

AFTER CHIAPAS: ABORIGINAL LAND AND RESISTANCE IN THE NEW NORTH AMERICA¹

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Abstract / Résumé

The 1994 uprising of Aboriginal peoples in Chiapas, Mexico was the catalyst for a renewal of pan-Aboriginal nationalism. Recent conflicts over Aboriginal land rights in Mexico and Canada present a challenge to the prevailing dependency theory of Aboriginal oppression. The author presents an alternate methodology for analyzing the relationship between economic restructuring and Aboriginal land rights on a continental scale.

L'insurrection en 1994 des Aborigènes du Chiapas, au Mexique, a été le catalyseur d'un renouveau du nationalisme panaborigène. Les conflits récents autour des droits territoriaux aborigènes au Mexique et au Canada présentent un défi à la théorie courante de la dépendance, base de l'oppression aborigène. L'auteur propose une méthodologie différente pour analyser la relation entre la restructuration économique et les droits territoriaux aborigènes sur une échelle continentale.

January 1, 1994, the inauguration day of the North American Free Trade Agreement, was supposed to mark the victory of the neo-liberal free-market agenda in the United States as well as Canada and Mexico. An ongoing process of continental economic restructuring according to the interests of big corporations had achieved a new level of legitimacy and legal recognition. Situated in the context of global restructuring under the existing European and East Asian trading blocks, NAFTA appeared to possess a logic of world-historical inevitability. Yet what is remembered about NAFTA's inauguration day is not the glittering pomp and ceremony orchestrated by President Bill Clinton, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien; what is remembered is the uprising of thousands of impoverished Aboriginal people in Chiapas, Mexico which sent tremors throughout the continent and around the world.

Despite the devastating military defeat of the Chiapas rebels under the full force of the Mexican army, the movement precipitated by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) is far from having dissolved over the five years following its emergence onto the public stage. Throughout Mexico, the EZLN remains the symbol of aspirations for Aboriginal land rights and self-determination, as well as broader demands for democracy and improved living standards. Although the government of Ernesto Zedillo proclaimed its economic restructuring program a success, numerous spontaneous flareups of revolt in the years following the inauguration of NAFTA have made evident the continuing decay of Mexican society. Mounting frustration over the governments' failure to resolve basic social issues was most spectacularly manifested in the violent emergence of a new guerrilla movement in the impoverished state of Guerrero in June, 1996, the Peoples Revolutionary Army, or EPR. On August 28 of that year, the EPR launched offensives in six states of Mexico, killing 14 and wounding 15 others. In the following month, the guerillas professed to have killed another 59 Mexican soldiers. The government's claim that the EPR was "just a charade" was brutally laid to rest.² Existing hostilities were only exacerbated by the government's rejection of Aboriginal demands for regional autonomy.

The resistance of Aboriginal peoples in Mexico since 1994 has had a particular resonance in Canada, where conflicts over the land rights and sovereignty of the First Nations have reached an intensity unprecedented in this century. The memory of the Mohawk rebellion at Oka, Quebec was still fresh in the minds of Canadians when the Zapatista rebellion erupted. The military confrontation at Oka, along with the crucial intervention of Aboriginal people in the ill-fated Meech Lake constitutional debates, argu-

ably marked a turning point in the struggle for Aboriginal self-determination in Canada.

First Nations in this country did win a series of significant gains during the first half of this decade, including federal recognition of the inherent right to self-government, the signing of the Nunavut comprehensive land claims agreement in the eastern arctic, the termination of the Great Whale hydro-electric project on Cree lands in Quebec, and the signing of the Nisga'a land claims agreement, the first legislated recognition of Aboriginal land rights in British Columbia. But these victories did not prevent a series of flareups in 1994-1995: the occupation of Revenue Canada in Toronto; the occupation of Stoney Point Provincial Park in Ontario, in which protester Dudley George was killed by police; and a confrontation at Gustafsen Lake, British Columbia, which was accompanied by a wave of blockades across the province. More recently, the Liberal government provoked new tensions by introducing a series of amendments to the *Indian Act* which Aboriginal leaders regarded as a threat to traditional rights, and a pretext to ignore the recommendations released in November, 1996 by the epic Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

The recent conflicts in Mexico and Canada have exposed the fractures in a new order in which the struggle over the land rights of Aboriginal peoples remains unresolved. The primitive accumulation of capital in North America has always been premised upon the expropriation of Aboriginal lands.³ But Aboriginal peoples have marked the geographical limits of capitalist expansion through more than five centuries of permanent resistance, a resistance "now hidden, now overt" (Marx, 1975:32). Studies of the latest phase of capitalist restructuring on this continent, however, have paid scant attention to the ongoing dynamic of primitive accumulation, focusing rather upon the changes taking place in the manufacturing and service sectors in the shift to a globalized "post-Fordist" production process (Hendrickson, 1995). The resurgence of Aboriginal resistance in Mexico and Canada in the 1990s points to the new pressures which have been exerted on existing Aboriginal land rights. Specifically in these two countries, restructuring under the competitive regime of NAFTA has involved as a crucial component the conquering of the last frontiers for the natural resource industries and agribusiness. These last frontiers also happen to constitute the residual lands that form the basis for Aboriginal self-determination. The specific nature of primitive accumulation in the late 20th century has given rise to renewed forms of Aboriginal resistance which transcend state boundaries. This article engages in a preliminary exploration of this aspect of the current conjuncture in terms of its theoretical implications for Canadian political economy.

Sceptics may argue that the differences in the conditions of struggle in Mexico and Canada are major enough to be qualitative, and thus must be addressed as the ground for comparison.⁴ Qualitative or not, the importance of recognizing the historical differences which inform specific local struggles cannot be denied. However, such a comparative analysis does not fall within the scope of this article. Although the specific examples of conflict in Chiapas and British Columbia are brought into play, the theoretical issues are not deduced from these examples as they are positioned within the two nation-states. The starting point is rather the process of primitive accumulation on a continental level. The purpose is to identify the continental pressures on Aboriginal land rights under the regime of NAFTA which might constitute the material basis for solidarity and a renewed national consciousness among Aboriginal peoples across state borders in North America. The article also proposes that common struggles of Aboriginal peoples in Mexico and Canada present a new challenge to the prevailing dependency theory of Aboriginal oppression. The simple comparison of specific examples would not allow for such an analysis.

The challenge issued by the rebels of Chiapas has led to the emergence of some research which considers the impact of NAFTA on the Aboriginal peoples in that region. However, I know of no current investigations of the relationship between economic restructuring and Aboriginal land rights on a continental scale. This reflects the absence of a systematic methodology for approaching the question; it has fallen through the cracks of the disciplines, so to speak. Recent Canadian research in the field of Native Studies has neglected analysis of the changing political economy of Aboriginal oppression in favour of a focus on questions of cultural self-determination, or the legal discourses of land rights and sovereignty. Moreover, the scope of research has tended to be localized and descriptive. While such empiricism is a valuable corrective to the racist generalizations which plagued such research in the past, it leaves little room for the development of theoretical innovations.

This primarily methodological inquiry is preliminary and therefore schematic; the purpose is not to provide an exhaustive survey of the relevant literature, but rather to provoke discussion and set the stage for further research. The initial theoretical discussion aims to demonstrate the necessity for moving beyond market-oriented approaches to the question of Aboriginal land rights and self-determination in the new economic order. Two frontiers of capital accumulation which clearly crystallize the current dynamic at work on a continental scale are the Lacondón forest of Chiapas and the traditional Aboriginal lands of British Columbia. Through a brief analysis of these examples, an alternative method is sketched out which

takes the dynamic of primitive accumulation on Aboriginal lands as the starting point of analysis. The pressures for the alienation of Aboriginal lands emerge as the common element in widely contrasting conditions of struggle. This makes it possible to understand the material basis for the national consciousness by which such concrete and specific struggles are potentially transcended and strategically linked. The renewal of pan-Aboriginal nationalism raises its own problems in relation to the ongoing process of primitive accumulation and class formation in Aboriginal communities. These problems are raised as challenges not only for Aboriginal peoples, but also for the labour movements of the new North America.

Free Trade and Forgetting

Until the outbreak of rebellion in Chiapas, Aboriginal rights and interests just didn't figure in the public debates over NAFTA. Prior to the first of January, 1994, the NAFTA debates were centred on questions of state sovereignty, union rights, social welfare, and the environment. Arguments in opposition to NAFTA tended to focus on the threats posed by a market free of state regulation. Dependency theory was brought into play to describe the impact in Canada and Mexico of "unequal exchange" in a market dominated by the United States.

One particularly compelling version of this perspective was put forward by Grinspun and Kreklewich (1994). These authors argued that free trade would undermine democratic process in dependent countries such as Mexico and Canada by subjecting the nation-state to a transnational economy; the imperatives of the transnational economy would erode the capacity of the nation-state to intervene in the local economy in response to democratic pressures. The alternative to the free market proposed by Grinspun and Kreklewich is a version of a classic dependency theory proposition; in their words,

A precondition to the deepening of democratic processes and the availability of real choices... is the freeing of the nation-state from perverse conditioning frameworks. This must include going back to some regulation of financial market (1994:54).

The alternative to the free market, then, is a strong and interventionist state. This solution achieved the status of commonsense in the anti-free trade movement.

In the absence of explicit applications of this perspective to Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the variations of dependency theory elaborated by Watkins (1977; 1993) and Usher (1976) might usefully be invoked. Watkins and Usher both point via the concept of internal colonialism to the nation-

state as the force for Aboriginal self-determination, the key to fighting the depredations of the market in the Aboriginal communities of Canada.⁵ The state bears a responsibility to counteract structures of oppression, and to create the space for democratic process in the nation as a whole. More generally, a nation-state free of what Grinspun and Kreklewich call "perverse conditioning frameworks" could transform capitalism by subjecting the economy to its power.

How is this possible? Ironically, it is necessary to return to the father of free-market economics, Adam Smith, for an answer to this question. As a number of critics have noted, particularly Brenner (1977), McNally (1981; 1986), Weeks (1981), and Banaji (1977), dependency theorists take a Smithian turn in locating the central motor of the capitalist economy in the sphere of circulation, the sphere of the market. Unfortunately, the victims of the market have no power over its mechanisms of unequal distribution, since the market transcends the level of the local. For example, the class struggle, which is fundamental to Marxist economics, can have no more than a peripheral role to play in a market-oriented theory, where the market is distinguished from the property relations involved in production.⁶ This leaves only the nation-state with the power to transform the market such that commodities are redistributed for the benefit of society as a whole; social issues can always be reduced to questions of state policy. Thus, according to this circulationist logic, the central conflict in capitalist society is between the market and the state; these are the subject-agents of history.

It would seem that this kind of theory would have no place for an event like the Zapatista rebellion. However, a number of analyses have emerged which clarify the potential application of dependency theory to the rebellion. One particularly sophisticated version is to be found in an article by Harvey (1994).

Harvey takes the Zapatista battle for democracy as his starting point. However, he makes it clear that he does not believe that the Zapatistas will succeed in this self-assumed role, since their rural positioning renders them peripheral to the Mexican economy. In fact, Harvey warns that the Zapatista rebellion, far from changing the course of history, is at risk of being obliterated by it; after all, rural rebellions have a long history of ending in ignominious defeat. To be fair, Harvey does ascribe a trace of historicity to such rebellions; as he puts it, "Historically, [the rebellion in Chiapas] is part of a cycle of rural rebellions which have periodically revealed the crisis of legitimation of the Mexican state" (1994:33). Put another way, rural rebellions are sort of an historic gadfly of the state. The challenge posed by the Zapatistas is no more than mnemonic: "What types of changes are necessary if the rural dimension is not to be forgotten?" (1994:2). This perspective

has a general appeal which was reflected during the crisis in headlines such as "Rebellion of a Forgotten People."⁷ The problem of democratic rights seems to have something to do with the state's dysfunctional memory.

The state's anti-democratic aspect—its capacity to forget—is exacerbated by the forces of free trade. Like Grinspun and Kreklewich, Harvey identifies the subordination of local needs to macroeconomic imperatives as the source of the conflict in Chiapas (1994:33). He goes on to suggest that the conflict could be resolved through a democratic process which creates the space for the participation of rural organizations in the development of new policy alternatives. This vision would seem difficult to sustain following the massive defeat of the democratic movement in the federal elections of August 1994. But Harvey, undaunted, persists in placing responsibility for the creation of a democratic space firmly back in the hands of the state:

The first steps have to be taken by the new government leaders, Eduardo Robledo and Ernesto Zedillo... There has to be a willingness to open up the political system and provide meaningful channels for political participation... Let us hope that the lessons of January 1 have been learned and that politics triumphs over war (1994:44).

Any analysis which reduces the Zapatista rebellion (along with five hundred years of Aboriginal rebellion before it) to the sphere of state policy and the forgettable, vastly underestimates the depth and extent of the ideological and political crisis which it provoked. The rebellion was not a mere footnote to the process of restructuring in Mexico; nor was it a marginal disruption to the forging of a new continental economic order. On the contrary, it revealed an essential truth about the contradictions involved in this process, a truth about the nature of North American capitalism, and the nature of the capitalist state. In their struggle for land rights, the Aboriginal peoples of Chiapas inscribed the brutal history of primitive accumulation into the present. In naming their movement after Emiliano Zapata, the *campesino* leader and hero of the Mexican revolution of 1910, the rebels directly evoked the permanence of resistance to capitalist development and the historical agency of Aboriginal peoples.⁸ For the working classes of North America, the Zapatista rebellion of 1994 represented a stark memory of dispossession and resistance.

The dependency framework seems to flounder when it comes to accounting for the historical significance of Aboriginal resistance. What is necessary is a method which locates the fundamental contradiction of continental restructuring in the struggle over property relations, not in the relationship between the market and the state. From this perspective,

Aboriginal resistance may be understood as a crucial aspect of the conflict over the process of continental restructuring and the emergence of a new capitalist order.

NAFTA was a combined attempt by state and corporate interests to gain a competitive position in the global economy by strengthening their control over the productive process. This meant a systematic assault on union rights and social spending which would reverse the gains of decades of struggle. It also entailed the elimination of obstacles to the expansion of capitalist interests into new domains; this was particularly necessary in Mexico and Canada, both of which lag behind the United States in the exploitation of primary resources and the competitive development of agri-business. Precisely because of their ongoing linkage to the land, which partially removes them from the sphere of free (dispossessed or property-less) labour, Aboriginal peoples have borne the brunt of the restructuring process. Yet the land remains the basis of their resistance, and the foundation of their struggle for self-determination.

Aboriginal Lands and the Limits to Capitalist Development

The development of capitalism in North America is founded in the struggle for control over Aboriginal lands. From the beginning, Aboriginal resistance played an important role in determining the conditions for the accumulation of capital; because of Aboriginal resistance, the ruling class has never had full access to Aboriginal land or labour. Existing Aboriginal land rights are the outcome of this long history. Traces of the history of Aboriginal resistance are imbedded in the very structure of the three states of North America.⁹ What is called for is a political economy that is able to centrally incorporate this historic fact.

There are times when the state may create the illusion of independence from capitalist interests in order to maintain legitimacy; it may *appear* as a benefactor or protector of Aboriginal peoples against the power of capital.¹⁰ This was precisely the foundation of the agrarian reform policies in Mexico which followed upon the Zapatista rebellion of 1910-1917. These policies addressed the immense disparity in land holdings through the distribution of 95 million hectares to some 3.1 million campesino beneficiaries since 1917 under Article 27 of the constitution (Barry, 1995:12). The central element in the agrarian reforms was the ejido system, which was established to remove from the market lands acquired by Aboriginal communities.¹¹ The ejido sector came to comprise almost half of the total land area in Mexico (Barry, 1995:119).

When he took office in 1988, it seemed that President Carlos Salinas would continue this tradition with promises to revive agricultural production, and to initiate a process of *concertación* (consensus negotiations) with campesino organizations. A newly created National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), along with the National Indigenous Institute (INI), were given an unprecedented mandate to distribute funds and transfer productive facilities to autonomous campesino organizations without insisting on political support. Even the government revisions to Article 27 appeared to be a compromise, since it seemed to open up ejido bureaucracies to more democratic and participatory structures, and it offered ejido members a choice about what to do with their lands rather than enforcing privatization. This seemed consistent with President Salinas' election promise that campesinos would be treated as adults in a new context of "shared responsibility." Salinas explicitly linked the revision of Article 27 to the historic aspirations of the campesino sector: "Like the agrarian struggles of the past, the objective is the broadening of justice and liberty" (November 1991; quoted in Barry, 1995:117). The government also launched a Land Rights Certification Program (Procede), which was empowered to grant certificates of rights, and subsequently fee simple land title, to petitioners. In some regions this initiative was welcomed as a way of clarifying land boundaries (Barry, 1995:121-125; 143-145).

Barry concurs with the official government position that "the problem of the Mexican countryside and the agricultural sector lies more in production than in ownership." This may be true with respect to foreign investment; Barry convincingly argues that foreign interests are unlikely to invest directly in agricultural production (1995:126-127). But the revisions to Article 27, albeit disguised in a democratic cloak, were aimed precisely at facilitating the privatization of ejido lands,¹² for productivity is closely linked to the underlying issue of control over the land. Insofar as they were removed from the land market and buffered by a system of subsidies, the ejidos were protected from the pressures of competition. Traditional subsistence production would take priority over investments in innovations to increase efficiency and market production. The persistence of nearly half of Mexico's land area outside the domain of the market was untenable under NAFTA, which required Mexico to open its markets to grain exports from the United States. During the first year of NAFTA, United States exports to Mexico jumped 24 percent. The dumping of agricultural products from the United States is bound to have an especially devastating effect on Mexican corn producers, given the huge disparity in productivity between the two countries; where Mexican farms produce an average of 7.3 kilograms of corn per worker hour, the corresponding figure for the United States is 1,000

(Barry, 1995:73-74) The process of capital accumulation in Mexico required that ejido lands be opened up to more efficient agribusiness interests.

In Canada, the numbered treaties as well as the *Indian Act* are often correctly perceived as instruments of state oppression. But it is also true that these documents, along with others such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the *Quebec Act*, and the Jay Treaty represent concessions, albeit limited, by the state in response to the history of Aboriginal resistance (Simmons, 1995). This is why Aboriginal communities in Canada have had some success, albeit limited, in utilizing the legal system to affirm their land rights.¹³

The election of a federal government under Jean Chrétien in 1993 was cause for new hope among many First Nations leaders in Canada, despite Chrétien's black record as Minister of Indian Affairs under Pierre Trudeau, when he presided over the White Paper aimed at the termination of special Aboriginal rights in 1969. This time around, the governing party had made Aboriginal rights a part of its platform, signalling the importance of this issue to its political strategy by setting up an Aboriginal wing of the party. The participation of two Aboriginal Members of Parliament, Elijah Harper and Ethel Blondin, seemed to ensure that Aboriginal issues would be taken seriously in the government. Harper was, after all, the lionized figure who had played a key role in the defeat of the Meech Lake constitutional accord, because of its failure to include recognition of the inherent Aboriginal right to self-government. In 1994, following the defeat of the Charlottetown Accord, the Chrétien government made a unilateral declaration recognizing that right. Minister of Indian Affairs Ron Irwin announced the eventual dismantling of his department in words that echo the noble sentiments expressed by Mexican President Salinas: "It's time to bring dignity, honour, self-reliance, and self-government to a people that have been held, not necessarily in bondage, but certainly as supplicants under an Indian Act that is archaic" (quoted in Newman, 1995:367).

But collectively held Aboriginal lands are a constraint on the expansion of capital in Canada, just as they are in Mexico. The resource extraction industries, under the pressures of intensified competition with their counterparts to the south, are particularly frustrated by their limited access to these often resource-rich lands. While paying lipservice to self-determination, the Canadian government has been experimenting with a number of legislative means to facilitate corporate access to Aboriginal lands, including the proposed First Nations Chartered Lands Act and its subsequent incarnations;¹⁴ the negotiation of land claims agreements in which Aboriginal and treaty rights are surrendered in return for cash settlements and land title held as fee simple property, which can be rented or sold; and a

withdrawal from its fiduciary obligation to protect Aboriginal land rights through proposed reforms to the *Indian Act* (Assembly of First Nations, 1996:22-23).

In Mexico as in Canada, the state organized transformation of Aboriginal lands into private property has been framed as part of a benevolent process of removing paternalistic governing mechanisms. But the state reveals its class nature when it turns to brute military or police violence, as in Chiapas, or at Oka, or in a number of subsequent smaller conflicts. The state is *compelled* to respond to the Aboriginal defense of land rights by such shows of brute force, because the Aboriginal struggle for land is inherently a struggle against the power of capital. In what follows, the changing nature of this conflict will be explored by reference to the specific examples of Chiapas and British Columbia.

Chiapas: Rebellion at the Frontier

The Zapatista rebellion may be more or less accurately portrayed as an uprising of Aboriginal people, following directly in the tradition of the rebellion eight decades earlier for which it was named. But such a portrayal would be seriously misleading if it were not modified by an analysis of the specific social conditions in which the recent rebellion was rooted. Unlike its precursor, this was not, in the main, a rebellion of communities that were still clinging to their ancestral territories. Nor did the rebels identify themselves in terms of their bonds to closed corporate communities, as had the first Zapatistas. The rebellion of 1994 was a revolt of displaced peoples, peoples struggling to establish their rights on a new agricultural frontier. Since the 1940s, the government had encouraged campesino colonization of unsettled rainforest areas as a way to relieve the pressure for land reform, and as what Barry calls a "safety valve to land tensions in the countryside" (1995:216). Colonization was a particularly important factor in Chiapas, because the land redistribution which had occurred elsewhere following the Mexican revolution had been arrested in Chiapas by a successful counter-revolution which kept political power in the hands of ranchers and estate owners. By the 1950s, big landowners retained 70 percent of the agricultural lands in the state (Tello Díaz, 1995:34-35). During that decade, the flow of migration to the new frontier increased rapidly, and the rainforest became populated with a wide diversity of Aboriginal peoples. At that time, the wealthy landowners of the Chiapas valleys were shifting from coffee production to more lucrative and much less labour intensive cattle ranching. Thus large numbers of Tzeltal campesinos lost their main source of income. To make matters worse, they also lost their communal subsistence plots, which were now needed as grazing areas. Entire communities were forced

to organize themselves under the ejido structure and move into the rainforest. As well, demographic pressures in the highlands of Chiapas led to an exodus of young and landless Tzotzil people into the Lacondón rainforest. Similar economic pressures also brought Chol people from the north, Tojolabal people from the plains, and Zoque people from the central valleys of Chiapas. Eventually, the flow of dispossessed people began arriving from other states, particularly Tabasco, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, and even the Federal District. These people brought new languages and cultures into the area—Náhuatl, Mixtec, Totonaco, Chontal. In the words of Carlos Tello Díaz, the Lacondón forest became a veritable "Tower of Babel" (1995:44-46).

The development boom of the 1960s encouraged the expansion of the ranching industry into the frontier. The primary resource industries also began to intensively exploit the natural riches of the rainforest, especially timber, oil and hydroelectricity. New access roads into the forest facilitated further campesino immigration. But the ejido territories established by the new campesino communities soon became an obstacle to the expansion of the resource industries. In 1972, the federal government found a way to regain control of a section of these ejido lands: under the Decree of the Lacondón Community, a Reserve of 614,321 hectares was unilaterally transferred to the sole ownership of the Lacondón Maya people, a population of 66 families. In return, the Lacondón people signed agreements with the government which gave it effective monopoly over industrial development in the region.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the rights of more than 4,000 immigrant families living within the borders of the Reserve were totally ignored; in fact, many of the ejido communities did not receive news of the Lacondón decree until 1974 (Tello Díaz, 1995:59-61). Suddenly, the ejido communities were faced with the prospect of expulsion from lands which they had laboriously cleared and occupied.

The immense wealth being extracted from the rainforest under the direction of the federal government stood in stark contrast to the increasingly precarious existence of the ejido communities.¹⁶ Chiapas became one of the three leading suppliers of beef to Mexico's cities, and the source of as much as one-half of the country's hydroelectric power. Yet nutrition levels in the state are still among the worst in the country, and the state ranks last in its provision of electrical services to households (Barry, 1995:218). What had once appeared as the Promised Land to campesino immigrants also turned out to be an extremely inhospitable base for agricultural production; the campesinos discovered that once cleared of its forest cover, the land rapidly lost its fertility. Demographic pressures aggravated the economic crisis of the ejidos. According to World Bank figures, the population of the

Lacondón forest jumped from 6,000 in 1960 to as high as 300,000 by the time of the Zapatista rebellion (cited in Barry, 1995:217).

The immigrant communities remained cohesive through the process of displacement, and transferred many of their traditional productive and cultural practices to their new lands. However, in establishing themselves as ejidos, the new communities of the rainforest were integrating themselves into a complex system of credit and government control. The ejido system was the main agent by which the immigrant campesino economy was commercialized. The introduction of systematic credit was predicated on cash repayment; thus the ejidos were compelled to rely upon commodity production for the market.¹⁷ Yet the removal of the land from the market ensured that these enterprises would not operate according to the law of value.¹⁸ Degradation of the soil, demographic pressures, the undervaluing of campesino labour, and legal uncertainty over usufructuary rights combined to ensure that the ejido would remain a deficit enterprise operating at a low level of productivity (Bartra, 1993:70). In (barely) rescuing the ejido through the extension of credit, the state was able to maintain the appearance of populist support for the agricultural "social sector" and independence from the forces of capital. At the same time, the ejidos remained a source of cheap food and a reserve for cheap and flexible wage labour.

But as industrial development and agribusiness gained momentum, the requirement to subordinate ejido lands to the market began to overcome the political and economic advantages of the ejido system. Consequently, during the 1980s the government began to extract itself from the social sector by starving the ejidos of credit. Harvey quotes figures showing that the number of individuals in Chiapas with access to credit for planting fell from an annual average of only 20.4 percent in 1985-89 to 12.7 percent in 1990 (1994:7, citing SARH-CEPAL, 1992:19). As well, the government reduced its traditional support for maize, the main crop produced by the ejido sector in Chiapas by allowing guaranteed prices to fall below costs under the Pact for Stability and Economic Growth (Harvey, 1995:11). Meanwhile, private sector agriculture and beef production went into a period of boom. The statistics are astounding; Harvey cites a study covering the period 1982-87:

The land area dedicated to new cash crops of soy beans, peanuts, sorghum and tobacco grew by 51.4, 64.5, 146.8 and 194.9 percent, respectively. In the same period, production of these crops grew by 150.8, 244.1, 144.8, and 261.2 percent. The more traditional export crops also continued to expand. Banana production increased by over 25 percent, while output of cacao and sugar cane doubled. In 1982-87 the volume of

meat production also increased by over 400 percent, reflecting the support which ranchers found in the state government. (1994:9, citing Thompson González *et al.*, 1988:225-230)

The ruination of the ejido economy combined with the expansion of cash crops and beef production created intense pressures for campesinos to illegally rent or even sell ejido lands. In this respect, the reforms to Article 27 of the constitution legislated in 1992 were a reflection of a clandestine reality; Barry suggests that this was a significant reason for the lack of immediate mass resistance to the reforms (1995:121). But the reforms were part of an accumulating body of evidence which acted to dissolve the illusion that the state was committed to the protection of the Mexican campesino sector against the depredations of capital.

The signing of NAFTA two years later was an unprecedented official proclamation of the state's allegiance to the free market. It signalled, for the first time since the Mexican revolution, an open and generalized offensive against the nation's land-based peoples. Insofar as the rebellion launched from the Lacondón forest addressed this offensive, it raised the memory of campesino revolution and reaffirmed the links between Aboriginal self-determination and land rights. But the multi-ethnic rebels of 1994 also represented the brutal history of displacement and dispossession which they had endured in the transition to the forest; in this, their rebellion exposed the class basis of the struggle for land. The Zapatistas made demands which aimed at the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system: demands for democracy, work, land, housing, food, healthcare and education. By linking these demands with opposition to NAFTA, they demonstrated that denial of such fundamental human rights is systematic, and that it affects the majority: it is not restricted to a marginal "forgotten people." Recognition of this was manifest in the massive demonstrations of spontaneous support for the Zapatistas which erupted in cities across the country during the rebellion, and in the enduring symbolic power of the Zapatistas in Mexican social movements to the present.

British Columbia: The Politics of Return

In the summer of 1995, a wave of blockades culminating in a major confrontation at Gustafsen Lake cast British Columbia into the centre of a national controversy over Aboriginal land rights. At the time, the British Columbia government was applauded in the media for its tough stand against the "renegade" protesters at Gustafsen Lake. Less than a year later, the same government provoked a major backlash from the three official opposition parties and a storm of debate in the media through the signing

of the Nisga'a land claim agreement-in-principle, the first such agreement signed in the province this century.

It is no accident that British Columbia became a hot spot in the struggle for Aboriginal rights in the 1990s. Tenaciously holding to its colonial heritage, British Columbia had refused to recognize Aboriginal land title until recently when they were compelled to do so by a combination of Aboriginal protests and the courts. Unlike the territories to the east of the Rockies, the colony of British Columbia did not find it necessary to subject itself to land treaties with its Aboriginal peoples.¹⁹ Not that colonial policy to the east was more benevolent: the treaties signed elsewhere were always linked to the expansion of wheat farming, and expressed the military weakness of the settlers with respect to their Aboriginal neighbours. British Columbia, in contrast, didn't develop a significant agricultural economy prior to confederation, so it didn't need to dispossess Aboriginal peoples of large portions of their land. There, the fur trade dominated the economy until the massive gold rush which was unleashed in 1858.

A series of violent attacks on colonists made it evident that the new resource industry and the attendant population influx did cause considerable disruption in Aboriginal communities (Fisher, 1992:95-118). But still, the pattern of settlement was much different from that in mainly agricultural areas. The settlers were not competing with Aboriginal communities for access to land much beyond the limits of the mines and the concentrated mining towns. During that early period, the question of ownership or title was simply irrelevant with respect to most of the land area.

Following the tradition established by the historian Harold Adams Innis (1930), students of Canadian history tend to assume that the relative decline of the fur trade automatically rendered Aboriginal peoples economically "irrelevant." But nowhere was this less true than in the case of British Columbia. As Knight noted (1978), rapid immigration did not solve the acute shortage of labour in the burgeoning resource industries which were established in the wake of the gold rush. In fact, considerable effort was devoted to moulding Aboriginal peoples into a disciplined workforce in the second half of the 19th century. This was partly done by corralling communities onto Reserves too tiny for subsistence. But the outlawing of the traditional potlatch and winter dances in 1884 was also a crucial disciplinary strategy. In the rhetoric of politicians and missionaries, these practices marked the dividing line between civilization and savagery.

The persistence of the potlatch in the face of such an offensive is the measure of Aboriginal resistance during that dark period. However, the rise of the labour market coincided with the decline of wildlife populations due to overharvesting. Although Aboriginal peoples may have maintained their

traditional practices of non-commercial hunting and fishing, they had no choice but to supplement these through wage labour. By the 1870s Aboriginal people had been absorbed into the labour force as sawmill workers, longshoremen, seamen, and placer miners. Aboriginal workers played a major role in the wave of railway construction which began in the province in the 1880s.

By the time of the second resource boom of the 1950s and 1960s, mechanization and "rationalization" had combined to create a surplus labour force for the first time after an employers' offensive which lasted two decades. Employers were successful in demanding more permanent, disciplined labour. Aboriginal workers, who had been able to retain their traditional subsistence activities on the land under the more flexible regime of the early resource industries, now lost their ability to compete in the newly restructured workforce. To make matters worse, hiring practices became increasingly racist as employers gained the upper hand. The unemployed had the option of attempting to survive in the city where they had to face the daily experience of racism, or returning to the Reserve. They were acutely aware that the issues of land rights and sovereignty had not gone away after decades of lobbying and court battles.²⁰

In fact, these issues had become more acute as the resource industries entered a new phase of expansion, and as Prime Minister Trudeau prepared his policy for the termination of special Aboriginal rights in the 1960s. Aboriginal people in the cities and on the Reserves of British Columbia had good reason to be on the cutting edge of the militant Red Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, both in the cities and on Reserves. Fish-ins were staged to defend traditional fishing rights. Blockades were organized to prevent development on traditional lands. Volunteer Aboriginal patrols were set up in Vancouver to help Aboriginal people on the streets and defend them from police violence. Young Aboriginal people read Mao's Red Book and debated the politics of race and class. There was a rebellion against the elitist politics of government-funded Aboriginal organizations in the province. Given this political ferment, it's not surprising that Aboriginal people from British Columbia constituted the bulk of the Native Caravan which made a trip from Vancouver to Ottawa in 1974, at the peak of the Red Power movement.²¹

By 1995, the resource industries of British Columbia had entered a new phase of expansion, making it the most dynamic economy in the country. Huge forests were removed, and entire mountains were dug away to release their mineral wealth. Aboriginal peoples were in the process of establishing claims, some of them overlapping, to a land area which amounted to 110 percent of the province's total land mass. Yet not a single

agreement had been reached, and claimants confronted the possibility that their lands may be environmentally devastated before they could establish territorial sovereignty. As in the Lacondón forest of Chiapas, the contradiction between the immense wealth being extracted from the land by industry under the tutelage of the state, and the systematic impoverishment of the First Nations, had reached a critical point. Federal cuts to social services, health and education, a betrayal of its fiduciary responsibilities under the *Indian Act*, aggravated the situation. These contradictions were the basis for the wave of highway and railroad blockades which erupted that summer, barring access to the very natural resources upon which the economy of British Columbia so much depends.

Under the circumstances, the signing of the Nisga'a land claim agreement is a significant breakthrough in the struggle for Aboriginal land rights in British Columbia. The final agreement was ratified by the Nisga'a people in November, 1998, with a vote of 61 percent. But the deal is by no means radical or generous, notwithstanding the vocal complaints of non-Aboriginal critics. An indicator of this is the strong support that has been garnered from key business leaders in the province, who applaud the progress made toward the establishment of "certainty" in Aboriginal land rights.²² At the same time, opposition to the agreement has been voiced by a number of Aboriginal organizations in British Columbia and elsewhere who fear that it will be used as a model for future negotiations.²³ The argument has been forcefully made that the agreement undermines the recent Delgamuukw ruling of Canada's Supreme Court, which defines the conditions under which Aboriginal title may persist on lands not yet covered by treaty.

The Nisga'a will receive only eight percent of the 10,000 kilometres comprising their traditional territory, and give up their tax-exempt status under the *Indian Act*, in return for less than \$200 million and some rights to harvest natural resources. But the area covered by the treaty has already been clearcut by outside interests, and the cost of tree-planting may suck millions from Nisga'a coffers. The Nisga'a government will be "permitted" to tax its citizens, thus setting the stage for the federal government to withdraw from its special funding obligations under the *Indian Act*. Reserve lands outside treaty boundaries will be reduced to fee simple property which can be sold by the Nisga'a government to non-Aboriginal private interests (*Nisga'a Final Agreement*).²⁴ Needless to say, the agreement is deeply demoralizing for Nisga'a communities which fall outside treaty territory.

The terms of the Nisga'a agreement are qualitatively distinct from the numbered treaties of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Nisga'a treaty rather follows the trend set since the 1970s when the Liberal government, faced with the threat of growing Aboriginal militancy, was forced to

withdraw its official termination policy.²⁵ The recent treaties have all involved cash settlements in return for the surrender of traditional lands, as well as the transformation of some lands into fee simple property.²⁶ The infusion of cash and the creation of fee simple property transforms Aboriginal governments into corporate entities subordinated to the logic of capital. Federal fiduciary responsibilities to First Nations communities are thereby reduced, and the effective control of the communities over lands and resources is eroded.²⁷ As the contradiction between the corporate interests of band governments and the aspirations of their constituents deepens, Aboriginal struggles are bound to take on an increasingly class content.²⁸

Nation and Class

The recent history of the Aboriginal struggle for land rights has led to the emergence of a national consciousness which transcends ethnic and state boundaries.²⁹ This nationalism is contradictory in nature. On the one hand, it limits the legitimacy and the power of the state. In Canada, such a limit was articulated in the recognition of the inherent right to self-government by the state, a concession which it had long fought. In Chiapas, a movement for autonomy gained momentum following the 1994 rebellion, leading to the removal of numerous municipal government leaders, and a wave of strikes against paying taxes and utilities.

But such nationalism obscures the extent to which the contradictions of capitalism are imbedded in Aboriginal societies. Aboriginal nationalism has its own tendency to locate itself outside the dynamic of capitalism.³⁰ Appeals to the Aboriginal bond with the land, combined with a reliance on traditional forms of spirituality, are crucial legitimating devices within this ideology.³¹ The state takes advantage of this; it combines the rhetoric of national identity with a selective funding process to promote the development of material contradictions in Aboriginal communities. This is usually reinforced by the imposition of a skewed electoral apparatus for self-government.

There is a second contradiction in the rise of Aboriginal nationalism: it flourishes in conditions where capital is set free to invade Aboriginal lands, casting large masses of Aboriginal peoples into migration in search of wage labour.³² As we have seen, in North America this violent process of displacement is currently being facilitated by the state under the pressures of free trade. As part of a drive to lower the wages and standard of living of the working class, capital is seeking out a labour force which is accommodating and flexible. It also seeks to lower the reproduction costs of its labour force; these costs are eliminated or minimized by the hiring of migrants who spent their formative years on Aboriginal lands³³ as well as the implemen-

tation of measures to reduce state funding for migrants, such as Proposition 187 in California. Certainly there will be no sudden moves in the near future on the part of the Mexican state to improve the disastrous living conditions in the maquiladoras,³⁴ or in the large shantytowns surrounding most Mexican cities.³⁵

Dispossessed Aboriginal peoples in search of work, whether they are migrating within or across state borders, are similarly faced with all the forms of systematic racism which force them into the lowest paid jobs with the least security, if they can find jobs at all.³⁶ State immigration controls in Canada and the United States are one of the most virulent elements of systematic racism; massive numbers of Aboriginal peoples have no alternative but to submit to a precarious existence as illegal workers. This is the situation of tens of thousands of Mexican migrants scattered across the continent in the cities and on commercial farms; a parallel example is the situation of Canadian Mohawks who have been involved in casinos or the cigarette trade. Despite the obstacles, millions of Aboriginal people are regular migrants to the cities of North America, if not permanent residents of those cities. Millions of Aboriginal people are imbedded within the wage labour force, albeit subjected to the pressures of systematic racism. Yet this displacement has not erased the memory of the land; on the contrary, the struggle for self-determination within the cities is imbued with the memory of dispossession, the politics of return.³⁷ It is the memory of dispossession which makes contemporary Aboriginal nationalism so deeply radical; Aboriginal peoples raise a mirror to the North American working classes, a mirror which reflects their own long forgotten history of dispossession.

In the continental economy of late 20th century North America, Aboriginal peoples are makers of history. A simple focus on state policy and mechanisms of exchange cannot capture the complex dynamic of class formation and resistance involved in this history. This article has argued for a political economy which focuses instead on labouring activity and means of production—especially in relation to the land—and the way these are configured by property relations. Such an approach opens up the conceptual possibility for a politics which overcomes the limits of left nationalism and demonstrates, against appearances, the complementarity of the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples with those articulated in the struggles of the working class. This was the central challenge posed by the Zapatista rebellion in 1994: Aboriginal land rights and self-determination must be a central and unconditional demand of the labour movement in an “America without borders.”

Notes

1. This paper has been almost five years in the making. The original concept arose from my experience as an activist in Chiapas solidarity groups in Ontario. The paper was first presented at the 1994 annual conference of the Canadian Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CALACS), *Towards an America without Borders*, where it provoked an animated discussion. The methodological issues were further developed as I researched and wrote my doctoral dissertation, *Against Capital: The Political Economy of Aboriginal Resistance in Canada*. The dissertation explores some of the technical points requiring a specialized background in political economy which have been removed from this essay due to considerations of space.

The current version bears traces of discussions with a number of leading voices in the field of Native Studies, Canadian political economy, and post-colonial theory. These include Frances Abele, Howard Adams, Ed Dosman, Tony Hall, Peter Kulchyski, David McNally, and Ato Sekyi-Otu. While they might not always have agreed with aspects of my approach, each of these individuals has challenged me to sharpen my ideas and clarify my evidence. I am very much indebted to the exchange among activists and academics which took place three years ago at the trinational conference on *Aboriginal Struggles in North America* in Mexico City, and at the *III National Plural Indigenous Assembly on Autonomy* in Oaxaca. I also owe much to my students in Native Studies at Trent University, who persisted in asking the big questions.

2. It should be noted that EPR strategy has been repudiated by the EZLN. For an analysis of the conditions in Mexico leading to the EPR offensive, see Dan La Botz, 1996.
3. Marx defines primitive accumulation as

nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as "primitive" because it forms the prehistory of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital (1976:875).

Primitive accumulation marks the point of origin of the capitalist mode of production. However, this is not to say that it is a completed first stage of capitalist development. Insofar as producers have been incompletely divorced from the means of production, the dynamic of primitive accumulation must be ongoing.

4. Frances Abele has made this point strongly to me in a personal communication (March 24, 1997), referring to various concrete formal

distinctions that should be made between the two countries: ethnic demographics, state forms, and levels of economic development and prosperity.

5. Watkins has recently articulated his opposition to free trade on the following basis: "The fact that free trade meant more play for market forces and less scope for government policy meant that free trade might rather exacerbate the deep-seated staples bias of the Canadian economy and further weaken the manufacturing base" (Watkins, 1993:131). For an extensive critique of Watkins and Usher in relation to the staple theory of dependency formulated by Harold Adams Innis, see Simmons (1995:144-156).
6. Weeks and Dore point out that circulationist theory tends to obscure the social relations specific to the capitalist mode of production (1979:66-67). When the mode of production is obscured, capital becomes fetishized as a thing in itself, a historical agent independent of social relations.
7. This was precisely the title of the final report produced by the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development following its research mission on the violation of human rights in the state of Chiapas, headed by Assembly of First Nations Chief Ovide Mercredi.
8. The term "*campesino*" is translated as "peasant," and literally means "one who works the land." The historical coincidence of racial stratification and class structure in Mexico means that the terms *campesino* and "indio" are often conflated. In fact, the term "indio" (Indian) is primarily defined in cultural terms; Aboriginal people who move to the city, adopt non-traditional dress, and speak Spanish, are referred to as *mestizos* or, in Chiapas and Guatemala, *ladinos*—this contrasts with the racial definition of aboriginal identity in Canada. However, as Barry observes, the contemporary reality is more complex. There is no clear dividing line between *indios* and *mestizos*. Moreover, class divisions are deepening within these groups (1995:184) For the purposes of this article, the term "Aboriginal" refers broadly to the self-identity of the individual or collective.
9. I rely for this analysis on the method developed by Brenner for understanding the uneven and combined development of capitalism in Europe as the "unintended consequence of class conflicts" (1977:82). More direct parallels with respect to the question of Aboriginal land rights in the South African case may be found in the pathbreaking work of Martin Legassick:

From the African point of view, resistance to mercantile colonial conquest had involved struggling for land which was the territorial and economic base of their society, a resistance waged

over two centuries which had been successful in the measure that areas remained in black ownership, even if they had become 'underdeveloped', and that indigenous blacks had become feudal peasants and not slaves. At the end of the nineteenth century the metropolis and locally dominant classes had perhaps the power (of the Gatling) to alter this situation, but only at massive expense against determined resistance (1974:266-267).

For a schematic account of the history of adaptations by the state to Aboriginal resistance in Canada from 1900-1970, see Kulchyski (1993:24-27).

10. Following Marx's discussion of Bonapartism, Bartra puts it thus: "The situations in which weak capitalist development is shown in the existence of hybrid, transitional forms in agriculture and in society in general also generate 'independent' forms of political power" (1993:111-112).
11. Article 27 represented one of the key gains of the Zapatistas in the 1910-1917 revolution, legislating a process of agrarian reform which would extend over the following seventy years. A collective ejido system of land tenure was established; by law, sale or rent of ejido lands was prohibited.
12. "The amendments included the termination of land redistribution; the granting to ejidatarios of the rights to sell, rent, sharecrop, or mortgage their individual parcels and to enter into joint ventures and contracts with private (including foreign) investors and stockholding companies; the collective right of *ejidatarios* to dissolve the ejido and distribute the property among members; and the elimination of the requirement that ejidatarios had to work their land to retain control" (Barry, 1995:117).
13. For a collection of definitive court cases dealing with Aboriginal rights, see Kulchyski (1994).
14. See coverage of this issue in *Anasazi* (1995-1996).
15. An agreement with the Lacondón people on timber harvesting gave the government rights to 35,000 cubic metres of wood per year over a period of ten years, with no fixed price. The main beneficiary of this deal was the state-owned development bank Nafinsa. The state-owned oil company, Pemex, began drilling in the region in the late 1970s. The government-directed development boom which followed upon the Lacondón decree also involved the construction of two hydro-electric dams on the Grijalva River (Tello Díaz, 1995:61; Barry, 1995:219).
16. Bartra identifies a similarly contradictory dynamic in Mexico as a whole during the 1960s in which government land distribution policies led to

a dramatic expansion of the ejido sector from 44.5 million hectares to almost 70 million, while a decline in production pointed to the progressive ruination of the peasantry (1993:147).

17. This was overwhelmingly devoted to maize production; in 1990, 91 percent of the ejido sector produced maize (Harvey, 1994:15).
18. "The chief expression of this fact is that products are sold without regard to the price of production" (Banaji, 1977:32).
19. As Paul Tennant points out, the exceptions were the so-called "Douglas treaties" of 1850-1854, involving purchases of about 3 percent of Vancouver Island's area. Douglas subsequently changed his land policy, establishing the principle of non-recognition that would be adhered to by future British Columbia governments (1990:17-38).
20. The Nisga'a had been some of the first to make organized claims for land under the auspices of the Nisga'a Land Committee, founded in 1907. They and organizations like theirs in the province presented enough of a threat that they provoked the federal government to pass legislation prohibiting land claims activity in 1927. See Raunet (1984).
21. Lee Maracle's autobiographical book *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* provides insight into the experience of this period for young Aboriginal militants in British Columbia.
22. This support was evident at a special gathering of British Columbia businessmen on October 29, 1998, organized by Canadian National chairman David MacLean and BC Hydro chairman Brian Smith (see "BC Business Urged to Back Nisga'a Treaty," *The Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1998).
23. In British Columbia, the Interior Six Nation Alliance, the Union of BC Chiefs, and the United Native Nations (representing non-Status Aboriginal people) have issued public statements of opposition to the Nisga'a model. The Kilcolith Band and the Gitanyow Band have both filed court challenges to the treaty. Mohawk Nation News has also strongly attacked the deal (August 9, 1998).
24. See also Griezic's provocative opinion piece in *The Globe and Mail*.
25. By 1973, the federal government was forced to establish a land claims process, and thereby recognize the unresolved status of Aboriginal land rights. For an account of the ongoing termination policies of the Canadian state, see Rudnicki (1987).
26. The transformation of land into fee simple title involves Aboriginal recognition of underlying Crown title. Refusal to accept the termination of Aboriginal and treaty rights was the cause of the cancellation of the Dene/Métis western Arctic Land Claim Agreement in 1990 after fourteen years of negotiations. However, the breakaway Band Council of

the Mackenzie Delta Gwich'in did approve a deal which will give them 15,000 square kilometers of land in fee simple, as well as \$75 million in cash. The Nunavut land claim agreement makes the Inuit of the eastern arctic the largest private landholder in North America; they will be paid \$580 million in cash over fourteen years, and become the corporate owner in fee simple of 350,000 square kilometers in return for the surrender of Aboriginal title (Dickason, 1992:414).

27. Indicative of the increasing commercialization of aboriginal communities was the opening of the federally chartered First Nations Bank in partnership with the Toronto-Dominion Bank in January 1997. Notable participants in the new bank are the James Bay Cree, who negotiated the first modern land claims agreement in 1975. Matthew Coon Come, Grand Chief of the James Bay Cree, sees the bank as a sign of progress: "First Nations aboriginal people are already involved in aviation, co-distribution, oil and gas, they have all kinds of construction companies and I think it is just a step towards self sufficiency." Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who had less than three weeks earlier ignored the proposals of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples for federally funded measures toward the achievement of self-government, had this to say about the new bank: "This time it's not government money, it's bank money. That's a lot of progress" (*Globe and Mail*, 10 December, 1996).
28. As Douglas Daniels (1986) observes such class divisions have been emergent on Reserves for some time.
29. This Aboriginal nationalism is arguably a recent phenomenon in Canada and the United States (Simmons, 1992) as well as Mexico. Trotsky's conception of the "nation in formation" is applicable here (1978:24). The concept was forged in a 1933 discussion with Arne Swabeck, published as "The Negro Question in America." Ernest Gellner more systematically sets the stage for analyzing the invented character of the nation (1983).
30. Daniels provides a scathing critique of the way in which Aboriginal nationalism is used to obscure exploitative practices within Aboriginal communities:

The author's ten year press file on Native labour relations contains countless examples of anti-labour, anti-union practices, including occupational health issues, all justified under the aegis of nationalism, the claim that Indians don't exploit, or that labour organizations and conflict are "unindian" (1986:110).
31. In fact, the "traditional" practices relied upon by Aboriginal politicians are often hybrid inventions. For example, Cherokee leader Jimmie

Durham describes the invention in 1920 of a key symbol of traditionalism in Canada and the United States, the powwow (1977:253). The concept of "invented traditions" is developed in a collection of essays edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (see especially Hobsbawm's introduction, 1-14, and Ranger's essay "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa").

32. Bartra cites a study by the Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias which explains the extent of this process of displacement in Mexico:

In 1960, 1.24 million peasants were classified as holders of infrasubsistence plots (with an average gross family income of fifty to eighty pesos per month); these peasants, representing 50 percent of the total, had to supplement their earnings with wage labour. Perhaps it would be better to say that they were proletarians who complemented their wages with agriculture. Furthermore, also in 1960, 820,000 peasants were classified as possessors of sub-familial plots, producing, on average, little more than what was strictly necessary to feed themselves. They constituted 33 percent of the peasantry, and obviously a high percentage obtained income in the form of a wage. All of this without even counting the millions of persons who had no land whatsoever! (1993:37-38).

The 1990 census of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática shows a net out-migration from most rural states. Chiapas alone lost 124,375 migrants, whereas the state of Mexico received 3,308,693.

In 1993, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development reported that forty percent of Status Indians in Canada live off-Reserve. This does not account for non-Status Indians (who have usually lost their Status as a result of being displaced), Métis and Inuit. The highest concentration of Aboriginal migrants is in Toronto, with an Aboriginal population of approximately 65,000.

33. Nigel Harris most cogently describes the economic advantages of immigrant labour:

It constitutes a net subsidy from one national capital to another. The sending country bears the cost of reproduction of the worker from its domestic product; the destination country receives adult labour power without the costs that would be needed to raise and train the worker... The subsidy is maximized for single adult workers on temporary contracts without any right to participate in local reproduction and maintenance services (1980:48).

This logic also applies to Aboriginal people migrating from their Reserves to the city, within state borders. Harris also points out that migrant labourers benefit the capitalist class as a whole by allowing "more workers to be utilized by a given capital stock: the small farmer in the Punjab produces much more surplus value when he is imported to work in a foundry in Wolverhampton" (1980:48).

34. For a description of living conditions in the maquiladora zones, see Dwyer (1994).
35. The informal economy which predominates in these shantytowns has a similar function to the economy of Aboriginal lands. Inhabitants of the shantytowns can easily be captured as workers in the formal economy, while the informal economy provides subsistence for those who cannot be absorbed into the main workforce. The informal economy is subject to state repression,, but at the same time it conveniently reduces the pressure for the state to take responsibility for the thousands who eke out a precarious living there.
36. This process of labour migration is less consciously and systematically organized than in South Africa under apartheid. However, it is arguably no less important to the economy of the North American trade block. As Legassick puts it, "rightlessness, migrancy, and dispersion" reduce the concentration and strength of a free/dispossessed labour force (1974:280).
37. The beginnings of such a movement have been visible in demonstrations of unprecedented size in Toronto and Winnipeg against attempts by the state to erode special Aboriginal rights. The demonstrations have for the first time brought together Reserve and urban Aboriginal people in large numbers. In Toronto, a protest of 450 against the taxation of off-Reserve Aboriginals led to the occupation of the Revenue Canada building in December, 1995. The following January in Winnipeg, 500 demonstrated against federal cuts to Aboriginal health care benefits.

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