> *Some students of peasant movements tend to take the view that peasants make their own rebellion; this is a romantic view and underrates the role of leaders.*
>
> *Arun Sinha (1991:215)*

Leaders in the social movements investigated by Sinha were seen by the movements' participants to be good, often of higher caste and socially "respectable", not from the families of the poor or from those of autocrats. They were held to possess an authority that matched that of the oppressors, often reflected in their educational background, and were not prepared to resign their futures to fate. Activism in organizations had come through contact with individuals already subscribing to a particular political approach, and because they often come from families in social decline, they were already sensitized to injustice in a way that brought them close to the mass of the people.

Here we have both agency and a set of socioeconomic and political structures shaping the course of involvement in local struggle. Again, local struggle can be seen as collective action that emerges in the form of social movement, a particular collective action rooted in specific local social and economic dynamics that are found within a political space conducive to such a form of collective action. Leaders play a key role within the rise of a social movement in framing the associated discourse and not least in the formulation and articulation of the objectives.

The work of Hamza Alavi and Eric Wolf pointed to the key leadership role of the middle peasantry, both for their economic capacity to take on a leadership role and for their ability to articulate the grievances and aspirations of social groupings of the poor into a language of protest that was focused and linked to specific demands. "There are two components of the peasantry which possess sufficient internal leverage to enter into sustained rebellion. These are (a) a landowning 'middle peasantry' or (b) a peasantry located in a peripheral area outside the domains of landlord control" (Wolf 1971:269).

These two groups provide the recruitment basis for a "tactically mobile peasantry" for peasant movements even though the middle peasantry was not the group assumed to be the focus for revolutionary activity (as it was seen to be the most conservative). Education is, however, seen as a key factor here, both for the type of knowledge that it provides and for the exposure to outsiders and their ideas that it can give.[29]

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[29] Both Eric Wolf and Alexander Solzhenitsyn document in the case of Russia how middle peasant soldiers were those most open to external influences from the industrial proletariat.

The growing role of educated individuals, and of educated youth in particular, links into the changing nature of rural social movements and their new geopolitical configurations. The combination of poverty and disaffected educated individuals has always been a potent combination. The consequences of greater mobility and electronic flows of information have been to bring the knowledge of inequities closer to the poor at the same time as inequities have been increasing. Differences between town and village, rich and poor, have given even greater potential to those who appear to possess a capacity to interpret and to mediate with the "outside" world. As early as 1971 Wolf wrote:

> peasant rebellions of the twentieth century are no longer simple responses to local problems, if indeed they ever were. They are but the parochial reactions to major social dislocations, set in motion by overwhelming social change. The spread of the market has torn men up by their roots, and shaken them loose from the social relationships into which they were born. Industrialization and expanded communication have given rise to new social clusters, as yet unsure of their own social positions and interests, but forced by the imbalance of their lives to seek a new adjustment. Traditional political authority has eroded or collapsed; new contenders for power are seeking new constituencies for entry into the vacant public sphere. Thus when the peasant protagonist lights the torch of rebellion, the edifice of society is already smouldering and ready to take fire. When the battle is over, the structure will not be the same (Wolf 1971:273).

David Slater reworks this argument concerning the relationship between the local and the non-local, but with new analytical insights as to how the processes work that give rise to rural social movements. Here, what is of particular interest is the manner in which educated individuals within the rural locale are seen to be the communicators between a specific locale and the national or even international levels beyond the territorial confines of the nation state (more specifically, the manner in which teachers in rural areas, appointed by the state, become the purveyors of radical politics that seek to challenge that same state and the political system and market outcomes that it supports).

James Petras picks up on the same theme when he writes:

> [A] new generation of educated' (primary and secondary) peasant leaders has emerged over the last decade with strong organisational capabilities. A sophisticated understanding of international and national politics, and a profound commitment to creating a politically educated set of cadres (Petras 1997:10).

But we should not assume that it is always a progressive form of politics that arises through such leadership, one that is inclusive of social and cultural diversities, participatory and empowering. In particular, teachers should not be seen as automatic advocates of progressive political philosophies. Drawing from European experience, Touraine points to the fact that "it was among solid categories such as school teachers—people sensitive to the national theme...that the Nazi party scored its most striking successes" (Touraine 1996:12). Seymour Martin Lipset used the expression "extremism of the centre" in order to describe the tendency for the politics of the middle ground in society to seek radical alternatives to the political status quo. Clearly, leaders respond as much as any other actors to the broader political processes at play. Therefore, once more we return to the need to analyse the social, political and economic nature of the specific locale in question, the different social groups and relations to be found, the nature and status of identities observed and articulated within the local population, and the impact that broader political and economic processes have upon local livelihoods.

The significance of teachers would appear to lie in their capacity to link the local with the non-local, the endogenous with the exogenous. They provide the local discourse associated with the movement, and they bring and interpret macro discourses to local public spheres; they provide the capacity to link or network with other local groups and to constitute the broader organiza-

tional framework for the movement; they are capable of bringing outside resources to a local movement; they serve as mediators and brokers between other social groups and the broader organization; and they have a similar role between the movement and outside actors, including the organizations of government (legislative, executive, judicial, military, etc.), donor agencies, international organizations, etc.[30]

Organization and Social Movements

While leadership is one important factor, an equally important element in many ways linked to leadership is that of organization. Social movements as a form of collective action have consistently developed some form of organizational basis, although not all approaches to social movements stress its importance. Spontaneous action and social protest is unorganized in so far as it lacks defined procedures and clear means-ends relations in its actions and objectives; and certainly there tends to be very little accountability within such actions and protests.[31] In the collective action approach argued in this paper, these actions are pre-organizational forms of social movements; they are preliminary forms or expressions of collective action that suggest a potential for later becoming a social movement should the political space, the relations of solidarity, or the pressure of poverty, continue to facilitate its emergence.

In so far as it is possible to generalize, social movements possess organizational forms with clear goals, often with strict organizational structures and hierarchies, and a strong code of conduct as part of their organizational ethos.[32] Around this organizational core are individuals with a common orientation toward changing a particular set of social relations, institutional practices or policies. Second, they share an identity that is linked to their situation and the desire to change it. Third, there is an associated discourse that both frames and shapes their perceptions and actions.

The fact that a social movement requires an organizational form raises the question of whether an organization can itself be a form of social movement. The contemporary emphasis in development upon participation, empowerment, mobilization and advocacy points directly to some NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) as having a character and role not dissimilar to that of a social movement. Furthermore, today's local organizations are more often playing an important role in shaping the local political space; they also provide formal and informal institutional channels with which to connect a local political arena to other localities and to higher levels of action and politics. And they also constitute a means by which social and economic relations are constituted and contested.[33]

The following table adapted from Norman Uphoff groups different forms of local organizations[34] on the basis of their political relationship to the state on the one hand, and to the individual on the other.

In the case of the collective action sector, it has the common feature of the individuals' roles being that of members with implicit reference to notions of solidarity, to the sense of shared

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[30] The "Maoist" movement in Nepal and the Sendero Luminoso in Peru are two examples of social movements rooted in the politics of rural poverty in which teachers play a leading role (Wilson 2000). The central role of teachers in the communist movements in West Bengal has also been documented (Cooper 1988; Webster 1986, Ruud 1999; Bhattacharya 1999). Here, studies have revealed the historical phases of the movement from left-wing "terrorism" against the British through to their formal inclusion within the contemporary left front government at local and central levels.

[31] In strict definitional terms, an organization is a specific type of institution that is set up around defined procedures that help to ensure reliable performance and that specify means-ends relations in a rule-like manner that helps to ensure accountability (adapted from Scott 1995:48–49).

[32] Bert Klandermans and Sidney Tarrow (1988:5) point to three important dimensions of organization: (i) organization decreases the cost of participation; (ii) it is important for the process of recruitment of others; and (iii) it is assumed to increase the chances of success. Good examples are provided by peasant movements in the 1950s and 1960s in West Bengal, the Sendero Luminoso in Peru and the Maoists in contemporary Nepal.

[33] It is also the focus of donor agencies with the current stress upon empowerment, participation, a dynamic civil society, social capital, etc.

[34] Uphoff calls these organizations "institutions". To maintain consistency within the paper, I have changed the term to "organization".

problems and objectives, and the possibility of common identities. Another common feature is the aim of using collective action as a means to change the relationship of individuals in economic and public spheres central to their interests, for example, as labourers, producers, artisans, consumers and so forth.

Continuum of types of local organizations by sector

Public sector		Collective action sector		Private sector	
Local administrative	Local government	Membership organizations	Co-operatives	Service organizations	Private business
-- Organizations of local organizations --					
Bureaucratic	Political	Self-help (common interests)	Self-help (resource pooling)	Charitable (non-profit enterprise)	Profit-making (business enterprise)
------------------------ Individuals' roles in relation to certain local organizations ------------------------					
Citizens or subjects	Voters and constituents	Members	Members	Clients or beneficiaries	Customers

Source: Uphoff (1993)

In Uphoff's schema, organizations are categorized not only by their relationship to individuals, but also to the state. In this way, they can be seen to be not just a part of the political system, but a reflection and indication of the type of system as well. Several links can now be made: to the discussion of Geof Wood in which the individual is seen in set of relationships linking him or her to state, market, community and household; to the argument that social movements are part of a broader range of collective actions where the presence or absence of local organizations is a critical factor to the nature of the political space; and to the idea that the political agency of the poor within an organization (as member, citizen, client, etc.) is a critical factor for poverty reduction. In this light, organizations are to be seen as different forms of collective action, part of the relationship between groups of individuals and the state, the market, the community, even the household. Today, it is common for researchers to map institutionally a country, a district, a village locating the organizations present, their interrelations, their powers and resource flows and so forth. In this way, service delivery, the status of women and the type of governance can be explored politically and sociologically. Social movements are now a standard part of such an exercise.

However, there remains still another category of organization that is only lightly touched upon, one that arguably is central to the collective action sector, but is rarely acknowledged: "organizing practices". They are more often than not neglected, as they lack any formal organizational form and are pre-institutional in nature. Yet their potential for poverty reduction and for bringing about significant changes in the livelihoods of the poor is considerable.

Organizing Practices, Social Movements and Public Spheres

In the current wave of democratization the tendency is to pose the question, If the rural poor are to bring the diversity of their situations into the public spheres of development on a daily basis, what institutional practices and organizations should be the basis for their participation? A problem with such a question is that it tends to assume that if there is no CBO, appropriate NGO or political party (that is, one of Uphoff's local organizations) that can be described to be either of or for the poor, then the poor are politically inactive and have yet to be empowered. The argument continues that new organizations of the poor need to be established, and new institutional practices based upon participation and empowerment need to be developed.

If, however, it is accepted that the poor already possess political agency, that they already engage in a variety of sociopolitical practices through which they avoid the descent into (greater) poverty or vulnerability, then the question should change. We should instead be asking, how do the rural poor engage in social action outside of clearly observable social movements? How do they organize to co-operate, negotiate and contest with others, both poor and non-poor? How do they engage with the institutions and organizations that reconstitute and secure the interest and rights of the non-poor while marginalizing or "downgrading" those of the poor?

Poststructural organization theories (including postmodernist approaches) provide interesting insights into people's actions, but as has been pointed out earlier, they also possess significant limitations. While they meet the need to explore the ideas guiding people's organizing behaviour and enable the discourse associated with their actions and strategies to be better understood, they leave us at a level of multiplicity and fluidity in explanation that is not particularly helpful when searching for a logic that can explain the past and provide a prescriptive guide for poverty reduction in the future.

As indicated previously in this paper, one of the more serious problems with such an approach is that apparent abandonment of the study of power relations is located within specific sociopolitical fields or contexts. Also neglected is the logic of economic relations within which people knowingly or unknowingly find themselves located—as sharecropper, as female agricultural labourer, as marginalized small farmer, etc. As Monique Nuijten argues, the discursive practices through which social actors decide upon certain courses of action, the social conditions in which they are formulated and implemented, and the outcomes that they produce are embedded within fields of power (Nuijten 1998:13). But these do not always give rise to collective action with the clear organizational form of a social movement or a member-based organization.

> People often follow fragmented organizing strategies, without collective projects ever becoming crystallized. They work with one set of actors and then another, develop strategies and change them in the course of action. Another important point is that collective action has the notion of common goals and well-defined objectives. However, in many cases common goals do not exist and the objectives develop in the course of the organizing process...although these fragmented forms of action are much harder to grasp and difficult to put in place, they form an important part of the organizing process. Hence, when I talk about organizing practices, I refer to the manifold forms of organizing, whether they be individual or collective. Yet my ultimate interest lies not in the isolated organizing actions, strategies, and performances in themselves, but in understanding their logics in specific socio-political contexts (Nuijten 1998:14).

Just as social movements can be viewed in terms of the flow of action that brings rural demands around land, agricultural wage rates or agricultural input prices onto the national political agenda, so too can we study organizing practices in the flow of action through which the rural poor seek to secure their livelihoods through negotiation, co-operation and contestation in local, less visible ways. This is the study of "small politics" and of the creativity in "everyday organizing practices" (Nuijten 1998:15). It is a study that acknowledges both the agency of the poor and the importance of the sociopolitical context in facilitating and shaping that agency. It is collective action found at the pre-social movement phase, pre-institutional in nature, or in the post-social-movement phase (or after the collapse of member-based organizations such as a co-operative movement) where such practices continue to be utilized but within a changed context.

The argument that the rural poor have a continuous capacity to challenge authorities, landowners and other "powers" through small-scale political manoeuvrings and not just large-scale organized social movements, is supported by Scott's work referred to earlier and by theoretical arguments that perceive hegemony as never being total, but rather have "taken a focus on the partiality, the

eternally incomplete nature of hegemony, with its implication of the cultural as a contested, contingent political field, the battlefield in an ongoing 'war of position'".[35]

Economically, it is to recognize that market economies are continuously being confronted and questioned with respect to their own boundaries and that the rural poor, as marginal landowners, tenants, artisans and sellers of labour, contest economic control with respect to different aspects of their livelihood activities (for example, various forms of credit, wages, market prices, access to common resources, etc.). It is not to argue that the poor can ever attain political or economic control over their situation, not least by definition the poor would find such a task improbable. As Villareal argues, we have to be careful not to misconstrue the idea of economic control, as there are many in the field of development who propose that the poor can gain such control through cost-efficiency formulas and budgetary measures. However, such thinking is to reify the idea such that control is possessed in absolute terms and total control is therefore possible.

Far from it; as Villareal argues, economic control is only ever partial and circumstantial and its possession is under continual negotiation. Therefore, it is in fact being underrated as it is only perceived in the sphere of the powerful; and the degree to which those living in poverty, in the "margins of markets", can wield control is in reality hardly considered (Villareal 2002).

If we were to change our expectations and to investigate more closely, we see that "people manage a degree of control in particular situations by manipulating definitions and changing interpretations, by joining unions which can represent their interests and whereby they can wield greater leverage, by networking and by playing one authority against the other" (Villareal 2002:3).

In fact, there is a wide range of such organizing practices used by poor people in seeking to assert, contest, negotiate or co-operate in securing assets, resources, returns to production or labour and much more. Economic control is, therefore, not merely being contested from below, it is being exercised from below, albeit seemingly far away from global markets and financial circuits.

Returning to the political role of organizing practices, if we move beyond the overt challenges to policy and political practice made by social movements, how might the organizing practices of the poor enter the new political space for collective action emerging under democratization? Organizing practices are as diverse as the dimensions of poverty they reflect. The politics to which they can give rise will be in the public sphere(s) that constitute the political space. At the local level, village councils, school committees, neighbourhood groups, local shop owners, co-operative societies, political parties and branches of trade unions will constitute one or more arenas in which the politics of resource allocation and service provision, and access to these on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, economic position, etc., will be played out.

In a similar line, Keane argues for the importance of public spheres found "within the nooks and crannies of civil societies and states" (1998:169) that provide the basis for challenging power and control.[36] While interconnected and networking in character, public spheres are seen to have a fractured quality, which is not overcome by tendencies toward greater integration, and the decline of geopolitical boundaries as discussed by Slater (1998). Rather, there are multiple public spheres operating at different levels, leading to Keane disaggregating them into micro-public spheres at the substate level; meso-public spheres at the level of the territorial nation-state framework; and macro-public spheres that normally encompass hundreds of millions and even billions of people enmeshed in disputes at the supranational and global levels of power.

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[35] Gupta and Fergusen (1997:5) commenting on recent interpreters of Gramsci, such as Williams (1977) and Hall (1986). Also see Foucault's discussion of power, and of power as the norm (for example, Foucault [1986]).

[36] A public sphere is

> a particular type of spatial relationship between two or more people, usually connected by a certain means of communication (television, radio, satellite, fax, telephone, e-mail, etc.), in which non-violent controversies erupt, for a brief or more extended period of time, concerning the power relations operating within their given milieu of interaction and/or within the wider milieux of social and political structures within which the disputants are situated. A public sphere has the effect of desacralizing power relationships. It is the vital medium for naming the unnameable, pointing at frauds, taking sides, starting arguments, inducing diffidenza (Eco), shaking the world, stopping it from falling asleep (Keane 1998:169–170).

Again, it is an argument for stressing the need for and presumably presence of diverse forms of contestation present within particular spheres or arenas. It reiterates the analytical need to locate arenas according to the power relations present (social, political or economic), the practices to which these give rise, and the forms of poverty that prevail. Then we can understand and study the possible forms for collective action, from organizing practices through social movements to popular political organizations, according to the both the agency of the poor and the political space in which they find themselves.

Micro-public spheres in particular are a vital feature of all social movements. They are initial points through which large-scale institutions' capacities to secure the co-operation of subordinates can be challenged and where the "norm" can be more easily questioned, particularly in more distant rural areas. What Keane describes as the "dominant codes of everyday life" can be called into question by submerged networks of small groups, organizations, initiatives, local contacts and friendships. The tea stall, taking food in the fields, informal gathering of friends and passers-by in the evenings, are points where the cohesiveness of local societies, their social and political institutions, the ordering of lives and the reproduction of poverty that they sustain, are potentially threatened. From these, public disputes emerge and more organized challenges can take root. Here is the political agency that feeds social movements and challenges poverty through the capacity of democratic politics to enable collective actions in pursuit of diverse but related interests.

Such agency is not to be restricted to the here and now of politics and life; often the purpose is to influence political processes in the broader sense and not just through social movements. Basing their actions upon a history of opposition to the state, groups of the rural poor have seized the opportunity in Bolivia to access and control the newly created municipalities in some areas (Robinson 1998; Jeppesen 2001). This is far from being an unambiguous process undertaken by a homogeneous rural poor; the Law of Popular Participation has excluded many marginalized groups through its system of registering organizations permitted to participate in the decentralized political process, and women and others still find their poverties subordinated to the poverty of others. Nevertheless, it suggests that the history of collective action on the part of the poor has moved into new public spheres, with new forms of mobilization and organization albeit rooted in a rich history of struggles for union recognition, citizenship, land rights and similar.

In Mozambique, collective action around issues of land rights has demonstrated a capacity on the part of the poor to utilize both "traditional" forms of authority such as the chiefs and more "modern" juridical and political institutions in their pursuit of land lost during the civil war (Blom 2001). In Zimbabwe, landless migrants have drawn upon the government proclamations over land rights and the associated discourses to claim lands in areas on the margins of government control, where "older" migrant groups have asserted their interests through the Rural District Councils (Hammar 2001). In West Bengal in India, Adivasi (tribal) women have drawn upon their marginal status as women, tribal migrant labourers to organize not only their own silkworm production co-operatives on land previously controlled by the Department of Forestry, but also to gain control of the local Forest Protection Committees established under the national programme of joint forest management (Webster 2001).

Such evidence is sufficient to give recognition to the political agency of the poor as a central element in processes of poverty reduction and one that is growing in its capacity to influence states and markets within the broader framework of politics as the political space changes. The general political environment, the attitude of government and the dominant political discourse, not least as to the nature, extent and reasons for poverty within a country, all have a strong bearing on the political strategies of poor people. Institutional reform, notably democratization and decentralization, has constituted the most popular way of seeking to integrate the poor into the political system in recent years, but weaknesses in this reform process are also emerging. Most significant is that very few of the decentralization programmes implemented to date have sought to connect the poor more directly with the functioning and practice of government at the macro level. Power has not yet been devolved, the poor have not been politically empowered in

any systematic way, and poverty has not become a priority of political, economic and social life in the majority of countries despite statements to the contrary. These failures do not yet undermine the democratic project as a means through which to pursue sustainable poverty reduction, but they do demonstrate the strength of the forces opposed to greater popular control over collective decision making and political equality it exercise.

A Rights-Based Approach to Development and the Case for Citizenship

If contemporary thinking about rural poverty reduction through the mobilization and agency of the rural poor lies within the framework of democracy and democratic solutions as opposed to revolutionary[37] ones, then at the core of this thinking lie two key discussions, one on rights and the other on citizenship.[38]

Rights have long been central to a diverse array of political movements with various development objectives and paths in mind. While the rights-based appeals of anti-colonial movements swiftly became lost in the broader struggles of the Cold War, caught up in the ideological critiques and counter-critiques of human rights "principles", its end has seen the re-emergence of the agenda, albeit still rooted in ideological arguments and new orthodoxies.

Rights-based development brings two important strands of work into development theory: the concern with human development, within which much of the contemporary work on conceptual approaches to poverty has evolved; and the broad literature around issues of good governance, participation and citizenship.

Amartya Sen's (1981) study of famine and the development of his entitlements approach took poverty and well-being clearly beyond the possession of commodities. The approach recognizes that people's capabilities are a function of their ownership of endowments (land, labour, etc.) and their exchange entitlement. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (1989:9–10) defined entitlements as "the set of alternative bundles of commodities over which one person can establish…command." Here, we find an expression of the diversity of poverties that people can experience and the dynamic of poverty that sees people moving in and out of poverty with the vulnerability—rooted in insecurity, risk and stress, self-respect and a sense of defencelessness—that this can imbue. It also provides a point of entry into discussing the politics of poverty: the relations (of power) implicit in the concept of entitlement and of the contested nature of social individuals' control and ownership of endowments.

Linking entitlement to resources into livelihood frameworks enables attention to focus upon the structures, institutions and processes that mediate between rural households, within rural communities, operating and functioning at different levels, to enable or deny access to assets, resources and services. Here we can see the organizing practices of the poor, not least those used within the local political spheres to secure such access. Here we can see the negotiations, contestations, co-operation and collaboration that occur in micro- and meso-public spheres, and in the more hidden ways of social interaction (caste, kinship, "social capital", etc.). These range from the association, mobilization, networking and linkages that can carry a social movement from a collective interest to a demand, to a demonstration, to a land occupation and to land rights; but also from a letter given by a local political leader, to a loan from a bank or a clerical job for a son.

For some years, it has been argued that political participation could be enough to change the ways in which these structures, institutions and processes function. This would make administrations "leaner" and more responsive through civil service reform and other changes. Similarly, democratization and electoral reform could change the state to be more accountable and

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[37] What some would term as "reformist".

[38] This is to assume that mere procedural and institutional reforms to bring about a democratic system are recognized as being necessary but far from sufficient.

to support emerging pro-poor policies. A dynamic civil society could introduce the linkages between household and state necessary to maintain checks and balances and aid in the communication of rights and responsibilities between the governors and the governed. While these have brought about some changes, they have not been to the hoped for extent.

The more recent argument for a rights-based approach to development has focused upon citizenship with the argument that rights are generally discussed in terms of being legally defined by the state, and citizenship claims are, therefore, made against the state (Pettman 1999). But rights and citizenship also go beyond the state, not least in the argument that citizenship can also be understood to define an individual's status within any political community and the practices in which they are permitted to engage. A political community is a

> collectivity whose members share a common system of governance, which includes both the institutions of government and the processes of collective decision-making…it simply refers to the existence of arrangements to enable a collectivity to govern itself, and the recognition of such arrangements but other polities. Individual members of the community who are entitled to participate in these political arrangements have the status of citizens (Turner 1993:6).

Citizenship is, therefore, constituted in the individual's relationship to all four institutional points identified by Wood (2000): state, market, community and household. It can embrace global notions of citizenship and, not least, the appeal of some social movements to rights that are global rather than merely national. The notion of community in particular transcends the local when it is based upon ideas, identities and forms of exploitation that are regional, national and transnational. This introduces the possibility of universal rights rooted in humanity being introduced into claims against specific nation-states by their citizens, that is, a claim to a "higher" citizenship status. Discourses associated with human rights—and increasingly the rights of the poor—frequently invoke such global dimensions. It also provides a basis for those without the status of citizenship in the country in which they find themselves—for example, migrants, refugees, tourists and others—to claim rights within a state's national boundaries.

It is not to be seen as reflecting a withering away of the state. In the contest between global and national citizenship, it is clear that the state retains the dominant position in defining and legitimizing the rights and responsibilities of citizens. In this way, the national level remains the site of principal contestation for those who seek to maintain or change the existing social and economic ordering of things. However, there are other sites at meso and local levels of government being contested as well, with other techniques, resources and associated discourses to be found in addition to those used in national public spheres. It is a scenario composed of multiple sites and forms of (collective) action that reflect but are not necessarily reduced to the diverse forms of poverty being contested. Such a scenario reflects a political system that is experiencing democratization.

Originalities and Diversities in Rural Social Movements: Democracy and Rural Poverty Reduction

Can including social movements and, more generally, collective action bring change to the rural poor within a democratic framework? Can we accept that radical change in rural areas no longer demands a classical revolutionary push from the countryside?

In this paper it has been argued that democracy is to be seen not as a set of procedures and institutions, but as a political system based upon the collective control of decision making and with political equality in the exercise of this control. As David Beetham argues, history suggests that such a system is not to be seen as a model derived from Western political philosophy and practice. It also suggests that democracy can provide the necessary political environment for sustainable poverty reduction in so far as it calls for the poor to be party to the control of collective decision making. In this, the agency of the poor is a necessary but not sufficient factor; agency in bringing

about the democratization of a political system and agency in articulating the interests of the poor within the political system. In this paper, it has also been argued that such agency is found in a range of collective actions in which social movements are one, albeit important, form.

A second theme of the paper has been the need to reconsider how poverty is conceptualised; in particular, the diversity of poverty and its multidimensional nature. While recognition of the complexity of poverty raises methodological problems concerning its measurement, its comparative analysis and the management of both quantitative and qualitative data, it allows for the possibility of taking into account the agency of the poor brought to bear on poverty reduction on an everyday basis. It accepts that the diversity of poverties can be the basis for a diverse and regular presence in the public spheres in which policies are decided. Within democracy, as defined above, the potential is greater for the poor themselves to undertake this task as the political space for their pursuit of poverty reduction is greater.

A third theme is that the poor cannot achieve poverty reduction on their own. The relational nature of poverty precludes this, and the underlying structures that have shaped the political environment prevent it. While their political agency can be a force for change, not least in challenging the forms of political and economic control that determine the nature of decision making in the key dimensions of their poverty, the formulation of collective political objectives on the basis of that agency, the role of institutions in which social and economic relations are embedded and the ideological discourses that are associated with these, are factors that lie beyond the immediate control of the poor. The power of poverty as the norm is extensive, and attempts by groups of the poor to change economic or political control over its dimensions are contested; political or economic control can never be possessed in absolute terms by the wealthy today or by the poor in the future.

Many writers concerned with globalization have seen the position of the poor worsen as the forces controlling economic and political power have become more remote from the rural localities in which the poor find themselves. Financial and production systems have become international while the poor remain fragmented as workers, consumers and producers at the local level. In this paper the argument has been that it is not globalization per se, but the politics of control that need to be the focus of our analysis. Globalization is not something that can be broken down into constituent elements and rolled back. All too often such arguments tend to focus upon the importance of national boundaries with a belief in the capacity for national elites to defend their own peoples, whether for reasons of self-interest or in defence of self-determination. While in a few instances this might have been the case, these tend to have been where there were strong anti-democratic regimes whose development also fulfilled the objectives of Western powers during the Cold War. In most Latin American and African countries, national elites have displayed wanton disregard for the poor. So while the capacity of actors within the international system to advocate and pursue policies detrimental to the rural poor cannot be denied, the argument of the paper is that globalization in itself is not the cause of rural poverty, and that to mobilize the poor against an "international" enemy with possible national "collaborators" promotes a nationalism and chauvinism that often has the greatest impact upon those already economically marginalized and politically excluded within a society, namely the poor and the poorest of the poor.

The argument here is that it is necessary to find new and better ways to contest economic and political control at local, national and global levels, and this should be according to the possibilities to be found in each locality and at each level of a political system.

While social movements have traditionally been seen as the most obvious option, our understanding of these has more often than not been based upon analyses that take them as isolated and discrete phenomena and does not locate them within a broader framework of collective action. By placing them within a broader framework, first, it is possible to stress their dynamic nature, including their rise and demise; second, it allows emphasis to be given to their place within broader political and social processes within the society and polity; and third, it enables other forms of collective action to be brought into the analytical and political frame. The argu-

ment is that the diversity of poverty can be located in the diversity of actions, and that democratization offers political opportunities not previously present.

Finally, the paper has referred to the importance of the political space present for poverty reduction in which the key factors are the institutional and organizational means by which the poor can engage in collective control over decision making; the ways in which poverty is conceptualized and perceived within society generally and government in particular; and the extent to which the political agency of the poor is facilitated and acknowledged. The political space for poverty reduction is a reflection of the more general political environment present and not least the extent to which it is democratic.

A democratic political environment must be capable of offering the types of changes that have given rise to rural social movements in the past. Challenges against the state characterize political regimes in which the collective participation of the poor in decision making and in which equity in the outcomes from those decisions do not exist. But can a democratic regime characterized by such decision making and outcomes support a political strategy to redistribute key resources and assets that is both economically and politically sustainable?

For those who stress the central importance of globalization for national economies, there remains an argument that it leaves little political latitude to practice redistribution policies that might benefit the poor. If this is true, then pursuing the interests of the poor through social movements and other forms of collective action within a framework of democratic politics is doomed from the outset. The possibility of resources being redistributed to the poor would be economically impossible even if political support for such a policy change could be established in national public spheres.

Mick Moore (1999), for one, does not accept such pessimism. He argues that there is a political strategy for redistribution that can and should be pursued on the part of national governments.[39] He opposes those who believe in the power of "interest group economism" and the argument, first, that redistribution initiatives will generate high-level opposition, polarization and conflict; and second, that any chance of success requires the active, mobilized support of potential beneficiaries, that is, the poor, which is very unlikely. These two preconditions combine in what Moore terms the polarization-mobilization thesis: that the non-poor will unanimously oppose redistribution and the poor will unanimously support it.

> [T]he image of the poor confronting the rich is profoundly misleading. On the one hand, the most effective strategy for securing the political viability of a redistributive policy often is to gain the backing of a selected part of the higher-income population…. On the other hand, one of the most serious problems of carrying out redistributive programs is that the already-benefited poor often resist the spread of benefits to other segments of the needy (Ascher 1984:34, cited in Moore 1999:40).

Moore believes that the developed world seriously underestimates the extent to which members of political, governmental and other elites—and, indeed, middle classes more generally—may perceive themselves to have a positive interest in the redistribution of income or assets to the poor. Furthermore, there is also an underestimation of the autonomy that governments and political leaders enjoy to exercise political leadership in favour of redistribution—to control information, manipulate symbols, determine agendas, define the public interest, create coalitions and confuse opponents.

On the basis of this, it can be argued that the rich and powerful are not necessarily opposed to pro-poor reforms, and that bringing about such reforms does not depend on a mass social movement and mobilization of the poor. Here, we return to the case for advocating progressive re-

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[39] It is an argument against seeing globalization as the dominant factor many argue it to be; and while it might pose problems for developing "leftist policy positions", it does not rule them out.

formism in a political space shaped by the struggles of the poor and the non-poor in their many diverse forms and natures. It is a political space with a direct continuity to the past in the struggles between social movements and other forms of collective action on the one hand, and authoritarian and undemocratic political regimes, on the other. Today, it is a political space characterized by degrees of democratization. There are no clearly defined homogeneous socioeconomic groups locked in opposition, but rather a diversity of struggles that periodically coalesce around specific identities based on ethnicity, gender, control of assets or resources, etc. Underlying these struggles remains poverty rooted in the politics of exploitation, marginalization and exclusion, which provides the logic for collective actions, including social movements, on the part of groups of the poor.

Today, globalization and democratization present a political space for social movements and collective action in which the diversity of poverties can be pursued through a diversity of solutions and actions. In seeking resources, services and assets central to their livelihoods, their knowledge and their rights, the agency of the poor can now be invoked through strategies of contestation, cooperation and negotiation directed at policy and programme implementation affecting their livelihoods. This might still involve the broad-based "peasant/agricultural labour movements" that challenge state power in direct confrontational forms. More often it will involve many other forms of collective action that democratization increasingly permits in "micro-, meso- and macro-public spheres" (Keane 1998).

The new political reality is well illustrated in India with Elisabetta Basile and Barbara Harriss-White's (1999) study of a municipality on the one hand, and the experience of the state of West Bengal on the other. The former describes the capacity of specific elites to dominate and control through institutionalized practices and local organizations in a locality. Organized opposition is difficult to mount, and there is little organized intrusion from outside that can threaten the prevailing order. The situation is shown to be shaped by and responding to global processes in the secularization of caste under liberalization in such a way that it links with networks of other civil organizations to comprehensively regulate economic and social life along deeply segmented social lines.[40] In brief: in the age of globalization, it is possible for civil society organizations to marginalize, exclude and impoverish; citizenship is denied; the state and market are mediated through the interests of the economic and social elite; all of the above secure and reinforce dimensions of local poverty.

In the state of West Bengal, sharecroppers have been registered, tenancies secured, moneylenders largely abandoned, land redistributed, minimum agricultural wages legislated, user rights in forests secured; many groups of the rural poor have experienced significant improvement. A long history of collective action has given rise to a state government with a pro-poor set of reforms that has secured quite radical and, in many ways, unexpected changes.[41] What commenced in the diversity of anti-colonial movements ended in the (reformist) politics of national and local elections, decentralized government and a series of government-implemented reforms.

While Basile and Harriss-White illustrate how collective action on the part of the poor can remain fragmented, localized and often individualistic in a situation in which the political space for poverty reduction is being locally denied, the case of West Bengal illustrates how poverty reduction has moved beyond social movements into the formal organizations of government. Neither situation is permanent; they both require that the political agency of the poor in alliance with pro-poor elements in the polity and society be institutionally secured in civil society, in political parties, in government administration and in the elected organizations of government. Collective action and social movements are still required, but they are to secure the process of democracy and thereby poverty reduction.

Fanon was not wrong in his assessment of the strategic choice facing Algerian peasants, and neither are the Maoists in Nepal wrong in promoting diverse forms of collective action to achieve a

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[40] See also Uphadya (1997) and Reiniche (1996).

[41] See Bose et al. (1999) for discussions as to the nature and causes of economic growth in West Bengal.

pro-poor democracy. Both of these mirror their times and contexts, with the diversities and originalities in the latter reflecting the age of globalization that is upon us. To accept the potential to be found in global, national and local natures of politics today, and to pursue non-revolutionary means is not to reject a class analysis of the situation within a political economy framework, but it is to recognize the changing nature of the political context and specifically the changing political space available for the poor on the one hand, and the political agency of the poor on the other. By organizing through diverse forms and practices, and linking to broader alliances of interests through leadership and organizations—and in an environment where national and global politics support democratisation—the potential for the poor politically to pursue poverty reduction is considerable. It is the task of the non-poor actors who seek poverty reduction to acknowledge that potential and to support them.

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