LIVING IN THE AGE OF EXCLUSION:
THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE GLOBALIZATION ON RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

Corporate globalization is a world-wide phenomenon that has rapidly come to affect the lives of many people - rich and poor, women and men, black and white, urban and rural. Its impact is felt not only at the level of the nation state, but in communities and households as well. While some hail its arrival, others fear its totalitarian rule.

Although corporate globalization does not discriminate between rural and urban areas, rural communities experience its impact in very special ways. Sparsely populated and spatially isolated, rural communities lack the range and depth of resources available to their urban counterparts to deal with these impacts. In addition, they are often excluded from consideration by government programs and policies that are written primarily with an urban focus (Pinder 1994, 178). Cut loose to fend for themselves, rural communities face a bleak and perilous future.

This paper will begin with a description of corporate globalization to set the parameters for understanding the kind of force that rural communities are up against. Then it will discuss the impacts of corporate globalization on rural communities, impacts that are mentioned in scattered references throughout the literature, but are now collected together to present a more coherent whole. This paper will conclude with a reminder that these impacts set the context for any future economic plans or policy initiatives that might be aimed at revitalizing endangered rural communities.

Corporate Globalization

While the term globalization has a range of meanings, the subcategory of corporate globalization involves the increasing dominance of transnational corporations around the world. Seemingly inescapable, corporate globalization has penetrated every aspect of our lives, from government policy and school curriculum to public washrooms and rural countrysides.

Described as a “world system in which powerful, interconnected, stateless corporations nullify national boundaries and incorporate whole societies as cost-effective sites of production” (Ratner 1997, 271), corporate globalization seeks to maximize revenues to corporate stockholders and high-level corporate managers. In order to accomplish this enrichment, transnational corporations roam the world looking for opportunities for the largest output with the smallest input. Output means profits. Input means costs, including paying fair wages, abiding by environmental regulations and adhering to health and safety laws. As business competition becomes more global, the ways that different countries account for such costs creates the so-called “uneven playing field.” Former World Bank senior economist, Herman E. Daly, explains how this difficulty is overcome under corporate globalization:

> the market left to itself will resolve the difficulty by standards-lowering competition - the way of counting costs that results in the cheapest product will prevail. Capital will move to the country that does the least complete job of internalizing environmental and social costs. Consequently, globalization results in a larger share of

> world product being produced under regimes that externalize costs to the greatest degree (1999, 34).

It is this combination of ever higher profits with ever lower costs that creates the incubus that is corporate globalization. Under its agenda, environmental damage, child labour abuses or hazardous workplaces are externalities (Mazur 2000, 84) that must not affect the constant search for the lowest costs possible.

Generally speaking, corporate globalization embraces three elements: larger markets, capital mobility and greater specialization (Drache and Gertler 1991, xi-xii). Larger markets involve global rather than national or international markets. Capital mobility changes the emphasis of trade from production commodities to financial ones. Encouraged by fluctuating currency values, capital mobility has resulted in currency trading surpassing the trade in goods and services by more than twenty to one (Lind 1999, 6), with foreign currency transactions estimated at US $1.3 trillion daily (Kerr 1998, 9). Such increased capital mobility has made economic well-being ephemeral, with poverty and prosperity alternating among different regions and localities (Lobao and Schulman 1991, 570), resulting in a kind of permanent insecurity. This pandemic of insecurity is part of

> a mode of domination of a new type, based on the institution of a generalized and permanent condition of insecurity aiming to compel the workers to submission, to the acceptance of exploitation (Bourdieu in Callinicos 1999, 89)

Greater specialization involves comparative advantage, which governs trade between nations. Although still promoted by global institutions like the International Monetary Fund, in reality comparative advantage is being replaced by “absolute advantage,” by which global capitalists rather than nations compete with each other for both labourers and natural resources, as well as markets, in all countries (Daly 1999, 32).

Although romanticized in the corporate-owned media, corporate globalization has negative consequences for the majority of people in the world. Promoted as a global solution to world problems, corporate globalization, when closely examined, “turns out to be unfettered individualism for corporations on a global scale” (Daly 1999, 31). According to Mazur (2000, 79), corporate globalization is “leaving perilous instability and rising inequality in its wake. It is hurting too many and helping too few.” In fact, corporate globalization has no place for those who cannot afford to take up the role of the consumer who contributes to corporate profits. We are living in “the age of exclusion” (George 1997, 1), when those who cannot afford to join the consumer culture have no right to exist. In this “reactionary utopia” (Wilson and Whitmore 1998, 16) of winners and losers, we are encouraged to emulate the winners - the wealthy - and blame the victims of corporate globalization - the poor. By blaming the victim’s situation on the victim’s failure to institute behaviour, responsibility to change things can be avoided (Flora 1990, 170). With corporate globalization, responsibility is easy to evade. According to Berry (1999, 184), the buck never stops when it comes to transnational corporations:

> The buck is processed up the hierarchy until finally it is passed to ‘the shareholders’, who are too widely dispersed, too poorly informed, and too unconcerned to be responsible for anything.

One of the greatest impacts of corporate globalization is uneven development, which involves the

> transfer and concentration of wealth into fewer and fewer hands through a process of centralization (mergers, takeovers), expansion (franchising and expanding sales to China, Eastern Europe), and cost-cutting efficiencies (moving production from the First to the Third World for cheaper labour and resources or replacing workers with robots) (Nozick 1992, 28).

Such uneven development tends to produce a “dual-economy system all over the world” (Korsgaard 1997, 12). Within this dual economy, “the rich increasingly disengage themselves from their fellow countrymen and leave them in deteriorating conditions” (Laxer 1995, 289).

Among the losers in the “casino capitalism” (Pacione 1997, 415) that is corporate globalization, according to a recent United Nations Human Development Report, are

> the 1.3 billion people living on a dollar a day or less, the 160 million malnourished children, the one-fifth of the world’s population not expected to live beyond 40, and the 100 million people in the West who are living below the poverty line (Brittain and Elliott 1997, 23).

The Impact of Corporate Globalization on Rural Communities

The impact of corporate globalization has been overwhelmingly negative for many people in the world. While economic growth in countries like Indonesia, Taiwan and Thailand was hailed as the miracle of the Asian Tigers, the subsequent Asian Meltdown put an end to such naive optimism. The reality, for “the Majority World,” is grim, with little relief in sight. All in all, the consequences of corporate globalization are “disastrous” for the majority of people (Nozick 1992, 27).

While communities around the world are feeling the increasing pressures of corporate globalization, rural communities are especially vulnerable because of their low population densities (ROMA 1997, 1), their increasing lack of diversity (Leach and Winson 1995, 349) and their persistent levels of poverty (Murray and Dunn 1995, 90-91). Given these vulnerabilities, rural communities in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan have been described as endangered habitats (Lind 1999). In Australia, corporate globalization and its accompanying agrarian restructuring processes have subjected many farming regions to continuous crisis conditions (Smailes 1997, 20). Berry (1999, 183) goes so far as to suggest that

> since its inception, the industrial economy has systematically undermined rural communities, and with globalisation, this process is accelerating throughout the world.

Although the problems facing rural areas are international and macroeconomic in their origins (Flora 1990, 173), the impacts of corporate globalization on rural communities are profoundly local in nature. These impacts can be divided into economic, political, social, environmental, gender-based and cultural. Although, in reality, many of these divisions overlap in a web of interdependency, their separation will help us to better understand how corporate globalization affects rural communities.

Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of corporate globalization are the most immediately obvious, and have the greatest repercussions. Kerr (1998, 5) sees corporate globalization as "contributing to the widening gap between rich and poor."

In rural communities, the economic impacts of corporate globalization are eroding the very foundations of the rural way of life. As the monetary imperatives of corporate globalization are felt in rural communities, the values of co-operation, loyalty, sharing, mutual obligation, trust and solidarity are downgraded or pushed aside.

Traditionally resource based, rural communities have long produced primary products and provided local employment. But as the internationalization of the world economy increasingly occurs through finance,

> capital markets, rather than commodity markets, appear to be the ultimate determinants of rural welfare and rural social, as well as economic, structures (Flora 1990, 157).

To understand the increasing dominance of capital markets under corporate globalization, we need to understand the imperatives of capital itself. Mitchell (1998, 276) reminds us that the driving force behind capitalism is the quest for surplus value or profit. She adds that once initiated by an entrepreneur, the process of capital accumulation is almost impossible to stop (283). It follows, therefore, that entrepreneurs, driven to accumulate capital, continuously seek out investment opportunities, and that "restricting one's investment in the face of escalating profits ... is counter-intuitive to the entrepreneurial mindset" (284).

These imperatives of capital that underlie the economic impacts of corporate globalization affect rural communities through an interconnecting matrix of agro-industrialization, poverty and debt creation, restructuring, deregulation, privatization, changes in employment/unemployment patterns and commodification/consumption.

1. Agro-Industrialization

The industrialization of agriculture has resulted in extensive declines in the number of farms and in the number of people employed in agriculture (Albrecht 1998, 51), with devastating effects for many rural communities. Increasingly, small and medium-sized farms are being replaced by large, agro-industrial farms, which Lyson and Geisler (1992, 248) characterize as supported by off-farm capital and involving substantial hired labour. Padavic (1993, 210) uses Friedland's description of large industrialized farms as marked by "vertically and horizontally integrated production, processing, and distribution of generic inputs for mass marketable foodstuffs," adding that it is occurring at an increasingly fast rate and replacing classic family farming (211).

In the United Kingdom, for instance, agricultural producers are becoming increasingly subsumed by external capital; in the United States, industrial-like farming is increasing its share of agricultural production (Lyson and Geisler 1992, 248, 249). And while direct federal payments to farmers in the US in 1999 rose to a record $23 billion, those payments went disproportionately to larger farmers, thus concentrating farming among the large operators (Kristof 2000).

In Canada, rural communities reflect the new tensions in agriculture, with farmers wanting to feed the world while making a fair income, and others seeing agriculture as a capital-intensive, high-technology, international industry (Lind 1999, 6-7). Such tensions lead one Canadian farmer to voice what many are feeling: if farm land is "taken over by the corporate farms, there's no doubt that there would be no communities left to speak of" (Canadian Press 1998, A13).

Agro-industrialization affects rural communities in other ways as well. For example, agro-industrial input manufacturers promote diverse credit relations among farmers, which ties them to technological packages that are designed to reproduce certain commodity forms (Marsden 1989, 315), such as products for export instead of local consumption. Production for export has already created problems in Latin America, where the process of corporate globalization has resulted in an export strategy of fresh fruits and vegetables that promotes local poverty and hunger (Wimberly 1996, 538).

In addition, the growth of corporate food firms and international finance capital allows the globalized food system to pick and choose between producing countries (Marsden 1992, 225). Under such conditions,

> national attempts to rebuild the social wage, develop welfare systems and ensure ‘social nets’ such as reducing the comparative costs of rural living, represent barriers to transnational investment (Marsden 1992, 225).

Either nations choose to protect rural people and are bypassed by transnational investors, or they eliminate the so-called “barriers” and remove such protections, leaving rural people to face the whims of corporate globalization alone.

2. Poverty and Debt Creation

One of the ways of widening the gap between rich and poor and contributing to the Age of Exclusion is debt creation. Whether it is individual or governmental indebtedness, Third-World or First-World indebtedness, all serve to keep money flowing to the wealthiest sectors of the population. While American and Canadian household debt has risen to a new record level of over 90% of after-tax income (McMurtry 1998, 249), government debt has also risen, in almost every country in the world. In developed countries, the national debt was deliberately created to "cap social spending" (McMurtry, 1999a, 71), allowing the private sector to move into formerly public-sector areas like health care. In developing countries, indebtedness was encouraged as part of "development" (McMichael 1996, 34). As country after country found themselves unable to repay their debts, structural adjustment programs were imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (George 1997, 14), programs which downgraded national priorities, such as welfare enhancement, while opening the door to foreign investment and export production (McMichael 1996, 35).

Poverty and debt often go hand in hand, especially in rural communities. When describing how poverty is perpetuated in rural communities by those who benefit from the status quo, Duncan (1996, 108) uses Townshend's definition of poverty:

> the lack of the resources necessary to permit participation in the activities, customs, and diets commonly approved by society.

In her presidential address to the Rural Sociological Society on rural peoples in a global economy, Flora (1990, 163) described how high prices and cheap credit in the 1970s encouraged indebtedness in the United States and in developing countries: the good farmer was the highly leveraged farmer. Seen by some as yet another way for capital to extract surplus value from farmers (Blanc 1994, 282), debt is one of the engines of corporate globalization, forming part of the "city-controlled but globally-based 'arbitrage' economy" (Marsden 1989, 315). The importance of debt can be understood by the fact that General Motors and General Electric, for example, "both made more profits in 1994 from their financial subsidiaries lending credit-money at compound interest than they did from all of their production of automotive and electrical manufactures put together” (McMurtry 1999a, 121).

A world-wide recession and the farm crisis of the 1980s resulted in a higher value for the dollar, which, in turn, meant loans were more expensive to pay off and commodity prices on the world market were less competitive for rural producers. Faced with rising debt costs and lower incomes, many farmers found themselves faced with the decision to either expand their operations to survive (i.e., incur more debt) or sell out (Lorenz et al 1993, 263). For many farmers, years of borrowing to survive resulted in

> entrenched indebtedness ... and the accompanying rural poverty and inability either to escape from indebtedness or to sell up without walking off the farm penniless (Smailes 1997, 22).

In this way, the farm crisis of the 1980s not only resulted in economic hardship for many rural families, but also forced many of those same rural families to “continue to labor under the bonds of economic hardship into the 1990s” (Lorenz et al 1993, 265).

3. Restructuring

Restructuring is a term often used to describe changes in the economy, changes that include “stagnant wage growth and increases in part-time jobs” (McLaughlin et al 1999, 395). Foley (1994, 122) warns that restructuring should be understood as a myth that masks the actual processes of capital reorganization. He adds that any economic restructuring which is directed by the capitalist state will be, ultimately and primarily, in the interests of capital and against the general interest (138-139). His view of the consequences of economic restructuring is borne out by McMichael (1996, 38), who argues that

> when states restructure, they may improve their financial standing

> and their export sectors, but the majority of citizens and poorer classes find their protections shorn away in the rush to participate in the world market.

Restructuring has had a devastating impact on the economies of rural areas, especially in those communities that are very dependent on manufacturing activity (Nelson 1999, 18). While rural restructuring has been triggered largely by agricultural deregulation and public sector reform, wider economic reforms have also had an impact (Wilson 1995, 420). Demanded in the name of economic efficiency, restructuring is "both an economic and a social phenomenon," initiated at the governmental and corporate level, but impacting most directly on people in places (Pawson and Scott 1992, 373). In the wake of economic restructuring, "the rural economy has worsened" (Duncan and Lamborghini 1994, 440).

For example, in the western Australian wheatbelt, rural restructuring has resulted in significant changes in the employment structure, with the primary sector of the workforce declining by 30 per cent (Jones and Tonts 1995, 135). This decline contributed to the process of depopulation, which has resulted in many rural communities struggling to survive (135). In addition, rural restructuring resulted in the withdrawal of services and the contraction of local economies (137).

In the United States, restructuring is a wrenching experience for many rural communities:

> restructuring ... is impoverishing small ranchers and farmers, forcing them to sell out, depopulating large chunks of rural America and changing the way Americans get their food (Kristof 2000).

In his study of displaced workers in the United States, Swaim (1995, 230) contends that his data suggests that the high rate of worker displacement "reflected ongoing economic restructuring more than intermittent cyclical downturns." His study also revealed that "rural workers were more likely to be displaced and experienced higher economic costs following displacement" than urban workers (230).

Swaim's work reflects the findings of other studies of rural counties in the US, where economic restructuring in the 1980s resulted in employment problems. Duncan and Lamborghini (1994, 443) found that the coal counties of Appalachia lost 2,000 mining jobs, while northern New England counties lost 1,000 manufacturing jobs. Restructuring in coal-mining communities in western Canada due to corporate globalization brought on hard times for the people who lived there. As a result of restructuring, these communities experienced a decline of one third in average incomes, sharp increases in domestic violence and in alcohol and drug abuse, less community involvement, lower local spending of wages, stalled residential development and construction, empty shopping malls and local governmental debt (Ciccantell 1999, 22-23, 24). The fiscal impacts of restructuring in the United States are emphasized by Flora and Flora (1993, 55), who contend that "the economic restructuring facing rural America has led to decreasing incomes and a decreasing tax base in many areas."

All in all, any private-sector or public-sector restructuring that takes place as a result of globalization impacts differently and more severely on rural communities than on their urban and metropolitan counterparts (Lauzon and Hagglund 1998, 6), engendering a kind of endless, grinding poverty that prompted one rancher to comment: "If you pass on your ranch to your son, ... then it's child abuse" (Kristof 2000).

4. Deregulation

To facilitate capital accumulation in a global market, “capital interests require ever more freedom from regulation (and other forms of ‘interference’) by the state” (Cloke 1989, 34). According to Bell and Cloke (1989, 4), the process of deregulation involves

> the removal or reduction of constraints upon the operation of the free market, particularly affecting the free entry of competitors into areas previously controlled by monopolies or dominant firms and agencies.

McMichael (1996, 46) claims that the new rules proposed by the GATT Uruguay Round that challenge agricultural protection and farm subsidies will result in a “streamlining of agriculture” that can only accelerate farm concentration and de-ruralization trends, resulting in “making the rural even more intensely residual,” but on a global scale.

New Zealand provides a classic study of deregulation. In that country, deregulation included two kinds of reforms: macroeconomic reforms, such as the floating of the exchange rate and removal of import licences; and sectoral reforms, including deregulation of the agricultural sector (Wilson 1995, 419). The deregulation of the agricultural sector dismantled the structure of subsidies, tax and other fiscal incentives, and the price controls that had been built up to protect farmers (419). Although initially welcomed by farmers, agricultural deregulation was shortly followed by falling world commodity prices, worsening terms of trade, rising interest rates and inflation, all of which meant that farmers were faced with dramatically reduced incomes and land values on one hand, and rising debts on the other (419).

At the community level, deregulation had a number of impacts in New Zealand. It resulted in the acceleration of the centralization of services in larger centres (Wilson 1995, 420), which directly affects rural community members' access to those services. In addition, one study found that deregulation altered the relationship between businesses and the farming community: traditionally based on loyalty, that relationship is now based on competitiveness (430), which has long-term implications for the survival of rural communities.

In this way, deregulation

> bids fair to widen the gap between basically profitable and unprofitable sectors and places, and between rich and poor (Bell and Cloke 1989, 11).

5. Privatization

Another economic impact of corporate globalization involves the privatization of the public sector in order to create new markets for private investment and profit. This privatizing agenda has been promoted by unregulated supranational institutions such as the World Bank, which, by 1991, had made 114 loans to speed up the privatization process (George 1999a, 5).

According to McMurtry (2000, 1), privatization involves defunding "all social sectors which provide life-serving, non-profit goods into crisis or bankruptcy so that they are forced into private corporate control." Privatization reshapes the "relationships between the public and private sectors" (Cloke 1989, 34). While numerous excuses are put forward to justify privatization,

> the whole point of privatisation is neither economic efficiency or improved services to the consumer but simply to transfer wealth from the public purse - which could redistribute it to even out social inequalities - to private hands (George 1999a, 5-6).

Bell and Cloke (1989, 3) define privatization as “reducing state sector involvement in a range of industries and in the provision of social services.” They contend that privatization can be accomplished in four ways: by charging for a service (i.e., user pays), by privatizing the production of services (e.g., contracting out), by denationalization (i.e., returning or transferring state-owned industries to the private sector) and by liberalization/deregulation (i.e., freeing up market operations) (3-4). Privatization increased tenfold in the 1980s (McMichael 1996, 35), as countries like the United States insisted on the “primacy of the private sector” (Flora 1990, 170). By the 1990s, years of cutbacks to areas of the public sector such as the Canadian health care system have left them crippled and open to privatization.

While increasing state revenues in the short term, privatization shifts various responsibilities into the market place (Bell and Cloke 1989, 3), responsibilities that were formerly undertaken by the state. As a democratic institution, the state was obliged to consider the welfare of all citizens, regardless of distant location. Not so with the global market, which will only invest in areas of assured profit. As a result, privatization has led to reduced service provision in rural areas (Wilson 1995, 420). Public services in danger of privatization include postal services, public utilities, telecommunications and public transport, all of which are crucial to the well-being of rural communities. In addition, the remoteness of many rural communities from privatized water, gas and electrical supplies “might thereby incur disproportionate increases” (Bell and Cloke 1989, 6). As well, the extension of privatization into education and health services will not only have a “major distributional impact” on the rural deprived, but will also have detrimental effects on the labour force as public sector national wage rates are replaced by locally bargained (and traditionally lower) rural wage rates (Bell and Cloke 1989, 8).

The ideology of self-help promotes the privatization agenda. Hailed as dependency reduction and innovation stimulus, privatization ultimately demands that rural communities, not private corporations, replace the state as provider of particular functions (Bell and Cloke 1989, 8). All in all, privatization will not serve rural areas well as a whole, and will disadvantage "the least affluent rural people" (14).

6. Changes in Employment/Unemployment Patterns

Yet another economic impact of corporate globalization involves changes in employment and unemployment patterns, such as indentured, child and slave labour, "flexible" employment and increased unemployment. As competition intensifies in the global market, full-time, stable employment dwindles, while new forms of employment, and unemployment, increase.

In general, corporate globalization erodes employment opportunities (Nozick 1992, 28). As transnational corporations roam the globe looking for the lowest costs, desperate governments join the "rush to the bottom" to attract foreign investment. Since market share and competition rely on a steady flow of cheap labour (Kerr 1998, 9), hard-won labour laws in developed countries are bypassed in favour of low-wage, or no-wage, alternatives in developing countries. Indentured and slave labour have increased (McMichael, 1996, 40), along with child labour (Baxter and Mann, 1992, 236; Cassidy 1997, 251) in countries with few or no protections. So-called "flexible" employment proliferates around the world to reduce corporate risk or avoid paying benefits to wage labour (Baxter and Mann 1992, 244). As unemployment mushrooms, the social safety net is shredded, all in the name of economic efficiency. The resulting loss of jobs represents:

> the 'hollowing out' of a nation's economic base, and the erosion of

> social institutions that stabilize the conditions of employment and habitat associated with those jobs (McMichael 1996, 40).

Like many other communities around the world, rural communities have experienced the changes in employment and unemployment patterns brought on by corporate globalization. Fordist traditions of stable, well-paid, full-time, unionized work evaporate as more and more corporations look for labour “flexibility,” which Leach and Winson (1995, 345) refer to as “a euphemism for cutting their wage bill.” In rural America, for example, recent economic restructuring, which is characteristic of corporate globalization, has gone “hand-in-hand with the erosion of employment opportunities” (McLaughlin et al 1999, 394).

Under corporate globalization, Marsden (1992, 222) finds conventional categories and formal boundaries of rural labour becoming increasingly redundant. He sees more emphasis on

> variable time and activity patterns; more casual and freelance work, variable leisure patterns, the erosion of the distinctiveness of domestic and formal labour and more ‘hire and fire’ vulnerability (222).

He adds that recent analyses suggest that these new forms of labour activity are characterized by “higher levels of exploitation and declining levels of social rights” (222).

More and more, employment falls into two categories: one small category with well-paid, highly skilled work and a much larger category with unskilled, precarious work. The latter category includes workers who have suffered “occupational skidding” - a slide to lower paying, often part-time work with limited fringe benefits and a decline of quality of life on the job (Leach and Winson 1995, 349). Such dualistic labour processes, Marsden (1992, 223) contends, may be more pronounced in rural regions, with a small proportion of white-collar workers and “a large proportion of blue-collar workers’ jobs being down-graded and de-skilled in a ‘secondary’ labour sector.”

Yet another change in employment patterns involves the rise of the service industry, which has replaced the manufacturing that moved to low-wage countries. The decline of mass-production operations that employ a well-paid, unionized workforce has opened the way for low-wage service jobs, often informally organized in the home or in sweatshops (Baxter and Mann 1992, 233). These low-wage jobs demand either long or intermittent hours, involve poor working conditions, promote deskilling, provide few, if any, benefits and offer little chance of advancement.

Even by 1990, research pointed to trends in rural areas that included the rise of the service sector as the dominant rural industry (Lobao and Schulman 1991, 569-70). However, the large proportion of newly-created, service-industry jobs are low-skill, low-wage and relatively unstable (Albrecht 1998, 55). Recent research in the United States has shown that the rural counties facing the greatest socioeconomic and family structure problems were the counties that were dependent on the service industry, and far from solving their economic problems, the service industry may be fuelling additional ones (60-61).

One sector of the growing service industry is the tourist industry, which is promoted as a replacement for the manufacturing jobs lost because of corporate globalization. As rural communities find themselves competing with one another for tourist dollars, it is important to recognize the downside of the tourism bonanza. While investments in tourism can generate significant benefits for those involved in rural tourism,

> such investments have also led to a partial destruction of the rural idyll, to the loss of a community that is happy, healthy and problem-free (Mitchell 1998, 283).

Another change in employment patterns involves working off the farm. While off-farm work is not new to the farming sector (Johnson 1996, 531), such work has increased as an adaptive strategy by farmers facing severely reduced incomes. Typical of many countries, increasing numbers of farm households in New Zealand "reduced their reliance on farm incomes by one or other partner working off the farm" (Wilson 1995, 419). Sometimes labelled "pluriactivity" (Marsden 1989, 315), such income diversification has become a survival strategy in many rural areas of the world (Flora 1990, 167; McMichael 1996, 46).

The rate of unemployment has also increased due to corporate globalization. In this era of the "jobless recovery," the economy thrives while more and more people face destitution. In Canada, according to Leach and Winson (1995, 248), there is strong evidence of a rather substantial and disturbing increase in the proportion of unemployed individuals experiencing long-term unemployment.

McMurtry (1999a, 54) explains the role of unemployment under corporate globalization:

> Unemployment and loss of livelihood to people is a further benefit to transnational operations and businesses in general because it lowers the price of labour, and, therefore, the revenues that private employers are required to pay out to workers.

Long-term unemployment carries high social and individual costs: for society, it leads to marginalization of a segment of the labour force and higher costs for unemployment insurance and other social programs; for the individual, it leads to erosion of work skills, limited prospects and undermined morale (Leach and Winson 1995, 349).

In the United States, Swaim (1995, 213) found that

> the rural unemployment rate rose more than the urban rate in the recession at the beginning of the 1980s and has remained higher ever since.

Both lumber and mining communities suffered massive unemployment during the recession of the 1980s (Flora 1990, 166), from which many never recovered. In farming communities, the level of unemployment can be gauged by the announcement in early 2000 that one-third of the farmers in the province of Saskatchewan will be out of business within one year (CBC 2000).

7. Commodification/Consumption

Commodification and consumption are essential aspects of corporate globalization, a twin dynamic that can produce the profits that investors restlessly seek. While by no means new concepts, they have gained in significance as the economy has gone global.

Commodities are objects that are produced for the purpose of being exchanged (Thrift 1994a, 78). Commodification entails turning objects into commodities so they can be exchanged and a profit can be realized. When discussing the "totalizing character" of capitalism, Carroll and Ratner (1994, 17) describe the "incessant process of commodification" as

> the relentless quest for new ways in which human practices and human beings can be brought under the sway of the law of value.

According to Thrift (1994a, 78-9), the process of commodification has reached into every nook and cranny of modern life: in Western countries practically every human activity relies on or has certain commodities associated with it, and in non-Western societies, the process of commodification has increasingly taken hold. Shiva (1997, 22) describes the spread of commodification:

> In effect, all aspects of everyday life are being transformed into globally-traded commodities. Food, land, seeds, plants, and animals are now all commodities on international markets.

Marsden (1989, 314) expands on our understanding of commodification when he explains that it involves the extension of the commodity form to new spheres of activity, brought about by capital's systematic seeking to "transform use values into exchange values and simultaneously to develop new 'needs' and markets" (314). He contends that

> successive bouts of re-commodification which transform use values and out-dated exchange values are pivotal to the understanding of agrarian change (314-15).

In this vein, Mitchell (1998, 273) discusses "the commodification of the countryside ideal," which involves, first, the idealization of the rural landscape and, second, the commodification of this myth through mechanisms like heritage shopping centres.

However, such commodification has led to problems in rural communities. Newcomers who move to rural communities to live out the countryside ideal can be at odds with long-time residents over issues like pesticide use and manure spreading. Rural communities can also be "home to significant tensions between visitor and local resident" (Mitchell 1998, 275) as tourists flood in to experience the ideal, thereby destroying not only the local residents' quality of life, but also the very pristine ideal the tourists themselves are seeking.

Commodification has also threatened family farms. Blanc (1994, 288) argues that because it induces a tendency toward individuation of family members and dissociation of work links from affectual ones, commodification weakens one of the main strengths of the family farm: the ability to call on a flexible and cheap work force from the household. In addition, the context of commodification that is accelerated under corporate globalization increases the value of capital transferred to the successor of the family farm, leaving other children less willing to accept a violation of equity and therefore problematizing the transfer of the family business (288).

Once commodified, an object needs a consumer to realize a profit for the investor. And while some argue that the chief reason for existence is consuming (Thrift 1994b, 89), such a view begs the question of what happens to the increasing numbers of people around the world who have no money to enable them to join the consumer culture promoted by corporate globalization.

One aspect of the increased scope for consumption is the "consumption of rurality" (Jones and Tonts 1995, 138) or the "role of rural areas as consumption 'spaces'" (Marsden 1989, 315). Within a rural setting

> corporate firms with rural interests such as housebuilders, food processors, forestry, mineral and mining interests as well as small-scale manufacturing and craft production, develop strategies to stimulate and *shape consumption* (Marsden 1992, 214).

Increased consumption affects rural communities in several ways. Tourism can involve the consumption of the commodified countryside, with heritage shopping villages becoming centres of consumption for tourists hungry to purchase a piece of the countryside ideal, which can result in tensions between local residents and visitors (Mitchell 1998).

Increased consumption also affects rural communities through agricultural production itself. Ward et al (1995, 1193) contend that

> the role of agricultural production is diminishing in association with a secular redefinition of the social functions of rural space to encompass distinctive consumption roles (such as residence, recreation, leisure, and environmental conservation).

Marsden (1992, 219) agrees, seeing a decline in the "productivist system of agriculture" at the same time as the development of a much more diverse set of "privatized consumption relations." These privatized consumption relations, he warns, are accompanied by the state-supported diminution of the remaining vestiges of collective consumption and welfare (219).

Jones and Tonts (1995, 138) also express concern for rural communities in the face of increased consumption. They argue that the perception of the countryside as a "space of consumption" to be enjoyed by tourists must be balanced by constructions of the countryside as a "space of production" - where economic efficiency and ecological sustainability must be maintained - and as a "space of social action" - where the social values of equity and community can be fostered (138).

Marsden (1992, 221) concludes that

> if neo-conservative state regulation is to protect and reproduce a growing consumer-oriented 'contented' class segment it seems likely that their influence upon a rural society ... will also grow.

By contributing to the widening gap between rich and poor through agro-industrialization, poverty and debt creation, restructuring, deregulation, privatization, changes in employment and unemployment patterns, and commodification/consumption, corporate globalization promotes the exclusion of more and more people from the economic opportunity to improve their lives.

Political Impacts

The role of the state has changed dramatically under corporate globalization, affecting rural communities both directly and indirectly. This changing role is highlighted by Shiva (1997, 25):

> The erosion of the power of the nation-state ... transforms institutions of the state from being protectors of the health and rights of people to protectors of the property and profits of corporations.

The emphasis on corporate globalization has meant that economic criteria have cast a shadow over the social criteria that defined the national project, resulting in new national priorities such as boosting export production, offering attractive conditions for foreign investments and rolling back public investment in the former Third World (McMichael 1996, 35). Another political impact is corporate tax avoidance (Cassidy 1997, 251), facilitated by changes in national taxation legislation and lack of regulation at a global level, which results in even less money available for national social expenditures like education and healthcare.

In addition, corporate globalization has not been matched by political globalization, or a system of governance that can control its powerful forces (Elliott 1999, 14). While the nation-state has traditionally buffered civil society from the excesses of capital, there is no such protection at the global level. Indeed, nation-states have fallen over themselves to pave the way for corporate globalization while undercutting their own ability to respond to transnational corporate demands by signing trade agreements that simply benefit large corporate players. For example, there was serious concern in some Canadian legal circles that the Canadian constitution, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, would be superceded by the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment that the Canadian government was secretly organizing in Paris over a number of years in the late 1990s (Fogal 1999). Described as a bill of rights for transnational corporations, the MAI focused on protection of foreign investment capital by enshrining the principle of "unconditional right to 'national treatment' of transnational corporations in host societies" (McMurtry 1999a, 79).

As market-place economics necessitate a reduction in the role of state benefits and regulations (Bell and Cloke 1989, 2), many governments are adopting less regulatory economic policies (Wilson 1995, 417). Government policy introduced within this new political climate has serious implications for rural communities because "rural areas provide less healthy arenas for competition than their urban counterparts" (Bell and Cloke 1989, 11). Government policies that reflect the imperatives of corporate globalization include public sector cutbacks, tariff reductions, changes in tax structures, curtailments of rural services, a culture of enterprise and an ideology of self reliance.

In New Zealand, for example, the government embarked on public sector cutbacks that dissolved a number of public-sector agencies with a key role in rural areas, such as the postal service, forestry and energy, and either re-introduced them as state-owned corporations run on a fully commercial basis or sold them to the private sector (Wilson 1995, 419). Bell and Cloke (1989, 6) contend that such kinds of "denationalisation" will raise interesting user-pay questions because rural areas represent high-cost areas for the supply of services such as water, gas and electricity.

In Australia, Smailes (1997, 40) reports that both major national political parties agreed on policies that would directly affect rural areas - radical tariff reductions and radical cuts in government expenditures, which he contends work against the interests of small family farmers.

In the United States, government tax support has declined for programs that are the primary conduit of mental health service delivery, especially in rural areas at a time when stress levels have become critical due to the crisis in agriculture (Jacob et al 1997, 275, 276).

In England, government deregulation of public transport had a significant impact on rural areas, resulting in a "major polarisation between more profitable urban areas and the less attractive rural zones" (Bell and Cloke 1989, 10).

Many governments, in both the North and the South, have eliminated state-sponsored extension programs, in line with the dominant privatization agenda of corporate globalization. Denounced as "financially unsustainable" (Kidd et al 2000, 96), public extension systems have been slashed through government cutbacks and structural adjustment programs, in spite of studies of privatized systems that "demonstrate the negative effects of such systems, particularly on small farming" (Rivera 1993, 1). Originally set up as a means of improving the education of rural people (OAC 1999, 10), the demise of publicly funded extension programs is a bellwether of publicly funded education in general. The privatization agenda of supranational institutions like the World Bank legitimizes, advocates and promotes education as a marketing opportunity (Sumner 1999, 77), not a learning opportunity. Seen as simply one more barrier to trade in a world-wide regime that only understands the value of priced goods (including the privatization of formerly public knowledge), publicly funded education is being starved by cutbacks in government expenditures in line with the imperatives of corporate globalization. In response to such government policy, commodifiable forms of education like distance education take on greater appeal to cash-strapped universities as a source of instant funding (Sumner forthcoming). Cultivating alliances with transnational corporations becomes more important than providing meaningful learning experiences for students.

As employment in rural communities evaporates, government policy promotes a "culture of enterprise" to promote prosperity, but

> the bulk of those entering self-employment today struggle to survive, joining those whose work is poorly paid, insecure and often casual (Pawson and Scott 1992, 384).

This promotion of enterprise is accompanied by an ideology of self reliance, which stresses the virtues of small business and self employment while leading a sustained assault on the welfare state (Pawson and Scott 1992, 384). This move toward "self help" has obvious distributional impacts for rural areas as rural communities pick up the functions that government no longer provides (Bell and Cloke 1989, 8).

Social Impacts

The impacts of corporate globalization reach far past the economic into the social lives of people in rural communities. And while the economic restructuring of agriculture is largely capital biased and concerned with increasing productivity, these processes have also generated a range of social problems for rural communities (Jones and Tonts 1995, 133). These problems include decreased access to quality education, health-care restructuring, declining social institutions and destabilizing forms of migration into and out of rural communities.

Education is one sector where the social impacts of corporate globalization are felt in rural communities. In many areas, small, rural schools are being closed and students are being consolidated in larger, urban and suburban schools. Driven by ideological considerations based on questionable claims of the cost-effectiveness of economies of scale, these closures ignore the superior pedagogical outcomes of small (rural) schools, especially for marginal and disabled students (Lauzon and Leahy 2000). In addition, such closures overlook the vital role rural schools play in the web of community life.

In terms of health care, Lorenz et al (1993, 265) point out that the rural poor report lower levels of health than their urban counterparts. For example, in the United States, research shows that populations in rural areas generally suffer greater levels of disability, impairment and mental and physical disorders than those in urban areas, while at the same time experiencing higher rates of poverty and less access to health and human services (Jacob et al 1997, 275). In spite of these findings, health care under corporate globalization is being restructured in ways that further weaken rural communities' access to essential health-care services.

In addition, health-care restructuring gives little consideration to the role that hospitals play in the web of rural life. For example, in the Canadian province of Ontario, rural hospitals are prime targets for government cutbacks without any consideration of the fact that the rural health care sector is not only concerned with health care access, but also with the economic, social and environmental health and well-being of the community as a whole (Lauzon and Hagglund 1998, 20).

The stresses brought on rural communities by the pressures of corporate globalization have affected the mental health of community members. Lorenz et al (1993, 248) report the continued impact of economic pressure on the psychological health of family members in rural areas. Jacob et al (1997, 275) describe how stress related to crises in agriculture in farm populations of the mid-western United States was found to be correlated with incidents of depression, poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence and decreases in social well-being. In spite of these findings, there is a severe shortage of professional mental health support in rural areas, and a decline in tax support for this kind of service (276).

The changes brought on by rural restructuring have also affected the viability of local social institutions such as churches, sport clubs and social centres. For instance, by 1994 in western Australia, the majority of rural settlements that were not the administrative headquarters of local shires had "not only collapsed commercially, but had failed to retain any viable social institutions" (Jones and Tonts 1995, 137), which are so important to the survival of rural communities.

Cloke (1989, 46) found varying social responses among rural communities facing what he calls, "the rural downturn." While one community experienced an increase in cohesiveness and a feeling that survival depended on mutual help, another community abandoned the patronage of local services and facilities in favour of cheaper operations based in urban centres (46).

In Canada, as in many other countries, the least populated provinces "also tend to have the highest proportion of rural populations" (Green and Meyer 1997, 164), but that population is changing as a result of corporate globalization. People are migrating in and out of rural communities in response to the pressures of the global market. These migration flows have reshaped rural society (Ward et al 1995, 1194).

On the one hand, rural communities located within the urban shadow are experiencing the effects of in-migration as urban people move to the country, a phenomenon known as counter-urbanization (Dahms and McComb 1999). This phenomenon has resulted in an erosion of dynastic farming values because it makes

> farmers more likely to marry into and to socialize with other social groups, and consequently less prone to see themselves as a special group in society and eventually less committed to family succession (Blanc 1994, 288).

In-migration has been associated with and helped to catalyze a major shift in public attitudes to agriculture and the countryside, which has produced a growing gap between public perceptions of the function of the countryside and those of the farming community on questions of pesticide and land use (Ward et al 1995, 1194). Salamon and Tornatore (1994, 638) found that in-migration also resulted in tensions between local residents and newcomers with more wealth and education than established residents. They concluded that far from always rejuvenating rural communities, in-migration can hasten the death of a sense of community (652).

On the other hand, rural communities located far from urban centres are not as attractive as areas for relocation. For example, there has been “a general pattern of population decline” in the western Australian wheatbelt, which conforms to national trends in comparable regions (Jones and Tonts 1995, 134). Such out-migration is caused by the “erosion of employment opportunities” associated with rural restructuring, which produces “negative multipliers resulting in the contraction of local economies, the withdrawal of services and further demographic decline" (134). Thus, out-migration can start a vicious circle, which, again, can result in serious problems for rural communities.

Environmental Impacts

In terms of the environmental impacts of corporate globalization, Nozick (1992, 28) claims that corporate globalization is destroying the environment. Daly (1999, 35) agrees, contending that the environment cannot sustain the massive growth that corporate globalization entails. For example, global policies such as comparative advantage increase the distance between producers and consumers, which Nozick (1992, 28) maintains is "ecologically unsound."

Under the regime of corporate globalization, the environment is reduced to a source and a sink because "economists cannot value what the environment is worth; merely its value in monetary terms" (Redclift 1993, 14). Thus, under corporate globalization, the environment suffers "the heavy costs of contamination from transport and wastes of the production process as well as a more rapid use of natural resources, especially energy" (Barkin 1998, 15). Under the growing impact of increased economic activities,

> Our forests are overlogged, our agricultural lands overcropped, our grasslands overgrazed, our wetlands overdrained, our groundwaters overtapped, our seas overfished, and just about the whole terrestrial and marine environment overpolluted with chemical and radioactive poisons (Goldsmith 1997, 242).

In developing countries, the environmental impacts of corporate globalization include "rainforest destruction, loss of biodiversity, desertification, land degradation, and rapid growth in greenhouse gas emissions" (Buttel 1998, 279). While the blame is often placed on the low-income countries where such problems occur, it rightly belongs with the "present consumption standards of the affluent throughout the world" (Barkin 1998, 23) that are characteristic of corporate globalization.

The intensification of agricultural production resulting from the commoditization process has brought about new problems, in particular environmental problems (Blanc 1994, 288). For example, Flora (1990, 171) cites the degradation of the environment that monocropping engenders. Barkin (1998, 9) reports that in Latin America, the rhythm and intensity of environmental strains have quickened so much as to now represent a great threat to the viability of uncountable species of flora and fauna, as well as to human society itself.

These problems have created a growing public concern about the environmentally damaging impacts of modern farming practices (Wilson 1995, 417). Ward et al (1995, 1194-5) agree, contending that environmental problems in industrial agriculture have helped to erode public confidence, citing pesticide persistence, land use questions and agricultural pollution as undermining the notion of farmers as guardians of the countryside.

In addition, persistent debt has driven some farmers to destroy the environment they inhabit in order to survive. Some Ontario farmers have had to literally "mine the soil," in an effort to produce ever more crops to pay back their loans (Blow 1990). Barkin (1998, 8) cites evidence of rural people in Latin America displaced to marginal lands by the pressures of corporate globalization and having "no choice but to devastate their own environments in the desperate struggle to survive."

Almost by definition, corporate globalization entails environmental destruction. Waltner-

Toews (1999, 43) argues that since agriculture is profoundly ecological as well as economical, production decisions have local biological effects:

> These are often environmentally destructive, but the farmers can seldom make changes to avoid such environmental damage without offending the market imperatives under which they work. No satisfactory mechanism is in place to change or overrule the market influence so that the local farming practices can be corrected. The necessary feed-back loops of economy and policy are missing. What we get instead are biological feedbacks of an unpleasant kind.

Gender-Based Impacts

Baxter and Mann (1992, 244) maintain that the invisibility of women in global production is in large part a product of their relegation to informal sectors, shadow industries, homework, and other non-wage spheres of work. Under corporate globalization,

> the emergence of a technical and financial elite has also brought forth a host of low-wage jobs to service the new economy, jobs disproportionately populated by women, visible minorities and new immigrants (Leach and Winson 1995, 346).

Kerr (1998, 5) summarizes the effects of corporate globalization on women by arguing that, in many cases, corporate globalization is “undermining gender equality.” For example, in Africa, as governments shed their responsibility to provide adequate health care, education, public transport or agricultural extension services, the onus for meeting those needs falls to women (7).

In Bangladesh, women, not men, make up the cheap, flexible labour force to produce the export goods demanded by corporate globalization because they are considered to be "more productive, submissive, and less likely to form unions demanding better wages, working and health conditions" (8). And in the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, women, who were among the first to lose their jobs, desperately sought employment in the informal sector, which "has led in some countries to an overwhelming number of women and girls entering prostitution" (Kerr 1998, 9).

Shiva (1997, 22) echoes Kerr, describing the effects of corporate globalization on Third-World women:

> The impact of globalization is ... to take resources and knowledge that have hitherto been under women's control, and the control of Third World communities to generate sustenance and survival, and put them at the service of corporations engaged in global trade and commerce to generate profits.

Tourism has been promoted in many rural communities after the collapse of traditional forms of employment caused by corporate globalization. But the boosterism surrounding tourism hides the division of labour often associated with it. In rural Newfoundland, for example, many people in former fishing communities were encouraged to open bed and breakfast operations. Such operations, however, mean that much of the menial work is done by women, work that is repetitive, dull and without hope of advancement or skill development. In this way, tourism promotion can reinforce not only unequal power relations between men and women but also assumptions about women as caregivers.

The restructuring of many economies has meant that steady, well-paying manufacturing jobs have moved to areas with lower wages and fewer health and safety regulations. When these jobs disappear from a rural community, Leach and Winson (1995, 357) found that women experienced greater wage decreases than men because of the nature of the jobs they were able to find after layoffs due to factory closures.

More and more, farm women have taken to working off the farm to make ends meet. In New Zealand, Cloke (1989, 45) found that farm women increasingly sought off-farm work. Such work only added to their already heavy work loads. Argent (1999, 13) quotes Whatmore, who contends that

> whatever else women do on the farm, it is clearly in *addition to,* rather than *instead of*, their domestic tasks and responsibilities.

Rural women's legal rights have not historically been the same as those of rural men. For example, until recently, Canadian law has

> elided from divorce settlements farm women's contribution to the reproduction of the family farm and the farm family (Argent 1999, 13).

However, such newly won rights are now at risk. Under the "new right" agenda of corporate globalization, Bell and Cloke (1989, 3) argue that the rights of women are seen as being anti-family, and are therefore exorcised wherever possible.

Under the privatization imperatives of corporate globalization, Bell and Cloke (1989, 8) claim that the task of replacing the state as provider of particular functions falls upon rural communities rather than private companies. This replacement often means that rural women must pick up the social services that the state has abandoned. In this way, the effects of privatization can fall most heavily on the shoulders of rural women.

Following the lead of feminist researchers, Argent (1999, 13) discusses the active power of the gender order in rural communities. While some facets of the gender order are slower to change than others in the rural Australian area he studied, he found that it was undergoing an "uneven but fundamental change" (13). However, that change is slowed by

> the rural media's role in constructing and perpetuating hegemonic discourses of rural masculinity and femininity (i.e. the gender order) (13).

Argent sees such construction as part of the gender ideologies and identities that have propped up the Western rural idyll (13), an idyll that places rural women in a subordinate position to men. With the commodification of the countryside ideal that accompanies corporate globalization, opposition to such ideology could be stigmatized as "bad for business."

Cultural Impacts

In terms of culture, McMichael (1996, 26) argues that corporate globalization displaces the institutional and ideological legacies of the welfarist regimes of the First World, the centrally planned socialist regimes of the Second World and the political collectivity of post-colonial states that make up the Third World. As a replacement, corporate globalization imposes mass culture to turn us into consumers (Nozick 1992, 28). Consumption becomes a leisure pursuit, with going to the mall ranking second only to watching television, which itself primes viewers to join the mass culture of consumption. However, not everyone can partake in this mass culture. Along with the loss of welfare rights, both the rural and urban underclass have also lost many of their rights to consume, remaining “unattractive clients” for the main corporate productive sectors (Marsden 1992, 221). Under corporate globalization, there is no provision for such “casualties of a free market system” (Bell and Cloke 1989, 11).

As corporate globalization penetrates every aspect of rural life, rural culture is being challenged by “a common global capitalist culture” that has been created by the spread of commodities and commodity meanings around the world (Thrift 1994b, 89). Jones and Tonts (1995, 138) mention improved communications technology and globalization as undermining the “distinctiveness of rural society” and producing

> a more uniform social experience which is shaped increasingly by global trends which dilute the significance of local or regional ideologies and cultures.

Part of that rural culture is the main street of rural communities, centre of so much more than economic exchanges. With the arrival of big-box stores in rural communities, rural retail has been restructured (Flora 1990, 169) and with it the main street atmosphere that formed the cultural backbone of rural life.

In many ways, in many countries around the world, the advent of corporate globalization has deeply altered rural life. For example, in Europe, Bryden (1998, 6) claims that

> rural areas have become progressively less self-sufficient and self-contained, and ever more open to the wider forces - economic, social, political - shaping European life and indeed global development.

Nelson (1999, 21) fears that economic restructuring might undermine the exchange practices of neighbourliness that underpin the informal economy in rural communities, which has traditionally seen them through difficult times. Citing a recent study, she reports how many low-income residents in rural communities experiencing economic restructuring believed they could not count on most other members of their community for assistance during a crisis (21).

Such findings undercut the very meaning of rurality, which is based on the notion that "rural areas offer and foster distinctive cultures and ideologies and, therefore, a 'way of life'" (Jones and Tonts, 1995, 138). Increasingly, those ways of life are threatened as the impacts of corporate globalization are felt in rural communities. For example, in Canada, the ongoing farm crisis means that rural ways of life are at stake. Commenting on the survival of family farms and the towns and villages they support, one farmer asks: "are we willing to let hundreds of communities fade away, taking their grain elevators, family stores and heritage with them?" (Canadian Press 1998, A13).

Rural ways of life are incrementally giving way to 'lifestyles' that are based on individualism, consumption and isolation, which are characteristic of the experience of corporate globalization. According to Redclift (2000, 5), lifestyles imply

> the importance of taste, fashion and personal consumption, all expressed through the ability to exercise choice in the marketplace.

Unlike ways of life, which are so deeply engrained as to almost constitute a race memory, lifestyles are easily constructed and discarded. Among other things, lifestyles involve the purchase of commodities, which include "both objects (cars, furniture, and so on) and experiences, such as holidays" (Mowforth and Munt 1998, 129). Purchasing commodities to construct a lifestyle instead of living out a way of life buys into the culture of consumption that supports corporate globalization.

Conclusion

While some people, both urban and rural, have definitely prospered under corporate globalization, it is obvious that many have not, and the number is growing as the global market penetrates more deeply into all areas of life. The prospect of exclusion looms large, with ever more people left out of “the good life,” and tainted with the contagion of “losers” that the competitive race to the bottom entails. The “winners” shun them, smug in their assumptions of superiority in the “survival of the fittest.”

Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of corporate globalization, and their existence is by no means assured in the current economic climate. Devastated by international trade agreements, preyed upon by transnational corporations, marginalized by unsupportive governments, abandoned by increasingly corporatized universities and isolated from the few benefits that larger populations can garner for themselves, rural communities face an uncertain future. As rural communities increasingly struggle under the impacts of corporate globalization, Barkin (1998, 20) argues that

> There are fundamental ethical questions about the sustainability of a global structure that perpetuates high degrees of international inequality while working with rural communities with little chance of satisfying even the most basic of their needs.

Such a situation leaves rural people unprotected in an era of rapid capital accumulation by the wealthy few. Inevitably, it also sets the larger context against which any future decisions and actions take place. Government officials, municipal representatives, policy analysts, community developers and rural researchers cannot continue to concentrate on particulars while carefully ignoring the larger picture. The key to rural community sustainability in the face of the impacts of corporate globalization lies in understanding this larger context and in working to change it at both the global and local level.

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