Optimism of the will

Food sovereignty as transformative counter-hegemony in the 21st century

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy

By

Nicholas John Rose, LLB (Hons), MICD
School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning
College of Design and Social Context
Submitted in the month of May, 2012
Revised, February 2013
CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I, Nicholas John Rose, declare that:

- Except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is mine alone;

- The work has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic award

- The content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement of the research program

- Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party, is acknowledged

- Ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed

Signed: Date:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of many years of work, and has depended on the assistance of a number of individuals, without whom it would not have been possible. I would like to acknowledge in particular the invaluable critical support, advice and encouragement provided throughout the thesis by my principal supervisor, Professor Paul James, and at different times by my two associate supervisors, Professor Heikki Patomaki and Dr Peter Phipps. I would also like to thank the generous support provided to me by all those who participated in this research, in particular the staff of La Via Campesina in Jakarta, and of Food Connect in Brisbane. Finally and most importantly, I must extend my eternal gratitude to my partner Julie, and my two sons Camilo and Jude, for their patience, forebearance and love during the long hours required to produce a work of this nature. I dedicate this work to them, in the hope that it might make a small contribution to the building of a fairer and more caring world which will be fit for them, and their children, to inherit.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis summary</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad context</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context for the thesis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence of the Food Sovereignty movement</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed statement of the thesis argument</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualisation of key terms</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The food system and food systems thinking</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The globalising capitalist food system</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Food Sovereignty movement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the argument through the thesis chapters</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-statement of the argument</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 2: Theory and method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key methodological commitments and principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key theoretical foundations of the method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime theory and global food regime theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalising capitalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Gramscian theory of politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis: a neo-Gramscian political ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of the method</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 3: Case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Via Campesina’s development of food sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local food movement in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local food on the Coffs Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Food Connect model of community-shared agriculture in Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4: The Political-institutional context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The political-institutional context at the global governance level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The legitimising frame of ‘food security’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National-level measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding remarks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Responses to the political-institutional context

The campaign for peasants’ rights
Food sovereignty, peasants’ rights, and the right to adequate food
The institutionalisation of food sovereignty at the national level: Ecuador
The institutionalisation of local food in Australia
Concluding observations

Chapter 6: The socio-economic and ecological context

The principal social relations of the globalising capitalist food system
Social relations of the system and its tensions
How the system’s social relations generate over-production and inequality
The ecological constraints of the globalising capitalist food system
Concluding remarks

Chapter 7: Responses to the socio-economic and ecological context

The political-economic model of food sovereignty
The theory and praxis of agro-ecology
Change on the ground: the extent of ‘re-peasantisation’
Food re-localisation: the third pillar of Food Sovereignty
Local food on the Coffs Coast
Robert Pekin and Food Connect
Concluding remarks

Conclusion

Common sense and good sense
Engaging with the political and institutional framework of the globalising capitalist food system: the efficacy of human rights
Disrupting the circuits of capitalist production and consumption: the significance of local food economies
The balance of forces: capitalist food system vis-à-vis food sovereignty
Food sovereignty – its ‘vectors of expansion’
Food sovereignty: limitations and contradictions
The globalising capitalist food system – vulnerabilities and fragilities
The existing ‘effective reality’: is food sovereignty a counter-hegemonic movement?
Thesis summary

This thesis explores the significance of the transnational movement for food sovereignty, in the context of three key intensifying tensions in global and national food systems: namely over-production, inequality, and ecological degradation. Using the synthesised methodology of a neo-Gramscian political ecology, the thesis asks whether the engagements to date of the Food Sovereignty movement with these tensions are deep and constructive. It does this by using the device of a hypothesis, within the framework and method of a Gramscian theory of politics: is the Food Sovereignty movement a counter-hegemonic movement, vis-à-vis the globalising capitalist food system as a hegemonic power formation in global politics?

Thus, the substance of the thesis is a ‘balance of forces’ assessment, conducted in order to determine the existing ‘effective reality’ as between the forces of food sovereignty and those of the globalising capitalist food system. The form of the thesis takes accordingly a ‘double-movement’ character. The first movement is where the context, being, respectively, the political-institutional, and economic-ecological, framework and conditions of the globalising capitalist food system, is discussed and analysed in depth. Here the theoretical resources of political ecology, and supportive Marxist-informed political economy approaches such as regime and food regime theory, and theories exploring the dynamics and historical evolution of globalising capitalism across time and space, are marshalled in order to probe the manner in which the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system has been constructed and maintained over time, and to understand the ways in which that hegemony is being renegotiated in the context of the contemporary ‘global food crisis’.

The second movement analyses the responses by key actors within the Food Sovereignty movement to the political-institutional, and economic-ecological, context. This movement draws on the empirical work undertaken for the thesis, in the form of two case studies: the development of food sovereignty at the transnational level by the peasant and family farmer organisation La Via Campesina; and two elements of the local food movement in Australia, namely on the Coffs Coast region of New South Wales, and the Food Connect social enterprise in Brisbane, Queensland. Particular attention is focused on the efforts devoted by La Via Campesina to the securing of a new United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Peasants; and to the development of a hybridised version of community-supported agriculture in Australia by Food Connect.

The thesis concludes that the Food Sovereignty movement is a potential counter-hegemonic movement, and accordingly that its engagements with the tensions of the globalising capitalist food system are deep and constructive. This positive conclusion is tempered with a number of qualifications regarding the lack of coherence, in certain respects, of the food sovereignty alternative, which are, in my assessment, impacting its political effectiveness. At the same time, these limitations represent opportunities for the further theoretical and political development of food sovereignty, which in turn will further enhance its transformative potential.
Introduction

*Let Food be thy Medicine; and Medicine be thy Food*

Hippocrates, 460-370 B.C.

This thesis concerns what many consider to be a defining terrain of political-economic and political-ecological contestation in the 21st century: the organisation of the production, distribution and consumption of food. Very broadly speaking, we can divide the field of contestation into two camps. On the one hand, there are significant political and economic actors - the governments of the industrialised North and of some nations of the ‘developing’ South, transnational agri-food corporations, and international financial institutions, both intergovernmental and private - that wish to consolidate and further the advance and expansion of the capitalist modernisation of food and agriculture. On the other, there are growing numbers of social actors in the North and South - transnational agrarian movements, local food activists, and some environmental non-governmental organisations - who believe that such a course would be highly detrimental to the prospects of a dignified quality of life for the mass of humanity and for the integrity of much of the world’s ecosystems.

For the purposes of the thesis, I regard the first set of actors as the embodiment of what I term the ‘globalising capitalist food system’. The second set I have grouped together under the broad umbrella of the ‘Food Sovereignty movement’. The basic context for my argument is as follows:

- the globalising capitalist food system is a *hegemonic power formation* in the global political economy
- that system is characterised by three, closely related, key tensions: over-production, the generation and intensification of inequalities, and ecological degradation, all of which are linked through the capitalist ontology of alienation
- the Food Sovereignty movement has emerged in response to those tensions

The main question that this thesis seeks to answer is: how effective are the Food Sovereignty movement’s responses to the complexities of the key tensions in the globalising capitalist food system? The answer that I am seeking to defend is that the Food Sovereignty movement is engaging deeply and constructively with the system’s key tensions, based on its ontology of connectedness. This assessment comes with some important qualifications, most especially the failure to date of the Food Sovereignty movement to respond positively and constructively to the needs and priorities of workers in the food system, as distinct from the needs and priorities of farmers. Using my method of a ‘neo-Gramscian political ecology’ as elaborated in
Chapter 2, I propose to defend this answer by testing a hypothesis, namely that the emerging Food Sovereignty movement embodies the potential of a counter-hegemonic political force, and therefore has the capacity to effect transformative change in the globalising capitalist food system.

My aim in this introductory chapter is, first, to set out the broad context for the thesis: the reasons why food is important; the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system; how its hegemony is constituted; and the emergence of the Food Sovereignty movement in response to the intensification of the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system. Secondly, I set out the structure of thesis argument. Next, I conceptualise the key terms of the thesis - namely the basic nature, tendencies and constitutive actors of the globalising capitalist food system, and then the Food Sovereignty movement: its nature as a movement, some of its key themes, its principal actors, and its main strategies and actions. Finally, I briefly outline the development of the argument as it will unfold through the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Broad context
Food is basic to human existence for a number of intricately interconnected reasons. On the biological level, food provides the nutrients and minerals essential to cellular maintenance and repair, which, cumulatively and collectively, sustains - or, as the case may be, according to what one eats and in what quantities, impairs - the healthy functioning of the individual human organism: the person. At the social and cultural level, food (and practices associated with different foods) embodies a wide array of traditions through which social collectivities - families, members of ethnic, religious and tribal groups, and nations - obtain shared meaning, history and identities.

Economically, the complex of activities around food and agriculture constitutes a very significant sector of economies both national and global. In particular, in recent decades, the growing commodification of food and agricultural products as a sector of international trade, and the processes and practices by which this has taken place have been profoundly destabilising for large numbers of people in many countries.

Politically, the compact between a society’s rulers and the mass of ordinary ‘citizens’ or ‘subjects’ has at its foundation the securing of the essential material elements for life, food foremost among them. When food becomes scarce, such as when it is priced out of the reach of ordinary people, this compact comes under strain and at times can be at risk of fracturing.

Finally, the production and consumption of food, and the question as to what becomes of the ‘wastes’ generated at all steps along the way, are central to the relationship between humanity and the natural world of which we form part. There is, accordingly, a fundamental ecological dimension, which any critical exploration of food and agriculture must account for. As will be discussed later in the thesis, the set of human

---

1 ‘Since the industrial revolution, ensuring a stable food supply has come to be a key source of legitimacy for both capitalist and socialist states alike’: Guthman, J., 2011, Excess Consumption or Over-Production? US Farm Policy, Global Warming, and the Bizarre Attribution of Obesity in Peet, R., Robbins, P., and Watts, M., (eds), 2011, Global Political Ecology, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon., 51-66, 54.

2 Waste, especially in the form of packaging, has become an integral feature of the globalising capitalist
practices that collectively constitute ‘agriculture’ have profoundly altered landscapes, changed the composition of waterways, and influenced the stability of the Earth’s climate. While these alterations have been taking place over millennia, their scale and pace in the past century has been unprecedented, with impacts that we are only now beginning to appreciate.

It is therefore little exaggeration to say that food and agriculture lie at the root of all that we are as individual living beings, and a great deal of what we do as social creatures. The interconnectivities across the various spheres outlined above should not be underestimated. ‘Well-fed’, well-nourished individuals are likely to be healthy; they are likely to participate fully and actively in society, and they are less likely to be motivated to seek substantive political or economic change. Conversely, under-nourished individuals are more likely to be ill and therefore less likely to participate actively in society; and when large numbers of individuals experience this status, political stability can, at certain times and places, become threatened. Further, it is now quite clear that we can undertake agriculture in ways that are broadly sympathetic with the goal of ecosystem maintenance and functionality; or we can conduct it in ways that are antithetic to this goal. Again, both outcomes can potentially have political consequences for prevailing power formations, particularly in an era when what we might term ‘ecological consciousness’ is becoming more salient.

It is clear then that food and agriculture, in one way or another, span virtually every sphere of human life and endeavour. While it is obviously impossible in the course of a single thesis to deal exhaustively with all its aspects, I will remain sensitive to the multi-dimensional and multi-functional nature of food and agriculture, as well as to its various interconnectivities across the various spheres of social life. This is captured in what I term the Food Sovereignty movement’s ontology of connectedness, which I juxtapose to globalising capitalism’s ontology of alienation.

---

footnote:

6 Recognising this multidimensional character of food, Philip McMichael (2000, ‘The Power of Food’, Agriculture and Human Values, 17(1), 21-33) states that:

For the majority of the world’s population food is not just an item of consumption, it’s actually a way of life. It has deep material and symbolic power. And because it embodies the links between nature, human survival and health, culture and livelihood, it will, and has already, become a focus of contention and resistance to a corporate takeover of life itself: 31-32.
Context for the thesis
When we first begin to look at the system and its impacts, what confronts us appears to be a bewildering and proliferating array of problems and 'crises'.7 We see, for example, persistent malnutrition and the so-called ‘obesity pandemic’ affecting, cumulatively, in the region of 1.5 billion individuals.8 At the social level, there appears to be a generalised rural crisis, which is claimed to be the result of the widespread dispossession of large numbers of small and peasant farmers, in the wake of the expansion of large-scale, industrialised capitalist agriculture, and liberalised commodity trade, into many countries.9 Economically, this globalising food system seems to be characterised in many of its sectors by concentrations of power and resources into a small coterie of transnational corporations. Many critical commentators describe the system as oligopolistic.10

Politically, critics argue that the expansion of the system has been substantially predicated on the dismantling of domestic agricultural sectors in many countries of the South, often achieved, so it is claimed, through the imposition of conditionalities attached to the so-called ‘structural adjustment’ and ‘stabilisation’ loans overseen by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.11 Critics say further that this loss of domestic productive capacity is a fundamental reason why many poor populations in the South have been exposed to steep rises in the prices of basic grains in recent years.12 As food prices have risen, so, it would appear, has political instability, with riots in numerous countries in 2008, and the overthrow of some regimes in North Africa

---

7 The idea of ‘converging crises’ has gained much currency recently amongst the activists and ‘organic intellectuals of the Food Sovereignty movement. For example, Peter Rosset writes: “In the contemporary world we are facing a systemic crisis where multiple dimensions converge. There is a convergence of an economic, a financial, a climate, an energy and a food crisis, and all are manifestations of medium-to-long term trends in global capitalism. Underlying this is a long-term crisis of access to land by food producing rural people…and the recent surge in land grabbing by foreign capital”: Rosset, P., 2011, ‘Food Sovereignty and Alternative Paradigms to confront Land Grabbing and the Food and Climate Crises’, Development, 54(1), 21-30, 21. For a recent wide-ranging exploration of the current global food crisis, see Campbell, H., Stock, P., and Rosin, C., (eds.), Food Systems Failure: The Global Food Crisis and the Future of Agriculture, Earthscan, London.


9 “The root causes of the food crisis lie in a skewed global food system that has made Southern countries and poor people everywhere highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shock. This vulnerability springs from the risks, inequities and externalities inherent in food systems that are dominated by a globalized, highly centralized industrial agri-foods complex”: Holt-Giménez, E., and Patel, R., 2009, Food Rebellions: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice, Pambazuka Press, Cape Town, 20.


12 “The policies of structural adjustment promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund combined with global trade liberalization under the auspices of the World Trade Organization have been the greatest contributors to the current food crisis…[There has been] a swath of destruction that adjustment programs have cut through different regions of the globe.”: ibid., 17. See also Painaik, U., 2010, Origins of the Food Crisis in India and Developing Countries, in Magdoff, F. and Tokar, B. (eds) 2010 op cit., 95; also Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009 op cit., 20.
in early 2011. It is, perhaps, for this reason, amongst others, that ‘food security’ has emerged as a major issue on national and global political agendas in the past decade.

Nor has the trend passed unnoticed in academia, with the launch of a new cross-disciplinary journal, *Food Security*, by the Springer group in February 2009. In his editorial that accompanied this launch, Norman Borlaug, regarded as the ‘father of the Green Revolution’ for his work in developing high-yielding hybrid varieties of wheat, commented that

[Since 1998] the challenge of global food security has sharpened greatly. I said in 2005 that we will have to double the world food supply by 2050. Meanwhile the term food security has passed into ordinary vocabulary. In recent months, hardly a day passes without the media focusing on the availability of food, the price of food, food safety and so on, in a global context.

The manner in which one frames and thereby understands the food security debate strongly shapes the nature of the responses that one considers appropriate to address the underlying human need for sustenance. For example, the late Professor Borlaug and many others argue that the biggest challenge is an increase in production, building on the claimed successes of the Green Revolution in quadrupling global grain yields and thereby staving off the threat of global famine. Alternatively, fierce critics of the Green Revolution like Dr Vandana Shiva argue that its techno-productivism and centralisation in fact proved a disaster rather than a boon; and that a lasting exit from the contemporary ‘global food crisis’ requires instead a thorough transformation in social, economic, ecological and political relations around food and farming.

Since the advent of the Green Revolution, capitalist agriculture has turned increasingly in the direction of monoculture cropping, which at times can reach very large scales; and which is generally dependent on irrigation and the constant addition to the soil of agri-chemicals. Paraguay, for example, has seen a 300% increase in the acreage devoted to the growing of soybeans for export as animal feed, to 6.5 million acres by

---


2008. Meta-analyses, most notably the United Nations-sponsored Millennium Ecosystems Assessment, have documented how such practices frequently entail major changes in landscapes and waterways, such as de-forestation and increasing soil salinity, thus compromising the integrity of eco-systems. This eco-system degradation takes multiple forms, including a loss of biodiversity brought about through the homogenisation of ecosystems and an anthropogenic acceleration in the rate of species extinction ‘by as much as 1,000 times over background rates typical over the planet’s history’. Further, industrialised monoculture agriculture has made possible the rapid expansion in the past fifty years of ‘concentrated animal feed-lot operations’: CAFOs, also known as ‘factory farms’. The negative social and environmental impacts of such operations are well-documented. They are compounded by the lax regulatory regimes under which such facilities typically operate.

It therefore appears that this system ripples with tensions and ‘crises’ at every level. La Via Campesina, the global farmer movement and principal protagonist of food sovereignty, speaks of ‘multiple, converging crises’:

In the current global context, we are confronting the convergence of the food crisis, the climate crisis, the energy crisis and the financial crisis. These crises have common origins in the capitalist system and more recently in the unrestrained de-regulation in

---

19 Howard, A., 2010, *The Battle for Sustainable Agriculture in Paraguay* in Magdoff and Tokar op cit. 2010, 176-7. The soy monoculture in Paraguay forms part of the so-called ‘Republic of Soy’ that spans tens of millions of acres across Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, and is associated with numerous forms of violence and dispossession. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6.


21 Ibid. 4. One example of biodiversity loss with serious implications for the food supply generally is the collapse in honey bee populations in many regions. The United States for example, had an estimated 2.4 million beehives in 2006, ‘less than half [the number recorded] in 1950’: Kosek, J., 2011, *The Natures of the Beast: On the New Uses of the Honeybee* in Peet et al op cit., 227-251, 227. Kosek, who documents both the decline of the honeybee as well its instrumentalisation for military purposes by the US government, argues that ‘we are facing the most serious crisis of the honeybee in its / our millennia-long relationship’: ibid., 243.


23 Ibid; also Guthman (2011 op cit.) who notes that the tremendously polluting nature of factory farms ‘would not have been possible if the costs of feedlot husbandry had not been effectively ‘externalised’ by lax regulation of the meat industry’: 62. Emel and Neo state the the ‘livestock industry is responsible for generating between 4.6 and 7.1 billion tons of greenhouse gases each year, or between 15 and 24 percent of total GHG emissions measured as CO2 equivalents’, mainly as a result of ‘deforestation, enteric fermentation and manure’: 2011 op cit., 71. As demand for meat is forecast to continue rising, ‘these emissions are expected to grow rapidly’: ibid.

24 Emel and Neo 2011 op cit., 77-8. John Kinsman, President of the US Family Farm Defenders, wrote in early 2012 that while the US Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration authority are notorious for their ‘light-touch’ approach to drug residue and other food safety violations endemic in factory farmed livestock operations, these and ‘various state agricultural agencies are squandering millions in scarce taxpayer dollars to criminalize small family farmers who are at the forefront of providing healthy and nutritious fresh food to their communities’: Kinsman, J., 2012, ‘If You Want More Local Food, Stop Criminalizing Family Farmers’, 10.1.12, available at: http://www.commondreams.org/view/2012/01/10-0, accessed 12.1.12.
various spheres of economic activity, as part of the neo-liberal model, which gives priority to business and profit...25

The challenge is to make sense of these multiple and apparently multiplying tensions in a systematic and coherent way. The way in which I propose to do this is to focus on what is specific and particular about this system, and what differentiates it from other previous and possible forms of food system.

Key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system

What then, is specific and particular about this system? First, and most importantly, it is a capitalist system. Capitalism, as a form of organising human societies, has certain core characteristics and tendencies, which manifest in a particular way when applied to the production, distribution and consumption of food. Since it is in the nature of capitalism to organise human productive activities to further the basic goals of capital accumulation and the generation of profit, these become the main goals of a food system organised on capitalist principles. Amongst other consequences, the application of capitalist principles to food production has, as most critical commentators emphasise, generated a dynamic of over-production of food, in particular of basic grains such as corn, soy and wheat. 26

The over-production of these basic grains has facilitated and sustained the expansion of the fast and processed food and beverage industries, as well as the factory farming system.27 These industries have in turn contributed substantially to the obesity pandemic that states worldwide, and in particular the United States itself, are seemingly powerless to stop or even significantly slow down.28 In recent years, health professionals and others have launched campaigns, seeking the greater regulation of these industries. One key demand is the prohibition of the advertising of their products to young children; another is a more transparent and easily understandable system of labelling.29 The capacity to date of agri-business corporations to have resisted successfully any effective regulation speaks to the extent of their political influence and power.30 The dynamic of over-production is inherent within the capitalist organisation of production. In its current form, it is also a direct consequence of the

26 Guthman 2011 op cit, 52.
29 For example, the Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) was formed in 2006 by major charities such as the Cancer Council (Victoria) and Diabetes Australia (Victoria), as well the Victorian Government’s Department of Health (VicHealth) and the World Healthy Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University, in order to ‘identify, analyse and advocate for evidence-based policy initiatives to reduce overweight and obesity, particularly in children, at a local, state and national level’: http://www.opc.org.au/whoweare.aspx, accessed 12.9.11.
The historical evolution of the political-economy of food and agriculture in the United States and the European Union during the 20th century, notably the practice of paying hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies annually to the larger commodity producers. The result is that the over-production of food is concentrated in the core capitalist states, which in turn has generated a complementary dynamic of the under-production of food for domestic consumption in many regions of the South.

Secondly, the system is globalising; that is, it is expanding geographically, absorbing more and more regions of the world within its orbit. At one level, this spatial expansion is a function of the system’s capitalist nature. Since capitalism’s basic drive is the endless need to accumulate further capital, it is of necessity an expansionary system. It will continually seek out new opportunities for capital accumulation, be they products or services, markets, resources, technologies or regions of production where labour is cheaper and more ‘flexible’.

At another level, however, the system has also been part of the global projection of the power of the United States, as a hegemonic actor in the world system of nation-states in the post-World War II era. The United States (and its allies such as the UK, Australia, Canada and the European states) has, according to a critical perspective, consciously and consistently sought to organise global economic and political relations in ways that benefit primarily its own citizenry, and in particular the richer sections of that citizenry. There is, in this view, a global hierarchy of states and peoples based on asymmetric spatial relations; and for the last century or more the United States (and its allies) has sat atop that hierarchy, absorbing a disproportionate amount of the world’s resources and wealth, and generating a disproportionate amount of the world’s waste and pollution.

As it results in the transfer of wealth and resources from one set of countries to another, globalising capitalism, according to a critical perspective, necessarily
produces inequalities between states. Further, because all societies are stratified internally according to social categories such as class, gender, race, ethnicity and religion, these inequalities are differentially experienced across time and space. In other words, there are not only inequalities between states; there are also inequalities within states. This applies equally to countries and regions in the core capitalist bloc (what we might call the North) and countries and regions outside it (the South). In addition, in the contemporary era of the financialisation of capitalism (what is commonly referred to as ‘neoliberalism’), these inequalities have become more pronounced, particularly in the core, Anglo-American, states.

In the context of the globalising capitalist food system, inequality manifests in diverse forms. Thus, the food-price volatility that has resulted from the wholesale commodification and globalised trade of food produces, on the one hand, record profits for agri-business corporations and multi-million dollar remuneration packages for their senior executives. On the other, it subjects growing numbers of poor people in the South and, increasingly, the North, to hardship, food insecurity and malnutrition. The rise in rates of obesity disproportionately impacts lower socio-economic groups in the North, while the consumption of the foods that cause obesity generates healthy profits for the major food and beverage manufacturers. The rapid growth of the global factory farm system has, as noted, led to increasing amounts of land being cultivated to produce grain for animal feed. To make this possible, in several places, notably the so-called ‘Republic of Soy’ and its ‘green deserts’ in the

37 It should be noted that while the division between the ‘North’ and the ‘South’ has historically corresponded to geographical demarcations, with the North consisting primarily of the what Samir Amin (e.g. 2011, ‘The Trajectory of Historical Capitalism and Marxism’s Tricontinental Vocation’, Monthly Review, 2010; ‘Exiting the Crisis of Capitalism or Capitalism in Crisis?’ Globalizations, 7(1-2), 261-273), terms ‘the Triad’ of North America, Western and Central Europe, and Japan, and the South embracing the great bulk of Africa, Latin America and Asia, these geographical lines have become more blurred in recent times. A growing middle and especially rich and super-rich class in countries such as India, Brazil and China have meant that the ‘North’ is now assuming a demographic as well as a geographic character.

38 As documented in numerous quantitative studies, compiled in a meta-analysis by Pickett 2009, The Spirit Level. Some neo-Marxist scholars have argued forcefully that neoliberalism is, at its core, a class project whose explicit purpose – thus far achieved, it would appear, very successfully - has been to restore the wealth, power and privileges of the ruling elites, following a period of relative decline in the era of welfare-state Keynesianism that commenced shortly after World War II and ended in the late 1970s: see Duménil,G., and Lévy, D., 2001, ‘Costs and Benefits of Neoliberalism: A Class Analysis’, Review of International Political Economy, 8(4), 578-607; see also Harvey, D., 2005, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

39 Cargill, the world’s largest grain processing and meat-packing corporation, provides one example of this dynamic. Cargill’s sales have more than doubled since 2000, while its profits rose 500% to US$2.6 billion in 2010. The 2010 figure is a near 50% fall in profits from the US$3.95 billion it earned in 2008, at the height of the last round of extreme food price volatility. To September 2011, its profits are up nearly 50% on the 2010 figure, once again taking advantage of the sharp rises in commodity prices: Whitford, D., and Burke, D., 2011, ‘Cargill: Inside the Quiet Giant that Rules the Food Business’, Fortune Magazine, 27.10.11, available at: http://money.cnn.com/2011/10/24/news/companies/cargill_food_business.fortune/index.htm?iid=EL, accessed 12.1.11.

40 Julie Guthman notes how the rapid expansion of cheap synthetic inputs have both enhanced profitability and the intensity of flavours of snack foods, contributing to the trend of compulsive snacking which is linked to the prevalence of obesity: 2011 op cit., 62.

southern cone of South America, indigenous and peasant communities have been dispossessed, often violently, from their lands and homes.\footnote{Noting how the volume of agricultural exports from the US to the South, and vice-versa, doubled after 1950, Gabriel Kolko argues that these exports ‘emerged as the single most important cause of the people’s poverty and displacement’: 2006 \textit{op cit.}, 35. Peasant farmers in Latin America were dispossessed to facilitate the expansion of export commodity industries such as cotton and beef cattle, and the doubling of the volume of beef exports from Central America to the US from 1957-1980 coincided with the tremendous growth of the US fast food industry during these years. Rates of urbanisation and rural poverty in Latin America rose 40\% over the same period: \textit{ibid.}} When inequalities are experienced in extreme forms such as rapidly escalating food prices they can, as discussed above, generate severe political instabilities.

The third key tension takes the form of the encountering of certain ‘ ecological’ or ‘planetary boundaries’ to the system’s further growth and expansion.\footnote{Foster, J.B., Clark, B., and York, R., 2010, \textit{The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Earth}, Monthly Review Press, New York.} Accelerating anthropogenic climate change is one such boundary; depletion of non-renewable resources such as oil is another. As discussed in Chapter 2, these boundaries are said to be manifestations of an ‘ ecological rift’ that the expansion of the capitalist system generally, and capitalist agriculture in particular, has been said to produce in the ‘natural metabolic relation’ between humanity and nature.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.} While these tensions are analytically separate, they are at the same time closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Again, the Republic of Soy provides a good example. The vast monocultures of the soy ‘ green desert’ widen the ecological rift, in the form of deforestation, biodiversity loss, and soil degradation; because they involve violent dispossess of indigenous and peasant communities, they also intensify inequalities. These monocultures feed the expanding factory farming system, with all its attendant social and ecological impacts. And because this mode of production is ‘ efficient’ and profitable, the incentives are for production to continue to expand. Soy, and the factory-farmed meat it feeds, is being over-produced, at the expense of a diverse range of food crops for the local rural populations.

What unites the three key tensions is the concept of \textit{alienation}, which, as Marx explained at length, is foundational to capitalism.\footnote{See Mészáros, I., 1970, \textit{Marx’s Theory of Alienation}, available at: \url{http://www.marxists.org/archive/meszaros/works/alien/index.htm}, accessed 12.1.12.} Capitalism is premised on so-called ‘ primitive accumulation’: the separation of the peasant-producer from the land and her conversion to a wage labourer; and on the separation of the wage-labourer from the product of her labour. The ecological rift, itself constitutive of capitalist production, further reveals the alienation of humanity from nature. Such separations being ontological to capitalism, over-production is only to be expected, because the driving imperatives of production are not the satisfaction of human need or the respecting of ecological boundaries, but rather the ceaseless accumulation of capital and generation of profit.

Just as alienation forms part of the capitalist rationality in an ontological sense, it is \textit{connectedness} which lies at the core of the food sovereignty rationality, which is aimed at healing the ecological and social rifts. In its practical manifestations to date,
I regard food sovereignty as constituted by three foundational ‘pillars’, namely: redistributive agrarian reform, agro-ecological methods of production, and (re-)localised and democratised food systems. Each in its own way contributes to the healing of the ecological and social rifts; and integrated as a whole they express the ontology of connectedness.

**Hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system**

As explained in Chapter 2, *hegemony* is used here in the Gramscian sense, to mean the maintenance of political power through a mixture of coercion and consent, with the emphasis on the latter. As part of the context for my argument, most critical commentators agree that political, economic and cultural relations around food and agriculture are structured in such a way as to benefit certain countries in the international system, as well as certain organisations and groups of people. Those organisations and groups hold and exercise a certain form of political-economic power; and they consciously work to maintain a global food system that is favourable to the preservation of that power and, where possible, its expansion. The preservation, exercise and expansion of this power take different forms and combinations of forms, of coercion and consent.

In the first instance, there are, consistent with the capitalist nature of the system, what Ellen Meiksins Wood terms ‘purely economic forms of coercion’; in other words, market compulsions, which are consequent upon the growing commodification of the necessities of life, the spread of wage labour relations, and of the private property form. Secondly, these economic forms are supported by what Wood calls ‘extra-economic’ forms of coercion. Such forms include, for example, the use of legislative and judicial power to enforce intellectual property rights, and at times the use of police and military power to evict peasant farmers from land sought by transnational agri-business.

For the globalising capitalist food system to be hegemonic in the Gramscian sense, however, it cannot be purely, or even primarily, reliant on forms of coercion, whether economic or extra-economic. Rather, according to this perspective, it must be based in a certain type of consent that exists amongst and within subordinate social classes. By ‘subordinate’, I simply mean those classes - the great majority of most societies - typically excluded from the exercise of political-economic power in the contemporary world; those classes who are the objects, rather than the subjects, of the exercise of such power.

---

46 A recent example of this form of social intentionality was documented in papers published in the medical journal *The Lancet* in September 2011. These papers examined the ways in which the major food and beverage manufacturing corporations had assiduously exercised their lobbying power on delegates from the United States and European nations, with the aim of watering down any commitment from the United Nations on restrictions of advertising of nutrient-dense, energy-rich food products to children: Swinburn *et al* op cit.


48 Ibid.

49 As Vicki Birchfield states, ‘Gramsci saw society as comprised of a small but dominant centre and a large body of ‘emarginati’ – marginalized people at society’s periphery who are never allowed to penetrate the traditional power structure. That vision laid the foundation for his ‘politics of inclusion’…which had as its primary goal the erosion of the boundaries dividing the centre and the periphery”: Birchfield, V., 1999,
Further, in order to sustain the system's hegemony on a global scale, it is not necessary for this consent to exist universally amongst all subordinate classes, wherever they might be. Indeed, in an asymmetric world the hegemony of the system in general, and of the globalising capitalist food system in particular, is primarily sustained by ‘consent’ amongst subordinate groups in the countries of the North, the United States in particular.

To say this is not to discount the possibility or the existence of effective counter-hegemonic agency in the South, or diminish its significance. As my case studies show, it is precisely in the South, Latin America in particular, that such agency has been, and is being, exercised most often and with greatest effect. Rather, the working basis of the approach taken in this thesis is that if the hegemony of the system - as a globalising system - is to be effectively challenged, then it must be challenged above all from within the system’s core.\textsuperscript{50} It follows from this that any movement that has pretensions of being a counter-hegemonic political force at the global level needs to pay careful attention to this feature of the system, and concentrate its resources accordingly. I now turn to consider the key issue of the ‘common sense’ of the system with a particular focus on how this plays out amongst the consuming populations in the North.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the ‘consent’ that underpins a hegemonic formation does not mean formal, conscious and explicit acceptance. Rather, it takes the form of a generalised ‘saturation of the consciousness’, to paraphrase Raymond Williams, so that the existing state of affairs is, for large numbers of people, naturalised as constituting in effect the limits of what is possible or desirable.\textsuperscript{51} What I am introducing here is the Gramscian conception of the ‘common sense of the age’, juxtaposed by David Harvey to a critically-developed ‘good sense’ in these terms:

Common sense is constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national traditions. It is not the same as the ‘good sense’ that can be constructed out of critical engagement with the issues of the day. Common sense can, therefore, be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices.\textsuperscript{52}

It is this ‘good sense’, which, following Harvey, must form a foundational pillar of an effective counter-hegemonic political project; and the elements of food sovereignty arguably constitute such a ‘good sense’. However, Harvey’s emphasis here on the ‘construction’ of common sense, whilst clearly accurate to an extent, only captures


\textsuperscript{52} Harvey 2005 op cit., 39.
part of what Gramsci intended by this term. Rather, the power of the prevailing common sense in grounding the consent that sustains the hegemony of ruling elites over significant periods of time, rests not so much in its intentional and explicit ‘construction’ by intellectuals and institutions, even though that obviously takes place, as in its regular affirmation through lived experience.

Thus, as regards food and agriculture, the prevailing common sense is, in the global North, affirmed and reproduced through the typical daily or weekly experience of the consumption of a seeming abundance of ‘cheap’ and ‘tasty’ food in supermarket aisles and fast-food restaurants. This lived experience reinforces the ‘common sense’ of the globalising capitalist food system, namely that the food system is robust; that it delivers plentiful and cheap food; and that our role as ‘ordinary’ people is as end-consumers in the food chain, who typically make, and should make, purchasing decisions according to the criteria of price, and price alone.53

Another powerful element of the prevailing common sense is a change in the social aesthetic environment. This relates both to the aesthetics of the human body, and to the appearance of food. As regards the former, what is perceived as a ‘normal’ body size and weight has changed significantly in recent decades.54 In terms of food appearance, the aesthetic standards of supermarkets, enforced through vertically-integrated supply chains, have substantially shifted the perceptions as to what is ‘normal’ amongst the buying public. Contemporary consumers, it seems, want (or have been conditioned into wanting) their food to look perfect and unblemished, regardless of more qualitative elements such as taste, as a long-time banana grower from the Coffs Harbour region explains:

[T]he supermarkets want every banana looking the same. Bugger the people, whether they've got any flavour - the Queensland bananas are like eating rubber, no flavour, too big to eat...55

This privileging of form over substance, and the disconnection from quality, neatly captures the extent to which the capitalist ontology of alienation has ‘saturated the consciousness’ of large segments of the population. Further, the common sense of the system is sufficiently flexible and adaptable to take into account the shopping preferences of ‘ethical’ consumers, so that ‘organic’, ‘fair trade’, ‘free range’, ‘hormone-free’ and other similar items are conveniently available within the same daily supermarket shopping experience. As I discuss in Chapter 2, this also brings into consideration what Gramsci termed processes of trasformismo, or co-optation, where potentially renegade political and / or economic tendencies are successfully

53 Indeed the production of people as consumers is central to the successful functioning of contemporary capitalism: ‘as Veblen pointed out long ago, one of the primary tasks of business propaganda is the “fabrication of consumers”, a device that helps induce “all the classic symptoms of state-based totalitarianism: atomization, political apathy and irrationality, the hollowing and banalization of purportedly democratic processes, mounting popular frustration, and so forth”: Dawson, M., 2003, The Consumer Trap: Big Business Marketing in American Life, University of Illinois Press, Illinois, 154, quoted by Chomsky 2006 op cit., 221.


55 Interview with Bill O’Donnell, 15.2.11.
‘domesticated’ and brought back within the dominant circuits of capitalist production and circulation.56

At the global level, a key part of the common sense of the system, and one which is claimed to underpin its legitimacy and the further expansion of technologies such as genetically modified organisms, is that only this system is capable of delivering ‘food security’ for a growing world population.57 This claim is in turn founded on the oft-repeated statement that global food security fundamentally depends on the doubling or near-doubling of global food production.58 This claim is contested59; yet, as with other forms of common sense, it appears to be reinforced, not only through the associated discourse around ‘food security’, but also through lived experience, albeit in this case indirect and mediated, such as the portrayal of modern famines on televisions screens.60

More generally, the globalising capitalist food system sits within, and forms part of, the contemporary globalising capitalist economy. Since the ascendancy of recognisably ‘neoliberal’ governments in the form of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the US and UK respectively at the end of the 1970s, the common sense of that economy has taken a particular and distinctive form. It has been founded in the powerful and intentional linkage between the ‘compelling and seductive ideals’ of ‘human dignity and individual freedom’ with the ‘free market’, ‘free enterprise’ and ‘free trade’, such that the latter are understood as the best, if not the only, means by which the former can be achieved on a real and lasting basis.61

56 For example, the ‘marketing of fair trade coffee draws on ethics and values as part of commoditizing marginalized producers and ends up producing a new consumer fetish – a fetish that perhaps emphasizes rather than hides the conditions of production, but still a fetish that capitalism can also benefit from’: Eden, S., 2011, The Politics of Certification: Consumer Knowledge, Power, and Global Governance in Ecolabeling in Peet et al op cit., 169-184, 179, citing Goodman, M.K., 2004, ‘Reading Fair Trade: Political Ecological Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods’, Political Geography, 23, 891-915.

57 Such a claim is implicit in the words of Norman Borlaug, cited above.

58 Ibid. While Borlaug claimed that food production would need to double by 2050, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations put the necessary increase at 70% by 2050 in 2009: FAO, ‘2050: A Third More Mouths to Feed; Food Production will have to increase by 70 percent’, http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/35571/, accessed 12.9.11.

59 Amongst other things, the statement about the need to double the amount of food produced globally has been flatly contradicted by the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Zeigler, who stated in 2009 that the world produces enough food now to feed 12 billion people: see. The global food system therefore appears to be characterised by a ‘paradox of plenty’, in which hundreds of millions suffer malnutrition because they lack ‘effective demand’ (i.e. income) to purchase food. As Julie Guthman notes, this same paradox existed in the form of widespread hunger experienced in the US during the 1930s even as grain stocks were high: 2011 op cit., 56-7.

60 It is very easy, even ‘natural’, to think when confronted with iconic images of a starving child, ‘That child needs food; the world needs more food’. It is much more complicated to take the time to unravel the reasons why and how – as discussed above and throughout the thesis – the conditions for famines to continue in the 21st century have been created and sustained: Alcock, R., 2009, Speaking Food: A Discourse Analytic Study of Food Security, dissertation presented in order to fulfil the requirements of a Master in Science, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol Working Paper No.07-09, available at: www.bristol.ac.uk/spais/research/workingpapers/.../alcock0709.pdf, accessed 12.9.11.

61 Harvey 2005 op cit., 5, 7. Indeed, in the formulations of the ‘founding fathers’ of neoliberalism such as Frederick von Hayek and Milton Friedman, the institutions and basic logic of a largely or entirely
Karl Polanyi argued that liberal utopianism - the idea that the only unrestrained capitalism could ensure ‘freedom’ - was ‘doomed’ because ultimately it ‘could [only] be sustained by force, violence, and authoritarianism’. As governments across the global North turn in varying degrees to the ‘extra-economic coercion’ of police force and judicial heavy-handedness to repress social and political protests against austerity budgets imposed in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis that began in 2008, it seems that Polanyi’s forecast will be tested over the next few years. For my purposes, the significance of these developments is that, to the extent that they mean that the common sense of contemporary globalising capitalism (and thus its hegemony) - what Vicki Birchfield terms, ‘the market ideology of neoliberal globalisation’ - is increasingly being called into question, this also creates opportunities for the common sense (and the hegemony) of the globalising capitalist food system to be likewise interrogated.

Emergence of the Food Sovereignty movement
The Food Sovereignty movement, in a formalised and institutional sense as a recognisably distinct social movement, was formally articulated as coming into existence at a specific point in time - 1995 - and at the instigation of a particular social movement actor: La Via Campesina, the global small farmer, peasant and indigenous peoples’ movement. Since then, diverse expressions of this movement - some oppositional, some propositional - have proliferated at the local, national and global levels. These expressions of food sovereignty share the recognition that the further spread and intensification of the globalising capitalist food system is deeply problematic in the 21st century, and the firm belief that the alternatives which they claim food sovereignty embodies are necessary, desirable and feasible.

unrestrained capitalist system are entirely conflated with ‘human freedom’, as Karl Polanyi explained towards the end of World War II:

Planning and control are being attacked [by liberal utopianism] as a denial of freedom. Free enterprise and private ownership are declared to be essentials of freedom. No society built on other foundations is said to deserve to be called free. The freedom that regulation creates is denounced as unfreedom; the justice, liberty and welfare it offers are decried as a camouflage of slavery.

Polanyi, K. 1944, *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 256-8, *quoted in Harvey 2005 op cit.*, 37. Friedman and von Hayek were among the founders of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947, which was the theoretical and ideological well-spring of neoliberalism: *Harvey 2005 op cit.*, 20.

As paraphrased by *Harvey 2005 op cit.*, 37.


64 See William Schanbacher (2010, *The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty*, Praeger, Santa Barbara, California) for a recent discussion of the emergence of food sovereignty as an alternative paradigm to food security (53-76).
As I discuss further in Chapters 2 and 3, the launching by Via Campesina (and subsequently other civil society actors) of food sovereignty as a key strategic plank of contemporary transnational agrarian activism draws on a millennia-long lineage of peasant rebellion and revolt in diverse agrarian societies and cultures around the world. Many of the demands of the Food Sovereignty movement are informed by what James Scott termed ‘the moral economy of the peasant’, whilst also including new demands (especially around ecological sustainability) that arguably give the movement a somewhat ‘Janus-like’ character.  

Detailed statement of the thesis argument
To recap, the context for the argument is, first, that the globalising capitalist food system is riven by three key tensions: over-production, intensifying inequalities, and the encountering of ecological boundaries. Secondly, that system is a hegemonic power formation in the broader globalising capitalist political economy. Thirdly, the Food Sovereignty movement emerged in response to the intensification of the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system. My argument is that the Food Sovereignty movement is engaging deeply and constructively with some of the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system. I propose to defend this argument via the detailed testing of a hypothesis, namely that the Food Sovereignty movement is a potential counter-hegemonic political force that is capable of effecting transformative change in the aforementioned system. The argument itself can be broken down into two principal ‘moments’, as outlined below, which culminate in the assessment as to whether, and to what extent, the Food Sovereignty movement can be regarded as a counter-hegemonic political force; and thus, in turn, whether the movement is engaging deeply and constructively with the key tensions of the capitalist food system.

First, the Food Sovereignty movement prima facie has the characteristics of a counter-hegemonic movement, vis-à-vis the globalising capitalist food system. Leading thinkers within the Food Sovereignty movement have strongly engaged with the ‘common sense’ of that system by identifying some of its key tensions, recognised their nature and significance, and developed their critiques accordingly. In political-institutional terms, the alternatives proposed by the Food Sovereignty movement have substantive normative content, are capable of mobilising significant political constituencies, are capable of being institutionalised at different levels of governance, and in some cases are being institutionalised. Anticipating the Gramscian analysis, food sovereignty advocates are developing its principles into an emerging ‘good sense’ that is beginning to undermine the ‘common sense’ on which the capitalist food system’s hegemony rests. In socio-economic terms, the practices of the Food Sovereignty movement, such as community gardening, farmers’ markets, and community-supported agriculture, challenge the primacy and the compulsion of impersonal capitalist market exchanges, and ‘expand the realm of the possible’.

Secondly, there are limitations and weaknesses in the critiques and alternatives developed by the Food Sovereignty movement, which call into question its status as a counter-hegemonic movement. These limitations assume multiple dimensions. In the first instance, there is a privileging of the voice of farmers at the expense of developing cross-class and cross-sectoral alliances, which will be required if the expressly stated goal of transformative change is to succeed. This has meant that little attention has been paid to the needs and priorities of workers in the food system; and more generally, there has been a failure to integrate the theoretical development of food sovereignty with the emerging fields of economic democracy and the commons.

Secondly, there is a common tendency (which has diminished over time) to phrase critique largely or exclusively in terms of ‘neoliberal globalisation’, without taking into account the underlying dynamics of the globalising capitalist system and its broader historical development. Thirdly, there is potentially a misplaced allocation of resources and effort in securing institutional change within the United Nations human rights system, having regards to the well-founded doubts about human rights and legal mechanisms as an effective avenue for transformative political and economic change. Fourthly, a key policy demand of food sovereignty takes the form of greater protection for farmers, especially small farmers. There is a risk that, in an era of apparent economic contraction that potentially bears comparison with the 1930s, this call for protection for one sector of the economy may become conflated with a more generalised call for protectionism, which could substantially impede any campaigns for social justice. Finally, and related to this fourth point, food sovereignty has expressly aligned itself with movements for greater localisation of the food system; indeed, as I indicated above, food localisation is the third foundational ‘pillar’ of food sovereignty. Within the politics of the ‘local’, there are risks of parochialism, chauvinism, xenophobia and autarky, any one of which would clearly militate against the greater global solidarities, and more direct and participatory forms of democracy, that food sovereignty also calls for.

Is the Food Sovereignty movement an actual, or potential, counter-hegemonic political force? This is the key assessment that the thesis requires. I undertake it via a Gramscian ‘balance of forces’ analysis that I outline in Chapter 2. The aim of this analysis is to discover whether, and to what extent, the Food Sovereignty movement is shifting the previously existing disposition of political, economic and cultural forces around food and agricultural systems, so that transformative change in these systems is taking place, or at least can be said to be reasonably likely in the foreseeable future. I undertake this assessment by reference to the criteria that I establish in Chapter 2.

Counter-hegemony involves analysis, critique, reflection, strategizing and action. It is, quintessentially, political praxis: the dynamic and reflexive combination of theory and political practice.

replacing the common sense of the system with the new good sense of food sovereignty, and thereby normalising and naturalising an ontology of connectedness in place of the prevailing ontology of alienation.

Hence a central terrain of the political contestation that counter-hegemony entails must be over the prevailing ‘common sense’ that underpins the hegemonic power formation. Effective counter-hegemonic politics thus requires the sustained critique of this common sense and its replacement with a new ‘good sense’, which can form the basis of a coherent and compelling political vision and program that is capable of appealing to, and mobilising, broad numbers of people in the ‘universal interest’.

My argument is that the Food Sovereignty movement is a potential counter-hegemonic political force precisely because it has done, and is doing, this dual work of critique and elaboration of a political vision, as well as the practical construction of political economic alternatives in diverse sites. In particular, food sovereignty proponents are in the process of articulating a new ‘good sense’ around food and farming. According to this good sense, humanity is capable of living in balance with the Earth’s ecosystems, but that to do so requires that we make two fundamental changes. First, we must adopt a less ecologically exploitative approach to the production of food and the other necessities of human life; and secondly, we must adopt less exploitative forms of social relations amongst people, in the form of much greater levels of equality. 67 These changes respond directly to the intensification of key social and ecological tensions within the globalising capitalist food system. They speak to the emerging counter-hegemonic potential of the Food Sovereignty movement, and therefore to the depth and effectiveness of its engagements with the tensions of the capitalist food system.

A distinctive feature of the food sovereignty vision and politics is the location at its centre of the role of small family and peasant farmers as ecological stewards, and the people who both currently feed the majority of the world’s population and can do so well into the future. In this imaginary, the main political-economic actors of the globalising capitalist food system - the transnational agri-business corporations - are pushed to the very margins of the global food and farming, with the firm expectation that over time they will most likely disappear from view altogether. In the campaign slogans of La Via Campesina, small farmers both ‘feed the world’ and ‘cool the planet’ thereby simultaneously offering lasting resolutions to the ‘food crisis’ and the ‘climate crisis’. 68

---

67 Thus, Raj Patel, one of the ‘organic intellectuals’ of the Food Sovereignty movement, claims that there is a ‘radical egalitarianism’ at its ‘core’; in the new society that food sovereignty envisages, he says, the ‘equality-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism and class power [will] have been eradicated’: Patel, R., 2010, What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like? in Wittman et al 2010 op cit., 194.

Conceptualisation of key terms

I turn then to the conceptualisation of the key terms in this thesis. As explained in Chapter 2, this is actually the first step in the development of my method, a ‘neo-Gramscian political ecology’. The process of conceptualisation necessarily involves a process of abstraction; inasmuch as the purpose of the inquiry is ontological - that is, to ascertain the nature of the objects under consideration - the researcher must identify the essential characteristics of the objects and their relationships to each other in order to ‘conceptualis[e] their combined effect’. For the purposes of this thesis, since it is not part of my argument to develop a fully formed theorisation of any of the concrete events or objects under consideration, it is sufficient to isolate and describe those attributes that are essential to the making of my argument regarding the purported counter-hegemonic character and actions of the Food Sovereignty movement.

The food system; and food systems thinking

The idea of a ‘food system’ is a relatively recent conceptual innovation, and to an important extent reflects thinking that has emerged out of the local and alternative food movements - in other words, one part of the global Food Sovereignty movement - in North America in particular. It draws on systems theory, and what it seeks to do is to capture in as holistic and integrated a manner as possible all the components of food and agriculture from ‘paddock to plate’, or ‘seed to spoon’, and back again. Its emergence was motivated to an important extent by the recognition that conventional thinking around food and agriculture was both linear and fragmented, with agriculture and ‘primary production’ seen as separate from other ‘downstream’ sectors such as processing, distribution, retail and waste. This reflects the capitalist ontology of alienation.

What differentiates food system thinking then is that it seeks, consistent with an ontology of connectedness, to integrate the five sectors of production, processing and manufacturing, distribution and retail, consumption, and waste and recycling, into a single system. Figure 1 below represents one approach to food systems thinking.

---

To date, the food systems approach has been largely confined to what are regarded as ‘community food systems’; that is, smaller-scale, locally- or regionally-oriented activities, as contrasted with the larger industrial scale of ‘big’ agriculture and agribusiness. However, there is no reason in theory or principle why the food systems approach cannot be applied to describe and analyse the globalising capitalist food system as a whole. Despite the massive differences in scope and scale, and the different nature of the actors and logics involved, suggesting the existence of layers of ‘food systems’ is an analytical move.

Hence in this thesis I use ‘food system’ to describe all those activities around food and agriculture that together constitute an integrated whole, consisting of the five sectors as outlined above. What differentiates a ‘community food system’ from the ‘globalising capitalist food system’ is that the former self-consciously sees itself as a single system in which each sector is regarded as mutually interdependent. There is, for example, a conscious recognition of the need for waste products to be recovered in the form of compost, so that nutrients can be recycled back to the land to sustain the fertility of soils. The globalising capitalist food system, by contrast, acknowledges only a more limited form of interdependence between a few of the sectors: above all, the need to close the circuits of production with consumption, so that investments can be recovered and the capital accumulation process can continue. Conversely, there is in

---


71 This explains, for example, why such large sums are now spent by food and beverage manufacturing companies in advertising and promoting their products, including to young children, as documented by US academic nutritionist Marion Nestle (2002, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Health and*
this system little or no recognition of the need to close the nutrient cycle, with the result that the tremendous wastes generated by the system typically become toxic pollution rather than potential sources of renewed soil fertility.\footnote{Stuart 2009 \textit{op cit.}}

The food systems approach represents a theoretical advance in terms of conceptualising food and farming in an integrated and holistic way; and as such explicitly forms part of the new ‘good sense’ being articulated by the Food Sovereignty movement in this field. In beginning to naturalise an ontology of connectedness, this approach shifts our ‘mental map’ of this part of the social world; and thus ‘expands the realm of the possible’ in terms of how we perceive the organisation of food production, distribution and consumption, and our own relation to such organisation.

\textbf{The globalising capitalist food system}

The capitalist and globalising features of this food system give it certain logics and tendencies, specifically towards capital accumulation and profit, and geographical expansion. The adjective ‘capitalist’ simply means that the system is organised according to a particular, historically specific logic, based around capitalist relations of production and exchange. Adopting for this purpose the historical materialist analysis of Michael Howard and John King, capitalism is characterised by a combination of certain key features that distinguish it as an economic and social system from historically previous (for example, feudalism and mercantilism) and contemporaneously alternative (for example, variants of socialism and communism) systems.\footnote{Ibid., 43-49.} Howard and King identify six core properties, as follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{i. The employment contract}, which above else is a ‘contract for obedience’, as reflected in the defining feature of ‘managerial prerogative’: the employer’s right to command and control the employee;
  \item \textit{ii. Highly refined institutions of private property} under which ‘[p]eople have control over what they own to an unprecedented degree’;
  \item \textit{iii. Impersonal markets}, in which the primary ‘economic bond is the cash nexus’, and there is ‘substantial free[dom] of restrictions imposed by family, kin and community’;
  \item \textit{iv. Substantial levels of market dependence}, ‘so that self-provisioning by individual households or by small groups shrinks significantly’;
  \item \textit{v. The promotion of individual acquisitiveness and the associated rationalisation of productive enterprises towards this goal} (capital accumulation and profit-maximisation, as expressed institutionally in the company and corporate forms); and
  \item \textit{vi. An ‘infrastructural role’ for credit and banking systems}, in the sense that the provision of money and credit is ‘necessary for all productive activity’.\footnote{Ibid., 43-49.}
\end{itemize}

Properties (i)-(iv) above can be conceptually grouped around the concept of ‘commodity’ and historical processes of ‘commodification’ (of labour, land, etc.). A central historical hallmark of capitalism as a hegemonic system - one that marks the passage from feudalism to capitalism - is that the majority of a population living within it must sell their labour for a wage in order to purchase what they need to survive.\textsuperscript{75} As discussed below, ongoing processes of commodification and de-commodification are central to the conceptualisation of the Food Sovereignty movement.

In addition to these core properties, capitalism is also characterised by a number of tendencies, or imperatives, that shape how it is operationalised in practice and experienced by persons living within the system. While the actual nature of how capitalism is experienced varies greatly across time and space, these tendencies can be observed, generally speaking, as historical features of the system from the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century onwards. In his recent work integrating an analysis of capitalism with the contemporary global food and agricultural system, Robert Albritton formulates these tendencies abstractly and historically as follows:

i. \textit{time intensification} - increasing the speed of production and labour productivity, emphasising quantity rather than quality;  
ii. \textit{spatial expansion and ‘homogenization of natural and built environments’}, as seen for example in agricultural monocultures and the spread of ‘big box’ out-of-town shopping centres;  
iii. \textit{a tendency towards under-consumption}, as manifested in the contradiction between the imperative for the endless expansion of production, and the limited physical and monetary consumption capacity of workers, resolved \textit{inter alia} on a temporary basis through the production of desires (via marketing and advertising, and the key technology of television) as well as, in the neoliberal era, the greatly expanded use of debt and credit, and the continuation of the cheap food complex;  
iv. \textit{the tendency towards concentration of capital in larger units}, leading to monopolies and oligopolies - a trend clearly observable in global agribusiness and food retailing; and  
v. \textit{the production of individual subjectivity} tending towards ‘extreme possessive individualism’ and atomization, undermining social and communal ties and bonds.\textsuperscript{76}

From these core properties and historical tendencies we can see emerging what it is about the \textit{nature} of the globalising capitalist food system that causes it to be generative of the tensions described above. The combination of increasing

\textsuperscript{76} Albritton, R., 2009, \textit{Let Them Eat Junk: How Capitalism Creates Hunger and Obesity}, Pluto Press, London, 23-49. Albritton also includes as factors the privileging towards the maximisation of short-term profits, leading to a disregard (externalisation and indifference to ‘use-value’) of longer-term social and environmental considerations, and also the commodification of labour power, both of which were mentioned as core properties in Howard and King's list.
commodification, market dependence, capital concentration and inherent drives towards spatial expansion and profit maximisation help explain, for example, why this system produces malnutrition and obesity simultaneously. The ways in which this has been observed to occur will be dealt with in Chapters 4 and 6, as part of the context for the main argument of the thesis.

A further historical feature of capitalism, consistent with its ontology of alienation, is that societies organised according to capitalist principles in the North - liberal democracies - are almost always characterised by a formal separation between political and economic power. This formal separation has historically been important in terms of securing and sustaining the legitimacy of the system as a whole. The durability of that legitimacy also depends however on whether the economy is perceived to be delivering material benefits and ‘progress’ for the majority of the population.

The globalising character of the food system brings into play questions of spatial expansion, as noted earlier. Globalising indicates that the system involves both the regular and systematic movement of food products and agricultural commodities across international boundaries, as well as increasing scales of the international movement of these products and commodities over time.

In terms of the principal actors of the globalising capitalist food system, I have classified these into five main sets. In the first instance, the governments of the North play a central role, as discussed in Chapter 4, in setting the institutional and political framework within which the system can function and expand in terms of production, distribution and consumption. In particular, these states play a decisive role within the intergovernmental financial and trade institutions, notably the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, that have in the past thirty years set and enforced the normative framework under which the system has expanded. Governments generally also play a role in absorbing and socialising the costs of production and consumption which the system presently externalises, such as the costs of the obesity pandemic.

Secondly, there are, what we might collectively term the workers, without whose labour the system would not function. In this group there are the farmers who as primary producers provide the raw materials on which every other aspect of the system depends; as well as food system workers who pick, pack, process, transport, distribute and sell food. It also needs to be said at this point that farmers are also

---

77 Wood 2003 *op cit.* As Vicki Birchfield states, ‘it is the capitalist wage relation that necessitates the conceptual separation of economics and politics, respectively, into private and public spheres of activity, which in turn becomes the defining feature of the liberal state: 1999 *op cit.*, 34.

78 As discussed in Chapter 2, this raises the question of the accumulation and distribution functions of a given ‘regime’, and whether both are performing well together. See Rapley, J., 2004, *Globalization and Inequality: Neoliberalism’s Downward Spiral*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Co.

79 Farmers are traditionally regarded not as workers but as independent producers, so here I might be accused of stretching categories. However my concern is not to be faithful to strict definitions or legalities, but rather to look to the substance of the role that particular groups play within the overall functioning of the system as a whole. In that sense, farmers are producers, in the same way that workers in the more traditional sense produce, with their labour and skill, products and services at multiple other points within the globalising capitalist food system.
important consumers of several products of the system, notably seeds, farm machinery, fossil fuels, and agri-chemicals.

Thirdly, there are the transnational corporations that dominate, as oligopolies, the key economic sectors of proprietary seeds; agri-chemicals; meat-packing and grain processing; food and beverage manufacturing; transport and shipping; and large-scale retailing. The corporations involved in the retailing spectrum of the system are also reliant on advertising companies to promote and sell their products.

Fourthly, there are private financial enterprises, such as investment banks and hedge funds, which have in various ways financed the expansion of existing production sectors of the system, and in recent years opened new fields of accumulation such as agro-fuels. Within these actors we must also include those who engage in speculation on commodity markets, which is cited by many as a significant factor in the food price volatility since 2008.

Lastly, there is the great majority of ordinary people in the North especially, but also in the South, who support the system as consumers of its products. Without sufficient numbers of end-consumers the circuits of production and consumption would not be completed, profits would collapse, capital could not be accumulated and re-invested, and the system would fall into a severe crisis.

The Food Sovereignty movement

In this section what I want to do is examine briefly what is meant by a ‘movement’, then look at who the principal actors are within the Food Sovereignty movement. Next I look at some of the key elements of Food Sovereignty itself, before turning finally to outline some of the actions and strategies that the Food Sovereignty movement has been undertaking. All of this will of course receive further detailed treatment throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapters 3, 5, and 7.

In the first instance, the Food Sovereignty movement is both a ‘social movement’ and a ‘transnational social movement’, or perhaps more accurately, a ‘transnational agrarian movement’. According to the social movement theory literature, a ‘social movement’ is a ‘sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities’. Likewise, a ‘transnational social movement’ is a social movement operating in three or more countries engaged in transnational collective action, that is, ‘coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states or international institutions’. The adjective

---

‘agrarian’ implies that the social movement in question is comprised largely or exclusive of farmer, or land-based, social actors.\(^{83}\)

These conceptualisations are rather limited, since they imply that the movements are necessarily oppositional in character, and that they are engaged only in the sphere of politics and institutions, thus ignoring the spheres of economics and ecology. Amongst other consequences, this immediately places almost all the focus of any analysis on protests and campaigns, foreclosing any consideration of grounded economic praxis in particular times and places. In any case, as will be discussed below, in Chapter 3 and elsewhere in the thesis, the self-conceptualisation of the Food Sovereignty movement has already moved beyond these limited confines. As a ‘movement’, it clearly embraces both the conventional understandings of a social movement as they appear in the literature, as well as the intentional enactment of grounded socio-economic and political praxis in diverse forms and places.\(^{84}\)

In terms of the principal actors of the Food Sovereignty movement, my analysis accords primacy to the originators of Food Sovereignty, the farmer-activists of La Via Campesina, for the reasons explained in Chapter 3. Food Sovereignty was collectively developed and first articulated by La Via Campesina in 1995, in explicit juxtaposition to the concept of ‘food security’ as it was then being deployed by core capitalist states in the lead-up to the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996.\(^{85}\) La Via Campesina is the global movement for small family and peasant farmers, landless rural workers, indigenous peoples, women and youth. Estimates vary, but it is said to include in excess of 200 million people affiliated to its 150 member organisations, located in 70 countries across five continents.\(^{86}\)

The member organisations of La Via Campesina, which is Spanish for ‘the peasant way’ or ‘the peasant path’, are exclusively organisations of small family and peasant farmers. La Via Campesina is careful to privilege the voice of farmers, on the grounds that they have been traditionally marginalised and excluded in both national and global debates around food and farming. La Via Campesina has developed strategic relationships with a number of activist-oriented NGOs.\(^{87}\) These NGOs also form part of the Food Sovereignty movement. Some La Via Campesina member organisations are,

\(^{83}\) Borras 2010 \textit{op cit.}

\(^{84}\) In these respects, the Food Sovereignty movement can be classified as a ‘hope movement’ (Dinerstein,A.C., and Deneulin, S., 2012, ‘Hope Movements: Naming Mobilization in a Post-development World’, Development and Change 43(2), 585-602. Dinerstein and Deneulin draw on Marxist Ernst Bloch’s (Bloch, E. (1959/1986) \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Volumes I, II and III. Cambridge,MA: MIT Press) conception of ‘the utopian function of hope’ as embodying the ‘not-yet-become’ – the imaginary human capacity to anticipate and enact the future within the present – in order to ground their conceptualisation of ‘hope movements’ as \textit{inter alia} ‘a prophetic voice which points to the fact that the reality we are currently living is not the only one’: 584-5, 598-99.

\(^{85}\) Nettie Wiebe, interview with the author, September 2010.


\(^{87}\) These include: Friends of the Earth, GRAIN, Food First, FIAN,
together with other peasant organisations, members of other national and transnational agrarian movements that also support the food sovereignty agenda. In addition, at the national level there are growing numbers of urban-based food groups, such as food co-operatives, community gardens, and community-supported agriculture initiatives, which explicitly identify with the values and vision of food sovereignty. Equally, there are many such groups which do not so explicitly identify with food sovereignty. Nevertheless, I would include them within the broader Food Sovereignty movement, because their efforts to construct diverse expressions of localised and de-commodified food systems are entirely consistent with the basic content of food sovereignty.

In terms of its key elements, as will be seen in Chapter 3, food sovereignty is a broad and expanding field in its own right. Thematically and philosophically, leading ‘organic intellectuals’ of the Food Sovereignty movement, such as Hannah Wittman, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Nettie Wiebe and Raj Patel, argue that food sovereignty entails a democratised food system; a localised and de-commodified food system; and a ‘radical egalitarianism’. Amongst other things, a commitment to such egalitarianism implies transformed gender relations and the eradication of all forms of violence against women.

Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe claim that:

The theory and practice of food sovereignty has the potential to foster dramatic and widespread change in agricultural, political and social systems related to food by posing a radical challenge to the agro-industry model of food production. The transformation envisioned entails a changing relationship to food resulting from an integrated, democratized, localized food production model. It also entails a fundamental shift in values expressed in changing social and political relations.

---

88 These include the Asian Peasant Coalition and the African network Network of Peasant Agriculture and Modernisation of Africa (APM-Mondial); the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC). Transnational networks that also count NGOs as members include the European Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty and the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty.


Our campaign is one of the commitments of all members of Via Campesina to build our Buen Vivir (Good Living). It is not just another task or another demand. It is a process of change of men and women in the way we look at each other, in the way we treat each other; it is the right to a life with dignity and relations with equity…


92 Wittman et al op cit., 4.
The implication is that a process of democratisation of food systems would, according to one senior academic affiliated with the Food Sovereignty movement in Canada, require a complete rethinking of the assumptions that were the very centre of the transition to capitalism, namely the divorcing of primary producers from any right over the goods they produced, and encasing those goods in ever larger, ever more disconnected, ever more monopolized, and ever more destructive markets. Food Sovereignty demands that we treat food not simply as a good, access to which and the production of which is determined by the market, but that we recognize the social connections inherent in producing food, consuming food, and sharing food. In the process it will change everything.93

According to such conceptualisations, food sovereignty envisages the replacement of the capitalist ontology and market-driven praxis of alienation, with a new ontology and democratised praxis of connectedness. In place of the anonymous ‘cash-nexus’ which constitutes the sole bond between primary producer and end-consumer in the capitalist food system, food sovereignty is premised on the recovery of social connectivity via more intimate and direct personal relationships between producers (farmers) and the end consumers achieved through localised food systems. In such direct and personal exchanges, it can also be argued that something is being altered in the minds of the participants as regards their understanding of food itself. A monetary exchange is still taking place, but the use value of food - its sensuous, cultural nature, and its true ecological and social cost - is being recovered, and more properly reflected in the price. The primary consideration is no longer simply about profit; in the process food becomes de-commodified; and this represents a deep and effective engagement with a central element of the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system.

There are other expressions of the Food Sovereignty movement, notably community gardens, and, by extension, the ‘growing’ practice of individuals growing a portion of their own food, which are further reinforcing this trend of de-commodification. This trend towards self-reliance and even in some places self-sufficiency, represents a recovery of earlier traditions in many countries in the North when such practices were the ‘norm’. That they are now making a come-back is significant for many reasons, not least of which is a possible indication of an increasing lack of confidence in the security and even the safety of the globalising capitalist food system.

A further key element of food sovereignty, and the Food Sovereignty movement, which Wittman and her colleagues emphasise, is its self-reflexivity, as regards the need for transformational change in terms of attitudes and behaviours towards women within the communities and organisations that form the movement. What they are referring to here is the campaign launched by La Via Campesina in 2008 for the eradication of all forms of violence against women in peasant and farming communities.94 This stance is both a matter of adherence to the basic principle of equality, as well as a recognition of the reality that in many parts of Africa and Asia in particular it is in fact women who constitute the bulk of the family and peasant farmers. The insight that

---

94 See footnote 85 above.
any attempt at social transformation must be preceded by personal and group
transformation is a sign of the movement’s maturity.95

In terms of the actions and strategies of the Food Sovereignty movement, in the first
place, there has been a lengthy and on-going process of movement-building and
reflection by La Via Campesina. Amongst other things, this has involved the
construction of a common identity capable of uniting what objectively appear to be
quite disparate groups and individuals. The unifying concept has been the term
campesino, or peasant, understood by reference to its French meaning as ‘person of
the land’; together with the common lived experience of marginalisation and suffering
due to the normal operation of the globalising capitalist food system. This process of
movement-building has from the beginning included the work of critique of the
globalising capitalist food system. Movement leaders most commonly refer to it as
‘neoliberal globalisation’. This is arguably a weakness of their critique, since the
emphasis on ‘neoliberalism’ as a conjunctural expression of globalising capitalism
tends to occlude consideration of the deeper structures, shifts, fundamental
imperatives and contradictions of the capitalism system as a whole, such as continued
economic growth.

Shortly after La Via Campesina was established, work also began on the development
of their alternative paradigm to the globalising capitalist food system: food
sovereignty. La Via Campesina and its constituent members have formulated other
campaigns and engaged in various forms of direct action, protest and ‘shadow
summits’. They have also engaged with some agencies of the United Nations, the Food
and Agriculture Organisation in particular, and have elaborated a project to attempt
to gain recognition of the human rights of peasants via a UN Convention to that effect.

At the national level, Via Campesina and affiliated groups have been successful in
working with some governments, such as Ecuador, to secure the institutionalisation of
food sovereignty principles in national constitutions and framework laws. This process
is in its infancy, and has been limited to a few countries in the South. Interestingly,
some communities and municipal governments in a few parts of the United States,
motivated by what they see as the unwarranted interference of Federal and State
authorities in the operation of local food economies on the pretext of ‘food safety’,
and inspired by the broader transnational movement for food sovereignty, have
recently passed ‘Local Food and Community Self-Governance’ ordinances, asserting
their right to democratically determine the conditions under which they produce and
exchange food.96

95 “If we do not eradicate violence towards women within our movement, we will not advance in our
struggles, and if we do not create new gender relations, we will not be able to build a new society”: Via
Campesina, 2008, Declaration of Maputo, Fifth International Conference, quoted in Wittman et al 2010 op
cit., 5.

96 This trend is most noticeable in the State of Maine, often regarded as the crucible of the local food
movement in the United States, and is documented by Food for Maine’s Futures in their newsletter, Saving
Seeds, Issue 12, Winter 2012, available at:
https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1221/images/Saving%20Seeds%20Winter%202012%20Web.pdf,
accessed 10.1.12.
In addition to these primarily political actions, there are as noted a host of economic and socio-economic practices that have been enacted, such as farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture, food co-operatives and community gardening. Using the food systems approach and drawing on the ontology of connectedness, I theorise these initiatives as part of the broader movement for food sovereignty, even though in many cases they may have no ‘radical’ political agenda of opposition or resistance to the globalising capitalist food system. The reason is that an effective counter-hegemonic movement requires a multidimensional collaborative effort, including the political work of critique, opposition and resistance, and the creative social, cultural and economic work of the development and implementation of the new models intended to transform and replace the hegemonic system.

**Development of the argument through the thesis chapters**

The structure I am deploying in the thesis is a double-movement, or flow, between the context of the globalising capitalist food system, and the response to this context of the Food Sovereignty movement. To facilitate the analysis and discussion, I have separated the context into two spheres: political-institutional, and ecological-economic. The discussion of each sphere takes place in its own chapter, and is followed in the succeeding chapter by the analysis of the responses of the Food Sovereignty movement to the most salient aspects of the context. The aim of this structure is to create a dynamic sense of contestation – the ongoing negotiation of hegemony, and the waging of counter-hegemonic struggles – which enables me at the end of the thesis to draw conclusions regarding the essential Gramscian question: has the Food Sovereignty movement managed to shift the existing disposition of forces, and thus destabilised the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system?

Chapter 2 focuses on theory and method. The method is a neo-Gramscian political ecology. It is informed by neo-Marxist political ecology and political economy, and a Gramscian theory of politics. The central element, as mentioned above, is a Gramscian ‘balance of forces’ analysis, which seeks to determine whether and to what extent the Food Sovereignty movement is a counter-hegemonic political force.

In Chapter 3 I deal with case studies, the first of which is the development of food sovereignty by La Via Campesina, as outlined above, with particular emphases on the campaign for a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, and on the advocacy of agro-ecology. I argue that in the methodologies of agro-ecology can be observed key elements of a new ‘good sense’ for sustainable, resilient and equitable agriculture, that can progressively replace and eventually make redundant the currently prevailing ‘common sense’ of large-scale, resource-intensive, technology-dependent industrialised agriculture. The second case study concerns the development of food sovereignty via the local food movement in northern NSW / South-East Queensland. This movement is broadly representative, in terms of its core philosophy and key strategies and actions, of similar movements throughout the Anglo-Saxon Global North. These movements seek to contribute to the de-commodification of the globalising capitalist food system by challenging the primacy of impersonal capitalist exchanges around food and agriculture. They also have a political component, as they seek to develop policy alternatives to support these embryonic economic initiatives.
The purpose of Chapter 4, which deals with the political-institutional context, is to identify the main political-institutional elements of the globalising capitalist food system and to explain how this balance of forces achieves and maintains the hegemony of the system. Some of these elements, such as the implementation of structural adjustment programs and the dismantling of support frameworks for domestic agriculture, as well as the inauguration of trade liberalisation, have been mentioned earlier in this Introduction. I will discuss several others in the course of Chapter 4, such as the promotion of market-led agrarian reform, the judicial enforcement of intellectual property laws, and the creation of an agro-fuels boom through government subsidies and targets.

As noted earlier, in this thesis I am particularly concerned to examine the ways in which the system’s hegemony is founded on ‘consent’, dependent in part upon a certain ‘common sense’. This common sense is linked to a particular, state-corporatist understanding of ‘food security’, and in its modern incarnation food sovereignty was explicitly articulated in juxtaposition to that discourse. Further, Food sovereignty relies heavily on the language and (to a certain extent) the institutions of human rights. Accordingly, in Chapter 4 I will pay particular attention to the way in which the human right to adequate food has, in recent years, been incorporated within a marketised and free trade-oriented framework of food security.

In Chapter 5 I examine the normative construction and politics of food sovereignty as a principal means of challenging the political-institutional basis of the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system. This necessarily entails a detailed discussion of human rights, for the reasons mentioned above. Thus I will examine the status, content, institutional development within the United Nations system, and degree of enforcement of the right to adequate food. By reference to Guatemala as a case study, I will look at efforts to implement the right to adequate food.

Next, I will discuss some of the areas of overlap and divergence between food sovereignty and the right to adequate food; and examine La Via Campesina’s efforts to secure a new UN Convention on the Rights of Peasants, and what this might mean for food sovereignty. I will examine the politics of food sovereignty at the international level, in the form of street protests and shadow summits. Then I will examine the degree of political acceptance and institutionalisation of food sovereignty at the national level, with a particular focus on Ecuador as one of the few countries to have taken significant steps in this direction. Finally, I will raise some questions about the risks in devoting time and resources to institutionalising food sovereignty in the United Nations framework, having regard to some of the major critiques of human rights formulated over the past few decades.

The purpose of this Chapter 6, which discusses the socio-economic and ecological context for the thesis, is to constitute the second plank of the Gramscian ‘balance of forces’ analysis, with an examination of how the system’s hegemony is maintained. Whereas in Chapter 4 the focus centred in extra-economic forms of coercion, as exercised by political-institutional actors, here it shifts to purely economic forms of coercion as exercised by the largest economic actors, the transnational corporations. As before, there a principal concern is to identify the ways in which the system’s
hegemony is supported via common sense, and in this chapter the inquiry here examines the construction of individual subjectivities via the technologies of advertising, aimed especially at young children. The concept of ‘cheap food’, and its relation to an accumulation regime increasingly dependent on credit to maintain levels of consumption, is also examined in this context. Further, I also examine how the tendency towards over-production is causing the system both to generate intensifying inequalities, and to encounter key planetary boundaries which, arguably, constitute the ecological limits of its further expansion. Here I look in particular at the Republic of Soy in South America.

The purpose of Chapter 7 is to examine the effectiveness of the socio-economic and ecological responses developed by the Food Sovereignty movement to the context explained in Chapter 6. By reference to case studies, the discussion centres in the first instance on agro-ecology as constitutive of the purported new ‘good sense’ in agriculture and food production, contrasted with the ‘common sense’ of intensified industrialised agriculture. Secondly, I discuss the building of local food economies as constitutive of the new ‘good sense’ across the five sectors of the food system, contrasted with the ‘common sense’ of increasing corporatisation and concentration of ownership.

**Re-statement of the argument**

My argument is that the Food Sovereignty movement is engaging deeply and constructively with the tensions of the globalising capitalist food system by mounting a counter-hegemonic struggle to transform and transcend this power formation. This struggle is multi-dimensional and multi-scalar, involving the intellectual work of critique, the political work of resistance and opposition, and the creative cultural and economic work of developing and enacting feasible new models. In the process a new ‘good sense’, based on the ontology of connectedness, is being elaborated, enacted and naturalised, thereby expanding the realm of the possible; and posing a substantive challenge to the capitalist food system’s ontology of alienation and its foundational ‘configurations of scarcity’.97 The ontology of connectedness is manifesting as the three pillars of food sovereignty: redistributive agrarian reform, agro-ecological methodologies, and localised and democratised food systems.

---

97 Panayotakis *op cit.*
Chapter 2

Theory and method

The decadent international but individualistic capitalism in the hands of which we found ourselves after the war is not a success. It is not intelligent. It is not beautiful. It is not just. It is not virtuous. And it doesn’t deliver the goods. In short we dislike it, and we are beginning to despise it. But when we wonder what to put in its place, we are extremely perplexed.

John Maynard Keynes

In this chapter I set out the method I intend to use to guide the development of this thesis, as well as its principle theoretical foundations. First, I provide a summary of the method, then an outline of my key methodological commitments as regards questions of ontology and epistemology. Next I will summarise, by reference to the principal literature, the main theoretical traditions on which my method is based: political ecology, neo-Marxist critiques of contemporary globalising capitalism, food regime theory, and a Gramscian theory of politics. Finally, I will explain how the method will be applied in the remainder of the thesis.

Summary of the method

The method I have developed in order to guide the development of the argument in this thesis is what I call a ‘neo-Gramscian political ecology’. The method entails a synthesis of recent neo-Marxist work in political ecology and political economy with a Gramscian theory of politics.

The method provides the theoretical foundations, the conceptual tools and logical steps which enable me to:

- Identify the principal tensions of the globalising capitalist food system, having regard to the principles of a neo-Marxist-based political ecological critique of the system,
- Analyse the effectiveness of the responses to these tensions being articulated and practiced by diverse expressions of the emergent Food Sovereignty movement, on the basis that this movement is engaged in a counter-hegemonic political struggle, and
- Draw conclusions regarding the depth and constructiveness of those responses.

A neo-Gramscian political ecology is firmly grounded in the structuralist Marxist tradition. At the same time, it is careful not to fall into the error of economic determinism and reductionism, and thereby plays particular attention to the inter-relationship between structure, agency, consciousness and practice. Consistent with the broader Marxist tradition, this method has a particular philosophical and political

---


2 The ‘base-superstructure metaphor’ of orthodox Marxism is a classic example of economic determinism.
commitment to contribute to progressive political praxis by subordinate social classes; that is, classes of people who because of shared economic, social and/or political status typically find themselves as the objects rather than the subjects of the exercise of political-economic power. In the particular topic which is the concern of this thesis, prominent among these classes are small family and peasant farmers whose livelihood conditions, most critical commentators agree, have been progressively and substantively undermined by the operation of the globalising capitalist food system.

The ‘ecological rift’

That the method is based in political ecology elevates as a matter of first-order importance an examination of the specific processes in the globalising capitalist food system by which an ‘ecological rift’, in what is postulated as the ‘natural metabolism between humanity and nature’, has been opened and progressively widened in the course of the past two centuries. This foundational concept provides the point of synthesis with neo-Marxist approaches to the analysis of the globalising capitalist food system. Thus, consistent with the Marxist method of abstraction and critique, the specifically ‘capitalist’ features and dynamics of the globalising food system are identified and discussed. Here I also draw on elements of accumulation regime theory, and in particular recent work on food regime theory, to examine the dynamics at work. Throughout this discussion and analysis I return to the exploration of the ‘ecological rift’ opened by the globalising capitalist food system, which, as indicated in the Introduction, in reality represents not only the alienation between humanity and nature, but also the alienation between people themselves, in terms of intensifying inequalities. It is therefore both an ecological and a social rift. This process allows me

---


5 In their survey of numerous quantitative studies mapping indicators of societal well-being against levels of income inequality in the OECD countries, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2010, The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone, Penguin Books, London), argue that relative levels of income inequality explain why material progress has in most countries not been accompanied by increasing levels of happiness and well-being. ‘The evidence’, they say, ‘shows that reducing inequality is the best way of improving the quality of the social environment, and so the real quality of life, for all of us [including] the better-off’: 29.
to identify some of the key ecological and social tensions which are generated by the globalising capitalist food system.

Understanding these tensions as conceptually and structurally linked by Marx’s concept of alienation, as the argument progresses I juxtapose the capitalist ontology of alienation, which necessitates the maintenance and further expansion of the ecological and social rift, with the food sovereignty ontology of connectedness, which grounds multiplying forms of praxis which seek the healing of that rift. Hence the enactment of counter-hegemonic politics, which I discuss below, is multidimensional and multiscalar, and includes efforts at economic as well as political democracy. At the same time the terrain of hegemonic struggle is also ontological and symbolic, as the new ‘connected’ good sense of food sovereignty seeks to disrupt and displace the atomised and alienated common sense of the globalising capitalist food system, thereby undermining the ‘consent’ on which its hegemony rests.

A Gramscian theory of politics
Having identified the key tensions as the context for the thesis, this analysis sets the stage for the application of the second part of the method, which is informed by a Gramscian theory of politics. According to this theory, a relatively stable hegemonic power formation in any given society depends on its rule being maintained by a mixture of coercion and consent, with the role of the latter being the most important in terms of the goal of temporal stability. Consent amongst subordinate social classes to the rule of hegemonic elites is achieved in significant part through the internalisation of the ‘common sense of the age’, which plays a crucial role in naturalising the status quo. Counter-hegemonic politics necessarily unfolds in multiple spheres, however the work of critiquing the prevailing common sense and so developing a critical consciousness amongst subordinate classes is fundamental to it. It is, according to my interpretation of Gramscian theory, the development of this critical consciousness which enables subordinate classes to formulate political-economic strategies, and undertake sets of practices, that cumulatively and collectively might be said to constitute counter-hegemonic politics. Further, it is the practice of such politics that enables such groups to begin to exercise effective agency and so become in their own right the subjects, rather than the objects, of history.

Key methodological commitments and principles
In this section I set out what I understand to be the purpose of critical theory and method, followed by my philosophical commitments as regards questions of ontology and epistemology. Here I also explicate what I consider to be a ‘proper’ relation between the spheres of economy and ecology, as achieved through the unifying term oikos.

The approach to questions of ontology is realist and relational. That is, the existence of structures comprised of social relations and having causal properties is recognised, and acknowledged as ‘ontologically distinct’ from human action, including intersubjective relations. It is accepted that capitalism has a logic and tendencies, which,

in historically specific interactions with other structures and the ‘conscious interventions’ of individuals and groups, help explain transformations in national and global political economies. The rigid ‘base / superstructure’ separation is abandoned in favour of a relational ontology where the separation between the economic, political, and cultural spheres is didactic rather than ontological. That is, no one sphere is accorded a causal primacy over the other.

Rather than regarding structures and agency as 'mutually constitutive' and thereby effectively collapsing one into the other, a proper relationship between structure, agency, practice and consciousness can and must be articulated. Structures are reproduced, not created, by historical actors. As Andrew Sayer explains, however, the concept of reproduction itself is not straightforward, since it happens neither 'automatically and rarely intentionally', rather:

[T]he execution of actions necessary for [the] reproduction [of social structures] must be seen as a skilled accomplishment requiring not only materials but particular kinds of practical knowledge. Actors are not mere dupes, automata, or bearers of roles, unalterably programmed to reproduce. The very fact that social structures are historically specific - that societies have existed and do exist without nuclear families, private property, prisons etc. - ought to remind us of the contingent status of social structures.

It is this contingent and historically specific nature of social structures - including hegemonic power formations - which demonstrates their susceptibility, both theoretically and practically, to change. However, certain social structures - such as the capitalist economy as a whole - tend by their nature to be particularly durable, an assertion that is verifiable historically and empirically. This indicates not the impossibility of substantive (that is, transformative) change of such structures, but rather that such change, if it is to occur, is most likely to do so ‘gradually, from within’. Conventionally, structures and agency are seen as oppositional, in the sense that agency is what enables human action, whereas structures, while not determining such action, typically constrain it. There is however no reason in theory or practice why these two concepts should be regarded as oppositional, nor why structures should not also be enabling, as well as constraining, of human action. Similarly there may be ‘structures of agency’, such as customary or religious systems, which at once enable

---

7 Ibid., 72.
8 Ibid., 69.
9 Sayer op cit, 96.
10 “The most durable social structures are those which lock their occupants into situations which they cannot unilaterally change and yet in which it is possible to change between existing positions”: ibid., 95. Thus, a group of workers may abandon their employment and join a commune, but to the extent that they are still dependent for their survival on the commodities produced by the capitalist economy, they continue to contribute, albeit to a lesser extent than previously, to its reproduction. The qualification 'most likely' does not of course rule out the possibility of more abrupt, ‘revolutionary', change; it does suggest however that it would unrealistic, even naïve, to expect such a change to be in any way probable.
11 Ibid. The qualification 'most likely' does not of course rule out the possibility of more abrupt, 'revolutionary', change; it does suggest however that it would unrealistic, even naïve, to expect such a change to be in any way probable.
12 Marsden op cit., Ch 3.
13 Ibid., 218.
and constrain (for example, within a particular belief system) human action. However, while structure and agency are not oppositional, they are not the same thing; and in order not to conflate them, a mediating influence must be identified. In a realist ontology, this is not consciousness \textit{per se}, but ‘social practice as embodying both conscious and unconscious social activity, customs, routines, and other forms of collective behaviour’.\footnote{Joseph op cit., 74.} Whilst ‘agents act consciously within practice’, the normal result of this is ‘the unconscious or unintended reproduction of deeper social structures’.\footnote{Ibid.} Hence the emphasis placed by Gramsci and other radical thinkers such as Paolo Freire on the necessity of educative practices to develop \textit{critical consciousness} and awareness.\footnote{Mayo 1999, \textit{Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education: Possibilities for Transformative Action}, London: Zed Books.} It also flows from this that processes of hegemonic formation are structurally conditioned, and therefore must be seen as ‘emergent and historically contingent’.\footnote{Joseph op cit., 78.}

As regards epistemology, contrary to idealist and purely subjective approaches regarding the question of how we obtain our knowledge about the world such as social constructivism, it is implicit in a realist approach that there is an ‘objective’ basis on which we can assess competing forms of knowledge. Given this approach, a distinction is made between facts and values; historical analysis is not to be conflated with normative judgments; and ‘wishful thinking’, in the form of suppositions regarding what one would like to happen as distinct from what is happening, is to be rigorously avoided.\footnote{Femia, J., 2008, \textit{Gramsci, Epistemology and International Relations Theory} in McNally, M., and Schwarzmantel, J., 2009, \textit{Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance}, Routledge, Oxford.} Normative commitments are possible, but they must be grounded in ‘effective reality’, being a ‘relation of forces in continuous motion’.\footnote{Gramsci 1971 \textit{op cit.}, 172} As Joseph Femia puts it, [u]ltimately theories are to be judged by the facts of the world rather than by their ‘progressive’ intentions.\footnote{Op cit., 39.} Claims to truth are approached as provisional and historical, and this applies equally to Marxism as it does to other worldviews.\footnote{As Gramsci puts it (using ‘philosophy of praxis’ to denote Marxism): If the philosophy of praxis affirms theoretically that every “truth” believed to be eternal and absolute has had practical origins and has represented a “provisional” value (historicity of every conception of the world and of life), it is still very difficult to make people grasp “practically” that such an interpretation is valid also for the philosophy of praxis itself, without in so doing shaking the convictions that are necessary for action: 1971 \textit{op cit.}, 406.}

At the same time, naïve objectivism and positivism - which continue to shape much common sense thinking, despite their poor status in the academy - are firmly rejected because of their tendency towards reification and thus to the inducement of passivity.\footnote{Reification is the ‘common tendency...to turn active, conscious social relationships and processes into things which exist independently of us so that we think of them in terms of “having” rather than “being”: Sayer \textit{op cit.} 16.} For example, if ‘the economy’ is conceived in the popular mind as an external, ‘nature-like’ force with which one merely interacts, rather than actively shapes and reproduces, then the scope for agency is correspondingly diminished, and
the social forces and processes perpetuating the status quo are reinforced.  

In contrast, the critique of the common sense notion of ‘objective reality’ as existing ‘out there’, separate from people, is intended to facilitate the processes whereby individuals and groups struggle to shed themselves of their status as ‘objects’ in capitalist social relations in order become creative subjects and movers of history.  

As such it is intended to facilitate empowerment and transformational change.

Further, having regard to the all-pervasiveness of common sense ideologies, it is recognised that knowledge is both ‘theory-laden’ and fallible, and therefore relative. As Gramsci puts it, ‘[w]e know reality only in relation to man, and since man is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming’, not an eternally fixed and static ‘given’. Just as people ‘produce’ and reproduce themselves through their daily activities, so knowledge production is a ‘social activity’, achieved with ‘raw materials and tools [that are] linguistic, conceptual[,] cultural [and] material’. These tools vary from place to place according to language and other factors, and they change and develop through human action and interaction over time.

As a social practice, the production of knowledge, and in particular the content of aspects of that knowledge at any given time, are influenced by the ‘conditions and social relations’ in which it takes place, including existing configurations of political and economic power. A ‘critical’ political ecology has a particular concern to scrutinise the centrality of expert knowledge in relation to questions of the environment and society; and to problematise how the ‘hegemonic control of knowledge’ marginalises other forms of knowledge and meaning-making.

As I discuss below, one of the major contributions of food sovereignty as an emerging transnational social movement, and one of the sources of its counter-hegemonic potential, is its foundation in an expanding ‘peasant ontology and epistemology’. In this sense, the battle for hegemony assumes an ontological and epistemological dimension, with the spread of globalising capitalism dependent on the embrace of a modern and even ‘hyper-modern’ (in the case of new technologies) ontology; and the counter-hegemonic movements asserting an alternative ontology and epistemology, grounded mainly in critical modernism.

---

24 As Gramsci puts it, ‘There exists...a struggle for objectivity (to free oneself from partial and fallacious ideologies) and this struggle is the same as the struggle for the cultural unification of the human race’: 1971 *op cit.*, 445.
25 Sayer *op cit.*, 5;
26 Gramsci 1971 *op cit.*, 446.
27 Sayer *op cit.*, 16.
28 *Ibid*, 4. In other words, the production of scientific knowledge can be, and often is, politically and / or economically motivated. It is important to bear this consideration in mind when considering questions such as claims regarding the supposedly benign effects on human and environmental health of genetically modified organisms, when those claims are made by scientists who are financially linked to corporations seeking to advance the expansion of GMOs.
30 McMichael, P., 2008a, ‘Peasants Make their Own History, But Not Just as They Please’, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(1 & 2), 205-228, 205.
Rural sociologist Philip McMichael has long been a sympathetic observer of La Via Campesina, and has contributed to the theoretical development of food sovereignty. He argues that food sovereignty’s radical ‘politicization of food’ and the assertion by the organised peasantry of ‘world historical’ subjectivity which it represents, has posed a fundamental challenge to both the ontology and epistemology that underlie the ‘narrative of capitalist modernity’. Thus, La Via Campesina has, with food sovereignty, reformulated the classical ‘agrarian question’ from one that was concerned primarily with the political and class commitments of a dwindling and dispossessed peasantry in the context of the inevitable historical agrarian transition from feudalism to capitalism, to a highly politicised re-conceptualisation of food and agriculture as based fundamentally on relations of social reproduction and ecological stewardship, rather than production for accumulation. In the process, it has made possible a profound interrogation and critique of the naturalised assumptions underpinning the ontology of the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture and food systems, in particular the ‘phenomenon of a ‘world price’, the corporate subsidy system as a foundation of the WTO [and] the capital / state nexus (in the multilateral institutions) as a global force’. Further, it has re-asserted, via a ‘grounded ecological perspective’ the foundational and ‘multifunctional’ role of agriculture in social reproduction as an epistemic principle, countering the epistemic violence through which the peasantry was ‘removed’ from history in the ‘narrative of capitalist modernity’.

Food sovereignty, according to McMichael, represents a peasant ontology which

[C]ritiques the reductionism and false promises of neoliberalism [and] posit[s] a practice and a future beyond the liberal development subject, and the science of profit. This emerging ontology is grounded in a process of revaluing agriculture, rurality and food as essential to general social and ecological sustainability, beginning with a recharged peasantry.

This ontology - which I conceive as the ontology of connectedness - therefore directly raises the question of a ‘post-capitalist modernity’ and claims for the peasantry ‘the right to produce society’ as fundamental to it. For McMichael, part of the ‘significance of the food sovereignty movement is that, in the narrative of capitalist modernity, its project is virtually unthinkable’; and in the process it opens up ‘a method of developing an alternative modernity, re-centred on agriculture and food’.

This roots of this ontology of connectedness, and indeed of the Food Sovereignty movement more generally, can be discovered in the rich history of peasant rebellion, as captured in the classic works of peasant history and politics of the 1960s and 1970s.

31 Professor of Development Sociology at Cornell University, McMichael has ‘worked with La Via Campesina on the food crisis and agroecological alternatives’: Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe, 2009, xii.
32 McMichael 2008a op cit., 205.
33 Ibid., 208, 210-216.
34 Ibid., 212.
35 Ibid., 213.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 216.
38 Ibid., 218.
by Barrington Moore Jr, James Scott and Eric Wolf. The seminal contributions of these writers included the identification, contrary to orthodox Marxist analysis which valorized the working class as the leading agent of social change above all others, of the critical role played by the peasantry as ‘the decisive social base of most, if not all, successful twentieth-century revolutions’ as well as the socio-economic and politico-cultural conditions in which such rebellion was likely. As regards the latter, Scott’s articulation of the ‘moral economy of the peasantry’ provided a rich theoretical framework with which to examine the customs and mores of agrarian societies, including distinctive peasant notions of justice and rights, the persistent violation of which increases the probability of peasant revolt:

A great deal of peasant violence in the Third World and historically in the West may be seen as a collective effort to preserve pre-capitalist communal rights against the incursion of a bureaucratic state and capitalism.

While undoubtedly building on this rebellious and revolutionary tradition, the extent to which the contemporary Food Sovereignty movement might be portrayed as anachronistic and backwards-looking in the face of the inevitability of capitalist modernity and technological ‘progress’ is an important theme that runs through this thesis. Certainly for McMichael and other ‘organic intellectuals’ of the movement, food sovereignty is future-oriented:

Instead of defending a world lost, transnational movements such as Via Campesina advocate a world to gain - a world beyond the catastrophe of the corporate market regime, in which agrarianism is revalued as central to social and ecological sustainability. More than a self-protective manoeuvre, the peasant movement proclaiming food sovereignty calls into question the neoliberal ‘food security’ project, and its trope of feeding the world with food surpluses generated in the North. This alternative modernity of food sovereignty would appear to resemble an agrarian-focused version of ‘critical modernism’ as a new development project, under which ‘development means using production to meet the needs of the poorest people’, under conditions of ‘reproductive democracy’. The ‘Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty’ contained in the Declaration of Nyéléni that followed an inaugural global forum for

---


41 Ibid., 279-280.


43 Peet, R., and Hartwick, E., 1999, Theories of Development, Guildford Press, New York. Peet and Hartwick juxtapose their Marxist-informed critical modernism against capitalist modernity, arguing for ‘socialist development [which] means transforming the conditions of reproduction under the control of directly democratic and egalitarian social relations so that the needs of the poorest people are met’: 208.
food sovereignty held in 2007 would appear to confirm food sovereignty as a project of critical modernity, with their focus on the social reproductive and ecological stewardship role played by small-scale producers. Significantly, this Declaration also expressly envisaged the implementation of food sovereignty through the democratisation and localisation of food systems, which brings under the umbrella of food sovereignty the growing local food movement in the global North.

The *method* I will use in this thesis is based on Marxist abstraction; that is, beginning with a chaotic totality, one abstracts its constituent elements (structures, agents, practices, and the relationship between them) in order to arrive at a coherent explanation of a concrete and historically specific phenomenon. This process is based on a dynamic treatment of contemporary capitalist social relations, premised on a set of core characteristics of capitalism (wage and property relations, impersonal markets and a high level of market dependence, and so on). From the general, highest level of abstraction, one moves progressively to the more specific.

In terms of the subject matter of this thesis, the elaboration of a coherent relationship between social structures, agency, consciousness and practice is based on a systematic abstraction of:

- The key social structures that constitute the globalizing capitalist food system, including the social relations of production within that system and the nature of political relations that characterize the contemporary global governance framework around food and agriculture,
- The leading (in the sense of being the most powerful in political and economic terms) actors within the globalizing capitalist food system, and the principal institutions that constitute the contemporary global governance framework around food and agriculture,
- The practices that constitute the globalizing capitalist food system, and how these shape and form a pervasive commonsense as regards the need for the further consolidation and expansion of that system,
- The nature of the actors that collectively constitute the global movement for food sovereignty,
- The practices of the Food Sovereignty movement actors, and how these practices work to develop a critical awareness and consciousness among their supporters regarding the emergence of a new ‘good sense’ around food and agriculture

Through these steps we thus move from the very general - the totality of human relations to the environment - to the more specific.

Central to the method, and at the highest level of abstraction, is the elaboration of what I term a ‘proper’ - in the sense of being systematic and coherent - relation

---

between ‘ecology’ and ‘economy’. Etymologically, these two terms have the same root in Greek, i.e. oikos, literally meaning ‘house’, ‘household’, or ‘family’. Drawing literally on this Greek root, ‘ecology’ as oikos logos is concerned with the study of the ‘law or the working of nature’s household’, while ‘economy’ as oikos nomos refers to household management, with perhaps the qualifying adjective ‘careful’ being implicit in that conception.

In its modern usage, ‘ecology’ has stayed reasonably close to the Greek conception, albeit with the ‘household’ extended to embrace local, regional and global ecosystems. Thus, ecology is the scientific study of the relations of organisms to one another and their environment, as one branch of biology. The term ‘economy’, by contrast, has diverged substantially from its Greek origins, and is now most commonly understood as the total wealth of a given society or nation, typically measured in terms of the gross throughput of goods and services as denoted by Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In a capitalist economy, a central policy goal is to ensure that this GDP figure increases by a minimum percentage each year, i.e. that the economy continually, and exponentially, ‘grows’. As will be discussed in the course of the thesis, it is this imperative towards growth and expansion that is generative of some of the most significant tensions in the globalising capitalist food system, and thus of some of the most fruitful opportunities for the articulation and practice of alternatives to it by the Food Sovereignty movement.

---

45 Oxford Modern English Dictionary, 333.
47 The meaning of ecology can be altered somewhat by the placing of qualifiers such as ‘human’: OMED…
48 O’Hara op cit., 181-3. Adopting a critical standpoint such as ‘ecofeminist political economy’, GDP is a value-laden metric that delimits ‘the economy as a boundaried system that excludes or marginalises many aspects of human existence and of nonhuman nature’: Salleh op cit. ‘What ecofeminist political economy explores is the gendering of economic systems. It sees a material link between the externalisation and exploitation of women and the externalisation and exploitation of nature’: Mellor, M., 2009, Ecofeminist political economy and the politics of money in Salleh op cit., 251-267, 251.
49 Continual growth of an economy is by definition exponential, since an economy that grows every year will, within a certain number of years and depending on the rate of growth, double; and then that doubled economy will at a further point in time double, and so forth, ad infinitum. Thus, US GDP per capita, which was $8,832 (in 2005 dollars) in 1940, had more than doubled to $20,823 by 1970; that figure had more than doubled again to $42,000 by 2009. Perry, M.J., 2009, ‘Recent Contraction has Barely Affected Decades of Sustained Economic Growth’, http://seekingalpha.com/article/160310-recent-contraction-has-barely-affected-decades-of-sustained-economic-growth, accessed 22.8.11.
50 The GDP measure has been subjected to various political economic, ecological, sociological and feminist critiques. In 2006, for example, the British-based New Economics Foundation published a study entitled Growth Isn’t Working (http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/growth-isnt-working, accessed 30.8.11), which argued that economic growth achieved in the neoliberal era was failing to benefit the world’s poor. Four years later the same Foundation published Growth Isn’t Possible (http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/growth-isn’t-possible, accessed 30.8.11), which drew on the work of ecological economists such as Herman Daly to argue that infinite economic growth was simply incompatible with the Earth’s biophysical capacity. See also Heinberg, R., 2011, The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, Canada. More than twenty years earlier New Zealand feminist scholar Marilyn Waring published If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics (1988, Harper & Row, subsequently re-published as Counting for Nothing: What Men Value, and What Women are Worth), which drew together numerous feminist critiques of the glaring
My neo-Gramscian political ecology begins then by proposing a conceptual (re-) linkage of ‘economy’ to its Greek roots, facilitated via the unifying function served by the term oikos. Thus ‘economy’, in this critical conception, is not the conventional measure of societal progress by reference to GDP increases. Rather, it describes the sum total of human activities connected with the healthy functioning, of the total human household, that is, the planet Earth; which is necessary for humanity to ‘live well’.  

The phrase ‘live well’ is deliberately chosen. It is the English translation of the Spanish phrase buen vivir, the term deployed in the Declaration issued following the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of the Mother Earth held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010, and since embraced by Via Campesina activists. In the Cochabamba Declaration, buen vivir is juxtaposed to the ‘logic of commodification, competition, progress and limitless growth’, as well as to the hierarchies of domination, that globalising capitalism is said to embody. In place of this logic and these hierarchies, buen vivir is said to be founded on relationships of harmony, balance, solidarity and equality. It calls for the elaboration of new socio-economic and political systems aimed at overcoming simultaneously the alienation between humanity and nature, as evidenced by numerous measures of environmental degradation, and between people themselves, as manifested in growing levels of inequality.  

As with food sovereignty, it is a contemporary expression of the emerging ontology of connectedness.

omissions and perversities of conventional GDP measurements. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, op cit.), on the basis of their survey of the quantitative literature, advance the thesis that, beyond a certain point, further economic growth actually diminishes, rather than enhances, the quality of life, stating that:

[W]e have got close to the end of what economic growth can do for us...Economic growth, for so long the great engine of progress, has, in the rich countries, largely finished its work. Not only have measures of wellbeing and happiness ceased to rise with economic growth but, as affluent societies have grown richer, there have been long runs in rates of anxiety, depression and numerous other social problems: 5-6.


51 This reconceptualisation of the economy draws substantially on the work of feminist ecological economists over the past decade or so; as Sabine O’Hara states: ‘Feminist ecological economists move ecological and social indicators that better reflect sustaining functions and processes to the fore...This means that complexity rather than reducibility, variability rather than specialisation, diversity rather than homogeneity, provisioning rather than non-satisfaction, and the ability to co-operate rather than compete, all become indispensable dimensions of a resilient and sustainable economy’: op cit., 190.


53 Cochabamba Declaration, op cit. Wilkinson and Pickett make the point that recent efforts to measure societal well-being other than by reference to GDP, such as Friends of the Earth’s Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (http://www.foe.co.uk/community/tools/isew/, accessed 30.8.11; the ISEW was first developed by Herman Daly and John Cobb Jr in their 1989 book, For the Common Good, Beacon Press, Boston), the Gross National Happiness Index of the Kingdom of Bhutan (http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/, accessed 30.8.11) or the Genuine Progress Indicator (see Lawn, P.A., 2003, ‘A Theoretical Foundation to Support the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, Genuine Progress Indicator and other related Indexes’, Ecological Economics, 44, 105-118), all pointed to the same
According to this critical conception and ontology, the ‘economy’ has a functional purpose only, that is, to provide mechanisms for human societies to organise and coordinate their activities so as to satisfy their material needs, and to do so in ways that do not jeopardise the well-being of other living creatures, eco-systems and natural environments, or of future human generations to secure their own well-being.\(^5\) Securing the ‘growth’ of the economy at all costs cannot be an unquestioned end in itself; and, further, the operation of the economy cannot be structured in such a way as to render it largely impervious to detrimental human and environmental impacts consequent upon ‘economic’ decisions.\(^5\)

This relational understanding of ecology and economy contrasts with the conventional and hierarchical approach in which the economy is regarded both as an autonomous sphere of human activity that operates more or less independently of apparent ecological constraints, and as the over-riding priority of human societies.\(^5\) The conventional approach, founded on the ontology of alienation, is also mechanistic and reductionist.\(^5\)

**Key theoretical foundations of the method**

In the remainder of this chapter, I will set out in more depth the principal neo-Marxist perspectives that inform and guide the development of this method: political ecology and food regime theory. Then I recapitulate how these theories are synthesised into a neo-Gramscian political ecology. Finally I will set out how I intend to apply the method in the remainder of the thesis.

**Political ecology**

Conventional accounts of Marxist theory have not traditionally been noted for their pattern: increases in material living standards (as measured by GDP) in poorer countries ‘results in substantial improvements both in objective measures of wellbeing like life expectancy and in subjective ones like happiness. But [as] you get more and more of anything, each addition to what you already have – whether loaves of bread or cars – contributes less and less to your wellbeing’: 2009 *op cit.*, 7-8, 10.


\(^5\) In classical and neo-classical economics, adverse environmental and human impacts are typically not factored into the ‘costs of doing business’ and thus are left out of the prices of products and services. In other words, they are ‘externalised’, or alternatively, ‘socialised’.

\(^5\) Here I am referring directly both to the systemic practice of cost externalisation, and to the growth imperative, mentioned above. As noted earlier, in mainstream discourse, the economy is reified as something ‘out there’, with recessions likened to natural events such as earthquakes: Sayer 1992 *op cit.*, 42. [http://www.agmates.com/herald/gfc-tsunami-headed-for-australia-are-you-prepared-video/](http://www.agmates.com/herald/gfc-tsunami-headed-for-australia-are-you-prepared-video/), accessed 30.8.11.

\(^5\) Thus, according to the logic of commodification, people and the environment are regarded as ‘inputs’ (i.e. in the form of labour and natural resources) into the ‘economic machine’, in order that it can then generate wealth and (so it is assumed) contribute to societal well-being. The metaphor of the ‘machine’ to describe and explain the operation of individual enterprises, and of the economy as a whole, has its origins in the ‘broader mechanistic paradigm that was formulated by Descartes and Newton in the seventeenth century and has dominated our culture for several hundred years, during which it has shaped our modern Western society and has significantly influenced the rest of the world’: Capra, F., 2003, *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living*, Flamingo, London, 89-90. Capra notes the developing contrast in systems and organizational theory between this machine metaphor – especially popular in the early twentieth century as Taylorism and Fordism, but still culturally predominant - and the metaphor of the organization (and, by extension, the economy), as a living organism: *ibid*. 
ecological content. In our era, diverse environmental challenges of varying complexity and gravity are forcing themselves increasingly into public and political consciousness. The idea that there might be objective, physical constraints, both on the capacity of human economies to grow infinitely and exponentially, and on the capacity of human societies to achieve this goal through technological innovation and adaptation, has for many years been debated on the fringes of mainstream discourse. For the first time since the 1970s, it is also, in the early years of the second decade of the 21st century, beginning to be raised within official circles. A theoretical tradition with the explanatory pretensions and emancipatory goals of Marxism must take these developments, and their implications, seriously.

The transdisciplinary field of political ecology emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the perceived inadequacies of the then-prevailing conceptual and methodological resources to explain intensifying levels of environmental degradation. Hence political ecology sought to integrate political economic understandings of power configurations with the emerging science of ecology. A critical political ecology is grounded firmly in the Marxist theory of alienation; and takes as its starting point an examination of the dynamics and historical transformations of capitalism proceeding from Marxist political economy.

This thesis follows the conceptualisation of a critical, global political ecology offered by Richard Peet, Paul Robbins and Michael Watts. The adjective ‘global’ draws attention to, first, the ‘planetary character of the ecological crisis’; secondly, the emergence of a ‘liberal international green regime’ of global environmental governance, and a ‘profusion of forms of situated knowledges’ that constitute ‘counter-discourses’; thirdly, the location of global ecological crises such as climate change in ‘the material world of basic provisioning systems, and in the energetic foundations of modernity itself’, what the authors call ‘the political economy of carbon-capitalism’; and finally, the ‘knowledge-power formations’ that constitute the foundations a global form of ‘environmental rule [or] environmentality’.

---

58 E.g. Millennium Ecosystems Assessment, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, etc etc.
62 Peet et al 2011 op cit., 24. At the time, existing explanations for environmental problems centred on ‘population growth, inappropriate technology, or poor management’: *ibid.*
64 *Ibid.*
These four dimensions of global political ecology ground the manner in which I develop the context for this thesis in Chapters 4 and 6. Similarly the conclusions of Peet and his colleagues regarding the incompatibility between capitalism and lasting sustainability, and hence the need for urgent transformative change, inform both my development of the context and the analysis of the responses of the Food Sovereignty movement in Chapters 5 and 7.

Feminist perspectives complement this global and critical approach by enriching the conceptual vocabulary and analytical tools of political ecology. Adopting what she terms an ‘embodied materialist’ epistemology, Ariel Salleh proposes a model of a gendered political ecology which ‘integrates three kinds of subsumption’, namely the ‘social debt owed by capitalist employers for surplus value extracted from [wage and slave] labourers’; the ‘ecological debt owed by the global North to the South for direct extraction of the natural means of production or livelihood of non-industrial peoples’; and the ‘embodied debt owed North and South to unpaid reproductive workers who provide use values and regenerate the conditions of production, including the future labour force of capitalism’. In response to the epistemic and daily violence of the ‘capitalist patriarchal system’, Salleh looks to diverse practices of ‘eco-sufficiency’, which ‘imply local autonomy and resource sovereignty’, as ‘prefigurative’ of ‘economic [and social] relations beyond alienation’. Food sovereignty, with its call for the prioritisation of locally and democratically controlled production for local consumption, is a leading example of such ‘eco-sufficiency’; and at the same time its ontology of connectedness grounds both an ‘intervention and [a] framework’ that points in the direction of the transformational change which Peet and his colleagues state is so urgently required.

For the reasons outlined throughout the thesis, the operation of contemporary forms of industrialised agriculture and food production has had, and continues to have, an especially direct and profound impact on the environment and ecosystems. For the purposes of the thesis, my neo-Gramscian political ecology begins with Marx’s own thesis that a ‘rational agriculture is inconsistent with the capitalist system’. Neo-Gramscian political ecology can be broken down into the assertions set out below. I preface what follows with the statement that while it is not part of my thesis to defend the alleged incompatibility of capitalism with a ‘rational agriculture’, the reasoning nonetheless grounds the development of the argument I pursue in this thesis.

---

67 Ibid., 4-5.
68 Ibid., 8, 13, 17-19, 291-308.
70 This section is based on the work of Foster, Clark and York *op cit.*, and Foster, J.B., 2000, *Marx’s Ecology*, Monthly Review Press, New York. For the relatively limited purposes of the thesis, I have restricted myself to the specific elements of the neo-Marxist ecology which concerns the elaboration of the distinction between ‘capitalist agriculture’ and ‘rational agriculture’. It should be noted, however, that Foster, Clark & York’s work on Marxist ecology is much broader and ambitious in scope: Foster 2000 *op cit.*, 21-65, 205; Foster et al 2010 *op cit.*, 215-247.
1. **There is a social metabolic relation between humanity and nature**

John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York narrate how German chemist and soil scientist, Justus von Liebig, was amongst the first to explain ‘how the soil required specific nutrients - nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium - to maintain its ability to produce crops’, and that the recycling of crop wastes and animal and human manures back to the soil in pre-capitalist societies had enabled the soil to remain fertile. Just as there is a complex and continual series of exchanges of nutrients and wastes at the cellular level within an individual organism in order to maintain that organism’s healthy functioning, so, according to von Liebge (and later Marx, who followed his reasoning), there is a form of social metabolism between humanity and nature. According to this social metabolic relation, the fertility of the soil sustains both individual people and human society as a whole, while depending on careful human management of agriculture and food production to ensure that fertility levels are maintained over time. From this conceptualization, it is a relatively short step to a perspective in which farmers are regarded as occupying a relationship of care and stewardship towards the land they work and own.

2. **Capitalist agriculture is expressive of a widening metabolic or ecological rift**

Capitalist agriculture, so it is claimed, is premised on the one-way transfer of nutrients from the country to cities, with the consequent fouling of air and waterways. It is therefore said to provoke a ‘metabolic’, or ‘ecological’, rift between humanity and nature.

---

71 Metabolism, which derives from the Greek *metabole*, literally meaning ‘change’, is a biological term that describes ‘all the chemical processes that occur within a living organism, resulting in energy production and growth’: Oxford Modern English Dictionary, 669. Thus Fritjof Capra describes how, at the cellular level, there is a ‘complex network of metabolic processes [that are] ceaselessly at work, transporting nutrients in and waste out of the cell, and continually using food molecules to build proteins and other cell components’: Capra, F., 2003, The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living, Flamingo, London, 4.

72 Foster et al *op cit.*, 76-77. István Mészáros has further extended the metaphor of social metabolism into the foundational concept of a ‘social metabolic order’, which he deploys as the basis for a thorough-going critique of the socially and environmentally destructive (and self-destructive) impacts of the capitalist system (Beyond Capital, The Challenges and Burdens of Historical Time, *op cit.*). For Mészáros, the social metabolic order consists of a series of six ‘first-order mediations’ between humanity and nature, which are reproduced in Appendix C (The Challenges and Burdens of Historical Time *op cit.*, 44).

73 This relationship of stewardship is captured in the earlier traditions of (animal) husbandry, discussed by American agrarian writer and thinker Wendell Berry, amongst others (see for example Berry, W., 1990, *What Are People For? Essays by Wendell Berry*, North Point Press, New York, and Berry, W., 2005, *The Way of Ignorance and Other Essays by Wendell Berry*, Shoemaker & Hoard, Berkeley, CA). It was also explicitly mentioned in the final report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD, *Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report*, Johannesburg, April 2008), i.e. that in working towards a shift to sustainable agricultural systems, ‘farming communities, farm households and famers [should be recognised] as producers and managers of ecosystems [and that] local and traditional knowledge [should be valorized] accordingly as ‘dynamic’ and ‘positive’.

74 The contemporary reality of factory farmed pigs provides graphic confirmation of the arguments of Marx and Engels: ‘A typical CAFO of 100,000 animals can generate more waste than a city of 1 million people…Manure thus becomes a form of waste rather than a potential resource, and waste from pig facilities is particularly onerous. It may contain not only the usual excess nutrients but [also] pathogens, trace elements, antibiotics and hormones. A study of wetlands nearby waste lagoons in Nebraska found abundant cyanobacteria and incyrocystin toxins. Tetracycline, macrolide, and diterpene antibiotics were detected in lagoon and canal sediment and water samples, as were concentrations of 17-B estradiol and testosterone…’: Emel and Neo 2011 *op cit.*, 74.

75 Foster *et al* 2010 *op cit.*, 76-7.
The transgression and near-transgression of several key planetary boundaries (see below) has been directly attributed to the land use changes and ecosystem impacts consequent on the expansion of large-scale industrialised agriculture in the second half of the 20th century. Here it should be mentioned that capitalism is by no means uniquely responsible for provoking a ‘metabolic rift’: many other societies and civilisations, from antiquity onwards, have in various ways and to varying degrees over-exploited the resource bases which sustained them for centuries. What distinguishes the ecologically destructive tendencies of actually existing globalising capitalism from historically previous systems and civilisations are, first, the accelerating pace of destruction due to capitalism’s productive capacities; and secondly, the planetary (i.e. global) scale of the destruction as capitalism has expanded its reach to encompass most of the Earth.

3. The metabolic rift, as ‘cheap food’, is constitutive of capitalist development

Agricultural revolutions, Jason Moore, argues, have played a crucial role in the historical development of capitalism, by creating the conditions for, and stimulating, successive major new phases of capital accumulation. They have played this role by bringing about, through a combination of outright ‘plunder’ and technologically-driven productivity gains, an ‘ecological surplus’, with ‘cheap food’ at its centre, that has managed to restrain the cost of labour relative to other factors of production, and so enable sustained profitability.

---

76 The authors of the Planetary Boundaries study (see below) attribute this causal relationship, as does the United Nations Millennium Ecosystems Assessment Reports, whose primary finding was that “Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber, and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth”: MEA 2005, Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Synthesis, http://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.356.aspx.pdf, accessed 31.10.08.


78 In a recent article John Bellamy Foster describes the accelerated pace of contemporary ecological destruction as the ‘accumulation of catastrophe’, drawing on historian William McNeill’s conception of the ‘conservation of catastrophe’, as the cumulative conservation of the ‘potential for catastrophe’ as human societies develop and modify nature to suit their purposes: Foster, J.B., 2011, ‘Capitalism and the Accumulation of Catastrophe’, Monthly Review, 63(7). See also Philip McMichael (2000, The Power of Food, Agriculture and Human Values, 17(1), 21-33), who argues that ‘[i]n a world in which fifteen percent of the global population produces and consumes eighty percent of the world’s income, accelerating development is arguably a recipe for social and ecological disaster’: 28.


80 ‘Affordable food is part of what scholars call the social wage – the overall package of basic goods and services supplied through either direct wages or public goods and entitlements that allow for the reproduction of the labor force’: Gutham op cit., 54. As Jason Moore puts it, the ‘ecological surplus [has been] central to accumulation over the longue durée [because it drove down the] system-wide organic composition of capital, thereby providing a crucial condition for the revival of profitability’: op cit. 392-3. The ‘organic composition of capital’ is an analytical term developed by Marx to refer to the ratio of the value of constant capital (materials and fixed costs) to the value of variable capital (labour power) embodied in the production of a commodity: Capital, Vol.III, Ch 8.
Thus the first phase of the Industrial Revolution was built on the ‘English agricultural revolution of the long seventeenth century’, the foundations of which lay not only in transformations in agricultural practices and rising labour productivity, but crucially in the expansion of geographical frontiers, in England and its colonies. Yields began to stagnate from 1760 onwards, and food prices rose sharply; the ‘ecological surplus’ was not significantly produced again until the Peruvian guano and the global wheat trades commenced from the late 1840s. This ‘second’ English agricultural revolution constituted what Friedmann and McMichael term the ‘colonial-diasporic’, ‘first’ global food regime; and again it was premised on geographical expansion and expropriation, this time in the form of commercial family farms extending deep into the indigenous territories of North America, Argentina and Australia. As the ecological surplus achieved during the second English agricultural revolution began to stagnate, a key technological innovation, in the form of the Haber-Bosch process for fixing nitrogen, allowed the production of synthetic fertilisers on an industrial scale after World War 1. It was this discovery, together with the large-scale mechanisation of agriculture, and the later development of high-yielding hybrid seeds during the ‘Green Revolution’, which constituted the first American agricultural revolution; and signalled the commencement of the second, ‘mercantile-industrial’, global food regime.

Moore argues that these successive English and American agricultural revolutions each constituted a ‘great leap forward in the provision of cheap food’, generating a substantial ecological surplus and laying the foundations for a ‘revolutionary expansion (and subsequent, low-cost reproduction) of the world proletariat that accompanies a

---

81 Ibid., 403. This revolution ‘could only proceed on the basis of a double movement of geographical expansion: an ‘inner’ conversion of nitrogen-rich pasture into arable land (therefore opening an expansive nitrogen frontier) within England [and] an outer conversion of the English Caribbean into plantation monocultures, in sugar above all’: ibid., citing Overton 1996 and Dunn 1972.
82 Moore op cit., 394. It is no coincidence perhaps that this period saw the development and rise in popularity of the theories of Thomas Malthus regarding the allegedly insolvable problem of over-population, brought about the incapacity of food production, which expanded ‘arithmetically’, to keep pace with the rise in population, which expanded ‘geometrically’: see Foster et al op cit., 378-80, 384-391.
84 Friedmann (1987), Friedmann and McMichael (1989). Friedmann (2005 op cit., 126) notes how these regions were simultaneously re-defined as the world’s ‘bread-baskets’, and how today Argentina, Australia and Canada are leading actors in the ‘Cairns Group’ of countries at the WTO which now ‘promote[s] the complete liberalization of trade in food’. The geographical expansion and expropriation that characterised the first global food regime produced several results: a ‘sharp’ decline in world cereal prices and hence in the price of food for the ‘proletarian heartlands’; a stimulation in demand for the ‘most dynamic capitalist sectors of the era’, namely railroads and shipping, as well as the growth of new industries to service agricultural production; genocide of indigenous populations, as they were violently dispossessed in the name of capitalist development; and a collapse in small-holder agriculture in Europe, brought about by the imports of cheap grain and meat from the settler countries: Moore 2010 op cit., 399; Friedmann 2006 op cit., 235; Friedmann and McMichael 1989 op cit., 101; Harvey 2003 op cit., 43-45.
85 Friedmann and McMichael (op cit.) periodise this regime from 1945-1973; however its legacies, above all in the form of cheap, mass produced food, continue to this day. As previously, this food regime has opened up several new arenas of capital accumulation: seeds, agri-chemicals, food processing and manufacturing, fast-foods, factory farming, large-scale retail. As Julie Guthman narrates, the introduction of hybrid seeds was accompanied by a wholesale transition to agricultural intensification, and ‘thus hastened appropriationism, referring to processes where industry seizes processes once part of farm production and sells them back as inputs’: 2011 op cit., 58.
new long wave [of capital accumulation]. Each followed a previous period of stagnation which, Moore suggests, can in retrospect be viewed as a developmental crisis that was capable of ‘resolution through new forms of productivity and plunder’; and whose resolution paved the way for new ‘long waves’ of capital accumulation.

4. **The metabolic rift has now widened to such an extent that key planetary boundaries are being transgressed**

The opening of the metabolic rift by capitalist agriculture, at the time that von Liebig and Marx were researching and writing about it in the 1850s and 1860s, was already contributing to air and water pollution, as well as to soil degradation. As Foster, Clark and York explain, the impacts of declining soil fertility were offset by the importation of large amounts of guano (bird droppings) from the coastal islands of Peru. Thus was set in motion what they call an ongoing process of ‘rifts and shifts’, ‘whereby metabolic rifts are continually created and addressed - typically only after reaching crisis proportions - by shifting the type of rift generated.’ Hence, as guano supplies were depleted in the second half of the 19th century, capitalist agriculture was once again able to displace the problem of soil fertility via the discovery of the process (Haber-Bosch) for producing artificial nitrogen fertilizer. While artificial fertilisers (and other agri-chemicals such as herbicides and pesticides) have managed to sustain crop yields for several decades, their near-universal application by industrialised, and industrializing, farmers has come at a heavy environmental and social cost; that is, new and more serious forms of the ecological rift have been opened, such as processes of eutrophication that have lead to the emergence of oceanic dead zones.

At the current time contemporary research is suggesting that this rift has widened into the transgression and near transgression of a series of key ‘planetary boundaries’, which are proposed as bio-physical constraints to the further expansion, both of capitalist agriculture in particular and of capitalist economies - and, for that matter,

---

86 Moore 2010 *op cit.*, 398. It is hardly a matter of coincidence that the yield increases achieved by the Green Revolution have coincided with a doubling of the world’s population in the forty years from 1970, and a consequent doubling of the global proletariat, to an estimated 3 billion people by the turn of the 20th century: *see* Coates, D., 2000, *Models of Capitalism, Growth and Stagnation in the Modern Era*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 256.

87 Moore *op cit.*, 395.

88 2010 *op cit.* 352-372.


90 *Ibid.*, 79. This dynamic might also be grasped using the metaphor of capitalism deploying ‘technological fixes’ to displace, or at least postpone the worst consequences of, the ecological degradation caused by its processes of production. There is an analogy here between the technological fix and the ‘temporal-spatial fixes’. The latter is the phrase used by David Harvey to explain how world capitalism, and American imperialism, has historically managed to displace elsewhere, or delay in time, the worst impacts of systemic crises (Harvey, D.,2003, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. From the political economic perspective, arguably both strategies are currently in operation (as at May 2012), as the continued resort by the US Federal Reserve to a policy of ‘quantitative easing’ since 2008 has devalued the US dollar relative to other currencies, to the advantage of American exporters, while at the same time it artificially inflates asset values and postpones the day of reckoning as regards the burgeoning US debt: *see* Hudson, M., 2010, ‘US ‘Quantitative Easing’ is Fracturing the Global Economy’, Bard College Levy Economics Institute Working Paper No.639, available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1713852 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1713852, accessed 3.5.12.

91 Foster 2011 *op cit.*
of all types of economy that seek the goal of infinite exponential growth - in general.\textsuperscript{92}

As I discuss in Chapter 6, Tony Weis describes these as the ‘bio-physical contradictions’ impeding further capitalist development.\textsuperscript{93}

5. \textit{The ecological rift widens in parallel with the social rift}

The ecological rift widens in parallel with the social rift (that is, the intensification of inequalities \textit{between} countries, and the intensification of inequalities \textit{within} countries via class stratification), and indeed is a product of it.\textsuperscript{94} The transgression of planetary boundaries is attributed to the exponential growth of the globalising capitalist economy; and that growth in turn depends to a large extent on increasing consumption in the Global North, much of it supported through excessive levels of individual debt.

6. \textit{Capitalism acknowledges no absolute limits to its own growth and expansion}

Capitalism’s core features include the centrality of the private ownership and control of the means of production, as well as the elevation of individual private gain as a primary systemic goal. These features foster a dynamic of competition as well as an underlying imperative towards further accumulation and expansion. Cumulatively, this means that capitalism acknowledges no absolute limits – no ‘boundaries’, planetary or otherwise – to its own growth and expansion, but only ‘barriers’ which it endeavours to overcome through technological means, productivity gains, or ‘plunder’ via geographical expansion and diverse forms of dispossession.\textsuperscript{95} An important contemporary expression of the latter is the so-called ‘global land grab’, which I discuss in Chapter 6.

This inability to acknowledge any limits is also observable in two key ecological and social paradoxes that characterize the capitalist system. The first is the Lauderdale paradox, which states that as private riches (exchange value) increase, public wealth (use value) decreases.\textsuperscript{96} The difference between the two in classical political economy

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{94} Foster et al 2010 \textit{op. cit.}, 47, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Foster et al 2010 \textit{op. cit.}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{96} The Lauderdale Paradox is named after James Maitland, the eighth Earl of Lauderdale, and his \textit{Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth and into the Means and Causes of Its Increase}, published in
\end{itemize}
is that monetary value is attached to the former because it exists in a condition (either actual or constructed) of scarcity, whereas the latter exists in a condition of (relative) abundance and is not susceptible to monetary exchange. More generally, a critical and democratic reconstruction of the ‘configurations of scarcity’ that constitute contemporary globalising capitalism will likely be essential to any emancipatory project of social transformation.

The Jevons paradox, also known as the ‘rebound energy’ effect, is named after William Stanley Jevons, and states that as efficiencies in production methods increase, the total throughput of non-renewable and renewable resources (and therefore waste and pollution) also tends to increase, not decrease.

**Regime theory & global food regime theory**

Adapting the concept of the regime as developed in international relations theory, John Rapley defines a ‘regime’ as:

> [T]he norms of reciprocity that govern relations between governors and governed, and between dominant and subordinate classes, [so that] a stable regime corresponds to an implied contract that binds elites and masses in bonds of mutual obligation.

The stability of any regime depends, says Rapley, upon a ‘mass perception of distributive justice’. This entails both the distribution of material resources as well as ‘cultural [and / or] spiritual component[s]’ that underpin the norms on which the masses consent to the prevailing mechanisms and substantive content of material distribution. Further, a ‘functional regime must contain two components: a distributive regime and an accumulation regime, [since in order] to [be able to] distribute resources, regimes must also generate them’. Using this framework, Rapley suggests that the neoliberal version of globalization has since the mid-1970s functioned as an ‘eminently successful accumulation regime’, but has provoked a

---


98 Foster et al 2010 *op cit.*, 139-143. For the 30 countries that constitute the OECD, the total volume of municipal solid waste ‘increased almost 23 percent between 1990 and 2006 from 530 to 650 million tons’, confirming the positive correlation between economic growth in capitalist economies and increasing volumes of waste: Moore 2011 *op cit.*, 136.

100 *2004 op cit.*, 7.

101 *Ibid*. There is a clear linkage here to the Gramscian theory of politics, which I deal with in the following section. As Rapley puts it, ‘regime stability tends to correspond to cultural stability, and regime crisis tends to correspond to cultural ferment and what Gramsci called hegemonic dissolution’.

---
series of distributive crises. Further, he argues, since this is a global regime, the crises are not merely isolated occurrences in countries in the periphery of the global system, but rather form part of a ‘global chain’ of reactions that is beginning to rebound back to the core capitalist countries of the United States and Europe.

The development of global food regime theory represented the adaptation of the general elements of regime theory to describe particular epochs in the development of a global or world agriculture and food system, as foreshadowed above. The originators of this approach, Philip McMichael and Harriet Friedmann, denote three such regimes to date: the ‘colonial-settler regime’ (1870-1914), the ‘mercantile-industrial regime’ (1945-1971), and the ‘corporate food regime’ (1975-present). These correspond to equivalent periods in the development of global capitalism: the era of liberal free trade and European imperialism that ended with World War I; the post-World War II era of Keynesian-led expansion and unchallenged US hegemony in international relations; and the contemporary period of neoliberal-led globalization. As noted above, there is also a broad temporal and geographic correspondence between these regimes and the agricultural revolutions periodised by Jason Moore.

Friedmann defines an ‘international food regime’ as a ‘sustained but nonetheless temporary constellation of interests and relationships’ that forms part of a ‘larger period[d] of stability in relations of power and property’. What is emphasized here is a ‘political-epochal’ rather than an ‘economic-cyclical’ logic in the construction and maintenance of what come to be hegemonic regimes structuring agricultural production, and food processing and distribution, on the world scale. Alluding to Albritton’s emphasis on the trend towards the extensification of capitalist social relations, McMichael depicts ‘world agriculture’ as:

[Refer[ring], not to the entirety of agriculture across the earth, but to a transnational space integrated by corporate circuits...a world agriculture resembles Hardt and Negri’s emergent concept of ‘Empire’, characterized by the elimination of boundaries – either spatial or temporal (implicit in the process of abstraction) and, most significantly, a “paradigmatic form of biopower” (2000:xv) where capital violently reconstitutes humans through reconstituting the natural order, in the name of food security and peace.’

---

103 Ibid., 8. The neoliberal regime was preceded by the Keynesian regime, which for twenty-five years (1946-1971) functioned so successfully as both an accumulation and distributive regime that Eric Hobsbawn termed this period the ‘golden age’ of global capitalism: Hobsbawn, E., 1994, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, 257-286. The Golden Age, Hobsbawn records, ‘had [by 1968] largely achieved the most dramatic, rapid and profound revolution in human affairs of which history has record’: 286.

104 Rapley 2004 *op cit.*, 8, 13-14. This argument, constructed in 2003-4, shows a remarkable degree of prescience, anticipating by several years the outbreak of the Global Financial Crisis that began in 2007 and, as of late 2011, is still unfolding.

105 See Friedmann, and McMichael 1989 *op cit.*, and the other references cited in footnote 5 above.


Explicit in such a formulation is the identification of ‘the corporate food regime’ with ongoing processes of violent expansion discursively legitimated by the regime’s appropriation of a neocolonialist discourse of ‘food security’; i.e. only the further expansion and institutionalisation of this regime will enable humanity to feed its growing numbers in the uncertainty-filled decades immediately in front of us. Here we can also see how a widely prevailing sense of ‘crisis’ and generalised anxiety about the future is also given an explicitly ideological twist in order to justify the perpetuation and expansion of a particular mode of organising production, exchange and consumption relations around food and agriculture.

One can distill from the work of Friedmann and McMichael a number of characteristics of a global food regime that allow its emergence, development and de-composition to be analysed over time, as well as the contributions that it plays in relation to processes of nation-state formation, capital accumulation and identity formation. These characteristics include:

(i) **spatial-temporal specificity**: the elements of a food regime are ‘geographically and historically specific’, and must be examined in such specificity; 109

(ii) **imbrications with processes of nation-state formation, industrialisation and identity formation**: both historical (such as the opening up of indigenous-held interiors of the wheat-producing countries110) and contemporary (emerging concepts of ‘agrarian citizenship’ in Brazil, the ‘new agrarianism’ in the US111);

(iii) **historical contingency and immanence**: this can be demonstrated by deploying the counter-factual ‘what if?’ device;112

---


110 Friedmann 2005 *op cit.*, 127, *also* Friedmann and McMichael *op cit.*, 96. Contradictorily, these processes took place simultaneously with the ‘culmination of colonialism’, or perhaps more correctly speaking the high age of imperialism, as Britain resorted to imperial strategies to fend off emerging challenges to its hegemony from the US and Germany, which, together with other European powers and Japan, extended colonial rule over much of Asia and Africa in an effort to secure markets for their expanding industries as well as ‘access to tropical products required by new technologies and new mass diets’: *ibid.*, 97, *citing* Hobson-W-M. 1987, 63-4.


112 For example, a key moment in the formation of the second food regime came in 1947 when the US and the UK vetoed the proposal of Lord Boyd Orr, the first head of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, for the formation a World Food Board. Had this proposal been carried, a transparent regime of liberal international trade would likely have emerged, based on the UK model of ‘deficiency payments’ to farmers, guaranteeing them stable prices; this in turn would have ensured that surpluses did not accumulate, and post-World War II history may have taken an entirely different course. Amongst other matters, the generation of agricultural surpluses, which in turn flows from the subsidy payments made to American and European farmers, is largely what underpins the highly uneven and unequal nature of global agricultural trade today. Friedmann comments that ‘[c]ontests over new directions have so far created new food regimes – something by no means guaranteed to continue into the future’: 2006 *op cit.*, 229.
(iv) emergence following instability & political contestation: food regimes have emerged as a result of political contestation during periods of instability characterized by crisis, demands made by influential political constituencies and social movements, and the intended and unintended effects of the compromises that resolve those demands;
(v) **food regimes as drivers of capital accumulation, and accumulation by dispossession**: global agricultural trade drove the development of railways and shipping industries in the 19th century; the industrialisation of agriculture in the mid-20th century saw the opening of new arenas of capital accumulation in pesticides, chemicals and hybrid seeds, while today the frontiers of accumulation have shifted to biotechnology and nanotechnology. Expansion of agriculture in the 19th century required the dispossession of indigenous populations; expansion of monocultures in the 20th and 21st centuries are one of the drivers of rural de-population and contemporary ‘land-grabs’;
(vi) the capacity of food regimes to adapt to and incorporate critique: leading to the emergence of ‘green capitalism’: '[a]n ecological phase of capitalism [entailing] a shift in the rules of economic activity so that profits are renewed through less depletion of resources...less pollution...and [through] selling products that are culturally defined as environmentally superior'. Fair Trade and organics are obvious examples of this phase of 'ecological capitalism', although any potentially renegade movement, most especially (for the purposes of this thesis) the local food movement, is susceptible to such co-optation;
(vii) **creation of new sets of social relations and contradictions**: especially emigration and slum-led urbanisation; ecological consequences of industrialised monocultures include soil erosion and degradation, which in turn jeopardise production and put pressure on new 'virgin' territories such as tropical rainforests;
(viii) **temporary and crisis-tending nature**: food regimes are epochal and temporary in nature, and enter into a period of crisis (understood as decomposition / disintegration) when the ‘implicit rules’ that underpin the system and make it appear natural during its stable phase ‘no longer have the same consequences’ and ‘become named’. At this point the relationships, practices and institutions that have formed the basis of the

---

113 Friedmann 2006 *op cit.*, 235; Friedmann 2005 *op cit.*, 126. Harvey (2003, 141-2) contrasts expanded reproduction with the violence of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, which is discussed further below. Of course this circuit of expanded reproduction was itself facilitated by earlier and simultaneous processes of accumulation by dispossession in the form of the violence meted out to indigenous populations and the expropriation of their lands, all of which was justified in chauvinistic and racist terms (*ibid.*, 43-4).
116 Friedmann, H., 2006, ‘From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and the Emergence of Food Regimes’, *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, 11, 227-264, 230. Friedman sees this new accumulation regime of green capitalism as being one branch of a global corporate-led reorganization of the world into ‘rich eaters’, catered for by the certified organic, wholefoods and fair trade industries, and ‘poor eaters’, who are left with mass-produced, genetically-modified, cheap commodities that are the modern legacies and outgrowths of the global diets shaped by the earlier food regimes: 252.
117 Friedmann *op cit.*, 232-3.
regime begin to decompose and in the ensuing period of instability and contestation ‘real choices [over future] direction[s]’ are possible.\(^{118}\)

It is apparent from the foregoing that many features of global food regimes theory inform the development of my neo-Gramscian political ecology, and provide it with considerable analytical power as regards both the examination of the tensions of the globalising capitalist food system; and the counter-hegemonic character of the Food Sovereignty movement. Specifically, the emergence of the food sovereignty and ‘anti /alter-globalisation movements’ in the 1990s named and problematised the assumption that ‘there is no alternative’ to corporate-led globalisation as *inter alia* the means to ‘feed the world’. The intensification of social and ecological tensions (inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss and so on) have further undermined the regime’s legitimacy and thrown it deeper into crisis and a state of decomposition. The ‘corporate food regime’ has endeavoured to respond through its self-portrayal as ‘green capitalist’, yet this in turn is increasingly derided by food sovereignty activists as ‘greenwashing’.

Summarising, the main focus of the global food regime approach is to detect the mechanisms by which the regime achieves, for a time, stability as a hegemonic power formation that structures patterns of production and distribution in ‘world agriculture’ \((\text{see above})\). The data and argument developed in this thesis strongly suggest that, consistent with the expectations of global food regime theory, we are entering - or have already entered - a period of instability and contestation. It is important to bear this in mind as we incorporate a Gramscian theory of politics into the neo-Gramscian political ecology in the last part of this section.

**Globalising capitalism**

As Richard Peet and his colleagues note, a global political ecology must be firmly based in a clear understanding of the historical transformations of capitalism; which in turn requires the analytical tools of Marxist political economy.\(^{119}\) Here I offer a brief synopsis of the globalising, expansionary tendencies of capitalism, which, as I discuss in Chapters 4 and 6, are manifesting today in specific ways in the globalising capitalist food system.

From its beginnings, capitalism has been an inherently expansionary system. By the 1880s, the imperatives of capitalist accumulation were encountering the limits of the nation-state system as it then operated, in the form of a lack of profitable outlets within national boundaries for the investment of surplus savings accrued through financial speculation in the previous decade. Thus, as Hannah Arendt recounts, the ‘export of money [was] followed by export of government power’; specifically the ‘expansion of the national instruments of violence’, in order to protect the new waves of foreign investments.\(^{120}\)

\(^{118}\) *Ibid.*, 234.

\(^{119}\) 2011 *op cit.*

\(^{120}\) Arendt *op cit.*, 136-7. As she puts it,
In other words, endless capital accumulation will require lesser or greater degrees of coercion and violence, depending on the historical conjuncture and the prevailing exigencies. Contemporary globalising capitalism is, in the account of Ellen Meiksins Wood, characterised by the predominance of purely economic forms of coercion, achieved through the compulsion of the impersonal market system, over ‘extra-economic’ forms of coercion; that is, political, military and judicial powers.  

Wood argues that ‘capitalism is unique in its capacity to detach economic from extra-economic power’, but that at the same time this economic power ‘cannot exist without the support of extra-economic power’, which continues to be ‘supplied by the [nation-state].’  

It follows from this, in Wood’s view, that theorising globalisation as characterised by either a ‘stateless world’ or one in which states are ‘increasingly irrelevant’, is not only inaccurate, but also politically disempowering. For Wood, the economic power of capital depends on the extra-economic powers exercised by the state, but the relationship between the two powers is fraught with contradictions and tensions, most especially in the era of ‘globalization’. During the twenty-five years of the ‘golden age’ following World War II, the two logics operated in relative symbiosis, under the hegemonic cultural and political leadership of the United States as the ‘super-imperialist state’, as well as the ‘primary engine of capital accumulation’. When this period of stable hegemony broke down for a variety of reasons in the early 1970s, and the leading role of the United States as the centre of world manufacturing was challenged by Germany and Japan, the United States responded by deregulating capital flows and ‘asserting its hegemony through finance’.

The mechanisms and impacts of the financialisation of capitalism in the era of neoliberal globalization will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. For the purposes of my method, what matters here is that the turn to financialisation signalled, first, the end of unchallenged US hegemony in global politics; and secondly, the commencement of

---

[T]he so-called laws of capitalism were actually allowed to create realities…Money could finally beget money because power, with complete disregard for all laws – economic as well as ethical – could appropriate wealth…": ibid.

For Arendt, the expansionist drive was always immanent in capitalist development, based on

[T]he theoretically indisputable proposition that a never-ending accumulation of property must be based on a never-ending accumulation of power…The limitless process of capital accumulation needs the political structure of ‘so unlimited a Power’ that it can protect growing property by constantly growing more powerful: ibid., 143.

Wood, E.M., 2003, Empire of Capital, Verso, London, 4. As Wood points out, this is not to say that extra-economic forms of coercion do not play an important role, as can be seen in recent years through the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ibid., 5.

122 Wood, E.M., 2003, Empire of Capital, Verso, London, 4. As Wood points out, this is not to say that extra-economic forms of coercion do not play an important role, as can be seen in recent years through the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

123 Ibid., 5.

124 Ibid., 24. David Harvey similarly sees the essence of contemporary globalising capitalism as lying within what he terms the dialectical relationship between the ‘territorial and capitalist logics of power’:


125 Ibid., 48, 50-55.

126 Ibid., 62.
an ongoing period of ‘predatory practices’ that collectively Harvey terms ‘accumulation by dispossession’. 127

**A Gramscian theory of politics**

The value of Antonio Gramsci as a political theorist and activist, as Stuart Hall puts it, that he provides us, not with the ‘answers’ or the ‘key’ to the resolution of contemporary problems, but rather ‘with the tools to ask the right kinds of questions about [contemporary] politics’. 128

How then does a Gramscian theory of politics provide the tools with which to assess the relations of forces in the terrain of contemporary global food politics? It is from within Gramsci’s rich concept of hegemony as a long-term political project, together with his insights regarding the conditions for the potential destabilisation of hegemony, that the relevant tools can be discovered. While there are several ‘tools’ within Gramsci’s thought that are relevant to this thesis, I will focus most attention on the concept of the ‘common sense’ that is a key element underpinning any hegemonic formation, and its linkage to the idea of ‘consent’. A Gramscian theory of politics holds that politics - as the sphere of social life concerned with the making of decisions regarding the distribution of authority, power and resources, and associated contestations regarding how and by whom such decisions are made - is a central human activity. 129 It is far broader than purely electoral or party politics. The sphere of politics, as conceived by Gramsci, is autonomous from, though closely linked to, the economy. 130 The contestation for power and authority - either in a given society or globally - manifests dynamically as the ongoing maintenance of hegemonic relations by the leading class or classes over the subordinate class or classes, with both acting within the constraints and imperatives of historical possibility and necessity according to the specific conjuncture. 131

127 Ibid., 71-3, 139-145. As he puts it, the use of debt in the form of structural adjustment programmes, the deliberate orchestration of crises, the expropriation of peasant proprietors via both economic and extra-economic forms of coercion, and the ‘wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms’, feature prominently in these expressions of contemporary globalising capitalism: ibid., 145-148. The deliberate orchestration of crises is the subject of an extensive treatment by author and activist Naomi Klein (2007 op. cit.).

128 In particular, Hall notes how Gramsci insisted on focusing upon

[T]he notion of difference, to the specificity of a historical conjuncture: how different forces come together, conjuncturally, to create the new terrain, on which a different politics must form up.


131 What has come to be known as a strategy of ‘counter-hegemony’ is derived, as Stanley Aronowitz notes, from Lenin’s United Front strategy of the 1920s, in opposition to the ‘council communists’ who insisted on ‘smashing the state’ via worker action from below: Aronowitz, S., 2008, *Gramsci’s Concept of Political Organization* in Francese, J. (ed), 2008, *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory*, Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon., 11.
The maintenance of a hegemonic power formation over a period of time rests on a combination of the consent and / or acquiescence of subordinate classes to the rule of leading classes, as well as access by the latter to the coercive apparatus of the state as necessary to discipline from time to time non-consenting groups and individuals.\(^\text{132}\)

That said, hegemony is characterized by what Gramsci termed ‘intellectual and moral leadership’, not by domination achieved through the exercise of force.\(^\text{133}\) It follows that far from being automatic and permanent, hegemonic relations need constantly to be negotiated and renegotiated in order to be maintained. Periods of hegemony in a particular country, and at the global level, can and do pass from periods of stability into periods of de-stabilisation, even crisis; and it is from within the latter that new hegemonic - or counter-hegemonic - projects can be constructed and advanced.\(^\text{134}\)

A highly significant insight of Gramsci was that hegemony as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ was not merely a political, but also a cultural project. One of the leading theorists of cultural hegemony, Raymond Williams, discusses how Gramsci’s ‘deep’ theory of hegemony overcomes the fundamental inadequacy of an orthodox Marxist ‘base / superstructure’ analysis, whilst nevertheless retaining the element of social ‘intentionality’ that is essential in order to grasp the nature of social relations in a capitalist society:

\[ \text{[H]egemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural, like the weak sense of ideology, but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci put it, even constitutes the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway...That is why hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives.} \]^{135}

\(^{132}\) As Peter Ives explains, for Gramsci coercion and consent are not 'mere antonyms', but rather exist in a dialectical relation; not only is there quite often a 'fine line' separating them, but one conditions the other: 2004, Gramsci’s Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School, University of Toronto Press: Toronto., 11-12, citing Femia, J., 1987, Gramsci's Political Thought, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 35-50.

\(^{133}\) 1971 \textit{op cit.}, 57-8.

\(^{134}\) Thus, it is commonly accepted that the period from the late 1960s through to the late 1970s saw the decomposition of one period of hegemony at the global and national levels, that of Keynesian welfare state capitalism, and the formation of a successor, in the form of neoliberalism: Hall \textit{op cit.}, Harvey, D., 2005, \textit{A Brief History of Neoliberalism}, Oxford University Press, London. Now, in 2012, with the onset of the so-called ‘global financial crisis’ in 2008, some critical commentators believe that we are witnessing the decomposition of the hegemony of neoliberalism: Harvey, D., 2010, \textit{The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism} (2010, Oxford University Press, New York).

\(^{135}\) Williams, R., 1991, \textit{Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory}, in Mukerji, C., and Schudson, M., 1991, \textit{Rethinking popular culture: contemporary practices in cultural studies}, Berkeley: University of California Press, 412-4. Williams explains social intentionality as revelatory of the 'class character' of 'certain kinds of ratifying theory, certain kinds of law, certain kinds of institution...These laws [etc.] which are so often claimed as natural, or has having universal validity or significance, simply have to be seen as expressing and ratifying the domination of a particular class': \textit{ibid}. 

59
This rich depiction of hegemony provides, amongst other insights, an indication as to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of ‘consent’ a primary condition of a hegemonic power formation. At one level, ‘consent’ is understood here not in the liberal sense of a fully conscious and informed affirmation of ‘free will’ by autonomous individual subjects, but rather as a more passive - even unconscious - individual and collective acceptance or acquiescence to the worldview of the leading classes.\(^\text{136}\)

On this level, such acceptance / acquiescence is to an important extent made possible by the general absence in subordinate classes of a coherent and critical worldview of their own (‘good sense’). In place of such a worldview, as Williams suggests, their understandings of the world, and of their own place within it, are shaped primarily by the fragmentary, chaotic and contradictory elements of ‘common sense’ thinking. This ‘common sense’ is perpetuated over time and space via the informal mechanisms of what Gramsci termed ‘folklore’, as well as formal ‘civil society’ institutions such as education, religion and, more so in our time than Gramsci’s, the media and advertising industries.\(^\text{137}\) Amongst other effects, the diffusion of a widely-accepted common sense normalises and naturalises existing distributions of power, authority and resources, and so plays a fundamental role in contributing to the stability of a hegemonic power formation. It performs this role not, as Williams says, in the guise of ‘mere manipulation’, but rather as a more totalising ‘saturation’ of the consciousness.

Taking this notion of the ‘saturation of the consciousness’ a bit further, it might also be argued that ‘consent’ as a condition of hegemony takes a more active form, in the sense that in the industrialised countries at least a significant majority of the population both consciously and unconsciously reproduces the principal forms of the capitalist economy on which the rule of the leading classes depends. Hence, far from seeking any transformational change to this economy, the majority desires its continued ‘normal’ functioning, and acts on a daily basis to bring about this result. Nevertheless, objective social conditions have in the past created the potential for a destabilisation in hegemony, and will likely do so again in the future, including in industrialised nations.\(^\text{138}\) Actual changes in power relations in a progressive direction, however, will not occur without shifts in consciousness and sustained political activity by subordinate classes that enable them to propose, in the universal interest, a credible and coherent alternative political and cultural project.\(^\text{139}\)

\(^{136}\) Ives 2004 op cit., 52.
\(^{137}\) Landy, M., 2008, Gramsci in and on Media, in Francese op cit.

\(^{138}\) A prolonged economic recession, or a depression, in which large numbers of people experience both absolute and relative deprivation, is one instance of such conditions.

\(^{139}\) In this respect it should be borne in mind that many countries in the industrialised world turned to fascism and militarism in the 1930s; and recent years have seen the resurgence of the political far right in...
The supersession and transformation of existing fragmentary common sense by subordinate classes - and most especially their ‘organic intellectuals’ - is one of the most important elements of successful counter-hegemonic politics. For Gramsci, these ‘organic intellectuals’ - organic in the sense of emanating from the particular social group, and in the sense of ‘organising’ that group - would play both a directive and an educative role, in helping to forge a ‘cultural and social’, or ‘moral-intellectual’, bloc. As Gramsci conceived it, the organic intellectuals would carry out the two fundamental tasks of Marxism: ‘combat[ting] modern ideologies in their most refined form’, and educating members of subordinate classes so as to enable them to engage critically with ‘common sense’ conceptions of the world.

This educative process presupposes a direct and constant dialectical and reciprocal relationship of learning, critical analysis and reflection between the intellectuals and the members of the subordinate classes. The relationship must be based on the practical lived experience of the latter; otherwise, it would simply become a purely intellectual and abstract exercise. It is in this sense that the organic intellectuals of the Food Sovereignty movement, especially the peasant-scholars and activists from the South, derive much strength from the grounded authenticity of their ‘intellectual’ work of writing and speaking. Leaders like Henry Saragih, for example, the current global coordinator of La Via Campesina, have been able to move creatively and simultaneously between (in Saragih’s case) the ‘traditional’ life a peasant farmer in northern Sumatra; and the modern, or post-modern, life of an alter-globalisation movement activist, regularly travelling between Jakarta, New York, Geneva, Rome and other centres of global governance; and speaking with conviction and authority about the hardships experienced by the peasantry worldwide.

The work of critique of common sense is not an end in itself, but is intended to lead towards the successful articulation of a unifying and coherent worldview, which can attract increasing numbers of individuals and groups. This coherent worldview - a new ‘good sense’ - creates the basis on which can emerge an alliance of groups that transcends the purely ‘corporate’ interests, such as those based solely in identities such as class, or gender, or race, of any single group. As Benedetto Fontana puts it, the
'stages of political action parallel [the] stages of political consciousness, and both reflect the movement from narrow self-interest to the common interest'.

The development of this thesis has in large part been based around the direct engagement with a number of the leading organic intellectuals of the Food Sovereignty movement. This engagement has taken the form of in-depth discussions of the secondary literature generated by a number of activist-scholars prominent in the field; and primary research in the form of in-depth interviews with international leaders of La Via Campesina and affiliated peasant and farmer organisations in Canada, Ecuador, Indonesia and Australia. The numbers of interviews are small, but in-depth. They take the form of ‘key informant’ interviews rather than a larger sample of interviewees as a broadly representative cross-section of the Food Sovereignty movement.

These interviews have been complemented by an extended process of participant-observation. As regards La Via Campesina, this involved attendance and participation at the 2nd regional East and South-East Asian Youth Conference, held in Timor Leste in March 2009; as well as interviews with several youth leaders of peasant organisations from the Philippines, Korea, Japan and Thailand attending that Conference. As regards the local food movement in Australia, my research is based on years of participant-observation in both the Coffs Coast region of New South Wales as well as being a Director of the Food Connect Foundation. This participant-observation is complemented with interviews conducted with farmers, wholesalers and retailers in the Coffs Coast region of Australia; and with the founder of the Food Connect social enterprise, Robert Pekin.

At the level of political organisation and strategy, counter-hegemonic struggles must necessarily be based on alliances formed around the articulation of such a unifying worldview, based on values and principles that mobilise and unite people both within and across national, linguistic and cultural boundaries. Further, such struggles require the identification and mobilisation of a key agent, or agents, of change, including firm and effective leadership; and such leadership, to be effective, must be grounded in national realities, and in a ‘dialectical analysis of the ever-shifting equilibrium of political forces’ at the national level. The practice of counter-hegemonic politics thus prefigures the formation of a ‘national-popular collective will’, which entails the abandonment of intellectualised and abstract cosmopolitanism


147 Jones, B.G., 2008, compares Gramsci’s revolutionary thought and strategy with that of Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon: 214-5.

to reconnect with the ‘socio-economic needs and cultural demands of the common people’ in each country.\footnote{McNally 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 61. McNally notes how in Gramsci’s estimation the French Jacobins provided the model for such a revolutionary national-popular strategy. As Epifanio San Juan Jr puts it, a ‘new way of being Gramscian’ is to ‘apply Gramsci’s dialectical materialist approach to the task of democratic mobilization against finance capital in specific national settings’: 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 166.}

It follows that in order to be effective, a counter-hegemonic project requires a direct and serious engagement with national politics; and the prioritisation of such an engagement above symbolic street protests against the institutions of global governance such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.\footnote{San Juan Jr \textit{op cit.}, who argues, by reference to the case of the Philippines, that the failure to engage in a serious and ‘meticulous’ analysis of the balance of forces at the national level leads ‘to catastrophes’ and is ‘the current malady afflicting anti-globalisation “leftists”’ in the Philippines ‘who consider the battle against the IMF / WB / WTO as more important than fighting the ruthless fascist acts of the US / Arroyo regime’: 181.} This emphasis is also informed by Wood’s insistence that the contemporary ‘global’ system is, more than ever, a system of nation states.\footnote{Wood 2003 \textit{op cit.}, 141.} Democratic struggles must be pursued at the national level; and as gains are made there, these can be translated to global arenas.\footnote{Peter Evans describes this dynamic as the ‘virtuous circles’ of ‘multilevel contestation’: \cite{Evans, 2008, Politics and Society, 36(2), 271-305, 295.}}

The Gramscian perspective is internationalist and ‘cannot be otherwise’, but ‘the point of departure is ‘national’: in other words, global transformation will proceed from nationally-grounded struggles and successes; and not the other way round. Such struggles will likely be linked by shared ‘universal’ values and commitments, but lasting progress is unlikely to come from ‘top-down’ global-led initiatives. The implications of this for the Food Sovereignty movement are that, while its supporters may self-consciously view it as a leading proponent of ‘counter-hegemonic globalisation’, the substantive achievements are most likely to be observed at the local and national levels.\footnote{Peter Evans defines ‘counter-hegemonic globalization’ as ‘a globally organized project of transformation aimed at replacing the dominant (hegemonic) global regime with one that maximizes democratic political control and makes the equitable development of human capabilities and environmental stewardship its priorities’: 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 272. Evans, in common with many other supporters of the ‘alter-globalisation’ movement, subscribes to the perspective that the capacity of national governments to take progressive policy decisions has been constrained by ‘neoliberal globalization’, but that in the current era there has been an ‘expansion of possibilities for trumping national constraints by organising at the global level’: \textit{ibid.}, 276.}

The advances achieved towards food sovereignty in many countries in Latin America, notably Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia, as well as in some African countries (Mali and Senegal) and at the pan-European level (in the form of the Nyéléni Forum on European Food Sovereignty), on the basis of sustained social movement mobilisation and political struggle at the national level, support this Gramscian ‘national-popular’ perspective.

In the context of his discussion of the Italian ‘Risorgimento’, Gramsci developed Vincenzo Cuoco’s term ‘\textit{passive revolution}’ as a short-hand way of capturing those
processes of elite-led change which would avert a revolutionary transformation from below. A ‘passive revolution’ is thus a manifestation of ‘political leadership [as a] function of domination’; it is a ‘revolution-restoration’, in other words, a restoration of ruling class dominance, albeit under political configuration, altered to a greater or lesser extent, but leaving untouched the fundamental aspects of capitalist social relations. Passive revolution is connected by Gramsci analytically with the term trasformismo, to describe the ideological convergence of political parties - as has in fact occurred to a large extent during the era of neo-liberalism - and thus ‘the formation of an ever more extensive ruling class’. In this thesis I also use it to describe the many processes of co-option of potentially radical political and economic tendencies, and their reincorporation within the main circuits of the globalising capitalist political economy.

A passive revolution typically occurs when there is a ‘crisis in the ruling class's hegemony’ or a ‘crisis in authority’, such as that following defeat in a war or in the context of revolutionary demands being made by ‘huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals)’. Arguably the neo-liberal counter-revolution took place at just such an historical moment, when the previous accumulation and distribution regime (Keynesian state-led macroeconomic management and welfare statism) appeared, for a wide variety of reasons, to have exhausted the limits of its further development. Its decomposition coincided in the industrialised countries with a wave of youth counter-culture, civil rights and self-determination movements, second-wave feminism, and militant trade unionism.

In the current context of austerity, processes of passive revolution and trasformismo may dovetail with the growing popularity of self-reliant localisation initiatives such as the Transition movement. In their enthusiasm for food relocalisation, food sovereignty advocates might be said to have absorbed what several critics have identified as an un-reflexive embrace of the ‘local’ as the contemporary site of an expanding progressive politics of social justice. According to this non-dialectical perspective, the ‘social embeddedness’ of relations at the local level is assumed to be ‘good’, and thereby juxtaposed to the ‘bad’ disembedded relations that inhere in the atomized global capitalist market.

Taking issue with what they see as a simplistic dualism, these critics problematize the ‘local’, drawing on social histories and contemporary practices to suggest that the organisation of power relations at this level can and do produce practices and

154 Ibid., 59, 106-120. Gramsci spoke of the 'intellectual, moral and political hegemony' and leadership of the Moderates before and during the Risorgimento, but this was a hegemony exercised in order to effect a 'passive revolution'. He saw the same process underway in the later years of his own life with the rise of fascism, which as he noted generated 'a period of hope and expectation [in] certain Italian social groups such as the great mass of urban and rural petit bourgeois': 108-9, 115, 117-8.


156 Ibid., 58-60, 109.

157 Ibid., 211-2.

outcomes of intolerance and exclusion. They argue that in many instances emerging local food organisations and networks are representative of such a ‘defensive localism’, which valorises the particular interests of local farmers while occluding broader questions of environmental sustainability and the ethical treatment of food sector workers and animals. Further, they suggest that in its privileging of consumer choice as a principal vehicle for social change, food system localization works to ‘reproduce neoliberal subjectivities’ and therefore constitutes an important respect ‘an intrinsic element of neoliberal political economy’, undermining its own progressive and transformative ambitions.

Taking this critique further, it could be argued that the food sovereignty demand for national food self-sufficiency has clear overtones of the protectionism that characterised the breakdown of the international system in the 1930s. This equation of food sovereignty with protectionism has recently been used by some critics to argue that food sovereignty principles will actually be harmful to national and global aspirations of food security. I engage at some length with these critics in Chapter 3.

In reply to the ‘defensive localism’ critics, Edmund Harris suggests that these critiques themselves are over-forceful; and that in the scholars’ predilection to ‘see neoliberalism everywhere’, they end up reifying neoliberal social relations and ‘inadvertently reproduce the dominance of neoliberal discourse’. As a corrective against this academic tendency which he says forecloses ‘a politics of possibility’, Harris proposes using Gibson-Graham’s method of ‘reading for difference, not dominance’ in order to ‘cultivat[e] a mode of thought which can operate outside the discursive bounds of neoliberalism’; and thereby understanding ‘the landscape of alternative food politics [as] populated by a variety of emergent institutions and practices’ which are bringing about ‘positive changes’.

Activist-scholar Amory Starr likewise sees these critiques as containing significant limitations, largely because they treat local food as a ‘set of institutions, policies or commodities’, and not as a social movement. Starr also detects a tendency amongst left critics of the local food movement, as well as among anti-capitalists, to ‘spurn market projects as

---

159 DuPuis et al op cit., 242, 245-6, describing the manner in which the locally-controlled regulation of pesticides in California’s major industrial agricultural region of the San Joaquin Valley ‘disproportionately and notoriously reflect the economic interests of the dominant agricultural elites, while sidelining and rendering invisible the concerns of poor, noncitizen, marginalized farmworker communities’.

160 DuPuis et al op cit., 243-5, 256.


ideologically inadequate pragmatism’. Here, she makes an important point with much relevance to the discussion of my case studies regarding local food in Australia:

[A]nti-capitalists have innovated precious few strategies engaging to the alienated, individualistic, fearful consumer culture we find ourselves organizing in. If the market is where society increasingly spends its time and attention, then we need to learn to organize in the market, keen to identify its fissures and expand them into new worlds. This is not reformism or apologism, it is recognizing the historical political-cultural reality in which we find ourselves and those with whom we would like to make revolution.

This passage highlights a number of issues of central importance in terms of the development of the Gramscian component of my method. First, in developing the critique of common sense and the articulation of a new good sense, a counter-hegemonic movement needs to work from within the common sense itself, rescuing those elements of it which are familiar and which can be progressive, in order to make them coherent. Secondly, this is also consistent with a (non-dogmatic) dialectical interpretation of history and politics, which sees contradictory tendencies and ambiguities in all social forms; and draws attention to the contingency of events and phenomena. Thirdly, the recognition that much contemporary local food activism in countries such as the United States and Australia must of necessity take place within the market reflects Marx’s own insights regarding the conditions of historical subjectivity and agency. Thus, in her reading of local food as a social movement, Starr valorises both the capacity of innovative social entrepreneurs to create meaningful change, and the potential for Community-Supported Agriculture initiatives to achieve a ‘collective ideological praxis’ as they reconfigure exchange relations between local producers and consumers. Similar observations might be made, with greater or lesser degrees of confidence, to other typical local food practices, such as farmers’ markets and community gardening.

Before moving to my synthesis of a ‘neo-Gramscian political ecology’, I wish to mention briefly the application, by Food Sovereignty movement organic intellectuals Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck, of the Polanyian ‘double-movement’ thesis to the assessment of the struggles waged by food movements against the ‘corporate food regime’. This thesis posits the historical and contemporary expansion of the capitalist market by the supporters of economic liberalism seeking the ‘establishment of a self-regulating market’; with such waves of expansion periodically resisted by counter-movements for reform and state intervention to ‘re-embed’ markets in society

---

166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living”: from the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx, 1973.
169 2010 op cit., 480, 486.
170 Holt-Giménez, E., and Shattuck, A., 2011, ‘Food Crises, Food Regimes and Food Movements: Rumblings of Reform or Tides of Transformation?’ Journal of Peasant Studies, 38(1), 109-144. Holt-Giménez is Director of the California-based NGO FoodFirst, and Shattuck works for that organisation as a researcher. FoodFirst, like GRAIN, FIAN and ETC, is strongly supportive of food sovereignty and La Via Campesina.
and thereby ‘protec[t] man and nature’, owing to the social and self-destructive tendencies of unregulated capitalist markets.\textsuperscript{171}

Combining the ‘double-movement’ framework with global food regime theory (see the discussion above), Holt-Giménez and Shattuck postulate, on the one hand, the hegemonic ‘corporate food regime’ as comprised of ‘neoliberal’ and ‘reformist’ actors and institutions, each of which is endeavouring to establish the conditions for its stabilisation and continued expansion.\textsuperscript{172} On the other, they identify ‘progressive’ and ‘radical’ trends within the ‘global food movement’, with the former articulating ‘practical alternatives to industrial agrifoods, such as sustainable, agro-ecological and organic agriculture and farmer-consumer community food networks, largely within the economic and political frameworks of existing capitalist food systems’; and the latter, epitomised by food sovereignty, making demands for ‘structural reforms to markets and property regimes, and class-based, redistributive demands for land, water and resources’.\textsuperscript{173}

Holt-Giménez and Shattuck suggest that the outcome of present struggles over the corporate food regime will largely depend on the trajectory of the ‘progressive’ elements of the food movement; and in particular whether they opt to ally themselves with reformist elements of the regime, or alternatively whether they can forge alliances with the ‘radical’ actors of the food movement.\textsuperscript{174} They suggest that, unlike the neoliberal and reformist elements of the regime, there is no ‘symbiotic’ affinity between progressive and radical elements of the food movement; and hence the movement is susceptible to ‘fragmentation’.\textsuperscript{175} They also make the very important point, as I emphasise throughout the thesis, that the lack of attention to the needs of food workers is a ‘profound area of silence commonly found across all trends in the food movement’; and that ‘it is difficult to imagine just how the [movement] could significantly change the food regime without establishing strong, strategic alliances with food system workers’.\textsuperscript{176} Transposing this to the transnational level, the strongest basis for such alliances, they argue, would be by reference to class interests: ‘linking the livelihood interests (production and reproduction) or underserved communities in the North with those of the besieged peasantry in the Global South’.\textsuperscript{177}

These points are well made, and the analytical framework developed by Holt-Giménez and Shattuck provides a useful methodological tool to assist with the balance of forces assessment. There is of course a considerable overlap with my own framework,


\textsuperscript{172} Holt-Giménez and Shattuck \textit{op cit.}, 114.

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Ibid.}, 115.

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Ibid.}, 133-136. ‘Neither reform nor transformation will likely occur without social movements strong and imaginative enough to inspire citizens to action and force governments to act. Historically, reforms have been forced on liberal markets not by dint of reformists in government, but as the result of intense social pressure, unrest and the threat of ungovernability. To build this kind of political power, organizations in the food movement will need strong alliances and must distinguish superficial reform from structural change’: 134.

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid.}, 135

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Ibid.}, 136.
although, for reasons already mentioned, I have chosen to use the ‘globalising capitalist food system’ rather than ‘corporate food regime’, emphasising *inter alia* the capitalist rather than the merely corporate nature of the object under consideration; and the Food Sovereignty movement, rather than the ‘global food movement’, as the principal historical subject, to emphasise the inclusive, dynamic and open nature of food sovereignty, rather than make a somewhat artificial delineation between the ‘progressive’ and ‘radical’ elements. Arguably, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck’s division between ‘progressive’ and ‘radical’ is perhaps too neat, and insufficiently dialectical, as the above discussion on the contested nature of the ‘local’ suggests. Community-supported agriculture initiatives can simultaneously challenge and support the commodity logic and ideology of the capitalist market. The same applies to agro-ecology. Further, at the level of theory, an analysis resting solely on Polanyi arguably lacks a sufficiently nuanced and dynamic theory of politics and agency, which, as Vicki Birchfield argues, is precisely what Gramsci provides. ¹⁷⁸

*Synthesis: a neo-Gramscian political ecology*

To recapitulate: the hypothesis being explored in this thesis is that the Food Sovereignty movement embodies the potential for effective counter-hegemonic politics to the globalising capitalist food system. The method, and the theory on which it is based, must be apt to explain the principal phenomena and enable the hypothesis to be satisfactorily tested.

These theoretical resources enable me to detect and describe the principal tensions of the globalising capitalist food system. Yet since the main concern is the exploration of potential counter-hegemonic politics, I need to incorporate a Gramscian theory of politics in order to explore the conditions under which such politics might successfully be enacted, and the subjective qualities of the agency that would be required for such enactment. For the purposes of this thesis, I place particular emphasis on the role of organic intellectuals as regards the critical engagement with the common sense that sustains the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system; the development of a coherent ‘good sense’ that can progressively replace this common sense, based on an emerging, peasant-led ontology of connectedness; the articulation of a project in the ‘universal interest’ that supersedes narrow corporate and sectoral interests of particular classes; the construction of broad-based alliances on which an effective ‘national-popular’ strategy can be mobilised; and the constant risks of passive revolution and *trasformismo*.

**Application of the method**

There are three principal moments:

---

¹⁷⁸ 1999 *op cit.*, 39-43. Birchfield describes Gramsci’s seminal contribution to Marxism in the following terms:

Gramsci dismissed the rigid separation of base and superstructure and began to describe domination as something congealed in the superstructure – the cultural, intellectual and moral realm – as opposed to the economic base. He effectively introduced human agency and a theory of consciousness here while also retaining the penetrating Marxian critique of the historicity of social relations embodied in the mode of production... he went beyond Marx’s understanding of civil society and false consciousness with his realization that there was a meshing of base and superstructure in which a whole social stratum operated to maintain the system: 42.
• a systematic abstraction of the social formations, i.e. the globalising capitalist food system, and the Food Sovereignty movement,
• an elaboration of the ‘effective reality’ as between the two social formations, via a balance of forces analysis, and
• the assessment of the concreteness and quality of the engagements of the Food Sovereignty movement with the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system.

The systematic abstraction of the social formations was undertaken in the Introduction. Here I will focus on the second and third moments.

As regards the effective reality & balance of forces, by reference to authoritative reports such as the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment and International Assessment on Agriculture, Science and Development, we can identify significant destructive impacts that contemporary industrialised agriculture is having on planetary, local and national ecosystems. We can also note that the globalising capitalist food system is highly vulnerable to the increasingly well-accepted reality of depletion of non-renewable resources, especially fossil fuels, since it (like all industrial processes) is highly dependent on constant inputs of cheap fossil-fuel derived energy and chemicals.179

The globalising capitalist food system represents, in its contemporary form, the industrialisation and the corporatisation of agriculture and food. Examining the productive forces across the five sectors of the food system (production, processing and manufacture, transport and distribution, retail and consumption, and waste and recycling) reveals its principal characteristics, which will be detailed in Chapter 6. In contrast, the Food Sovereignty movement proposes a quite distinct set of productive forces and social relations. La Via Campesina, has responded, for example by developing increasing capacity for self-conscious agency and action through internal processes of movement formation, paying especial attention to the role of women and youth.

These analyses allow me to draw initial conclusions regarding the existing balance of political-institutional forces, as well as the capacity of food sovereignty to expand the realm of the possible and to shift the existing balance of forces. The three moments of

179 The widespread use of fossil-fuels and related technologies and infrastructure that came with the advent of the Industrial Revolution marks a dramatic turning point in human history. As Gavin Bridge notes,

Unlike wind, water or other solar-derived sources of energy, fossil fuel energies can be expanded and made to flow at will, enabling the realization of economies of scale. They are mobile in a way that wind and water power are not, and allow an unprecedented geographical concentration of production…The reliance on machines and large-scale infrastructure for the release of fossil energies have given industrial capitalism many of its distinctive social and geographical forms so that it makes sense to talk of a “fossil fuel mode of production”. Huber…argues that by decisively shifting productive forces from human labor to machines, fossil fuels generalized the conditions for a class monopoly over the means of production. And in the sphere of circulation, fossil fuels overcame “the biological constraints of transporting goods” and became a primary means for expanding markets and reducing the costs of circulation.

analysis are synthesised to achieve a concrete whole in terms of the ‘effective reality’ and the balance of forces. In terms of the concreteness and quality of engagements by the Food Sovereignty movement with the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system, the analysis must determine the extent to which the Food Sovereignty movement constitutes the effective practice of counter-hegemonic politics. The analysis will be guided by the key Gramscian-informed question: to what extent are these engagements ‘convincing and shift the previously existing disposition of social forces’?

This key question can be further broken down into a series of specific questions, which I have anticipated in the course of preceding discussion, as follows:

- Are the campaigns and actions of the Food Sovereignty movement based in, and do they critically engage with, the ‘common sense’ that underpins the legitimacy of the globalizing capitalist food system?
- To what extent does the movement articulate and enact practices and projects that realistically expand the realm of the possible?
- How effective have global-level campaigns targeting global institutions been?
- Having regard to the ‘balance of forces’, how realistically grounded are these campaigns?
- Are they matched by a similar concentration of forces at the national level: a ‘national-popular’ strategy which (re-)connects the movement with the socio-economic and national traditions of its members in each country, as well as building cross-interest and cross-class alliances?
- Are the critiques and normative proposals of the movement regarding the historical necessity of change convincing?
- To what extent have processes of ‘passive revolution’ (elite-led change) and trasformismo (co-optation of potentially radical movements / normative proposals into elite formations and ideology) taken place or are taking place?

This approach differs considerably from existing frameworks of analysis in the social movement literature. For example, in assessing the impact of La Via Campesina’s ‘Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform’, Saturnino Borras Jr adopts the five-stage framework developed by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink to determine the effectiveness of transnational advocacy networks. The stages are as follows:

1. ‘Framing debates and getting issues on the agenda’,
2. ‘Encouraging discursive commitments from state and other policy actors’,
3. ‘Causing procedural change at the international and domestic level’,
4. ‘Affecting policy’, and
5. ‘Influencing behaviour change in target actors’.

While this framework is useful at one level, it - and the social movement literature more generally - is limited insofar as it positions La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement almost exclusively in oppositional and reformist terms. More

---

181 Ibid., 201, quoted in Borras 2008 op cit., 269.
fundamentally, as an approach grounded in social constructivism and according primacy to ideational factors over social structures and material forces, the maintenance and durability of the systemic integrity of the globalising capitalist political economy is assumed, not problematized, in this analytical framework. A major problem with this paradigm - Wendy Brown argues that it is a problem replicated in variants such as Habermasian theory of communicative action - is that it occludes and marginalises the role of power and politics, within a broader historical American liberal narrative of progress.

In the remainder of this chapter, I set out a number of further sub-questions in relation to each of the Gramscian-informed questions articulated above. This set of questions will serve as the guide and focus for the exploration of the thesis argument through the remaining chapters.

**Critical engagement with common sense**

- Who are the ‘organic intellectuals’ of the movement, and what role have they played and do they play in the movement’s evolution?
- Which elements of prevailing common sense (e.g. individualism, food as cheap, consumer choice, etc.) are consistently and critically addressed by the movement?
- Which elements are ignored and / or uncritically addressed?
- Are the analyses and discourses of the movement increasing in coherence and critical insight?

**Realistically expanding the realm of the possible**

- To what extent can we speak of a coherent alternative social and political project being articulated and advanced by the movement?
- What are the components of that project?
- Which of these components are being implemented now?
- Which of these components cannot be implemented now, and why?
- How likely is it that the barriers to the implementation of the project as a whole may be overcome?

**Effectiveness of global-level campaigns**

- Have any of the goals of any of these campaigns been achieved?
- If so, what practical & political changes have been made as a result?

---

• If not, have any practical and political changes been made anyway?
• What have been the benefits and costs, in organisational and movement terms, of the campaigns?

Existence of national-popular strategy

• What actions are the movement taking at the national level?
• Are the movement acting from purely sectoral or corporate interest? Are they moving towards positioning themselves as acting in the universal interest?
• What alliances have the movement made with other social movement groups?
• What political relationships have the movement formed?
• What attitude do the movement take towards national and sub-national political processes? Are they engaged with these processes, or do they shun them?

Convincing-ness of normative proposals

• Are the movement gaining in numerical strength and political credibility?
• What popular support do the movement enjoy?
• What legislative or other changes have taken place at the national or sub-national level, linked to the movement’s actions, which further their strategic visions and goals?

Tendencies and impacts of passive revolution / trasformismo

• Which potentially radical elements of the movement have been reincorporated back into the dominant circuits of capital accumulation processes?
• Which elements of the movement’s discourse and practices are liable to trasformismo? e.g. contestations over claims to be advancing the ‘human right to food’ and ‘food security’; the dangers of parochialism and prejudice inherent in discourses of ‘the local’; the dangers of protectionism and fantasies of autarky in discourses of ‘national sovereignty’
• What have been the actual experiences to date of passive revolution / trasformismo? Based on the assessment of the ‘relation of forces’, what are the likely tendencies in the future?

Based on this analysis, I then assess which are the most realistically grounded, and therefore the most promising, progressive tendencies amongst the movement, and consider ways in which these tendencies can be strengthened and developed.
Chapter 3
Case Studies

“[F]or those concerned with contesting the anti-democratic impulses of an atomized, anti-political global market society, we must propose counter-hegemonic strategies of rectifying a public sphere, where power can be made more visible and therefore subjected to accountability. To be successful, these strategies must be omnipresent and take multiple forms in the political, cultural and intellectual realms.”

Vicki Birchfield

I support the argument that the Food Sovereignty movement embodies a potential counter-hegemonic political force by reference to two case studies: the development of Food Sovereignty by La Via Campesina, and two elements of the local food movement in Australia. Each case study constitutes a particular manifestation of the Food Sovereignty movement. Their exploration will be guided by the key Gramscian-informed questions that I outlined at the end of Chapter 2, setting the stage for the deeper exploration of the particular campaigns and strategies of the various social movement actors and thus the full elaboration of the thesis argument in Chapters 5 and 7.

While these cases are intended to be illustrative and, to a certain extent, representative of the global food sovereignty movement, they obviously do not describe the entire field. The local food movement in Australia is broader than the Coffs Coast and Food Connect; and internationally it is growing rapidly, especially in North America. The global movement for food sovereignty, and for that matter transnational agrarian activism, is broader than La Via Campesina.

As discussed below, I have selected the two elements of the local food movement in Australia that I have been closely involved with as a participant-observer over the past several years. I have seen local food initiatives ebb and flow in the Coffs Coast since 2008, and I have similarly witnessed first-hand the internal dynamics of the Food Connect social enterprise in Brisbane since 2009. What the thesis may lose in ‘objectivity’, it gains through the detailed understandings of a critical insider’s perspective.

Alongside La Via Campesina, food sovereignty as a concept and political movement is supported by numerous other alliances and networks. These include the member organisations (farmers, fisherfolk, and NGOs) of the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty; the Network of Peasant Agriculture and Modernisation of Africa (APM-Mondial); the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC); the European Nyéléni Forum

---

on Food Sovereignty; and Food Sovereignty Alliances that have recently emerged in
the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, amongst many other networks
and organisations at the regional and national levels around the world. There is a
certain amount of shared membership amongst some of the larger networks; for
example some movements that belong to the IPC for Food Sovereignty, the APC and
APM-Mondial also belong to La Via Campesina.

The reason for choosing to focus on La Via Campesina rather than, or in addition to,
one or more of these other groupings, is both to keep the thesis within manageable
confines, and to allow for in-depth discussion of La Via Campesina as a social
movement. La Via Campesina is the largest transnational agrarian movement; and the
most diverse in terms of the geographical dispersion, class composition and political
ideology of its membership. It is both the originator of the concept of food
sovereignty, and its most persistent protagonist over time, especially at the global
governance level, with its campaign for a new United Nations Declaration on
Peasants’ Rights. Assessing the success or otherwise of La Via Campesina’s efforts to
advance food sovereignty as a counter-hegemonic strategy will, having regard to its
size and scope, enable me to draw conclusions regarding the counter-hegemonic
potential of the movement as a whole.

La Via Campesina’s development of food sovereignty

First I propose to outline the emergence of food sovereignty and its subsequent
development over time by La Via Campesina. The focus will be on the normative
content of food sovereignty and its conscious positioning in juxtaposition to the
productivist discourse of food security which the architects of the globalising
capitalist food system have been promoting since the mid-1990s as a means of
legitimising and justifying the further expansion of the system. I will also touch on
the question of human rights and its relation to food sovereignty, which I develop at
length in Chapter 5; and agro-ecology as a foundational pillar of food sovereignty in
the La Via Campesina framework, which I explore further in Chapter 7.

While this case study concerns the development of food sovereignty by La Via
Campesina and not the farmers’ movement per se (nor for that matter transnational
agrarian movements in general), it is nevertheless important to my argument that I
devote some consideration to La Via Campesina as a transnational agrarian
movement. The reason for this is that, in order to conduct an assessment of the
balance of political and economic forces, I need to be able to make a judgment as to
the relative strength and capabilities of La Via Campesina, as the leading actor within
the wider Food Sovereignty movement, vis-à-vis the dominant actors in the
globalising capitalist food system. Hence I will begin this section with an outline of
the origins, political strategies, successes and shortcomings of La Via Campesina,
which I will further develop in Chapters 5 and 7.

In the following discussion, I draw on some of the emerging literature forging a
synthesis between agrarian studies and social movement theory that recognises the
historical, political and organisational complexities ‘that necessarily characterize any
effort to construct cross-border alliances linking highly heterogeneous organizations,
social classes, ethnicities, political viewpoints and regions'. The aim within this literature is to ‘acknowledge [the] contradictions, ambiguities and internal tensions’ in a transnational agrarian movement such as La Via Campesina, in order, as ‘engaged intellectuals, to advance a transformative political project by better comprehending its origins, past successes and failures, and current and future challenges’.

This aim is entirely consistent with a critical and realist approach as outlined in Chapter 2. It also contrasts with an understandable tendency in some of the literature to over-estimate the impact that La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement has achieved to date, and even at times to romanticise it in ways that at times border on wishful thinking. Thus, Walden Bello, recalling the symbolic suicide protest of South Korean farmer Lee Kyung Hae at the fifth ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Cancun, Mexico, wrote that

Lee was one of the exceptional figures...that have made the new peasant movement...the epitome of dedication, courage, imagination, innovative organising and élan over the last decade, taking up the role that the industrial working class filled decades ago...

The organised industrial working class, from the latter decades of the 19th century through to the 1960s, was a force that wrought major social reforms and advances in democratic rights from establishment capitalist parties in country after country in the industrialised West, substantively re-shaping the ‘configurations of scarcity’ that are fundamental to capitalist economies, the maintenance of elite privilege, and thus hegemonic power formations.

In his examination of the reasons which explain the ‘size and effectiveness of income security states’ that militate against poverty and inequity in the ‘affluent capitalist democracies’, Alexander Hicks concludes that the effective industrial and political organisation of the working classes is the principal cause. Whatever else might be said or claimed for the new peasant internationalism that La Via Campesina and food sovereignty embodies, their impacts to date can hardly compare with the achievements of the organised working class of the first decades of the 20th century.

---


3 Ibid.


5 Panayotakis, C., 2011, Remaking Scarcity: From Capitalist Inefficiency to Economic Democracy, Pluto Press, London. As regards the historical achievements of the organised working class, in some countries, notably Germany and Italy, the proletariat came close to achieving socialist revolutions in the tumultuous years of 1918-1920; and indeed socialist, anarchist and communist workers were elected to power as the Popular Front in Spain in 1936, only for the country to descend into a bloody civil war that ended in 1939 with General Franco’s fascist counter-revolution: Hobsbawm, E., 1994, The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991, Abacus, London, 67-71; Thomas, H., 2001, The Spanish Civil War, Random House, New York.


7 Achievements, it should be said, that have been substantially undermined during the ‘neoliberal counter-revolution’, as labour has once more become increasingly commodified in emerging configurations of scarcity – austerity, structural adjustment, free trade – reminiscent of pre-welfare state forms of capitalism: see Harvey 2005 op cit. Gosta Epsing-Anderson (1990, The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.) explains the welfare state in terms of an effort by the working classes to achieve the greatest possible measure of de-commodification of labour, i.e. to reduce the market
Of course, one would hardly expect achievements at such a level, which were the outcome of more than a century of organisation and struggle, from a transnational farmer and peasant movement that has not yet completed twenty years of existence in a formal, institutional sense. That said, contemporary transnational agrarian movements clearly have their social and political origins in long histories of peasant rebellion; and it is important that such continuities, as well as divergences, be made explicit.

A more realistic assessment, albeit still supportive and sympathetic, is called for. Where Bello is perhaps correct is that La Via Campesina and the broader ‘peasant International’ is currently the main transnational social force proposing the broad outlines of a systemic alternative to capitalism. It is not enough, however, to propose a systemic alternative; that alternative must, as my questions at the end of Chapter 2 indicated, be sufficiently convincing to mobilise and organise large groups of people who can substantively shift the balance of forces in the direction of the desired transformation.

Beginning the balance of forces analysis requires then an examination of the political-economic context for the emergence of La Via Campesina; its class composition and social bases; its political ideologies; the extent to which it is genuinely representative of the sectors whose interests it claims to be advancing; its political tactics and actions; the actual political and economic impacts thus far of those tactics and actions; and internal movement dynamics. I turn briefly to each of these issues, before proceeding to La Via Campesina’s systemic normative alternative: food sovereignty.

In terms of its origins, the immediate context for the emergence of La Via Campesina was provided by neoliberal restructuring of agrarian relations worldwide to the widespread detriment of the rural poor in general, including the peasants and small farmers. One of the main participants in the formation of La Via Campesina, former President of the Canadian National Farmers Union Nettie Wiebe, observes that the particular historical context in the early 1990s was the drive towards trade liberalisation, and the anticipated impact that this would have on small farmers. As she puts it,

[W]e realised that the liberalisation of agricultural trade was going to reorganise production in all of our domains, no matter what kind or level of agriculture we were

compulsions that are the hallmark of capitalism; and the owners of capital, by contrast, are constantly seeking to increase the levels of commodification of labour.


9 Ibid., 181-2.

engaged in; and that it would be very, very hostile to small-scale, diverse production. And that was us.\textsuperscript{11}

The 1992 Managua Declaration, one of the foundational texts of La Via Campesina, put the matter even more strongly, with its authors regarding trade liberalisation as an existential threat for peasants and small farmers:

Neoliberal policies represent a dramatic constraint on farmers throughout the world, bringing us to the brink of irredeemable extinction and further aggravating the irreparable damage which has been caused to our rural environs...Trade and international exchange should have as their fundamental goal, justice and cooperation rather than survival of the fittest...We reject policies which promote low pricing, liberalized markets, the export of surpluses, dumping and export subsidies. Sustainable agricultural production is fundamental and strategic to social life and cannot be reduced to a simple question of trade.\textsuperscript{12}

In this Declaration and subsequent documents of Via Campesina and the broader movement for food sovereignty we can clearly detect this movement’s continuity with earlier traditions of ‘the moral economy of the peasant’ and closely associated notions of peasants’ rights and justice.\textsuperscript{13} Adapting the original usage of ‘moral economy’ by eminent historian of the English working class, EP Thompson, in relation to ‘confrontations in the market-place over access to necessities’, James Scott located in Southeast Asian peasant communities strong customary values around the concept of a ‘just price’ as well as ‘access to land [and] redistributive mechanisms and forms of reciprocity that linked peasants with elites and with each other’, including understandings of the acceptable limits of processes of commodification and appropriation of commonly-held resources.\textsuperscript{14} As Marc Edelman comments, while ‘[t]oday the specific resources targeted for commodification are different than a century ago, the moral discourse of the affected peasants in remarkably similar\textsuperscript{15}; as we can see from this excerpt from the statement by Henry Saragih, Global Coordinator of La Via Campesina, delivered to the 9\textsuperscript{th} Asia-Europe People’s Forum held in October 2012:

If we want to overturn the bleak situation of our current food system, we need to attack the roots of the problems. Injustice in land, water and seeds must be addressed. Stop land and water grabbing and also patents of seeds. Genuine agrarian reform must be implemented. We need to focus to rural areas to address our hunger problem by restructuring our mode of production to a more sustainable-agroecology farming. This is also to protect and restore our Mother Earth.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} Interview with the author, 15.9.10.
\textsuperscript{12} Excerpt from the Managua Declaration, \textit{quoted in Desmarais op cit.}, 76.
\textsuperscript{14} Edelman 2005 \textit{op cit.}, 332, discussing Scott 1976 \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}
While there is clearly a continuity with the moral economy perspective elaborated in the 1960s and 1970s, there is also a clear departure, in at least two senses. First, that literature was elaborated at the beginnings of contemporary globalisation, and so its focus (and that of peasant rebellions) was either local or national. Today, as the sources of violations of peasants’ rights and sense of justice have become transnational, so have the peasant movements themselves and their locus of much of their actions. Secondly, the norms articulated by the peasants around ideas of ‘just price’, rights and limits to commodification have similarly become internationalised.

While neoliberal restructuring in general, and the push for the liberalisation of trade in agricultural commodities in particular, created the objective conditions for the emergence of a transnational agrarian movement like La Via Campesina, the actual emergence and protagonist nature of La Via Campesina depended on the actions of groups of organised sectors of the peasantry and farmers in several countries, first in building national-level alliances, and then in establishing the links that would eventually lead to the transnational movement itself. These links included solidarity exchanges between women farmers from the Canadian National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Nicaraguan Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG - the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers) during the late 1980s and 1990, as well as between the NFU and farmer groups in China, Mozambique, Cuba, the Caribbean, Mexico, the USA and the Philippines.

As Marc Edelman observes, the solidarity exchanges that the Sandinista-led Nicaraguan government fostered amongst peasant organisations in Central America during the 1980s were a key part of the historical context for the establishment of La Via Campesina. A key moment was a meeting in Managua in May 1992, attended by representatives of eight farmer and peasant organisations from North America, Central America and the Caribbean, and Europe. One of the principal founding organisations was ASOCODE; and central to its establishment in 1991 was a large flow of development funds from European donors that formed part of the Copenhagen Initiative for Central America. In that sense, the development projects of European NGOs helped facilitate the emergence of La Via Campesina, and the

---

17 Edelman 2005 op cit., 337.
18 Ibid., 339.
20 Desmarais op cit., 78; also interview with Nettie Wiebe, 15.9.10. Other significant formative links included exchanges between the French Confédération Paysanne, and farmer organisations in the USA, Peru, the Philippines and Nicaragua, as well as regular exchanges between Central American and Mexican peasant organisations: Ibid.
22 Desmarais op cit., 75. The eight organisations attending this meeting were ASOCODE, Winward Islands Farmers Association, Canadian National Farmers Union, Coordination Paysanne Européene (European Peasant Coordination), Coordinadora de Agricultores y Ganaderos (Coordinator of Farmers and Ranchers, Spain), National Farmers Union (Norway), and the Dutch Farm Delegation.
23 Asociación de Organizaciones Campesinas Centroamericanas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo, Association of Central American Peasant Organizations for Cooperation and Development.
continued financial support from some of these agencies has been crucial to the peasant movement’s ability to conduct international meetings and run an international secretariat.25

Subsequently, forty-six representatives of farming organisations from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean, Europe and Asia met in Mons, Belgium in May 1993 and formally established La Via Campesina, the ‘Peasant Way’.26 The emergence of a ‘peasant International’ in the late 20th century has significant historical antecedents. Organisationally, scholars point to the Bulgarian-led ‘Green International’ and the Soviet-led ‘Red Peasant International (Krestintern)’ in the 1920s, noting that these earlier, short-lived Internationals were comprised of peasant-led political parties and governments rather than social movements.27 Ideologically and politically, Joan Martinez-Alier describes La Via Campesina as ‘ecological neo-Narodnism’, tracing a direct historical lineage to the pre-1917 Narodnik peasant movement in Russia, whose militants and supporters ‘dreamt of moving towards a kind of socialism based on peasant communes without relying on the growth of an industrial proletariat’.28

In terms of its class composition, La Via Campesina is self-described as ‘a movement of peasants, small and medium-sized farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers’.29 This is an extraordinarily diverse and heterogeneous category of social classes and groups. Even the core of La Via Campesina, its social base, of small farmers and peasants, is very heterogeneous, given that there are rich, middle-income and poor farmers in the North, and rich, middle-income and poor peasants in the South, including many millions of landless peasants.30 As noted below, this limits the extent to which it can claim to be genuinely representative of the vast numbers of rural poor worldwide who have been impacted by diverse processes of agrarian change throughout the 20th century, and under neoliberal restructuring in the past three decades in particular. Indeed Saturnino Borras Jr., Marc Edelman and Cristobal Kay argue that the exclusion for many years of landless Dalit groups in India by the rich and middle-income Karnataka State Farmers Association (KRRS)31 reflects

[The relatively low priority to workers’ issues within La Via Campesina, whose advocacy caters primarily to surplus producing strata of the peasantry who are engaged with issues of trade and biotechnology. There have been no systematic worker-centred campaigns

---

25 Desmarais op cit., 122-123. The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, in which La Via Campesina plays a leading role, also receives support from numerous European state- and church-based aid organisations: see http://www.foodsovereignty.org/Aboutus/Donors.aspx, accessed 14.4.12.
26 Desmarais op cit., 76-7.
28 Martinez-Alier, J., 2011, ‘The EROI of Agriculture and Its Use by the Via Campesina’, The Journal of Peasant Studies, 38(1), 145-160, 154. Martinez-Alier notes that while Marx was sympathetic to the Narodnik perspective on transformative social change, Lenin was ‘strongly opposed to the “peasant way” in Russia [and] [n]o protagonist role was to be given to the peasantry’ in the 1917 Revolution: ibid.
31 Karnataka Rayja Raitha Sangha, KRRS.
These tensions between different classes within La Via Campesina and their (at times) conflicting class interests also raises questions of internal movement dynamics, discussed briefly below. At the same time, Borras argues, the ‘mass base [of La Via Campesina] more or less represents sectors in the global North and South that are already economically and politically marginalised’, which is one of the most ‘important unifying commonalities’ amongst its diverse membership. Borras delineates the class profile of La Via Campesina as including:

(i) ‘landless peasants, tenant-farmers, sharecroppers and rural workers mainly in Latin America and Asia’,
(ii) ‘small and part-time farmers located in (Western) Europe, North America, Japan and South Korea’,
(iii) ‘family farms in the global South, including those in Africa as well as those created through successful partial land reforms, such as those in Brazil and Mexico’,
(iv) ‘middle to rich farmers, mainly, but not solely, in India’, and
(v) a ‘semi-proletariat located in urban and peri-urban communities in a few countries such as Brazil and South Africa’. 34

‘The most numerous, most vibrant and politically influential groups within La Via Campesina’, Borras says, ‘are the Latin American block, the (Western) European group and a few Asian movements’. 35 The global campaigns that are run and prioritised reflect to an important extent the class interests of the dominant strata within the broader movement, as Borras notes with respect to trade liberalisation, and the lack of ‘worker-centred’ campaigns. Wages, as Borras points out, ‘are not favoured issues by middle and rich farmers’, who may indeed ‘be the oppressors of farmworkers’; and ‘land reform is an issue [likely] to be resisted by rich farmers’. 36

What this implies, in terms of my questions posed at the end of Chapter 2 regarding the convincing-ness of the Food Sovereignty movement’s normative proposals, is that while the farmer-centred focus of La Via Campesina has allowed it to grow rapidly amongst the constituencies outlined by Borras, the extent of its popular support amongst broader strata of the population is limited by its failure to date to articulate campaigns responding to the needs and priorities of workers, qua workers. This appears to be a key limitation and weakness of the Food Sovereignty movement, and I will return to it later in the thesis and in the conclusion.

As one would expect of a movement with as diverse a membership as La Via Campesina, there are several ideological currents. Borras detects at least five: ‘(i) varying strands of radical neo-populists, (ii) various types of Marxists, (iii) radical

32 Borras et al 2008 op cit., 193; see also Borras 2008 op cit., noting that it was the Asian groups that managed to get LVC to launch a global campaign for agrarian reform, over the initial opposition of the KRRS.
33 Borras 2008 op cit., 259, noting how this social base distinguishes LVC from the more politically conservative and Northern-based International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP).
34 Ibid., 274.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 277.
groups with anarchist tradition, (iv) radical environmentalists and (v) feminist activists’, which are evident both between different member organisations, and between different factions within some of the larger organisations such as the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement (MST).\(^{37}\) As of 2008, the ‘dominant current’ amongst the global La Via Campesina leadership, according to Borras, was ‘a radical neo-populist tendency’, with representatives of the other four currents also included.\(^{38}\) As mentioned above, this ‘radical neo-populism’ is reflective of the ‘ecological neo-Narodnism’ that La Via Campesina embodies.\(^{39}\)

Ideological divisions amongst peasant and farmer organisations within countries have been used, as noted in the case of India and the KRRS, to block other organisations from joining La Via Campesina.\(^{40}\) Further, one outcome of the dynamic with the KRRS was the formation of a new peasant movement in Asia - the Asian Peasant Coalition - with a membership based comprised of ‘the most destitute strata of the peasantry’.\(^{41}\) While this ‘network has the potential to sharpen the class analysis and related demands of La Via Campesina’, relations between the two movements have been somewhat strained, although a dialogue exists through La Via Campesina members who are also members of the Asian Peasant Coalition.\(^{42}\)

There are two levels on which the issue of representativity needs to be tackled: the claims of La Via Campesina to be a ‘global’ movement; and the claims of national organisations and movements to represent ‘the peasants’ or ‘the farmers’ in their territories. As to the first, La Via Campesina has no membership as yet in China, Russia, the Middle East, North Africa or Central Asia; and as a result, its claims to be a ‘global’ movement do not stand up to serious scrutiny.\(^{43}\) To be fair, La Via Campesina’s principal slogan - ‘Globalise the struggle, globalise hope!’ - implicitly recognises the limited character of the movement as it stands, and the need to continually broaden its appeal, geographical coverage and numerical strength.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Martinez-Alier 2011 \textit{op cit.} Martinez-Alier traces the ‘ecological’ element of the ‘neo-Narodnism’, as seen in La Via Campesina’s slogan of recent years that ‘Small Farmers Cool the Planet’, has its origins in the study of the energetic flows of agriculture by Ukrainian Narodnik activist and medical doctor S.A. Podolinsky; and in particular his argument that pre-fossil fuel agriculture was a net producer of energy (i.e. that it produced a positive ‘energy return on energy invested’, in the form of human and animal labour expended): \textit{ibid.}, 152-3.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 278-9. A similar dynamic also occurred in the Philippines, with two splits (1993 and 2000) in the Peasant Movement of the Philippines (KMP, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Philinopinas) producing two new organisations. The first, the Demokratikong Kilusang Magbubukid ng Philipinas (dKMP, Democratic Peasant Movement of the Philippines) resulted in frosty relations with the KMP that hampered the effective functioning of La Via Campesina in the mid-1990s (Desmarais, \textit{op cit.}, 146). The second, UNORKA (National Coordination of Autonomous Local Rural People’s Organizations), also had difficult relations with KMP so that its requested membership of La Via Campesina was for many years blocked by that organisation: \textit{ibid.} UNORKA is now a candidate member of La Via Campesina: \url{http://www.viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_wrapper&view=wrapper&Itemid=71}, accessed 21.9.11.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 279.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.; Interview with Tejo Pramono, La Via Campesina Secretariat, Jakarta, 31.3.09.

\(^{43}\) Borras \textit{et al} 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 180; \textit{also} interview with Tejo Pramono, La Via Campesina Secretariat, Jakarta, 31.3.09. Pradmono advised that La Via Campesina is in discussions with farmer groups in Iran and in some Central Asian republics, but not as yet in China or Russia.
As regards the second, there are few, if any, countries, where La Via Campesina members could claim to represent the majority of its ‘social base’: marginalised peasants (including rural labourers) and small farmers.\(^4^4\) Even its most politically active and influential member, the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement, is, by the admission of one of its founders, ‘very small’ as ‘an organized force of the [rural] workers in Brazil’.\(^4^5\) Thus, while La Via Campesina certainly has a presence in a significant number of countries and across a large diversity of rural groups, and can be regarded as more significantly representative ‘than any other transnational agrarian movement’, its direct representation of peasants and small farmers, and of landless rural workers, mean that it ‘represents only a small fraction of the global rural working classes (at least for now)’.\(^4^6\)

Thus, while its undoubted trajectory has been one of rapid growth and expansion in its short life to date, the representation of La Via Campesina is partial, both at the global and the national levels.\(^4^7\) This partiality of representation takes an acute form in the under-representation of important and large sectors of the rural working classes, such as migrant workers.\(^4^8\)

In terms of the research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2, the argument I pursue in the thesis is that the partially representative character of La Via Campesina limits its capacity to grow as a movement, in terms of popular support, numerical strength, and political credibility. As regards the existence and development of both a ‘national-popular’ strategy and a coherent social and political project that is capable of unifying all subordinate social classes and groups, the overwhelming prioritisation of the needs of small farmers reflects a corporatist or sectoral tendency. Food sovereignty has the potential to contribute to the formation of effective ‘national-popular collective wills’ and, simultaneously, the emergence of a ‘counter-hegemonic globalisation’, however further theoretical and political work is required for this potential to be realised.\(^4^9\)

The detailed consideration of La Via Campesina’s political and economic strategies and actions forms the subject of Chapter 5 and, as regards agro-ecology and forms of direct exchanges between producers and consumers, Chapter 7. At this stage I wish to do no more than briefly mention the principal strategies, and highlight those that I will consider in detail later in the thesis. What is evident is that La Via Campesina has had to adapt and be flexible with its campaigns and strategies, according to changing contexts and new expressions of accumulation by dispossession such as the expansion of agro-fuels and the phenomenon of ‘land-grabbing’.

---

44 Borras 2008 op cit., 280.
46 Borras 2008 op cit., 280.
48 Ibid., 185.
La Via Campesina has launched a series of *global campaigns* responding to particular needs and priorities of its membership, with a bias as noted towards small farmers and peasant producers. Consistent with its early (and continuing) focus on trade liberalisation, the first of these campaigns was ‘Get the WTO out of Agriculture’. Other prominent campaigns launched subsequently were the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, and the Campaign to End Violence against Women.\(^{50}\) La Via Campesina has made the struggle to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women a high priority, beginning with ensuring parity of gender representation at all levels of its internal decision-making structures.\(^{51}\)

While La Via Campesina has launched a total of seven campaigns of which food sovereignty is said to be one, every other campaign, to a greater or lesser extent, forms part of the expanding food sovereignty political, economic, ecological and cultural agenda. Food sovereignty *is* the systemic alternative that La Via Campesina and others are promoting to counter the further consolidation and expansion of the globalising capitalist food system. Hence the major focus in the thesis will be on food sovereignty, with other specific campaigns, such as agrarian reform, considered where appropriate.

As discussed earlier and below, the articulation of food sovereignty draws very heavily on narratives and discourses of rights, including historically-based understandings of peasants rights and justice; and the particular role that rights-language plays in the emerging construction of what a number of scholars are terming ‘agrarian citizenship’.\(^{52}\) Influenced by their growing Asian membership, La Via Campesina have now formalised the set of rights-based demands into a campaign for a new United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants. This campaign represents at once the centrepiece of the strategy to institutionalise food sovereignty as a policy framework at the international level; and, through its linkage with the existing institutional framework of the human right to adequate food, creates possibilities for enabling the implementation of food sovereignty at the national level. At the same time, human rights as a strategy for transformative political and economic change can be problematic.\(^{53}\)

---


\(^{51}\) See Desmarais 2007 *op cit.*, 161-181.


\(^{53}\) I explore these issues, which relate directly to several of the research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2, at some length in Chapter 5.
Together with other elements of the broad alter-globalisation movement, members of La Via Campesina have engaged in street protests and shadow summits accompanying major international meetings such as gatherings of the G8, the G20 and WTO Ministerials, in attempts to de-legitimise and ‘name and shame’ these state-led institutional embodiments of ‘neoliberal globalisation’. It members have also engaged in other forms of direct action at the national level, such as uprooting plantings of genetically modified crops, and occupations of idle lands in order to press claims for land redistribution.

As I indicated in my research questions at the end of Chapter 2, the formation of alliances is critical to the development and implementation of an effective ‘national-popular’ strategy. La Via Campesina has developed alliances with a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), notably the ETC (Erosion, Concentration and Technology) Group, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, the Land Action and Research Network, and FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), who have been able to provide specialist research and knowledge to support La Via Campesina campaigns and actions in fields such as genetically modified technologies, the human right to food, corporate concentration in food and agri-business, tracking the phenomena of land grabs, and monitoring the development of agro-fuels.

At the national level, La Via Campesina member groups, and other like-minded peasant- and farmer organisations and movements, have entered into strategic alliances with some NGOs and urban-based consumer groups, with a view to pressing local, state and federal governments to adopt legislative and policy changes according to food sovereignty principles. What is notable, however, is the lack (to date) of alliances with trade unions and other organisations that represent the interests of workers in the food system; and this absence, as noted above, has important implications for the overall effectiveness of the Food Sovereignty movement, especially in countries like the United States and Australia, where farmers constitute such a small percentage of the total working population.

---

54 Notably at the Third Ministerial of the WTO in Seattle in 1999: ibid., 111-114.
55 In particular the KRRS undertook numerous forms of direct action against Cargill and Monsanto in India from 1992 onwards; and the MST has uprooted plantings of GM seeds in Brazil: ibid., 116-8. In Chapter 7 I discuss the MST and its articulation of ‘agrarian’ or ‘ecological citizenship’ amongst the urban unemployed in Brazil: see the references of Wittman in footnote 321 above.
56 In Chapter 5 I discuss recent political developments in Ecuador that such alliances are producing.
57 There are signs that national-level expressions of the global Food Sovereignty movement are beginning to incorporate workers’ organisations into their core organising and political structures. The United States Food Sovereignty Alliance, for example, which was formed in 2010, includes amongst its core (founding) members the Food Chain Workers’ Alliance: http://www.usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/about/member-missions, accessed 28.12.11. The Food Chain Workers’ Alliance, formed in July 2009, is

[A] coalition of worker-based organizations whose members plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, organizing to improve wages and working conditions for all workers along the food chain…The Alliance works together to build a more sustainable food system that respects workers’ rights, based on the principles of social, environmental and racial justice, in which everyone has access to healthy and affordable food: http://foodchainworkers.org/?page_id=38, accessed 28.12.11.

The Food Chain Workers’ Alliance currently has 13 member organisations, some of which are from the traditional US trade union movement (e.g. the United Food and Commercial Workers Union), and others are non-traditional labour-based organisations responding to the needs of immigrant and Latino populations, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; and still others are NGO advocacy and legal
In parallel with political campaigns, forms of direct action and alliance-building, La Via Campesina has sought to cultivate relationships of discussion and negotiation with certain agencies of the United Nations, notably the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Human Rights Council, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the Committee on World Food Security. Managing these relationships requires sensitivities to the internal politics of the various agencies, which ‘pull in different directions’.

In terms of the articulation of *economic alternatives*, in recent years, and responding in part to the growing public clamour for effective action on climate change, La Via Campesina has been encouraging its members to embrace agro-ecological production methods; and on this basis has been making the political and ecological claim that ‘small farmers cool the planet’. As discussed in Chapter 7, some member organisations, such as the Indonesian Peasant Union, are establishing agro-ecology training centres and demonstration farms in order to encourage their individual members to transition to these methods and away from reliance on chemically-based production. International meetings on agro-ecology are also now being facilitated by La Via Campesina; and agro-ecology is being promoted as a key component of food sovereignty.

There is a growing amount of institutional and expert support gained by the vision of small-holder agro-ecology as perhaps the best means to feed the world in a socially just and environmentally sustainable manner. While by no means solely or even largely attributable to the efforts of La Via Campesina, this high-level recognition is potentially a significant achievement and reflects the fact that La Via Campesina is critically engaging with the common sense of the system, mapping out the contours of its own ‘good sense’, and expanding the ‘realm of the possible’. At the same time,
there is, here as elsewhere, a risk of passive revolution and trasformismo, with the World Bank appropriating, in La Via Campesina’s view, the language of agro-ecology in order to legitimise its proposed market-led ‘solutions’ to the challenges of climate change through the promotion of an international trade and off-sets in soil carbon.\(^\text{62}\)

As regards the analysis of impact, in Chapter 2 I discussed the limitations of the Keck and Sikkink framework to analysing the effectiveness of transnational social movements; and in particular the privileging of ideological over structural change. This framework nevertheless has a limited utility as an initial step in assessing the counter-hegemonic potential of La Via Campesina and food sovereignty, because it provides an indication as to progress made in the critique of the prevailing common sense of the globalising capitalist food system and the articulation of a new good sense. Borras, Edelman and Kay conclude that La Via Campesina has had by far the greatest impact in framing debates and getting issues on the agenda of international actors, in relation to the Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform as on other issues.\(^\text{63}\)

While ‘little headway’, they say, has been made in the subsequent four stages outlined by Keck and Sikkink, they suggest that

\[\text{[I]t is possible that one of the most valuable aspects of La Via Campesina is [its]}\]

reframing the terms of relevant policy and political debates internationally, which in turn can help create a favourable context for (sub)national movements to actually make palpable gains.\(^\text{64}\)

This observation, which points to the potentiality of food sovereignty as a framework for ‘counter-hegemonic globalisation’, is supported by the way in which food sovereignty is being institutionalised in the legal and policy frameworks of a number of countries.\(^\text{65}\) In Chapter 5 I discuss how this process is unfolding in the case of Ecuador. More generally, however, Borras, Edelman and Kay are \textit{prima facie} right to state that La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement have thus far failed to shift the balance of forces at the global level to any significant extent in terms of the major goal of systemic transformation of the globalising capitalist food system. One way of measuring this is the degree to which rural de-population is taking place, as political-economic changes inherent to the capitalist ontology of alienation are causing peasants, small farmers and their surrounding communities to abandon the land and move to cities or to emigrate abroad. Although the situation is complex, and in certain places dialectical processes of ‘re-peasantisation’ may be said to be occurring, the clearest trend in most countries would appear to be ‘de-peasantisation’, or more prosaically, ‘urbanisation’.\(^\text{66}\)


\(^{63}\) 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 271; Borras \textit{et al} 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 190-1.

\(^{64}\) Borras \textit{et al} 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 191.

\(^{65}\) \textit{See} Evans 2008 \textit{op cit} regarding counter-hegemonic globalisation.

\(^{66}\) Re-peasantisation – literally an increase in the numbers of people living according to what might be
After the small island states, some of the most urbanised countries are those where the modernisation and industrialisation of capitalist agriculture is the most deeply entrenched: England and its former colonies. Worldwide, a significant historical milestone was passed in 2010 when, for the first time, a greater proportion of the world’s population lived in cities than in the countryside. While the speed with which this outcome came about is in part due to the rapid industrialisation and modernisation that China (and, to a lesser extent, India) has undergone since 1980, the deterioration in living conditions for many millions of small and peasant farmers across the South as a result of structural adjustment conditionalities, trade liberalisation and the spread of industrial-scale monocultures has also played a key role in driving the rural-urban population shift.

As a result of these multiple and reinforcing dynamics, farm populations have dwindled dramatically in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and are likewise falling in many other places. Today less than 2% of the total US population are farmers; and the figure in Australia is less than 1%. The trend globally appears to be towards a decrease in the numbers of farmers in general, and small and peasant farmers in particular. It is for this reason that Nettie Wiebe regards the single biggest failure of La Via Campesina to date as being ‘the inability to hold ground (literally) as the displacement of small farmers and rural communities continues, and corporate concentration ramps up’. In other words, the balance of forces remains, prima facie, clearly in favour of the globalising capitalist food system.

As regards the internal movement dynamics, transnational social movements such as La Via Campesina are not static and fixed entities; rather, as Borras, Edelman and Kay point out, they are highly dynamic, undergoing surging and ebbing all the time...Movements may come and go, rise and fall, or strengthen but later weaken...
Nettie Wiebe, one of the leading actors within La Via Campesina confirms this ‘ebb and flow’ dynamic within the movement:

[S]ometimes when we think that somewhere in the world we’re losing ground, elsewhere in another part of the world we’re in fact gaining ground. The stories out of Mexico [in 2010] are really quite terrifying, but the stories out of the [United] States, it seems there’s a bit of a reprieve on a few things there. So it’s an ebb and a flow, and we take courage from each other, which is of course one of the advantages of being part of a large network.73

The same point is made by Tejo Pramono, confirming the nature of La Via Campesina (and therefore of the wider movement for food sovereignty) as a ‘process’, with national organisations ‘have[ing] their ups and downs [and] not always growing’.74 A high priority over the next period, according to Pramono, is to ‘strengthen the regions [so that] they function well’.75

Charting the rise and fall of the foremost of these coalitions, ASOCODE, Marc Edelman attributes their weaknesses to ‘two main sources’. In the first place, there were a series of internal difficulties: ‘political differences, disputes over resources, over-funding by cooperation agencies, and an emphasis on networking activity, rather than concrete gains’. Secondly, these movements were negatively impacted by external factors such as declining commodity prices and a reduction in the relative importance of agriculture, which led to a rural exodus and with it the draining of numerical strength, political influence and organisation capacities of the organisations that formed the base of ASOCODE, which formally ceased to exist in 2005.76 Edelman notes that in a Central American panorama characterised by large waves of economic migration, the collapse of commodity prices and dependence on remittances, the prospects for the re-emergence of a newly invigorated transnational peasant movement in the region appear bleak.77

Complementing this assessment, Jefferson Boyer argues that the construction of food sovereignty had no historical resonance in Honduras, unlike the term ‘food security’ which, due to historical associations with struggles for land security, meant that ‘the

---

73 Interview with the author, 15.9.10. One of the earliest examples of the ebb and flow dynamic in La Via Campesina was the exit of ‘one of the key founders of La Via Campesina’, UNAG from Nicaragua, shortly after La Via Campesina was established, to return to the more politically conservative and establishment-oriented International Federation of Agricultural Producers. Another was the disintegration of the previously powerful transnational peasant coalitions of Central America which had been so instrumental in the establishment of La Via Campesina from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s: Borras et al 2008 op cit., 179, who note that one of the many points of distinction between LVC and IFAP is that IFAP collaborates with the troika of international financial institutions (the World Bank, IMF and WTO), whereas LVC adopts a confrontational stance towards them: 188. Regarding the departure of UNAG, Borras states that as a member of IFAP, it had a ‘closer affinity to fellow middle to rich farmers…and to issues more concerned about government support services, production and trade issues, and credit facility via bilateral and multilateral donor agencies’, which put it in direct class opposition with ‘the concerns of another Nicaraguan founding organization’, the ATC (Asociacion de Trabajadores del Campo, Farmworkers’ Association). The ATC was much more focused on issues to do with ‘wages and land’:


74 Interview with the author, 31.3.09.

75 Ibid.


77 Ibid., 251.
very word *seguridad* [had] a central place in the campesino’s cultural lexicon on key words’.

These associations, dating from the ‘developmentalist’ era of the 1950s and 1960s, explicitly linked ‘food security’ with the goal of national self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs. Boyer’s assessment was that ‘beyond the national leadership ranks’ of the main peasant organisations, Via Campesina’s campaign for food sovereignty ‘had not reached [rural peasant communities] in a deliberate, systematic way’, largely because the local leaders ‘were not sufficiently convinced’ that it better responded to their needs that ‘the older food security [development] trope’. In terms of my research questions, clearly these issues bear on the mobilising capacity of food sovereignty in terms of its movement-building potential. As discussed below, Via Campesina no longer juxtaposes food security and food sovereignty in strict oppositional terms, but rather argues that the latter is the route to the former.

**Food sovereignty**

Food sovereignty has been analysed and interpreted from a variety of perspectives by scholar-activists and scholar-farmers who would, in Gramscian terminology, be regarded as constitutive of the ‘organic intellectuals’ of the Food Sovereignty movement. In the succeeding discussion I consider a range of these perspectives, which begin to convey some sense of both the theoretical breadth and depth, and the practical political import, of this new framework for understanding social relations around food and agriculture. These perspectives allow me to deepen the exploration of certain aspects and practices of the Food Sovereignty movement that I pursue in Chapters 5 and 7. In the process, they help me to answer the research questions set out in Chapter 2 regarding the role played by the organic intellectuals as regards the critique of the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system, as well as to delineate the components of the alternative social and political project that food sovereignty represents, and the extent of its coherence.

First, however, I want to locate the form and institutionalised emergence of food sovereignty in 1995, as a self-consciously and ‘very politicised’ farmer- and peasant-discourse, juxtaposed to the prevailing ‘productivist’ and free trade-oriented food security discourse of the globalising capitalist food system. Since then it has broadened further to become potentially the foundation of a systemic alternative.

While originally it was very clearly differentiated from a particular language of food security, Wiebe explains that food sovereignty is in fact a necessary condition for ‘genuine food security’:

> We say, and I think there’s growing evidence for this, that you won’t have food security in the long run without food sovereignty. The sustainability and control of the system has to accrue to you, or you will never be food secure. So we say that a necessary condition of food security is food sovereignty, but not as oppositional in the first instance [when] we were trying to delineate this alternative radical vision. We had to juxtapose it, we had to set it out there. Now you’ll see it’s our objective to broaden, deepen and examine

---


79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., 332.

81 Interview with Nettie Wiebe, 15.9.10.
from many perspectives what food sovereignty might look like, and how we can discuss it in different contexts.  

Before considering some of those perspectives below, it is worth briefly recalling the key elements of the content of food sovereignty in its first formulation by La Via Campesina during the shadow summit to the 1996 World Food Summit held in Rome.

In the first place, food sovereignty was expressed to be a national right of self-determination as regards food production capacity, as well as a means of satisfying the basic individual human right to adequate food. The achievement of food sovereignty was claimed to depend to an important extent on peasants and small-scale producers, especially women. For these groups, food sovereignty claimed the right to redistributive agrarian reform; the right to the means of, and resources for, production; the right to produce food staples for their countries; the right to adequate incomes; and the right to be free from all forms of violence. The right to produce food further implied a right of environmental stewardship in peasants and small farmers. As discussed earlier, these rights, insofar as they touch on questions of access to resources, redistribution and questions of reciprocity, have their origins in long-standing traditions of peasants’ rights and justice.

The implementation of these rights, and therefore of food sovereignty, required a number of measures. First, there had to be a reconceptualization of the nature of food, as ‘first and foremost [a] source of nutrition, and only secondarily an item of trade’. Each nation should therefore, according to La Via Campesina, ‘prioritize food for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency’. Secondly, the ‘dumping’ of agricultural commodities had to end, and proper regulation of food prices established in order to ensure that they ‘reflect[ed] the true costs’ of production. Thirdly, food production should not be driven by the need to earn foreign currency to pay interest on debts; and debt forgiveness was required. Fourthly, the growing power of transnational corporations over agricultural policies had to be curtailed, via ‘the regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for transnational corporations’.

Finally, La Via Campesina asserted the need to democratise the ‘United Nations and related institutions’ so that ‘peasants and small farmers, and rural women in particular, have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels’. This claim was based on the universal rights ‘to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making’, which in turn formed ‘the basis of good governance’.

---

82 Ibid. See also Schanbacher, W., 2010, The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty, Praeger, Santa Barbara, California, who argues that

[A] critical analysis of the food security and food sovereignty models reveals fundamental antagonisms between the way hunger and malnutrition are conceived within these two constructs. Ultimately, the food security model is founded on, and reinforces, a model of globalization that reduces human relationships to their economic value. Alternatively, the food sovereignty model considers human relations in terms of mutual dependence, cultural diversity, and respect for the environment: ix.


84 See the previous discussion on the ‘moral economy of the peasant’.
governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination’.  

The content of food sovereignty therefore draws very heavily on human rights. This includes rights that are already recognised in the international human rights corpus, such as the right to adequate food, and the right to freedom from discrimination; and many others that are not, such as the right to redistributive agrarian reform, the right to the means of production, and the right to produce for one’s country. This second set of rights, into which the majority of the rights mentioned above fall, are rights claims rather than rights per se.  

Their assertion, which builds on historical traditions of peasants’ rights and notions of justice, forms a key political strategy of La Via Campesina, as seen in the efforts to advance through the United Nations a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants. These claims, most of which are expressed in the form of the assertion of collective rather than individual rights, are an important part of the process of building class solidarity, and a shared identity and vision; and therefore their assertion is fundamental to building movement strength. At the same time, the Declaration in its entirety can be understood as the assertion of what political philosopher Hannah Arendt termed ‘the right to have rights’; the praxis of claiming rights, Arendt argued, was fundamental to the recovery of human dignity for marginalised and oppressed peoples. In terms of my research questions, then, this campaign appears to bring significant organisational and movement benefits, quite apart from any institutional and policy change that it may produce.

The firm assertion of a ‘peasant identity’ and an associated set of rights can be seen a contemporary expression of the basic historical antagonism between capitalism and the peasantry. In his 2009 book, provocatively entitled Food Wars, written in the wake of the many food riots precipitated by extreme volatility in commodity markets during the first half of 2008, activist-scholar Walden Bello argues that the neoliberal restructuring of agrarian relations since 1980, in the form of structural adjustment loan conditionalities and trade liberalisation, constitutes a sharp intensification of a centuries-long conflict, which he terms ‘Capitalism versus The Peasant’. Capitalist agriculture, he suggests, regards the peasantry as an obstacle to its appropriation of land and other resources in order to expand production for export; and those peasants who cannot or will not make the transition to become capitalist farmers

85 Ibid.
should be, and are being, expropriated. As discussed in Chapter 6, the global ‘land-grab’ phenomenon represents an intensification and acceleration of this historical dynamic. Yet even as capitalist agriculture appears poised on the verge of its final triumph in this epic struggle, it is, Bello says, increasingly mired in intractable crises, many of which are of its own making, and it is rapidly losing legitimacy. Who ends up as victor in the Food Wars, according to Bello, ‘will be determined by which paradigm of production can better bring about food security’. In Phillip McMichael’s terms, this is one of the most important achievements of Via Campesina and the broader Food Sovereignty movement to date: the re-framing of the classic ‘agrarian question’, from one concerned with the class allegiances of a dying peasantry, to one which problematises the very foundations of the capitalist food system, and claims for a ‘recharged peasantry’ the right to produce food ecologically and sustainably, and thus reproduce global society.

While Bello’s shorthand depiction of the ‘global peasantry’ as a single and homogenous, unified class, is clearly inaccurate, bearing in mind the discussion above, it is nevertheless the case that La Via Campesina has managed to achieve a significant measure of movement unity and even an internationalised cross-class consciousness and shared identity around a broad conceptualisation of ‘peasant’ as ‘people of the land’, as Nettie Wiebe explains:

Are we Canadian farmers ‘people of the land’? Well, yes, of course. And it’s important to take that language back...We too are peasants and it’s the land and our relationship to the land and food production that distinguishes us...We’re not part of the industrial machine. We’re much more closely linked to the places where we grow food and how we grow food, and what the weather is there... 

Here Wiebe is alluding to what Peter Rosset terms the ‘food-producing vocation’ of the farmers allied with La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement; and the distinction between this and the ‘export vocation’ of transnational agribusiness. As well as forging class consciousness, solidarity and a strong sense of a unified political project, the introduction and use of distinctions and contrasts such as these by ‘organic intellectuals’ of the movement like Wiebe and Rosset play an important role in critiquing the common sense of the system, and developing the new ‘good sense’ of food sovereignty. The sense of connectedness and solidarity amongst diversity is intangible, but as an indicator of consciousness and critical awareness it is an essential ingredient in a long-term struggle to shift the balance of forces:

90 Ibid., 35.
91 Ibid., 36.
92 Ibid., 15. In Bello’s view, history, ecology and morality are firmly on the side of the ‘global peasantry’ which are ‘becoming what [Marx] said the working class would become: a “class for itself”, or a politically conscious force’: 18.
93 McMichael 2008 op cit., 213.
To stand...and to walk shoulder to shoulder with people who all recognise that what we’re struggling for here are sustainable, nutritious, locally-based, empowering systems of farming, and that that’s key to all of us, that’s a tremendous strength...The hardships that we suffer, and the joys we have, don’t look the same, but...they’re very real in our own context. That kind of solidarity, generated of course by the political necessity of standing in solidarity with each other, has been just a powerful, powerful dynamic internationally. And it has sometimes surprised us in La Via Campesina just how powerful that has been.  

Class and transnational solidarity, though clearly necessary, will not on their own be enough to achieve the desired transformation in the globalising capitalist food system: sustained, strategic political action is required; and crucially, from the Gramscian perspective, the articulation of a universal project which engages not just the ‘global peasantry’ but growing numbers of all subordinate classes in many countries, especially those of the global North. However, in talking about the ‘crises of capitalism’, as Bello does, there is a risk of a sense of teleology creeping in; of assuming that the ‘converging crises’ - financial / economic, climate, energy, food, legitimacy - will inevitably result in the collapse of capitalist industrialised agriculture, and (perhaps) of the capitalist system itself. In the same vein, senior Via Campesina researcher Tejo Pramono states that

[With] the financial crisis, and the energy crisis, and the climate crisis, we feel that the whole model of [capitalist] industrial agriculture is collapsing...it cannot survive. I believe that [the capitalist powers] will finish with difficulties to maintain the system...It might be that the crises will worsen. I hope that that will happen, so that they will have to change.

Capitalism has faced and overcome many crises previously, even deep ‘structural crises’ such as that we appear to be in at present. The resolution of these crises, and the forms that such resolutions take, are highly contingent on a number of factors, not least the character and force of the political interventions by the subordinate classes. As discussed below in relation to the local food movement in Australia, there are risks that discourses of the ‘local’, ‘transition’ and

---

96 Interview with the author, 15.9.11.
97 Bello has developed over the past decade his thesis of ‘de-globalization’, which he describes in relation to capitalist agriculture as follows:

Today, the global economic crisis has derailed the globalist project and inaugurated an era of de-globalization. Industrial agriculture has not only been overtaken by a crisis of legitimacy that has been spreading for some time but the global production and supply chains that it is built on might now wither away...with the collapse of the global economy, the integration of production and markets that has sustained the spread of industrial agriculture is going into reverse: 2009 op cit., 38, 36.

98 Interview with the author, Jakarta, 31.3.09.
99 Panitch and Gindin op cit., 5, mentioning three previous structural crises: the long depression of the last quarter of the 19th century, the ‘more concentrated Great Depression of the 1930s’, and ‘the decade-long ‘stagflation’ of the 1970s: 5.
100 Panitch and Gindin, and many other writers on the left in the industrialised countries, emphasise what they believe will be the decisive role played by the ‘Western working classes’ in the resolution of the current crisis. In particular, they believe that the question as to ‘whether there can be a radical redefinition of what is meant by standards of living in the context of working-class struggles, both in the North and the South, is now on the agenda as never before’; and in particular that there is a need to advance demands which challenge the commodification logic of capitalism and the capacity of people “to act independently of it”, such as universally-available and free public transport: ibid., 16-17.
‘sustainability’ could be co-opted in one possible resolution of the crisis which would see current austerity programmes extended and made permanent as part of the reconfigurations of scarcity leading to a ‘transition’ to an ostensibly ‘green and sustainable’, though still capitalist, still globalising, and still profoundly unequal, food system.

Such an outcome would be a clear case of both passive revolution (elite-led change) and transformismo (co-option). Any movement with counter-hegemonic pretensions, having generated an initial momentum and attracted substantial popular support, needs to be capable of building on such beginnings; and be wary of the risk that its dynamism and radicalism might be channelled in mild reformist directions that support the existing hegemonic power formations. According to David Harvey, one of the world’s foremost Marxist geographers and political economists, and a close observer of capitalism and its crises over several decades, the task of ‘disparate political movements, transcending barriers of space and time’, is clear if they genuinely wish to move to a post-capitalist society:

Capitalism will never fall on its own. It will have to be pushed. The accumulation of capital will never cease. It will have to be stopped. The capitalist class will never willingly surrender its power. It will have to be dispossessed.101

As regards transformation in the globalising capitalist food system, two of the pathways to achieving this, both of which form key pillars of the Food Sovereignty movement, are clear: redistributive agrarian reform which expropriates large landowners and makes land available to small-scale producers; and re-orientation of production for domestic consumption rather than export, with mechanisms to ensure fair returns for producers. These two measures alone, if widely implemented, would significantly challenge the logic of commodification and ceaseless expansion of production that underpin the globalising capitalist food system. At the same time, they would represent democratically achieved reconfigurations of scarcity, responding to immediate and longer-term social needs; and thereby enhancing the movement for economic democracy.102

At the level of theory, other organic intellectuals of the Food Sovereignty movement argue that it has a distinct and unique philosophical grounding which implies, in terms of my research questions, that it has begun to ‘expand the realm of the possible’.103

Food sovereignty, however, is not merely the philosophical basis of La Via Campesina as a transnational agrarian movement. Its framers intend it to ground and enable a concrete political praxis, namely the strategies and actions necessary to defend and valorise peasant producers and small farmers in the face of the capitalist

102 Panayotakis 2011 op cit. In Chapters 5 and 7 I examine ongoing efforts to bring about such outcomes in Ecuador.
103 This draws explicitly on Philip McMichael’s argument that food sovereignty represents a particular ‘peasant ontology and epistemology’, which achieves both an ‘ontological break’ with capitalist modernity, and places the multifunctional role of agriculture and peasant producers at the centre of a ‘critical agrarian modernism’ as a matter of epistemological principle: see McMichael 2006 op cit., 214, 218.
transformation of rural landscapes and social relations; and potentially the transformation, and supersession, of capitalist agriculture itself. Its content is based on a series of existing rights and numerous rights claims, as well as a series of values statements and principles that flow from its peasant ontology and epistemology. Is it possible, though, to pin down a ‘core’ of food sovereignty?

As it has developed in various iterations since 1996, the different formulations of food sovereignty have accumulated certain omissions and contradictions. Unsurprisingly, as the Food Sovereignty movement has gained in strength and political efficacy, it has begun to attract a number of critics, some of whom joined forces in a recent issue of the ATDF Journal in an apparent effort to demolish the claims of food sovereignty to offer a politically, socially or economically viable path out of the impasse in which the global food system is mired.104 At one level, a fair portion of these critiques consist in ad hominem attacks against some of the leading activists and proponents of food sovereignty, as well as numerous appeals to emotion, ridicule, cherry-picking, unjustified generalisations, ignoring counter-factual evidence, and the creation of several straw man arguments. For example, Philipp Aerni describes the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Zeigler, as

A self-styled intellectual with no competence in the field of food policy whatsoever but many friendship ties to the dictators of socialist authoritarian regimes in Africa and Latin America. His rigid socialist ideology has not budged an inch since the 1970s. The enemy is capitalism and the salvation lies in communism.105

This ad hominem attack is not incidental, but is rather central to Aerni’s main critique of food sovereignty, which runs more or less as follows: food sovereignty is an out-dated left-wing ideology whose main proponents are affluent environmental activists in Europe; and as a consequence they are seeking to impose a misguided agenda of national food self-sufficiency on poor peasant farmers based on the utopian ideal of the human right to food. This will likely lead to famines, as happened under Stalin and Mao, and is happening now in North Korea and Zimbabwe.106 Further, food sovereignty has become a ‘lifestyle phenomenon’ which ignores the harsh fact ‘that agriculture has always been a fight against nature’.107 The affluent European proponents of food sovereignty are also ‘anti-science’ and, in their ‘[anxiety] to

---


105 Aerni op cit., 27.

106 Ibid., 27. Aerni thus equates food sovereignty with Stalinism and Maoism, and castigates food sovereignty proponents for not recognising this aspect of the movement:

This blindness to the failures of left-wing policies in coping with food security also applies to the advocates of Food Sovereignty. Not a single document in the Food Sovereignty literature actually refers to these tragedies caused by communist and socialist regimes, because their enemy is the ‘neoliberal’ food regime: ibid.

107 Ibid., 28.
defend their privileged lifestyles’, are denying the multiple benefits of biotechnology to the world’s poor farmers.\(^\text{108}\)

The linkage between food sovereignty, food self-sufficiency, protectionism, and famine is central to Aerni’s critique, as it is to the shorter critiques of Douglas Southgate and William Kerr.\(^\text{109}\) For them, the conclusion is clear: free trade and further liberalisation of agricultural markets are the only proven path to food security.\(^\text{110}\) In many respects, Aerni and his colleagues have caricatured the food sovereignty position, intentionally creating a straw man which they then knock down by raising the bogey man of communism. Nowhere in the food sovereignty literature or policy demands are there any calls for complete autarchy and total opposition to trade, and much less for the forced collectivisation of Stalin. Rather, there is opposition to contemporary ‘free trade’ which, as amply documented, ‘has concentrated enormous wealth in the hands of very few people, while ushering in policies that have worsened the lives of several billion [others]’.\(^\text{111}\)

Further, in claiming that communism was mainly responsible for famines and excess mortality in modern times, Aerni and his colleagues ignore the historical record of contemporary mass famine under the WTO free trade regime, which has clear historical antecedents in the ‘late Victorian holocausts’ brought about the British free trade regime in the latter decades of the 19\(^{th}\) century.\(^\text{112}\) Of course no-one would question the brutality of the horrifically failed attempts at collectivisation by Stalin and Mao, but this type of cherry-picking and straw man argumentation substantially detracts from the validity of Aerni et al’s critique.

Indeed, their stance of ‘free trade’ advocacy and the claim that food sovereignty is merely re-hashed ‘old protectionism’ which will undermine food security and create more suffering, is further undermined in the article of Ramesh Sharma, which appears in the same issue of the journal.\(^\text{113}\) Sharma notes that

\(^{108}\) Ibid. 29, naming specifically as ‘affluent Europeans’ Jose Bove and Dr Vandana Shiva. The latter comes in for sustained ad hominem attacks, both for her ‘magic charisma’ with which she charms European politicians and convinces them to ban GM crops; and for her willingness to embrace the ‘big lie’ strategy of George W. Bush as regards the levels of suicides by Indian farmers sowing Bt cotton: \textit{ibid.}, 29-30.

\(^{109}\) See footnote 108 above.

\(^{110}\) As Southgate puts it,

> The soundness of [the argument for free trade] is readily apparent where a comparative advantage in agriculture exists. However, it also applies for the poorest of the rural poor in countries that find themselves importing more food in the wake of trade liberalization. Impoverished farmers, who tend to have tiny holdings, typically are net buyers of food, so they benefit as prices are driven down due to the availability of cheaper imports. Even worse off are rural households with no land at all and that lack the skills required for remunerative employment. This group may suffer a reduction in earnings as lower commodity prices reduce the demand for unskilled labor in the agricultural sector. But for most landless households, this reduction is outweighed by the gains coming their way because of cheaper food: 19.


The positions articulated by the food sovereignty side are increasingly guiding national policy responses to the price spikes in the global food sector. This is revealed by the renewed national focus on food production, higher targets for food self-sufficiency, increased attention to small farmers and to inequities in their access to productive and national resources as well as markets.\footnote{Ibid., 10. The main thrust of Sharma’s article is that the critique of Food Sovereignty proponents of the Agreement on Agriculture is misguided because it doesn’t constrain any of these efforts at the national level, and indeed could support them. This is a controversial and contested position (e.g. see Murphy \textit{op cit.} for a detailed analysis of why the AoA is disadvantaging poor farmers in developing countries), however its validity or otherwise is not central to my argument.}

Sharma goes on to suggest that there is an emerging consensus amongst development economists, and within international institutions, that effective policies to improve the lot of small farmers are central to achieving poverty- and hunger-reduction objectives.\footnote{As evidence of this consensus, Sharma cites the response of ‘20 leading development economists’ to the anti-peasant stance articulated by Paul Collier (2008) \textit{op cit.}} This speaks to the constructive and effective engagement by the food sovereignty movement with the intensifying tensions of the globalising capitalist food system. It contradicts the argument that food sovereignty is simply the revival of a tired and discredited ideology, and should therefore be rejected.

What the critiques do reveal however is that there is a certain lack of clarity in the articulation of food sovereignty which renders it vulnerable to these sorts of distorted presentations. Sharma makes this point well in calling on food sovereignty advocates to do more to demonstrate the practical effectiveness of its principles, and how they can be incorporated into national policy documents:

In order to fill the gap between rhetoric and reality, advocates of food sovereignty need to come up with empirical evidence and studies on best practices to convince policy makers and other stakeholders in the respective countries that they have a coherent and detailed approach that can be clearly written in national policy documents such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as well as trade and agricultural policies.\footnote{Ibid.}

As I discuss in Chapters 5 and 7, there are now examples of the incorporation of food sovereignty principles into national laws and institutions, notably in Ecuador and Venezuela.\footnote{The Ecuadoran case I discuss in this thesis. For an overview of food sovereignty developments in Venezuela, see Schiavoni, C., and Camacaro, W., 2009, ‘The Venezuelan Effort to Build a New Food and Agriculture System’, \textit{Monthly Review}, 61(3), 129-141; and the recent documentary \textit{Growing Change} made by ACT-based filmmaker Simon Cunich: \url{http://www.growingchange.com.au/}, accessed 20.2.12.} Further, there are numerous examples, some of which are also empirically documented, of the multiple benefits of the practical implementation of food sovereignty principles in the form of food localisation and regionalisation initiatives. Nevertheless, Sharma’s point is well-made, and more work remains to be done on these issues.

Other omissions and contradictions relate to the class composition and biases of La Via Campesina, as noted earlier. For example, the structural inequalities and potential conflicts between farm owners and farm workers are effaced, and the call for ‘new social relations free of oppression and inequality between \textit{inter alia} men
and women’ sits uncomfortably alongside the eulogising of the family farm, bearing in mind that ‘the family is one of the oldest factories for patriarchy’. These contradictions might be resolved, Raj Patel argues, by recognising that there are certain preconditions to the substantive realisation of the rights claimed by food sovereignty. In particular, he says, the ‘right to shape food policy’, implies a commitment to a ‘radical egalitarianism’; and operationalizing this envisages a ‘society in which the equality-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism and class power have been eradicated’. It is this ‘radical egalitarianism’, Patel suggests, which lies at the ‘core of food sovereignty’.

What does ‘radical egalitarianism’ actually mean in practice? Patel says that his ‘interpretation doesn’t pre-empt others, nor does it set in stone a particular political program’. Similarly Nettie Wiebe emphasises national variability in the practical evolution of food sovereignty:

[O]ne of our strategies around food sovereignty is to try to deepen, in radical ways, what kind of an alternative this offers to our current system. The practical application of that is very diverse and very challenging... we have to be constantly struggling to re-define it, and make it concrete in our own context.

The emphasis on diversity of local cultures and conditions is fundamental, and a key point of differentiation with the epistemic and material violence of the globalising capitalist food system, as Wiebe states:

The model of food sovereignty is very deliberately a model that isn’t global. In a very real way, it respects the diversity of conditions, situations, ecosystems, and cultures; that have grown up, and are indigenous to, various areas of the world. One of the huge problems of the globalised, liberalised trade system is that it erases diversity, and therewith erases the possibility of long-term sustainability.

What Wiebe doesn’t acknowledge here is that the attempts by La Via Campesina to institutionalise food sovereignty, most notably via the proposed Declaration on Peasants’ Rights, is precisely a ‘global model’; namely, the creation of universal and binding norms via the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations. Yet while the normative framework is global - the universalisation of the ‘moral economy of the peasant’ - its concrete application in different societies can take into account cultural diversity. Amongst other things, what we can see here is a very self-conscious form of ‘social ecological thinking’; namely, that, just as sustainable ecosystems are those that are bio-diverse, sustainable social systems must also be based on ‘biological, cultural, political and agricultural’ diversity. This raises the general question as to what are the conditions in which such diversity can be

---

119 Ibid., 194.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 195.
122 Interview with the author, 15.9.10.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
guaranteed; and the specific question as to whether this diversity is possible in a capitalist system. Patel’s ‘radical egalitarianism’ raises these questions more or less directly. A society in which ‘class power, racism, sexism and patriarchy have been eradicated’ will, almost by definition, not be a capitalist society, since a capitalist society is by its nature one in which economic and (to a lesser extent) political power are concentrated in the capitalist class by virtue of its ownership and control over the means of production.  

Ecological thinking and new forms of social relations free of oppression bring directly into consideration the research questions I posed at the end of Chapter 2, in the application of my neo-Gramscian political ecology, especially as regards the intellectual work of expanding the realm of what is politically possible, in the context of a widening ecological or metabolic rift.  

Having posed the existence of such a rift, the question, from progressive and radical political perspectives, then becomes how individuals and social collectivities can begin to heal it. It is at this point that the political praxis of food sovereignty and La Via Campesina as a ‘movement in action’, based on an emerging, peasant-led ontology of connectedness, becomes significant. Hannah Wittman, using the concept of the metabolic rift as a point of departure, suggests that the grounded praxis of La Via Campesina member organisations such as the land occupations, formation of producer cooperatives and building of communal schools undertaken by Brazilian the Landless Workers Movement (MST) since its formation in 1984, constitutes the embodiment and enactment of an ‘agrarian citizenship’.  

Agrarian citizenship, says Wittman, ‘goes beyond traditional or liberal conceptions of rights linked to individual property, production or possession’. Instead, it proceeds from an ‘ecological rationality’, not an ‘economic rationality’, and ‘recognize[s] how the political and material rights and practices of rural dwellers are integrated into the socio-ecological metabolism between society and nature’. For Philip McMichael, agrarian citizenship ‘involves the re-territorialisation of states through the revitalization of local food ecologies under small-farmer stewardship, in the interests of society at large’, based on the right of small farmers ‘to produce society

---

125 Peet and Hartwick *op cit.*, 200-201, summarising the Marxist critique of capitalist modernity: “Marxism’s thesis is that capitalism is a class and patriarchal society in which a minority owns and controls the means of the reproduction of existence, determining thereby the character and direction of development, the social relations with nature, and the way people are created as kinds of human beings”.  
126 It will be recalled that a key premise of this critical ecology is that the ‘metabolic’ or ‘ecological rift’ is constitutive of the globalising capitalist food system; that it widens in parallel with the social rift; and indeed that both are a reflection of humanity’s alienation from nature and from itself: *see Foster et al op cit.*, Moore 2010 *op cit.*.  
128 *2009a op cit.*, 121.  
129 *2010 op cit.*, 95.
and manage local resources’. It is precisely the widening of the ecological rift under the globalisation of capitalist agriculture, says Wittman, that is creating both the necessity and the opportunity for food sovereignty, as practiced in diverse, grounded forms of agrarian citizenship, to differentiate itself from the capitalist ‘laws of motion’ that cause the rift. However, while the conceptualisation and practice of agrarian citizenship may be ‘interests of society at large’, the issue remains as to whether it is actively constructed as a universal project, so as to ground the formation of a national-popular collective will, or whether it remains limited to the corporate and sectoral interests of small farmers.

Agrarian citizenship is a key form of the grounded praxis of food sovereignty. Central to the rights claims that form the basis of agrarian citizenship (and food sovereignty) is the right to exercise control over the means of production of food: land, water, and crucially, seeds. Without ‘seed sovereignty’ - ‘the right of the peoples to recover, defend, reproduce, exchange, improve and grow their own seed’ - the ‘full realization of food sovereignty’ will be impossible. Actualising seed sovereignty means both resisting the growing corporate control over seed through the expansion of intellectual property rights, as discussed in Chapter 6, and the recovery and continuation of the traditional practice of saving and sharing seed at the local level. As discussed below, seed saving is also a common feature of local food initiatives in countries such as Australia.

Seed-saving is one component of agro-ecology: ‘the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems’. Agro-ecology captures a range of production and design methodologies, such as nutrient and energy recycling, integration of crops and livestock, species diversification and taking a ‘whole-of-system’ approach rather than a reductionist focus on a single species. Together with redistributive land reform and localised food systems, agro-ecology forms one of the three foundational pillars of food sovereignty.

Farmer autonomy and self-determination lie at the centre of the philosophy of agro-ecology. This methodology of production is explicitly intended to reduce farmer dependence on purchased external inputs such as seed, agri-chemicals and fossil fuels, because its aim is to build ‘agricultural systems in which ecological interactions and synergisms between biological components provide the mechanisms for the

---

130 2008 op cit., 217.
131 2009b op cit., 821.
system to sponsor its own soil fertility, productivity and crop protection’. As such, it arguably poses a direct challenge to the further consolidation and expansion of the globalising capitalist food system, which is premised on what rural sociologists have termed the decades-long tendency towards ‘appropriationism’, that is, ‘the process by which corporate agribusiness reduces the importance of nature in farm production’, and thereby generates multiple opportunities for capital accumulation and profit. Appropriationism is an expression of how the capitalist food system patterns configurations of scarcity to the benefit of agribusiness; agro-ecology disrupts such configurations by (re-)connecting farmers with a natural economy of abundance.

Agro-ecology as a genuinely liberating practice should not be simplistically confused with certified organic production, or fair trade labels, both of which have been quite comfortably reinserted within the circuits of the globalising capitalist food system.

La Via Campesina has had to shift from an early singular focus on trade liberalisation to embrace a wider range of emerging issues. Key among these has been climate change. La Via Campesina have attempted to use this issue as an opportunity to reinforce their critique of the common sense of the system and to add further substance to their emerging good sense of food sovereignty. Hence in 2009, in advance of the Copenhagen Climate Change negotiations, they advanced their claim that ‘small farmers are cooling the planet’. Central to this claim is emerging research which demonstrates that agro-ecological production techniques which restore soil fertility by increasing levels of organic matter, and thus soil carbon, has the potential to sequester significant amounts of greenhouse emissions from the atmosphere.

I will discuss these matters at more length in Chapters 6 and 7. At this stage I wish to note briefly two further important aspects about agro-ecology and its underpinning of food sovereignty as a potential counter-hegemonic project. First, the success of agro-ecological methods is fundamental, not just to the claims about climate change, but to the underlying question of whether small-scale farmers can feed the planet. A key

135 Altieri 2010 op cit.
137 As Altieri notes:

Organic farming systems that do not challenge the monocultural nature of plantations and that rely on external inputs and expensive foreign certification seals and fair-trade systems destined only for agro-export offer very little to peasants and small farmers, who become dependent on external inputs and foreign and volatile markets: Altieri 2010 op cit.


138 Martinez-Alier 2010 op cit.
140 Ibid., GRAIN.
part of the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system is that only large-scale, industrialised agriculture for export is capable of meeting the food demands of a growing world population. Agro-ecology poses a direct challenge to such claims. To the extent that this challenge is well-founded, it will significantly advance the political credibility of the global movement for food sovereignty.

Secondly, in the past few years as it has developed its thinking and campaigning around sustainable farming and climate change, La Via Campesina has held two ‘Continental Encounters’ of Agro-Ecology Trainers in La Via Campesina.142 The Declarations produced following these meetings are notable for their increasing radicalism; they represent a qualitatively significant development in food sovereignty compared to earlier formulations mentioned above. In the first place, the cause of the multiple crises is explicitly identified as the ‘capitalist system’, rather than simply ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘neoliberal globalisation’; and its multiple contemporary forms of accumulation by dispossession, such as land-grabbing and mining, are named and denounced.143

In the second place, ‘peasant, indigenous and community-based agro-ecological farming [which] reduce[s] dependence on the capitalist system’ is explicitly stated to be ‘a cornerstone in the construction of food sovereignty’, whereas previously there were only general and somewhat vague statements about the need for ‘sustainable farming’. Thirdly, agro-ecology is stated to be ‘vital’ in ‘people’s struggles’ for a post-capitalist society, ‘whose final aim is not accumulation’; indeed, ‘true’ agro-ecology is said to be ‘part of a socialist project’ and is said to be incompatible with the capitalist system. Going forward, these agro-ecology trainers of La Via Campesina commit themselves to the construction a reflexive analysis on the basis of a ‘dialog among [their respective indigenous] cosmovisions’, as ‘complemented by a historical materialist and dialectical interpretation of reality’; with the aim of ‘liberating’ themselves and ‘achieving buen vivir for [their] peoples’.144

Thus, from its emergence as (primarily) a denunciation of liberalised agricultural trade in 1996, food sovereignty has rapidly evolved to the point where it is increasingly identified, both by the organic intellectuals of the movement as well as the praxis of La Via Campesina member organisations and its more militant individuals, with an explicitly post-capitalist, neo-socialist project. Its transformative

143 As Julie Guthman documents, the neoliberal era does not represent a break with the long-entrenched dynamic of over-production in the US-led global food system: ‘US food policy has [since the 1880s] been guided by expansionist efforts at home and abroad – to expand and secure markets – and through policies that encourage high yielding crops and cheapened food, to produce as much food as possible…the post-1980 period often associated with neoliberalism was less a break with this pattern than an exacerbation of it’, in particular through the loosening of environmental and food safety regulations: 2011 op cit., 63-4.
ambitions do not appear to be in doubt. What remains to be seen is whether they stand any prospect of being achieved. To a significant extent, that depends on what is happening in countries that form the core of the globalising capitalist food system, led by the United States. With that in mind, I turn to consider my second case study, the local food movement in Australia.

The local food movement in Australia
As is apparent from the foregoing discussion, food sovereignty contains a number of significant philosophical and political commitments. In terms of its practical implementation, the re-localisation of food systems, including the establishment of mechanisms that enable direct, or near-direct, exchanges between farmers and urban residents, features prominently in many articulations, as well as in thinking of leaders and strategists of the movement. In other words, food sovereignty strategists appear to have in mind, at least partly, democratically-constructed food localisation as a cornerstone in the practical enactment of food sovereignty principles. In this section, I consider some ways in which local food is being practised in two sites of eastern Australia: the Coffs Coast region of the state of New South Wales; and Brisbane, the capital of the state of Queensland.145

In Chapter 2 I discussed recent scholarship seeking to problematise the politics and practices of food localisation, raising questions as to the extent of its progressive or non-progressive character. These debates lead to a wider issue, which is of central importance for this thesis: namely, what is the transformative potential of local food? For some observers, such as Clare Hinrichs, it is clearly limited, ‘represent[ing] modest socio-economic, cultural and environmental shifts in encouraging directions’.146 Melanie DuPuis, David Goodman and Jill Harrison see significant transformative potential, but this is contingent on the local food movement rejecting ‘defensive localism’ and a ‘problematic communitarian discourse of social justice’ centred around a ‘perfectionist politics’ represented by imposed standards such as organic labelling, in favour of a reflexive, egalitarian localism built on ‘the imperfect politics of process’.147 Amongst other things, a reflexive localism would not impose rigid ‘economic boundaries between a particular “here” and a global “there”, but [would] engender and deepen [local food movement activists’] connections with the people who live nearby’.148 These scholars also point to the need for local food to expand access to healthy food for much broader numbers of people, which in their view will mean going ‘beyond the creation of farmers’ markets and CSAs [to] explore more democratic food provisioning processes, including public procurement policies, consumer cooperatives and community food schemes’.149 From this perspective, the

145 At this point the discussion will be general and relatively brief, setting the stage for a more detailed discussion in Chapters 5 and 7.
146 2003 op cit., 43.
147 2006 op cit., 242, 260-1, 264. The authors identify ‘perfectionist politics’ with standards such as ‘pure’, ‘natural’, ‘local’ and ‘organic’, arguing that such labels ‘pla[y] into the hands of food corporations by making sanitized, labelled, certified and well-sealed packaged products the preferred choice of fearful consumers’: 261.
148 Referring here to the ‘New Regionalist’ and ‘smart growth’ movements, ‘which attempt to reunite inner city and surrounding suburban interests: ibid., 262.
149 Ibid, 263. This echoes the need identified by many in the local food movement and its supporters to it to ‘scale up’ in order to have a much bigger impact than the niche market sectors of CSAs and farmers’
local food movement and related initiatives needs to adopt a more explicit and inclusive commitment to a universal and democratically-constructed sense of social justice, which arguably could be grounded in a politicised understanding of the right to food.

Others, pointing to what they see as the de-commodifying and de-reifying practices of the movement, as well as the creation of new ‘commons’ spaces and opportunities for self-provisioning, are more optimistic about its transformative potential. The capacity for local food institutions such as community gardens and Food Policy Councils to strengthen civic engagement, build community through strengthening social capital, and foster a more politicised number of ‘food citizens’ are cited as evidence of transformation. As to how and when such transformation might take place, there is general consensus that change will be incremental, achieved through ‘pragmatic’ and ‘reflexive’ politics of negotiation, debate and engagement. Consistent with an approach that sees local food as a social movement, Starr observes, in terms strikingly reminiscent of the La Via Campesina insiders Nettie Wiebe and Tejo Pramono quoted above, that ‘we would understand its promise as a participatory process and long-term dialogue’, with the focus of the inquiry on its ‘trajectories and expansions’, rather than ‘what it has done’. With such a focus in mind, and explicitly conceiving the local food movement as part of the wider Food Sovereignty movement, I now turn to a brief discussion of the local food case studies.

**Local food on the Coffs Coast**

As with Food Connect (see below), I have found myself in the role of participant-observer in the development of a local food movement on the Coffs Coast since 2008. I co-founded the Bellingen Local Food Network in late 2007, then the Coffs Coast Local Food Alliance and the Bellingen Community Gardens Association in 2008. I also co-coordinated the Bellingen Local Food Film Festival in 2008-9, and then the Coffs Coast Local Food Film Festival in 2010-11, as well as the Coffs Coast Permaclitz programme from 2010-12. This case study is based accordingly on my lengthy and

---


152 Hassanein *op cit.*, 84; DuPuis *et al op cit.*, 263-4.

153 2010 *op cit.*, 486. *See also* Dixon 2011 *op cit*, who argues that while many elements of ‘alternative food systems [are] not necessarily anti-capitalist and could not exist outside of a capitalist framework’, the assessment of their ‘transformative potential awaits the experience that lies ahead’: i32-33.

154 Bellingen is the smallest of the three shires that make up the Coffs Coast. The shire itself has a population of 13,000, with the main centre, Bellingen, having a population of 3,000. The Coffs Coast itself has a population of 100,000, with the main centre, Coffs Harbour, having a population of 55,000.
intensive degree of personal involvement, as well as conversations and semi-structured interviews with numerous local residents, farmers, growers, educators, and providers of emergency food relief. Consistent with the ‘reflexive, egalitarian localism’ proposed by DuPuis and her colleagues, as well as a dialectical approach to both action and research, I offer through this case study my own critical reflections on this movement.

The first point that should be noted is that, compared to other expressions of the local food movement in Australia and beyond, the ‘movement’ on the Coffs Coast as such is in its relative infancy. Its antecedents date back to the late 1990s, with the establishment of the Bellingen Growers Market and the Coffs Regional Organic Producers Organisation (CROPO), and the Coffs Growers Market in 2004. Short-lived experiments with community gardens at different private sites in Bellingen occurred in 2000-1 and again in 2003-4.

These were discrete, disconnected initiatives. The intentional launching of something that could be regarded as a ‘movement’ took place in late 2007, with the establishment of the Bellingen Local Food Network. From 2008 onwards, the level of activity, and the numbers of groups involved, increased considerably. The first Bellingen Local Food Film Festival was held in early 2008. Later that year the Coffs Coast Local Food Alliance was established (see below), as well as the North Bank Road Community Garden in Bellingen (again on private land), the Bellingen Seed Savers Network, the Dorrigo Green Life Style Group, the Nambucca Valley Local Food Network, Transition Bellingen, and an informal shared gardening arrangement on private land involved eight families. In 2009 the second Bellingen Local Food Film Festival was held, and a draft Coffs Coast Local Food Futures Framework was produced; also Permablitz Bellingen, the Bellingen Environmental Youth Experience, and the Coffs Regional Community Gardens Association were established. 2010 saw the planting of an edible streetscape, consisting of 16 citrus trees, on the entry into Bellingen, as well as the holding of a Permablitz at the Bellingen Primary School, the first Coffs Coast Local Food Film Festival, and the launching of the region’s first vegie-box scheme, Bello Food Box. In 2011 the Community Gardens were established at the Bellingen and Bowraville High Schools, and a new Bellingen Permaculture Collective was formed.

All of this activity is occurring in a region with a long agricultural heritage, with the Coffs Coast historically being a major banana-growing region of Australia, from the 1930s to the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{155} Today the region produces the majority of Australia’s blueberry crop.\textsuperscript{156} The other main agricultural activities are dairy and beef cattle farming, intensive forms of horticulture such as Lebanese cucumbers and roma tomatoes, and niche markets in some certified organic lines, such as Russian garlic and pecan nuts.\textsuperscript{157} As banana production dwindled with urban expansion and...
competitive pressures from the heavily mechanised and large-scale tropical banana industry in North Queensland, thousands of small growers either abandoned fruit growing or diversified into other crops, such as blueberries, avocados and lychees. The pressure to diversify continues as produce from other regions in Australia squeezes the ‘window’ available to producers on the Coffs Coast.\textsuperscript{158}

Other than the small number of growers who sell into the Coffs and Bellingen growers’ markets and the small-scale ‘Bello Food Box’, as well as a few local wholesalers who attempt to source local produce to meet the demand of their business customers, the bulk of the produce is shipped out of the region to the central markets in Sydney and Brisbane, and to the centralised distribution centres of the major supermarkets. From there, a percentage (not measured) will find its way back to retail outlets on the Coffs Coast, consistent with the standard practice for food distribution in Australia.

The Coffs Coast Local Food Alliance, and related initiatives such as the Coffs Coast Local Food Film Festival, Coffs Coast Permaablitz, and the Community Gardens Associations in Bellingen and Coffs Harbour, came into existence as a result of a funding opportunity made available through the NSW State Government. To a certain extent, the aims and objectives of these initiatives are driven by the priorities of the funder and Coffs Harbour City Council, as the lead body in the Alliance, which centre on general environmental awareness-raising and education, and ‘sustainable living’, with a particular focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation. The individuals participating in the various project activities share these motivations, as well as others such as the desire to eat well, to achieve a measure of self-reliance, and build greater levels of food security; as well as (amongst a minority) ideological considerations regarding the structure of the food system in Australia, which is dominated by the two major supermarkets.

Many of the groups are linked to broader national and international networks. The Bellingen Local Food Network identified itself with the broader global movement for food sovereignty. The community gardens are part of growing national and international phenomena. The Seed Savers Network is part of a wider Australian and international network, which, as noted earlier, links to the movement for seed sovereignty, an element of food sovereignty. Permaablitz originated in Melbourne in 2006 and has spread around Australia; Transition initiatives began a year earlier in England, and have now spread to over two-dozen countries, albeit located exclusively in North America, Western Europe and Australasia.\textsuperscript{159} Both Permaablitz and Transition have their roots in permaculture, which originated in Australia in the late 1970s and has also spread internationally.\textsuperscript{160} Farmers’ markets and CSAs likewise constitute growing national and international phenomena.

\textsuperscript{158} For example, the commercial growing of potatoes on the Dorrigo plateau, a traditional form of agriculture for decades, has declined rapidly in recent years.


In terms of socio-economic composition, consistent with local food movements elsewhere, and localisation movements generally in the developed world, the participants in the embryonic Coffs Coast local food movement are overwhelmingly white, and mostly middle class. There is for example no involvement as yet of the sizeable African immigrant community in Coffs Harbour, nor of indigenous communities. Nor has any effort yet been made to work with emergency providers of food relief in the region, who serve individuals and families living at or below the poverty line. The lack of engagement to date with these groups is consistent with the movement reflecting generally middle class concerns about sustainability and resilience, with little attention being paid thus far to questions of social justice and access to healthy food for under-served communities. In these respects, the movement would seem, for the most part, to be a clear manifestation of ‘defensive localism’ critiqued by Melanie DuPuis and her colleagues.\(^\text{161}\)

As regards its trajectories, the movement has expanded rapidly in a short period. It is probably no coincidence that the year of most rapid growth was 2008, when several major events occurred internationally, including: a food price crisis and food riots; a spike in oil prices that generated widespread discussion of Peak Oil; and the onset of the Global Financial Crisis.\(^\text{162}\) As all these tendencies seem to be re-emerging, albeit in different forms, in late 2011 and 2012, it is reasonable to expect that the numbers of people taking an interest in local food in the region will continue to grow.\(^\text{163}\)

Much work remains to be done in terms of deepening and broadening the movement, and in creating democratic structures that enable participation from many more stakeholders in the food system such as farmers’ representatives and emergency providers of food relief. There have been proposals and discussions around the establishment of a Small Farms Centre and a regional Food Policy Council, however no resourcing is yet available for such initiatives. The Local Food Alliance is perceived as largely driven by Coffs Council and project-specific, and this has acted as a disincentive to the involvement of groups and individuals not connected with the funded project. This raises questions as to what will become of the Alliance once the funding ends in July 2012. The extent of institutional support for the movement is also uncertain, with many local councillors unconvinced of the benefits or merits of local food, as distinct from ‘traditional’ agriculture for distribution via centralised market structures, or for export.

The Food Connect model of community-shared agriculture in Australia

Community-shared or community-supported agriculture is a principal means by which local farmers and their supporters in rural and urban communities have attempted to redress the inequalities and irrationalities of the capitalist food system.\(^\text{164}\) When La

\(^{161}\) DuPuis et al 2006 op cit.

\(^{162}\) As Gavin Bridge argues persuasively, from the perspective of critical political ecology and economy, the conventional and popular way in which Peak Oil is theorised and understood as a ‘simple’ matter of ‘below-ground’ physical constraints on supply is problematic: 2011 op cit. I discuss this further in Chapter 6.

\(^{163}\) This trend will be reinforced by the fact that, after two years of delays, the community gardens in Coffs Harbour and the Bellingen High School have now been established.

Via Campesina speaks of localised food systems and forms of direct exchange between farmers and consumers, this is the type of model they most frequently have in mind. A community-supported agriculture initiative is

[generalized as a localized food production and consumption system, organized to share farming risks between producers and consumers, practice ecologically sensitive forms of food production, and contribute to building community and educating the shareholders about agricultural processes and realities through their participation.]

Traditionally, a group of consumers - usually called 'shareholders' or 'subscribers', will agree to invest in the farm for a growing season, spreading the costs of farm operation, including a fair return for the grower, between themselves; and receiving in return a weekly box of farm produce. This form of exchange is portrayed in the community-supported agriculture and local food literature as representing a decommmodification of food and food-based relationships, which clearly distinguishes it from the anonymous cash nexus of capitalist market exchanges.

This model of food distribution originated in Japan in the mid-1960s as teikei, which means 'cooperation', and is often translated as 'food with a farmer's face on it'. From there, it spread to Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, where it has so far achieved the largest impact in terms of an exponential growth in the number of community-supported agriculture initiatives.

Like the local food movement on the Coffs Coast, I am involved with Food Connect in a professional and personal capacity. I met the founder of the Brisbane-based Food Connect enterprise, Robert Pekin, in mid-2009, in my project work with the Coffs Coast Local Food Alliance. Since then I have worked with Robert in the Food Connect Foundation, established in 2010 to further certain strategic objectives, notably the piloting in Australia of farmland trusts as a mechanism to protect prime farmland from continued urban sprawl. So as with the Coffs Coast local food movement, my qualitative research with Food Connect takes the form of participant observation. While my degree of familiarity may impact to some extent on the 'objectivity' of my observations, they are enriched by my unparalleled access to Robert Pekin over several years, the high degree of trust that exists between us and, as a result, the

---

165 Ibid., 203.
166 Ibid., 204.
168 Japanese Organic Agriculture Association, *TEIKEI System – Producer-Consumer Co-partnership*, "Teikei" is an idea to create an alternative distribution system, not depending on the conventional market. Though the forms of "teikei" vary, it is basically a direct distribution system. To carry it out, the producer(s) and the consumer(s) have talks and contact to deepen their mutual understanding: both of them provide labor and capital to support their own delivery system. In this system they usually set delivery stations, where the nearest consumers of 3 to 10 families can get the delivered products. The Japanese organic agriculture movement started with this "teikei" system. "Teikei" is not only a practical idea but also a dynamic philosophy to make people think of a better way of life either as a producer or as a consumer through their interaction": http://www.joaa.net/english/teikei.htm#ch3-1, accessed 25.9.11.
169 The United States had a few dozen such initiatives in the mid-1980s, and by 2008 that number had risen to 1,500, with 12,549 farms participating, according to the 2007 US Agricultural Census: see: Feagan and Henderson op cit., 204; http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml, accessed 25.9.11.
detailed understanding I have developed of the Food Connect ‘journey’ over time as an ‘insider’, that would not have been possible as an ‘impartial’ researcher conducting one or two time-limited interviews. It is for these reasons that I have selected Food Connect as a case study for this thesis.

As I discuss in Chapter 7, Robert Pekin is a ‘failed’ dairy farmer, having lost his father’s property in the context of the commercialisation and de-regulation of the Australian dairy industry in the mid-1990s. As he describes it, his path to recovery, or redemption, came in the establishment of a small-scale, single-farm community-supported agriculture initiative on a piece of land he leased from a supportive farmer near Hobart. At the time, Pekin had no financial resources, and the arrangement he came to with the farmer had many elements of what Brazilian author Euclides Mance calls a ‘solidarity economy’:

I said I’d run [the paddock] as a [community-supported agriculture initiative], and I explained it to him. And he said, what is it, some kind of communist thing? And I said, no, I don’t think it’s that, it’s just a new model of farming, it’s from the philosophy of social engagement, it’s a risk-sharing opportunity for subscribers and farmers. So he let me have the paddock for six months, rent-free, free electricity and free water, as long as I worked a day a week for him. It was a great deal.

Pekin built the garden by hand, driven by passion, rather than any expectation of personal financial gain. He obtained part-time work at a fish-farm, and used his wages to pay for the materials and plants for his market garden. He began by growing salad vegetables and leafy greens, selling them on the side of the road, and to local cafes and restaurants with whom he made contact, ‘while we built up the subscription model’. In keeping with the principles of agro-ecology, and in order to have sufficient variety to make up an attractive box of produce, Pekin diversified his production to the maximum extent possible.

Consistent with the philosophy of ‘seed sovereignty’, Pekin also began to collect and propagate his own seed, with the help of a local grower, knowledgeable in those techniques. After he returned to Colac for a month’s visit to repair relations with his father and to speak to former dairy farmer colleagues interested in diversifying along the community-supported agriculture lines, he left his Hobart venture to the local people, and began a five-year journey (1999-2004) travelling round Australia working with farmers to help them set up community-supported agriculture initiatives.

He managed to help establish nine community-supported agriculture initiatives in Western Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria. However, by 2004, Pekin could see that while a great deal of enthusiasm had been generated around the concept, its success in practice was at best mixed. Most of the initiatives he had helped established, as well as others that had been established

---


171 Interview with the author, 30.10.11.

172 “I grew 70 different types of vegetables. Within those types, I’d have another 7-8 varieties of carrots, and 12 varieties of tomatoes, and 20 varieties of garlic. Cos’ I wanted to know what would grow on the farm, and be most productive”: Interview with the author, 30.10.11.
independently, were folding. Pekin, who by that time was ‘heavily invested in the [community-supported agriculture] movement worldwide’, concluded that two crucial steps were needed in the Australian context to make the model viable. 173 First, it had to be implemented as a multi-farmer, rather than a single-farmer, model, so that the burden of growing the produce didn’t all fall on the one farmer. Secondly, it needed to be located within the capital cities, in order to access a larger market. 174

By this point (2004), Pekin had moved to Brisbane, was in the process of helping to establish two more community-supported agriculture initiatives in Beerwah, and was still giving talks to farmers and the public about the model. He was asked by a group of seven farmers in the Lockyer Valley to help them set up a multi-farmer community-supported agriculture venture, which would sell into Brisbane. The venture was set up and commenced operations, but it eventually fell apart due to internal conflicts amongst the farmers, and the bankruptcy of the lead farmer in the group.

From the failure of this venture emerged Food Connect Pty Ltd. Food Connect is a hybrid of a single-farm community-supported agriculture initiative, because it brings together a larger number of farmers and growers, with a larger number of subscribers; and it does this by creating an intermediary social enterprise to facilitate the packing, marketing and distribution of the produce. Thus, Food Connect Brisbane obtains produce from about 70 growers, and provides weekly boxes of produce to around 1000 subscribers in Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Other key differences are that, unlike a traditional single-farm community-supported agriculture initiative, the subscribers are not obliged to invest in an entire growing season (typically six months). Rather, their minimum subscription period is four weeks, although Food Connect encourages subscribers to take out longer subscriptions if possible, and some do, up to a year or more in a few cases. Although there is not the direct, personal relationship with a single individual grower, Food Connect strives to retain the ‘community building’ and educational aspects of a community-supported agriculture initiative. To this end, a ‘Farm Letter’ is included with every box, profiling one of the supplying farmers, and offering recipes and suggestions for the produce. Food Connect also organises regular weekend-long farm tours to a few of the local farmers, so that subscribers can get to meet and know their farmers in person.

In terms of the key successes and challenges of the model to date, according to evaluations by independent consultants, as well as the enterprise’s own data, the main successes include:

173 Robert’s visits to half a dozen of the community-supported agriculture initiatives which had folded revealed that the primary reasons for their failure were identified as it being ‘simply too hard to establish a community group, and to grow that many vegetables for a box’: interview with the author, 30.10.11.

174 Interview with the author, 30.10.11. As a confirmation of the potential for symbiosis between theory and practice, Robert’s thinking about the multi-farmer model became ‘solidified’ after he read an academic article in which a scholar advanced the view that only this model would be viable in the longer-term.
• increased farmer viability, with an average of 40-55 cents in each food dollar going back to the farmers and growers, as compared with 10-15 cents in the supermarket / central market system
• improved health outcomes - Food Connect subscribers report an increase in their consumption of fruit and vegetables by as much as 50%; and children of subscribers report a higher level of familiarity with fruit and vegetables
• being a source of inspiration for others around the country wanting to do the same (e.g. Bello Food Box, CERES Fair Food)
• being regarded as a model of a sustainable social enterprise - reduced carbon and ecological footprints compared to mainstream food distribution

In its six years in operation, Food Connect has always struggled financially. Its survival has been due, to a significant extent, to the tremendous personal sacrifice and commitment of Robert Pekin, and also of a number of committed staff, who have worked for years at minimum wage rates. Food Connect was established with no start-up loans or grants from any source, and this has placed it at a disadvantage ever since. While it may be achieving good outcomes for its farmers, a number of whom have said they would have abandoned farming had it not been for Food Connect, its social justice outcomes in terms of its own workforce is much more debatable.

A further substantial challenge has been the constant reality of subscriber ‘churn’; that is, an inability to retain large numbers of subscribers for the long-term. The churn rate has often reached levels as high as 80 or 90%, which has placed great pressure on Food Connect to market itself in order to continually attract new subscribers. Thus far, it has managed to do so, although the inability to deal with the churn situation must place question marks over the viability of this business model, which relies almost entirely on a single product line, in the long-term.

Exit surveys conducted by Food Connect attribute the churn to the pervasiveness of attachment by former subscribers to the culture of consumer choice. That is, departing subscribers have simply got sick of receiving the same types of vegetables and fruit, week in and week out, in their boxes. One result is that some of the produce is left unused and then thrown away, leading subscribers to the conclusion that the service is not good value for money. Dealing with this attachment to choice, and the related lack of a culture of eating seasonally and locally, is a major challenge for Food Connect and similar businesses.

In 2010 Food Connect expanded into Sydney and Adelaide, with mixed results. Food Connect Adelaide started very well, but entered into a crisis after about nine months when it started experiencing high levels of churn. The Directors took the view that the company was insolvent, and closed its doors on 30 June 2011, after approximately 15 months’ operation. Food Connect Sydney started much more slowly, and has steadily increased its subscriber base over time. Food Connect Sydney also had the cushion of a $125,000 start-up grant from Social Ventures Australia.

175 Food Connect received a Banksia Sustainability Award from the Queensland Government in 2010.
As regards the socio-economic composition of Food Connect subscribers, market research for Food Connect has identified that the majority of its subscribers are female and fall with the demographic known in marketing jargon as LOHAS - Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability. According to the LOHAS Journal, this market segment includes from 13-19% of the US adult population and is worth $290 billion per year ‘for goods and services focused on health, the environment, social justice, personal development and sustainable living’. In Australia the LOHAS market is predicted to reach $27 billion by the end of 2011, and includes 11% of the adult population. Organic produce is known to be a LOHAS product, which means that LOHAS individuals will tend to be in the middle to upper income brackets. Thus, as with conditions for its workers, Food Connect has not, as yet, adequately addressed the issue of improved access to healthy food for lower socio-economic and marginalised groups. This places its social justice credentials under further scrutiny.

In terms of the motivations and philosophy of the Food Connect founders, they clearly see themselves as ‘social entrepreneurs’. That is, they view themselves as innovative and inspirational individuals, working to achieve social change using a business approach. In this respect, their ideology is supportive of market capitalism, but a reformed version of it that consistently achieves a ‘triple bottom line’ result.

Robert Pekin also speaks enthusiastically about ‘associative economics’, a form of economic thought that seeks ‘to place human beings at the centre of all economic processes’. Associate economics is said to steer a ‘third way’ between free market capitalism and state-controlled socialism, in order to facilitate ‘the shift from competitive, national economies to the inherent dynamics of a single global economy’. The development of the field owes much to the economic thought of Rudolf Steiner, who is also regarded as the philosophical originator of community-supported agriculture. The community-supported agriculture model and associative economics are linked in the following way by Gary Lamb:

---

179 Ibid.
181 One of the role models mentioned in conversation is Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank and Nobel Peace Prize recipient for his role in empowering poor and marginalised women through microcredit loans: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Yunus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Yunus), accessed 26.9.11.
The most basic necessity of earthly life, food, can provide the starting point for moving from our present government-guided, production-driven market economy, which is based on competition, to an independent, associative economy based on consumer needs and conscious, rational decisions between producers and consumers.\(^{186}\)

In such articulations community-supported agriculture initiatives and associative economics are understood to be pointing towards a co-operative, post-capitalist future society and economy. Thus, one of the most potentially transformative elements of the community-supported agriculture model is said to be the way in which it facilitates a direct dialogue between farmers and ‘eaters’ as to what should be grown, and how much, to meet everyone’s needs; as opposed to production being driven by considerations of profit.\(^{187}\) Food Connect, however, as a hybridised version of a community-supported agriculture initiative, does not facilitate such a direct dialogue between its farmers and its subscribers.

As regards possible future directions and trajectories, although it has managed to survive in a marketplace dominated by cultural assumptions of ‘cheap food’ and ‘endless consumer choice’ all year-round, Food Connect has in its short life struggled to stabilise, let alone grow significantly. When expansion came in the form of new operations opening in Adelaide and Sydney, the fact that one of these failed in little over a year prompts the question: how viable is the business model in Australian conditions? At a time when farmers’ markets are experiencing strong growth across the country; when new community gardens are similarly coming into existence on a regular basis; and when the LOHAS market segment is expected to grow exponentially, in theory there should be a growing demand for the sort of ‘ethical’ and ‘socially and environmentally conscious’ buying relationship that Food Connect offers. One thousand subscribers a week in a market place of several million potential customers is clearly not going to make any serious inroads into the established retail distribution system in Australia for fresh food. Hence *prima facie* the Food Connect model is doing little - in strict economic terms - to shift the balance of forces within the Australian capitalist food system and so contribute to the wider counter-hegemonic struggle.

While box schemes can grow to large sizes - Riverford Organic Vegetables in the United Kingdom delivers 47,000 boxes a week, after starting with local deliveries to 30 people\(^{188}\) - Food Connect has not experienced the sort of growth that might indicate that it will scale up significantly. This raises the question as to how the local food movement can achieve a greater economic and social impact, an issue that has been recognised and discussed in North America.\(^{189}\) One of the approaches being developed and implemented there is the concept of a multifunctional Regional Food Hub, which provides essential infrastructure in the local food supply chain in the form of an aggregator and distributor of local produce.\(^{190}\) Preliminary research undertaken

---

\(^{186}\) Op cit.

\(^{187}\) Ibid. As discussed in Chapter 2, the profit imperative invariably points towards maximisation of production, with all the associated social and ecological tensions that flow from this dynamic.

\(^{188}\) \[http://www.riverford.co.uk/about_riverford/\], accessed 26.9.11.

\(^{189}\) Mount op cit.

\(^{190}\) Barham, J., 2011, *Regional Food Hubs: Understanding the Scope and Scale of Food Hub Operations, Preliminary Findings from a National Survey of Regional Food Hubs*, United States Department of
by the US Department of Agriculture has found that over 100 such food hubs now exist in the United States, most established since 2006; and with a significant percentage having explicit social justice mandates.  

By selling to local businesses such as restaurants, independent grocers and institutions such as schools, hospitals and aged care centres, these hubs arguably represent a more secure and resilient business model than household vegetable box schemes like Food Connect. They also have considerable potential to reach a much greater scale of operation than the traditional community-supported agriculture initiative. As discussed in Chapter 7, the concept is now under consideration by local governments and health departments in some areas of Australia. There are questions as to how and whether the potentially transformative elements of the community-supported agriculture model, as outlined above, might be retained in a Food Hub operation; and I will address these in Chapter 7.

Agriculture Marketing Service.  

191 Average annual sales approach $US1 million; the average number of business customers that each hub serves is 40; the average number of jobs each hub creates is 13; and more than 40% of hubs are working in ‘food deserts’ to increase access to fresh and healthy produce to under-served and vulnerable populations: ibid.
Chapter 4

The political-institutional context

“[T]he world as a whole is not poor...malnutrition exists and persists because of the powerlessness of the poor and the indifference of the rich...On the whole, the rich really don't care much about the poor...We do not yet have a strong community at a global level. Many poor people, and even entire countries, are abandoned to their fate...In a genuinely caring global community, people would not be left to live and die in intolerable conditions in any part of the globe...In the end, there is only one good reason to end hunger: we care about each other. Ending hunger is the right thing to do...People should be able to live in dignity because they are people. No other reason should be necessary. The main reason for ending hunger in the world is that it is not right for people to remain hungry. No other reason should be necessary. Any other reason is inadequate”.

George Kent

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the political-institutional context that underpins the consolidation and expansion of the globalising capitalist food system, so that in Chapter 5 I can examine the responses of the Food Sovereignty movement, and draw some preliminary conclusions as to whether, and to what extent, the balance of forces at the political-institutional level is altering.

Consistent with my neo-Gramscian political ecology, the principal terms of the political-institutional context are that the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system is enabled and sustained by the framework of globalising capitalism at the global and national levels, which has been, and continues to be, both progressively consolidated, and increasingly contested, over time. I draw on the recent analytical framework developed by Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck to explore the transformative potential of the food movements vis-à-vis what they term the corporate food regime; and in particular their distinction between ‘neoliberal’ and ‘reformist’ tendencies within the regime. This distinction is useful in terms of mapping the shifting contours according to which the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system has been negotiated and re-negotiated in recent years in the context of the 2008 ‘global food crisis’.

This chapter provides a (non-comprehensive) overview of the key moments in the erection of this framework in recent decades, which, cumulatively and collectively, can be viewed as consolidating and expanding a pattern of globalising capitalist relations around food and agriculture. As will be recalled, globalising capitalism is characterised by the ‘development of economic relations favourable to the

---

interest[s] of [the] dominating countries’, with the role of the state, in both the dominating and dominated countries, being essential to this process. The contemporary phase of globalising capitalism is strongly associated with the financialisation of capitalism that began with the breaking down of the Keynesian compromise that had structured the non-Soviet bloc world economy since 1945; a key moment of rupture came with the abandonment of the fixed US dollar-gold exchange standard by US President Richard Nixon in August 1971. As a project intended to restore power to ruling elites in the core capitalist countries, as well as to shore up US hegemony in the international system, debt played (and continues to play) a critical role in the unfolding of neoliberalism in general, and in the construction of the globalising capitalist food system in particular.

At the international level, the Third World debt crisis, combined with the Thatcher and Reagan revolutions in America and Britain, established the conditions in which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) deployed processes of ‘structural adjustment’ to transform the nature of agriculture in many indebted Southern countries. This was closely followed by the inclusion of trade in agricultural commodities in the Uruguay Round of the Global Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which culminated in the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995. The WB’s ‘market-led agrarian reform’ program has continued the integration of Southern agricultural systems into the globalising capitalist food system. The priorities of the core capitalist powers, and the extent of the lobbying influence of major food corporations, were recently further confirmed in the context of negotiations leading up to a first-ever High Level Meeting of the United Nations on non-communicable diseases, held in September 2011. Previously expressed commitments to specific targets and deadlines as regards the burden of dietary-related ill-health were watered down, and language suggesting that regulatory

---

measures be adopted to ‘discourag[e] the production and marketing of unhealthy foods’ was abandoned.  

A series of international food summits and high-level conferences of the G8 and the G20 have been held since 1996 to provide a forum for heads of state and agriculture ministers to discuss the problem of ‘global food security’ and, since 2008, the ‘global food crisis’; and to formulate measures and strategies to be taken to respond to these phenomena. As mentioned in Chapter 3, these various international gatherings have produced a certain framing of ‘global food security’ which is basically supportive of the further consolidation and expansion of the globalising capitalist food system, forming part of the contemporary ‘common sense’ that sustains it. This conceptualisation of food security, and the means by which it can and should be achieved, reveal how the hegemony of the system is currently being re-negotiated. The extent to which this understanding of food security has been internalised by some governments is illustrated by reference to the release in June 2011 of the Australian Government’s Issues Paper for a first-ever National Food Plan.

These moments at the international level have in turn been supported and reinforced by steps taken at the national level by the core capitalist powers, the United States especially. Only some of the most significant of these steps can be dealt with here. In the first place, the US and European governments have continued the annual multi-billion dollar subsidy payments to commodity producers, first established in the context of the great Depression of the 1930s. These subsidies in turn form a large part of the context of the push for further trade liberalisation, as well as the opposition to it. Similarly, the setting of targets for agro-fuel production, and the payment of production and consumption subsidies by these and other governments, have played a key role in enabling the ‘agro-fuels boom’, the impacts of which I consider in Chapter 6. The erection by the US government of a regulatory and intellectual property regime favourable to the commercial expansion of genetically modified seed (GM), together with governmental promotion of the benefits of this technology, has resulted in 146 million hectares in 29 countries being planted with this seed in 2010, mainly for crops such as corn, soy and canola, from a baseline of 1.7 million hectares in 1996. Another measure taken by the US government which has enabled the expansion of the globalising capitalist food system has been the loosening of regulations regarding financial speculation in commodities; again, the impact of such speculation will be discussed in Chapter 6.

---


10 “The gist of New Deal farm policy was enhanced government spending to restore farm prices and hence farmer incomes. Specifically, the Agricultural Adjustment Acts of 1933 and 1938 entailed government loans that would allow farmers to store commodities rather than market them, so [as to] not glut the market. The loan program provided a minimum price support, because if market prices fell below the set rate, farmers would then put excess grain in storage…”: Gutham 2011 op cit., 57.

11 According to the industry peak body’s annual review: International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications, available at [http://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/briefs/42/executivesummary/default.asp](http://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/briefs/42/executivesummary/default.asp), accessed 26.9.11. It should be noted that bio-tech plantings are heavily concentrated in a few countries, notably the US, Brazil, Argentina, India, Canada, China, Paraguay, Pakistan and South Africa, with 13 of the 29 countries devoted a minimal acreage (less than 100,000 hectares) to these crops.
The political-institutional context at the global governance level

As indicated above, the key moments in the construction of the political-institutional framework for the globalising capitalist food system were the advent of the Third World debt crisis, the promotion of trade liberalisation, and the rolling back of redistributive agrarian reform. After briefly summarising the contemporary global framework as it applies to the food system, I turn to examine each in turn.

Applying their ‘comparative analytical framework for different political and social trends within the corporate food regime and global food movements’, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck discern ‘two main trends within the corporate food regime’, namely ‘Neoliberal’ and ‘Reformist’.\footnote{2011 op cit., 115.} In their assessment, the neoliberal trend is hegemonic and is ‘managed by institutions such as the USDA, the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, the WTO, the private sector financing arm of the WB, and the IMF’, in collaboration with ‘the major agrifood monopolies, [the] agricultural policies of the G8 and big philanthropy capital’; while the reformist trend is ‘managed by weaker offices in the same institutions’, as well as some agencies of the United Nations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation.\footnote{Ibid., 115, 119, 121. By ‘big philanthropy capital’ the authors are referring mainly to the protagonist role played by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in promoting the ‘Green Revolution for Africa’ in partnership with the Monsanto Corporation: 119. They draw explicitly on Michael Edwards’ construct of ‘philanthrocapitalism’, defined as the belief that ‘business thinking and market methods will save the world’: Edwards, M., 2008, Small Change: Why Business Won’t Save the World, Berret-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2.} Basing themselves on the Polanyian ‘double-movement’ thesis, which I have discussed in Chapter 2, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck argue that the contemporary dynamic within the corporate food regime is one ‘in which reform is largely subjugated and instrumentalized by liberalization’ because thus far there has been insufficient pressure, either due to social movement activism or ‘environmental implosion’, to ‘substantively reform’.\footnote{Ibid., 124.} The leading food-related UN agencies—notably the FAO and its reformed Committee on World Food Security, the High-Level Task Force on Global Food Security, and the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food—are, in their assessment, becoming effectively sidelined as regards the taking of key decisions in global agri-food governance.\footnote{Ibid., 121.} Rather, the WB has emerged as the key global governance institution in this field.\footnote{Ibid.} Its 2008 World Development Report has set the parameters for a global market- and free trade-led set of policy responses to what appears to be a near-permanent global food crisis; and its market-led agrarian reform program is established a framework of land titling and property rights which is facilitating renewed concentration of landholdings and the acceleration of a global ‘land grab’ in many countries.\footnote{Ibid.} As I discuss further in Chapters 5 and 6, the land-grab phenomenon expresses in several respects the key tensions that are now acutely manifesting within the globalising capitalist food

\textsuperscript{12} 2011 op cit., 115.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 115, 119, 121.
\textsuperscript{14} Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011 op cit., 124.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 119, citing as evidence the establishment of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program as a ‘multilateral trust fund set up by the US, Canada, Spain and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to span the gap between the $40 billion a year needed to end hunger, the $20 billion promised by the G8 countries, and the $14 billion that is actually forthcoming on these promises’.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.,
system as the ecological and social rift widens. As McMichael and Friedman would put it within food regime theory terms, the very naming of this phenomenon as a ‘land-grab’ highlights the extent to which the hegemony of the corporate food regime is becoming destabilised.

The context for contemporary phenomena such as land-grabs, and associated regime destabilisation and contestation, is the era of structural adjustment ushered in by the ‘Third World debt crisis’ of the 1980s. Previous to that decade, and consistent with the prevailing economic development theories of the post-colonial era, as well as the key role played by peasants in many independence struggles, many states across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and south and south-east Asia, prioritized the modernization of peasant agriculture during the 1960s and 1970s. They were supported in this effort by Northern donors, in the belief that raising productivity levels amongst the peasantry in largely rural societies would generate surpluses and tax revenues, as well as raising levels of demand and consumption; and that this would in turn create the conditions for the broader modernization and industrialization of these countries. Expenditures on rural development, including subsidized fertilizer and seed packages, price supports for farmers and state-led procurement and distribution, rose in many places during this period. As a result, crop yields increased, rural poverty fell, rural employment began to diversify, and many countries in the South achieved and retained the status of net exporters of agricultural produce until the 1980s.

This status of widespread net food export status began to be reversed during the 1980s, and by 2008 ‘about 70 per cent of countries in the Global South [were] net food importers’. This transition from relative food autonomy to growing food dependency, and rising levels of poverty, malnutrition and food insecurity, came about for several reasons. Structural adjustment programs negotiated in the wake of the Third World debt crisis, which saw levels of debt across the South increase by 4000% between 1970 and 2002, featured prominently. These programs failed in their ostensible objectives of ‘mobilizing external investment’, improving ‘world market access’ for Southern exports, promoting sustainable growth and reducing poverty. Yet, if, as appears more likely, their real purpose was to open up Southern

---


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 71-2; also Patnaik 2003 *op cit.*, 47.


countries to global financial capital, create the conditions that ‘enable[d] [domestic] government[s] to push through [austerity] policies that otherwise would have been rejected’, and thereby facilitate the transfer of resources and wealth from South to North, and then they must be judged a success.\(^{25}\)

The key shift came in 1981, when the WB released its *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa report*.\(^{26}\) It attributed the economic difficulties that the continent was experiencing in the wake of the second oil shock to the ‘over-involvement of the African states in their economies’.\(^{27}\) Conditions attached to loans required the dismantling of previous measures of support for peasant agriculture; and these conditionailities have in turn led to the undermining of food production capacity, and contributed significantly to the growth of import dependency.\(^{28}\) More generally, the deflationary policies of across-the-board reductions in government spending, wage cuts, and interest rate rises caused anemic growth and long recessions in many Southern countries, except where neoliberal policies were not adopted.\(^{29}\) The reversals in economic growth rates dwarf the comparatively paltry

\(^{71-2}\) Noting that the average


\(^{26}\) Bello 2009 *op. cit.*, 70-1; Bryceson 2010 *op. cit.*, 72. This report reflected the ideological ‘“purge” of all Keynesian influences’ from both the WB and the IMF in the early 1980s and the subsequent adherence of staff within both institutions to a developing ‘neoliberal orthodoxy’, thus ushering in the ideological hegemony of the neoliberal tendency in the globalizing capitalist food system: Harvey 2005 *op. cit.*, 29; Bello 2009 *op. cit.*, 71; Bryceson *op. cit.*, 72.

\(^{27}\) Bryceson *op. cit.*, 72.


\(^{29}\) Harvey notes how neoliberalism has failed to resolve the underlying problem of ‘flagging capital accumulation’, with average global growth rates falling from 3.5% in 1960s, to 2.4% in the 1970s, to 1.4% in the 1980s, to 1.1% in the 1990s, and the high growth rates were achieved in countries that had adopted ‘radically different institutional arrangements’ to the global centres of neoliberalism, namely China, Japan (during the 1980s) and West Germany: 2006, ‘Neo-liberalism as Creative Destruction’, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 88(2), 145-158, 151-2. Based on a data set of 1024 annual observations of 79 countries from 1979-1990, Adam Prezowski and James Vreeland found that the average growth rate for countries participating in IMF programs was 2% compared to 4.4% for those that were not participating: *op. cit.*, 403. Other analyses suggest that sub-Saharan Africa experienced negative growth for the whole of the 1980s: Sharma, D., 2005, ‘Trade Liberalization in Agriculture: Lessons for the First 10 Years of the WTO’, APRODEV, Brussels; see also Weisbrot, M., and Rosnick, D., 2003, ‘Latin America’s Growth Failure Continues into the 21st Century’, [http://www.cepr.net/publications/another_lost_decade.htm](http://www.cepr.net/publications/another_lost_decade.htm), accessed 15.5.04; also Weisbrot, M., Baker, D., Kraev, E., and Chen, J., 2003, ‘The Scorecard on Globalisation 1980 -2000: Twenty Years of Diminished Progress’, [http://www.cepr.net/globalization/scorecard_on_globalization.htm](http://www.cepr.net/globalization/scorecard_on_globalization.htm), accessed 15.5.04; also Easterly, W., 2005, ‘What Did Structural Adjustment Adjust? The Association of Policies
sums that have been transferred by Northern countries in the form of ‘development aid’.\(^{30}\) Import dependency, coupled with the establishment of what McMichael terms a ‘world price’ for agricultural commodities, have rendered poor and marginalized populations in the South, who spend fifty percent or more of their income on food, highly vulnerable to the increasing volatility in food prices over recent years.\(^{31}\)

Levels of food import dependency and associated vulnerabilities created by structural adjustment programs became further entrenched with the liberalisation of trade in agriculture.\(^{32}\) The contemporary push for trade liberalisation under US hegemony recalls in certain respects the pre-World War I era of free trade under British imperial hegemony, which constituted the first ‘global food regime’.\(^{33}\) The theoretical justification for free trade is found in the ‘law of comparative advantage’ and specialisation developed by the British classical economist David Ricardo.\(^{34}\) Thus, developing countries were told that food security, based on self-sufficiency in food grains production, was passé in a modern globalised world, even for large countries with poor populations. Rather, they would benefit from specializing in the non-grain crops in which they had a ‘comparative advantage’ by increasing their exports, and purchasing their grains and dairy products from northern countries that had surpluses of those products.\(^{35}\)

According to its promoters, the most prominent of which were the representatives of the US and European governments, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and the WTO would implement Ricardo’s law and maximise universal welfare, by

[D]eveloping countries were told that food security, based on self-sufficiency in food grains production, was passé in a modern globalised world, even for large countries with poor populations. Rather, they would benefit from specializing in the non-grain crops in which they had a ‘comparative advantage’ by increasing their exports, and purchasing their grains and dairy products from northern countries that had surpluses of those products.\(^{35}\)

According to its promoters, the most prominent of which were the representatives of the US and European governments, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and the WTO would implement Ricardo’s law and maximise universal welfare, by

[E]nding subsidies to inefficient producers, tearing down tariff walls, and ending the practice of holding government-controlled food stocks. World market supplies would then move to where need is greatest. In turn, world prices for agricultural commodities would rise, which would be good for farmers [and] consumers [would] pay less, benefiting from the efficiencies created by sharper competition.\(^{36}\)

\(^{30}\) Basing himself on World Bank figures, Robert Pollin (2003, *Contours of Descent: US Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity*, Verso, London & New York) notes how the less developed countries (excluding China) recorded annual average growth rates of 5.5% from 1961-1980, but this dropped to 2.6% from 1981-2000. For the five-year period from 1995-1999, had the less developed countries (excluding China) returned to pre-neoliberal growth rates, their net gain would have been $2.4 trillion, or $480 billion per annum. This is more than five times what they would have received in development aid if the North collectively had met its promise of devoting 0.7% of GDP to aid; and more than ten times what was actually received over the period in aid ($55 billion per annum): 165-167.

\(^{31}\) McMichael 2010 op cit., 59-60.

\(^{32}\) As noted in Chapter 3, the inclusion of agriculture in the Uruguay Round of the Global Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (1986-1994) was the immediate impetus for the formation of La Via Campesina.

\(^{33}\) Friedmann and McMichael 1989

\(^{34}\) Ricardo, D., 1817, *On the Principles of Political Economy*. According to this ‘law’, a net total benefit will ensue to all countries in a trading relationship if each specialises in those productive activities in which they have either the greatest advantage or the least disadvantage. Murphy, S., 2010, *Free Trade in Agriculture: A Bad Idea whose Time is Done* in Magdoff and Tokar op cit., 103-119, 105-6.

\(^{35}\) Patnaik, U., 2010 op cit., 95.

\(^{36}\) Murphy op cit., 105; Sharma op cit., 19.
In practice, the benefits of trade liberalisation in agriculture have, according to critics, accrued almost entirely to transnational agri-business, while its adverse impacts have exacerbated an already severe global rural crisis.\(^37\) The collapse in development assistance funding for Southern agriculture since the 1980s adds further evidence to the picture of the wholesale abandonment of small-scale producers to the outcomes of a globalised free trade ‘free for all’, in which the playing field has been heavily tilted in favour of Northern agri-business interests.\(^38\) Three issues in particular stand out. One is that the United States and the European Union continue, in violation of the AoA, to pay their commodity producers hundreds of billions of dollars annually in farm payments (subsidies).\(^39\) This has led to the practice of the ‘agricultural dumping’: Northern transnational grain traders sell large volumes of basic grains into Southern markets at below the cost of production.\(^40\) Subsidy payments in the United States and the European Union encourage the over-production of certain commodities, depress global prices, and frequently rush into Southern countries as ‘import surges’, thereby undermining the conditions of trade for Southern farmers producing those commodities, such as cotton farmers in Burkina Faso and Benin.\(^41\) Estimates suggest the annual loss of export earnings to Southern farmers attributable to such over-production and dumping to be in the region of US$60 billion.\(^42\)

Secondly, WTO rules and structural adjustment programmes ‘pushed developing countries to eliminate their public food stocks’.\(^43\) Yet these were the foundation of domestic systems of grain procurement and ‘distribution at controlled prices[,] put in place after decolonization, precisely in order to break free from earlier colonial systems of specialization and trade that had severely undermined nutrition

\(^{37}\) Sharma *op cit.*; Murphy *op cit.*, 106-113. Fred Magdoff and Brian Tokar state bluntly that ‘the ideology of comparative advantage…is absolute rubbish. There are definite winners and losers in such a system, with the winners’ power to implement their desires trumping all other considerations’: 2010, *Agriculture and Food in Crisis: An Overview* in Magdoff and Tokar *op cit.*, 18.

\(^{38}\) ‘In 2007, the share of the EU’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) to agriculture was a little more than three percent of its total ODA spending. This was down from more than 13 percent in 1987. In the US it was a little under five percent of its overall ODA spending in 2007. This was down from more than 20 percent in 1980’: Anderson, M.D., 2009, ‘A Question of Governance: To Protect Agribusiness Profits or the Right to Food?’ *Agribusiness Action Initiatives*, available at [http://www.iatp.org/files/258_2_107086.pdf](http://www.iatp.org/files/258_2_107086.pdf), accessed 15.10.10.


\(^{40}\) Murphy *op cit.*, 11-12; Sharma *op cit.*, 10-14.

\(^{41}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{42}\) Sharma *op cit.*, 16.

\(^{43}\) Murphy *op cit.*, 110.
standards’. The result has been a steep rise in food import bills for many countries.

Third, the doctrine of comparative advantage, when combined with the need to earn foreign currency to meet interest payments on debts, has seen a significant shift from domestic food production to the growing of cash crops for export. For example, in the decade to 2001, India had witnessed a displacement of eight million hectares - over six per cent of its food producing land - to export crops: cotton, soybean, sugarcane, horticulture, floriculture and prawn farming.

Liberalised trade in agriculture has been experienced by millions of small farmers and rural communities as an aggressive form of economic coercion, and as accumulation by dispossession. Giving material expression to Bello’s heuristic device of the ‘Food Wars’ fought by ‘capitalism against the peasants’, agricultural commodity dumping and import surges have led to a rural exodus and accelerated the phenomenon of de-peasantisation; as many as two million Mexican small maize farmers, for example, left their farms in the wake of the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, from January 1994. Those farmers who have stayed on the land have done so under conditions of increasing hardship, including high levels of debt, which, in the case of cotton farmers in India, has resulted in an epidemic of suicides and other desperate measures such as the sale of organs. Domestic food production has been undermined in many places, and this has resulted in increasing levels of poverty, malnutrition and inequality.

The negative impacts of structural adjustment and trade liberalisation have been compounded by the rolling-back of processes of redistributive agrarian reform in recent decades. Historically, agrarian reform in the 20th century has taken a variety of forms. Redistributive agrarian reform - the expropriation of landed monopoly

44 Patnaik 2010 op cit., 95.
45 Murphy op cit., 110.
46 Patnaik 2010 op cit., 95.
47 Patnaik 2003 op cit., 51.
51 In the case of India, for example, Utsa Patnaik reports that ‘the average Indian family of five in 2005 was consuming a staggering 110kg less grain per year compared to 1991’, as well as a ‘steep decline in protein intake for four-fifths of the rural population over the period 1993-94 to 2004-05’; Patnaik 2010 op cit., 92. Patnaik argues that the actual levels of poverty in China and India have been severely underestimated by both governments, as well as by the World Bank, because they have abandoned a nutritional measure in favour of a CPI measure. She says that this has ‘produced absurdly low current official poverty lines’ of 12 rupees per day in 2005 ‘which would not have bought even one kilogram of open market rice’; and the same is true of China: 9.4. She concludes that ‘the correct poverty lines are more than double the official ones and applying them shows that the percentage of poor have not decreased but have risen sharply during the period of market oriented reforms and emphasis on exports’: 94.
52 In one recent typology, for example, four categories are identified: ‘cold war proxies’, ‘endogenous social revolution’, ‘postwar Allied consolidation’, and ‘endogenous political compromise’: Rosset, P., Patel, R., and Courville, M. (eds), 2006, Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform, Food
classes, and the distribution of their land to landless and land-poor peasants and small farmers, together with other support mechanisms to help the latter boost their production - is commonly said to have been one of the keys to successful and lasting economic development in countries such as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam and China. The first redistributive land reform of the 20th century is identified as that which followed the Mexican Revolution of 1910. It has been argued that the transition to capitalism required redistributive land reform to abolish pre-capitalist landed property because of its fundamentally unproductive nature. Currently, some scholars argue that this type of reform is the only way to deal effectively with the contemporary global crisis of under- and underemployment in many countries in the South.

While a number of largely successful agrarian reform programs were undertaken from the 1940s to the 1960s, many attempted programs were frustrated over succeeding decades by determined landlord opposition. Often, such opposition translated into violent repression of peasants mobilising either to defend their land from expropriation from powerful landed and capitalist interests, or, consistent with a ‘moral economy of the peasantry’, to agitate for redistributive land reform. Further, comprehensive redistributive agrarian reform required the sort of state intervention and regulation that structural adjustment was scaling back, so the impetus for this type of reform diminished as governments focused on measures to

---

53 Patnaik 2003 op cit., 39-40: ‘Much of China’s good growth, reduction in rural poverty and excellent performance on the human development indicators can be trade to the initial egalitarian land reform and its consolidation through the decentralised units like cooperatives and the later commune system up to 1980…Those developing countries that do not tackle the question of archaic agrarian relations and effectively abolish land monopoly soon find that their development strategy runs aground on account of an insufficiently expanding internal market which only a prosperous peasantry can provide’. See also Rosset, P., 2010, Fixing our Global Food System: Food Sovereignty and Redistributive Land Reform, in Magdoff and Tokar op cit., 189-205, citing the redistribution of land in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991 as a central factor in achieving a ‘remarkable rate of 4.2% per cent annual growth in per capita food production from 1996 through 2005’: 194. See also Griffin, K., Khan, A.R., and Ickowitz, A., 2002, ‘Poverty and the Distribution of Land’, Journal of Agrarian Change, 2(3), 279-330, 315, but for a contrary argument see Bramall, C., 2004, ‘Chinese Land Reform in the Long-Run Perspective and in the Wider East Asian Context’, Journal of Agrarian Change 4(1 & 2), 107-141. See also Mo, P.H., 2003, ‘Land Distribution Inequality and Economic Growth; Transmission Channels and Effects’, Pacific Economic Review, 8(2), 171-181, whose regression analysis found that; and distribution inequality has a significant negative effect on the rate of GDP and productivity growth.


56 Rosset op cit., 199; also van der Ploeg, J., 2008, The New Peasantries: Struggle for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization, Earthscan, London, who argues that ‘in most continents, there is only one adequate mechanism for tackling and superseding [the] condition of marginality and that is by enlarging the ranks of the peasantry and providing for peasant-managed forms of rural and agricultural development’: xvi.


finance external debt payment obligations. However, by the early years of the 21st century, three factors coalesced which led the WB to embrace agrarian reform once more, albeit of a rather different type. The first was the by-then acknowledged ‘systemic failure of structural adjustment’ to boost agricultural productivity or reduce rural poverty in the South. The second was the perceived need to respond to La Via Campesina’s campaign for a new round of redistributive agrarian reform. The third was the pressure placed on the ‘international financial institutions [to] develop a market-friendly policy response to the need for asset redistribution in [the] politically fragile circumstances’ that accompanied the end of apartheid and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Hence from the early-to-mid 1990s onwards the WB has worked with several countries across the South to implement what came to be known as ‘market-led agrarian reform’. Arguing that past ‘state-led’ agrarian reforms had failed because of ‘distortions of the land market, poor programme design and implementation, and excessive cost’, as well as elite resistance, the WB’s alternative was intended to secure:

[T]he redistribution of land from large to smaller owners via market transactions in order to achieve objectives of both social equity and economic efficiency…New ‘family farmers’ are to be drawn into increasingly liberalised markets for land, commodities and agricultural services.

In other words, this type of land reform was intended to deepen and broaden the penetration of capitalist market relations amongst the global peasantry; an irony, as one scholar notes, given ‘the well-documented failures of global capitalist development over the past 25 years’. While the impacts to date of this model of reform are still being evaluated and contested, critical assessments from numerous countries suggest that it has had a ‘very limited impact on patterns of landholding where reforms have actually been carried out’, and that its character is ‘pro-elite [and anti-poor’.

60 Ibid., also Borras 2008 op cit.
63 Ibid., 1420.
64 Akram-Lodhi 2007 op cit., 556.
Further, concerns are now being raised about the way in which the market for private property in land which the reforms are introducing can be used to facilitate large-scale acquisitions of arable land by foreign corporations and sovereign wealth funds - the so-called ‘global land-grab’. This highly contested phenomenon, which has been most prominent in sub-Saharan Africa, will be further discussed in Chapter 6. For present purposes, what is notable is that it is consistent with the general historical trajectory of recent decades which has been to create regulatory, legal and political frameworks favourable to the expansion of capitalist social relations and large-scale, industrialised agriculture. Recent examinations of the context behind several land deals in Mali, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia reveal that the World Bank has played a leading role in creating a ‘favourable climate for foreign investment’, including the promotion of reforms to customary land tenure arrangements which facilitate the leasing and sale of large areas of land. Meanwhile, in May 2012 the Food and Agriculture Organisation’s Committee on World Food Security released a ground-breaking document, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. These Guidelines, which were the result of three years’ of negotiations between governments and civil society actors, have been hailed by the latter as an important breakthrough in creating a global, rights-based framework for ensuring secure access to food-producing resources for rural and indigenous communities. They will be discussed briefly in Chapter 5.

The legitimising frame of ‘food security’

Above I have charted some of the key moments in the erection of the political-institutional architecture at the international level which has supported the controversial program of expropriation and redistributive agrarian reform commenced in Zimbabwe in 2000, discussed in Scoones, I., Marongwe, N., Mavedzenge, B., Mahenehene, J., Murimbarimba, F., and Sukume, C., 2010, Zimbabwe’s Land Reform: Myths and Realities, James Curry, Woodbridge, Suffolk. Contrary to the widespread perception disseminated in Northern media that the ‘fast-track’ land reform undertaken in Zimbabwe led to a collapse in agriculture production and chronic food insecurity, extensive empirical research has revealed a far more complex and differentiated picture (Scoones et al op cit.).


68 These reports have been published by the Oakland Institute, and constitute part of an intended series of seven. See (2011) ‘Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa: Country Reports from Mali, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia’, available at http://media.oaklandinstitute.org/special-investigation-understanding-land-investment-deals-africa, accessed 28.9.11.


globalising capitalist food system, and facilitated its expansion. In this section, I will examine how the continuing persistence of high levels of hunger and malnutrition in the contemporary world has provided the context in which the core capitalist states have used a series of World Food Summits and ‘high level meetings’ to legitimise the system’s continued expansion through a ‘productivist’ discourse of ‘global food security’. By this discourse, I mean the claim that ‘feeding the world’ can only be achieved via the continued expansion of large-scale, high-tech industrialised agriculture, together with the related claim, either made explicitly or by implication, that ‘low-tech’, small-scale, peasant agriculture is incapable of ‘feeding the world’. This productivist discourse at once seeks to renegotiate the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system by re-framing the common sense on which the system is based; and to de-legitimise claims made by food sovereignty proponents that their alternative represents an emerging ‘good sense’.

As a concept in international politics, ‘food security’ only emerged for the first time in the early 1970s, and at that time was understood in food supply and price stability terms at the macro level. Influenced by the work of development economist Amartya Sen, the conceptualisation of food security was refined over the following two decades to focus on issues of consumption and access at the individual and household levels, especially for poor and vulnerable people.

Normatively, food security as the guarantee to ‘all people at all times [of] physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food’ resembles in several respects the universal human right to adequate food; and indeed in numerous global summits and conferences in recent decades, states have, as I discuss below,

---


72 FAO Economic and Social Development Department, 2002, Food Security: Concepts and Measurement, available at http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm, accessed 11.10.11. The original definition of food security at the 1974 World Food Summit was the ‘availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices’: ibid.

73 Ibid. FAO’s State of Food Insecurity 2001 offered the following definition, now widely accepted: ‘Food security...exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life’. The seminal work of Sen’s was Poverty and Famines (1981, Clarendon Press, Oxford). Over ‘200 competing definitions’ of food security had already been identified by 1992: Smith, M., Pointing, J., and Maxwell, S., 1992, “Household Food Security, Concepts and Definitions: An annotated bibliography”, Development Bibliography No.8, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, cited in Alcock, R., 2009, ‘Speaking Food: A Discourse Analytic Study of Food Security’, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol Working Paper No.07-09, 10. Alcock notes how one of the leading experts on food security, Simon Maxwell, has traced ‘three paradigm shifts’ in its meaning since the 1970s: ‘from the global / national to the household / individual, from a food first perspective to a livelihood perspective, and from objective indicators to subjective perception’: 11. For a recent contrast of food security and food sovereignty, see Carney, M., 2012, ‘ “Food Security” and “Food Sovereignty”: What Frameworks are best suited for Social Equity in Food Systems?’ Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems and Community Development, 2(2), 71-88.
formally committed themselves to the achievement of both.\textsuperscript{74} However, as the globalising capitalist food system became hegemonic during the 1980s and 1990s, the means for achieving both food security and the right to food shifted from the public to the private sphere. Whilst still formally a state responsibility, food security - consistent with the general neo-liberal shift - became a policy goal to be achieved primarily via market mechanisms and private sector actors, with the state playing an enabling role in terms of setting the policy frameworks in which the market can function efficiently.\textsuperscript{75} These are the terms in which the hegemony of the system is being re-negotiated at present.

Accordingly, this ‘privatisation of food security’ delivery translates to calls for the further liberalisation of trade in agriculture, and the creation of enabling environments for greater foreign investment in the South, as part of the overall broadening and deepening of the social relations that constitute the globalising capitalist food system.\textsuperscript{76} One important element of this discourse - and thus of the common sense of the system - is that it is research, technology and science which saved hundreds of millions of people from hunger and starvation through the Green Revolution; and that therefore the peoples and governments of the world should now place their faith in the corporate inheritors of this tradition who are mapping out the path to food security in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century through biotechnology.\textsuperscript{77}

Over many years states have affirmed and reaffirmed their commitment and their responsibility to ‘eradicating hunger and malnutrition’, albeit with diminishing levels of ambition and confidence as the decades have passed and the numbers of malnourished people have increased. At the first World Food Summit, in 1974, when 400 million people were defined as ‘food insecure’, governments committed themselves to eradicating hunger within 10 years.\textsuperscript{78} The same goal - albeit with no stated time limit - was reaffirmed by representatives of 159 countries during the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition held in Rome in 1992, in the ‘World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition’.


\textsuperscript{75} McMichael 2003 \textit{op cit.}, 169; McMichael, P., 2000, ‘The Power of Food’, \textit{Agriculture and Human Values}, 17(1), 21-33, 27.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}, 171-3.


Significantly, this Declaration included the following statement:

We recognize that access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is a right of each individual. We recognize that globally there is enough food for all and that inequitable access is the main problem. Bearing in mind the right to an adequate standard of living, including food, contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we pledge to act in solidarity to ensure that freedom from hunger becomes a reality.79

Subsequently, the recognition of the contradiction between growing numbers of malnourished persons in a world which produced, and which continues to produce, an abundance of foodstuffs, appears to have been sidelined. The 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) produced the ‘Rome Declaration on Food Security’.80 The major causes of food insecurity were listed as poverty, war and conflict, environmental degradation, and gender inequality; the earlier identified contradiction of the global political economy was not mentioned. The accompanying Plan of Action set forth twelve commitments, including the formal acceptance by states that they were the primary agents for delivering food security, as well as the affirmation that the path to food security lay in ensuring the full enjoyment of all human rights on a universal basis.81

The 1996 WFS commitment to halve the numbers of malnourished people by 2015 was re-stated as the third target of the first of the eight Millennium Goals, adopted by the United Nations in September 2000, with the apparently slight but significant revision that what was now to be halved was not the absolute numbers of those malnourished, but rather the proportion of those in hunger.82 In any case, the numbers of malnourished have since risen, not fallen, with a further predicted increase to 1.2 billion over the next decade.83 In 2002 the FAO hosted a follow-up gathering to the 1996 Summit, and the 1996 pledge to reduce the absolute numbers of hungry people to 400 million by 2015 was renewed.84 While calls were made during

79 Ibid.
80 This summit was attended by 112 Heads or Deputy Heads of State and high level representatives from a further 71 countries: http://www.fao.org/wfs/index_en.htm, accessed 26.5.09. The text of the Declaration of the 1996 WFS is available at http://www.fao.org/wfs/index_en.htm, accessed 26.5.09. In the Declaration, governmental representatives reaffirmed the human right to food and freedom from hunger; and pledged their ‘political will and… common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the numbers of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015’.
81 Commitment 12 of the Plan of Action, ibid.
82 In effect a substantially less ambitious goal, given the projected increase of 1.5 billion in the global population between 2000 and 2015: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml, accessed 4.12.08. As at 2000, 840 million people were classified as malnourished out of a total population of slightly over 6 billion people: a proportion of 14%. With a global population of 7.5 billion people, 840 million malnourished persons would constitute a proportion of 11.2%. To achieve MDG 3, states will need to reduce the numbers of malnourished to 525 million people.
84 This Summit was attended by senior governmental representatives of 179 countries. World Food
a multi-stakeholders’ forum for major cuts in the trade-distorting agricultural subsidies of developed countries, the text of the official declaration made no mention of this issue.  

Two significant developments emerged from the 2002 summit. The first was the adoption by the FAO in November 2004 of ‘voluntary guidelines to support the efforts of Member States towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security’. As their title suggests, these Guidelines constitute a series of voluntary recommendations for states and contain no binding commitments, with earlier proposals for a mandatory Code of Conduct blocked by powerful states. Some critics argue that the Guidelines in effect represent the replacement of the human right to food with a market-based project of food security, with the former reduced to a mere aspiration rather than a fundamental right. According to this perspective, hunger is not conceived of in the Guidelines as a ‘moral outrage’ or a gross violation of a fundamental right, but rather as a ‘problem to be gradually alleviated’; the persistent phenomenon of global hunger and malnutrition is thus de-contextualised and reduced to the mere recitation of statistics.

Further, hunger, and by extension, the right to food, is alluded to in various submissions in purely instrumentalist terms; that is, a malnourished person is not an economically active person, and her hunger should be alleviated, not because it is the morally right thing to do; or, consistent with a deontological understanding of human rights, because it is her fundamental and inalienable right; but rather, because it will allow her to contribute to ‘properly functioning markets’ and thus to continued economic growth. This instrumentalist rationality, which is reflective of the disconnection and alienation that characterises the operation of the globalising capitalist food system as a whole, runs through the Guidelines. The need for properly functioning markets is again stressed in Guideline 4, creating the clear impression that markets are the primary means by which the right to adequate food will be realized. Here we see the emergence of what Indian legal theorist Upendra Baxi describes as the ‘trade-related market-friendly’ human rights paradigm. This paradigm forms part of the shifting negotiation of the hegemony of the globalizing Summit: Five Years Later, Rome, 10-13 June, 2002. http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/english/newsroom/news/8580-en.html, accessed 4.12.08.  


87 Germann op cit., 34.  

88 Ibid., 36.  

89 Ibid., 42.  

90 For example, states are urged to ‘promote good governance as an essential factor for sustained economic growth [and] sustainable development’ (Guideline 1.3). Guideline 2.4 asks States to adopt a ‘holistic and comprehensive approach to hunger and poverty reduction’, which should include ‘the development of appropriate institutions, functioning markets [and] a conducive legal and regulatory framework’.  

capitalist food system, which is now incorporating a marketised understanding of food security and the right to food into its common sense and its discourse of legitimation.

The second development of significance from the 2002 Summit was the formation of a multi-stakeholder scientific peer-review process to carry out, for the first time, an International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). The Executive Summary was approved by 58 of 61 participating countries, with three - Australia, Canada and the US - abstaining. The IAASTD Report was very much a science-driven, evidence-based document; the assessment brought together in an unprecedented inter-disciplinary manner the work of hundreds of agricultural and development experts from across the world. The substance of the report urged a ‘fundamental shift’ in agri-food systems to:

- prioritise the livelihood needs of small-scale farmers,
- redress the inequalities experienced by women in agriculture, and
- embrace and adopt the principles and methodologies of agro-ecology.

Further, in a tacit critique of the shifting common sense of the system as discussed above, the report’s authors rejected a ‘business-as-usual’, market-based approach as being at all sufficient to meet the food security challenges of the 21st century. Particular emphasis was placed on the deep inequalities in the global political economy and the vulnerabilities faced by marginalised communities and the rural poor. The IAASTD Report therefore presented governments with a call for a substantive reorientation of the global food system. It constituted a potentially significant challenge to the prevailing ‘productivist’ and marketised discourse of food security.

While the core recommendations of the IAASTD Report have largely been ignored by most governments, the political eruption of the global food crisis in 2008 provided the context, both for the reaffirmation of the central dynamics of the globalising

---

92 Initiated in the first instance under the auspices of the FAO and the World Bank, the IAASTD expanded to include a number of UN agencies as its sponsors: the UNDP, the UNEP, UNESCO, WHO; as well as the multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral Global Environment Facility: IAASTD, Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report, Johannesburg, April 2008.

93 Ibid., x, Appendix A.

94 Ibid., Foreword.

95 Ibid.

96 In a clear reference to neoliberal ideology, the authors stated that ‘we cannot escape our predicament by simply continuing to rely on the aggregation of individual choices to achieve sustainable and equitable outcomes’: IAASTD, Executive Summary op cit., 3.

97 “Development and sustainability goals should be placed in the context of (1) current social and economic inequities and political uncertainties about war and conflicts; (2) uncertainties about the ability to sustainably produce and access sufficient food; (3) uncertainties about the future of world food prices; (4) changes in the economics of fossil-based energy use; (5) the emergence of new competitors for natural resources; (6) increasing chronic diseases that are partially a consequence of poor nutrition and poor food quality as well as food safety; and (7) changing environmental conditions and the growing awareness of human responsibility for the maintenance of global ecosystem services (provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting)” : Ibid.

98 These calls, as I discuss at some length in Chapter 5, have been echoed both before and since by the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food.
capitalist food system, and for a new rhetorical emphasis in official declarations on
the needs of small-scale producers and women. In this way the hegemony
of the system has been re-negotiated, incorporating elements of an ostensibly critical body
of work and ‘domesticating’ them to suit the needs of the system for continued
expansion and capital accumulation. We see here clearly at work the tendencies of
passive revolution and trasformismo.

Official declarations and texts from 2008 onwards have repeatedly emphasised the
need for greater liberalization of trade in agriculture. The UN Secretary General
convened a High-Level Taskforce on the Global Food Security Crisis, with the
participation of 15 UN agencies, together with the IMF, the WB, the WTO, and the
OECD. This Task Force issued a Comprehensive Framework for Action in July 2008,
and updated it in September 2010; both documents called for the rapid conclusion of
the Doha round of trade negotiations as a centre-piece of their strategic
frameworks. The centrality of trade liberalization, and a marketised approach to
food security, was reaffirmed in the Declaration of the November 2009 World Summit
on Food Security, convened by the FAO in Rome. Paragraph 22 of that Declaration
reads (in part):

   We will pursue policies and strategies that improve the functioning of domestic, regional
and international markets and ensure equitable access for all, especially
smallholders and women farmers from developing countries. We support WTO-consistent, non-trade
distorting special measures aimed at creating incentives for smallholder farmers in
developing countries, enabling them to increase their productivity and compete on a
more equal footing on world markets. We agree to refrain from taking measures that are
inconsistent with the WTO rules, with adverse impacts on global, regional and national
food security. We reiterate support to a timely, ambitious, comprehensive and balanced
conclusion of the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations that would be
important to achieving food security...

Whilst explicitly linking trade liberalization and participation in world markets with
food security and assuming that the former contributes positively to the latter, this
statement also embodies a shift in the ‘common sense’ of the globalizing capitalist
food system that accompanied the 2008 food crisis; namely, a new emphasis on
small-holder farmers and women. In these respects, this statement, as well as the

Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bio-energy’, para.3:
This conference was convened by the FAO, the UN World Food Programme, the International Fund for
Agricultural Development and Biodiversity International. It was attended by forty-two heads of state and
100 high-level ministers. G8 Heads of Government Meeting in July 2008: ‘G8 Leaders Statement on
Global Food Security’, July 8, 2008, paras.3-4, 6. UN High-Level Expert Forum in October 2009,
‘How to Feed the World in 2050’:
accessed 11.10.11.
103 Ibid.
104 Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011 op cit., 112.
Comprehensive Framework for Action, and the WB’s 2008 World Development Report, represent an appropriation (trasformismo) of certain elements of this focus, including agro-ecological production methodologies, developed in the IAASTD Report, the work of the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food, and in the food sovereignty discourse more generally as elaborated by La Via Campesina and others.\(^\text{105}\) The emphasis, however, is not primarily on realizing the right to food or eradicating hunger; although these objectives are mentioned, and form a key part of the common sense of the system.\(^\text{106}\) It is instead on boosting the productivity and competitiveness of smallholders, and facilitating their inclusion into ‘food commodity chains’.\(^\text{107}\)

Another shift in the system’s common sense, and further evidence of the processes of trasformismo, has been the recognition of the chronic under-funding of agricultural sectors in the South.\(^\text{108}\) This recognition is both an implicit acknowledgement of the failures of structural adjustment, and an apparent acceptance of an important aspect of the critiques aimed at the ‘Washington Consensus’ policies of the international financial institutions.\(^\text{109}\) The official declarations of the various summits and meetings have acknowledged that national food security is the responsibility of each state, and that there must be ‘national ownership’ of food and nutrition security plans.\(^\text{110}\) However, the context for these plans is being set by the major donors to the new global agricultural research partnerships. The WB’s Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, launched in 2010 and funded by the United States, Canada, Australia, Spain, South Korea, Ireland and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has, according to Holt-Giménez and


\(^{106}\) The Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA), for example, states as its two primary objectives, to ‘improve access to food and nutrition support and take immediate steps to increase food availability’, and to ‘strengthen food and nutrition security in the longer-term by addressing the underlying factors driving the food crisis’; and both objectives in turn are placed under the primary aim of achieving the first Millennium Development Goal, namely to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: *op cit.*

\(^{107}\) Thus, the CFA speaks of the need to ‘ensure sustained access to competitive, transparent and private-sector-led markets for food produce and quality inputs’, such as seed, fertiliser, equipment and animal feed, as well as the need to ‘strengthen market linkages, especially between farmers and food traders and processors (through e.g. contract farming)’: *op cit. See also* the Ministerial Declaration of the G20 Agriculture Ministers, ‘Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture’, Paris, 22-23 June 2011, available at: http://agriculture.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2011-06-23_-_Action_Plan_-_VFinale.pdf, accessed 11.10.11. This declaration mentions the need to pay ‘special attention to smallholders, especially women and young farmers’ (para.11), while again highlighting the centrality of ‘open and well-functioning markets’ in ‘increasing agricultural production and productivity to meet growing demand’; and of free trade in ‘allow[ing] the unrestricted flow of food and agricultural commodities, [thereby] contributing to food security’ (para.37); and hence of the need to bring the Doha round ‘to a successful, ambitious, comprehensive and balanced conclusion’ (para.38).

\(^{108}\) The October 2009 Forum produced a projected increase in demand for food and fibre of 70% by 2050, and stated that the Global South would require $83 billion annually invested in agriculture in order for demand to be met. The Final Declaration of the November 2009 World Summit reaffirms the commitment to eradicate hunger and achieve both the MDG and the 1996 World Food Summit goals, as well as recognising the need to reverse chronic under-funding of agriculture: *ibid*.

\(^{109}\) Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011*op cit.*, 112.

\(^{110}\) See CFA Updated, para.87, *op cit.*
Shattuck, a central focus on the promotion of ‘more public money for the dissemination of new proprietary agricultural technologies’.

This Program has received most of the money requested for the implementation of the CFA, thereby ‘shelter[ing] [the funding] from much of the social pressure currently on the UN bureaucracies’; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck attribute this to ‘a strategic effort by the [WB] to shift the locus of the war on hunger from Rome and New York, where civil society has opened political space, to Washington’.

From the ‘green capitalist’ perspective, biotechnology purports to offer an environmentally and socially responsible production system that addresses pressing issues such as greenhouse emissions, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss.

The Global Harvest Initiative, led by four agri-business transnational corporations, working in collaboration with a number of Northern NGOs, epitomizes this perspective, with its call for the embrace of ‘science-based technologies’ in order to ‘feed over 9 billion people by 2050 in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way’.

Corporate-led biotechnology is a prime instance of elite-led ‘passive revolution’ in the 21st century.

A further instance of the manner in which the global governance framework is shaped by corporate actors to suit their interests is provided by a recent inaugural meeting of the United Nations to discuss measures to tackle the obesity pandemic.

While the gravity of the public health burden posed by obesity is no longer in any doubt, critical observers of this UN process have detected a concerted and sustained lobbying effort by transnational food corporations to influence the stance adopted at these negotiations by representatives of the United States, the European Union, Australia, Canada and New Zealand governments.

As stated in the chapter summary, commitments to specific deadlines and targets to reduce the burden of

---

111 http://www.gafspfund.org/gafsp/content/frequently-asked-questions#Where%20does%20the%20funding%20for%20GAFSP%20come%20from?, accessed 11.10.11; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011 op cit., 119, noting that the Program derives its ‘strategic direction’ from the World Bank’s 2008 Agriculture for Development Report, which (at p15) speaks of the ‘potentially large benefits to poor producers and poor consumers’ that ‘revolutionary advances in biotechnology offer’. The Report goes on to note that such benefits have to date been limited because of ‘low public investment in biotechnology and slow progress in regulating possible environmental and food safety risks’.

112 2011 op cit., 119, 122. In a similar vein, the recent focus of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, established in 1971 to promote the first Green Revolution through national agricultural research centres, has also been on the ‘second’ Green Revolution ‘based on GMOs’: ibid., 121. In its 40 year review (2011, The CGIAR at 40 and Beyond: Impacts that Matter for the Poor and the Planet, available at http://www.cgiar.org/pdf/cgiar@40_final_LOWRES.pdf, accessed 11.10.11), the CGIAR states that ‘biotechnology is rapidly becoming the standard of the trade’, and that the CGIAR ‘must continue to address issues related to intellectual property rights’, which are now ‘the norm’ in agricultural research; 22.


114 This initiative was founded by biotech companies DuPont and Monsanto, grain trader Archer Daniels Midland, farm machinery manufacturer John Deere, and a series of ‘consultative partners’: Conservation International Caucus Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, TransFarm Africa, the Congressional Hunger Centre, and World Wildlife Fund: http://www.globalharvestinitiative.org/index.php/policy-center/embracing-science-based-technologies/, accessed 11.10.11; see also Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011 op cit., 120.

115 Food Advertising in the United States, Anthony E. Gallo
dietary-related illness have been removed, as have any references to the adoption of measures to reduce the consumption and production of energy-dense, nutrient poor foods.116

The transnational food manufacturing industry is rejecting any attempts to tighten regulation of its products in the interests of public health, due to concerns that this will impact growth in profits and sales; and is lobbying assiduously to achieve this outcome.117 Thus, even though they may be marginalised as regards decision-making, UN agencies continue to serve a very important role in re-negotiating the system’s hegemony. On the one hand, they confer the form of democratic legitimacy, and promote the ethical goals of hunger and poverty eradication as the guiding public mandate for the system. On the other, they arguably establish the limits of what is politically possible and acceptable in terms of domestic regulation of transnational corporate ‘freedom of action’.

In terms of its lobbying and related practices, food industry tactics closely resembles those taken by large tobacco companies over several decades to stymie effective regulation of the sale and promotion of their products.118 US academic nutritionist Marion Nestle, who has studied the practices of US food corporations closely over several years, sees clear parallels between the two industries:

[F]ood companies - just like companies that sell cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, or any other commodity - routinely place the needs of stockholders over considerations of public health...Food companies will make and market any product that sells, regardless of its nutritional value or its effect on health. In this regard, food companies hardly differ from cigarette companies. They lobby Congress to eliminate regulations perceived as unfavourable; they press federal regulatory agencies not to enforce regulations; and when they don’t like regulatory decisions, they file lawsuits. Like cigarette companies, food companies co-opt food and nutrition experts by supporting professional organizations and research, and they expand sales by directly marketing to children, members of minority groups, and people in developing countries - whether or not the products are likely to improve people’s diets...119

Public health experts have shown how lobbying efforts have successfully stymied meaningful action at the national level in every country where the obesity phenomenon exists.120 To date, Governments have opted for industry self-regulation


117 As one of Australia’s leading experts in the field, Professor Boyd Swinburn, puts it:

The whole negotiation process has ground to a halt with the G77 group of low and middle-income countries in one corner in a stand-off with the rich countries and multinational companies in the other corner: ibid.

118 “[T]he experience of tobacco shows how powerful profits can be as a motivator, even at the cost of millions of lives and unspeakable suffering...”: Brownell, K.D., and Warner, K.E., 2009, ‘The Perils of Ignoring History: Big Tobacco Played Dirty and Millions Died. How Similar is Big Food?’ The Millbank Quarterly, 87(1), 259-294.


on the basis that the state should not interfere with what is essentially, in their view, a matter of individual consumer choice. However, the evidence is that industry self-regulation is doing little or nothing to slow down the spread of the obesity pandemic. Professor Swinburn admits to considerable frustration as he and his colleagues, and many other researchers around the world, have ‘been able to specify and model several policy interventions which are highly cost effective and feasible, but they are not being implemented due to the counter lobby power of the food industry and other private sector interests’. Indeed, Swinburn ‘has come to see that the core problem is a set of economic, political and policy structures that are driving consumption-based growth’.

Governments are clearly capable of effectively regulating the food industry in the public interest, because they have shown the capacity to do this with the tobacco industry, albeit over several decades and in the face of sustained, organised and well-resourced industry resistance. At the present time, the indications that food industry regulation will be forthcoming in the near future are not promising. This has clear implications for the balance of forces analysis, which I return to in Chapters 6 and 7.

National-level measures
Here, I consider how actions by governments of the core capitalist countries at the national level have shaped and supported the spread of globalising capitalist relations in food and agriculture. I will briefly cover four topics: the ongoing payment by the United States and the European Union of farm subsidies to sustain surplus production; the use of subsidies and targets by the United States, European Union and other governments to promote agro-fuel production and consumption; the institutionalisation and promotion of genetically modified organisms by the US government; and the loosening of restrictions on financial speculation in agricultural commodities, which has contributed significantly to food price volatility in recent years.

I have already mentioned production subsidies above, in the context of the discussion on trade liberalisation. Their origins lie in the context of political responses taken by the US government in response to the farm crisis during the Great Depression years of the 1930s. Harriet Friedmann, one of the principal theorists of

122 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Friedmann, H., and McMichael, P., 1989, ‘Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Fall of National Agricultures, 1870 to the Present’, Sociologia Ruralis, 29, pp. 93–117, 103-110; Friedmann, H. 2005, ‘From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and Emergence of Food Regimes’, Research in Rural Sociology and Development, 11, 227-264, 239-241. As Julie Guthman narrates, the farm crisis of the 1930s, including the infamous ‘dust bowl’ conditions, had its origins in the ‘decline in foreign demand’ for US produce after World War I which lead to ‘yet another glut of agricultural over-production’ in the 1920s and declining farm prices, combined with ‘high land prices, which had forced
‘global food regimes’, notes the contingency of particular historical outcome, given that at the time there were various agricultural support programs, such as the transparent and non-trade distorting ‘British system of deficiency payments’. However it was only the non-transparent procurement policy introduced by the United States that resulted in ‘government-held surplus stocks’, which the government could then remove from the market in ‘order to achieve target prices set by Congress’. The existence of the surpluses themselves ‘put downward pressure on prices’, with the result that the policy ‘became self-perpetuating’; and it also required restrictions to protect US farmers from cheaper imports. Thus one of the ‘key institutions’ of the emerging ‘mercantile-industrial food regime’ (1945-1973) were ‘subsidized exports’ from the United States, and later Europe, under the aegis of ‘food aid’.

As noted above, US and EU subsidies have survived the liberalisation of agricultural trade, even as the number of farmers in both regions has dramatically declined. These subsidies are seriously detrimental to the interests of producers and consumers in the South. One of the most tragic examples is the collapse of Haiti’s domestic rice production, brought about by a flood of subsidised imported rice when ‘the IMF forced Haiti to cut its rice tariff from 35 per cent to 3 per cent in 1995’.

---

126 2005 op cit., 239. Friedmann comments that, under the British system, ‘the government set target incomes for farmers and paid the difference between actual and target incomes out of general revenues. No surpluses accumulated anywhere, and prices to consumers were not affected. This form of subsidy was consistent with the World Food Board proposal and with liberal international trade”: ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid., 240-1. As Friedmann explains, these exports:

|E|levated the rank of the United States to leading export nation, and fostered a perception that it was somehow naturally a “breadbasket.” European countries devastated by war accepted Marshall [Plan] Aid for food, feed and fertilizer, which set major commodity crops…on a path to industrial farming on the US model: ibid., 241.

See also Guthman 2011 op cit., 59, who notes that the institution of the Food Aid program in 1954 via Public Law 480 served multiple purposes, not least of which was the disposal of ‘chronic food surpluses’. Julie Guthman suggests that US subsidies have survived the inauguration of the World Trade Organisation’s Agreement on Agriculture, because the grain trading and meat-packing transnational corporations that are the main purchasers of commodity crops have become the chief beneficiaries of the subsidy programs, since ‘subsidies allow them to pay even less to farmers’: 2011 op cit., 61.

130 Subsidies mean that US and EU exports are sold at below the cost of production: “For example, the U.S. exports corn at prices 20 percent below the cost of actual production, and wheat at 46 percent below cost. This has resulted in Mexican corn farmers being put out of business”: Akande, W., 2002, ‘How Agricultural Subsidies in Rich Countries Hurt Poor Nations’, Yellow Times, 19.10.2002, available at http://www.mindfully.org/WTO/Subsidies-Hurt-Poor-Akande19oct02.htm, accessed 27.10.08. In a study published in 2002, Oxfam documented how the Common Agricultural Policy subsidies paid to inefficient European sugar producers meant that highly efficient Mozambican sugar cane producers were crowded out of third country markets, reducing incomes and depriving as many as 40,000 people of gainful employment: Oxfam, 2002, ‘Stop the Dumping! How EU Agricultural Subsidies are Damaging Livelihoods in the Developing World’, http://www.globalpolicy.org/soccon/trade/subsidies/2002/10stopdumping.pdf, accessed 27.10.08; Ong’Wen, O., and Wright, S., 2007, ‘Small Farmers and the Future of Sustainable Agriculture’, EcoFair Trade Dialogue, Discussion Paper No.7, 36. The consequence was that by 2003 ‘three-quarters of all rice eaten in Haiti was imported’, ‘Ricelands Foods of Arkansas, the world’s biggest rice mill, saw profits increase to $123 million’, while ‘[t]oday Haiti’s rice-growing areas face some of the country’s worst hunger and malnutrition”: ibid.
With the near-trebling of rice prices during 2007-8, large numbers of Haitians experienced extreme suffering and many rioted in protest.\textsuperscript{133}

The maintenance of farm subsidies in the United States and the European Union has long established a dynamic of over-production of the major commodity grains: corn, soy, and wheat. From 2007 onwards, the combination of a third ‘oil shock’ and pressure to ‘take action’ to reduce greenhouse emissions led these governments to set the parameters of a political-institutional framework that enabled a new field of accumulation to open up: the production of biofuels, or ‘agro-fuels’, such as ethanol and bio-diesel.\textsuperscript{134} The policy shift was led by the second Bush administration in the United States, with the passage in 2007 of the Energy Independence and Security Act, whose Renewable Fuels Standards mandated an 800% increase in agro-fuels production ‘from 4.7 billion gallons in 2007 to at least 36 billion gallons in 2022’.\textsuperscript{135} With the added incentives of tax credits and new multi-billion dollar subsidies, farmers across the United States shifted from other crops to corn production; dozens of new ethanol plants were constructed; and by 2008 30% of the entire US corn crop had been diverted to ethanol production.\textsuperscript{136} With agro-fuel production capturing ‘80% of all US government support for renewable energy, vastly outpacing solar and wind technologies’, the ‘agro-fuels boom’, for which major US grain processing transnational Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) had advocated since the 1970s, had arrived.\textsuperscript{137} In December 2008 the European Union adopted a biofuels mandate which called for a minimum 10% content of renewable transport fuels by 2020, replacing an earlier voluntary target of the same percentage.\textsuperscript{138}

As a consequence, production of feedstock for biofuels has increased sharply in other parts of the world, notably the expansion of palm oil plantations in Sumatra, Malaysia, Colombia and India, and sugarcane and soybean plantations in Brazil.\textsuperscript{139} Agro-fuels have been a leading motivation for large-scale land investments by transnational corporations in Africa: in one study examining acquisitions in Mali, 40% of all cases ‘involve[d] crops for agro-fuels’.\textsuperscript{140} Transnational corporations such as ADM have taken advantage of this increased production by locating biodiesel processing plants in Indonesia and Brazil.\textsuperscript{141} They have also lobbied extensively to secure regulatory and fiscal regimes that are highly favourable to increased production.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{133} Bello \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{134} Tokar, B., 2010, \textit{Biofuels and the Global Food Crisis} in Magdoff and Tokar \textit{op cit.}, 121-138.
\textsuperscript{135} Bello 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 107.
\textsuperscript{136} Tokar \textit{op cit.}, 121-123; Bello 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 107-8. Bello cites the Global Subsidies Initiative estimate of $92 billion in US subsidies for agro-fuel production between 2006-2012, with 88% of that sum committed to ethanol production ‘in the form of tax credits to agrofuels blenders, market price support, and direct crop payments’: 108.
\textsuperscript{139} Tokar \textit{op cit.}, 129.
\textsuperscript{140} Oakland Institute \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{141} Bello \textit{op cit.}, 109.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
The ostensible justification for agro-fuels is that they are a benign form of renewable energy; and thus in promoting their increased production and consumption, governments and corporations can claim to be taking meaningful and substantive action on climate change. This claim, which clearly forms part of the common sense of this emerging element of the globalising capitalist food system, has come in for sustained attack, with studies suggesting that, once carbon dioxide and methane emissions from land use conversions are taken into account, most agro-fuels actually release more emissions than they save. Further, they are also widely viewed as contributing to food price volatility and food insecurity, by diverting food crops into feedstock for transport fuel.

As with agro-fuels, genetically-modified (GM) crops constitute another new and emerging field of capital accumulation; and as with agro-fuels, the rapid expansion of this technology has been facilitated by political and regulatory decisions taken largely by the US government from the 1990s onwards. The first key step was in 1992 when the US Food and Drug Administration ruled that food containing genetically modified components were ‘the same or substantially similar to substances commonly found in food’, and therefore required no special regulatory oversight, and in particular no requirement for these ingredients to be specially labelled.

As noted earlier, the planting of GM soybeans, canola, corn, and cotton has expanded exponentially. There is considerable and continuing controversy about the productivity gains and environmental benefits that GM technology might produce, particularly in relation to the reported reduced use of pesticides, as well as the potential dangers (or claimed benefits) to human and environmental health and biodiversity. While these disputes are still to be resolved, it is clearly the case that

---

143 As Tokar notes, a key part of this claim is that ethanol and soy-based biodiesel are ‘merely a stepping stone toward the development of fuels from cellulosic sources, and ultimately a fully carbon-neutral transportation system’: op cit., 129.
144 Ibid., 130.
145 Bello 2009 op cit., 105-6, noting that a 2008 World Bank assessment ‘claimed that US and EU agrofuels policies were responsible for three-quarters of the 140 percent increase in food prices between 2002 and February 2008’.
147 A literature review published in the biotechnology industry-funded AgBioForum in 2006 stated for example that many studies ‘report[t] that Bt cotton has led to significant yield gains, reductions in conventional insecticide sprays, or both throughout the world’: Frisvold, G.B., Reeves, J.M., and Tronstad, R., 2006, ‘Bt Cotton Adoption in the United States and China: International Trade and Welfare Effects’, AgBioForum, 9(2). Similarly industry researchers Graham Brookes and Peter Barfoot stated that the net economic benefit of GM crops ‘amounted to $5 billion in 2005 and $27 billion for the ten year period [1996-2005]’: ‘Global Impact of Biotech Crops: Socio-Economic and Environmental Effects in the First Ten Years of Commercial Use’, AgBioForum, 9(3). A 2005 paper partly financed by the Rockefeller Foundation concluded that Bt Cotton plantings in Argentina ‘reduces application rates of toxic chemicals by 50% while significantly increasing yields’, and that ‘the benefits could be highest for smallholder farmers, who are not currently using the technology’. The paper further found that ‘[r]apid resistance buildup and associated pest outbreaks appear to be unlikely if minimum non-Bt refuge areas are maintained’: Quim, M. and de Janvry, A., 2005, ‘Bt Cotton and Pesticide Use in Argentina: Economic and Environmental Effects’, Environment and Development Economics, AgBioForum 12(3). For a contrary view see Ho, M.W., Cummins, J., and Saunders, P.T., 2007, ‘GM Food Nightmare Unfolding in
this technology fits very well into the global business model of the transnational agribusiness corporations. The technology is amenable to high volume, industrialised monocultural production; and an extensive legal framework of intellectual property laws provides a secure juridical environment in which accumulation can take place. 148 As regards popular and political legitimacy for the further expansion of the technology, the biotech companies have, as noted above, turned to a market-based, ‘green capitalist’ discourse of food security. 149 This strategy of legitimation, which constitutes another key element of the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system, received a substantial boost with the endorsement of GM technology in 2001 by the United Nations Human Development Programme 150, and subsequently, as noted above, by the World Bank, amongst others. The food security and poverty reduction claims of the GM transnationals are strongly contested by La Via Campesina and many of the ‘organic intellectuals’ of the Food Sovereignty movement. 151

The securing of legal ownership of seed and germplasm via patenting laws means that farmers must abandon age-old practices of collecting, saving and swapping seeds, because to do so would mean fines or possibly even imprisonment for infringement of the patents. 152 Instead, they must purchase the seed anew each planting season, and since this seed is expensive, it adds considerably to their costs and their indebtedness, perpetuating a cycle of dependency already established by the first Green Revolution. 153 Legal enforcement can now potentially be

the Regulatory Sham’, ISIS Report, March 2007, available at:

148 “The use of GMOs in farming is associated with many of the same risks as the original Green Revolution, including homogenization and input reliance. Their use may reinforce the move to industrial agriculture, support capital and energy-intensive systems, and reinforce the dependency of farmers on costly inputs”: Ong’wen & Wright op cit., 43.

149 As Tim Lang and Michael Heasman put it, corporations ‘not usually associated with humanitarian activism are now advocating that [their] technologies…be rapidly implemented in order to feed the world’: Lang, M., and Heasman, M., 2004, Food Wars: The Global Battle for Mouths, Minds and Markets, EarthScan, London, 22. The leading players are the US multinationals Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, and Dow Chemicals: 179-80.

150 In its 2001 Human Development Report the UNDP stated that: “Tranengics offer the hope of crops with higher yields, pest- and drought-resistant properties and superior nutritional characteristics—especially for farmers in ecological zones left behind by the green revolution. In China genetically modified rice offers 15% higher yields without the need for increases in other farm inputs, and modified cotton (Bt cotton) allows pesticide spraying to be reduced from 30 to 3 times”: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development, http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2001/, accessed 30.10.08.


152 “Private detectives have been used in Canada and the United States to enforce intellectual property regimes. Monsanto has filed 73 cases in court and has claimed billions of dollars in compensation from farmers who have saved seed. Penalties have included massive fines and prison sentences”: Ong’wen & Wright, op cit., 43, 45.

153 Ibid. As a further instance of the extent to which the US legal system supports and protects corporations, the ‘Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act’ was passed in 2006 to protect factory farming operations from direct action taken by animal rights activists: Emel and Neo 2011 op cit., 76.
complemented by scientific and biological coercion. This became possible when Canadian biotech corporation Delta & Pine Land obtained a patent in 1998 for the development of the so-called ‘genetic use restriction’, or terminator technology, which renders seeds sterile after one planting. While this technology has not been commercially implemented, Delta & Pine Land – which was acquired by Monsanto Corporation in June 2007, consistently expressed its intention to do so: http://www.banterminator.org/News-Updates/News-Updates/Monsanto-Acquires-Delta-Pine-Land-and-Terminator, accessed 30.10.08. A consortium of biotech and agribusiness firms promoted a law in the Brazilian Congress (268/2007) that would allow for the partial commercialisation of terminator technology, and for further research and patenting in Brazil: http://www.banterminator.org/News-Updates/News-Updates/Industry-Tries-to-Repeal-Brazil-s-National-Ban-on-Terminator, accessed 30.10.08. The effort was rejected by the Brazilian Commission on the Environment following extensive mobilisations by social and environmental groups: http://www.banterminator.org/News-Updates/News-Updates/Brazil-s-Environment-Commission-Rejects-Effort-to-Roll-back-Ban-on-Terminator, accessed 30.10.08.

The Australian government is generally supportive of the further commercialisation of GM crops. Some GM crops (Canola, Soy) have already received approval for commercial plantings, and Australia has 700,000 hectares of GM cotton and canola as at 2010. Trials for plantings of GM wheat have also been approved, and Monsanto recently acquired a 20% stake in one of the country’s leading grain breeding companies. Australian State Departments of Agriculture are generally sympathetic towards the technology, and the prospects for its further commercialisation in this country appear promising.

Critics and activists who oppose GM technology say that it has contributed to increasing regional and global food insecurity; and further, that is poses serious threats to biodiversity, ecosystem integrity and human health through inter alia contamination of non-GM plants, the large-scale conversion of forests and grasslands to GM monocultures, and encouraging increasing levels of herbicide and pesticide use. Scholars documenting the spatial spread of the technology have also

---

154 This became possible when Canadian biotech corporation Delta & Pine Land obtained a patent in 1998 for the development of the so-called ‘genetic use restriction’, or terminator technology, which renders seeds sterile after one planting. While this technology has not been commercially implemented, Delta & Pine Land – which was acquired by Monsanto Corporation in June 2007, consistently expressed its intention to do so: http://www.banterminator.org/News-Updates/News-Updates/Monsanto-Acquires-Delta-Pine-Land-and-Terminator, accessed 30.10.08. A consortium of biotech and agribusiness firms promoted a law in the Brazilian Congress (268/2007) that would allow for the partial commercialisation of terminator technology, and for further research and patenting in Brazil: http://www.banterminator.org/News-Updates/News-Updates/Industry-Tries-to-Repeal-Brazil-s-National-Ban-on-Terminator, accessed 30.10.08. The effort was rejected by the Brazilian Commission on the Environment following extensive mobilisations by social and environmental groups: http://www.banterminator.org/News-Updates/News-Updates/Brazil-s-Environment-Commission-Rejects-Effort-to-Roll-back-Ban-on-Terminator, accessed 30.10.08.


158 ‘This deal [worth $10.5 million] would allow Monsanto to insert its GM traits into the best Australian wheat and claim ownership of those GM varieties’: ibid.

159 ‘The Victorian Government aspires to be the largest hub of GM research and development in the Asia Pacific region and signed a public private partnership with Dow AgroSciences at the BIO trade show in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2009. The Queensland trade commissioner to the USA makes a priority of biotechnology promotion’: ibid.

documented how some governments in the South have come under intense political and economic pressure to accept imports of GM products in the form of ‘food aid’ and to allow the commercialisation of GM crops in their territories.\textsuperscript{161} The newly-formed public-private Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA), led by the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations, is a further expression of this dynamic.\textsuperscript{162} While ostensibly aimed at achieving food security for all Africans and contributing to economic development by lifting the productivity of Africa’s smallholders, critics point to the clear links between the biotech industry and the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations, and argue that the real agenda has more to do with creating new markets for Northern agribusiness in the spirit of ‘philanthrocapitalism’:

Underpinning the New Green Revolution and biotechnology agenda in Africa is the neoliberal economic push to integrate Africa into the world market economy by creating markets for agricultural inputs and products, all in the name of freeing poor African farmers from the clutches of hunger and poverty.\textsuperscript{163}

Given the centrality of finance to contemporary processes of globalising capitalism, no analysis of the current ‘global food crisis’ should ignore the role of \textit{speculation} in driving food price volatility and achieving oligopolistic levels of concentration via mergers and acquisition.\textsuperscript{164} Indeed, the ‘food crisis’ is arguably but one manifestation

\begin{flushleft}

Walters \textit{op cit.}, who in his investigation of the various pressures brought to bear on the anti-GM government of Zambia by US government agencies and spokespersons, as well as by biotech companies themselves, concludes that ‘the ongoing pressure on countries such as Zambia to accept GM technologies violates international environment law and serves to remind us how states and corporations exercise and exploit law, international relations and power for political and economic gain’: 41. Releases from Wikileaks confirm that such practices, involving US diplomats and officials, is widespread: \url{http://www.truth-out.org/new-wikileaks-cables-show-us-diplomats-promote-genetically-engineered-crops-worldwide/1314303978}, accessed 15.9.11. During 2011, releases of US diplomatic cables by the Wikileaks organisation revealed the existence of US government-funded and promoted ‘biotechnology outreach programs’ in many countries in the South ‘where Western biotech agriculture had yet to gain a foothold’, as well as sustained diplomatic pressure in European governments to legislate for commercial approval of GM crops: Ludwig, M., 2011, ‘New Wikileaks Cables Show US Diplomats Promote Genetically Engineered Crops Worldwide’, \url{http://www.truth-out.org/new-wikileaks-cables-show-us-diplomats-promote-genetically-engineered-crops-worldwide/1314303978}, accessed 11.10.11.


of a generalised crisis of globalising capitalism, which has its immediate roots in a
globalised accumulation model dependent on ever-increasing levels of debt and asset
inflation, thus leading to the generation and collapsing of speculative bubbles. I
will consider these dynamics in Chapter 6. At this point my focus concerns the way in
which regulatory actions by the US government have created the conditions for
financial speculation in food commodities to grow at such a rapid pace in the early
part of the 21st century.

Contemporary speculation in commodities has its origins in the creation of the
Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) by trading merchants in 1848 to regulate grain
trading by allowing producers and buyers to negotiate and agree ‘forward’ or
‘advance sale’ contracts, the purpose of which was to provide price certainty and
risk management for farmers, and security of supply for distributors. Given certain
operational difficulties with advance sale contracts, CBOT assumed the role of a
trading intermediary and advance sale contracts were converted into futures
contracts, which, unlike advance sale contracts, were themselves tradable
instruments. The justification for futures markets, then as now, is two-fold: the
contracts provide a hedge against the risk of fluctuating prices; and they ensure
liquidity in the market. However, in the largely unregulated atmosphere of the
United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, futures markets became
arenas for speculative gambling, and contributed to food price volatility, as well as
to record profits for grain traders such as Cargill.

Calls for reform became increasingly loud, and with the advent of the Great
Depression of the 1930s futures markets were regulated for the first time. This
took the form of placing caps on investments in futures contracts by actors not

only receives the most cursory mention in Magdoff and Tokar op cit., which otherwise provides extensive
coverage of most major dynamics: structural adjustment, trade liberalisation, concentration of corporate
agribusiness, land-grabbing, and agro-fuels.

Finance?’ Science & Society, 69(3) 396-419, who presciently asked in 2005, ‘May it be the case then, that
the ongoing outbreaks of financial crises signal a potential global repetition of the Great Depression?’;
416. It was of course the collapse of the ‘sub-prime mortgage bubble’ in 2007 that triggered the onset of
the ‘Global Financial Crisis’ in 2008, which has (as at October 2011) metastasized into a serious

“In his recent testimony before Congress, hedge fund manager Michael Masters said that institutional
investors (pension funds, university endowments, sovereignty wealthy funds, etc.) have increased their
investments in commodities futures from $13 billion in 2003 to $260 billion in March of 2008, and the
price of 25 commodities has risen by an average of 183% in those five years”: Kane, D., 2008, ‘A Quick,
Easy Way to Lower World Food Prices, Commentary’, Americas Policy Program, 16.10.08, available at

Vargas and Chantry op cit., 10.

Reform initiatives included direct action by farmers and consideration of nationalisation of grain
trading corporations: “At that time, producer co-operatives tried to organize themselves in such a way as
to take control of prices, by directly controlling production and marketing. The newspapers of the period
even recorded that the Administration planned to take control of the five main grain-selling firms, whose
transactions amounted to over a thousand million dollars per year”: ibid., 12.
‘directly involved in agriculture and food’. At the same time, this legislation declared the trade in commodities via futures contracts to be ‘in the public interest’, as ‘providing the means for suitable risk management [and] more information on the future evolution of prices through trading in a market that has greater liquidity, fairness and financial security’.  

The first loosening in this regulatory framework came in 1974, when the creation of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission also saw legislative amendments that gave the Commission the ability to lift the limits on investments in commodity futures contracts by non-industry traders. Concerted lobbying by investment banks and other financial actors in the late 1980s saw these limits progressively lifted from 1990 onwards. It is these measures that have enabled speculative financial capital to invest heavily in commodity futures, after previous bubbles in ‘dot.com’ companies and the housing market have burst. A related development is the extent to which hedge funds and other financial actors are involved in buying up farmland in many countries, thereby contributing to the ‘land grab’ phenomenon described above.

Commodity futures exchanges exist outside the United States, notably in Europe and Japan. In Europe, there are restrictions on purchases of contracts for basic grains by non-industry traders, but not for coffee, sugar and cocoa. In addition, restrictions on commodity trading have never applied to industry ‘traders’, which include major transnational corporations such as ADM and Cargill, who between them control up to 80% of all US grain commodity exports. This dominant market position, which enables them both to set prices and control supply, has enabled these corporations to become significant financial speculators in their own right, as well as to work in partnership with hedge funds and pension funds by offering them specialised financial instruments.

Finally, outside the lightly-regulated commodity futures trade, there is the entirely private and non-transparent ‘over-the-counter’ trade in financial derivatives, whose ‘notional value’ is estimated to be worth in the order of $580 trillion as at June 2010. Though commodities account for less than one-half of one percent of this

---

171 Kane op cit.; Vargas and Chantry op cit., 12.
172 Commodity Exchange Act 1936, quoted in Vargas and Chantry op cit., 13, who note that this legislation thereby played an important role in legitimising the futures trade: 12.
173 Kane op cit.
174 Vargas and Chantry op cit., 14, noting how the CBOT wheat market raised these limits for six financial institutions from ‘39,000 contracts (equivalent to 5.3 million tonnes) to 130,000 (17.5 million tonnes)’.
175 Kane op cit.
176 Vargas and Chantry op cit., 7.
177 Ibid., 17. Some Spanish banks have popularised commodity futures speculation by creating special deposit funds with returns linked to appreciation of these commodities over the deposit term: Ibid., 17-18.
178 Ibid., 18.
179 Ibid., 19-20.
180 Nesvetaliova op cit., 400; Vargas and Chantry op cit., 30.
figure, at $2.85 trillion dollars, this is still a sum large enough to heavily influence food price movements.\textsuperscript{181}

In a conjuncture of perceived multiple challenges to national and global food security and apparently recurring waves of food ‘crisis’, certain national governments are manoeuvring to position themselves and their corporations at the forefront of efforts to achieve global food security. Efforts to position the United States are apparent with the introduction of the Bill for the Global Food Security Act 2009 into the US Congress.\textsuperscript{182} Senator Richard Lugar, when introducing the Bill, observed that while ‘food insecurity is a global tragedy [it] is also an opportunity for the United States [since we are] the indisputable world leader[s] in agricultural production and technology’.\textsuperscript{183} A key role for biotechnology is explicitly contemplated as the Act seeks to make additional funding available for further research into genetically modified organisms.\textsuperscript{184}

‘Crisis as opportunity’ also forms the backdrop for the proposed development of a first-even National Food Plan for Australia.\textsuperscript{185} The National Food Plan was announced as a policy commitment by the Australian Labor Party prior to the August 2010 Federal Election, following meetings with the-then Opposition Spokesperson for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, and the CEO of Woolworths Ltd, the country’s largest supermarket. In December 2010, a National Food Policy Working Group was established “as a forum for active communication between the food industry and government to foster a common understanding of the industry’s priorities, challenges and future outlook across the supply chain”\textsuperscript{.186} This group, comprised almost entirely of big farming, agri-business and retailing interests, with one health representative and one consumer representative, is advising on the development of the National Food Plan.\textsuperscript{187} Critics say it reflects a very narrow view of food and farming, with

\textsuperscript{181} Different forms of ‘over-the-counter’ derivatives trade have evolved, such as managed futures funds, collateralised commodity obligations, and credit default swaps: Vargas and Chantry\textsuperscript{op cit.} 31. These forms of derivatives instruments, while highly abstract in appearance, have nevertheless assumed the character of ‘near-money’ and ‘can have a direct impact on liquidity levels, which can cause increases in asset prices as real interest rates decline’: Nesvetaiova\textsuperscript{op cit.}, 401.


\textsuperscript{183} Senator Lugar’s speech was made on 5 February 2009, \url{http://www.govtrack.us/congress/record.xpd?id=111-s20090205-22&bill=s111-384#sMonofilemx003Ammx002Fmmx002Fmmx002Fmhomemx002Fmgovtrackmx002Fmdatams002Fmmsmx002Fm111mx002Fm2ermxm002Fms20090205-22.xmlElementm1m0m0m}, accessed 15.5.09.


\textsuperscript{186} Ref… A Food Processing Industry Strategy Group is also advising on the development of the Plan.

\textsuperscript{187} The members of the Food Policy Advisory Working Group are: Michael Luscombe, Managing Director and CEO Woolworths; Michael Byrne, CEO, Linbox Logistics; Dr Alastair Robertson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, CSIRO; Terry O’Brien, Managing Director, Simplot Australia; Simone Tully, Owner, OBE Organics; Jock Laurie, President, National Farmers’ Federation; Janine Allis, CEO, Boost
community and public interest advocates entirely excluded. The Group has met twice, with little public information released about what was discussed. The ‘Issues Paper to inform the development of the National Food Plan’ was released at the end of June, 2011. While taking into account a range of drivers and trends, the overall approach is entirely consistent with the market-led approach to food security outlined above. As health advocates stated,

> The overall emphasis of the paper is on maximizing food production and on food as a commodity. The chapter of the paper on promoting a ‘Competitive, productive and efficient food industry’ is by far the biggest chapter and the focus of most of the questions for consultation. Of the 48 questions for consultation, 24 questions are related to developing a ‘Competitive, productive and efficient food industry’, 4 are related to food security, 4 to diet and nutrition, 4 to a ‘sustainable food industry’ (with just one question on environmental sustainability). 12 are overarching questions.

The Issues Paper assumes that ‘Australia is food secure’ because the country exports two-thirds of its agricultural produce. While some challenges are noted, the overwhelming focus of the Paper concerns how Australian food producers and processors can enhance their productivity and competitiveness, and look to expand export opportunities over the coming years. The underlying assumption is that the future will continue to resemble the past in all essential respects.

In their submissions in response to the Paper, several individuals and institutions took issue with such assumptions, arguing that ‘fundamental shifts’ and ‘transformations’ are required in order to deal with a national (and global) food system that is largely ‘broken’. The Victorian Eco Innovation Lab, which is the only research body in Australia to have comprehensively modelled the impact of multiple critical resource constraints in ‘three divergent scenarios for economic development trajectories’ over the next three decades, made these points forcefully in its submission:

> Juice; Kate Carnell, CEO, Australian Food and Grocery Council; Malcolm Jackson, CEO, Elders Ltd; Nick Stace, CEO, Choice (Australian Consumers Association); Alison Watkins, Managing Director and CEO, Graincorp; Jeff Lawrence, ACTU Secretary; Dr Peter Williams, Associate Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at University of Wollongong.

> These people [members of the Advisory Group] mostly represent vested interests that will not propose or support the necessary transition to more sustainable futures that food security and sovereignty require. The public and public interest advocates are marginalised, and this will not produce a good plan nor win public allegiance for implementation’: Phelps op cit.


> Issues Paper op cit., Foreword.

> World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention, 2011, ‘Submission to the National Food Plan Issues Paper’, 22.7.11, (Swinburn, B., Deakin University), http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/food/national-food-plan/submissions-received/who-collaborating-centre-for-obesity-prevention-submission, accessed 15.11.11. Professor Swinburn argues that ‘TRANSFORMATION of the food system [is required] towards one which is more health-promoting, environmentally sustainable, equitable and prosperous. This indicates that major, not minor changes are needed…’ (capitalisation in original). In a similar vein, Graham Brookman, Joint Managing Director of the Food Forest, writes in his submission that ‘the whole food system needs rethinking and massive effort needs to go into rebuilding the skills of our agricultural producers such that the nation can remain domestically food-secure in a world likely to be racked by extreme weather events, inevitable climate change and geopolitical insecurity’: Brookman, G, 2011, ‘Submission to the National Food Plan Issues Paper’, (The Food Forest), available at: http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/food/national-food-plan/submissions-received/the-food-forest, accessed 30.9.11.
Substantial, unavoidable and imminent changes in our food supply systems, in Australia and globally, require fundamental shifts in how we manage land and resources for food production and other critical needs. Although the timing and precise manifestation of these changes are inherently uncertain, they are inevitable. The declining availability of critical resources, particularly oil and water; increasing instability in the climate systems; cumulative decline in quality of soils, water and other ecosystems services; and the continuing loss of farmers and productive farm lands make our systems of food production and distribution increasingly brittle. These potentially non-linear changes mean the past is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the future and care must be taken in avoiding “lazy” assumptions about the possibility of continuing in a business as usual trajectory.192

The threat to the general welfare that the obesity pandemic poses is also downplayed, with no indication that the government is prepared, for example, to intervene in the market to curtail or prohibit the advertising of nutrient-poor, energy-dense food to young children.193 The World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention, in its submission, argued that the Issues Paper was deficient in several respects, including: a failure to acknowledge that ‘there is an existing crisis of obesity and other diet-related diseases’; failing to acknowledge the ‘key role of overconsumption of food, particularly processed energy-dense food, as a driver [of] obesity’; failing to be ‘more explicit about food marketing as an important component in the food system’; and failing to ‘fram[e] people as “citizens” rather than just consumers so that this plan is part of food democracy and not just a Food Industry Plan”.194

The focus on production, trade and export is unsurprising, given the fact that successive Australian governments since the early 1980s have promoted these policy goals and orientations. Australia is a leading member of the ‘Cairns group’ of countries within the WTO, which advocates for more liberalised trade in agriculture as in other commodities. Similarly, the relative de-emphasis of health and environmental concerns perhaps reflect the origins of the Issues Paper within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, rather than the Department of Health or the Environment. More fundamentally, the emphasis of the Issues Paper reflects, as many submissions have noted, a failure to engage with the broader Australian community, and instead a privileging of the needs and priorities of the food industry.195 Picking up the theme of ‘food democracy’, Patrick Leonard of Slow Food Noosa writes:

---


193 Food Alliance op cit.

194 Swinburn 2011 op cit.

195 In his comments on behalf of Slow Food Noosa Inc., Patrick Leonard notes how ‘the interests of consumers have been ignored or, where mentioned, have been represented from the standpoint of the large food retailers’; that ‘there is no analysis or consideration of the millions of tonnes of food that is wasted every year’; and that ‘most seriously of all, Ministers appear to have abrogated their responsibility to defend the public interest: available at: Leonard, P., 2011, ‘Submission from Patrick Leonard on Behalf of Slow Food Noosa Inc.’, available at: http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/food/national-food-
Perhaps most seriously of all, Ministers appear to have abrogated their responsibility to defend the public interest. We live in a democratic country, we elect politicians to defend our interests against those who would limit our freedom of choice through deception and the manipulation of markets. We also expect Governments to manage those things that can best be done on behalf of us all...This consultation paper presents a view of Government as the assistants to the big players in the farming and retail industries...[W]e do not think the issues in the consultation paper have been correctly identified...

Concluding remarks
In this chapter, I have outlined and briefly discussed a number of the key components that constitute the political-institutional architecture supporting the globalising capitalist food system, at the international and national levels. I have also examined how this system has been legitimised by a particular discourse of food security which links the widely desired goal of ‘good food for all’, as well as the eradication of hunger, with the accumulation and profit imperatives of the major economic actors in the system. I have explored how this understanding of food security is being institutionalised in Australia in the form of an inaugural National Food Plan, and how the assumptions that underpin it are strongly opposed by several individuals and institutions who have expressed their views to the Federal Government in submissions.

This chapter reveals that the challenges confronting the Food Sovereignty movement are formidable, at both the international and national levels, in terms of securing favourable, let alone transformative, change in the political-institutional context. Prima facie, the balance of forces appears to be heavily tilted in favour of the political and economic forces that are presently re-negotiating the terms of the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system, against the backdrop of what appears to be an intensifying and (semi-) permanent ‘global food crisis’. In the next chapter I will discuss how the leading actors within the Food Sovereignty movement are responding to these challenges via the strategy of human rights.

plan/submissions-received/slow-food-noosa-inc, accessed 15.11.11.

Ibid.
Chapter 5

Responses to the political-institutional context

The equality and anti-discrimination principles [of human rights texts]...make certain economic and political organizations incompatible and directly in conflict with the advancement of human rights. While authoritarian politics is often [seen as] a source of violations of civil and political rights, capitalism...is seldom identified as an obstacle for the realization of human rights or as a target of change for the human rights project.... We may argue that the implementation of full spectrum of human rights call for a social democratic model, if not a substantial democracy...that can be actualized only in a socialist economy. The radicalism embedded in such an argument, however, makes human rights less palatable to some people. This may explain why the study of human rights has been short on political economy and why many advocates of human rights strategically avoid controversy.”

Zehra F. Kabasaka Arat

Based on the discussion in the previous chapter, it appears that to date, the contemporary ‘global food crisis’ is viewed principally as an opportunity to be exploited for further consolidation and expansion of the globalising capitalist food system. With a constant focus on the underlying need to open up new arenas for accumulation and profit, such as genetically modified technologies, agro-fuels, large-scale land acquisitions, and the further liberalisation of agricultural trade, the political-institutional context entrenches and intensifies the key tensions of over-production, inequality, and ecological degradation.

In this chapter, I consider the responses of the Food Sovereignty movement to this context, and the tensions to which it substantively contributes. My primary focus concerns the effectiveness of the reliance on human rights as a central strategy to de-legitimise and resist the further institutionalisation of the globalising capitalist food system. The main question that I intend to explore is whether, and to what extent, La Via Campesina’s attempts to secure a new United Nations Declaration on the rights of peasants will advance the transformative aims of food sovereignty, as I outlined them in Chapter 3.

My argument is that the peasants’ rights campaign, and the broader campaign for food sovereignty, has been successful in a number of ways. First, and most importantly, it has strengthened movement-building processes within La Via Campesina and its member organisations, by raising levels of consciousness and class solidarity amongst peasants and small farmers. Secondly, it has contributed to raising the profile of peasants and small-holder farmers within the work of a number of UN agencies, the Special Rapporteurs on the right to food especially, and in placing their needs and priorities on the agendas of these agencies. Thirdly, and partly as a result of the influential interventions of La Via Campesina and its allies, the normative development of the right to food by the Special Rapporteurs has followed a trajectory that has strong synergies with food sovereignty principles, such as the need for redistributive agrarian reform and the prioritisation of the needs of small-holder farmers. Fourthly, the efforts being made at the national level in twenty-two countries to institutionalise and implement the right to food are broadly supportive of the objectives of the peasants’ rights campaign and in accord with food sovereignty principles generally. Finally, the institutionalisation of food sovereignty in a few countries, such as Venezuela, Ecuador and Nepal, demonstrates that this new normative framework is beginning to shift the existing productivist ‘common sense’ of global and national food systems organised according to capitalist imperatives.

At the same time, these developments, particularly those at the national level, are far from being straight-forward and unproblematic. Unless articulated clearly and consistently, and in terms that are relevantly and appropriately contextualised, food sovereignty can be a confusing concept that does not contribute to greater levels of organisation and mobilisation. The UN agencies within which La Via Campesina has achieved some level of influence are those with moral and symbolic power in the international system; substantive decisions regarding the direction of the global political economy are taken elsewhere, and have, as noted in Chapter 4, been hostile to the interests of peasants and small farmers. The effectiveness of the human rights system as a strategy for transformative change in the context of globalising capitalism is open to serious doubt. Further, as the case study of Ecuador reveals, the erection of a legal framework is only the first step towards implementation of food sovereignty principles and peasants’ rights; achieving substantive and lasting changes requires confronting and overcoming vested political and economic interests; and this is turn requires sustained mobilisation and activism. This points towards the chapter’s principal conclusion: that the major value of the peasants’ rights campaign, and of the broader Food Sovereignty movement, lies in its capacity to educate and mobilise peasants and small farmers so that they become an organised political force capable of applying the sustained pressure necessary to work towards the full and lasting implementation of their rights. Potentially this process may prefigure the building a wider, counter-hegemonic, political alliance.

Hence the development of the thesis argument in this chapter enables me to address several of the key research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2. Specifically, the examination of the institutional articulation and implementation of food sovereignty allows me to draw initial conclusions regarding the extent of engagement with key elements of the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system; the degree
of coherence of food sovereignty as an alternative social and political projects, some of its components, whether they can be implemented, and what barriers exist to their implementation; the effectiveness of the campaign for the UN Declaration, the changes (legislative and policy) it has brought about, and its costs and benefits; and the extent to which food sovereignty, and the right to food, might ground a national-popular strategy. I will reference these questions at appropriate points through the chapter, and return to them in the chapter’s conclusion.

The organisation of the chapter is as follows. First, I discuss the peasants’ rights campaign: its immediate origins in the context of global social movement tactics and Indonesian domestic politics; its background in La Via Campesina’s attitudes and tactics towards international governance institutions, especially the WTO; the normative content of the draft Declaration and the status of its progress through the UN human rights machinery; and the extent to which it meets some of the principal critiques of human rights as a vehicle for achieving societal transformation. Next, I explore the synergies between this campaign and the normative and institutional development of the human right to adequate food. Here I discuss in particular the work of the two Special Rapporteurs on the right to food, from 2000 to the present, as well as attempts to institutionalise the right to food in Guatemala. Third, I examine the attempt to institutionalise food sovereignty in Ecuador. Finally, I discuss efforts to institutionalise the local food movement in Australia, briefly compare this with related developments in the United States and Canada, such as the establishment of Food Policy Councils.

The campaign for peasants’ rights
This campaign originated in the provinces of Indonesia as well as Jakarta, via workshops conducted by the Indonesian Peasant Union with the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission over 2000-2002.\(^2\) Marc Edelman and Carwill James suggest that La Via Campesina’s ‘adoption of a more explicit human rights discourse mirrors a shift in the practice of transnational indigenous, anti-privatization, and environmentalist movements in the same period, some of whom now call for a “Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth”’.\(^3\) The argument here is that the peasants’ rights campaign, and the broader Food Sovereignty movement for, is part of the attempt to secure ‘normative shifts’ as a tactic in the ‘struggle among competing models’ of global agri-food systems:

Such normative shifts facilitate external international pressure on governments and affect policymaking by international institutions. The creation of international standards

---


\(^3\) Edelman and James op cit., 92. The call for the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth followed the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010, which resulted in the so-called ‘Cochabamba Declaration’: [http://pwecc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement/](http://pwecc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement/), accessed 15.6.10. I discuss this Declaration, and its central concept of *buen vivir* as an alternative to logic of economic growth, in Chapter 2.
can also encourage the evolution of national norms by providing a readily available template for constitutions and legislation.\(^4\)

Arguably, such a normative shift has already been at least partially implicit in the extensive and expanding corpus of international human rights law. There are several existing international instruments that, at the juridical level, provide substantive protection to peasants.\(^5\)

Nevertheless, as human rights experts have observed, there is no single instrument which draws these rights together in order to meet the specific and unique contemporary challenges faced by peasants and small farmers, and which also takes into account the profound historical injustices they have experienced.\(^6\) Hence the first justification for the new Declaration is the deontological claim that, as a matter of social and historical justice, governments must address the ‘crime against humanity’ constituted by the massive historical and continuing violations of peasants’ rights in diverse forms, made all the more compelling given that peasants as a group of people constitute a significant percentage of humanity.\(^7\) As discussed in earlier chapters, this claim draws on the historical tradition of the ‘moral economy of the peasant’, but universalises it as against governments and transnational

---

\(^4\) Edelman and James op cit., 91-2, discussing Martines-Torres, M.E., and Rosset, P.M., 2010, ‘La Via Campesina: The Birth and Evolution of a Transnational Social Movement’, Journal of Peasant Studies, 37(1), 149-175, 168-170. This theory of the impacts and significance of ‘norm shifting’ is based on the ‘boomerang effect’ described by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, according to which domestic conflicts are internationalised via venue-shifting with the aim of exerting additional pressure on domestic actors, usually national governments, to meet the demands of social movements: 1998, 12-3, discussed in Edelman and James op cit., 91.

\(^5\) These include the rights to adequate food, housing and the highest possible standard of health, which form part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the provisions on the rights of women living in rural areas of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the protections against arbitrary arrest and detention, and the other rights and freedoms contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation on the rights of indigenous peoples; and the 2008 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. See art.11, ICESRC (right to adequate standard of living, including adequate food and housing); art.12 ICESCR (right to highest attainable standard of health); arts.6(1), 9, 10, 14, 19, 21 and 22 ICCPR (right to life, right to freedom from arbitrary detention, right for persons deprived of liberty to be treated humanely, right to a fair trial, right to freedom of expression and association, right to form and join trade unions, right to freedom of assembly); art.14 CEDAW (prohibition of discrimination against women living in rural areas regarding access to productive resources, work, housing, social security, health, training and education); arts.13-17 ILO No.169 (rights of indigenous peoples to land and territories); and the rights to self-determination, land and territory specified in the 2008 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. For a recent discussion of these provisions and their applicability to peasants and small farmers, see Golay, C., 2009, The Rights of Peasants, CETIM, Critical Report No.5, available at http://cetim.ch/en/publications_cahiers.php, accessed 4.10.11; also United Nations Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, 2011, Preliminary study of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, United Nations A/HRC/16/163, 18.2.11.

\(^6\) Golay op cit., HRC Advisory Committee 2011 op cit.

\(^7\) La Via Campesina International Coordinating Committee, 2009, ‘Draft Declaration of Rights of Peasants – Women and Men’, Seoul, March 2009, available at http://viacampesina.net/downloads/PDF/EN-3.pdf, accessed 3.10.09, Recitals I & II. See also Edelman and James op cit., 83-4, noting that in this respect La Via Campesina fits into the familiar pattern of the expansion of the international human rights system over time, with the incorporation of new groups who ‘go through a common pattern of identifying themselves as part of the global human condition, asserting an equal claim to universal rights, and specifying rights that are particular to their unique situation’: ibid.
corporate actors. From the legal and political perspective, the advantage of a new Declaration would be ‘to increase coherence and visibility’ of the demands that peasants and small farmers are making on national governments.\(^8\)

Secondly, the new Declaration is said to be needed to facilitate the proper implementation of a number of existing international human rights and other obligations, by providing specific content and filling in ‘normative gaps’.\(^9\) For example, La Via Campesina says that it would constitute the implementation of the ‘Peasants’ Charter’ that emerged from the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, and its cornerstone of pro-poor agrarian reform; and also that it would strengthen the safeguards to protect bio-diversity contained in the Convention on Bio-Diversity.\(^10\) Perhaps the most glaring ‘normative gap’ in existing human rights law is the absence of any clear guarantee of the ‘right to land’ and ‘to the means of agricultural production’ for peasants and small-scale farmers.\(^11\)

Finally, La Via Campesina and its supporters advance an instrumentalist justification, which runs as follows: human social and economic development is dependent on agriculture and food; peasants are the people who principally do the work of sustaining agricultural systems and rural communities; and so the integrity of peasant culture and the viability of their livelihoods must be ensured, for the good of all. Related to this justification is the fact that the majority of malnourished persons in the world are rural dwellers and small-scale farmers; hence addressing rural poverty and dispossession will facilitate the eradication of hunger and the full realisation of the right to food; and the way to do this is by recognising and upholding peasants’ rights, as part of the transition to food sovereignty.\(^12\)

The peasants’ rights campaign also needs to be contextualised in its country of origin.\(^13\) During the Suharto dictatorship (1966-1998), the state suppressed independent peasant organisations, and a strong strain of virulent anti-communism and anti-left politics was implanted within the governing and religious elites.\(^14\) As I have discussed, food sovereignty is potentially radical in its implications, and is

---

\(^8\) HRC Advisory Committee 2011 \textit{op cit.}, para.70.

\(^9\) \textit{Ibid.}, paras.62-3; La Via Campesina 2009 \textit{op cit.}

\(^10\) Saragih 2005 \textit{op cit.}, mentioning (in Recital IV) the ICESRC, the Peasant Farmers’ Charter of 1979, ILO Convention 169 (regarding control of tribal and indigenous peoples over natural resources), Clause 8J of the Convention on Bio-Diversity (regarding clarification of the prohibition of patenting of peasant and indigenous knowledge), Point 14.60 of Agenda 21 (regarding its failure to mention the rights of peasant farmers as central to preserving bio-diversity), and the Cartagena Protocol (strengthening the protection of bio-diversity by allowing a right of peasant farmers to ‘refuse seed and plants that could harm and pollute the environment’); 9-10.

\(^11\) HRC Advisory Committee 2011 \textit{op cit.}, paras.63, 70.

\(^12\) Saragih \textit{op cit.}; also Edelman and James \textit{op cit.}, 100; also HRC Advisory Committee 2011 \textit{op cit.}, paras.4-6.

\(^13\) While the campaign for Peasants’ Rights began in Indonesia, and has been led more generally by the Asian regions of La Via Campesina, it was formally endorsed by La Via Campesina’s peak decision-making body, the International Coordinating Committee, during its March 2009 meeting in Seoul: Edelman and James \textit{op cit.}, 92. This ICC meeting was preceded by an International Conference on Peasants’ Rights held in Jakarta in June 2008, which “brought together about a hundred delegates drawn from 26 countries and representing the various peasant groups that make up La Via Campesina”: Golay 2009.

\(^14\) Interview with Tejo Pramono, Jakarta, 31.3.09.
openly talked about by many groups and activists as part of a post-capitalist political project. In Indonesia, such explicit public discussions are beyond the realms of political possibility; and so ‘food sovereignty as human rights’ becomes the acceptable - perhaps the only - alternative, as La Via Campesina researcher Tejo Pramono explains:

[We] never bring in the ideology of the left, of communism, or socialism. Yes, it’s different, when we’re talking about La Via Campesina; that is actually what we’re talking about, in Brazil everyone is talking about communism, about the left. But it doesn’t work in Indonesia. So, what we want to do now is - we have to talk about the rights of the farmers. We are the majority, but we are landless. Is there any single country, or any single corporations in agribusiness that [don’t] have land? So why don’t you give us land? You ask us to feed our families, but you don’t give us land. How can - what strategy do we use? So we work more on this kind of issue, on rights.15

Thus, education about rights has become a central movement-building strategy of La Via Campesina; and in a country such as Indonesia, the raising of consciousness through such education also forms a corner-stone of a long-term political strategy for transformative change, as I discuss below. In the terms of my Gramscian methodology, the educational work around a politicised understanding of human rights can be seen as part of a broader effort to build a national-popular collective will. This interpretation is consistent with my principal argument, which is that the significance of the peasants’ rights campaign lies in the contribution it can make it countries such as Indonesia to the building of a mass movement for transformative political change.

This campaign is reflective of La Via Campesina’s ‘dual-track’ strategy of opposition to some international institutions and critical engagement with others. That is, it takes a ‘rejectionist’ stance to what it regards as the institutional embodiments of ‘neoliberal globalisation’ - the IMF, the WB, the WTO, the G8 - whilst forming a number of ‘working partnerships’ with what it sees as the more ‘democratic’ elements of global governance on food and agriculture, notably the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Committee on World Food Security, and the Human Rights Council.16 Saturnino Borras, Marc Edelman and Cristobal Kay argue that ‘La Via Campesina’ s capacity for combining multiple tactics and strategies, as well as a wide range of forms of action, almost certainly contributes to its effectiveness’.17 The problem, however, is that at the present time the key decisions regarding the further expansion and consolidation of the globalising capitalist food system are largely taken by the ‘neoliberal institutions’, as discussed in Chapter 4. The ‘democratic’ institutions within which La Via Campesina has secured a measure of influence have only ‘soft’, symbolic power.
in the international political system, in contrast to the ‘hard’, coercive power of the ‘neoliberal institutions’.

The challenge for La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement is to translate this ‘soft’ power, of which human rights is emblematic, at the international level, into substantive and lasting political and economic change at the national and sub-national levels. Hence the significance of securing legal and political change based on food sovereignty principles, as in Ecuador; and building a rights-based consciousness amongst broad layers of the peasantry in pursuit of a ‘national-popular’ strategy, as in Indonesia.

With respect to the ‘neoliberal’ institutions, La Via Campesina’s aim has been ‘to delegitimize [them via] public shaming through confrontational actions’. Has such de-legitimisation succeeded in altering or slowing down the trajectory of expansion of the globalising capitalist food system? Yes, to a certain extent, according to Nettie Wiebe, one of the driving forces behind the establishment of La Via Campesina. She regards it as a ‘small victory’ that La Via Campesina has managed to throw some ‘sand in the WTO gears’, as she puts it, even as free trade talks continue to be pursued in the bilateral and regional arenas.

To this extent, La Via Campesina has, through its direct action interventions in global politics, arguably succeeded in contributing to the destabilisation of one of the ideological (free trade / trade liberalisation) and institutional (WTO) pillars of the globalising capitalist food system. Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck argue that ‘slowing the rate of liberalization’ in this way is ‘not trivial’, because it enables ‘the

---

18 In international relations and global political economy theory, the ‘“soft power” of attraction and emulation’ is contrasted with the ‘“hard power” of military dominance and economic coercion’: see Cox, R., 2004, ‘Beyond Empire and Terror: Critical Reflections on the Political Economy of World Order’, New Political Economy, 9(3) 307-323, 309. As Cox notes, the originator of the concept is Joseph S. Nye, Jr (1990, Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power, Basic Books, New York) who defined it as the ‘“intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions” or those aspects of a dominant power that are attractive to people beyond its borders’: Cox op cit., 321, note 5. Cox argues that in the context of the War on Terror, ‘the relationship between [US] “hard power” and “soft power”…has been inverse rather than complementary’; i.e. as the US has flexed its military muscles more aggressively, so it has ‘dissipated the gains [its] “soft power” made in the post-Second World War era’: op cit., 312. See also Nye, J.S.Jr., 2002, ‘Limits of American Power’, Political Science Quarterly, 117(4), 545-559; Nye, J.S., Jr., 2004, Soft Power and the War on Terror, Speech before the Foreign Policy Association, Washington DC, May 10, 2004. Human rights and ‘democracy’ are classic examples of ‘soft power’: Nye, J.S., Jr, 1999, ‘Redefining the National Interest’, Foreign Affairs, 78, 22-35.


20 “It is a small victory that expansion of free trade hasn’t been able to be managed by one agreement or negotiating table. That’s already introduced all kinds of possibilities into the power dynamic, which weren’t there as long as there was a small clique of nations negotiating and [presenting the rest of the world with a fait accompli]…Even in these bilateral arrangements, you see the same corporate players benefiting…But minimally we’ve made their job a little more complex…In the long run I have to be very doubtful that even the bilateral arrangements can succeed. A lot of them are so uneven, and so tentative in their benefits…it’s not clear to me that they’re well enough grounded, and that there’s enough power to hold them in place. That for us is good news because a lot of those agreements are just bilateral replicas of what’s happening at the WTO”: interview with the author, 15.9.10

21 La Via Campesina Global Coordinator Henry Saragih, in his presentation to the 2nd La Via Campesina Youth Conference of the East and South-East Asian region, held in Timor Leste from 26.3.09 – 29.03.09, stated that the ‘WTO process has come to a standstill. There’s no political momentum to take it forward’.
dispossessed time to “adjust to changing conditions without fatally damaging their substance, human and economic, physical and moral”.22 In other words, it creates some ‘breathing space’ in which to organise for further mobilisation and advances.23 As such, it represents both an effective political engagement with one of the key institutions of the globalising capitalist food system; and an effective ideological critique of a central element of the system’s common sense, namely that further liberalisation of agricultural trade is the best, if not the only, way to achieve global food security. The issue then becomes, assuming that some ‘breathing space’ is being created in this way, to what extent can La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement take advantage of it to articulate and implement their alternatives?

This in turn raises the issue as to what those alternatives mean in practice. The subject of trade is particularly important, having regard to the impact of trade liberalisation on small and peasant farmers. La Via Campesina’s alternative to free trade is trade based on food sovereignty principles: fair and transparent trade regulated by democratised international institutions, within the broad context of all nations working towards greater food self-sufficiency, and being supported in these efforts.24 As to what this would mean in practice, the details have not yet been developed, although La Via Campesina researcher Tejo Pramono states that the emerging Latin American ‘ALBA’ (Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) framework of ‘trade by solidarity’ might constitute a potential model.25 For Wiebe, the struggle at

23 As noted in Chapter 3, in the case of the organised labour movement in the advanced capitalist countries, these advanced ultimately resulted in substantive de-commodification of the human condition via the creation of welfare states: see Epsing-Andersen, G., 1990, The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
24 In one of its first texts following the launch of food sovereignty as an alternative to market-driven food security, La Via Campesina called for the promotion of ‘initiatives which will contribute to the development of fair trade with direct participation of producers and consumers, beginning with an international anti-dumping campaign’ (‘Tlaxcala Declaration of the Via Campesina’, Tlaxcala, Mexico, April 18-21, 1996, available at: http://www.virtualsask.com/via/laviacdeceng.html, accessed 30.12.11. In 1999, during the anti-WTO Seattle protests, La Via Campesina launched its demand to ‘get the WTO out of agriculture’: La Via Campesina, 1999, ‘Seattle Declaration: Take the WTO out of Agriculture’, December 3, 1999, available at: http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57:seattle-declaration-take-wto-out-of-agriculture&catid=24:10-years-of-wto-is-enough&Itemid=35, accessed 30.12.11. In the Seattle Declaration, La Via Campesina called, somewhat contradictorily, for ‘an alternative to the current neo-liberal policies and to institutions such as the WTO, WB and the IMF’; and at the same time insisted that ‘[w]e must civilize these international policies and institutions’; ibid. The Declaration contained some specific demands of a negative character (e.g. cancel the minimum import and mandatory market access requirements) and very general demands regarding the need to ‘create genuine international democratic mechanisms to regulate food trade while respecting food sovereignty in each country’; ibid.
25 Interview with the author, Jakarta, 31.3.09. ALBA’s origins date to proposal made by Venezuelan
this stage seems to be mainly a matter of ‘holding ground’ and ‘pushing back’ in some areas - creating breathing space, in other words - as opposed to proactively creating a different model of agricultural trade:

I can’t say that there are yet any brilliant successes of implementation of food sovereignty-type agreements on the basis of fair and transparent trade. However, there are places where we’ve achieved enough push-back that we’ve been able to protect certain parts of agriculture.\(^{26}\)

Thus, while the ‘realm of the possible’ has been expanded in the most general and abstract sense of a ‘fair and transparent trading system’, there is clearly considerable work to be done in terms of its elaboration, let alone its concrete implementation. In this crucial respect, food sovereignty as an alternative social and political project is (currently) lacking in coherence. Further, in the concrete terms of ‘protection’ as posed by Wiebe, the general trajectory appears to be one of on-going ‘de-peasantisation’, which is to say that peasants and small farmers are not ‘holding their ground’. There are, however, some scholars who claim that a counter-trend of ‘re-peasantisation’ is under way in certain places, and I will evaluate those arguments in Chapter 7.

In contrast to the oppositional stance towards the ‘neoliberal’ institutions, the strategic thinking that guides the engagements with the ‘more democratic’ international institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is that the forums that these institutions have created in recent years constitute a dialogic space in which La Via Campesina can articulate the needs and priorities of peasants,
and advance food sovereignty as a feasible and necessary alternative to what they say is the failing model of neoliberalism. The strategy thus appears to be, on the one hand, to try to slow the political processes of liberalisation and (perhaps) the economic processes of unrestrained capital accumulation through opposition and resistance; and on the other, to pursue the campaigns for ‘normative shifts’ in sympathetic global governance forums and so create a momentum for change at the national level.

One challenge for La Via Campesina is for it to be able to engage constructively in these spaces, without being co-opted by institutions that might use La Via Campesina’s ‘participation’ as a form of legitimising an agenda contrary to La Via Campesina’s core values and objectives, ‘thus effectively diluting or silencing opposition’. As a consequence of early experiences of such tactics, the La Via Campesina has adopted ‘as a matter of principle’ an insistence on its autonomous participation and ‘the right to speak on its own behalf in all spaces’. The fact that La Via Campesina has ‘been able to gain seats in [several] official venues’ has been said to constitute, by itself, a ‘profound change’, which ‘partially undermin[es] the hegemony previously enjoyed by more conservative movements’, IFAP especially. Further, it suggests that La Via Campesina is alert to the dangers of trasmormismo that being subsumed into joint representation in these forums would entail.

Getting a seat at the table is a first step; the next involves influencing the processes and general culture in these forums so that their general orientation is more responsive and more supportive of the case being made for food sovereignty and peasants’ rights. La Via Campesina’s participation in these venues has had to be managed carefully, with constant attention to the dangers of co-optation. For example, Tejo Pramono notes how ‘there is a dynamic to the relationship’ with the FAO, since ‘the politics within the FAO pull in different directions’. Thus, the 2006 FAO-sponsored International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) was supportive of the La Via Campesina agenda and included references to food sovereignty in its final Declaration, and was ‘a major political achievement for

---

27 In other words, La Via Campesina uses this space to advance its ‘struggle among models’: Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010, op cit.

28 A common way in which some food- and agriculture-related global governance institutions have attempted to do this is by ‘conflating IFAP [the large commercial farmers’ transnational movement] and La Via Campesina into just one space’, thereby ‘erasing the fundamental differences between the two [movements]’: Desmarais 2007 op cit., 118-121, discussing La Via Campesina’s experience with the multi-stakeholder Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) in May 2000. The ‘GFAR brought together…representatives of government departments of agriculture, national and international agricultural research institutions, NGOs, [the biotech companies] Monsanto and Novartis, La Via Campesina and IFAP. The expressed goal of the conference was to reach a consensus on the future direction of agricultural research…GFAR resolved [the] challenge [of overcoming the diametrically opposed interests of some participants] by simply fabricating consent’: 118.

29 Ibid., 120.

30 Borras et al 2008 op cit., 171.

31 Interview with the author, Jakarta, 31.3.09. La Via Campesina participates in a civil society forum of the FAO as part of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, specially created for the purpose. The IPC for Food Sovereignty includes 500 rural social movements and NGOs as members, including important artisanal fisherfolk networks such as the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and the International Collective in Support of Fish Workers’: Borras et al 2008 op cit., 171.
La Via Campesina’. 32 However, the Declarations of FAO-sponsored meetings on the food crisis in recent years have tended in the opposite direction, endorsing the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa as well as emphasising the need to conclude the Doha Development agenda of the WTO. 33 This appears to be reflective of ‘the apparent weakening of La Via Campesina allies within FAO post-ICARRD (due to funding cuts and internal re-organization)’. 34 Similarly, since 2005 La Via Campesina has played a leading role in shaping a ‘relatively progressive land reform framework’ within the Farmers’ Forum of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); however, because of internal political configurations within IFAD, this influence has not translated to strong and decisive support of the institution as a whole for the La Via Campesina positions. 35

While the follow-up to date to the ICARRD and IFAD processes appears disappointing from the food sovereignty perspective, and is, as Holt-Giménez and Shattuck argue, reflective of the balance of power held by neoliberal tendencies within the WB, La Via Campesina’s interventions in these forums are suggestive of a growing confidence and international protagonism. Further evidence of this tendency within the UN system is the leading role played by La Via Campesina in securing wide-ranging reforms to the FAO’s Committee on World Food Security (CWFS), agreed during its 35th session in October 2009 in the wake of the 2008 global food crisis. La Via Campesina now participates actively in this forum, intended to become a principal international arena for debate and discussion on food security and nutrition issues, via the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty. 36

In what has been hailed as the first international agreement of its kind, negotiated directly between government representatives and affected civil society actors, the Committee on World Food Security released in May 2012 its Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. 37 Civil society actors, including La Via Campesina, have

33 Interview with Tejo Pramono, Jakarta, 31.3.09.
34 Borras 2008 op cit., noting that these developments within the FAO ‘[do] not bode well [for La Via Campesina]’: 272.
35 Ibid., 270, 272. Borras comments: ‘At IFAD, La Via Campesina allies are located mainly in the Policy Division, a relatively weak division politically, because they do not control the fund and do not directly interface with country partners. For its part, the more powerful operations division of IFAD, where the main fund is directly handled, still lacks a coherent position on land reform, and has maintained broadly pro-market tendencies’: 272.
36 http://www.fao.org/cfs/en/, accessed 3.10.11. The October 2009 reforms intend ‘to make the CFS the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform dealing with food security and nutrition and to be a central component in the evolving Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition. The CFS reforms are designed to focus the Committee’s vision and role on the global coordination of efforts to eliminate hunger and ensure food security for all. This includes supporting national anti-hunger plans and initiatives; ensuring the all relevant voices are heard in the policy debate on food and agriculture; strengthening linkages at regional, national and local levels; and basing decisions on scientific evidence and state of the art knowledge’: FAO, 2009, ‘Global platform for food security revitalized: Member countries agree to reform Committee on World Food Security’, http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/36446/icode/, accessed 3.10.11.
welcomed these Guidelines both as affirmation of the capacity of the participatory process of the CWFS to achieve a successful outcome; and for the substantive content of the Guidelines themselves. The Guidelines place achievement of food security and ‘the progressive realisation of the right to food’ as ‘the most important goal of good land tenure governance’; and devote special attention to the needs of indigenous peoples, small landholders, and women, enshrining the principle of ‘free, prior and informed consent’ for indigenous communities vulnerable to losing their land tenure as a result of legislative or commercial arrangements.

At the same time, the Guidelines contain significant omissions and (from the perspective of civil society) shortcomings, notably the absence of any reference to secure communal access to water, the acceptance of transfer of land tenure through market mechanisms without any administrative or legislative safeguards for the poor, and the absence of a strong monitoring mechanism. Further, the guarantee of ‘free, prior and informed consent’ only applies to indigenous communities; others (such as peasants) are entitled only to ‘participation and consultation’. For reasons discussed below, these sorts of omissions raise serious questions as to whether the Guidelines will make any significant difference on the ground in terms of slowing down, let alone halting or reversing, the on-going process of land-grabs.

According to La Via Campesina researcher Tejo Pramono, the campaign to secure a new United Nations Declaration on the rights of peasants is similarly about ‘occupying the [international] space’. There is, in his view, a dual process of education taking place in this campaign, which is less to do with legal niceties and judicial procedures, and much more to do with consciousness-raising. At the level of the United Nations, the presence of La Via Campesina fills an obvious absence, and also plays an educative role vis-à-vis the governmental representatives, since ‘there is no one there to talk about the realities of peasants’. At the level of the grassroots, it is part of building the Food Sovereignty movement, in Indonesia and elsewhere:

Personally, when I think about peasant rights and human rights, I didn’t come to that process through thinking about...the legal process. Yes, we should have the laws, and it should be mentioned in the laws...but I do not believe that it will go to the legal process. I believe more in raising awareness of the people. In Indonesia we have to talk about the political campaign: it’s [only] a [procedural] democracy [at the moment]. Fifty per cent or more of the voters are farmers, and their voice is not heard. They need land. The democracy is distorted somewhere. It’s good to talk about farmers’ rights, and give some

---

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Interview with the author, 31.3.09.
meaning to it....Many people are disappointed with the lack of progress [in Indonesia] over the past ten years, and so we have to educate the farmers about these issues. 43

Here, Pramono is discussing the iterative and critical processes of education and movement-building that the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI) is undertaking. As mentioned previously, this sort of ‘rights talk’ plays a crucial role in efforts to form class consciousness and solidarity amongst peasants in Indonesia and beyond. 44 In the terms of my research questions, this is the principal benefit of the campaign for the UN Declaration. The educative processes associated with the campaign are also helping to ground a national-popular strategy within Indonesia, in terms of forming the peasantry and allied classes as a mass movement that is capable, over the medium-to-long term, of becoming a potent organised political force, eventually capable of forming provincial and perhaps a national government in their own right.

I turn then to consider the normative content of the draft Declaration on peasants’ rights. The Declaration is very wide-ranging, containing eleven substantive articles and eighty-two sub-sections, each of which specifies a different right. The eleven groups of rights claims come under the headings of:

- gender equality and the right to participate in decisions, policy formation processes, etc., that affect peasants’ territories;
- the right to life and an adequate standard of living;
- the right to land and territory;
- the right to seeds, and traditional agricultural knowledge and practices;
- the right to the means of agricultural production;
- the right to information and agricultural technology;
- the freedom to determine price and market for agricultural production;
- the right to the protection of agricultural values;
- the right to biological diversity;
- the right to preserve the environment;
- the freedoms of association, opinion and expression; and
- the right to have access to justice. 45

As noted above, some of the claimed rights and freedoms already exist in international human rights law, such as the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to freedom of association and expression, and the right to access to justice. Others, notably the right to own land and produce food, the cluster of rights associated with agrarian reform and the means of agricultural production, the freedom to determine price and markets, and the right to resist oppression, are quite novel. It is therefore somewhat surprising that in a recent discussion of the Declaration, Priscilla Claeys construes these rights claims as expressive of a ‘belief in an alternative, less urban, less technological, less industrial and less western, modernity, and the quest for a ‘natural’, ‘pre-capitalist form’ of existence’. 46 On the

43 Ibid.
45 La Via Campesina 2009a op cit.
contrary, I would argue that they are expressive of a 21st-century and universalised form of the ‘moral economy of the peasant’, which is future-oriented, precisely because the norms claimed are universalised; and precisely because underpinning these claims is an ecological understanding which posits peasants and farmers are stewards of the land who at this point in time have a unique responsibility to heal the ecological rift. Where Claeys does make a valuable point is in her cautioning of an exclusivist focus on the needs and special role of peasants:

Building alliances globally with indigenous groups in the South, consumers in the North, agricultural and industrial workers all around the globe will certainly be critical to advance the proposed new rights, from above (through constitutional changes, public policies, institutions) and / or from below (through alternative food and farming practices). But building alliances may become useless if too much of the movement’s rights rhetoric revolves around peasants’ distinctiveness, and their quest for recognition... Then, Via Campesina might be confronted with a lesson already learned by others: rights, when framed as absolutist claims, may inhibit the necessary political dialogue with other fragments of society...47

In the terms of this thesis, this observation links to the Gramscian principle that a counter-hegemonic project can only be successful if it can articulate a vision in the universal interest, above and beyond the needs and priorities of a particular class or sector. This is precisely the question that Via Campesina, and the Food Sovereignty movement more generally, needs to address as a matter of urgency.

In several instances, the Declaration speaks not only of the granting of positive rights and entitlements to peasants, but also of their ‘right to reject’ certain economic forms and practices, notably land-grabbing, GMO seed, and forms of bio-piracy.48

This ‘right to reject’ is said to flow from the claimed right of autonomy and self-determination for peasant communities, and to have antecedents in the ‘right to free, prior and informed consent’ that appears in the 2007 Indigenous Rights Declaration.49 Conceptually and juridically, it is a novel departure for international human rights law, and, as with claims such as the ‘right to the means of production’, is ‘indicative of an effort to push existing [human rights] norms beyond their current bounds’.50

The lengthy introduction and preamble to the draft Declaration, in which are recited the historical struggles of peasants and the many contemporary forms of suffering which they endure, quite effectively describe the contemporary processes of

Institutionalizing Subversion’, Sociology 46(5), 844-860, 851.

47 Ibid., 854.

48 See Art.IV(9) (‘the right to reject all kinds of land acquisition and conversion for economic purpose’ – a clear reference to land-grabbing); Art.V(2) (the ‘right to reject varieties of the plant which [sic] they consider to be dangerous economically, ecologically and culturally’ – a clear reference to genetically-modified seed);

49 and Arts. X(3) & (4) (the ‘right to reject patents threatening biological diversity’ and ‘intellectual property rights of knowledge etc. owned or developed by the community’ – a reference to ‘biopiracy’).

50 Edelman and James op cit., 100.

51 Ibid., 93.
‘accumulation by dispossession’, and the many forms of economic and ‘extra-economic’ forms of coercion by which they are accomplished.\(^{51}\)

La Via Campesina is well aware of these forms of coercion, and has formulated its response in the shape of a ‘right to reject’ coercive phenomena such as ‘land-grabs’ and mega-development projects which are resulting in the expropriation and dispossession of many thousands, if not millions, of peasants and rural dwellers.\(^{52}\)

Read as a legal text, an historical document and a critique of the violent practices of a hegemonic power formation, the draft Declaration represents a dynamic synthesis of the democratic construction of the content of food sovereignty over many years by members of La Via Campesina. In this sense it represents, in the terms of my research questions, an increase in the coherence and critical insights of the analyses and discourses of the Food Sovereignty movement. The comprehensive nature of its content is also suggestive of the growing coherence of the food sovereignty alternative, and enables observers to delineate its principal components and contours.

In terms of the Declaration’s present status, the path to securing a new Declaration on Peasants’ Rights is a long one, and only really gathered any momentum in the wake of the 2008 global food crisis.\(^{53}\) Prior to this conjunctural imperative, there were certain key institutional innovations within the United Nations which enabled a greater receptivity towards La Via Campesina and its campaign. Christophe Golay cites the formation of the Human Rights Council in 2006, the subsequent establishment of its Advisory Committee in 2008, and the thematic and country-specific work undertaken over several years by the two Special Rapporteurs on the right to food, Jean Zeigler and Olivier de Schutter, in developing the normative content of the right to food as strongly supportive of the substance of food sovereignty and the peasants’ rights campaign as the most significant changes.\(^{54}\)

Responding to calls from Mr de Schutter to prioritise the global food crisis and its impacts on the right to food, the Human Rights Council mandated the Advisory Committee to ‘make further recommendations to advance the realization of the right to food’.\(^{55}\) In May 2008, the Human Rights Council convened a special session on the global food crisis and right to food, and urged States to conduct what are in effect ‘right to food impact assessments’ of policies or measures, such as the facilitation of land acquisitions, prior to their adoption and implementation.\(^{56}\)

---

\(^{51}\) As discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, it is these processes and forms which characterise contemporary globalising capitalism. See Wood 2003 \textit{op cit} regarding the distinction between economic and extra-economic forms of coercion.

\(^{52}\) HRC Advisory Committee 2011 \textit{op cit.}, para.20; Golay \textit{op cit.}, citing as an example of a mega-development project leading to forcible eviction and displacement the construction of the Narmada Dam in India in the 1990s.

\(^{53}\) Golay \textit{op cit.}

\(^{54}\) \textit{Ibid.} Golay worked as an advisor to Jean Zeigler.

\(^{55}\) \textit{Ibid.}, citing Resolution 7/14 on the Right to Food adopted by the Human Rights Council on 27.3.08, para.34.

\(^{56}\) \textit{Ibid.}, citing Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/S-7/2, \textit{The negative impact of the worsening of the world food crisis on the realization of the right to food for all}, 17.7.08.
In March 2009 La Via Campesina representative and Basque farmer leader Paul Nicholson addressed the Human Rights Council on the food crisis and the alternatives proposed by La Via Campesina, including the Declaration on peasants’ rights; and this was followed by La Via Campesina’s Global Coordinator, Henry Saragih, addressing a ‘thematic dialogue’ of the UN General Assembly on the same topic. 57 Also in March 2009 the Human Rights Council debated the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the food crisis, and, as Golay notes,

[The recommendations] produced a lively debate. Several Latin-American States were in favour of a study on the food crisis, the right to food and peasants’ rights, but other States (particularly from the West) were against it. A compromise was reached [in which] the Advisory Committee [was requested] to undertake a study on “discrimination in the context of the right to food, including identification of good practices of anti-discriminatory policies and strategies.” 58

This shift in emphasis away from discussion on new substantive rights of peasants as a social class, and towards discrimination, clearly at the insistence of Northern states, is perhaps a sign of the resistance of these States to a new Declaration on peasants’ rights in anything like the draft presented by La Via Campesina. In terms of my Gramscian methodology, it points once more to the dangers of passive revolution and trasformismo, which are clearly potential costs of the campaign for the new Declaration.

In its 13th Session, during March 2010, the Human Rights Council, in the context of a wide-ranging resolution on the continuing global food crisis and the realisation of the right to food, mandated the Advisory Committee to ‘undertake a preliminary study on ways and means to further advance the rights of people working in rural areas, including women, in particular smallholders engaged in the production of food’. 59 The preliminary study was prepared and delivered to the 16th session of the Human Rights Council, during March 2011. 60 In essence this study represented a strong endorsement of La Via Campesina’s Peasants’ Rights campaign for, including expressing support for a new Declaration and Convention. 61 At the same time, the North-South divide mentioned above appeared to be widening. 62

57 Golay op cit.
58 Ibid., citing Human Rights Council Resolution 10/12, 20.3.09.
60 Human Rights Council Advisory Committee 2011a op cit.
62 During the 16th session, La Via Campesina and its two NGO allies on the peasants’ rights campaign, FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) and Centre Europe-Third World (CETIM), hosted a ‘side-event’ titled ‘The need of increased protection of human rights of peasants’. At that event both Mr Zeigler and Mr de Schutter spoke strongly in favour of the need to adopt the new Declaration. A number of States also spoke at that event and subsequently when the preliminary report was presented to the Chair of the Human Rights Council. While ”Nigeria, on behalf of the African Group, welcomed the Preliminary Study, the European Union [merely] took note of it”, indicating an emerging North-South divergence: see HRC Advisory Committee 2011b op cit., para.3; also http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?article3307, accessed 5.10.11.
Cognisant of the dangers of passive revolution, Henry Saragih later wrote that

Under pressure from some European countries, the use of the expression ‘rights of peasants’ was replaced by the less threatening ‘rights of people working in rural areas’. They [European states] seem to fear giving too much political weight to a large number of people whose trade has largely remained outside the capitalist economy.  

In an Update prepared for the 7th Session of the Advisory Committee during August 2011, Mr Zeigler reported that of the seven States that had by that date expressed their views on the study, only one, Germany, disagreed with the central recommendation that a new Declaration was justified. Having regard to the generally supportive attitude of states and other stakeholders, and taking into account the generally negative panorama for the right to food in 2011, especially the accelerating global ‘land grab’, Mr Zeigler stated that the key recommendations of the study should remain unchanged.

Thus far, it appears, the peasants’ rights campaign is progressing quite well; albeit with clear risks of passive revolution and trasformismo. However, if the experience of the recently-adopted Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is any guide, La Via Campesina and its allies are in the early stages of a lengthy process, with no guarantee of a successful outcome. The latter Declaration took 25 years from first conception to final approval by the UN General Assembly, with determined opposition throughout from a handful of Anglo-American countries. Nevertheless, the Declaration is, in the words of a leading expert in the field of economic, social and cultural rights, an ‘historic document’ and a ‘very ambitious text’, which goes ‘very far in justifying indigenous peoples’ claims to far-reaching autonomy, control over lands, veto over development projects which the indigenous consider undesirable, and far-reaching claims for restitution or compensation’.

---


64 In Germany’s view, there was ‘no legal foundation in international law to recognise the rights to land, seeds and the means of production’: HRC Advisory Committee 2011b op cit., para.10. The following States had expressed their views by the time of this Update report: South Africa, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Indonesia and Cuba. Switzerland, while not opposing the main recommendation directly, wanted to shift the focus to the ‘need to improve the implementation of existing human rights instruments’; and also stated that intellectual property rights had an important role in improving food security: ibid., para.11.

65 Ibid., para.25.

66 Of those 25 years, 20 consisted of ‘debates and negotiations’ in which States and representatives of indigenous peoples spent many hours discussing the precise meaning of concepts such as ‘self-determination’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘land rights’: see Stavenhagen, R., 2011, ‘How Strong Are the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?’ Journal of Human Rights, 10(3), 414-421. The entire process leading up to the Declaration is recounted in detail in Charters, C., and Stavenhagen, R. (eds), 2009, Making the Declaration Work: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen. Despite the very drawn-out process, ‘it was not certain until the very last minute that the General Assembly [of the United Nations] would proclaim [the final Declaration], since a bloc of four countries with significant indigenous populations – Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand – opposed the Declaration at every stage through the drafting process and voted against it in the final General Assembly vote: Stavenhagen 2011 op cit., 420; Charters and Stavenhagen op cit., 29, 38-41.

67 Eide, A., 2009, The Indigenous Peoples, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the
At the same time, the ‘gap between word and action’ on indigenous rights, as with other human rights, is likely to persist, due to the lack of ‘state compliance and implementation’.  

Exactly the same can be said about the field of peasants’ rights. As Hannah Arendt stated over forty years ago, in words that have lost none of their relevance,

No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as “inalienable” those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves.

The inadequacy of the response of the ‘international community’ to legislate in response to massive human rights violations has been confirmed by growing numbers of quantitative studies which reveal that both the conventional ‘naming and shaming strategies’ of leading human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as treaty ratification itself, have little or no positive impact as regards human rights performance of nation states. This supports a critical
perspective on human rights which argues that the ‘root of the problem does not lie in perfecting legal instruments’, but in a deeper analysis of the prevailing political and economic system, and the way that power is distributed and exercised within it.72

Arguably this history of widespread non-observance of universal human rights has demonstrated the ‘deep truth’ of the observation first made by Edmund Burke in the year after the French Revolution, namely that ‘only national law can...effectively protect rights’.73 Yet, national laws, too, can be a frail protection at best if, as is frequently the case, political and economic expediency dictates that ‘universal rights’ can and must be dispensed with. Writing more than thirty years ago about the state terror then gripping much of Latin America, Julio Barreiro noted how nearly all the Latin American states had incorporated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into their Constitutions, but that that did not prevent them from violating most of its provisions in the most horrific ways on a daily basis.74

As regards peasants’ rights and food sovereignty, it is abundantly clear that redistributive, agrarian reform, including equitable and secure access to the means of production, lies at their core. A suitable legal framework and adequate administrative capacity are required to undertake such reform, but what is most important is the political will to see the process through, and overcome entrenched opposition from landed and corporate interests.75 In some countries, such as

---


77 Douzinas op cit., 143.

78 In terms that prefigure today’s critics of neoliberal globalization, Barreiro wrote:

The irrational advance of industrialization…the uncontrolled development of new and powerful economic forces…the constantly increasing interference by the military in shaping the destiny of peoples…and an amazing development of forces and techniques of repression – these are all inter-related factors, which not only set the style for an era but which also give rise to the most serious misgivings about the future of human rights…

Barreiro op cit., 105.

79 Ibid., p105.

80 Borras 2008 op cit., 262, noting that ‘the point of departure [for agrarian reform] is landlord resistance
Indonesia, adequate agrarian reform laws exist, including Constitutional provisions, but, according to representatives of the Indonesia Peasant Union, there is, as noted earlier, no effective implementation. Worse, they say, the legal system is biased towards corporations, allowing them to expropriate peasants’ lands with impunity, and then criminalising peasants who seek to resist these processes through various forms of direct action. Further, the model of agrarian reform that is most commonly being implemented today by states is the WB’s market-led model, notwithstanding the commitment given by states at both the World Food Summit in 1996 and in the 2006 ICARRD Declaration to a pro-peasant model of agrarian reform.

Even if La Via Campesina manage to secure a Declaration on peasant rights, and then at some future time, a Convention, what difference would it actually make to the daily lives of peasants? From the legal perspective, there is, quite simply, almost no meaningful and effective enforcement of international ESC rights obligations owed by states at the international level. As regards human rights violations by non-state actors such as transnational corporations, there is no international enforcement mechanism whatsoever.

to land reform – should it be evaded or confronted?...Neoliberal economists see landlord resistance as something to be avoided at all costs...’. In her elucidation, from the text of the International Bill of Rights (the 1948 Declaration, and the two Conventions of 1966), of a modernist and politicised ‘human rights ideology’ whose goal is ‘equality in dignity’, and which is predicated on social mobilization, Zehra Arat argues that this ideology implies *inter alia* a ‘strong’ and ‘interventionist’ state that is willing to place considerable restrictions on the control of the means of production and on the operation of markets, especially in labour and agriculture: Arat, Z.F.K, 2008, ‘Human Rights Ideology and the Dimensions of Power: A Radical Approach to the State, Property and Discrimination’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30, 906-932, 919-920, 923-924.

77 Interviews with the author, Jakarta, 31.3.09; see also Golay 2009 *op cit.*., who cited an Amnesty International Memorandum to the Government of Guatemala in 2005, in which it observed that ‘a particular characteristic of agrarian disputes in Guatemala is that the full weight of the law and judicial system is often levied in order to enforce evictions, but not to issues relating to labour rights of rural workers or land tenure of rural communities’.

78 Golay *op cit.*

79 Koen de Feyter, for example, sees the state-centric institutional structure of international human rights law as particularly ill-suited to deal with a world where human rights violations occur ‘as a consequence of the behaviour of a variety of actors’:

Globalization has not strengthened the United Nations Geneva human rights institutions. They are arguably less effective now than they were during the Cold War...[they] have been unable so far to deal in a meaningful way with post-Cold War challenges, such as the impact of the business world and the international economic organizations that drive globalization...: 2005, *Human rights: Social Justice in the Age of the Market*, University Press, Dhaka, 5.

80 Donati, F., and Vidar, M., 2009, *International Legal Dimensions of the Right to Food*, in Kent, G., (ed) 2008, *Global Obligations for the Right to Food*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 47-88, 77-9. Mahmood Monshipouri, Claude E. Welch Jr., and Evan T. Kennedy argue that multinational corporations (MNCs) ‘have thus far shown meager interest in the sociocultural welfare or human rights of the vast majority of the people living in host countries. MNCs are under no legal—much less ethical—obligations to the governments of the countries within which they operate, even as their policies and actions affect hundreds of millions of people. Conversely, it is states that are accountable to the transnational business forces and economic private regimes set by the MNCs. In the absence of international regulatory agencies, MNCs have been entirely free to devise their own rules, creating an environment less hospitable or indifferent to human rights’. 2003, ‘Multinational Corporations and the Ethics of Global Responsibility: Problems and Possibilities’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 25, 965-989, 987-8. See also
The lack of a meaningful enforcement procedure for violations means that the human rights system offers ‘few incentives for compliance’; the WTO, by contrast, allows for the imposition of economic sanctions against those states that fail to abide by the rulings of its dispute resolution panels to amend their national laws.\textsuperscript{81} The adoption by the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2008 of an Optional Protocol allowing the submission of individual complaints to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, while of undoubted historic significance in terms of remedying this feature of the long-standing imbalance between civil and political, and ESC rights, is unlikely to make a substantial contribution to the greater observance of ESC rights.\textsuperscript{82}

In summary, while La Via Campesina and its supporters say that a key reason why the Declaration is needed is that ‘such protection as does exist [under the ICESCR and other Conventions] is ineffectual and continues to be flouted with impunity’, one must be circumspect as to whether a new international instrument will be effective to remedy this state of affairs. My argument is that the real battle to be waged is political and economic; and the peasants’ rights campaign must be judged a success or failure according to what extent it contributes to the outcome of this battle.

This leads then to a wider consideration of the role that human rights might or might not play in processes of substantive social change. Food sovereignty, as I have discussed earlier in the thesis, explicitly seeks to achieve transformative change in global and national food systems. This means structural change and class-based redistribution, such as comprehensive agrarian reform, in the context of a movement that has over time become more explicitly ‘anti-imperialist[,] anti-capitalist [and

\textsuperscript{81} There are no sanctions, no international human rights court, and the UN treaty system offers ‘ritual condemnation at best’: \textit{ibid.}, 8, 32-33; \textit{also} Kuper, A., (ed.), 2005, \textit{Global Responsibilities: Who Must Deliver on Human Rights}? Routledge, New York, x-xi. In the case of regional and bilateral free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, the right to sue state parties for alleged loss of profit extends to private corporations, and has been successfully exercised against the Mexican government by grain transnational corporations Cargill and Archer Daniels Midlands: Public Citizen, 2011, ‘Table of Foreign Investor-State Cases and Claims under NAFTA, CAFTA and Peru FTA’, August 2011, available at \url{http://www.citizen.org/documents/investor-state-chart-april-2011.pdf}, accessed 5.10.11. The successful claims by ADM, Cargill and another US transnational Corn Products International, concerned a tax imposed by the Mexican government on beverages sweetened with High Fructose Corn Syrup, which these three companies produced, but not with Mexican cane sugar. Mexico ‘argued that the tax was legitimate because the US had failed to open its market sufficiently to Mexican cane sugar exports’, but the Tribunal rejected this claim, and awarded the three companies US$33.5 million, $77.3 million and $58.5 million respectively in compensation: \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{82} A campaign for the adoption of this Protocol has been waged by various NGOs for over 30 years: see International Coalition for an Optional Protocol to the ICESCR. As one commentator has noted, the deliberate exclusion of NGOs from the possibility of making complaints under the Protocol, when combined with the traditional international law requirement that all available domestic remedies must be exhausted, ‘can be seen as a failure when it comes to creating a mechanism that has the best chance of being one that will provide access to justice’. Given that NGOs are the most likely to make use of the Protocol: Mahon, C., 2008, ‘Progress at the Front: The Draft Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’, \textit{Human Rights Law Review}, Vol.8(4), 617-647, 646.
even] openly socialist’. 83 What are some of the possible risks of pursuing such change via the human rights route?

Several scholars in recent years have expressed scepticism of many aspects of human rights activism, or even of the entire human rights project itself. Most of these critiques are directed towards what might be termed the ‘individual, liberal’ human rights project; that is, the privileging of individual rights and freedoms in the sphere of civil and political rights, over collective projects directed more at structural change based on economic and social rights. 84 Wendy Brown, for example, sees the common liberal claim that civil and political rights enable economic and social rights as a reversal of modern history ‘in its suggestion that national wealth is produced by rather than productive of civil liberties and constitutionalism and in its elision of the deformations of colonialism and a global economy in which the wealth of the core states is predicated in part on the poverty of the periphery’. 85

This sort of liberal, individualist human rights praxis is seen variously as a form of Northern cultural imperialism 86; as necessarily entailing the ‘pathologisation of the South’ via the ‘disciplinary’ and ‘therapeutic’ imposition of human rights norms 87; as sustaining neo-liberal globalisation through discourses of ‘rights-based development’ 88; ‘rights-based food security’ and a more general paradigm of ‘trade-

83 Holt-Giménez, and Shattuck op cit., 115.
88 For feminist perspectives on the risks and opportunities of the emerging discourse of ‘rights-based development’ in a number of Southern countries, see Cornwall, A., and Molyneux, M., 2006, ‘The
related market-friendly human rights’\textsuperscript{89}, and as justifying the post-Cold War trend of growing militarism and ‘humanitarian intervention’.\textsuperscript{90} The liberal ontology of human rights which sees individual empowerment as the route to social change is critiqued as a form of fatalistic and politically disempowering ‘anti-politics’, foreclosing as it does any discussion over the prevailing political and economic constraints within which individual choices can be made.\textsuperscript{91}

In a similar vein, what Tony Evans calls the ‘legal discourse of human rights’ - the focus on laws and institutions - is said to entail anti-democratic consequences, substituting as it does legislation, constitutionalism and litigation for political contestation as the principal means of determining the shape and content of the good society.\textsuperscript{92} The result of these processes of legal codification has been to reduce and narrow human rights to a ‘number of rights that people have which precede politics or which are above politics [rather than] rights which are achieved (and sustained) through politics’.\textsuperscript{93}

Further, critics say, the historical experience is that ‘the trajectory of institutionalization is always the same, from “change” to “order”, from challenging the status quo to sustaining it’\textsuperscript{94}. Pre-institutionalised demands for rights have a radical capacity to re-shape norms and values as part of a counter-hegemonic

\begin{center}
\textit{Politics of Rights – Dilemmas for Feminist Praxis: An Introduction’, Third World Quarterly, 27(7), 1175-1191, as well as the other essays in that special issue of the journal.}
\textsuperscript{90} Sellars \textit{op cit.}, Barkawi and Laffey \textit{op cit,} and see the essays in Chandler \textit{op cit.} There is a growing literature on the exploration of what is seen as the emerging new norm of the right of ‘humanitarian intervention’; for recent reviews see Woodward \textit{op cit.;} Lyon and Dolan \textit{op cit.}; and Bellamy \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{91} Brown 2006 \textit{op cit.}, 456. Much depends, says Brown, on how the ‘global problem’ is framed: if it is understood in terms of ‘relatively unchecked’ globalizing capitalism, then.

[O]ther kinds of political projects…may offer a more appropriate and far-reaching remedy for injustice defined as suffering and as systematic disenfranchisement from collaborative self-governance…if there are still other historical possibilities…then we would do well to take the measure of whether and how the centrality of human rights discourse might render those other political possibilities more faint: \textit{ibid.} 461-2.

\textsuperscript{92} Pupovac \textit{op cit.}, 98-100. Conor Gearty (2006, \textit{Can Human Rights Survive?} Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) asks: ‘What kind of a war-strategy is it to entrust our greatest emancipatory tasks to judges, a sub-category of precisely the kind of well-off, already empowered person who ought to be terrified by the prospect of true human rights?’: 12.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Op cit.,} 71-2; Pupovac \textit{op cit.}, 98-100.
\textsuperscript{94} Stammers 1999 \textit{op cit.}, 998.
project; this capacity tends to be lost, and rights become progressively more conservative, once they are codified in laws and institutionalised. The restrictive judicial interpretation of the economic and social rights contained in South Africa’s ostensibly progressive post-apartheid constitution supports such an analysis.

The La Via Campesina peasants’ rights campaign addresses many of the central thrusts of these critiques more or less directly, since it is clearly a form of human rights praxis which attempts to assert the demands for greater autonomy and self-governance of oppressed social classes. In the process it is endeavouring, not to support the political and institutional processes that seek to further the expansion of globalising capitalism, but to undermine them. At the same time, the critiques, while arguably themselves ‘excessively bleak’ and relentlessly dismissive of any emancipatory role for human rights projects, do reveal the many limitations and risks of human rights and law-based strategies as vehicles for social transformation. I argue that La Via Campesina must remain aware of these limitations and risks of passive revolution and trasformismo, which are already becoming apparent as the Declaration progresses slowly through the UN machinery; and keep firmly in mind the necessity for constant political mobilisation as ultimately the most effective route for wider social change.

95 Ibid. Cases that illustrate this tendency include the failure of the equal pay laws in Britain to significantly close the gender pay gap during the past three decades, with women working part-time in the UK receiving only 60% of the comparable male full-time salary, and in some parts of the country the pay gap has widened in recent years: see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/3765535.stm, accessed 22.10.07. Another example is the failure of the anti-discrimination laws to make significant inroads into structural racial wealth and income inequalities in the United States following the formal end of segregation in the 1960s; the typical African American family has around $8000 of wealth compared to $80,000 of wealth for the typical white family, and the income gap has closed approximately 3 points, from 59% to 62%, over the past forty years: see http://www.blackcommentator.com/119/119_black_wealth.html, accessed 23.11.07. Both statistics will likely have worsened since the onset of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.

96 Pieterse, M., 2007, ‘Eating Socioeconomic Rights: The Usefulness of Rights Talk in Alleviating Social Hardship Revisited’, Human Rights Quarterly, 29, 796-822, 816. Commenting on these developments, Pieterse suggests that they seem to confirm the continuing validity of much of Peter Gabel’s ‘phenomenology of rights consciousness’ critique of the tendency of social movements to be co-opted via law-based rights strategies, the essence of which is that rights tend to perpetuate an unjust social order by creating the illusion that a more just order has been achieved ‘by virtue of the mere acknowledgement of its possibility’: Ibid., 814-6, discussing Gabel, P., 1984, ‘Symposium: A Critique of Rights: The Phenomenology of Rights-Consciousness and the Pact of the Withdrawn Selves’, Texas Law Review, 62, 1563-1588.

97 As such, the praxis of food sovereignty is an expression of what Upendra Baxi terms the “insurrectionary practice” of the ‘politics for human rights’, which sees human rights as ‘an arena of transformative political practice that disorients, destabilizes, and, at times, even helps destroy deeply unjust concentrations of political, social, economic and technological power’, in contrast to the politics of human rights’, which ‘treats human rights languages and logics as an ensemble of means for the legitimation [of] governance and domination [which] universalizes the powers of the dominant in ways that constantly reproduce everywhere human rightlessness and suffering’: Baxi op cit., xiv-xv, 19.


99 As Wendy Brown puts it, “[Human rights] is a politics and it organizes political space, often with the aim of monopolizing it. It also stands as a critique of dissonant political projects, converges neatly with the requisites of liberal imperialism and global free trade, and legitimates both as well”: 2006 op cit., 461.

172
Food sovereignty, peasants’ rights and the right to adequate food

In the discussion above concerning the content and status of the draft Declaration on peasant’s rights, I have noted how supportive both Special Rapporteurs on the right to food have been of this campaign, and of La Via Campesina and food sovereignty generally. Olivier de Schutter’s understanding - and that of his predecessor Jean Ziegler- of the global problematic regarding food and agriculture coincides with that of La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement on every matter of significance; and contradicts that of the principal neoliberal governance forums.

De Schutter argues that the persistence of global hunger is ‘primarily a problem of a lack of access to productive resources such as land and water, of unscrupulous employers and traders [and] of an increasingly concentrated input providers sector’. Above all, it is ‘the result of political factors that condemn small farmers, the primary victims of hunger, to poverty’. In contrast, G20 leaders have proceeded ‘from the misdiagnosis of attributing global hunger to a simple lack of food [and] for years focused their efforts solely on increasing agricultural production by industrial methods alone’. This simplistic ‘solution’ of food security via increased production has demonstrably failed, in de Schutter’s view. In its place, the power and structural inequalities in the food system need to be systematically addressed, by a bold reorientation of the food system which strengthens and supports the capacity of small-scale farmers to feed themselves and their communities, and by ‘support[ing] the capacity of all countries to feed themselves.

---

100 The two Special Rapporteurs to date are Jean Zeigler (2000-2007), and Olivier de Schutter (2008-present). Formally the Special Rapporteur is appointed by and accountable to the UN Human Rights Council, and his mandate is to ‘promote the full realization of the right to food and the adoption of measures at the national, regional and international levels’ (Human Rights Council, 2008, A/HRC/6/L.5/Rev.1). The extent of their support for the Food Sovereignty movement has developed to such an extent that Olivier de Schutter, commenting on the renewal of his mandate for a further three years in May 2011, now sees a major part of his role as being to ‘serve’ what he terms the ‘right to food movement’; and it is clear from his many reports and press releases that he includes La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement within that movement: De Schutter, O., 2011, ‘New Mandate: Message from Olivier de Schutter’, http://www.srfood.org/index.php/en/component/content/article/1-latest-news/1324-breaking-the-impasse-of-food-crisis, accessed 4.10.11.


102 Ibid.


104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

173
by strategies based on the right to food’. This call for a transformative reorientation in the global food system towards greater national self-sufficiency closely mirrors a central component of food sovereignty, as discussed earlier in the chapter. This emerging synthesis between food sovereignty and the normative development of the universal right to adequate food is indicative of the increasing coherence of the social and political project advanced by the Food Sovereignty movement, and its growing political credibility.

Indeed, given the close philosophical and political affinity between food sovereignty and the work of the Special Rapporteurs on the right to food, the coherence and substantive normative content of the former could be further advanced by the explicit embrace of the Special Rapporteurs’ recommendations by food sovereignty advocates. Many of these recommendations clearly advance food sovereignty goals. For example, amongst other measures, de Schutter has urged G20 political leaders to:

- regulate and control financial speculation on food commodities;
- ‘encourage the development of regional storage facilities’;
- ‘support the provision of public goods’ such as rural infrastructure and agricultural extension services; and
- ‘strengthen global food security governance’ by ensuring that trade and investment policies do not contradict or over-ride efforts of the Committee on World Food Security to improve global and national food security.107

During his first mandate, de Schutter produced reports and briefing papers on several matters of key significance to La Via Campesina:

- land acquisitions and land rights108;
- trade109;
- seed policies and intellectual property rights;
- sustainable agriculture and agro-ecology;
- concentration in the agri-business sector; and
- commodity speculation.110

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
He also carried out missions to six countries, promoting the need to adopt measures to support the right to food and evaluating the functioning of existing legal and institutional frameworks. His conclusions invariably accord with the core of the food sovereignty perspective and the peasants’ rights campaign, namely that all countries should work towards greater levels of food self-sufficiency via supporting and strengthening the capacity of peasants and small-scale producers. Amongst his many recommendations to national political leaders are the following:

- that the right to land should be recognised as a human right;
- that global trade rules must enable Southern countries to protect their farmers from the vastly more productive Northern industrialised producers;
- that states must reorient ‘their agricultural systems towards agro-ecological modes of production’; and
- that states ‘combat excessive concentration in the food chain, or abuses of dominant positions acquired by certain actors’.

De Schutter’s underlying concern closely mirrors the raison d’être of La Via Campesina:

[How to make a transition: how to move from a system that ruins small-scale farmers in order to feed the cities, to a system in which better incomes for rural households slow down rural-to-urban migration, improve the bargaining power for urban workers, and create multiplier effects on the local economy even beyond agriculture? How to move from ways of producing food that create inequality, poverty and environmental degradation in rural areas, to sustainable agricultural systems, that can at the same time increase incomes of food producers and be more resilient to climate change?] 116

At the same time, as a political realist, he acknowledges that the achievement of such a transition depends above all on the continued political mobilisation of ‘broad-based social movements and human rights defenders all over the world’, who must continue inter alia to ‘resist the current tendency to deprive peasants from the land or water on which they depend from [sic] their livelihoods’. 117 From this it is easy to

---

111 Ibid.
112 de Schutter 2010b op cit.
113 United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, de Schutter, O., 2009, Background Document on the Mission to the World Trade Organization, A/HRC/10/005/Add.2, 2.3.09. In this report, De Schutter critiques what he terms ‘the illusory notion of a ‘level playing field’, noting that ‘in 2006, agricultural labour productivity in the Least Developed Countries was just 46 per cent of the level in other developing countries and below 1 per cent of the level in developed countries’, and further, that ‘these massive differences in productivity are increasing: labour productivity grew by only 18 per cent in LDCs between 1983 and 2003, by 41 per cent in other developing countries, and by 62 per cent in developed countries. Depending on the kind of equipment available to farmers in LDCs or in developing countries, some estimates suggest that the differences in productivity per active labourer between the most efficient and the least efficient producers amount to 1/1000 or more’: 8.
116 2011a op cit.
117 Ibid. Emel and Neo note that intensive livestock production is a major source of depletion of
see why he conceives the role of his office as being to ‘serve’ the right to food movement; and, in the terms of my research questions, to the extent that the protagonism of La Via Campesina and its allies in the Food Sovereignty movement within the UN agencies has contributed to producing this outcome, it must be regarded as a major political and strategic success, which will help to shift the balance of forces in the globalising capitalist food system over the coming years.

One indicator of a shift in the balance of forces is the extent of political changes at the national level: from governments that are supportive of the further expansion of the globalising capitalist food system, to those that want to resist and roll it back, and create spaces for the development of alternative food economies based on food sovereignty principles. Is the adoption of national legislative and administrative measures to implement the human right to food, as contemplated by human rights theory, contributing to such a dynamic?

The Special Rapporteur has worked with the Right to Food Unit at the FAO, established in the wake of the adoption of the 2004 Voluntary guidelines on the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, to map out best practice for countries on the legal and institutional steps to implement the right to food.118

The key steps are:

- incorporating the right to food in national constitutions;
- passing enabling appropriate legislation, ideally a ‘framework law’;
- developing participatory ‘national strategies based upon the right to food’;
- designing appropriate institutions and processes of a participatory nature;
- monitoring the implementation of the national strategy; and
- enforcing the right to food through judicial means where necessary.119

In terms of my research questions and Gramscian methodology, my interest here is to determine whether the legislative and administrative changes linked to the right to food at the national level are contributing to the wider strategic goals of the Food Sovereignty movement. A related question is the extent to which the implementation of the right to food might conceivably form part of an effective national-popular strategy.

In 2009, de Schutter reviewed progress towards implementation of the right to food at the national level. The results revealed that (as of 2009) ‘24 countries [had] included the right to food in their constitution’; three countries had adopted framework laws, and a further five were drafting such laws; five countries had adopted national food and nutrition security strategies; and four countries had groundwater aquifers, especially for the production of animal feed: 2011 op cit., 72.


created new institutions specifically charged with overseeing implementation of the right to food.\textsuperscript{120} Of particular significance, in terms of its scope and achievements, was Brazil’s ‘Zero Hunger’ strategy, which had helped bring about a drop of 73\% in levels of child mortality since 2002.\textsuperscript{121}

At the municipal level, activist-scholar Frances Moore Lappé has documented how Belo Horizonte, Brazil’s fourth-largest city, managed to reduce levels of hunger and malnutrition in the city by 50\% over 10 years from 1993 by adopting an explicit multi-dimensional ‘right-to-food’ approach.\textsuperscript{122} Key elements of this successful strategy were:

- offering local farmers ‘dozens of choices spots of public space on which to sell to urban consumers’, thereby improving farmer incomes and food access by eliminating retailer mark-ups;
- establishing 34 fixed-price bulk produce markets at prominent locations;
- establishing three ‘People’s Restaurants’ with subsidised healthy meals;
- an extensive network of community and school gardens; and
- nutrition classes.\textsuperscript{123}

The annual cost of all the programmes amounted to around two percent of the city’s budget.\textsuperscript{124} Such practical and effective changes clearly further many of the goals of the Food Sovereignty movement, and demonstrate how partnerships between farmers, food, health and education workers, and community activists can bring about rapid progress towards realisation of both the right to food and food sovereignty. While such a strategy may not of itself constitute a ‘national-popular collective will’ in the Gramscian sense of bringing about transformative change in the configurations of political and economic power, it certainly contributes to that objective, insofar as it empowers local farmers and fosters a strong sense of collective and community spirit.

On the positive side, de Schutter is encouraged by the speed with which several national governments have taken constitutional and legislative action in the five years since 2004. The most successful examples, especially Brazil and Ecuador, depended on strong and committed social movement mobilisations, which for de Schutter ‘confirm[s] the saying that ‘rights are rarely given, they are taken’.\textsuperscript{125} At the same time, he suggests that the adoption of framework laws themselves ‘can be a powerful incentive for [NGOs] to mobilise their efforts’. His other conclusions are

\textsuperscript{120} De Schutter 2010a \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{121} Elements of the strategy include cash payments to poor families and a national free school meals programme, which includes a procurement mandate requiring 30\% of the food purchased to ‘come from small family farms’; in 2009 this amounted to US$418 million dollars’ worth of purchases from this sector: \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{125} De Schutter 2010a \textit{op cit.}
that new institutions must be adequately resourced; the right to food depends on an independent judiciary; and that it is not yet possible to assess what contribution legal and institutional frameworks based on the right to food make to food security.\textsuperscript{126}

As de Schutter’s review makes clear, there are many obstacles to the effective implementation of the right to food at the national level. Guatemala, which has adopted a framework law and a national strategy, and established new institutions, is a case in point. In terms of my research questions, the experience of efforts to implement the right to food in Guatemala demonstrate the existence of numerous barriers to the achievement of food sovereignty at the national level, and the difficulty in the current conjuncture of overcoming them. While the particular history of Guatemala is obviously unique, several of the barriers to the more effective implementation of the right to food relate to dynamics within the wider globalising capitalist political economy, such as landgrabs connected with the ‘agro-fuels’ boom; and are therefore of widespread relevance across many countries in the South.

Guatemalans have, in living memory, experienced brutal armed conflict that, from 1978-1983, reached the scale of genocide against four of the indigenous Mayan ethnic and linguistic groups.\textsuperscript{127} The internal armed conflict, that began shortly after the US-inspired overthrow of Guatemala’s only post-colonial social democratic governments (1944-1954) and ended nearly forty years later in 1996, had its roots in a history characterised by exploitation, discrimination and impoverishment of the ethnic Mayan majority groups and poor people generally. One of the most conflictual social issues throughout Guatemala’s modern history concerns access to, and ownership of, agricultural and productive land.\textsuperscript{128} It was the attempt by the second social democratic Guatemalan government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman (1950-54) to implement a socially progressive program of agrarian reform and land redistribution that led to his assassination and the overthrow of his government in a coup d’état.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
The demand for agrarian reform was one of the key factors motivating the leftist insurgents who struggled against successive military dictatorships, often with substantial support amongst some of the Mayan linguistic groups. Today, however, Guatemala continues to be characterised by one of the most unequal land distributions in the hemisphere and indeed the world as a whole; and this is acknowledged as a key factor behind the continuing high levels of structural poverty and inequality, which, amongst other consequences, translate into widespread violations of the right to adequate food for a great many poor and indigenous Guatemalans. Further, land concentration appears to be increasing over time, as the population grows and as small-holders are forced to divide their parcels into ever smaller units for their children, whilst at the same time ‘predatory land consolidation’, often linked to commodity and agro-fuels production for export markets, has been taking place amongst the big landowners.

The internal armed conflict in Guatemala was concluded with the signing of 13 Peace Accords, one of which was the Agreement on Socioeconomic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation. This Accord, though subjected to critiques from some Mayan organisations in whose view it represented a return to colonialism through the back door of ‘market-led land reform’, nevertheless generated an expectation amongst the general population, especially poor and indigenous people, of rising living standards, and an obligation on the Government to take prompt and effective action to secure such an outcome. Contrary to these expectations, however, the socioeconomic situation of the most vulnerable and marginalised populations has deteriorated in the transitional and post-conflict years, with the percentage of the population experiencing malnutrition rising sharply during the post-conflict transition, from 16% in 1992, to 25% in 2001.

As in many other agrarian countries, extreme poverty is concentrated in rural areas, and stood at over 31% in 2002, an increase of nearly a third in the two years since 2000. As is frequently the case, children suffer more than other sectors of the population (49% of all children under five suffer

---

130 Gauster op cit., who notes that, ‘according to the country’s 2003 agricultural census, 2% of the country’s farms, with an average of 194 hectares, control 57% of the land, while 87% of all farms, with an average size of 1.2 hectares, occupy just 16% of the land’: 1521.
132 See http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/guatemala/key-texts.php (accessed 27.10.09) for a full list of the various accords and a chronography of the lengthy Peace Process, which commenced in 1987.
134 Ibid., citing the FAO State of Food Insecurity in the World 2003. Using different statistical methods, the most recent FAO State of Food Insecurity in the World (2009) shows that for the last years for which figures were available (2004-6) the proportion of undernourished persons in Guatemala stood at 16%, an increase of 2% from 1990-92, whilst the total numbers of undernourished persons was 2.1 million in 2004-6, up from 1.3 million in 1990-92: 50.
malnutrition in Guatemala), and indigenous children most of all, with 69% experiencing chronic malnutrition in the first decade of the 21st century.\textsuperscript{136}

During his visit to the country in January-February 2005, Jean Ziegler observed that the historical and contemporary inequalities concerning the lack of access to land and other productive resources were at the root of Guatemala’s very high rates of malnutrition and food insecurity.\textsuperscript{137} Specific violations of the right to food found during the visit included ‘forced evictions, ongoing expropriation of land from indigenous peoples, violations of labour rights, the repression and criminalisation of peaceful protest, and the climate of impunity in which violations occur’.\textsuperscript{138} Ziegler was also concerned that further trade liberalization under the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) would ‘result in greater levels of hunger and poverty amongst the most vulnerable’.\textsuperscript{139}

Efforts to tackle hunger and malnutrition had received a higher political profile with the election of a new government in 2004, and the establishment of a legal and institutional framework for a national food and nutrition security system.\textsuperscript{140} Ziegler was concerned however that the plan failed to ‘address the structural problems of land reform, labour rights, and non-discrimination in employment and education’.\textsuperscript{141}

In 2009, de Schutter visited Guatemala to review the changes made since Ziegler’s visit.\textsuperscript{142} Little progress had been made on the structural inequalities of wealth and land distribution, with 2% of the population owning 80% of arable land, 15.2% of the population living in extreme poverty, and 3 million ‘suffer[ing] from hunger, which is double the number of hungry in 1991’.\textsuperscript{143}

Affirming La Via Campesina’s critique of the generally negative impacts of trade liberalisation, and confirming the expectations of Ziegler, de Schutter found that the entry into force of CAFTA in 2006 has ‘been mainly to the benefit of agribusiness

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.; also Stefan Hartleben, ‘El Derecho a la Alimentacion y su definicion de conformidad con el derecho international de los derechos humanos’, Colectivo Social, Informe Alternativa 2009, 57, citing UNICEF 2007, Defensoria de la Mujer Indigena. The total proportion of people living in poverty increased from 56% to 57% between 2000 and 2002, whilst those in extreme poverty rose from 16% to 21%. ActionAid and FIAN op cit., 5, citing DESCGU/A CIDHL.

\textsuperscript{137} United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 2006, The right to food: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, Mission to Guatemala, E/CN.4/2006/44/Add.1, 2. Child malnutrition in Guatemala is chronic: half of all children are stunted, and 70% of indigenous children, with 15,000 Guatemalan children under five dying every year: para.6. As regards the extent of food insecurity, Mr Ziegler cited Government statistics revealing that ‘two-thirds of Guatemala’s people are too poor to feed themselves adequately [and] one third of Guatemalan families cannot afford even half a minimal food basket’: para.8.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} The institutional framework consists of CONASAN (the National Council on Food and Nutrition Security), SESAN (the Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security), and SINASAN (the National System for Food and Nutrition Security, including an early warning system: ibid., para.35.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., para.35.


\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., para.10. In the economy as a whole, he found that 50% of all workers are paid below the minimum wage, which in any event is inadequate to meet the costs of a basic food basket: ibid., para.28.
companies’, and to the detriment of small-scale peasant producers. In a dynamic reflective of trends elsewhere in the global South, forced evictions of peasant and indigenous communities were continuing in relation to the rapid expansion of export cash crops such as sugar cane and palm oil plantations.

As the land area taken by these crops has grown, the production of basic food crops – corn, rice, wheat and beans – has decreased by 15.7 per cent (corn) to 64.6% (wheat) over recent years. These decreases continue a long historical decline. The national production of rice and wheat had already been severely affected by free trade and structural adjustment policies. Repeating the pattern observed elsewhere, the loss of domestic production capacity is accompanied by growing dependency on imports, and therefore vulnerability to international price fluctuations. Over 90% of imports into Guatemala are controlled by five companies, and this market domination saw bread prices rise by nearly two-thirds between 2004 and 2008.

At the same time, de Schutter stated that he was ‘generally impressed by the level of commitment of the government towards the realization of the right to food’. Guatemala, he noted, ‘stands out as one of the first countries to have adopted a framework law on the right to food’. However, he identified several shortcomings. Moreover, the existence of a national plan and ‘its excellent legal framework’ has not been matched by practical implementation and change.

In related policy areas the Guatemalan government’s words are frequently not matched by actions. A policy for integrated rural development to promote production of domestic food crops ‘was hampered by lack of land, fertilizers, seeds and credit’. Institutions established to promote land redistribution are inadequately resourced and not working effectively; and in fact having the opposite

---

144 Ibid., paras.21-25, expressing concern about the lack of any government data regarding the impacts of this free trade treaty on the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population.
145 The total land area devoted to palm oil rising from 35,000 hectares in 2005, to 65,000 hectares in 2007, and to an estimated 100,000 hectares in 2010; and the area devoted to sugar cane rising from 197,000 hectares in 2005 to 308,657 hectares in 2008: Ibid., paras.18, 34-6.
146 Ibid., para.35.
149 Ibid., para.16.
150 Ibid., para.39.
151 For example, while the framework establishes a ‘forum for social consultation and participation’ (INCOPas), the peak institution (CONASAN – National Food and Nutrition Security Council) has taken little notice of the proposals elaborated by INCOPas: Ibid., para.41.
152 De Schutter commented that:

[T]he institutions set up to implement [the framework] appear to have been ineffective in practice. The limited powers of CONASAN are generally considered a constraint, while SESAN [Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security] lacks political weight and has tended to focus on the nutritional aspects of food security rather than on issues of equity and sustainability: Ibid., 44, noting a general lack of coordination between different institutions and hence the risk of duplication.

153 Ibid., para.49.
effect to that intended, with the trend being towards ‘land re-concentration [as] a result of agro-fuel production and the development of mining and hydroelectricity projects’. While the government has established a minimal safety net for some of the most vulnerable families, its overall social spending of six per cent of GDP is ‘amongst the lowest figures in Central America’, and the amount allocated for the food and nutrition plan is 0.25% of GDP, well below the level required for its adequate implementation.

A positive feature of the Guatemalan right to food framework has been the proactive role of the Human Rights Ombudsman in monitoring the implementation of the relevant laws. Unfortunately, the Ombudsman’s budget was cut by 20% in 2009, thus impacting that office’s ‘ability to report consistently and in a timely manner on the realization of the right to food’.

At the conclusion of his visit in 2005, Ziegler called for a ‘comprehensive rural development strategy’, with a particular focus on ‘investment in small-scale peasant agriculture’, in order to reverse ‘the model of exclusionary development and export-oriented agriculture that has created and is deepening extreme inequality in the ownership of resources’.

As is clear from de Schutter’s visit in 2009, nothing of the kind has happened. While a legal right-to-food framework has been established and institutionalised, it has clearly been unable to make any significant inroads in the very high - and increasing - levels of malnutrition and food insecurity. Moreover, the persistence of several structural factors, in particular the entry into force of CAFTA, the rapid expansion of agro-fuel and other cash crop plantations, the effective freezing of the minimum wage and the widespread failure to comply with the legal minimum, and the failure to address or resolve the agrarian situation, are further entrenching malnutrition and food insecurity.

This serves to highlight the limitations of law as a vehicle for transformative change in the face of deeply entrenched structural inequalities and the lack of a highly organised and mass social movement that can effectively pressure the government to follow through on its legal commitments. While a social movement based around the right to food is emerging in Guatemala, consistent with De Schutter’s expectations, its capacity to effectively pressure the government to devote the resources necessary to properly implement its right to food legislation is clearly limited; and it

---

154 Ibid., para.55.
155 Ibid., para.82-84, noting that Guatemala’s tax take of 9.9% of GDP remains well below the 12.5% target specified in the 1996 Peace Accords.
156 Ibid., paras.62-3.
157 Ibid., paras 57-8, especially para 58(j). Zeigler’s comments coincide closely with the demands made by the cross-sectoral Agrarian Platform in recent years for the [dismantling of] the agro-export model [and the] democratization [of access to land and land tenure [as well as the] diversification of the economy’; LRAN op cit., 16.
158 Ibid. In one case the US group Green Earth Fuels, which is owned by investment fund managers Carlyle Group, Goldman Sachs and Riverstone Holdings, acquired 25 thousand hectares across three departments for biodiesel production based on palm oil: 36.
could hardly be said, at least at this stage, to be contributing to the formation of an effective ‘national-popular strategy’.  

In the case of Guatemala, the capacity of the state itself to make the necessary changes must be questioned, weakened as it is by years of military and authoritarian rule and the culture of impunity that has characterised the post-conflict stage, combined with the insidious and corrupting influence of a burgeoning trade in illegal narcotics. All these factors must be regarded as serious obstacles to the implementation of the right to food - and by extension, food sovereignty - in Guatemala. To them must be added the dynamics of a liberalised agricultural trade and commodity speculation, which is fuelling the demand for export crops such as sugar cane and palm oil, and thereby further undermining food sovereignty objectives. In the absence of broader change within the globalising capitalist food system in which the potential for such speculative booms is curtailed, the prospects for the realisation of the right to food and food sovereignty in Guatemala - and other countries which are subject to the same speculative pressures - appear mixed at best.

**The institutionalisation of food sovereignty at the national level: Ecuador**

Ecuador is one of the 24 countries to have enshrined the right to food in its new Constitution of 2008; and it is one of the half dozen countries to have included the promotion of food sovereignty alongside this right. Ecuador is also the first country in Latin America to have expressly incorporated in its new Constitution an alternative development paradigm based on an indigenous (non-Occidental) concept: ‘*buen vivir*’, or ‘living well’.  

---

159 In 2008 a new civil society alliance was formed in order to monitor the performance of the Guatemalan state with respect to the implementation of the right to food: the Social Collective for the Right to Food (*Colectivo Social por el Derecho a la Alimentación*). The members of this Collective are the International Centre for Human Rights Investigations (CIIDH), the Coordinator of NGOs and Cooperatives (CONGOOP), the Interdiocesan Land Pastoral (PTI), the National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala (REDSAG), the National Food Table (MNA), and the Campaign for a Guatemala without Hunger. In 2008 it published an ‘Alternative Report on the Right to Food in Guatemala’, which is available at: [http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/informe-alternativo-del-derecho-a-la-alimentacion-en-guatemala/pdf](http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/informe-alternativo-del-derecho-a-la-alimentacion-en-guatemala/pdf), accessed 26.10.09.  

160 Republic of Ecuador, 2008, *Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador*, 20.10.08, available in English at: [http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html](http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html), accessed 6.10.11. The relevant article is Art.13, which reads:  

“Persons and community groups have the right to safe and permanent access to healthy, sufficient and nutritional food, preferably produced locally and in keeping with their various identities and cultural traditions. The Ecuadorian State shall promote food sovereignty.”  

The other countries to have legislated for food sovereignty, and / or incorporated it into their constitutions are (at 2011): Nepal, Venezuela, Mali, Bolivia, and Senegal.  

The following discussion will focus on these research questions: what has the institutionalisation of food sovereignty in Ecuador meant to date, in terms of securing concrete gains towards the achievement of the goals of the food sovereignty movement? What have been the obstacles to the implementation of the food sovereignty legislation, have they been overcome, and if not, will they be overcome?

After setting out the content of Ecuador’s 2009 ‘Organic Law of the Food Sovereignty Regime’ (‘Framework Law’), I explore the current status of its implementation. This analysis is based on an in-depth interview with Ricardo Intriago, President of the Ecuadoran Federation of Agricultural Centres and Farmers’ Organisations, who sits on the newly established Ecuadoran National Food Sovereignty Conference, and is one of the foremost social actors in Ecuador promoting the peasant conception and implementation of food sovereignty.

By way of preliminary remarks, it is worth noting that, by itself, the constitutional inclusion of food sovereignty and its legislation in a Framework Law is a significant achievement; and evidences the extent to which La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement have brought about a ‘normative shift’ - and thus a destabilisation of the prevailing common sense - around food and agriculture.\(^{162}\)

Further, the passage of legislation for food sovereignty speaks to the growing coherence of this paradigm, and, in the Ecuadoran context, its strong popular support and political credibility. In contrast to Guatemala, it is possible to say with some confidence that food sovereignty in Ecuador forms part of an effective ‘national popular collective will’, which is led by the powerful pan-indigenous movement and finds a unifying expression in the concept of *buen vivir*. All these achievements point to a substantive shift in the balance of forces vis-à-vis the globalising capitalist food system and its supporters within Ecuador. Such observations are important in terms of the conclusions I will reach in this thesis.

As one of the first food sovereignty laws in the world, the Framework Law is significant for several reasons. First, it reveals how a national legislature has conceptualised food sovereignty and delineated its contours and priorities in law. Secondly, the ‘food sovereignty regime’ whose establishment this law contemplates, provides an example of how the principles of food sovereignty can be feasibly institutionalised at the national level. Thirdly, the various obligations it imposes on the Ecuadoran state provide a yardstick by which the Ecuadoran government can be held to account by peasant and social movements regarding the degree of implementation, and, as Olivier de Schutter suggested as regards the right to food, a rallying point of mobilisation in the event that the government is dragging its heels.

In the Introduction and Chapter 3, I have set out a conceptualisation of food sovereignty as cohering in practice around three pillars:

- support for peasant and smaller-scale producers, especially through redistributive agrarian reform;

---

\(^{162}\) Other countries to have included the promotion of food sovereignty in their constitutions include Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Nepal.
the utilisation of agro-ecological production methodologies, in order to overcome the harmful environmental effects of industrialised monocultural agriculture and to create greater levels of autonomy for smaller-scale producers, and;

the development of more localised food systems, with an emphasis on direct forms of exchange between producers and consumers, in pursuit of the achievement of greater levels of domestic food self-sufficiency.

The Framework Law reflects all these basic orientations of food sovereignty. Thus, several of its provisions mention explicitly the goals of:

- national self-sufficiency in basic foods, and the avoidance of dependencies on imported foods (Art.1, 22, 23);
- privileging and providing material support to small-scale production and artisanal fishing (Arts.1, 3(c), 4, 6, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21);
- promoting the ‘social and environmental functions’ of land, including redistributive agrarian reform and rural development strategies (Arts.2, 3(b), 3(d), 6, 9-15, 17-20);
- promoting sustainable forms of agriculture, especially agro-ecology and organic production, in order to protect agro-biodiversity (Arts.1, 3(a), 3(d), 4, 6, 7, 13(d), 14); and
- the optimisation of public health through the commercialisation, storage and consumption of healthy, nationally-produced foods, including via direct forms of exchange between producers and consumers (Arts.1, 2, 3(d), 21-22, 24-25, 27-30).

In addition, other provisions emphasis the need for the recovery and protection of traditional knowledge and food-related practices, including all native seeds and plant germplasm, and the prohibition of their patenting or other forms of commercial appropriation (Arts.7, 8, 9); as well as the prohibition of genetically-modified organisms in Ecuador, except where the President and the National Assembly determine that their introduction is in the ‘national interest’ (Art.26).

The law’s scope is accordingly very wide-ranging, and, as Article 2 provides, covers:

- land use and planning;
- protection of watersheds and biodiversity;
- seeds and the protection of traditional knowledge and practices;
- the provision of financing, technical and other forms of support for smaller-scale producers;
- agrarian reform;
- rural development and employment generation;
- food value-adding and storage;
- infrastructure and mechanisms of storage, distribution and consumption; and
- food safety and quality.

From a food systems perspective, the only element not expressly addressed concerns the adoption of measures to minimise waste and promote recycling, although
arguably this might be covered, at least partially, through the prominence given to agro-ecology. The law thus not only synthesises and delineates in a systematic fashion the content of food sovereignty, but also speaks to the growing coherence and critical insight of the work carried out by La Via Campesina and its allies in the Food Sovereignty movement, in self-consciously developing this paradigm as a credible alternative social and political project to the globalising capitalist food system since 1995. In what might be understood as a process of reciprocal, iterative and symbiotic development, how food sovereignty is actualised in Ecuador will in turn inform the further articulation and concretisation of food sovereignty principles in other national and local contexts.

The implementation of food sovereignty is intended to be undertaken with the ‘widest possible social participation, via processes of public deliberation promoted by the State and by civil society, and articulated by the Food and Nutritional Sovereignty System (SISAN) in the various levels of government’ (Art.31). The key institution is the National Food Sovereignty Conference (‘the Conference’) which is intended to serve as a ‘forum for debate, deliberation and the generation of proposals, by civil society, for the elaboration of the Law which will develop food sovereignty’ (Art.32). Hence the current law establishes a framework, which sets out the objectives and the principles according to which further implementing laws in specific areas will be enacted. The Conference consists of eight members from different sectors of civil society, including peasant organisations (Art.33). Amongst other functions that may subsequently be specified, the Conference is empowered to encourage dialogue in order to formulate civil society proposals, promote investigations and studies into the problematic of food sovereignty in Ecuador, and release reports and alternatives for the new food sovereignty law (Art.34).

In addition to the principles of broad social participation and national food self-sufficiency, the implementation of food sovereignty in Ecuador must be in accord with several other key principles. These include: solidarity; self-determination; transparency; non-discrimination; sustainability; gender equity as regards access to the means of production; equity; and social, economic and inter-cultural inclusion (Art.4). Thus prima facie, the Framework Law appears to represent the democratisation of the food system in Ecuador, which is a major success of the global movement for food sovereignty, and clearly one capable of being replicated in other national contexts, depending on prevailing political configurations.\footnote{Ecuador’s near-neighbour, Venezuela, is another example of a Latin American state which has moved strongly towards the direction of implementing the principles of food sovereignty. As documented by Christina Schiavoni and William Camacaro (Schiavoni, C., and Camacaro, W., 2009, ‘The Venezuelan Effort to Build a New Food and Agriculture System’, Monthly Review, 61(3), 129-141), in recent years the Venezuelan government has prioritised the goal of becoming self-sufficient in food production, through the provision of credit, storage facilities, training and technical assistance, infrastructure and equipment, better access to land, and government-supported distribution networks to smaller-scale farmers and fishers, as well as a national school meals program, guaranteed healthy lunches for workers, and more than 6,000 community kitchens serving nutritious meals to the most vulnerable sectors of the population: ibid. In terms of land reform, an estimated 2.7 million hectares have been redistributed to farmers since the passage of the Law of the Land in 2001; and agriculture credit has increased from ‘$164 million in 1999 to $7.6 billion in 2008’: ibid. The results to date show a 24% increase in Venezuela’s total food output in the ten years to 2007; with the country “reaching self-sufficiency in its two most important
In contradistinction to a ‘market-led’ process of food security, the development of food sovereignty as contemplated by the Framework Law is highly dependent on an activist and interventionist state. Further, it explicitly contemplates numerous measures to protect domestic agriculture, in opposition to the ‘free trade’ model promoted through the WTO and other global governance forums.

Article 3 sets out six sets of obligations of the Ecuadoran State as regards the implementation of the requirements of food sovereignty. Specifically, the State must:

- encourage sustainable agriculture and a transition towards a new agri-food development model;
- establish incentives for productive land use and disincentives towards the creation and maintenance of land monopolies and centralisation;
- encourage the formation of associations of micro-businesses and smaller-scale producers, within ‘the framework of a social and solidarity economy’;
- encourage the consumption of healthy and nutritious food produced according to organic and agro-ecological methods, and avoid the expansion of monocultures and the use of food crops for biofuels;
- adopt fiscal, customs and tariff policies to protect domestic agriculture; and
- promote social participation and public deliberation in the formulation of laws and policies for food sovereignty, and in their implementation.

In terms of the implementation to date of the Framework Law, it must first be noted that many of the provisions of the 2008 Ecuadoran Constitution, including the promotion of food sovereignty and the enactment of the Framework Law, were the outcome of a protracted process of social and political struggle by peasant organisations and Ecuadoran social movements, notably the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), ‘one of the strongest indigenous social movements in Latin America’. According to Ricardo Intriago:

These achievements were won by the social and peasant organisations, pressuring the government. In other words, it’s a political result, of social struggle, that the President could not resist, at a certain moment in time...When we speak of [GMOs] it was the organised Ecuadoran social movement who protested and prohibited [the entry of GMOS] into Ecuador. What [President Rafael] Correa’s government did was to [insert in the Framework Law] the second part of that article, which says, ‘except at the request of the President or the National Assembly for reasons of national security’.

grains, corn and rice’, in 2008, as well as in pork; near self-sufficiency in beef, chicken and eggs; and a ‘900 per cent increase in milk production to 1.96 million tons, fulfilling 55 per cent of national demand’: ibid.

In this respect it confirms Zehra Arat’s expectations of the politicised ‘human rights ideology’ that she detected in the International Bill of Rights: 2008 op cit.


Verbal response to written interview questions, 15.8.11, translated by the author from Spanish to English.
In his view, Correa’s government, even though it has passed the Framework Law and established the Conference, neither understands the types of changes required by genuine food sovereignty nor is particularly sympathetic to them. The government’s attitude to agro-ecology which, as discussed, is widely seen as a foundational pillar of food sovereignty, makes this clear:

Correa’s government doesn’t believe in agro-ecology, because Correa is an economist. And as an economist, he believes in numbers. So he sees everything in terms of productivity, whilst sustainable agriculture can’t be seen only in [those terms]. It’s seen also [in terms of] utility, in nature. But instead Correa emphasises ‘productivity in the countryside’.

Similar observations are made by Tejo Pramono in relation to the Indonesian government which, although it has not legislated for food sovereignty like Ecuador, has nonetheless given some rhetorical support to the concept, as it ‘was a good strong term for the government to respond to the [global] food crisis, to say [that] we need a strong system of food’. However, according to Pramono, their understanding of food sovereignty is limited, and contradictory:

[We briefed] the Minister of Agriculture many times, but he doesn’t understand the picture of food sovereignty. They understand - the word is nice, sovereignty - but they do not have the picture that food should be provided by the farmers, meaning agrarian reform; that they have to protect [small farmers] from imports, that they should not liberalize, that they should produce locally, organically - they do not understand the soul of food sovereignty.

Given that the Framework Law expressly incorporates many elements of the ‘soul of food sovereignty’, it would seem that significant progress had been achieved in Ecuador. However, for Intriago, constitutional recognition and a Framework law for food sovereignty are merely the first steps. The challenge that he, his members and their allies are currently engaged in is to secure the meaningful implementation of the food sovereignty law. He describes them as being engaged in a ‘permanent struggle’ to achieve their desired outcomes; and yet their campaigns have had important results in terms of raising awareness and encouraging participation and mobilisation. In political terms, these mobilisations have allowed them to ‘win spaces’ inside the government, such as a seat on the Conference; and thereby to ‘take decisions from inside’, making proposals for legislative and policy measures to implement food sovereignty in Ecuador. All these actions and alliances point to the existence of an effective ‘national-popular’ strategy in Ecuador, and one that, as previously indicated, appears to have overcome purely corporate and sectoral interests, in order to advance a transformative political project (buen vivir) in the universal interest.
The Government, however, has to date accorded a low priority to the Conference:

[The Conference was established and since then has passed] a year, eight months, with no budget...We had no office, they gave us an office which they'd borrowed, we had no equipment, no technical assistance, we had no means of feeding ourselves in Quito...How much more clear can it be, that the government doesn’t want to fight for food sovereignty, if the first institution that [was established] had no budget for more than a year? Where the government puts its money, that’s where its priorities lie.171

In addition to this clear lack of political will in favour of food sovereignty, Correa’s productivist approach to agriculture is leading the government to support other policies which are undermining food sovereignty, says Intriago. He cites two trends in particular. The first is the government’s encouragement of concentration of landholdings on the Ecuadoran coast, where the agro-export crops - sugar cane, coffee, bananas, rice, cacao - are grown; and its reluctance to embark on a program of redistributive agrarian reform. The second is the importation of agro-chemicals from Venezuela, which the Ecuadoran government makes available at subsidised prices to peasant producers. While the Federation is trying to promote agro-ecology and freedom from dependence on chemicals, in accordance with the terms of the food sovereignty law, the Ecuadoran government is, according to Intriago, encouraging such dependence in the name of boosting agricultural productivity.172

A further obstacle to the implementation of the Framework Law has been, in Intriago’s view, the lack of detailed knowledge of the law amongst the citizenry as a whole. This comes back again, he says, to the lack of support for food sovereignty in the government, which has not undertaken any measures to promote the law widely and make its content and its goals known, contrary to the law’s express provisions which call, as noted earlier, for the ‘widest possible social participation’ in the implementation of food sovereignty. Moreover,

[The] public institutions of the State are not complying either with the [food sovereignty] law or with the Constitution. The very same Ministry of Agriculture is acting totally, completely in opposition to what the law and the Constitution says. They do not respect Mother Earth, when the Constitution says respect Pacha Mama. The Environment Ministry is developing programs to bring [GMOs] to Ecuador, when the Constitution forbids exactly that.173

Confronted with this political reality, the peasant and social organisations have no option but to maintain their struggle to force these Ministries, and the government in general, to comply with its own laws and with the Constitution. The problem, says

---

171 Ibid.
172 This form of co-operation between the Ecuadoran and Venezuelan governments contradicts Venezuela’s own commitments to the promotion of agroecology. According to Schiviano and Camacaro (2009 op cit.), the ‘2008 Law for Integrated Agricultural Health officially established agroecology as the scientific basis for sustainable agriculture in Venezuela and mandated the phasing out of toxic agrochemicals’: ibid. Further, the existence of such accords between member states of ALBA must raise questions as to what extent this treaty is promoting genuine autonomy and self-determination on the principles of cooperation and solidarity, as opposed to replicating forms of dependency established during colonial and neo-liberal eras.
173 Ibid.
Intriago, is that there is no formal, legal mechanism of accountability, which citizens and civil society can use to force the Ministries to obey the law:

To achieve the law’s implementation, we have a long path in front of us. Ultimately what it means is to get rid of all the people who are currently occupying the key positions and not implementing the law, and put in their place conscientious individuals who will respect the law and implement it. But for now, implementation is a very big problem. ¹⁷⁴

To be able to do this requires the exercise of political power, which in turn arguably requires direct participation in government. Leaders of the Indonesian Peasant Union are coming to this conclusion, as Pramono observes:

For the peasants’ organisation to have their own political party - that is what we want to have, because then we could influence, we could change and decide upon policies. ¹⁷⁵

Nowhere is the need for influence over the political process, either through holding political power directly, or through mobilising social forces, more apparent than with respect to *redistributive agrarian reform*, which is widely understood to be a necessary pre-condition to the achievement of food sovereignty. At the present time, the Ecuadoran peasant movement is formulating proposals for such reform within the auspices of the Conference, as contemplated by the Framework Law. The previous attempt at agrarian reform in Ecuador, says Intriago, was a ‘failure’:

The landlords and the government managed to secure their lands, and now they’re stronger than ever. But with the new agrarian reform, what’s going to happen, is that we’re going to take away once more the land from the landlords, and give it to the small producers. Between here and there are many difficulties. First of all is that the Government doesn’t want to make a radical program of agrarian reform in favour of the small producers. So to start with we have a fight with the government. ¹⁷⁶

Both the Constitution and the Framework Law (Article 6) prohibit *latifundios*, or large plantations. However, neither specify how large a farm has to be before it will be regarded as a latifundio; and so this is a question that must be resolved politically in the context of the current agrarian reform process. The social movements are proposing that the maximum size should be 250 hectares, which will affect the holdings of approximately 2,500 families. The Federation, and Intriago, would like to see a more radical reform, which puts a limit of 20 or 30 hectares for each landowner:

We shouldn’t have very rich people in the countryside, because they don’t believe in [caring for] our natural resources. ¹⁷⁷

Intriago expects a major political struggle when the Agrarian Reform law finally comes before the National Assembly. As noted in Chapter 4, many previous attempts at redistributive agrarian reform around the world have failed due to the entrenched

¹⁷⁶ Interview with the author, Jakarta, 31.3.09.
opposition of land-owning elites, and the refusal, or the inability, of governments to confront them effectively. How this issue plays out in Ecuador will be crucial in determining whether the ‘balance of forces’ have shifted sufficiently at the national level to allow for the full implementation of food sovereignty. I will consider this question further in Chapter 7.

The institutionalisation of local food in Australia
Food localisation is a key pillar of food sovereignty. The Ecuadoran Framework Law confirms this interpretation, calling as it does for ‘autonomous, de-centralised governments to provide the necessary infrastructure for direct commercialisation and exchange between small producers and consumers, to the benefit of both groups, as a new relation of a social and solidarity economy.’ Expressions of the local food movement in the Northern countries like the US and Australia, such as farmers’ markets, community gardens and community-supported agriculture initiatives, arguably embody, in principle at least, the envisioned ‘social and solidarity economy’. As I discuss briefly later in the thesis, further manifestations of this economy, such as new theorisations of the commons, the growing praxis of the co-operative movement, and attempted syntheses such as ‘economic democracy’ and ‘inclusive democracy’, may provide fruitful directions for the progressive development of the Food Sovereignty movement.

In Australia, farmers’ markets and community gardens enjoy some measure of institutional and political support at the local and state government level. As discussed in Chapter 7, these local food initiatives have expanded substantially in the past decade; and this expansion has been made possible by favourable planning and zoning decisions taken primarily at the local government level. Unlike the United States, however, these local food initiatives do not enjoy, as yet, any political or institutional support at the Federal level. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Federal Department of Agriculture in Australia remains firmly committed to the productivist, free trade view of food and farming, if the content of its Issues Paper on a National Food Plan is a reliable indication of current thinking within the Department.

In the case of the Coffs Coast, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Coffs Harbour City Council has supported the formation of a regional Local Food Alliance, in the context of a project funded by the NSW State Government. It has not yet, however, sought to expand this Alliance into a more permanent and inclusive body that could serve to guide food policy formation in the region over the coming years. The obvious models here are the one hundred-plus multi-sectoral Food Policy Councils which have been established in North America over the past few decades. As a participant-observer

178 Article 21, paragraph 2.
179 Mance 2007 op cit.
in the Local Food Alliance, my assessment is that the project-based nature of the Alliance, and its focus on project ‘outcomes’ and ‘deliverables’ in the strict terms of the grant, has thus far rendered it rather inward-looking and inhibited its capacity to reach out and involve other stakeholders not directly involved in the project activities.

Food Connect in Brisbane has to date been similarly focused on its own, enterprise-oriented, goals. At the same time, the founder Robert Pekin has for several years been deeply concerned about some of the strategic challenges facing food production in Australia, such as the loss of prime agricultural land to urban development and mining, and the demographic crisis facing Australia’s farmers. He has also been approached by several local governments since 2008 to provide consultancy advice regarding the establishment of policy frameworks for more localised food systems. Like Coffs Harbour, a growing number of local governments in Australia are looking to food localisation as an area where they can take policy and practical actions to address the challenges posed by climate change and peak oil.

In order to support these local governments and diversify its business model, Food Connect developed a consultancy arm, Think Food, in December 2010. During 2011 Think Food has worked on consultancy projects with councils in NSW, Queensland and Victoria, in order to scope opportunities for localising food systems, and to develop strategic frameworks for sustainable agricultural systems. Conversations with senior managers in state government Health Departments have also revealed considerable sympathy for these sorts of initiatives, evidencing a willingness on the part of this part of State government to explore alternatives to the dominant modes of food production and distribution in Australia.¹⁸²

What emerges from this picture is that there is an uneven and highly variable ‘bottom-up’ process of institutionalisation of local food in certain parts of Australia, dependent on active and motivated community and social enterprise leaders working with sympathetic officers at the local government and (in some instances) State Health department levels. As discussed in Chapter 3, the NSW Department of Environment funded a number of local food initiatives across the state from 2008-2011 as part of its Urban Sustainability Programme. Continuation of this support is not guaranteed, and as yet there is no systematic political or institutional support at either the State or Federal levels in Australia for food localisation as a policy and political priority.

Food Connect, together with other leaders of the local food movement in Australia such as the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, and Friends of the Earth Adelaide, joined together in August 2010 to form the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, introducing food sovereignty into Australian debates around food and farming for the first time.¹⁸³ The impact to date of the Alliance on Federal government policy cannot be assessed, as the National Food Plan is still under

¹⁸² Personal communications with the author, September-October 2011.
¹⁸³ http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/, accessed 15.01.11.
development. Representatives of the Alliance have had two meetings with senior figures in the Australian Greens, who have indicated considerable sympathy for food sovereignty principles and values; and expressed agreement with the political demand to recognise at the Federal level, for the first time, the non-export and non-commodity sector of food and farming in Australia.

In this, the development of the political process in Australia in the past 18 months has some parallels with developed in Canada over the past five years. There, a number of local food initiatives (Food Policy Councils, Food Charters, farmers’ markets and so on) were scaled up politically into a participatory policy framework under the auspices of the ‘People’s Food Policy Project’. This Project, which took place over two years and involved, amongst other things, the participation of 3,500 Canadians in 250 ‘kitchen table’ discussions, produced ten policy discussion papers, and a synthesis summary report. It called for a ‘healthy, fair and ecological food system’ for Canada, and was based explicitly on the principles of food sovereignty, developed in a participatory manner by the Canadian food movement. The document’s key recommendations called for food relocalisation; a transition to agro-ecology; a strong poverty elimination programme to enable access to good food for all; a nationally-funded children and food strategy; and the active involvement of the public, ‘especially the most marginalised’, in food system design and governance.

Similar recommendations were incorporated by the New Democrats party in their Food for Thought policy platform which they took to the Canadian Federal election in March 2011. Also based on a lengthy (18 months) process of public discussion and consultation, the key themes of this document concerned: universal access to healthy food; support local food production via, for example, more farmers’ markets and the targeted use of government procurement policies; and provide incentives and support for young people to enter farming, including making arable land available to them. Like the People’s Food Policy Project, this document was also based on the principles of food sovereignty, evidencing substantial public and

---


187 The 10 policy discussion papers concerned: indigenous food sovereignty; food sovereignty in rural and remote communities; access to food in urban communities; agriculture, infrastructure and livelihoods; sustainable fisheries and livelihoods for fishers; environment and agriculture; science and technology for food and agriculture; food trade and international aid; healthy and safe food for all; food democracy and governance: http://peoplesfoodpolicy.ca/policy/resetting-table-peoples-food-policy-canada/policy_papers, accessed 10.10.11.

188 Ibid.

189 http://xfer.ndp.ca/FoodForThought/EN.pdf, accessed 10.10.11. The New Democrats became for the first time the official Canadian opposition at these elections, increasing their share of the vote to 30.63% from 18.18% at the previous Federal election; and their seats to 103, from 37 previously.

189 Ibid., Executive Summary.
political support for these principles across a reasonably broad spectrum of Canadian society. While food sovereignty is certainly not the policy of the current Canadian federal government, it is the policy of the official opposition.\(^{191}\) This is a significant achievement for a political movement that has not yet been in existence for two decades.

In terms of my research questions, these Canadian developments, and to a lesser extent those in Australia, evidence the growing coherence of food sovereignty as a political project; its emerging political credibility; and its capacity to contribute to the formation of a ‘national popular collective will’, in the North as well as the South. At the same time, there are formidable barriers to the substantive implementation of food sovereignty principles in contexts such as Canada and Australia, where jurisdictional complexity and a firmly entrenched political bias in favour of key tenets of neoliberalism, such as the commitment to free trade, mean that ‘[d]espite the imperative for change, the forces aligned in [favour] of the status quo are powerful’.\(^{192}\)

**Concluding observations**

To mount an effective counter-hegemonic political project, a social movement must be capable of shifting the balance of political and economic forces that sustain a hegemonic power formation. In the context of the globalising capitalist food system, these forces include the complex of global governance institutions discussed in Chapter 4, together with national governments, most especially those of the core capitalist bloc led by the United States. Counter-hegemonic politics also entails engaging with the ‘common sense’ that naturalises the existing state of affairs, and developing a new ‘good sense’ that can supplant this common sense.

The Food Sovereignty movement, led by La Via Campesina, has responded to the attempted institutionalisation of trade liberalisation and the further commodification of natural resources and social relations around food and farming through a combination of opposition and proposition. Together with other social movement actors, it has managed to ‘throw sand in the WTO gears’ and ‘slow down the process of liberalisation’ by forcing it into bilateral and regional forums, rather than the ‘single table’ of the WTO.\(^{193}\) At the same time, insufficient progress has been made thus far in the elaboration of food sovereignty-based ‘fair and transparent’ trade arrangements; and this must be regarded as a missed opportunity.

---

\(^{191}\) See Macrae, R., 2011, ‘A Joined-Up Food Policy for Canada’, *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, 6(4), 424-457, for a recent overview of food policy initiatives in Canada, including those of political parties, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute, and the People’s Food Policy Project.

\(^{192}\) Macrae 2011 op cit., 453. On the issue of trade alone, Macrae notes that in Canada the following steps would be required:

> The federal government would need to undertake major redesign of policy mandates in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and AAFC to permit modifications to legislation and regulations that currently support problematic elements of trade deals. Major modifications would be required to food aid policy and programming of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Consistent with these shifts, major policy changes to Canada’s official participation in United Nations’ bodies and treaty negotiations would be required. Importantly, new negotiating positions for multilateral and bilateral trade agreements to restrict “noncommercial speculator” activities in futures and commodity markets would be essential. The provinces would require new approaches to trade missions: *ibid.*

\(^{193}\) Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011 op cit.
La Via Campesina has also responded to intensifying processes of commodification with the assertion of the collective and individual rights of peasants and small farmers. It is attempting to institutionalise these rights demands through the UN human rights mechanisms, in the form of a new Declaration on peasant rights. This campaign has garnered the support of some states, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. The normative content being given to the right to food by the Special Rapporteur coincides with the substance of food sovereignty on all significant points: the centrality of agrarian reform; the need to protect and support small farmers; the necessary transition to agro-ecological methods of production; and the prioritisation of domestic production for domestic production, rather than production of commodities for export. Hence I have distilled as the core content of food sovereignty its three pillars: redistributive agrarian reform, agro-ecology, and food localisation.

While I will develop this argument further over the next two chapters, the peasants’ rights and Food Sovereignty campaigns have, in my assessment, significantly destabilised the ‘common sense’ of the globalising capitalist food system, which is that only large-scale, industrialised, export-oriented agriculture can ‘feed the world’. Further, they constitute an emerging ‘good sense’ around food and farming; one that is linked to tangible actions to address climate change and resource constraints, and one that proposes a feasible strategy to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. Evidence for these normative shifts can also be seen in the rapid development and partial institutionalisation of the local food movement in countries such as Australia, the US and Canada; whilst recognising that formidable political (and economic) barriers exist in those countries, at the Federal level especially, to the further implementation of food sovereignty principles.

At the same time, human rights campaigns have significant limitations as a means to achieve transformative social and political change, because they can and do have contradictory effects. Laws, treaties and Declarations do not of themselves achieve lasting and transformative change. The contrasting cases of Guatemala and Brazil amply demonstrate that, while a right to food legal and institutional framework is important, what really matters is the political will and commitment, including the devotion of adequate financial resources, to see its full implementation across all relevant sectors of society.

This is where the real value and significance of the Peasants’ Rights campaign, and food sovereignty, lies. The naming and assertion of the rights of peasants is an educative and consciousness-raising tool, which is enabling peasants and small farmers to take pride in their history and identity. In the process, a rights-based education builds class consciousness and solidarity, thereby constructing the foundations for a long-term project of social, political and economic transformation:

Our biggest challenge and threat is a more liberalised political and economic system in Indonesia. Now the system does not support the peasants’ struggle. The opportunity is that the peasants are the majority in Indonesia - 60-70%. Our opportunity is how to
consolidate them into the base for political power; that can change our political and economic system. I am optimistic, but this is a long struggle.\textsuperscript{194}

At issue here are questions of moral and political agency, and, conversely, of paternalism and dependency. I argue that the granting of rights from above, or outside of, the political process, denies agency and subjectivity, and thus can work to undermine democratic processes and the building of successful movements.\textsuperscript{195} By contrast, rights secured in the course of political struggle are more likely to be empowering, since historical experience shows that genuine dignity amongst the oppressed can be gained in the act of becoming conscious that one is being denied one’s rights, and in struggling with comrades to reverse this state of affairs. In recounting the many successes of the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement (MST - a powerful and influential member of La Via Campesina), its co-founder João Pedro Stedile comments that:

\begin{quote}
The most important thing that we have built over these last twenty-five years is that when someone joins the MST, he or she stops walking with their head down, and acquires dignity, and thinks with their brains, organizing their comrades in struggle.\textsuperscript{196}
\end{quote}

Further, just as individual dignity can be redeemed through collective struggle, it is through such struggle that the broader social objectives of greater justice and equality are advanced. As the current Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has said, “Rights are rarely given; they are taken”.\textsuperscript{197} The observations of Martin Luther King, Jr., bear repetition on this point:

\begin{quote}
Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals…\textsuperscript{198}
\end{quote}

As the above quote implies, and as Ricardo Intriago confirms, such struggles are, in effect, ‘permanent’. Food Sovereignty is further advanced - in political and institutional terms - in Ecuador than almost anywhere else in the world. Yet, even there, the political and economic obstacles in the path of its fuller implementation remain formidable.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{194} Ali, SPI organiser, interview with the author, Jakarta, 31.3.09.
\textsuperscript{195} Pupovac \textit{op cit.}, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{See note} 138 above.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{From King, C.S., 1983, The words of Martin Luther King, Jr.}, New Market Press, New York, 59.
\end{flushright}
Chapter 6

The socio-economic and ecological context

“All great waves of capital accumulation have unfolded through a greatly expanded ecological surplus, manifested in cheap food, cheap energy and cheap inputs.”

“The expansion of industrial agro-foods crippled food production in the Global South and emptied the countryside of valuable human resources...as long as cheap, subsidized grain from the industrial north kept flowing, the agri-foods complex grew, consolidating control of the world’s food systems in the hands of fewer and fewer grain, seed, chemical and petroleum companies. Today three companies, Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, and Bunge control the world’s grain trade...”

Accumulation of wealth at one pole...is, at the same time, accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole...

Karl Marx, Capital

In this chapter, I discuss the nature of the principal social relations in the globalising capitalist food system, and some of the principal mechanisms which cause the system to generate the key tensions of over-production, inequalities and environmental destruction. I also consider emerging understandings of the key ecological constraints on the system’s further development.

In terms of social relations, the system is characterised by oligopolistic levels of concentration of ownership and power in a few transnational corporations, disempowered and dwindling numbers of farmers, highly-exploited and vulnerable workers in many of its sectors, and rising levels of ‘addictive preferences’ as regards consumption of unhealthy food products. The mechanisms which produce and sustain these relations, and thereby contribute to dynamics of over-production and...

---


The effective subsidies that fossil fuels provide have...underpinned huge gains in labor productivity (as fuel-based machines substitute for human labor), an unprecedented concentration of productive powers that enable massive economies of scale, and a deepening of the exploitation of nature. As such, the application of ever-greater fossil fuel inputs has been a primary means by which prodigious increases in the production of renewable and non-renewable resources have been maintained over the last 200 years, in the face of declining quality of raw materials and the exhaustion of localized stocks’: 311-312.


inequality, include coercive and violent processes of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ of the land and water resources of farmers and rural communities; the widespread use of immigrant and vulnerable labour forces; and the aggressive marketing of ‘energy-dense, nutrient-poor’ food products. While always immanent within capitalist societies, the dynamics of over-production and inequality have been substantially intensified in recent decades during the contemporary era of the financialisation of globalising capitalism. The same dynamics have also contributed to the widespread ecological destruction associated with the spread of the globalising capitalist food system.

The food system, both historically and contemporaneously, has played a central role in the expansion of capital accumulation generally, via the production of ‘cheap food’, with negative ecological and ill-health costs externalised to wider society. In the second half of this chapter, I discuss suggestions by some commentators that, because of emerging ecological constraints, the system may be approaching the exhaustion of its further possibilities of development. These constraints include the cumulative impacts of accelerated biodiversity loss; growing levels of soil degradation; the anticipated impacts of a warming climate; and a high degree of reliance on fossil fuels, both for transport fuels and for agro-chemical inputs. A corollary is that, unlike previous eras of agricultural crisis and transition, there are no new transformative technological innovations, nor subsidies of cheap energy, which will open up large new fields of accumulation, and so usher in a new phase of capitalism based on the renewal and perpetuation of the accumulation complex of ‘cheap food’.4

The principal social relations of the globalising capitalist food system

In this section, I outline first the oligopolistic and oligopsonic character of the globalising capitalist food system.5 Next, I discuss the principal impacts upon the leading transnational corporate actors brought about by the financialisation of globalising capitalism in recent decades. Thirdly, I consider how the concentration of corporate power, now over-determined by the imperatives of financialisation, organizes and structures the nature of the system’s social relations as they affect farmers, workers and consumers. Finally, I briefly discuss how the currently organised forms of social relations intensify the key tensions of over-production and inequalities.

The theory of oligopoly suggests that when a relatively small number of firms are dominant in a particular industry or sector, they will exercise their preponderant market power as sellers in the form of an ‘oligopolistic bargain’ or ‘collusion’ in order to ‘maximise joint profits’, for example by adopting the practice of ‘dominant-firm pricing’ or by denying new markets and stifling competition.6

4 Moore 2010 op cit.
5 Oligopolistic concentration applies where economic actors are sellers; oligopsonic concentration is where economic actors are buyers.
Oligopsonic (buyer) power can be exercised, for example, when the actions of a small group of purchasing firms directly or indirectly dictate the terms according to which suppliers can participate in the market through ‘vertical pricing games’.7

While there are various models used to detect when an oligopoly exists, a commonly-accepted indicator of oligopolistic power is a high level of concentration within a particular industry or industry sector, often expressed as the ‘four-firm concentration ratio’.8 I will use this ratio as indicative of the degree to which concentration exists in the globalizing capitalist food system.

While levels of concentration vary across sectors, and at the global level and within particular countries, the clear trend is towards concentration across the system as a whole.9 The leading groups of agri-food corporations have, for reasons connected with the vagaries of agriculture and its high-risk nature, tended to focus their activities in sectors other than farming itself: inputs (proprietary seeds, agro-chemicals); processing, packaging and manufacturing; grain trading; and retailing.10 This is not to say that concentration has not occurred at the farm level; on the contrary, due to the perpetual dynamic of over-production and the relative powerlessness of farmers, the numbers of farms have declined significantly, especially in highly commoditised sectors; and the remaining farms have increased in size, following a relentless logic of ‘get big or get out’.11

---


8 That is, an oligopolistic situation is held to exist when four firms or fewer hold greater than 40% of total market share in the industry or sector: Caves and Porter op cit., Eckbo op cit.

9 Patel 2007 op cit., 12-14, discussing the ‘hourglass’ representation of concentration of market power in the European and US food systems.


11 Livestock production is a prime example: ‘The defining feature of the contemporary meat industry is its unceasing concentration and intensification – fewer but bigger farms or factories, with more specialisation of feed and other inputs, and fewer farm workers...in the United States alone, the number of pig farms decreased drastically from 2 million in 1950 to 73,600 in 2005, while the production of pigs in the same period rose from 80 million to 100 million’: Emel and Neo 2011 op cit., 68.
At the corporate level, the concentration of ownership has largely taken place via an ongoing series of mergers and acquisitions, facilitated by the financialisation of capitalism, which, as discussed below, has become a *sine qua non* for the continued growth and expansion of the system in its current form.

With the rise in the past few decades of transnational supermarket corporations, and their establishment of vertically-integrated and standardised national and international commodity supply chains, the economic power of these giant retailers has grown significantly *vis-à-vis* other actors in the system. In 2007 the leading ten supermarket chains accounted for about 12% of the $5.1 trillion in global retail sales that year; the top 100 global retailers shared 35% of all sales. The top three supermarket chains - Walmart, Carrefour, and Tesco - ‘account for 50% of the Top [Ten’s] revenues’, and sales of the Top Ten have risen nearly 50% since 2002.

The degree of corporation concentration in the inputs, processing and retailing sectors illustrates the general trajectory. To begin with, in the ‘global proprietary seed market’ (that is, seeds which are sold under patent licenses), the market share of the top ten multinationals had reached 67% by 2007, with the top three corporations - Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta - capturing 47% collectively.

In the agro-chemicals sector, the ten leading pesticide multinationals had 89% of global herbicide and fungicide sales in 2007, with the top six corporations - Bayer, DOW, ChemChina, BASF, Syngenta, and DowDuPont - achieving greater growth over this five year period than the other sectors. The power of the giant retailers is epitomized by the world’s leading grocery retailer, the US transnational corporation Walmart, which is also the world’s largest corporation by turnover, with an annual net income of $16.4 billion, and more than two million employees globally, according to the Financial Times (FT) Global 500 list of the world’s biggest corporations: see [http://media.ft.com/cms/33558890-98d4-11e0-bd66-00144f6eab49a.pdf](http://media.ft.com/cms/33558890-98d4-11e0-bd66-00144f6eab49a.pdf), accessed 26.10.11.

The trend towards concentration in agri-food sectors is reflective of the broader trend towards ‘the increasing consolidation of oligopolistic, monopoly, and transnational power within a few centralised multinational corporations’ during the era of neoliberalism: see Harvey, D., 2006, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 80, who notes how this reality contradicts the rhetorical flourishes regarding the ‘virtues of competition’

ETC Group *op cit.*, 11. According to ETC, the global proprietary seed market represents 82% of the ‘total commercial seed market worldwide’, which was valued at $26.7 bn in 2007: *ibid.* Monsanto, with a 2011 turnover of $10.5 billion and net income of $1.1 billion, currently enjoys near-monopoly status in the genetically-engineered seed market, with ‘87% of the total world area devoted to genetically engineered seeds in 2007’ being planted with GM seeds and traits developed by the company. The global worth of GM crops, at $6.9 billion, is small, but has grown rapidly from a zero base at the beginning of the 1990s: ETC Group *op cit.*, 13. On the FT Global 500 list, which orders corporations according to their market value, Monsanto ranks at 213, Syngenta ranks at 293, with a turnover of $12.9 billion and net income of $1.5 billion. .

12 Burch, D., and Lawrence, G., 2005, ‘Supermarket Own Brands, Supply Chains and the Transformation of the Agri-Food System’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture*, 13(1), 1-18. Within the global corporate food chain as a whole, the grocery retailers are by far the largest players in terms of sales volume, with the top ten retailers grossing more than double the combined annual sales volume of the top ten food manufacturers, and nearly fifteen times the combined sales of the seeds and agrochemicals companies: ETC Group (Action Group on Erosion, Biotechnology and Concentration), 2008, ‘Who Owns Nature? Corporate Power and the Final Frontier in the Commodification of Life’, Communiqué Issue #100, November 2008, [http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=707](http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=707), accessed 2.12.08, 18; these proportions have altered only slightly since 2002, with the top 10 seed and agrochemicals corporations achieving greater growth over this five year period than the other sectors. The power of the giant retailers is epitomized by the world’s leading grocery retailer, the US transnational corporation Walmart, which is also the world’s largest corporation by turnover, with an annual net income of $16.4 billion, and more than two million employees globally, according to the Financial Times (FT) Global 500 list of the world’s biggest corporations: see [http://media.ft.com/cms/33558890-98d4-11e0-bd66-00144f6eab49a.pdf](http://media.ft.com/cms/33558890-98d4-11e0-bd66-00144f6eab49a.pdf), accessed 26.10.11.


15 The trend towards concentration in agri-food sectors is reflective of the broader trend towards ‘the increasing consolidation of oligopolistic, monopoly, and transnational power within a few centralised multinational corporations’ during the era of neoliberalism: see Harvey, D., 2006, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 80, who notes how this reality contradicts the rhetorical flourishes regarding the ‘virtues of competition’

16 ETC Group *op cit.*, 11. According to ETC, the global proprietary seed market represents 82% of the ‘total commercial seed market worldwide’, which was valued at $26.7 bn in 2007: *ibid.* Monsanto, with a 2011 turnover of $10.5 billion and net income of $1.1 billion, currently enjoys near-monopoly status in the genetically-engineered seed market, with ‘87% of the total world area devoted to genetically engineered seeds in 2007’ being planted with GM seeds and traits developed by the company. The global worth of GM crops, at $6.9 billion, is small, but has grown rapidly from a zero base at the beginning of the 1990s: ETC Group *op cit.*, 13. On the FT Global 500 list, which orders corporations according to their market value, Monsanto ranks at 213, Syngenta ranks at 293, with a turnover of $12.9 billion and net income of $1.5 billion. .
Syngenta, BASF, Dow AgroSciences, Monsanto and DuPont - responsible for 75% of sales between them.\textsuperscript{17} The levels of growth and the extent of corporate concentration in the input sectors of agriculture are expressive of the decades-long trend of ‘appropriationism’ - ‘the process by which corporate agribusiness reduces the importance of nature in farm production’ - which I mentioned in Chapter 3.\textsuperscript{18}

Oligopolistic and oligopsonic dominance is somewhat less pronounced at the global level in food processing and manufacturing industries and in grocery retailing, but it is nevertheless observable and the trend is towards increasing concentration, fuelled by an ongoing process of mergers and acquisitions.\textsuperscript{19} Recent analysis suggests a lower level of concentration amongst packaged food companies, but a higher degree of concentration amongst soft drink companies, with the top ten companies accounting for over 50% of global sales, and two companies - Coca-Cola and PepsiCo - capturing 37.4% of all sales.\textsuperscript{20} Transnational meat packing corporations such as the US-based Tyson and Smithfield are rapidly expanding their operations, with the result that ‘more meat is being produced by fewer farms in fewer places’.\textsuperscript{21}

One important sector in which oligopolistic control is especially marked is in the production of high-fructose corn syrup: three corporations - Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, and Tate & Lyle - control over 90% of the market; and three soft drink manufacturers - Coca Cola, Pepsi Co and Cadbury Schweppes - purchase 60% of total production.\textsuperscript{22} As discussed in Chapter 4, these levels of market concentration are a significant impediment to the effective regulation of a product, the excessive consumption of which is a major contributor to the global obesity pandemic.

At the national level, the degree of concentration can be substantially higher. It is particularly marked in food and beverage manufacturing in the US, with a 1997

\textsuperscript{17} ETC Group 2008 op cit., 15, citing Agrow World Crop Protection News, August 2008. Sales growth in pesticides exceeded eight percent in 2007 to reach $38.6bn for the sector as a whole, driven in part by increased crop plantings destined as livestock feed and as feedstock for the rapidly emerging agro-fuel sector: Ibid. For similar reasons growth in the chemical fertilizer sector has also been strong in recent years, increasing nearly a third from 1996 to 2008, and with profitability achieving record levels due to a greater than six-fold rise in fertilizer prices, from $245 a ton in January 2007 to $1,600 a ton by August 2008: 17. At least part of this meteoric price rise can be attributed to increasing market awareness of natural resource constraints in the form of ‘peaks’ in the global production of both fossil fuels and – especially salient in the case of chemical fertilizers – phosphorous: see Déry, P., and Anderson, B., 2008, ‘Peak Phosphorous’, published on the Energy Bulletin, 13.08.07, \url{http://www.energybulletin.net/node/33164}, accessed 20.04.09.


\textsuperscript{19} ETC Group op cit., 21, relying on data supplied by the food industry research and consultancy group Leatherhead Food International.


\textsuperscript{21} Emel and Neo 2011 op cit., 69.

\textsuperscript{22} Patel op cit., 115; Gillespie, D., Sweet Poison: Why Sugar Makes us Fat, Penguin, Camberwell, Vic., 189-191. Together, these six companies generated almost $17.5 billion in profits in 2006, ‘most of it as a direct result of government subsidisation [of corn production in the US]’: Gillespie op cit., 191..
study finding ‘notably high degrees of oligopoly power’ across 33 out of 36 food industries tested.\textsuperscript{23} Meatpacking in the US is now ‘more concentrated than at any time in the twentieth century’, with three major firms (ConAgra, Iowa Beef Packers, and Cargill) dominating the beef and pork processing and packing sectors.\textsuperscript{24}

Retail market dominance is especially pronounced in Australia, with the two major chains, Coles and Woolworths, operate a virtual duopoly in this sector, accounting for as much as 80\% of all grocery sales, according to some estimates, while in 1975, the figure was 30\%.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly in the UK, market research revealed that four companies - Tesco, Morrisons, Sainsbury and Asda - controlled almost 75\% of the domestic grocery market by 2006.\textsuperscript{26}

As already indicated, the transformations in the globalising capitalist food system over recent decades cannot be understood apart from wider transformations in the globalising capitalist economy, and in particular the financialisation of capitalism. This section will be divided into two parts; the first will deal briefly with the general capitalist turn to financialisation; and the second will examine some of the specific ways in which financialisation has transformed the globalising capitalist food system.

Finance-driven capitalism describes a phase of capitalism in which the interests collectively represented by finance (including the various types of financial institutions and major investors) come to dominate patterns of trade, investment and commercial activity to such an extent that maximisation of short-term profit, for its own sake, becomes clearly observable as the over-riding economic imperative.\textsuperscript{27} Giovanni Arrighi links the rise of finance-driven capitalism to periods in

\textsuperscript{23} Applying the new empirical industrial organization model to test for degrees of oligopoly power across 40 food and tobacco industry sectors, and using data from 1972-1987, Sanjib Bhuyan and Rigoberto Lopez (1997, ‘Oligopoly Power in the Food and Tobacco Industries’, \textit{American Journal of Agricultural Economy}, 79, 1035-1043) found that ‘statistically significant oligopoly power’ existed ‘in all but three of [the] industries’ tested, with especially high levels of concentration in the cereals preparation, flour and grain milling, soft drinks, condensed and evaporated milk and pickled sauces industries: 1038.

\textsuperscript{24} Dickes \textit{et al op cit.}, 100; also Welsh, R., Hubbell, B., and Carpentier, C.L., 2003, ‘Agro-food System Restructuring and the Geographic Concentration of US Swine Production’, \textit{Environment and Planning A}, 35, 215-229. Emel and Neo write that ‘In the United States, several leading companies now control most of the supply of meat in the country. In 2005, the top three beef packers…controlled more than 80\% of the market, while the pork packing industry was 64\% controlled by four companies, up from 40\% in 1990’: 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 68.


\textsuperscript{26} See \texttt{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4785544.stm}, accessed 26.10.11, reporting on research by TNS Worldpanel.

\textsuperscript{27} Thorstein Veblen, who drew a basic distinction between tangible capital (goods and machinery) and intangible capital (money), saw ‘the central goal of modern industrial capitalism [as being] to create an income stream either from productive activity or from the financial capitalization of assets or by the disruption of productive activity, with a view to maximizing the rate of return on invested capital, both tangible and intangible’: Cornehls, J., 2004, ‘Veblen’s Theory of Finance Capitalism and Contemporary Corporate America’, \textit{Journal of Economic Issues}, 38(10), 29-58, 34. Likewise Marx, making the same
which ‘major expansions of world trade and production have resulted in an over-accumulation of capital beyond the normal channels of profitable investment’. During such periods surplus capital has found profitable outlets through inter alia ‘greater specialisation in financial intermediation’, with a consequent surge in credit and speculation.²⁹ Arrighi notes how such specialisation enables ‘the organising centres of the expansion...to reaffirm, for a while at least, their dominance over world-scale processes of capital accumulation’.³⁰ At the same time, the ‘recurrent dominance of finance capital is [also] a sign of autumn’; in other words, an early indicator that a period of hegemony in global capitalism is coming to an end.³¹

Neo-Marxist accounts suggest that the turn to finance in the mid-1970s can be explained by reference to three main sets of considerations. The first was the need to restore the conditions of profitability in the economies of the global North, especially the US, which had entered a period of prolonged ‘stagflation’ by the early 1970s as the post-war settlement of ‘embedded liberalism’ showed signs of being ‘clearly exhausted’.³² The second was the restoration of class power and privilege, in the face of growing militancy of organised labour movements.³³ The third was the perceived need amongst US elites to restore US hegemony in the

distinction, saw that ‘[t]he circulation of money is...an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement’; in his notes on this section of Capital, Tucker quotes from Aristotle’s treatise on the difference between the Oeconomic, which is ‘the art of gaining a livelihood’, from the Chrematistic, which, as the ‘art of making money’, strives for unlimited riches: Tucker, (ed.), 1978, The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 333-4. See also Demir, F., 2007, ‘The Rise of Rentier Capitalism and the Financialization of Real Sectors in Developing Countries’, Review of Radical Political Economics, 39(3), 351-359.

²⁹ Arrighi cites those periods dominated by the Genoese diaspora in the 16th century, Holland in the 18th century, Britain in the Edwardian era, and the United States from 1980 onwards: ibid.
³⁰ ibid.
³¹ ibid., 225-6, citing Fernand Braudel. Such signs are apparent today, with the US and Europe mired in the most severe financial and economic crisis since the 1930s, and growing speculation about the ‘centre of geopolitical gravity’ shifting from West to East, with attention focused on China as the potential new global hegemon: Harvey 2003 op cit., noting at the same time that the prospects that the US will ‘peacefully accept and adapt to the phenomenal growth of East Asia and recognise...that we are in the midst of a major transition towards Asia as the hegemonic centre of global power’ are ‘hard to imagine’: 77. Further, there are doubts as to what extent contemporary export-oriented Chinese state capitalism is sustainable, even within its own terms. Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett (“China, Capitalist Accumulation, And Labor”, Monthly Review, May 2007, 59(1) 17-39) argue that as capitalist accumulation in China progresses, so will unemployment and underemployment, and that accumulation by dispossession in terms of poor peasants being thrown off their land is a central part of this process, leading to increased social tensions: 34-5.
³³ As growth stalled and ‘asset values collapsed’, that implicit feature of the post-war settlement which required that ‘the economic power of the upper classes be restrained and labour be accorded a much larger share of the economic pie’ became a direct threat to the political and economic survival of the ruling classes: Harvey 2003 op cit., 15-16; also Dumenil and Levy 2001, Dumenil 2004.
international political economy, in the context of the rise of Germany and Japan as the most dynamic centres of world manufacturing. 34

The transition to finance-driven capital meant in turn a shift in ‘the balance of power and interests within the bourgeoisie from production activities to institutions of finance capital’. 35 As I discuss below, amongst other impacts this led to a collapse in the power of organised labour and a stagnation or decline in average wages in many countries of the North, which for a period was offset by rising asset values and the mass availability of cheap credit. At the same time, levels of income inequality in these countries reached historically unprecedented levels, leading to rising social tensions that are now (in 2011) beginning to find expression in the context of the unfolding ‘Global Financial Crisis’ that began in 2007.

‘Accumulation by dispossession’ is geographer David Harvey’s description of those contemporary processes of capitalist accumulation that are based on predation, fraud and violence. 36 Harvey bases his formulation on Marx’s description of primitive, or original, capitalist accumulation. 37 This referred principally (though far from exclusively) to proletarianisation, the process which, in Marx’s words, ‘takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production [and reproduction]’ - typically this would be land - and through which ‘wage-labour is created’. 38 While the conversion of poor peasants into landless workers is a key aspect of contemporary accumulation by dispossession, this is but one of its manifestations.

Harvey and other neo-Marxist political economists place particular emphasis on the ways in which debt and credit have been employed to further accumulation by dispossession in the era of financial capitalism, with the proffering, during successive financial crises, of ‘stabilisation’ loans and ‘structural adjustment packages’ to indebted Southern countries. 39 These crises had - and continue to have

---

34 The collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, and the subsequent loosening of capital controls, allowed US banks, in the wake of the first oil crisis of 1973, to

Gain the monopoly privilege of recycling the petrodollars into the world economy…New York became the financial centre of the global economy…Threatened in the realm of production, the US had countered by asserting its hegemony through finance": Harvey 2003 op cit., 62.

35 Ibid., 63. In the process, the US ‘was complicit in [further] undermining its dominance in manufacturing’ as the contemporary era of globalised production and distribution began in earnest, and ‘wave after wave of deindustrialization hit industry after industry and region after region’ in the former heartlands of world manufacturing: ibid., 64.


37 Ibid., 431-3.


39 Harvey suggests that many of these crises were in fact ‘orchestrated, managed and controlled to rationalise the system’, via the ‘periodic creation of a stock of devalued, and in many instances undervalued, assets in some part of the world, which [could] be put to profitable use by the capital
an explicitly redistributive operation, in terms of transfers of wealth from South to North, and from poor to rich. An estimated $US4.6 trillion had been transferred from Southern countries to Northern financial institutions from 1980-2005 via ‘debt and financial crises’.41

The financialisation of capitalism has assumed particular forms in relation to the globalising capitalist food system. In the first place, it has facilitated a growing process of mergers and acquisitions in the food sector, leading to increasing levels of consolidation, thus reinforcing the trends towards oligopoly and oligopsony.42

surpluses that [lacked] opportunities elsewhere’: 2003 op cit., 147; see also Nesvetaliova, A., 2005, ‘United in Debt: Towards a Global Crisis of Debt-Driven Finance?’ Science & Society, 69(3), 396-419, Foster, J.B., 2007, ‘The Financialization of Capitalism’, Monthly Review, 58(11), 1-12. Thus Harvey argues that during regional financial crises, such as the Asian crisis of 1997-8, Valuable assets are thrown out of circulation and devalued. They lie fallow and dormant until surplus capital seizes upon them to breathe new life into capital accumulation…One of the prime functions of state interventions and of international institutions is to orchestrate devaluations in ways that permit accumulation by dispossession without sparking a general collapse. This is the essence of what a structural adjustment programme administered by the IMF is all about: ibid., 151.

40 Crisis creation, management and manipulation on the world stage has evolved into the fine art of deliberative redistribution of wealth from poor countries to the rich”: Harvey 2006 op cit., 162.


Secondly, financialisation in practice requires that businesses focus on maximising shareholder value, which in turn means that food companies are competing not only in their core products, but also ‘on financial markets to deliver the fastest and biggest possible rates of return to ‘impatient’ financial capital.’ Hence the globalising capitalist food system is now subjected to the discipline of ‘a rate of profit established not in industry but in finance’. Annual profit expectations of 15% or more can only be achieved by ‘high leverage (debt) and / or by cranking up the rate of exploitation [of workers and the environment]’.

This time intensification has a number of consequences. First, agriculture itself, already speeded up through the processes of industrialisation, is now further quickened by the pressures of financialisation. Farmers must now produce according to a production schedule dictated by supermarkets and the profit expectations of financial markets; not according to the seasons and the ‘natural’ growth patterns of plants and animals. Secondly, corporations want approvals for new production processes and products as quickly as possible, so that they can begin to recover the costs of research and development. This may lead to the approval of products that have been inadequately tested for toxicity or environmental safety: GMOs, arguably, are a case in point.

Thirdly, much of food itself has become ‘fast’, ‘convenient’ and ‘pre-packaged’, to suit ‘busy’ lifestyles where frequently both parents work and have neither the time nor the inclination to cook ‘slow’ meals. The expansion of McDonalds, from its commencement in 1955, to 31,000 restaurants worldwide in 2011, serving 47 million customers daily and employing 1.5 million people, is emblematic of the extraordinary rise of the fast food industry.


44 Moore op cit., 390.
46 Albrighton op cit., 33.
47 One example among many is the selective breeding of broiler chickens in factory farms, so that whereas two generations ago a bird would take three months to reach maturity, now they are slaughtered at 42 days: Foer op cit.
48 Albrighton op cit., 32.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
production and serving schedules, with the result that in many countries food sector jobs are amongst the most hazardous occupations.  

Fifthly, the pressure to ‘return value to shareholders’ diverts resources from productive investments and research and development, and enhances the tendency towards job reductions and downwards pressure on terms and conditions. Finally, the intensified profit timeline and expectations of finance capital result in intensified competition. This can lead to price wars and heavy discounting by retailers, which has negative impacts on producers and suppliers. It also means, as discussed in Chapter 4 and further below, that food companies will aggressively market and promote their products to existing and potential consumers, including young children, regardless of the health and social impacts.

The drive to maximise short-term returns has been further heightened by the direct investment and acquisition of food businesses by a range of financial institutions. As Geoffrey Burch and David Lawrence observe, this has taken multiple forms, from investment vehicles operated by superannuation and hedge funds (at times in partnership with the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation) to acquire land and invest in the inputs and logistics sectors, to the direct acquisition of stakes in food companies, and their wholesale purchase, by investment banks and private equity firms, to purchases of farmland by Sovereign Wealth Funds.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, large-scale land acquisitions (leases and purchases) have come under increasing scrutiny, following a dramatic escalation in the pace and scale of acquisitions in several sub-Saharan African countries in the wake of the 2008 food price crisis. Some of these acquisitions have been carried out by sovereign wealth funds of food importing countries, looking to obtain secure supplies of basic

53 Rossman *op cit.*
55 Nestle, M., 2002, *Food Politics* *op cit.* I discuss the issue of advertising of unhealthy food products further below.
grains outside global markets.\textsuperscript{58} Others have been carried out by financial institutions such as hedge and pension funds, and investment banks; and are directed at commodity production, especially biofuels, in order to generate both short and longer-term financial returns in an anticipated era of rising commodity prices, thereby providing a hedge against inflation.\textsuperscript{59}

Hedge funds have also been very active in commodity speculation.\textsuperscript{60} As discussed in Chapter 4, this has been facilitated by de-regulation of the investment banking sector in the United States.\textsuperscript{61} With the volume of investments by index funds increasing by over 1000\% in the five years to 2008, the impact on prices of basic commodities is clearly established.\textsuperscript{62} Whether these speculative investments are the main cause of contemporary food price inflation, as some argue, or whether the diversion of grain to agro-fuels is the main cause, is to an extent immaterial.\textsuperscript{63} The context for the Food Sovereignty movements is that speculation on commodity futures is a major cause of food price inflation; and further, that this speculation and consequent price movements are substantially divorced from underlying ‘supply and demand fundamentals’.\textsuperscript{64} The expectation is that in the absence of any


\textsuperscript{59} De Schutter 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 251. GRAIN 2008 \textit{op cit.}, GRAIN 2011, ‘Pension Funds: Key Players in the Global Farmland Grab’, 20.6.11, \url{http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4287-pension-funds-key-players-in-the-global-farmland-grab}, accessed 21.10.11. GRAIN reports that pension funds, which collectively hold an estimated $23 trillion in assets, currently have around ‘$5 - $15 billion’ of their $100 billion commodity portfolio invested in farmland acquisitions, however this is expected to double by 2015. Pension fund managers are looking to diversify their investment portfolios and securing rising and guaranteed income streams over the longer term: 2011 \textit{op cit.}


\textsuperscript{62} ‘From the beginning of 2004 to [2008], Index Speculators have poured $173 billion into [the 25 largest and most important] commodities…this has caused futures prices to rise dramatically as the commodities futures markets were forced to expand in order to absorb this influx of money’: Masters and White \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{63} Ghosh (2010 \textit{op cit.}) argues that commodity speculation was the main cause; Andreosso-O’Callaghan and Zolin (2010 \textit{op cit.}) argue that agro-fuels were the principal cause, although they acknowledge that commodity speculation was a significant contributing factor.

\textsuperscript{64} Masters and White \textit{op cit.} This de-linkage is made clear by UNCTAD, whose 2009 analysis revealed that the ‘so-called efficient market hypothesis’, which holds that ‘commodity price movements…reflect nothing but information on fundamentals [of supply and demand]’, ‘does not apply to the present commodity futures market’, which is driven more by ‘herding behaviour’. Ghosh also argues forcefully that market fundamentals were unrelated to recent food price volatility, given that global aggregate demand has increased ‘very little, and less than both production and supply’, with China and India in
effective regulatory action, in particular to re-impose position limits on speculative investments, ‘investor money will continue to flow unimpeded into the commodities futures markets and the upward pressure on prices will remain’.  

Another dimension of the financialisation of the food system are private equity takeovers of food companies. The goal of such acquisitions is to ‘realise shareholder value’ over ‘a 3-5 year time frame by leveraging the assets of a company in the short term and making capital gains’. David Burch and Geoffrey Lawrence observe that there are three principal mechanisms for doing this: asset-stripping; restructuring (for example, by introducing ‘flexibility’ into the workforce) and re-floating; and by borrowing against the company’s assets.

Burch and Lawrence describe what they term a process of ‘financialisation in reverse’; that is, the diversification of agri-food corporations into the financial sphere, such as supermarkets offering credit cards and opening banks, and grain-trading corporations developing their own private equity investment funds. This represents the internalisation of the logic of financialisation, as agri-food corporations begin to see themselves as, and behave like, financial intermediaries; and is an indication that this logic is becoming - or is already - a, if not the, dominant force in the globalising capitalist food system.

Further, this logic organises spheres of life beyond the contractual and employment relations between economic actors in the capitalist food system. As a ‘market rationality’ which constructs citizens as ‘rational economic actors in every sphere of life’, it is a ‘totalizing ideology’ that ‘saturates the consciousness’, in the rich and dynamic Gramscian sense of cultural hegemony and common sense.

Social relations of the system and its tensions
In this section I briefly discuss how the dynamics outlined above - oligopolistic concentration, financialisation, accumulation by dispossession - translate into particular forms and patterns of social relations regarding farmers, food sector workers, and consumers. My main concern in this section is to make explicit how these social relations express and reproduce the key tensions of over-production and

---

particular ‘exhibit[ing] falling food grain consumption both in per capita terms as well as in the aggregate’: 2010 op cit., 80.

65 Masters and White op cit; Burch and Lawrence 2009 op cit., 273. Ghosh recommends either ‘very strict limits’, or the complete banning, of commodity futures speculation by financial actors: op cit., 85.

66 Burch and Lawrence 2009 op cit., 273-5.

67 Ibid., 273. Citing the example of the take-over of UK supermarket chain Somerfield in 2005 by Apax Partners Worldwide, the authors note how a private equity take-over usually involves all three strategies: ibid., 274. As well as resulting in further concentration and consolidation in food industry sectors, a common impact of these takeovers, identified by Burch and Lawrence in the Apax case, is downwards pressure on terms and conditions of food sector workers: ibid., 274. The authors note how Apax outsourced most of the IT functions of Somerfield to ‘a subsidiary of the Tata conglomerate in India – for a saving of £2mn’, and withdrew from ‘the Ethical Trading Initiative’ citing the need to ‘reconsider its short and medium term business priorities’: ibid.

68 Ibid., 276-7.

inequality that characterise the globalising capitalist food system. Accordingly I will preface the discussion with a brief synopsis of the general intensification of overproduction and inequality during the contemporary era of finance-driven capitalism; bearing in mind that both these dynamics, but especially over-production, also contribute to the third key tension of ecological destruction.

Also known as ‘over-accumulation’, ‘excess capacity’, and ‘under-consumption’, over-production, conceived as ‘the widening gap between the growing productive potential of the system and the capacity of consumers to purchase its output’, has become a persistent structural feature of the global economy since the turn to finance-driven capitalism in the late 1970s.\(^{70}\) The rise of China as a major centre of world manufacturing has aggravated the tendency; and the crisis of over-production has translated into a long-term decline in global economic growth rates, which have halved from 1980 onwards compared with the period 1960-1980.\(^{71}\) Excesses of capacity have therefore become endemic throughout many sectors in the global economy.\(^{72}\) While it may be perceived as a ‘rational choice’ for corporations to stay in unprofitable sectors in the expectation that others will exit and profitability will return when the sectors become oligopolistic through mergers and acquisitions, even this strategy is often not working as expected.\(^{73}\)

In relation to farming, agrarian political economy has revealed ‘two fundamental tendencies of agricultural production’ which strongly contribute to the dynamic of commodity over-production.\(^{74}\) The first is the tendency of farmers to ‘harvest and sell their crop no matter what the price consequences’, because ‘[g]etting some return is better than none’.\(^{75}\) The second is that because people can only eat so much food, ‘markets for food [are inelastic]’; the combined effect of both tendencies is that commodity farmers find themselves relegated to the status of ‘price-takers’, which often means absorbing losses.\(^{76}\) Farmers have responded, as

---


\(^{71}\) Ibid., 79; Navarro, V., 2006, ‘The Worldwide Class Struggle’, *Monthly Review*, 58(4), 18-33, 22-3. When the data for China are excluded, the picture that emerges for the South as a whole is one of stagnation; from an annual GDP per capita rate of 3.2% from 1961-1980, to a mere 0.7% from 1981-1999: Navarro op cit., 23, citing World Bank figures.

\(^{72}\) Bello 2005 op cit., noting that the capacity of the global computer industry is rising at 40% per annum, ‘far above projected increases in demand’, the world auto industry is selling only 74% of the cars made, there is a 20% excess capacity in steel, and fibre-optic networks are operating at only 2.5% of their capacity: 85.


\(^{74}\) Guthman 2011 op cit., 53. While I have focused on terrestrial food production and other forms of agriculture (e.g. textile production and biofuels) in this thesis, the depletion of many of the world’s principal oceanic fisheries is a powerful and further illustration of the dynamic of over-production and depletion of natural resource bases inherent to globalising capitalism. Becky Mansfield, 2011, “Modern” Industrial Fishing and the Crisis of Overfishing in Peet, R., Robbins, P., and Watts, M., (eds.), 2011, *Global Political Ecology*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon., 84-99, 85.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., noting that Karl Kautsky was amongst the first to identify this tendency in his 1898 work, *The Agrarian Question*.

\(^{76}\) Ibid.
Julie Guthman notes, via three main strategies: extensification (bringing more land under cultivation); intensification (increasing productivity through the industrialisation of farming); and shifting to higher-value crops. Ultimately all three strategies have only provided temporary resolutions to the predicament of being a price-taker; and hence there has been no exit from the ‘classic treadmill of production’ and the dynamic of over-production. The result, as I discuss below, has been declining terms of trade for farmers, and a dwindling farm population.

This leads to a consideration of inequality, as the second key tension of the globalising capitalist food system. Confirmation of Dumenil and Levy’s portrayal of neoliberalism as a class project to restore the wealth and privilege of the upper fractions of the capitalist class is provided by a brief survey of the sharpening inequalities in wealth and income distributions between and within countries and regions. The United Nations 2005 Report on the World’s Social Situation found that while the world’s richest decile saw their per capita GDP increase 86% from 1960-1995 to $US30,700, the world’s poorest decile saw their income decline by 49% over the same period to $US214. The gap between the richest and poorest 20 countries has similarly grown by nearly 300% from 1960-62 to 2000-2002. Meanwhile, the total number of people in poverty rose by nearly 300 million between 1981 and 2001, to reach 2.735 billion. While the rapid expansion of the Chinese economy (and to a lesser extent, of the Indian economy) has slightly improved on a macro-level total income disparities between the Global South and North (and brought about a significant reduction in the global rate of absolute poverty), the gulf is still vast, and every region of the world apart from those two countries has seen its per capita income levels ‘steadily declining relative to the average per capita income in the wealthier OECD countries’.

Studies also strongly indicate that income inequality within countries has also increased. This is true of both developed and developing countries, with countries where neo-liberalism has been most extensively applied registering increases in the Gini measure of inequality in excess of ten points over the past three decades. The case of the United States, as the leading capitalist country, is illustrative of the

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 2001 op cit.; also Navarro 2006 op cit.
80 Radetzki, M., and Jonsson, B., 2002, ‘The Expanding Global Income Gap: How Reliable is the Evidence?’ European Journal of Development Research, 14(1), 243-263. The gap between the two increased from 40:1 to 140:1, or 263%. This calculation was based using exchange rate determined per capita GDP, rather than the World Bank preferred (though much criticised) method of purchasing power parity (PPP) GDP, which gives a much more benign increase of 28% in the gap between the richest and the poorest deciles.
81 World Social Report 2005 op cit., Figure III.2
83 Ibid., para.145. East Asia and Pacific saw a relative improvement, from a 1.5% share of OECD per capita income in 1980, to 3.3% in 2001; the South Asian share increased from 1.2% to 1.6% over the same period: ibid.
84 Using the World Income Inequality Database, Cornia, Addison and Kiiski (2004) found that in a study of 73 countries, 29 countries reported high levels of income inequality by the early 1980s, and that number had risen to 48 by the late 1990s. Only nine countries saw a decline in income inequality: cited in World Social Report 2005 op cit., para.148.
85 Ibid., para.149.
trend. The ratio of Chief Executive Officer remuneration to average workers’ salaries in large US corporations increased by over 1000%, from 30:1 in 1970 to 400:1 in 2000. Financial liberalization has seen a huge rise in the numbers of super-rich. In absolute terms, the top 1% of the population increased their amount of net worth by 103% between 1983 and 2007; their income increase over the same period was 127%. The richest of the rich - the top 0.1% and 0.01% of the population - saw their shares of national income rise 400% and 500% respectively, between 1975-2008. The bottom 80% of the population suffered a substantial decline in both net worth and income, from 18.7% and 48% respectively in 1982, to 15.1% and 38.5% in 2007.

Extrapolating these trends to the global level, the concentration of global income in the top 1% of the world’s population is indeed striking; this fraction had by 2005 captured 57% of total global income; a share that has likely risen in the subsequent few years. According to the 2011 Forbes ‘rich list’, as at March 2011 there were 1,210 billionaires, with a total net worth of $4.5 trillion, well in excess of the collective wealth held by the poorest 3 billion inhabitants in the world.


87 Within the United States, the numbers of millionaires trebled from 1983 to 2007 (2,411 to 7,274), the number of ‘pentamillionaires’ ($5 million or more) quadrupled (247 to 1,466), and the numbers of ‘decamillionaires’ ($10 million or more) rose by nearly 800% (66 to 464): Wolff 2007 op cit., 46. The speculative activity of the hedge fund managers brings enormous rewards: in 2006, ten individual hedge fund managers earned more than $500 million each, whilst five earned more than $900 million each; these five individuals being George Soros $950m, Edward Lampert $1.3bn, Kenneth Griffin $1.4bn and James Simons $1.7bn: Peston, R., 2008, “Hedge funds: The new global super powers”, Daily Telegraph, 28.1.08, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/main.jhtml?xml=/money/2008/01/27/cnpeston127.xml&CMP=ILC-mostviewedbox, accessed 29.1.08.

88 As a share of national income, the top 1% rose to 20% by 2000, and then to 21.3% in 2007, up from 12.8% in 1982; Wolff, W.N., 2007, ‘Recent Trends in Household Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the Middle Class Squeeze’, Working Paper No.502, The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, 12; Wolff, E.N., 2010, ‘Recent Trends in Household Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the Middle-Class Squeeze – An Update to 2007’, Working Paper No.589, Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, 44-45. Wolff has an additional measure of ‘non-home wealth’, which shows an even starker absolute gain amongst the top 1%; and an 88% increase from 1983, and a 94% increase for the top 20%, of the population, which by 2004 held 92.5% of total non-home wealth.


90 Wolff 2007 op cit., 45. The decline was especially precipitous amongst the lowest 40%, whose absolute wealth declined by 63% over the period, and as a share of the national total declined from an already low 0.9% in 1983 to a mere 0.2% by 2007; their share of national income declined from 12.3% in 1982 to 9.6% in 2007: ibid., 44, 46.


92 http://www.forbes.com/wealth/billionaires, accessed 20.10.11. As Professor James Petras notes, these individuals – who constitute one one-hundredth million of the world’s population – own more wealth than the poorest 3 billion people on the planet: http://petras.lahaine.org, accessed 3.10.07. The 2011
The experience of inequality by farmers and food workers assumes particular dimensions, having regard to the centrality of the complex of ‘cheap food’ for the globalising capitalist economy as a whole. Farmers hold relatively little economic power in the globalising capitalist food system, being reduced in many cases to the status of contract workers, supplying a product according to price and specifications that are determined higher up in ‘vertically-integrated food supply chains’, usually to the specification standards of supermarkets and fast food companies.\(^93\) They have been subjected to a relentless cost-price squeeze which has seen their terms of trade steadily worsen since 1950.\(^94\) The tendency of supermarkets to continually lengthen payment terms to suppliers, as well as engage in other coercive practices, only intensifies this dynamic.\(^95\)

The logic of the system, intensified via financialisation, mandates constant efficiencies and higher levels of productivity, which, as discussed below, translates into the simplification and homogenisation of diverse physical landscapes into agricultural monocultures.\(^96\) Most value in the food supply chain is extracted post-farm sales. The very low 11.6% ‘farm and agribusiness’ share of the US food dollar in 2011 (Figure [2]) represents the continuation of a steep decline from 1980 onwards.\(^97\)

---

\(^93\) The farmer’s job is simply to implement the input package [hybridized seeds, pesticides, chemical fertilisers, an irrigation system and a variety of tractors and mechanical inputs] in order to produce the [commodity] that the [end-client – supermarket or fast-food company] has contracted the farmer to produce: Albritton 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 130. \textit{See also} Friedmann, H., 2009, ‘Discussion: Moving Food Regimes Forward: Reflections on Symposium Essays’, \textit{Agriculture and Human Values}, 26, 335-344, 336; and Emel and Neo 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 68. Julie Guthman notes how this dynamic is very far advanced in poultry production in the impoverished rural communities of the American south: 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 62.


\(^95\) Burch and Lawrence \textit{op cit.}, who note that while supermarkets typically had delayed payment periods of 20-30 days in 1998, ten years later this had stretched out to ‘88 days and growing’: 276. Other documented coercive practices of supermarkets include seeking or imposing retrospective discounts on suppliers, requiring compensation from suppliers if the supermarket’s profit is less than anticipated, and requiring a supplier to buy back unsold items: Mills, G., 2003, ‘Buying Power of Supermarkets’, \textit{Agenda}, 10(2), 145-162, 151, discussing the findings of the 2000 UK Competition Commission report: ‘Supermarkets: A Report on the Supply of Groceries from Multiple Stores in the United Kingdom’. These sorts of practices led Australian businessman Dick Smith to describe contemporary supermarket behaviour in Australia towards its suppliers as ‘thuggery’ in an interview broadcast on national television on 27.9.11: \url{http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/business/items/201109/s3327292.htm}, accessed 21.10.11.

\(^96\) Albritton 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 66.

\(^97\) Secton and Zhang 2006 \textit{op cit.}, 155, who report that the ‘farm share of the US Department of Agriculture’s market basket [the precursor of the food dollar] remained stable at about 40 percent from 1960 through 1980 but has declined rapidly since then to 30 percent in 1990 and 22 percent in 1998’.
The steadily worsening terms of trade for farmers has led to a sharp fall in their numbers across the North and the South. Figure [3] below shows a decline in excess of 70 per cent in employment levels in agriculture in the US from 1950 to 2010.

---

98 In its *Global Employment Trends Report 2011*, the International Labour Organisation comments that the ‘long-term trend’ is one ‘in which employment in agriculture is on a steady downward march in terms of the share of total employment, while employment in services has steadily risen…Employment in services surpassed employment in agriculture in 2001 and the gap between the two has grown ever since’; 20. The US ‘loses on average approximately 20,000 farms per year…largely because the smaller family farm cannot compete with large industrial farms’: Albritton 2009 *op cit.*, 128; see also McMichael 2005 *op cit.*, 58, citing Hobsbawm, E., 1992, ‘The Crisis of Today’s Ideologies’, *New Left Review*, 192, 55-64.

While agriculture’s share of total global employment has been decreasing, if the numbers of workers in food processing, packing, transport, service and retailing are included, then the food sector as a whole is the world’s largest economic sector.\textsuperscript{100} However, the ‘cheap food’ imperative, over-determined by financialisation, means that the trend is towards heightened levels of exploitation of workers in most of these sectors.

Agricultural and farm work is characterised by long hours, hard manual labour, and low pay, making it the lowest paid of all occupations in most countries.\textsuperscript{101} In many Northern countries the work is carried out by newly arrived immigrants, some of whom with irregular or ‘illegal’ migration status, and therefore subject to even greater exploitation.\textsuperscript{102} Meanwhile in some agricultural sectors in the South - notably the sugar cane plantations in Brazil - contemporary conditions are described by some as ‘modern-day slavery’, continuing earlier patterns of super-exploitation in the South that underwrote the cheap food complex for the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Industrial Revolution.\textsuperscript{103}

Work in the retail and fast food sectors is similarly characterised by relatively high degrees of exploitation, with rates of turnover in the latter reaching as high as 300 or 400 per cent per annum.\textsuperscript{104} As discussed below, workers in abattoirs and meat-packing plants in America are subjected to very demanding production schedules, making this industry now one of the most dangerous in the country.\textsuperscript{105} In food processing and manufacturing, the drive for efficiencies, productivity and ‘maximising returns to shareholders’ has led to substantial job cuts, and downwards pressure on terms and conditions through outsourcing and casualization.\textsuperscript{106}

Inequality also assumes certain dimensions in the sphere of consumption. The converse tension of over-production is under-consumption: namely, that the working populations worldwide will lack the purchasing power and / or the desire to

\textsuperscript{100} Albritton 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 125.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{102} ‘[A]s of 2005, over 90 per cent of all field workers in California were undocumented [and the] average income [of these workers was $7,500 per year…well below the poverty line of $10,488 for a single person’; Albritton 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 127. Albritton also notes that these workers are greatly at risk of exposure to dangerously high levels of toxic chemicals, with their death rate ‘five times higher than the average for all other industries taken as a whole’: \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{103} Patel 2007 \textit{op cit.}, 87-8, citing Davis, M., 2001, \textit{Late Victorian Holocausts. El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World}, Verso, London. The ILO estimates that 12.3 million people currently work in conditions of forced labour at the global level. In Brazil an estimated 25,000-50,000 workers, mainly illiterate, landless migrants, are forced into slave labour: FIAN 2008 \textit{op cit.}, 21-2; Patel 2007 \textit{op cit.}, 193-4, who notes that practices of slavery also extend in Brazil to the soy export industry.

\textsuperscript{104} Albritton \textit{op cit.}, 132-3.
\textsuperscript{105} ‘Because the conditions are so dreadful (processing plants have almost 100 percent turnover annually), workers have to be recruited from desperate populations of illegal immigrants and even those who have yet to migrate’: Emel and Neo 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 74.

\textsuperscript{106} Rossman 2011 \textit{op cit}. Rossman notes that, following leveraged buy outs and acquisitions, food companies ‘now employ fewer and fewer workers to produce their branded products [as] [o]utsourcing and casualization have become key tools for enhancing exploitation in the quest for super-profits’. He cites the example of Unilever – ‘the world’s largest food company’ – which embarked on a ‘Path to Growth’ strategy in 2000 that aimed to return €46 billion from 2000-2010. This was largely achieved via a halving of its global workforce, from 300,000 in 2000, to 148,000 in 2010, alongside outsourcing of many functions, and casualization of the remaining workforce.
consume the products of the globalising capitalist food system in sufficient quantities to maintain profitability.\textsuperscript{107} The system has two primary, closely related, mechanisms for managing this tension. The first is to ensure that the products are affordable, via the subsidised complex of ‘cheap food’.\textsuperscript{108} While many forms of ‘cheap food’ are contrary to optimal human health if consumed on a frequent basis, research has demonstrated that due to the high levels of sugar they typically contain, these foods appear to have quasi-addictive properties.\textsuperscript{109} Hence the second mechanism for managing the ‘over-production, under-consumption’ dialectic is the widespread promotion, through the technologies of television, advertising and marketing, of a ‘market-induced akrasia, or weakness of will’, amongst large numbers of consumers, encouraging them to express ‘addictive [shopping] preferences’ for these products.\textsuperscript{110}

Sugar and sugar-substitutes, notably high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), have become ubiquitous in the contemporary food system. From the introduction of cane sugar into the Western diet in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, annual per capita consumption rose steadily to around 25 kg (in the US) by 1885, and to 50kg by the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{111} Per capita sugar consumption then plateaued until the early 1970s, when the discovery of HFCS revolutionised the food industry and caused fructose per capita consumption to rise significantly.\textsuperscript{112}

Since it is much sweeter than sugar, cheaper to produce, more stable and in liquid form, the discovery of HFCS in 1969 - combined with the use of palm oil and the lecithin (stabiliser) made from processed soy - has proved invaluable to the rapid growth of transnational supermarket chains, in terms of prolonging the shelf-life of the great bulk of supermarket items, as well as in improving their taste, appearance and ‘mouthfeel’.\textsuperscript{113} From the mid-1970s, HFCS was being added to a wide range of soft drink beverages and processed food products.\textsuperscript{114} By the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, over forty percent of the US corn crop was being converted into HFCS, flowing from

\textsuperscript{107} Albritton 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 41-3, 68-71. Gavin Bridge notes how the crisis of under-consumption that characterised the 1930s Great Depression was resolved (in part) with the availability of abundant oil, then being discovered and produced in great quantities the United States: ‘Through expanding automobility, suburbanization, and development of a mass market for consumer durables, demand for oil was effectively built – via physical engineering and socio-cultural convention – into the social and geographical structure of urban, national and international economies’: 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 313.

\textsuperscript{108} Moore 2010 \textit{op cit.} I discuss this further below.


\textsuperscript{110} McMurty 2003 \textit{op cit.}, arguing that the ubiquitous marketing and advertising of such commodities undermines the ‘mythology’ of ‘consumer sovereignty’ that forms the basis of much contemporary neoclassical economic theory: 381.

\textsuperscript{111} The annual consumption of sugar per capita rose 7-fold in Great Britain between 1815 and 1955, from 7 kg to 50 kg: Gillespie \textit{op cit.}, 8, 88-9.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}, 89.

\textsuperscript{113} Critser, G., 2003, \textit{Fat Land: How Americans Become the Fattest People in the World}, Penguin, London, 10-12, 14-15. Patel notes that by 1999 ‘the average American consumed around 64 dry-weight pounds of [HFCS] a year’ (115), and that lecithin is now ‘a component in nearly three-quarters of products on supermarket shelves, and in most products sold by the fast food industry’: 166.

\textsuperscript{114} Patel \textit{op cit.}, 114-5.
the mills of the three companies that control over 90% of the HFCS market, throughout the products of the soft drink and fast-food companies.\textsuperscript{115}

The cheap (subsidised) cost of HFCS enabled soft drink manufacturers and fast food companies to pursue a variety of marketing and pricing strategies to entice consumers to purchase more of their products. A key marketing device was ‘super-sizing’, which was first adopted by McDonalds in the US in the 1970s, and then spread rapidly throughout these sectors. The new sales strategies not only increased profits, they also increased calories: average adult daily caloric intake in the US rose from 1876 calories in 1977, to 2043 calories in 1995.\textsuperscript{116} In a passage that reveals the how the perception of ‘cheap food’ constitutes the common sense of the system, Greg Critser notes that by 1999:

Kids had come to see bigger everything - bigger sodas, bigger snacks, bigger candy, and even bigger doughnuts - as the norm...anything could be made a lot bigger for just a tad more.\textsuperscript{117}

Super-sizing has been accompanied by the heavy promotion of fast food and soft drink products. Leading US academic nutritionist Marion Nestle, in her investigation into the social, economic and political power of food manufacturers, reported that in 1999, $US11 billion was spent on direct advertising of packaged food products, and that ‘[f]or every dollar spent [directly], the companies spend another two on discount incentives’, so that the true advertising and promotional budget in the US in 1999 was $US33 billion.\textsuperscript{118} Nestle continues:

Nearly 70% of food advertising is for convenience foods, candy and snacks, alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts, whereas just 2.2% is for fruits, vegetables, grains or beans...Advertising costs for any single, nationally distributed food product far exceed (often by 10 to 50 times) federal expenditures for promotion of the [Healthy Food] Pyramid or to encourage people to eat more fruit and vegetables.\textsuperscript{119}

Having regard to the under-consumption tendency, the role played by the advertising and marketing industries in encouraging continual mass consumption is now fundamental to the health of industrialised economies.\textsuperscript{120} Advertising on a large scale has become essential to securing and maintaining sales figures in a highly competitive environment. ‘Food sales increase with the intensity, repetition and visibility of the advertising message’, notes Nestle, and strong sales are also associated with the making of nutritional and health claims. This dynamic can be traced in significant part to an excess of processed and manufactured food products.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{115} McMichael 2004 \textit{op cit.}, 59; Gillespie \textit{op cit.}, 191, Patel \textit{op cit.}, 115.
\bibitem{116} Critser \textit{op cit.}, 28.
\bibitem{117} \textit{Ibid.}
\bibitem{118} Nestle 2002 \textit{op cit}, 11-14. The biggest 10 producers of packaged foods in the US in 1999 were: Nestlé, Unilever, Philip Morris, Pepsico, Group Danone, H.J. Heinz, Nabisco, Kellogg, General Mills, and Campbell Soup. As Nestle notes, the direct advertising spend is only a fraction of total food sales, which for these ten companies exceeded $US155 billion for 1999: \textit{Ibid.}
\bibitem{119} \textit{Ibid.}, 21-2.
\bibitem{120} Indeed it has been for many decades. Shortly after the Second World War retailing analyst Victor Lebow described how the logic of mass production would necessitate the creation of a culture of mass consumption: \textit{cited in Smith, R., 2005, ‘The Engine of Eco Collapse’, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 16(4), 19-35, 30.}
\end{thebibliography}
More generally, as discussed in Chapter 2, a basic systemic imperative of capitalism is expansion and growth (in quantitative terms); and this now depends to a large extent on the continual promotion of ‘competitive consumption’ via the technologies of advertising, irrespective of the extent to which this detracts from individual and societal well-being.121

A growing trend is the direct promotion of fast and processed foods, and beverages, to young children.122 Children are exposed to food advertising through magazines, packaging, supermarket displays, sponsorship of sports teams, and new social media - but above all on television.123 Research indicates a correlation between higher levels of television viewing and childhood obesity; and has also detected concentrated promotion of ‘non-core’ food during popular children’s programs.124 Further, there is now ‘clear and robust evidence that unhealthy food advertising influences the types of foods children prefer, request and eat’; and, having regard to its ubiquity, this advertising ‘undermines the effectiveness of strategies to improve children’s diets, such as healthy eating media campaigns and school-based nutrition programs.’125 At the global level, food companies spend $500 promoting energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods for every $1 spent by the World Health Organisation to promote healthy foods.126

122 In August 2010 the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, based at Yale University, reported that American children aged 2-11 were exposed, on average, to 4,494 food, beverage and restaurant advertisements during 2008 – more than 12 every day. Teenagers (ages 12-17) were exposed to 5,353 food, beverage and restaurant advertisements each day: Harris, J.L., Weinberg, M.E., Schwartz, M.B., Ross, C., Ostroff, J., and Brownell, K.D., 2010, ‘Trends in Television Food Advertising: Progress in Reducing Unhealthy Marketing to Young People?’ Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, Yale University, http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/RuddReport_TVFoodAdvertising_2.10.pdf, accessed 30.5.11.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
The results of this advertising are observable in sharply increased levels of consumption of unhealthy food products amongst children and adults. In Australia, average soft drink consumption for all age groups has more than doubled since the 1970s, with nearly a quarter of children (aged 2-12) having ‘been reported to drink more soft drink every day than water’. More generally, the year-on-year growth in sales for the fast food sector is remarkable; by 2004, US consumers were spending $US148.6 billion on fast food, nearly a 50% increase since 1999. Per capita US consumers were spending an average $492 each per year on fast food. Meanwhile, national nutritional surveys show that very few Australian children are eating the recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables each day, and the ‘vast majority’ are eating too much sugar and saturated fat, with deleterious consequences for their health, well-being and enjoyment of life.

How the system’s social relations generate over-production and inequalities
The system is organised according to the rationalities of efficiency and productivity; it is operationalized by the application of the technologies of industrialisation and chemistry; and its basic imperatives are the ceaseless expansion of capital accumulation and profit. Both imperatives have been intensified by processes of financialisation and the associated corporate concentration within the major agri-food sectors. All social relations are therefore directed towards securing enhanced productivity, thereby entrenching the dynamic of over-production; and continued growth in profits, thereby intensifying forms and processes of dispossession and exploitation of farmers, workers and consumers, and heightening the key systemic tension of inequality.

As previously discussed, the logic of the system points very clearly in the direction of economies of scale. The bigger farms - and in the South, plantations - are the ones that can meet the demands of the supermarket for large, consistent and standardised volumes; and hence they are the ones that survive in this environment. At the same time, economies of scale and the wholesale application of an industrial (and now financial) logic to farming have generated exponential increases in agricultural productivity in the North, with a ‘near tripling of global cereal output’ from 1950 to 1990. This productivity revolution has, however, come at the cost of the collapse (until very recently) in the world price of commodities, and a consequent large decline in farm sector employment in the North (see figure [3] above); and ongoing ‘de-peasantisation’ in the South.

---

127 Ibid., 9.
128 Followed by Canadians, with $387 per capita spending. Australians were in third place in terms of global per capita spend on fast food, with each Australian spending an average $US279 on these food items in 2004: ‘Top Fast Food Countries’: http://www.suite101.com/content/top-fast-food-countries-a29881, accessed 27.5.11.
129 Ibid, citing the 2007 Australian National Children’s Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, which found that only 3% of 4-8 year olds were consuming the recommended 2-4 daily servings of vegetables (excluding potatoes), 2% of 9-13 year olds, and no 14-16 year-olds.
130 At the same time, the culture of ‘competitive consumption’ on which contemporary capitalism depends increasingly appears to be at odds with human well-being in psychological terms: Panayotakis 2011 op cit., 50-56.
132 The price of basic grains fell 60% in real terms between 1960 and 2000: Moore op cit., 398. The rise
As I have discussed, much of the increased volume of grains has been diverted to animal feed, facilitating the tremendous growth of the factory farming system and the fast food industry. The former has grown so rapidly that Americans now eat on average 150 times more chicken than eighty years previously; 10 billion animals are processed through the system each year in the US; and fifty billion poultry birds are farmed worldwide each year. These extraordinary levels of production are made possible by meting out extreme levels of cruelty to the animals themselves, as well as insisting upon the super-exploitation of workers in these operations.

Competition for limited supermarket shelf space in processed and packaged foods means that each year sees increasing numbers of these products; research for the United States Department of Agriculture found that in the decade from 1998-2007, ‘the number of new product introductions rose by 181 per cent.’ Commercial experience shows that the most heavily promoted products achieve the best sales. The end result of structurally entrenched over-production, when combined with the equally structurally-entrenched complex of cheap food, is phenomenal levels of food waste, perhaps as much as 40-50% in the OECD countries. When added to the amount of grain that is diverted to biofuels and animal feed, it becomes clear that the contemporary world is characterised not by a food shortage, but by over-abundance.

Land use conversions, brought about by the large-scale shift to export-oriented agriculture and commodity production, have led to hundreds of millions of small and subsistence farmers, and indigenous communities, being displaced from their lands and migrating towards rapidly expanding rural slums and shanty-towns. Much of this rural-urban migration is linked to the persistent poverty that most rural dwellers endure. As with many of the impacts of structural adjustment, peasant displacement frequently occurs as a result of violent coercion.
Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, and right to food NGOs such as FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), have documented ‘soaring’ levels of violations of the right to food and water, together with the ‘subsequent repression of human rights defenders - both those attempting to assert their rights and those who support them’. This is a reference to what La Via Campesina calls the ‘criminalisation of peasant struggles’.

**Land grabs**

In what is being termed ‘a new scramble for Africa akin to the frenzy that followed the Berlin conference of 1885 and the partitioning and colonization of [the continent]’, sovereign wealth funds, transnational corporations and private financial institutions are acquiring millions of hectares of farmland in numerous sub-Saharan countries. While estimates of the numbers of acquisitions and the total

---

in the likelihood of torture in a country implementing a structural adjustment agreement as compared with a country not implementing one, controlling for other factors: *ibid.* These results confirmed similar findings from an analysis conducted previously in relation to IMF agreements: see Camp Keith, L., and Poe, S.C., 2000, *The United States, the IMF and Human Rights in The United States and Human Rights*, in Forstyhe, D.F., (ed.), University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, *cited in Abouharb and Cingranelli op cit.*

The global peasant and small farmers movement La Via Campesina reported in June 2008 that ‘in Indonesia, on the 29th of January 2008, 35 security guards of the National Plantation PTPN IV Adolina backed by 70 police officers from Deli Serdan district destroyed 30 hectares of land planted with corn and casava belonging to small farmers…The company has cleared the land in order to grow palm oil…In Brazil, it is estimated that 4,340 families have been expelled from their land by private companies in 2007, 28 people were assassinated and 259 people received death threats in land conflicts…’: ‘The Hidden Face of the Global Food Crisis: Massive Farmers Rights Violations’, 21.06.08, [http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=567&Itemid=40](http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=567&Itemid=40), accessed 27.10.08; see also Friends of the Earth, 2005, ‘The Oil for Ape Scandal: How Palm Oil is Threatening the Orang-utan’, [www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/oil_for_ape_full.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/oil_for_ape_full.pdf), accessed 27.10.08.


141 La Via Campesina, 2006, ‘Annual Report: Violations of Peasants’ Human Rights’. In this 2006 report, La Via Campesina sought to show how violations of economic and social rights are linked with violations of civil and political rights, so that once peasant organisations and leaders ‘begin to assert their rights, they face persecution or even assassination’: 4. Referring to cases in Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, the Philippines, Colombia and Indonesia, La Via Campesina says there is a clearly observable pattern of impunity for violations of peasants’ rights committed by landlords and agri-business. In Brazil ‘more than 1,425 rural workers, leaders and activists related to social movements fighting for land and agrarian reform have been murdered over the past 20 years’, but [as at 2006] only 79 cases have been legally processed, with 69 convictions: 3. Conversely, the full force of the law is often brought against those peasant leaders and activists who attempt to defend their rights: 22. The violent repression by state and private security forces of members of peasant organisations in the Bajo Aguán Valley on the Atlantic coast of Honduras, who have struggling to reclaim their lands fraudulently taken by palm oil exporters, is a contemporary illustration of this dynamic: see FIAN, *Honduras: Human Rights Violations in Bajo Aguán*, International Fact Finding Mission Report. FIAN and La Via Campesina formed part of a six-organisation human rights fact-finding mission that visited Honduras during February-March 2011, to investigate allegations of widespread violations of human rights in the Bajo Aguán land conflict. The mission found that between January 2010 and March 2011, 25 peasant leaders and activists were murdered, with ‘little or no progress’ being made in the investigations of these acts, which ‘are moving towards being treated with complete impunity’; a ‘generalised atmosphere of fear and terror caused by continual threats and harassment’, including personal threats of violence, threatening phone calls, continual surveillance, ‘kidnapping, torture and sexual abuse’, the burning of houses and firing shots in the night’ and a concerted State campaign of criminalisation to ‘silence and instil fear in the peasant movement, and weaken their demands’: 19-23, 31.

area of land acquired vary, the figures involved are substantial. GRAIN, for example, has documented 416 cases between 2002 and 2012, of which 228 are in Africa; 293 are for biofuel production, covering in excess of 17 million hectares. The Land Deal Politics Initiative (Cornell University) which has conducted two international academic workshops on the topic (2011 and 2012), has begun an interdisciplinary global land deals mapping exercise.

The land-grab phenomenon appears to have two principal drivers. On the one hand, governments in food importing countries such as Saudi Arabia, wish to secure adequate land with reliable water access in order to feed their growing populations. On the other, speculators and transnational corporations see these acquisitions as investment opportunities in order to generate commodities for export, whether they be food crops of feedstock for biofuels. Either way, as critics have pointed out, the net effect is that poor communities in the target countries are losing access to land and means of livelihood.

UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter locates the land-grab phenomenon within the wider context of the historical trends towards the integration of small-holder farmers into the globalising capitalist food system: first via vertical integration into global supply chains through direct contracting arrangements, and now through the direct acquisition of farmland. He argues that, contrary to the expectations of the World Bank, which has made available billions of dollars via its lending facilities to help finance many of the deals, and other promoters of greater levels of ‘foreign investment’ of this type, the most likely impact of these acquisitions will not be to improve the livelihoods of rural commitments and the greater realisation of the right to food, but rather the increasing commodification and concentration of land, in the shape of a global agrarian ‘counter-reform’. In this, land grabs are yet another ‘cutting edge’ of the many processes of accumulation by dispossession that constitute contemporary globalising capitalism.

Citing Karl Polanyi’s warnings regarding the dangers of such excessive commodification of land and labour, de Schutter argues that what is now required is ‘a vision that goes beyond disciplining land deals and providing policymakers with a checklist of how to destroy the global peasantry responsibly.’ In his view, ‘voluntary approaches to discipline land-grabbing are bound to fail’ because ‘both the investors and the governments in host countries have every incentive to shield...


146 2011 op cit., 251.

147 Harvey 2003 op cit.

148 2011 op cit., 275.
the deals they negotiate from outside scrutiny.' Such incentives are in effect structural imperatives of contemporary capitalism, as I have demonstrated throughout the thesis. While we must wait to see whether the newly-agreed Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure (discussed in Chapter 5) have any noticeable impact in terms of slowing large-scale land acquisitions or ensuring that their benefits flow primarily to local communities, there are strong grounds for scepticism.

The millions of small farmers who have thus far managed to stay on the land have become trapped in spiralling cycles of poverty which means, paradoxically, that they constitute 50% or more of all people suffering malnutrition. Farmers growing for export have fallen victim to the dynamics of the commodities markets, in which the growing purchasing power of multinational buyers like Nestle and the huge supermarket chains has translated into falling prices for small primary producers. Most of the benefits of the primary commodity chain accrue to intermediaries, food processors and retailers who ‘add value’ along the way; or alternatively to the giant industrial and highly capitalised farms ‘that are able to produce vast amounts of produce with a low profit [margin]’.

Meanwhile, diseases linked to malnutrition cause more than half of the annual 10.4 million deaths of children under five. Malnourished children are also likely to experience stunted physical and mental growth, and consequently have lower levels of educational achievement. If not dealt with in a timely and comprehensive fashion, childhood malnutrition amounts in effect to a life sentence of suffering, with a high probability of reduced life expectancy.

In the case of certain crops (food and non-food) that are highly dependent on inputs, small farmers have often had to go heavily into debt in order to continue production, placing themselves in extremely vulnerable situations. This is especially the case with cotton production in general - a ‘market [that] is heavily distorted by

149 Ibid., 274.
150 Ong’wen and Wright op cit., 31.
151 Coffee is a clear example. According to statistics published by the International Coffee Organisation, growers in Kenya received nearly $2.20 per lb for Arabic coffee in January 1977 (http://www.ico.org/asp/display7.asp, accessed 27.10.08). By December 2000, that had fallen to $0.47, dropping to $0.35 by December 2003 (http://www.ico.org/asp/pdf/PRGROW-2000-03.pdf, accessed 27.10.08). The World Bank’s price index on a selected basket of commodities shows declines of 40-600%, with the most dramatic price fall being for Robusta coffee: a kilogram fetched $4.11 in 1980, $1.18 in 1990, and $0.63 in 2001: cited in Ong’wen and Wright op cit., 34.
152 Ong’wen and Wright op cit., 32-5.
154 Ibid., 7-8, noting that the UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition reports at least 150 million underweight and 200 million stunted school children globally. The Report of the 35th Session of the Standing Committee on Nutrition in Hanoi, Vietnam, held from 3-6 March 2008, describes how ‘[e]vidence links stunting to cognitive development, school performance and educational achievement and a child’s height for age is the best predictor of human capital’; Dr Mercedes de Onis of the World Health Organisation reported the global prevalence of stunting at 32%, with 178 million infants suffering from it: 5.
155 Malnutrition is ‘strongly linked to many different forms of disease…It…inhibits mental and physical development’; it is by far the single leading cause of mortality globally (12% of all deaths – 50 million – in 1990), with the status of childhood ‘being the biggest risk factor of all’: Kent op cit., 15-16.
subsidized cotton from the United States’ - and with Monsanto’s genetically modified BT cotton in particular.156 As regards the latter, small cotton farmers have found themselves having to borrow heavily to buy expensive patented seed, and the company’s Round-Up Ready pesticide that must be applied to the plants, only to be faced with financial ruin after the crops have not performed as promised. According to some estimates, as many as 150,000 Indian cotton farmers have killed themselves in these circumstances between 1997 and 2005.157 Meanwhile, the enhanced productivity of the super-productive industrial farmers in the United States has also generated a ‘slow-burn’ suicide epidemic.158

A further example of the dialectic of over-production and inequality in the globalising capitalist food system is provided by the meat-packing industry in the United States. The intensification of production in this industry in recent years has reached unbearable levels.159 As a result, ‘[m]eatpacking work has extraordinarily high rates of injury [and] [e]mployers put workers at predictable risk of serious physical injury even though the means to avoid such injury are known and feasible’.160 Repetitive strain injuries are commonplace, and ‘long overtime hours’ are enforced on ‘pain of dismissal’.161 Migrant, often undocumented, labour is commonplace, making union organising difficult; a dynamic reinforced by very high rates of labour turnover.162

As already discussed, the over-production of a handful commodities has generated the conditions for the rapid expansion of globalising packaged and fast food industries, whose products in turn have contributed substantially to the current obesity pandemic. Children who are overweight, and most especially those who are obese, are also likely to experience shorter and diminished lives through being prone to suffer a wide range of degenerative diseases including diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, various types of cancers, and strokes.163 In Australia, as in other rich countries, obesity and its associated diseases disproportionately impact...

---

156 Ibid., 36-7.
157 Sainath, P., 2007, ‘Neoliberalism’s Price Tag: 150,000 Farm Suicides in India from 1997 Through 2005’, Counterpunch, November 17 / 18, 2007, http://www.counterpunch.org/sainath11172007.html, accessed 27.10.08, who considers that this figure is likely to be a serious underestimate since it only counts those with title to land, thus excluding women and tenant farmers.
158 The relentless logic of industrialisation in the name of efficiency and productivity is exacting a heavy psychological toll: “In 1950, one farmworker supplied every 15.5 consumers. Today, it’s one for every 140. This is depressing to both the communities that valued the contribution of their small farmers and to the famers themselves. (American farmers are four times more likely to commit suicide than the general population). Just about everything – feed, water, lighting, heating, ventilation, even slaughter – is now automated”: Foer op cit., 162.
159 ‘What once were hundreds of head processed per day are now thousands; what were thousands are now tens of thousands per day. One worker described the reality of the line in her foreman’s order: “Speed, Ruth, work for speed! One cut! One cut!” Said another, “People can’t take it, always harder, harder, harder”: Comba 2005 op cit.
160 ‘Nearly every worker interviewed for this report bore physical signs of a serious injury suffered from working in a meat or poultry plant. Automated lines carrying dead animals and their parts for disassembly move too fast for worker safety’: ibid.
161 Repeating thousands of cutting motions during each work shift puts enormous stress on workers’ hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and back: Comba op cit., Foer op cit, 131, 231-2.
162 Ibid.
163 Lang & Heasman op cit., 63-70.
lower socio-economic groups. Further, there appears to be a clear correlation between levels of inequality and rates of obesity, with the United States having an incidence of obesity more than 12 times that observed in Japan. Research suggests that there is a relationship between chronic stress - common amongst people in lower socio-economic groups in highly stratified (i.e. unequal) societies - and over-eating, a phenomenon known as ‘comfort-eating’. This builds on evidence indicating that, as suggested above, much advertising is often directed at creating feelings of inadequacy in order to perpetuate a treadmill of competitive (i.e., status-driven) consumption. At the same time, the medicalization and individualisation of obesity has opened up new fields of accumulation for the pharmaceutical and dieting industries.

The ecological constraints of the globalising capitalist food system
I have discussed above the oligopolistic configuration of the main economic actors in the system and the nature of the system’s principal sets of social relations, paying particular emphasis to the impacts of financialisation on these relations, as well as on the key tensions of over-production and inequality. In this final section I examine the nature of the ecological constraints that the system is faced with; and how these constraints impact upon the system’s possibilities of further development in the coming period.

In Chapter 2 I outlined the thesis of the ‘metabolic rift’, as recently developed by John Bellamy Foster and his colleagues. In this section I consider the principal ecological constraints that have been suggested as boundaries to the system’s further expansion and development, as distinct from barriers to be overcome through (for example) the application of new technologies. Finally I will briefly discuss a recent political ecology perspective which conceives capitalism’s successive phases as ‘ecological regimes’ dependent on the generation of ‘ecological surpluses’.

Capitalism is remarkable for its refusal to acknowledge any boundaries or limits to its further and indefinite expansion, irrespective of the apparent extent of

---

164 “[I]t was the poor, the underserved, and the underrepresented who were most at risk from excess fat...Poverty. Class. Income. Over and over, these emerged as the key determinants of obesity and weight-related disease...there was a new trend that saw significant numbers of the middle and upper middle class also experiencing huge weight gains. But the basic numbers were – and are – clear and consistent: the largest concentrations of the obese, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender, reside in the poorest sections of the nation...”: Critser op cit., 109, 116. See also National Preventative Health Taskforce, Obesity Working Group, 2009, Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020, Technical Report 1, Obesity in Australia: a need for urgent action, Commonwealth of Australia, which found that ‘Obesity is particularly prevalent among men and women in the most disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, people without post-school qualifications, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and among many people born overseas’.


166 Ibid.

167 Gillespie op cit., who notes that ‘Australia, the UK and the US all spend more than 60 per cent of their respective health-care budgets on the treatment and ‘prevention’ of symptoms and diseases that the evidence shows are caused by fructose’; with drug companies being ‘the largest direct beneficiaries of this spending’. 185-6.

168 Moore 2010 op cit.
environmental destruction that its processes of production engender. There are few sectors where this tendency is more evident than industrialised agriculture. A defining ecological characteristic of the globalising capitalist food system is the predominance of agricultural monocultures over large portions of the arable land surface of the earth. These monocultures have produced what have become known as ‘green deserts’: vast expanses of single crops or forest plantations that are largely devoid of the life that previously existed where they now stand. The phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the southern cone countries of South America, where tens of millions of hectares have been devoted in recent decades principally to genetically modified soy (agro-fuels and animal feed), and eucalyptus (agro-fuels). The expansion of such monocultures are contingent on the rapid de-

169 ‘More land was converted to cropland in the 30 years after 1950 than in the 150 years between 1700 and 1850. Cultivated systems (areas where at least 30% of the landscape is in croplands, shifting cultivation, confined livestock production, or freshwater aquaculture) now cover one quarter of Earth’s terrestrial surface’: MEA 2005, Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Synthesis, <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.355.aspx.pdf>, accessed 31.10.08, 2.

170 For example in 2004 the Alert Against the Green Desert Network, a Brazilian coalition of more than 100 entities of the social movements, local leaders and representatives of traditional and indigenous populations of the States of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro’, issued a ‘Manifesto against the Green Desert and in Favour of Life’, in which they denounced the ‘socio-environmental disaster caused in the last 35 years by the eucalyptus and pine monocultures, associated to the iron and steel and cellulose sectors, that affect several ecosystems and people of our territory, thus impoverishing our biological, social and cultural diversity, and causing expropriation, unemployment, exodus and hunger’: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/manifesto.html>, accessed 27.10.08. See also Böhm, S., and Brei, V., 2008, ‘The Hegemony of Development: Of Pulp Fictions and Green Deserts’, Marketing Theory, 8(4), 339-365: and Altieri, M., and Pengue, W., 2006, ‘GM Soybean: Latin America’s New Coloniser’, Seedling, January 2006. Green desertification is distinct from ‘desertification’ in general, which is a major environmental challenge in its own right, affecting up to 2 billion people who live in the 41% of the planet’s surface that constitutes ‘drylands’, that is, all those lands ‘where the climate is classified as dry subhumid, semiarid, arid, or hyper-arid’: MEA 2005, Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Desertification Synthesis, <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.355.aspx.pdf>, accessed 31.10.08. Industrial agriculture also contributes to desertification via livestock overgrazing: Barker op cit., 11.

171 Altieri and Pengue note that the land devoted to soy cultivation in Brazil has ‘grown on average at 3.2% or 320,000 hectares a year since 1995’, and as at 2006 was the largest crop in the country, ‘covering 21% of the cultivated land’; while in neighbouring Paraguay, soy covers ‘more than 25% of all agricultural land’. The race to plant soy has been even more rapid in Argentina, ‘where 5.6 million hectares of non-agricultural [mainly forest] land has been converted to [soy] in less than ten years’: ibid. Such developments are amongst the principal factors leading the members of the Stratigraphy Commission of the Royal London Geological Society to officially confirm the dawning of the ‘anthropocene age’, announced by what many scientists describe as the greatest mass species extinction event since the disappearance of the dinosaurs: “The projected temperature rise will certainly cause changes in habitat beyon environmental tolerance for many taxa. The effects will be more severe than in past glacial-interglacial transitions because, with the anthropogenic fragmentation of natural ecosystems, “escape” routes are fewer. The combination of extinctions, global species migrations…and the widespread replacement of natural vegetation with agricultural monocultures is producing a distinctive contemporary biostratigraphic signal. These effects are permanent, as future evolution will take place from surviving (and frequently anthropogenically relocated) stocks”: Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Smith, A., Barry, T.L., Coe, A.L., Brown, P.R., Brenchley, P., Cantrill, D., Gibbard, P., Gregory, F.J., Hounslow, M.W., Kerr, A.C., Pearson, P., Knox, R., Powell, J., Waters, C., Marshall, J., Oates, M., Rawson, P., and Stone, P., 2008, ‘Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?’ GSA Today, 28(2), 4-8; also Davis, M., 2008, ‘Living on the Ice Shelf: Humanity’s Melt Down’, 26/6/2008, <http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/tomdispatch/2008/06/welcome-to-the-anthropocene.html>, accessed 5.08.08. On current trends it is estimated that around 50% of all living species will have disappeared by the end of this century: in August 2008 the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources announced in its ‘Red List’ of threatened species that 48% of all primates
forestation of old-growth forests from 1850 onwards, and their replacement with radically simplified landscapes and ecosystems suited to the requirements of capital accumulation.\textsuperscript{172} The negative consequences of this loss of biodiversity are well documented and increasingly well-understood within the natural sciences and beyond.\textsuperscript{173} In the first place, the various ecological services provided by a biodiverse ecosystem - prevention of soil erosion, groundwater replenishment and flood prevention, nutrient recycling, ‘control of local microclimate, regulation of local hydrological processes, regulation of the abundance of undesirable organisms, and detoxification of noxious chemicals’ - disappear.\textsuperscript{174} Secondly, their absence means that the equivalent services must be compensated for, to some extent, via external inputs, which take the form of fossil fuel-based fertilisers, pesticides, and

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{172} As much as ‘10 million square kilometers in croplands were gained globally during this period [1850-the present], primarily from conversion of forests and grasslands’: Steffen \textit{et al op cit.}, 96. Miguel Altieri observes that:

\begin{quote}
Modern agriculture implies the simplification of the structure of the environment over vast areas, replacing nature’s diversity with a small number of cultivated plants and domesticated animals. In fact, the world’s agricultural landscapes are planted mostly with some 12 species of grain crops, 23 vegetable crop species, and about 35 fruit and nut crop species...i.e., no more than 70 plant species spread over approximately 1440 million ha of presently cultivated land in the world, a sharp contrast with the diversity of plant species found within 1 ha of a tropical rain forest, which typically contains over 100 species of trees...Genetically, modern agriculture is shockingly dependent on a handful of varieties for its major crops...Researchers have repeatedly warned about the extreme vulnerability associated with this genetic uniformity...For example, in the US, 60–70% of the total bean area is planted with 2–3 bean varieties, 72% of the potato area with four varieties and 53% of the cotton area with three varieties.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{173} The issue received international prominence at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 when the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed by 150 government leaders with the aim of ‘promoting sustainable development’: \url{http://www.cbd.int/convention/}, accessed 31.10.08. In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, although it produced little by way of concrete outcomes and plans to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss: \url{http://www.worldsummit2002.org/}, accessed 31.10.08. The cause of promoting and protecting biodiversity received a boost with the publication in 2005 of the UN-sponsored Millenium Ecosystem Assessment reports, the outcome of four years of work by 1360 experts from around the globe: \url{http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/index.aspx}, accessed 31.10.08. The first main finding of the MEA was that

\begin{quote}
Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber, and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth:
\end{quote}

MEA 2005, \textit{Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Synthesis, op cit.} On 3 January 2006 Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary Of The Convention On Biological Diversity, issued a statement ‘[t]o [the] Citizens Of The World’ in which he emphasized that

\begin{quote}
Two thirds of the services provided by nature to humankind are in decline, worldwide’, and further that ‘[h]uman activity is putting such strain on the natural functions of Earth that the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted:
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{174} Altieri 1999 \textit{op cit.}, 19.
\end{footnotesize}
herbicides, as well as extensive irrigation.\textsuperscript{175} However the application of these chemicals over time tends to compound the problems associated with the initial biodiversity loss, so that this form of agriculture becomes progressively more dependent on higher levels of inputs even as it depletes and pollutes water tables and worsens the quality of the soils.\textsuperscript{176} Intensive livestock operations have a particularly debilitating effect on the quality and integrity of nearby waterways.\textsuperscript{177}

Thirdly, genetic simplification and loss of biodiversity makes crops more vulnerable to pests and diseases. Repeated applications of the same pesticides and herbicides over many years has led to certain weeds and pests developing resistances that make them more of an environmental menace that they might otherwise have been.\textsuperscript{178} GM crops are also said to pose their own special threats to biodiversity through the risk of cross-pollination with wild species.\textsuperscript{179}

In addition to the loss of biodiversity, globalized industrial agriculture contributes as much as 33\% of all greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), taking into account land conversions, de-forestation, techniques such as deep ploughing and the heavy applications of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and the methane and nitrous oxide emissions of factory farmed animals.\textsuperscript{180} Further, a substantial amount of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item These being the constituent elements of the Green Revolution. In relation to pesticide applications, their rate of increase grew globally in excess of ‘10\% per year until the 1980s, when it slowed to about 3\% growth per year’, whilst chemical fertiliser use is expected to continue to grow until 2010: Steffen \textit{et al} \textit{op cit.}, 87. Further, ‘[s]ince 1960, flows of reactive (biologically available) nitrogen in terrestrial ecosystems have doubled, and flows of phosphorus have tripled. More than half of all the synthetic nitrogen fertilizer, which was first manufactured in 1913, ever used on the planet has been used since 1985’: MEA \textit{Synthesis report \textit{op cit.}}, 2. As regards water, the MEA \textit{Synthesis} report states that ‘[t]he amount of water impounded behind dams quadrupled since 1960, and three to six times as much water is held in reservoirs as in natural rivers. Water withdrawals from rivers and lakes doubled since 1960; most water use (70\% worldwide) is for agriculture’: \textit{op cit.}, 2.
\item D.R. Montgomery, 2007, ‘Is Agriculture Eroding Civilization’s Foundation?’ \textit{GSA Today}, 17(10), 4-9; \textit{also} Vandana Shiva’s \textit{Closing Address to the Soil Association Conference} \texttt{http://transitionculture.org/2007/02/13/vandana-shiva’s-closing-address-to-the-soil-association-conference/}, accessed 27.10.08. Intensified applications of chemicals also carries potential consequences for human health, as higher chemical residues are left on the food.
\item Animal waste can harm water quality through surface runoff, leaching into soils and groundwater, direct discharges, and spills...Nutrients...sediment (erosion), pesticides, antibiotics, heavy metals, chemical disinfectants, and pharmaceuticals such as hormones are primary constituents of intensively produced animal facilities...Even under extensive production modes, streams and groundwater can be polluted by nitrogen from excreta’; Emel and Neo 2011 \textit{op cit.}, 72-3.
\item \texttt{http://www.irac-online.org/documents/thefacts.pdf}, accessed 1.7.09. Particular concerns have been raised about the appearance of so-called 'superweeds' that have developed resistance to Monsanto's glyphosate (RoundUp), the sale of which have increased substantially following the commercialisation of several genetically-modified crops in the 1990s: see B. Hindo, 2008, ‘Report Raises Alarm over ‘Superweeds’,’ \textit{Businesses Week}, 13.2.08, \texttt{http://www.columbia.org/pdf/files/centerforfoodsafty36.pdf}, accessed 1.07.09; also M-W. Ho, J. Cummins and P. Saunders, 2007, ‘GM Food Nightmare Unfolding in the Regulatory Sham’, \textit{Microbial Ecology in Health and Disease}, 19(2), 66-77.
\item Ho, Cummins and Saunders \textit{op cit.;} Ong’wen and Wright \textit{op cit.}, 43-5; \textit{also} Miller, G., 2008, ‘Nanotechnology — the New Threat to Food’, Friends of the Earth, \texttt{http://nano.foe.org.au/node/198}, accessed 31.10.08.
\item Barker, D., 2007, ‘The Rise and Predictable Fall of Globalized, Industrial Agriculture’, \textit{International Forum on Globalization}, \texttt{www.ifg.org/pdf/ag%20report.pdf}, accessed 31.10.08, 10-11. Steffen \textit{et al} comment that ‘[t]he most important land-use/cover change in terms of the carbon cycle is tropical deforestation and conversion to agriculture, which removes carbon from both the biomass of the trees through burning of the slash and from the soil through subsequent oxidation and erosion’: \textit{op cit.}, 121.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
greenhouse emissions are produced through the sheer waste of the present globalised system of food production and distribution. Most climate modelling suggests that warming of one degree or greater will have significant negative impacts on crop yields in many parts of the world, so in this sense contemporary capitalist agriculture appears to be caught in a genuine contradiction, where its own practices are undermining the conditions for its future growth and development. The context for contemporary debates about cheap food and capital accumulation are the projections, based on current demographic trends and changing dietary patterns, above all the putative ‘meatification’ of diets in China and India, that world food production will have to increase very substantially in the coming period. The commonly cited figure is the FAO’s 2009 claim that the world will have to produce 70% more food by 2050. Further, the new revolution in agricultural productivity will have to be achieved against the backdrop of a 70% decline in world crop production growth in the past twenty years.

Of all sectors of the global economy, “[a]gricultural activities generate the largest share, 58 percent, of the world’s anthropogenic non-carbon dioxide (non-CO2) emissions (84 percent of nitrous oxide (N2O), 47 percent of methane (CH4)), and make up roughly 14 percent of all anthropogenic GHG emissions”: Beach, R.H., DeAngelo, B.J., Rose, S., Li, C., Salas, W., and Stephen J. DelGrosso, S.J., 2006, ‘Mitigation Potential and Costs for Global Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Emissions’, http://www.johnquiggin.com/rsrg/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2006/09/beach%20age%20abatement.pdf, accessed 27.10.08. The GHG burden of capitalist industrialised agriculture is ‘projected to increase significantly over the next 20 years, especially in Asia, Latin America and Africa, due to increased demand for agricultural products as a result of population growth, rising per capita caloric intake, and changing dietary preferences’: World meat demand ‘has tripled since 1961’ (Steffen et al op cit., 86); and factory farming on its own is estimated to be responsible for up to 18 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions, meaning that ‘omnivores contribute seven times the volume of GHGs that vegans do’: Safran Foer, J., 2008, Eating Animals, Hamish Hamilton, Camberwell, Vic., 58.

In 2004 the United Kingdom exported 17,600 tons of chocolate-covered wafers and imported 17,200, exported 85,652 tons of potatoes and imported 43,993, and exported 27,125 tons of milk and cream while importing 25,720”: Ong’Wen, O., and Wright, S., 2007, ‘Small Farmers and the Future of Sustainable Agriculture’, EcoFair Trade Dialogue, Discussion Paper No.7.

Mark Lynas (2007, Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet, Fourth Estate, London) undertook a survey of peer-reviewed science to chart the anticipated impacts of each degree of warming on the major geographical regions of the planet. At one degree, ‘the western US could once again be plagued by perennial droughts – devastating agriculture and driving out human inhabitants on a scale far larger than the 1930s [dustbowl] calamity’: 9. At four degrees, China’s ‘[y]ields of staple crops like rice, wheat and maize will decline by nearly 40 per cent’; in India ‘it will simply be too hot for most crops to survive’; and as a general observation ‘it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that mass starvation will be a permanent danger for much of the human race... With major global breadbaskets dusty and abandoned, rising demand will be chasing rapidly diminishing supply’: 185-7.

While the global population has doubled since the early 1960s, the tonnage of meat for human consumption has risen four-fold, to 276 million tons by 2006: Emel and Neo 2011 op cit., 68.


The FAO’s current projected increase for world crop production from 1979/1999 to 2030 is only 55%,
This slowdown in crop production growth confirms that the yield increases of the Green Revolution are exhausting themselves.\textsuperscript{186} This trend, when combined with commodity speculation and the agro-fuels boom, has produced an historically unprecedented run-up in food prices in recent years, with very noticeable spikes in 2008 and 2011 (Figure [5]).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{FAO_Food_Price_Index.png}
\caption{FAO Food Price Index\textsuperscript{187}}
\end{figure}

Further, there is, as Figure [6] shows, a close correlation between the FAO Index and the global oil price:

\textsuperscript{186} The critical view is that such increases were in important respects illusory, because they were premised on financially unsustainable and ecologically destructive levels of agri-chemical inputs and intensive irrigation.

\textsuperscript{187} Available at: \url{http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/}, accessed 18.10.11.
Correlation does not, of course, equate to causation; however as discussed below, there are good reasons to believe that a causal relation exists, given the high level of dependence of industrialised agriculture on fossil fuel sources of energy. The seeming end of the era of ‘cheap’ energy constitutes the cutting edge of what Tony Weis calls ‘accelerating biophysical contradictions’ that puts the sustainability and profitability of the globalising capitalist food system over the medium term into considerable question.

The origins of these biophysical contradictions can be traced to the institutionalisation by neoclassical economics of the practice of cost externalisation, in which ‘nature’ is treated, not as a factor of production that must be paid and accounted for like labour or rent or inputs, but as a ‘free gift’. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that there is no limit in free market doctrine as to how far social goods, such as water and air quality, can decline.

Contemporary orthodox economics, in its ‘life-blind accounting’, effectively obscures from view virtually the

---


189 Weis argues that the inflation-inducing dynamics expected as the first impacts of peak were clearly visible in the run-up to the food price crisis of 2008, ‘when there was a relatively parallel movement between indexes of fertiliser and oil costs and food prices’: Weis, T., 2010, ‘The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture’, Journal of Agrarian Change, 10(3), 315-341, 324.

190 Ibid., 319.


entirety of the foundations which makes ‘economic’ activity possible in the first place.  

These externalities constitute ‘a vast series of implicit subsidies to cheap industrial food’ which, combined with the large explicit subsidies discussed in Chapter 4, greatly enhance the competitiveness of the globalising capitalist food system vis-à-vis ‘more labour-intensive agricultural systems’. Such subsidies are therefore both a major driver of both over-production and the intensification of inequalities. Weis distinguishes between those externalities that can be socialised and do not ‘pose[e] a threat to the operative logic of the system’; and other externalised costs which ‘mask the deterioration of the very biophysical foundations of agriculture’, and which are therefore ‘deeply contradictory’. Amongst the former he includes the burden of dietary-related ill-health and food-related disease threats, factory-farm related pollution, injuries to workers, and the ethical mistreatment of animals in factory farms. The latter include ‘soil erosion and salinization’; the drawdown of global freshwater supplies; biodiversity and ‘ecosystem services’ loss; the contribution of industrialised agriculture to climate change; and ‘the intractable dependence of industrial methods upon a finite resource base, particularly fossilised biomass’.

Highlighting this fossil-fuel dependency, Weis places much emphasis on the apparently immanent phenomenon of ‘Peak Oil’. Owing to the need to ‘simplify, standardize and mechanize agriculture, and increase productivity per worker, plant and animal’, the level of the dependence on fossil fuels has reached the point where ‘an average 10 calories of fossil fuels’ are now required to produce a single calorie of food in the industrialised capitalist food system. Geological studies predict, in

---

193 This would include:

[All of the ecosystem services and resources which are sources and sinks of unpaid and despoiling exploitation by the monetized economy’s for-profit circuits, all of the past and current research and development of and by the public sector institutions and free and unpriced inquiry, all of the unpaid labour of homemakers and of the other work given beyond money wages, all of the public sectors of free goods of every kind…all of the non-priced school, hospital, pension and other public services we depend on, all of the historical heritage and web of communities which are not priced or saleable…[All this] complex substructure of the life economy is voided by the neo-classical market value calculus…

194 Weis 2010 op cit., 316

195 Ibid.

196 The rearing of pigs – ‘an animal more intelligent than dogs’ – in factory farms is especially cruel: ‘The animals often experience crippling because of the metal or concrete floors, and sow’s legs eventually break down under the stress of being forced to overproduce piglets…The piglets can be grown stacked on top of each other in crates…’: Yarger (1996) quoted in Emel and Neo 2011 op cit., 74.

197 Ibid., 321. Weis suggests that the ratio is likely higher as regards the production of meat in the factory farmed animal system, which is by itself one of the principal contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (Safran Foer op cit.) Historical data shows that global economic and population growth, as well as the creation and maintenance of the high levels of material comfort which are now taken for granted in modern industrial societies, have to a very important extent been made possible by the abundance of cheaply recoverable oil and natural gas that has been readily available and accessible since World War II: For example the work of German physicist Professor Reiner Kummel, American ecologist Professor Charles Hall and their colleagues revealed that conventional (neoclassical) economic modeling had grossly under-emphasised – by a factor of 10 - the role played by hydrocarbon energy as a motor of
the short term, the increasing scarcity of easily recoverable oil as global demand outstrips discovery, production and then supply. The increasing resort to more
difficult, dangerous and more highly polluting sources of fossil fuel energy, such as
deep-sea drilling, coal-seam gas ‘fracking’, and tar sands, as well as the turn to
agro-fuels as a liquid fuels substitute, appears to support the conclusion that the
world is either rapidly approaching the global peak of oil production, or has passed
it.

The tradition of political ecology requires the researcher to integrate scientific
discovery and knowledge with a sceptical and reflexive stance towards the socio-
economic and political implications of this knowledge, and in particular the use
being made of it by ruling elites. This is especially important with claims
regarding ‘natural limits’ and ‘the creation of scarcity’ which, as Gavin Bridge
notes, ‘is the heart of capitalist society, whereas for peak oil it is a natural
condition’. Conventional, ‘naturalist’ accounts of Peak Oil as geologically
determined are, in Bridge’s analysis, ‘politically problematic’, because they

[F]oreclose arguments about the social organization of oil production, the limited
time-horizon of a market-based energy policy, or the ways in which the social
economic growth, with a correspondingly large over-emphasis of the importance of capital, labour and
technological advances: Hall, C., Lindenberger, D., Kummel, R., Kroeger, T., and Wolfgang, E., 2001,
‘The Need to Reintegrate the Natural Sciences with Economics’, BioScience, August 2001, discussed in
John Murray, London, 119-124. Kummel and Hall’s paper was complemented by physicist and engineer
Professor Robert Ayres’ examination of the impact on economic growth of gains in thermodynamic
Growth: The Role of Physical Work’, Structural Change and Economic Dynamics, February 2004,
discussed in Strahan op cit., 122-3. Gavin Bridge (Bridge, G., 2011, Past Peak Oil: Political Economy of
Energy Crises in Peet, R., Robbins, P., and Watts, M., (eds.), 2011, Global Political Ecology, Routledge,
Abingdon, Oxon., 307-324) notes how the available data ‘evidences the strong, positive correlation
between energy consumption and economic output for [dozens of] countries’, and globally, ‘where
economic output and total commercial primary energy supply have both risen about 16-fold in the last
100 years’: 307. See also Heinberg, R., 2010, The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic
Reality, Post Carbon Institute; Martenson, C., 2011, The Crash Course: The Unsustainable Future of
Our Economy, Energy and Environment, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.

Thus, according to the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2005,

The doubling of oil prices from 2003-2005 is not an anomaly, but a picture of the future. Oil production is
approaching its peak; low growth in availability can be expected for the next 5 to 10 years. As worldwide
petroleum production peaks, geopolitics and market economics will cause even more significant price
increases and security risks. One can only speculate at the outcome from this scenario as world petroleum
production declines…


According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the world passed the ‘conventional peak’ of
 crude oil in 2006, however the IEA forecasts that ‘total liquids’ (i.e. crude oil from fields yet to be
developed and / or yet to be found, natural gas liquids and ‘unconventional oil’) will continue to increase
as far ahead as 2035: Staniford, S., 2010, ‘IEA Acknowledges Peak Oil’,

Peet et al op cit.

Op cit, 316.
metabolism of oil via the hydrocarbon commodity chain has effectively excluded many of oil’s social and environmental costs from the calculus of market price.  

In his exploration of the ‘materialities of oil’ - the ‘biophysical characteristics and material forms of oil as it flows in and through society and the way these are productive of particular forms of social relations’ - Bridge highlights that the ‘scarcity of oil [is] not a generalized physical shortage but a shortage relative to modes of living’.  

In an ‘oil-constrained’ future in which scarcity is socially and politically constructed, access to oil, and the benefits it confers, will be contingent on existing distributions of political and economic power; and indeed whether society continues to be organised primarily according to a ‘fossil fuel mode of production’. From this critical perspective, Peak Oil should be understood as an opportunity to politicise and shape debates around the necessary ‘energy transition’ to ‘low-carbon pathways’ and even ‘post-growth’ societies, rather than as a ‘natural’ imperative to uncritically accept and replicate the ‘future-as-catastrophe’ discourse that constitutes much of the popular presentation of the topic. As Bridge notes, the ‘crisis’ of the ‘fossil fuel mode of production’ is located ‘not in any post-peak apocalypse, but [rather] in the everyday “normal” operation of the contemporary oil economy’.

At present, Weis argues that the global food ‘crisis’ - and by extension the contemporary ‘energy crisis’ - is very firmly seen as an opportunity for transnational agri-business and finance capital; his assessment is that the basic operative logic of the system ‘remains as yet unshaken’. The implications of the critical perspective on peak oil as outlined above is that the Food Sovereignty movement is faced with an important and historical opportunity to intervene in emerging popular understandings of what will likely be a key terrain of political-economic contestation in the coming period.

Periods of crisis and their resolution are of course hardly novel in the history of capitalism. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Jason Moore’s thesis that the ‘productivity and plunder’ of successive agricultural revolutions, and the consequent generation of an ‘ecological surplus’, have created the conditions for ‘long waves’ of capitalist accumulation, suggests that periodic ‘developmental crises’ emerge in capitalist development which these revolutions resolve.

---

203 Ibid.
204 Ibid., 317.
206 Bridge 2011 op cit., 321. For example, a study prepared for German army on the implications of peak oil and leaked to the German newspaper Der Spiegel, and then widely re-circulated on the internet, forecast a range of ‘catastrophic’ consequences: Schulz, S., 2010, ‘Military Study Warns of a Potentially Drastic Oil Crisis’, Der Spiegel, 1.9.10, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,715138,00.html, accessed 18.10.11.
207 Op cit., 321.
208 Weis op cit., 332.
209 Moore 2010 op cit.
Following this reasoning, the issue now is whether the ‘global food price crisis’ that began in 2008 is becoming an *epochal* crisis, not only for the food system but for capitalism as a whole; whether the historically unprecedented commodity price rises of the past few years are threatening to bring to a definitive end consecutive centuries of ‘cheap food’. The forms of ‘productivity and plunder’ attempted to date have not (yet) achieved the desired results. Biotechnology has failed to produce the promised major yield increases; and may even be causing yields to fall by intensifying the loss of biodiversity and contributing to the evolution of superweeds. The scope for further plunder, in terms of bringing more arable land into the circuits of capitalist agriculture, is relatively limited. Perversely, yet predictably, where agricultural extensification and intensification are taking place on a large scale, as in the ‘Republic of Soy’ in the southern cone of South America, they are not alleviating the problem of a declining ecological surplus, but rather intensifying it. That is, the manner in which the globalising capitalist food system is now expanding - through rapid de-forestation, and by expropriating vast acreages of arable land for agro-fuel production - is both accelerating the system’s ‘biophysical contradictions’ (soil degradation loss, end of cheap energy, climate change, biodiversity loss) and making high food prices a permanent feature of the

---

210 Moore 2010* op cit.*, 398, describing the ‘unravelling of the cheap food regime [in] 2003’ as ‘the signal crisis of neoliberalism as an ecological regime…the moment at which the [regime] has reached its tipping point in the production of the relative ecological surplus…A terminal crisis awaits’.


212 While the Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that only a third of the world’s total arable land is currently under cultivation, much of the remainder is marginal or otherwise constrained land in Africa and South America that is unsuitable to the commercial, mechanised production that characterises capitalist agriculture: FAO, *World Agriculture: Towards 2015 / 2030*, Chapter 3, *Crop Production and Natural Resource Use*, available at [http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4252e/y4252e06.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4252e/y4252e06.htm), accessed 18.10.11. Thus, while there are potentially 2 billion hectares available for rain-fed crop production, over 60 per cent of it ‘suffers from one or more soil and terrain constraints [and] much of the land balance cannot be considered to be a resource that is readily usable for food production on demand’. Further, ‘arable land per capita has fallen by more than half over the past half-century, declining from 0.46 ha per person in 1961 to 0.21 ha per person in 2006’; the impacts of increased population with contemporary dynamics of land degradation mean that ‘the obvious outcome is that arable land per capita will continue to fall’: Weis *op cit.*, 327, *citing FAOSTAT.*

213 The Republic of Soy is comprised of an estimated 50 million hectares of land in In Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia devoted to GM soy monocultures destined for processing and export either as animal feed for factory farms or as agro-fuels: Altieri, M., and Pengue, W., 2006, ‘GM Soybean: Latin America’s new coloniser’, *Seedling*, January 2006; It is ‘an integrated network of production, processing and distribution organized according to the needs of transnational [corporations] to leverage cost advantages across borders, raise efficiency, and take advantage of production-related infrastructural developments’: Turzi 2011 *op cit.*
global political economy, thereby intensifying the system’s social contradictions at the same time.  

Concluding remarks
The globalising capitalist food system is organised to further the goal of capital accumulation; ‘feeding the world’ in its entirety clothes the system with ideological legitimacy, but is in no way central to its operational logic and internal dynamics. It is for this reason that Moore makes the important point that ‘[g]lobalizing malnutrition does not add up to a “food crisis” [because] [s]o long as hunger can be corralled, and imposed on the very poorest of the world, there is no great problem’. In other words, there may well be a humanitarian ‘food crisis’ in the moral and ethical sense of spreading malnutrition, but this will only become a crisis for capitalism if the ecological surplus cannot continue to be produced, and profitability comes under sustained pressure as a consequence. The same reasoning applies to the obesity pandemic which, paradoxically, has served to open up new fields of accumulation for pharmaceutical corporations.

At the same time, Moore, in his singular focus on the world-ecological development of capitalist agriculture, overlooks the subjective element in the unfolding crisis: the capacity of the poor and dispossessed, through the means of political mobilisation and class struggle, to make the humanitarian crisis into a broader political crisis of legitimacy for the system as a whole. Similarly Weis, in drawing the distinction between contradictory and non-contradictory externalities, also runs the risk of occluding and thereby minimising the prospects of effective agency based inter alia on the growing perception of the system as irrational, unjust and radically unsustainable.

This of course is exactly what the Food Sovereignty movement is attempting to do. There is however clearly a need for the movement to be sensitive to the objective dynamics of capital accumulation, as Moore, Weis and others have analysed them, and to incorporate such analysis into the movement’s critiques and strategies. Beyond the work of analysis and critique, the Food Sovereignty movement needs to develop political and economic proposals that offer a genuinely transformative

---

214 For most ‘[F]irst-generation’ agro-fuels, the net energy return is ‘invariably at best thin, at worst negative…Based on output per land area, it is estimated that roughly two-thirds of all cropland in the USA and EU would need to be devoted to biofuels to substitute only 10 per cent of current oil consumption…In short, rather than providing a partial fix for the crisis of liquid energy, the current biofuel boom is based upon an irrational biophysical budget and threats to worsen rather than reduce anthropogenic climate change: it at once fortifies the operative logic of industrial capitalist agriculture and exaggerates its contradictions’: ibid., 325-6.

215 Moore op cit., 399, observing that ‘[t]he great boom of the long twentieth century was constructed on the mass graves of the ‘late Victorian holocausts’. John McMurty (1997 op cit.) similarly observes that ‘need without effective demand counts for nothing’ and ‘is not recognised’ by the market: 645. ‘It follows’, he continues, ‘that people without the money to purchase goods do not have under the rules of the free market the right to live’: 646.

216 Habermas, J., 1975, Legitimation Crisis, Beacon Press, Boston, Mass.; O’Connor, J., 1987, The Meaning of Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction, Basil Blackwell, Oxford. Habermas’ conception of a legitimation crisis is whether the combination of social, economic and political circumstances are such as to potentially place in doubt the continued functional and symbolic integration of the particular system under consideration without the bringing about of major changes in both its form and its substance.
alternative to the current trajectories of the globalising capitalist food system; and
an alternative that responds to the necessities of, and therefore appeals to, growing
numbers of subordinate classes and groups, and not simply to the immediate
priorities of farmers. I consider the extent to which this is or is not being done in
Chapter 7.
Chapter 7

Responses to the socio-economic and ecological context

Small Farmers Cool the Planet!

La Via Campesina, 2010

In Chapter 6, I discussed the economic and ecological context of the globalising capitalist food system, focusing attention on the stability of the socio-economic configurations that constitute the system, as well as the system’s key socio-economic and ecological tensions. In terms of the key Gramscian question regarding the ‘effective reality’ and the balance of forces, the main conclusion to be drawn from the discussion of the context is that, while the configurations of large economic actors at the centre of the system appear both stable and powerful, this stability and power rests on an increasingly fragile ecological basis. Further, while the system’s basic operative logic appears not to be encountering any serious challenges, and indeed seems to have been reinforced and even strengthened by the contemporary global food and financial crises, there are good reasons to believe that the cheap food complex on which this logic depends for its continuity may be approaching the end of its possibilities for further development, within the confines of the capitalist food system.

In this chapter the analysis shifts once more to the question of the effectiveness of the agency of the actors that constitute the Food Sovereignty movement. I argue that food sovereignty proponents have begun to articulate a coherent political-economic project that, if implemented on a sufficiently large scale, would result in substantively transformed social relations around food and farming. As a matter of praxis, elements of this project have been and are being implemented in diverse places around the world, providing tangible demonstrations of what a new food system would mean in practice.

At the same time, the theoretical exposition of food sovereignty is in its relative infancy. In this chapter I indicate some potential avenues of research and praxis, linked to the conceptualisation of economic democracy, cooperatives, and the commons, which I discuss further in the Conclusion. These linkages may prove fruitful not only in giving greater theoretical depth and coherence to food sovereignty; but also - consistent with a Gramscian theory of politics - of great value in terms of political strategy, as regards the articulation of a project or
projects in the universal interest, and the building of cross-class and cross-sectoral alliances.

The discussion of my case studies, supported by the secondary literature, reveals a number of obstacles to the further development of the counter-hegemonic potential of the Food Sovereignty movement. These obstacles take various forms, according to the geographical and historical context. In countries such as the US and Australia there are, within the current market mechanisms for food distribution and sale, significant difficulties in scaling up what to date have been essentially small-scale and niche experiments in food localisation. Further, there is potential for local food initiatives to be co-opted into the principal circuits of the capitalist food system, and the general ideology of neoliberalism, as simply another ‘purchasing choice’, catering to the market segment described by ‘lifestyles of health and sustainability’. More generally, there are legitimate concerns regarding the extent to which consumer behaviours can effect social change, if not consciously linked to a political praxis that has transformation as its long-term goal.

In countries such as Ecuador, Guatemala, and Indonesia, the principal obstacles concern the difficulties in effecting genuinely redistributive agrarian reform processes, combined with a continued pro-export orientation of several national governments. As discussed in previous chapters, amongst other impacts, this has resulted, when overlaid with the growing financialisation of the food system in recent years, in phenomena such as the wave of land acquisitions for agro-export and speculative purposes.

These obstacles and limitations notwithstanding, my assessment is that food sovereignty proponents have exercised, and are exercising, effective agency by expanding the realm of the possible, and shifting the existing disposition of forces to the extent of demonstrating the viability of elements of an alternative system based on new forms of food production and food-based social relations. At this point in time, many of the elements of this alternative system are still in embryonic stage and do not yet pose any serious threat to the dominance of the principal socio-economic configurations of the globalising capitalist food system. Nevertheless, if one looks towards the trajectory of the movement, as distinct from its actual impact to date, the potential to effect transformative change is significant and increasing.1 Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 6, objective economic and ecological conditions are pushing in the direction of the greater realisation of this potential.

Organisation of the chapter
First, I present, by reference to my case studies, the primary literature of Via Campesina and the secondary academic literature, an outline of the political economic model that food sovereignty might be said to represent. I focus on the nature of the social relations that are contemplated in a food sovereignty model, and contrast these with the social relations prevailing under the globalising

---

capitalist food system. By reference to a brief discussion of recent work regarding economic democracy, I also draw attention to some of the existing shortcomings within food sovereignty theory and political-economic praxis.

Secondly, I examine the theory and praxis of agro-ecology, which in my thesis constitutes one of the three central pillars - both as a matter of theory and praxis - of food sovereignty. The capacity of agro-ecology to achieve sustained yields is an issue that bears directly on its legitimacy, and therefore on its potential to challenge the common sense that only large-scale, mechanised and technologically ‘sophisticated’ capitalist industrialised agriculture can ‘feed the world’; and thus its potential to challenge the hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system.

Thirdly, I consider the question as to whether, and to what extent, ‘re-peasantisation’ is taking place, having regard to the nature of the system’s social relations as discussed in Chapter 6. The clear historical trajectory for the past 100 years has been, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, the progressive exodus of farmers and peasants from the countryside. The halting and reversal of this dynamic is crucial to the counter-hegemonic aspirations of food sovereignty. In this discussion I will return once more to the question of agrarian reform, which is another of the central pillars of food sovereignty.

Next, I turn to the Australian case studies, and the examination of food localisation as the third crucial pillar of food sovereignty. Locating them with the growth in recent years of local food initiatives around Australia and internationally, I discuss the economic and ecological significance of the local food movement on the Coffs Coast and of Food Connect, with a particular focus on the thought and practice of Food Connect’s founder, Robert Pekin. I also discuss the obstacles and barriers to scaling up that Food Connect has encountered, the strategies it has adopted to overcome these, and the degree of success it has achieved to date. Finally I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the emergent Food Hub movement, as a likely next iteration of the Food Connect model in Australia.

The Gramscian method suggests that change needs to be based from within the prevailing common sense which, in countries such as Australia and the US and, is formed within the material and discursive contours of market-based consumerism. The Food Connect case study shows that purchasing choices can serve as an entry point into a broader community of interest, dedicated to lasting and transformative social change. In this way food purchasing decisions can in themselves be politicising; but whether they assume that form is highly contextual and contingent; both on the character of the social relations in which these decisions take place, and on the degree of transformative intentionality that they embody.

**The political-economic model of food sovereignty**

In discussing what the political-economy of food sovereignty might look like, we need to consider questions regarding the basic productive forces and nature of social relations within that economy, as well as (at least in broad outline) governance structures and decision-making processes. We also need to consider the scale at which such an economic model can feasibly operate.
Earlier in the thesis, I discussed recent theoretical conceptualisations of food sovereignty, each of which contained different emphases and points of departure. I noted that food sovereignty calls for democratised, localised and de-commodified food systems, founded on the principle of ‘radical egalitarianism’ which entails, amongst other things, the eradication of ‘class power’. The cluster of rights claims which La Via Campesina has advanced in its campaign for a new UN Declaration on Peasants’ Rights and in its articulations of food sovereignty, concerning *inter alia* the right to the means of agricultural production, the right to produce food for domestic and communal consumption, the right of environmental stewardship and the right to adequate incomes, proceed from its ‘peasant ontology and epistemology’. These rights are said to constitute the core of an ‘agrarian citizenship’, based on an ‘ecological rather than an economic rationality’. In this sense, the emergence of La Via Campesina and its project of food sovereignty as a ‘critical agrarian modernism’ is said to constitute the politically conscious emergence of the global peasantry as a ‘class for itself’.

In Chapters 3 and 5 I demonstrated that, from its emergence in the mid-1990s with the relatively limited, reformist objective of trying to slow down or halt the liberalisation of global agricultural trade, and an insistence upon the participation of peasants and small farmers in the formulation of food and agricultural policies, the successive iterations of food sovereignty appear to be converting it into a political-economic project with radical and transformative ambitions. These ambitions are not mere rhetorical flourishes; rather, they are finding their practical expression in a variety of forms. In particular, the growing embrace within La Via Campesina of agro-ecology as a foundational pillar of food sovereignty is now explicitly being identified with an emerging post-capitalist, pro-socialist political-economic project, drawing on the pan-indigenous concept and cosmology of buen vivir as the fundamental social objective that ought to guide all political and

---


6 For example, the ‘Tlaxcala Declaration’ (International Conference of the Via Campesina, Tlaxcala, Mexico, April 18-21, 1996, available at [http://www.virtualsask.com/via/lavia.deceng.html](http://www.virtualsask.com/via/lavia.deceng.html), accessed 7.11.11) stated that ‘[La Via Campesina] is determined to influence the World Trade Organization in order to promote changes to the existing trade agreement. International trade agreements must take the interests of peasants and small farmers into full account ...’; *ibid*. La Via Campesina’s position statement on food sovereignty, presented at the 1996 World Food Summit (The Right to Produce and Access to Land, available at: [http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/1996%20Declaration%20of%20Food%20Sovereignty.pdf](http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/1996%20Declaration%20of%20Food%20Sovereignty.pdf), accessed 7.11.11), called for an end to the practice of dumping, the regulation of food prices, the forgiveness of debts, the control of speculative capital and a ‘strictly enforced Code of Conduct for transnational corporations’; *ibid*. 

241
economic activity, replacing the capitalist rationality of endless economic growth irrespective of social and environmental costs.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, *buen vivir* is explicitly juxtaposed to the profit- and capital accumulation-maximising imperatives of capitalism. This cosmology can be conceived as one attempt to overcome the ‘ecological rift’ that is, as Tony Weis puts it, ‘constitutive of capitalist agriculture’. Its embrace as a fundamentally different ordering principle for society might simultaneously begin to heal not only this ecological rift that flows from humanity’s alienation from nature; but also the social rift that flows from humanity’s alienation from itself, as observed in intensifying levels of inequality and the contemporary treadmill of ‘competitive consumption’. In the course of this chapter and the Conclusion, I develop these arguments further by suggesting that food sovereignty is an important expression of a growing consciousness that the recovery of substantive connectedness – with nature, with each other – is essential if human societies are to successfully respond to the gravity of the challenges with which we are faced.

Contemporary capitalism, as I conceived it in the Introduction, and as I have chartered its development in relation to food and agriculture in Chapters 4 and 6, is predicated on the maintenance and extension of the experience of atomisation and alienation. This atomisation and alienation is ontological, and has deep historical roots. All the core features of capitalism – the employment relation; the well-developed institutions of private property, centred on the private ownership of the means of production; the development of impersonal markets as the principal means of exchange of goods and services; the high degree of market compulsion to obtain the necessities of life – are predicated, it would seem, on the conception of ‘the individual as the proprietor or owner of his own person or capacities’.

In the globalising capitalist food system, producers and consumers meet each other anonymously, and at great distance, via the ‘cash nexus’ of the supermarket shelf. Ultimately this is the core of the common sense that sustains the hegemony of the

---

9 Panayotakis 2011 op cit.
11 Historically, the transition from feudalism to capitalism was, as is well known, made possible by the separation of English peasants from the land, and their forced conversion into wage labourers: Melman, S., 1999, *After Capitalism: From Managerialism to Workplace Democracy*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 35-44, who describes the enclosures as the ‘founding alienation’ that gave birth to capitalism. Melman notes how attempts by the new generations of workers to organise themselves to better their conditions were proscribed as a ‘heinous crime’ as early as the 1349 Statute of Labourers, which remained in force in various iterations until 1825: 42.
globalising capitalist food system: the appearance of alienation and separation, naturalised as the norm and ‘saturating the consciousness’, because affirmed daily through lived experience. A key part of the transformative potential of food sovereignty lies in the offering of an alternative ontology. The new cosmology of *buen vivir*, based on connectedness, not separation; on mutual respect, not self-interested exploitation; and on quality, not quantity, via the abandonment of GDP, offers a promising avenue for the grounded practice of this ontology. Food is what constitutes us: we are - physically, emotionally, spiritually - what we eat. Through food and the daily practice of eating we can perpetuate the experience of alienation and separation; or we can begin to re-establish connectedness, and in the process start to heal the ecological and social rift. The potential of food sovereignty lies in its capacity to create a multitude of possibilities in which the daily experience of eating can tend towards connectedness. As connectedness through food becomes increasingly the norm, the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system will, arguably, struggle to compete with this emerging ‘good sense’. In my assessment, this is perhaps the most fruitful way in which Food Sovereignty can realise its counter-hegemonic potential.

In calling for a localised and de-commodified food system, food sovereignty proponents do seem to grasp this potential, although as yet it does not appear to have been theorised in these terms. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, food sovereignty proponents have on the whole failed - and, as suggested earlier, this is likely due to the farmer-based origins of the discourse - to address systematically a central issue, in terms of the key tension of intensifying inequalities, of wage labour and employment relations. Food sovereignty calls for democratised food systems in terms of farmers determining, or at a minimum participating in the determination of, what is produced, in what quantities, for whom, at what price and in what markets; but it has not (as yet) made the logically parallel call for widening economic and workplace democracy.

In this respect, interestingly enough, the actual practice of local food may be running ahead of the theory, since food co-operatives (of both consumers and producers) appear to be experiencing a resurgence in the United States. One of the distinguishing features of co-operatives, of course, is that typically they are not

---

14 Borras 2008 *op cit*; Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck *op cit*.
based on employment relationships; and so in that respect represent a de-commodification of labour, and (arguably) a step towards workplace democracy.\(^{17}\)

Further, while food sovereignty directly contests the ethics and morality of a system of food production based on the commodity, which for Marx was the ‘cellular form’ of capitalism, it has not systematically elaborated an alternative ‘cellular form’ - such as the commons - that might form the basis of an alternative political economy.\(^{18}\) As Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witherford point out,

Commons has become a concept connecting multifarious struggles against capital’s old but ongoing primitive accumulation and its new horizons of futuristic, high-tech accumulation. Beyond resistance to enclosures, commons politics involve renewed attention on the forms of association through which communities can govern shared resources...Commons discourse resumes older discussions about “public goods”, but breaks new ground, both in the range of ecological, biogenetic, and cultural domains it addresses, and in its interest in the possibilities for the organization of resources from below, rather than according to the models of command economies or bureaucratic welfare states.\(^{19}\)

As is the case with the call for democratised and localised food systems, food sovereignty frequently asserts commons rights and property forms: the right to communal and customary forms of land ownership; the right to save and share seed; and the right to reject the privatisation of water and other natural resources, being notable examples. Hence there are significant opportunities for theoretical and practical linkages with the growing commons movement.

Explicitly incorporating within the development of food sovereignty the theory and praxis of the commons and forms of economic democracy represent significant opportunities. In terms of my research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2, such linkages would both deepen the critique that food sovereignty makes of the globalising capitalist food system; and render more coherent the content and practice of food sovereignty as a truly transformative and systemic alternative. Further, as a matter of political strategy and movement building, it is essential that food sovereignty expand its sphere of concern beyond farmers in the core capitalist countries, where farmers have shrunk to a tiny percentage of the total population. I pursue these points further below.

On the following page, I set out in tabular form the productive forces and social relations contemplated in an ‘ideal type’ food system organised according to Food Sovereignty principles as I have analysed them in this thesis, compared with those prevailing in the globalising capitalist food system (see table [1] below).

---


\(^{18}\) De Peuter, G and Dyer-Witherford 2010 *op cit.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Globalising Capitalist Food System</th>
<th>Productive Forces</th>
<th>Social Relations</th>
<th>Governance Structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core organising principle:</strong> Alienation</td>
<td>Land: Large-scale farms / plantations</td>
<td>Land concentration / accumulation by dispossession</td>
<td>International: World Trade Organisation / Regional &amp; Bilateral trade agreements World Bank (e.g. Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other resources: Soil, water, simplified ecosystems</td>
<td>Externalisation of costs</td>
<td>National: Strong &amp; enforceable systems of private property rights in land and intellectual property. Decisions about production volumes and food types are largely left to the market, with minimal government interference apart from food safety regulations that benefit agribusiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour: Decreasing numbers of capitalist farmers; wage labour</td>
<td>High degree of exploitation of farmers and wage labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capital (non-finance): Large-scale machinery, new technologies (e.g. GMOs), agro-chemicals</td>
<td>Concentration of ownership - oligopolies and monopolies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capital (finance): investment banking, hedge funds, private equity</td>
<td>Profit-orientation of finance capital causes multiple processes of accumulation by dispossession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Sovereignty</strong></td>
<td>Land: Smaller-scale, decentralised concentrations of land</td>
<td>Agrarian reform: expropriation of large land-owners</td>
<td>International: Democratised United Nations, Reformed Committee on World Food Security, Convention on the Rights of Peasants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core organising principle:</strong> Connectedness</td>
<td>Other resources: Soil, water, biodiverse ecosystems</td>
<td>Internalisation of costs</td>
<td>National: State support for smaller producers within right to food / food sovereignty framework, including new institutions &amp; laws; democratised &amp; localised food systems, with small farmers involved in determinations regarding what to produce, where it is sold, and for what price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour: Independent small-scale farmers, peasant co-operatives</td>
<td>Wage labour Agrarian citizenship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capital (non-finance): ‘appropriate’-scale technologies, agro-ecology, smaller-scale mechanisation</td>
<td>Peer-to-peer learning, supported by state extension services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capital (finance): state-backed loans and credit; co-operative / community financing mechanisms</td>
<td>Production organised according to an ‘ecological rationality’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table [1]: The political economy of food: globalising capitalist food system & food sovereignty compared.

245
It is apparent from this comparison that the political economy of food sovereignty differs substantially from that of the globalising capitalist food system in several crucial respects. While the latter is concerned with large volumes of commodities destined for export, and pays little attention to the social or ecological consequences of production, the former emphasises food produced for domestic consumption by smaller-scale farmers. Further, it seeks to begin to internalise all the costs of production, by simultaneously emphasising the need for fair prices for producers, and the adoption of farming practices that minimise harmful ecological and environmental impacts. Conceptually, the transition is from a linear, extractive and wasteful system, organised according to the principle of alienation, towards an integrated and regenerative system, organised according to connectedness. Food sovereignty seeks to break down the atomisation and alienation that is inherent to the capitalist food system, by bringing people together in direct forms of social relations and exchanges, and by taking steps towards democratising the food system, whilst enabling diversity in place of homogenisation and standardisation.

The achievement of these goals is much more complicated than simply ‘raising the price of food, or even the farm-gate price of food’, because, as Nettie Wiebe explains, such a measure on its own, without wider transformations in the prevailing market logic and regulatory frameworks, would lead to ‘perverse’ social and environmental outcomes. In the first instance, the higher prices would create an immediate incentive for farmers nearing retirement age to sell their farm and ‘take the money and run’. That would simply reinforce the dynamic of farm concentration, because the barriers to entry for young people in agriculture, beginning with the cost of purchasing a working farm, are so high as to be insurmountable in most cases. This in turn contributes to the demographic crisis of an aging and shrinking farming population in the North, which I discussed in Chapter 6.

Secondly, an increase in commodity prices also acts as incentive to increased production, which in conventional, chemically-based agriculture, means either bringing more land under cultivation, or intensifying production through the addition of more chemical fertilisers, or both. In either case, the ecological and environmental outcomes are likely to be negative, as observed for example in enhanced rates of deforestation, soil degradation, and so on, as discussed in Chapter 6. Further, more extensive production in the South frequently comes at the expense of the well-being rural communities and peasant producers, via processes of accumulation by dispossession.

So in order to ‘price food in such a way that farmers can make a living growing it’, Wiebe argues that a more wide-ranging set of economic, political and cultural changes are required that entail ‘valuing small-scale production, valuing diversity

---

20 Interview with the author, 15.9.10.
21 Ibid.
22 As Wiebe puts it, ‘If you just raise the price, instead of securing your farming population, you actually get a retirement wave and you shrink your farming population. That’s a perverse outcome, but that’s actually logically how it happens’: Ibid.
23 Ibid.
and paying for diversity, and demanding knowledge about and [building] relationships [around] the source of [our] food’. She cites farmers’ markets as an example of a mechanism of exchange ‘where consumers are actually prepared to pay more for food just to know where it’s come from, and to know that it’s come from nearby’. She identifies another obstacle to the viability of small farmers in the form of regulations (for example, on the sale of meat at community events) that explicitly favour large-scale agribusiness. On issues such as these, Wiebe recognises the need for farmers to ‘work in solidarity with other parts of the citizenry, who can push for the political changes, in order to make the economics work for us and them simultaneously, if they’re demanding better food produced locally’.

Will farmers’ markets, farmer-consumer alliances and the like be sufficient to shift the existing disposition of forces? As I discussed in Chapter 3, the transformative potential of this sort of consumer-driven approach to food localisation cannot be taken for granted. Its utility as a strategy for systemic change, in a recessionary economic climate characterised by a growing turn to austerity in many parts of the North, and sharp increases in basic cost of living expenses such as electricity, housing, transport and food, must be seriously doubted. In current economic conditions, simply asking consumers to ‘pay more’ for local food at farmers’ markets will arguably further entrench and broaden a perception of ‘local food’ as a niche movement that is limited to the well-off middle classes who can afford to make lifestyle choices based on ‘health and sustainability’. Potentially it could harden and widen the already-existing divide between ‘rich eaters’ and ‘poor eaters’.

It is here that a basic antagonism arises between the class interests of farmers, and those of lower-, and lower-middle income, working classes in the North, within the context of the prevailing globalising capitalist food system. Farmers, as Wiebe explains, need a liveable income from food production. For many years, the system of ‘cheap food’ has not delivered that outcome for large numbers of them, which results in most farmers having to rely on off-farm income sources to remain on their properties, and also in significant numbers of farmers abandoning the land. A (now retired) fruit grower from the Coffs Coast region explains how the basic economics

---

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid; also Wittman, H., 2009, “Reworking the Metabolic Rift: La Via Campesina, Agrarian Citizenship, and Food Sovereignty”, The Journal of Peasant Studies, 36(4), 805-826, 814-6, who cites leading La Via Campesina activist Paul Nicholson as stating that ‘We work on consumer-producer relationships leading to a different agricultural model”: ibid., 814.
27 Research undertaken for the thesis amongst several providers of emergency food and other relief in the Coffs Habour region revealed sharp increases (50% of more) since 2009 in demand for these services.
29 According to Michael Burt, regional organiser for the NSW Farmers’ Association, mid-North Coast, 90% of NSW FA members in the region are dependent on off-farm sources of income: interview with the author, 20.2.11.
of food production in countries such as Australia - the 'cost-price squeeze' - has simply 'chased the [smaller] farmer out of the industry', and has also resulted in a declining agricultural workforce:

[In the 1950s and 1960s], we could afford to hire workers and pay ourselves a fair wage, because we were getting a decent price from the wholesalers. These days you just could not afford to do that, because the price hasn't gone up while the costs have. I heard the other week that they were getting $8 a box [of bananas]. I can remember in the mid-1950s we were getting £8 a box - that's £16, and the wages were £5 a week. You only needed one case of bananas a week to pay the wages. And in those days we might do 100 cases of bananas a week. In mid-winter we might only cut every second week. But wages were just no trouble at all. If you needed extra work, you'd just go along to the pub and get a bloke, and they'd give you a hand...  

The class antagonism expresses itself in the reality that, as the declining terms of trade for farmers have been disastrous for them, the delivery of 'cheap food' to consumers has inter alia freed up a greater portion of disposable income for discretionary spending, and thereby constituted a foundational pillar of modern consumer capitalism. 'Cheap food' is the business model underpinning mass consumer supermarkets, and has become reinforced by advertising promotions in the context of recessionary conditions. One clear expression of the consumer preference for 'cheap food' is the expansion of low-cost, 'home-brand' items in supermarket shelves. For example, the de-regulation of the dairy industry in Australia in the late 1990s saw the major supermarket chains launch their own generic low-cost home-brand fresh milk; and in the space of four years the percentage of milk sales captured by these products had doubled. By 2009-2010, these generic milk products accounted for 50% of all sales of drinking milk in Australia; and this market share has further increased with the launch by Coles of its 'milk price war' in early 2011.

30 Bill O'Donnell, interview with the author, 7.12.10.
31 Condon, J., 2011, 'Coles 'Down, Down' Campaign Sends Sales Growth Soaring', Beef Central, 28.7.11, http://www.beefcentral.com/trade/domestic-trade/article/400, accessed 7.11.11. This article quotes Coles managing director Ian McLeod as saying that 'Our customers have responded positively to our 'Down, Down' campaign to reduce shelf prices on the products they buy most against a backdrop of rising costs of living that has adversely affected consumer sentiment and industry sales': ibid.
Accordingly, the extent to which many consumers would support calls by farmers for price rises is at best uncertain; and at worst, wishful thinking. In any event, the deeply entrenched dynamic of over-production, and the rise of supermarkets to dominance in the food supply chain means, as discussed in Chapter 6, that farmers participating in this system are ‘price takers’. Thus, one of the many attractions of exchange venues such as farmers’ markets is that farmers, freed from the constraints imposed by supermarket supply chains, are more empowered to set their own prices. However, while farmers’ markets may arguably prefigure a new food system based on food sovereignty principles, on their own they will not reach the scale required to bring about systemic transformation, when supermarkets account for the large majority of food purchases of most consumers in the North.

This is why the Food Sovereignty movement needs to deepen its analysis and critique of the basic logic and common sense of the globalising capitalist food system. Specifically, it needs to be able to move beyond its (understandable) focus on the particular situation of farmers, in order to include the interests of working people as a whole, but especially the lower and lower-middle class socio-economic groups. It needs to do this to render its theory and literature more coherent, recognising the existence of the cheap food complex at the heart of contemporary capitalism, and examining its contradictions and implications. Further, as I have argued consistently, the Food Sovereignty movement must, as a matter of political strategy, be able to forge broad-based and mass alliances with many sectors in the North, having regard to the effective political impotence of smaller (non-corporate) farmers.

The failure to date to systematically tackle the question of wage labour means that statements in key international texts to the effect that ‘food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between...social and economic classes’ are at present little more than rhetorical flourishes. As I argued earlier, food sovereignty is missing an important opportunity to integrate itself with emerging theoretical and practical advances in the fields of economic and workplace democracy, and the commons. A key political insight which informs the

---

35 “In a climate of routine over-supply, as has characterized much of what goes on in basic commodity farming, high profits [for farmers] only come when someone else’s misfortune reduces such supply through pests, drought, and other ‘acts of God’”: Guthman 2011 op cit., 53.
36 In Australia this market share is approaching 80%, while in Canada the top five supermarkets account for 56% of all sales: Jacenko and Gunasekera op cit., 3. The concerns about the limited potential of farmers’ markets as a vehicle for transformation in the contemporary food system mirror those expressed by Marx about the tendency of expressions of the early co-operative movement to assume ‘dwarfish forms’ which would ‘never transform capitalist societies’: cited in De Peuter and Dyer-Witherford op cit., 33. As a result, Marx – and the emergent worker-based movements that became the socialist internationals – placed primary emphasis on the seizure of political power, rather than on the implementation of workplace democracy in the form of co-operatives.
call for economic democracy is the recognition that, in modern liberal democracies, the separation between political and economic power means that political democracy, in the form of periodic elections and voting, is more formal than substantive. \(^\text{39}\) Democratising the economy is thereby seen as a necessary condition in order to progress towards the realisation of a substantive democracy. \(^\text{40}\) This is essentially a core demand of food sovereignty as regards agriculture, albeit expressed in vague and general terms.

While there are various theoretical frameworks and proposals for democratising the economy, a common feature amongst many is the necessity of transforming the wage labour relation that lies at the heart of capitalism as an economic system. In other words, economy democracy takes place, first and foremost, within the individual workplace, either in the form of worker self-management of firms, or in the form of worker ownership (and control) of firms. \(^\text{41}\) The history and contemporary practice of worker cooperatives, particularly in countries such as Argentina and Venezuela, and in the Basque region of Spain, are seen as the practical and historical embodiment of economic democracy. \(^\text{42}\) Significantly, trends towards worker-ownership and co-operatives have also emerged in the so-called ‘rust-belt’, de-industrialising regions of the United States in recent years, such as Ohio. \(^\text{43}\)

Unsurprisingly there are numerous theoretical and tactical debates within this field. \(^\text{44}\) Food sovereignty activists and intellectuals, focused as they have been on the situation of small farmers affected by the expanding capitalist food system, have developed the theoretical content of food sovereignty in parallel to these

\(^{39}\) De Peuter, and Dyer-Witherford \textit{op cit.}, Foutopolous 2008 \textit{op cit.}.

\(^{40}\) As Seymour Melman puts it, ‘to really make a difference [in terms of wealth distribution], the social relations that underlie the hierarchical control of the economy must be changed’: 2001 \textit{op cit.}, 6.

\(^{41}\) Schweickart (\textit{op cit.}) and Jossa (2004 \textit{op cit.}) argue for the former; Ellerman (\textit{op cit.}) for the latter.

\(^{42}\) In Argentina, the ‘recovered factory’ movement that emerged in the wake of the 2001 financial collapse saw many bankrupt firms occupied and put into production by their former employees: De Peuter and Dyer-Witherford \textit{op cit.}; Venezuela has seen an exponential increase in cooperatives during the first decade of the 21st century, as a result of policies put in place by the government of Hugo Chavez; and the Mondragon cooperatives of the Basque country have grown from modest beginnings in 1955 to reach the status of the top ten business entities in Spain: De Peuter, and Dyer-Witherford \textit{op cit.}.


\url{http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2011/1111alperovitz.html}, accessed 10.1.12. Alperovitz highlights in particular the ‘Cleveland model’ of economic democracy promotion, which ‘involve[s] an integrated complex of worker-owned co-operative enterprises targeted in significant part at the $3 billion purchasing power of such large scale “anchor institutions” as the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospital, and Case Western Reserve University’: \textit{ibid}. In a demonstration of what Euclides Mance calls the integrated operation of the ‘solidarity economy’, the ‘[Cleveland] complex also includes a revolving fund so that profits made by the businesses help establish new ventures as time goes on’: \textit{ibid}.

\(^{44}\) These debates touch on issues such as the role of the market in determining production decisions and setting prices; how investment decisions are to be made and financed; the linkages between the emerging commons movement and workers cooperatives; and the extent to which cooperatives have played a genuinely transformative social and political role, or whether they have simply been co-opted by, and thus complemented, the expansion of the dominant capitalist economy..
debates, even though there are many synergies and numerous points of intersection.

Thus in terms of my research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2, the theoretical development of food sovereignty in isolation from wider schools of contemporary thought similarly aimed at transformative praxis suggests some omissions and weaknesses. First, it means that the full implications of the cheap food complex, which is a key element of the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system, has not been consistently, critically and systematically addressed in the elaboration of critiques. This is a serious omission, since it is the modern expression of the cheap food paradigm which helps explain much of the oppression and suffering that farmers worldwide have endured, and are enduring. Secondly, while the analyses and discourses of the food sovereignty movement have been increasing in coherence, much remains to be done as regards the situation of workers, and the antagonism identified above between workers and farmers as regards cheap food. Thirdly, these lacunae detract from the normative appeal and credibility of food sovereignty as the emerging ‘good sense’. The failure to date to systematically integrate a discussion of economic alternatives to the wage labour relation forecloses the possibility of a theoretically rigorous discussion about how to reconfigure the food system away from the ‘cheap food’ dynamic. Finally, these omissions also impede the development of a ‘national popular’ strategy and the formation of effective alliances and political relationships in Northern countries where farmers are a tiny minority of the working population.

The theory and praxis of agro-ecology
In contrast to the failure to engage in debates about economic democracy and the commons, the theory and praxis of agro-ecology is an area in which food sovereignty activists and intellectuals have demonstrated the capacity to combine a radical and coherent critique of the globalising capitalist food system with alternative methodologies that overcome the tensions of over-production, inequality and ecological destructiveness. Agro-ecology, conceived as ‘the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems’, is a method of agricultural practice that eschews the uncritical embrace of corporate-led ‘high’ technology and large-scale mechanisation, in favour of a reliance on building and sustaining local human capacity and peer-based exchanges of knowledge.45

According to one of the world’s leading researchers and practitioners in the field, Professor Miguel Altieri, agro-ecology is aimed at developing ‘agricultural systems in which ecological interactions and synergisms between biological components provide the mechanisms for system to sponsor its own soil fertility, productivity and crop protection’.46 In other words, farming systems operated according to agro-ecological principles increasingly become self-sustaining, thereby reducing farmers’ dependence on synthetic inputs, whilst diversifying their production and raising

45 Altieri, M.A., 2010, Scaling up Agroecological Approaches for Food Sovereignty in Latin America in Wittman et al op cit., 121.
yields. These practices represent what Jules Pretty terms ‘sustainable intensification’; that is, ‘making better use of existing resources and technologies’ in order to increase agricultural production.

It is this capacity to combine high levels of production, whilst progressively reducing the ecologically destructive impacts of agriculture that gives agro-ecology its potentially ‘revolutionary’ character. Arguably it is through agro-ecology that the resolution to the dilemma posed by the capitalist food system’s encounter with the limits to its ‘cheap food’ complex will be resolved: not within the terms of that system, but via the combination of a different set of productive forces, based on a different set of social relations, and operating according to an increasingly non-capitalist logic. Agro-ecology is paradigmatically a production methodology grounded in the organising principle of connectedness; and as such represents in my assessment a serious systemic challenge to the alienation of large-scale capitalist agriculture. Its growing embrace and implementation would represent an important shift in the existing disposition of forces.

In a recent article, Altieri and Victor Toledo trace the development of what they term the ‘agro-ecological revolution’ across Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Central America and the Andean region over the past few decades. In the process, they identify and describe the ‘cognitive, technological and social’ dimensions of this revolution, which interact in a mutually supportive dynamic to sustain and strengthen its growth and impact.

As a ‘highly knowledge-intensive’ set of methodologies that have their roots in ancestral indigenous cultures, agro-ecology is expressive of a ‘peasant epistemology’ because it is ‘developed on the basis of farmers’ knowledge and experimentation’. The knowledge and innovations associated with agro-ecological techniques have spread principally through peer-based farmer-to-farmer networks; and these networks in turn are being supported by continent-wide academic and NGO collaborations.

Amongst a number of ‘epistemological innovations’ associated with agro-ecology, Altieri and Toledo mention its trans-disciplinary and holistic character (‘joining political ecology, ecological economics and ethnoecology’); its abandonment of value-neutrality and its ‘self-reflexive’ character; its embrace of a ‘long-term vision’; and its dialogic and participatory character, valuing ‘local wisdom and traditions’ in order to ‘constant[ly] create new knowledge’. These horizontal and de-centralised forms of knowledge-sharing epitomise the

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 588.
53 Altieri and Toledo op cit., 598.
connectedness of this methodology, which contrasts with the dis-empowering and atomising effects of proprietary-based knowledge systems that form the basis of contemporary capitalist agriculture.

In the Australian context, former Colac dairy farmer Robert Pekin explains how knowledge that was previously held and shared amongst dairy farmers, with the support of long-standing and well-trusted agricultural extension officers, became outsourced and privatised as a result of processes of farm concentration and commercialisation:

Before [in the 1960s and 1970s], it was all hands to the deck. But by the early 1990s, all the [private] support infrastructure that had been established to help agriculture was in place. You didn’t have to go far to find a consultant to help you with your fertiliser regime, or your cow regime, herd improvement, all of those things, which [previously] was all done by the community, or through people knowing who had a good bull, or who had a good pasture regime...The farmers all held that knowledge, or they knew someone who had the skill on how [for example] to do a soil test. That [knowledge] was all privatised...It was actually owned by the fertiliser companies...they’d organise the whole show for you, the delivery [of the chemicals], the spreading, everything. The farmer didn’t have to do a thing. Farmers became more specialised [and] dependent on the companies.54

Interestingly, almost exactly the same point is made by Ricardo Intriago, President of the Federation of Agricultural Centres and Farmers Organisations of Coastal Ecuador, in relation to the impact of the Green Revolution on small farmers in Ecuador:

Now, the majority [of small farmers] have access [to Green Revolution technologies], and what was created was a dependency not just on the fertilisers, but also on machinery and on advisers...Because it all came as a package: chemical fertilisers, seeds, and an adviser who would show you how to use these fertilisers...All of this was a system for the commercialisation of products...They were the teachers of the farmers. When we have food sovereignty, the farmers will be the teachers of agriculture for all of us.55

In this system of privatisation and commodification of knowledge, the technology generated is highly specialised, and all of it is geared, not towards the integrity and well-being of the farming system as a whole, but to the deepening of the farmer’s dependence on commercial products with the primary aim being maximisation of production for profit. Farmers were subjected to a barrage of propaganda to embrace it, as Robert Pekin recalls:

[At that time] I remember that the chemical companies were highly visible. Dominant, to the point where you’d go to a night on calving...and you’d walk into a little old hall, and the place would be plastered with chemical company ads. A chemical company rep would be standing there, and the night would have been supported and run by a chemical company. So if the night was about calving, it’d all be about using formula, and using this drug and that drug, a chemical regime to rear your calves. Every [information evening or field day] you went to would be dominated by chemical

54 Interview with the author, 3.11.11.
55 Interview with the author via Skype, 15.8.11.
companies. It was all about boosting productivity, and making more money, [but only] if you used their stuff. [The products] were expensive, and it was all highly scientific. I remember being mesmerised, because they had some chemist, or some scientist there, explaining in quite complex terms, the way [for example] the rumen worked in a cow, and how this particular little drug would trigger this biological reaction - and you’d be asleep, cos’ it was just bloody boring! It had nothing to do with farming, it was just about how to manipulate a cow’s gut to produce more milk.56

In contrast, the techniques associated with agro-ecology are an expression of what Ernst Friedrich Schumacher calls ‘intermediate’ or ‘appropriate, people-centred’, and locally-controlled, technology.57 As a labour and knowledge-intensive, rather than capital intensive, mode of production, agro-ecology encourages the development of ‘autochthonous technologies’ based on ‘diversity, synergy, recycling and integration’, as well as locally-available energy resources.58 This leads Altieri and Toledo to argue that not only does agro-ecology support the achievement of food sovereignty, but also ‘technological sovereignty’ and ‘energy sovereignty’.59 One example of this technology, amongst many, is the elaborate system of terraced cultivation developed by the pre-Columbian and pre-historic Andean cultures of Peru, which ‘provided tillable land, controlled [soil] erosion, and protected crops during freezing nights’.60 Another example, in the Australian context, is the recent emergence of ‘pasture cropping’ amongst cereal and livestock farmers; in this adaptation, born out of the necessity of adapting to harsh drought conditions, cereal crops are sown directly into pastures, thereby eliminating the need for tillage, substantially reducing inputs, restoring soil fertility, maintaining yields, and helping to secure financial viability for farmers.61

The social and political dimensions of agro-ecology flow from the collaborative, cooperative and communal character of its epistemology and technologies: its connectedness. Practices that are rooted in local customs and traditions; which require for their development and ‘diffusion constant farmer participation [and interaction]”; and which have a sound economic rationale in the form of reduced reliance on external inputs, are likely to be conducive to social movement mobilisation and organisation, as has in fact occurred in many countries in Latin America, Brazil especially.62 The collaborative construction and sharing of knowledge and practices constitutes a concrete manifestation of the ‘circulation of

56 Interview with the author, 3.11.11.
58 Altieri and Toledo op cit., 588, 607.
59 Technological sovereignty is conceived as ‘the exploit[ation] [of] environmental services derived from biodiverse agroecosystems [using] locally available resources [that] farmers are able to produce without external inputs’: ibid., 607. ‘Energy sovereignty’ is ‘the right for people inhabiting farms, cooperatives or rural communities to have access to sufficient energy within ecological limits from local and sustainable sources, such as plant biomass producer on farm, without sacrificing food crops’: ibid.
60 Ibid., 603.
61 Pasture cropping is described by its originators, Bruce Maynard and Colin Seis, as ‘profitable regenerative agriculture’: http://www.pasturecropping.com/, accessed 7.11.11. In an interview with the author, Food Connect Founder Robert Pekin described how he was an early embracer of pasture cropping in the early 1990s.
62 Altieri and Toledo op cit., 599.
the commons’; and its linkage to social movement formation demonstrates the inherent synergies between forms of economic democracy and effective political praxis.

More generally, and as a necessary foundation for social movement formation, these practices contribute to building and strengthening a sense of community, because of their fundamentally social nature. Robert Pekin recalls how he and a small group of like-minded Colac dairy farmers swam against the tide of corporate-driven chemicalisation, by individually and collectively informing themselves about alternative practices; and in the process began to recover a sense of community that the processes of farm concentration in the 1980s had partially eradicated:

[Before I went away in the late 1970s when we changed] from walk-through dairies to herring-bone dairies, [a]t a certain time of year, that’s all I remember doing, for quite a few years: either a heap of people building our dairy, or we would be off building everyone else’s dairies. I just remember that camaraderie, that spirit of community, and obviously footy, and tennis, and cricket, and dancing and horse-riding...By the time I’d come back [after 13 years away] that pretty much didn’t exist any more...farms were getting bigger and bigger, footy clubs were folding...All that sense of community, and collaboration, had started to go. Not so much because you didn’t want it to happen, but you just weren’t as close, there just weren’t as many farmers...So [in response to the onslaught by chemical companies] a group of 13-14 of us began [and] we would find people with specialist skills and knowledge on compost making, and how to acupuncture cows, and all sorts of things. We would meet up in a hall on Lavers Hill, and spend the whole day there, and the families would come, and we would picnic - it was a whole different setting. It was really inclusive.

In this quote, Pekin puts his finger on several themes that I have addressed in the course of this thesis. First, there is what US farmer, poet, novelist and social commentator and critic Wendell Berry terms the ‘fundamental conflict between the interests of farmers and farming, and the interests of agribusiness corporations’. The second, closely related, theme is the commodification of food and agriculture, and the consequent loss of autonomy experienced by farmers. The third - which I discuss briefly here and in the Conclusion - is Berry’s notion that in order for ‘good farming’ - that is, ‘farming that does not destroy either farmland or farm people’ - to take place, there must be a ‘proper’ or ‘correct’ ratio between the number of

63 De Peuter and Dyer-Witherford op cit.
64 Costas Panayotakis (2011 op cit.) makes the argument that while the ‘anti-democratic’ nature of capitalist firms stunts the development of democratic skills and capacities amongst the working population and thus militates against effective engagement in the wider political process, the practice of economic democracy in the form of worker-run co-operatives would ‘nurture ordinary people’s democratic skills’ and ‘cultivate ordinary people’s ability to govern themselves’: 8. He envisages a ‘virtuous circle’ coming into existence ‘as the democratization of the state can facilitate the spread of democratically run institutions, while the democratic skills ordinary people acquire in such institutions can equip them to fight more effectively for progressive social change that democratizes the state even further. The creative tension between reforms aimed at democratizing the state, on the one hand, and building autonomous institutions, such as worker co-operatives, on the other, can therefore trigger a process of social change with the potential to transform the debate between competing visions of a non-capitalist, economically democratic social order from an academic question to an issue of immediate political relevance’: ibid.
65 Interview with the author, 3.11.11.
66 Berry, W., 2002, Stupidity in Concentration, 17.
farmers and farmworkers, and the number and size of farms; combined with a ‘proper ratio between plants and animals’. 67

Achieving these ratios will, in Berry’s view, ensure that the ‘fertility cycle is kept complete’.68 In the process, environmental problems that are endemic to industrial agriculture, such as soil erosion and compaction, the pollution of nearby waterways, and the proliferation of toxic animal waste, will be progressively reduced.69 Conversely, the linearity of industrial agriculture - its alienation and separation - means that by definition waste is intrinsic to its production methods, leading inevitability to ‘exhaustion and contamination’ of natural resources.70 Thus, what further strengthens the normative appeal of agro-ecology for progressive and radical agrarian movements is its ecologically benign and regenerative nature. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, it is this feature of agro-ecology which has enabled La Via Campesina to link its promotion of Food Sovereignty in recent years to the broader climate justice movement, with the claim that ‘Small Farmers Cool the Planet’.71 Given that capitalist agriculture is arguably the major contributor to anthropogenic climate change, such a claim, if it can be substantiated, is politically significant for at least three reasons.

In the first instance, it serves as a powerful critique of the irrationality and sheer wastefulness of the globalising capitalist food system, when contrasted with an existing and viable alternative, thus undermining the common sense on which the system is based.72 Understood holistically, the waste this system generates includes not only multiple direct and indirect forms of pollution and contamination, but also the waste of solar and animal energy, as well as human energy, knowledge and

---

68 Berry, Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems, 27-8, op cit. Although he is no Marxist, such a statement clearly recalls Marx’s assertion that a ‘rational agriculture is incompatible with capitalism’; and further that this rational agriculture required a proper balance in the population between town and country.
69 Berry, 2002, Stupidity in Concentration, 13. Jonthan Safran Foer (2009, Eating Animals, Camberwell, Vic: Hamish Hamilton), discusses at some length the vast volumes of untreated animal manure produced annually on American factory farms, and its consequences for human and ecosystem health: 174-181. Thus, the average US pig factory farm produces 7.2 million pounds of manure annually, a typical broiler factory will produce 6.6 million pounds, and a typical cattle feedlot 344 million pounds...All told, farmed animals in the US produce 130 times as much waste as the human population – roughly 87,000 pounds of shit per second. The polluting strength of this shit is 160 times greater than raw municipal sewage. And yet there is almost no waste-treatment infrastructure for farmed animals...": 174. In terms of industry practices regarding disposal or, more accurately, dispersal, Foer writes: “When the football field-sized cesspools are approaching overflowing, Smithfield ['America's leading pork producer'], like others in the industry, spray the liquefied manure onto fields. Or sometimes they simply spray it straight up into the air, a geyser of shit wafting fine fecal mists that create swirling gases capable of causing severe neurological damage. Communities living near these factory farms complain about problems with persistent nosebleeds, earaches, chronic diarrhea, and burning lungs”: 176.
70 Berry, Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems op cit., 23.
capacities.\footnote{Berry \textit{Energy in Agriculture}, op cit., 63–4. For Berry, the abandonment of the practices of crop rotation and cover crops leads to the waste of solar energy; the unnatural confinement of animals in feedlot operations results in the waste of animal energy; and human energy, knowledge and abilities is dissipated via the loss of farmers' knowledge and skill, the mass unemployment that de-ruralisation has generated and continues to generate, and the ill-health produced through over-consumption of industrialised food.} In the industrialisation of agriculture, Berry observes a paradoxical and ultimately self-defeating transformation, expressive of the ecological rift:

\begin{quote}
[F]arming, which is inherently cyclic, capable of regenerating and reproducing itself indefinitely, becomes...destructive and \textit{self-exhausting} when transformed into an industry.\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

Secondly, the ecological benefits of agro-ecology constitute a powerful defence of peasant agriculture, strengthening the claims of food sovereignty to embody the new ‘good sense’, and providing justification for claims that such agriculture should be recognised and supported by governments and international institutions.\footnote{Martinez-Alier, J., 2011, ‘The EROI of Agriculture and its Use by the Via Campesina’, \textit{The Journal of Peasant Studies}, 38(1), 145-160, 149; also Wittman 2009 op cit., 152-5, discussing the research undertaken by Ukranian doctor and narodnik activist S.A. Podolinsky.} Implicitly drawing on the traditions of ‘agricultural energetics’ dating back to the 1880s, La Via Campesina makes the justifiable claim that the capitalist industrialisation of agriculture has transformed it from being a net producer of energy to being a net consumer.\footnote{Martinez-Alier \textit{op cit.}, 152-5.} Conversely, agro-ecological production that does not involve large-scale deforestation and land-clearing, and which does not rely on heavy machinery and large amounts of synthetic inputs, not only consumes far less fossil fuels, but also, through the increase of organic matter in soils, increases their carbon capture potential.\footnote{Vandermeer et al \textit{op cit.}. The carbon sequestration potential of ecological forms of agriculture (such as pasture cropping) is only recently being understood and researched, with the ‘Carbon Farming Coalition’ formed in Australia in 2006 to promote such practices: see \url{http://www.carboncoalition.com.au/CarbonFarmers/WhatisCarbonFarming.html}, accessed 7.11.11. The Carbon Farming Coalition, it should be said, is not an anti-capitalist grouping; and indeed wants to secure access to carbon trading markets for farmers who adopt agro-ecological techniques such as pasture cropping. This serves to highlight the potential for the co-optation of agro-ecology by capitalist agriculture, and is a matter to which I return in the Conclusion to the thesis.} Further, not only does agro-ecology appear to mitigate the severity of climate change through emissions reductions; its practices and techniques have demonstrated a far higher level of resilience to extreme weather events in recent years.\footnote{Altieri and Toledo \textit{op cit.}, 596-7, noting that ‘[a] survey conducted in Central American hillsides after Hurricane Mitch [in 1998] showed that farmers using diversification practices such as cover crops, intercropping and agroforestry suffered less damage than their conventional monoculture neighbours...It was found that sustainable plots had 20–40 percent more topsoil, greater soil moisture and less erosion and experienced lower economic losses than their conventional neighbours’.}

The lesser reliance on fossil fuels points to a third reason for the political significance of agro-ecology: its capacity to function productively within the emerging resource constraints which capitalist agriculture is encountering in the form of ‘biophysical contradictions’.\footnote{Weis 2009 op cit.} Forms of agriculture that can reliably
produce diverse crops in the midst of a resource-constrained and climatically-changing world, and which can restore fertility to soils degraded by the practices of capitalist agriculture over decades, should, at least in theory, be highly prized and supported by governments cognisant of their obligations to ensure the universal right to food to all their citizens.  

However, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, in a world patterned by globalising capitalism, many governments - and most especially those of the core capitalist nations - currently place most value on, and direct most support towards, capitalist and large-scale industrialised forms of agriculture. The reorientation of state support towards sustainable forms of agriculture is necessary to facilitate the transition because, as Jules Pretty points out, the transition itself is not a ‘costless process’; and requires in particular that ‘farmers invest in learning’. It is here that the social, economic and political dimensions of agro-ecology become essential to the consolidation and expansion of its epistemic and technological advances. The sharing of knowledge and its continual co-creation leads to further technological innovations and experimentation with new economic forms, notably cooperatives. The small group of dairy farmers that Robert Pekin belonged to in Colac, while deepening their knowledge and practice of non-chemical production methodologies, also established a local dairy co-operative in order to counter the consolidation and corporatisation of the existing cooperatives. Cooperatives, and collective forms of self-management, have been central to maintaining the viability of the newly-settled communities following land occupations by militants of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement. Technological and economic innovations support the economic viability of farmers, allowing them to stay on the land, enhancing their confidence and generating mutual solidarity.

These dynamics support movement building, which as Altieri and Toledo note, has contributed to political changes that have been broadly supportive, in some places, of the demands of small farmers in many Latin American countries. Of course this dynamic is neither uniform nor universal; as noted in Chapter 5, while Ecuador’s Rafael Correa appears highly progressive from a distance, those working to implement food sovereignty in that country have observed his lack of sympathy.

---

80 Kirschenmann, F., 2010, *Do Increased Energy Costs Offer Opportunities for a New Agriculture?* in Magdoff and Tokar op cit., 224-240; also Pimentel, D., 2010, *Reducing Energy Inputs in the Agricultural Production System* in Magdoff and Tokar op cit., 241-252, who argues that ‘[a]n increase in human and animal labour as well as a decrease in fuel-powered machinery in necessary to decrease fossil fuel use in the US food system’; and that the adoption of such practices would ‘lead to an approximate 50 percent reduction of energy inputs in agricultural production’, while also producing multiple other benefits(e.g. nutrient recycling, enhanced soil fertility, reduced chemical usage, and so on): ibid., 252.

81 Pretty op cit 291. Pretty argues that ‘[l]ack of information and management skills is…a major barrier to the adoption of sustainable agriculture’: ibid., 291.

82 Interview with the author, 3.11.11.


84 Op cit., 599, 604, discussing developments in Brazil and Bolivia. As regards the latter, the authors note that ‘[p]artly as a result of pressures from the agroecological movement, president Evo Morales situated agroecology as one of the four central goals of his mandate and promoted Law 3525, which regulates agro-silvo-pastoral production in Bolivia’: ibid., 604.
towards, and understanding of, smallholder agriculture based on agro-ecological principles.\textsuperscript{85} Furthermore, the advance of agro-ecology is being accompanied by the arguably more rapid advance of industrial-scale capitalist agriculture, in the form of the expanding ‘green deserts’ of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.\textsuperscript{86} As Ricardo Intriago stated, whether or not the movement for the ‘scaling up’ of agro-ecology succeeds or not will depend on the actions of the social movements themselves in building their movements, educating the public, and maintaining constant pressure on their governments to support the expansion of this production methodology.\textsuperscript{87}

Put another way, the progress of agro-ecology and the broader Food Sovereignty movement, in Latin America as elsewhere, is contingent on the growing practice of ‘agrarian citizenship’, as manifested in the ‘participation in material and political struggles’ in a ‘contested space for dialectical negotiation between nature, state and society’.\textsuperscript{88} As one aspect of the practice of this citizenship, agro-ecology practitioners and researchers are fulfilling the educative role of the organic intellectuals in building a counter-hegemonic social and political force.\textsuperscript{89}

Effective counter-hegemony depends on destabilising the prevailing common sense. As discussed earlier in the thesis, a key ideological justification for the further expansion of the globalising capitalist food system is the claim that only large-scale, mechanised agriculture can ‘feed the world’; and in particular, that only such agriculture can deliver the anticipated 70% increase in food production that will be required to meet the world’s food demands by 2050. Agro-ecological practices are either dismissed as marginal to this effort, or else they are co-opted in various ways so that they pose no threat to the advance of the system. Co-option has arguably been the fate, for example, of significant parts of organic and fair-trade agriculture: the former because it has mirrored the capitalist practice of large-scale input dependent monocultures, albeit with the difference that the inputs are certified organic, rather than chemicals; and the latter because it integrates small farmers in the South into global markets, subjects them to the disciplining effects of price volatility, and diminishes local food sovereignty aspirations in the process.\textsuperscript{90}

Agro-ecology might be one of the ways in which we can ‘cool the planet’, adapt to the extreme weather events that will come with a changing climate, and produce food in a post-peak oil world, but can it meet the challenge of producing sufficient food for a global population now in excess of seven billion? The first response to this question is that peasant farmers following these types of practices have ‘fed much of the world for centuries and continue to feed people across the planet’.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{85} Interview with Ricardo Intriago.
\textsuperscript{86} See Chapter 6 for a discussion on the advance of green deserts.
\textsuperscript{87} “Tenemos que conscientizar a la gente para que peleen por eso – porque si no hay consciencia, ¿Quién va a pelear?”, which translates as “We have to raise consciousness and educate the people about this – because if there is no consciousness, who is going to fight?” Interview with the author, 15.8.11; see also Altieri and Toledo \textit{op cit.}, 608-9; Wittman \textit{op cit.}, 820.
\textsuperscript{88} Wittman \textit{op cit.}, 820.
\textsuperscript{89} See Chapter 2, p26.
\textsuperscript{90} Altieri 2009 \textit{op cit.}, 265-6.
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Ibid.}, 255.
Conversely, it must also be remembered that, in global population terms, the
globalising capitalist food system presently includes somewhere between 25 to 50% of
the global human population\textsuperscript{92}, and has to date managed to integrate only a
similar percentage of the world’s annual biomass into the monetized global market
economy.\textsuperscript{93} Some estimates put the percentage of global agricultural production
accounted for by the capitalist system at no more than ten percent, which leads
critics to assert that what passes for global agricultural trade is in fact ‘an
international trade of surpluses of milk, cereals and meat dumped primarily by the
[European Union], the [United States] and other members of the Cairns group’;
what Tony Weis calls the ‘grain-livestock complex’.\textsuperscript{94}

Taking these statistics into account, it becomes clear that the corporate-led food
system is still a minority actor as regards the basic task of ensuring the daily
sustenance of the global human population as a whole. Somewhere between half
and three-quarters of the world’s people are, rather, fed primarily by peasant,
smallholder and various forms of small-scale urban agriculture.\textsuperscript{95} Bearing in mind
Gibson-Graham’s admonition to ‘read for difference rather than domination’, this
reality problematizes the portrayal of the capitalist food system as ‘dominant’; and
casts substantial doubt on the assertion that only this form of agriculture can - or,
for that matter, does - ‘feed the world’.\textsuperscript{96} Seen in this light, the vision of corporate-
led and technicised world agriculture can be read as a narrative constructed by the
powerful of an ‘imagined econom[y] of globalization’; and as such it is a project
that is immanent and contingent, not achieved and inevitable.\textsuperscript{97}

The second response is that agro-ecology, on its own terms as a developing set of
production principles and methodologies, is demonstrating the capacity to out-
perform large-scale capitalist monocultures. Yield increases are achieved through
techniques such as integrated nutrient management, agroforestry, water
harvesting, crop and farm diversification, and the integration of livestock into
farming systems, as well through the reduction of ‘losses due to weeds, insects and

\textsuperscript{92} McMichael 2004 \textit{op cit.}, 62.
\textsuperscript{93} ETC Group \textit{op cit.}, 3.
\textsuperscript{94} McMichael 2004 \textit{op cit.}, 63, citing La Via Campesina, 2001, ‘Our World is Not for Sale: Priority to
accounted for ‘45 per cent of the value of global agricultural trade in 2005’; but comments that this
figure underestimates the extent to which these products dominate the global food system, ‘given how
[they] are contained in various processed foods and how cheap and bulky grains comprise a much
greater relative volume of agricultural trade than their value represents’: \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid.}, 9, citing ‘The Resources Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security’,
http://www.ruaf.org/node/513, which suggests approximately 15-20% of global food production is
undertaken in urban areas with the participation of some 800 million people.
\textsuperscript{96} Gibson-Graham, J.K., 1996, \textit{The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political
\textsuperscript{97} McMichael 2006, 62; also McMichael, P., 2000, ‘The Power of Food’, \textit{Agriculture and Human
Values}, 17(1), 21-33, who argues that

The scenario of a fully globalized food system is undoubtedly far fetched. Roughly ninety percent of the
world’s food consumption occurs in the country in which it is produced. Sixty percent of the food consumed
by rural populations they produce, whereas urbanites depend on the market for ninety percent of their food
consumption…Only about one-fifth of the world’s almost six billion people participate in the cash or credit
economy: 26.
Research conducted during the 1990s suggested that small farms operating as polycultures according to agro-ecological methods achieved total production yields up to 60% higher than conventional capitalist agricultural monocultures. The largest study conducted to date, involving 286 projects in 57 [developing] countries’, found average yield increases in farms using agro-ecological methods to be in excess of 79%, compared with conventional methods. Discussing the study’s results, Pretty concludes that:

We do not yet know for sure whether a transition toward the sustainable intensification of agriculture, delivering greater benefits at the scale occurring in these projects, will result in enough food to meet the current food needs in developing countries, let alone the future needs after continued population growth and adoption of more urban and meat-rich diets. But what we are seeing is highly promising, especially for the poorest. There is also scope for additional confidence, as evidence indicates that productivity can grow over time if the farm ecosystem is enhanced, communities are strengthened and organized towards positive goals, and human knowledge, nutrition and health are improved. Sustainable agriculture systems appear to become more productive when human capacity increases, particularly in the form of farmers’ capacity to innovate and adapt their farm systems for sustainable outcomes.

In other words, there appears to be a virtuous circle between increasing human capacity, and the capacity of the land to feed people; and if this assumption is correct, the future is open. The passage quoted highlights a further response to the ‘can agro-ecology feed the world’ question. As I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, the capitalist organisation of agriculture and the food system is failing to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, and, in the current context of economic and financial crisis, and the financialisation of the food system, is in fact increasing these forms of inequality. Agro-ecology, by contrast, has the virtue of making a substantial contribution to meeting the food needs of the poorest sectors of society. Higher yields, diverse income streams and freedom from the need to purchase expensive inputs translate into higher farm incomes, which in turn can boost local job creation and reduce rural poverty. This is why the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has embraced it as a key means by which the universal right to food will be realised. For the same reasons, La Via Campesina agro-ecology trainers argue that ‘peasant, indigenous and community-based agro-ecological farming [is] a cornerstone in the construction of food sovereignty’.

---

99 Altieri and Toledo op cit., 595.
100 Pretty op cit., 292-3.
101 Ibid., 296.
102 Ibid.
103 De Schutter 2011 op cit.
In terms of my research questions, the theoretical and practical development of agro-ecology evidences a deep and critical engagement with the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system. It points strongly towards the convincing-ness of food sovereignty as a coherent, even necessary, alternative. In a growing number of countries, especially in Latin America, it is contributing to the formation of national-popular strategies and alliances that in some cases, such as Ecuador, are finding political and institutional support and expression. At the same time, the reality of co-option is clearly present and the struggle for a ‘genuine peasant-based agro-ecology’ is a permanent one.\textsuperscript{105}

Change on the ground: the extent of ‘re-peasantisation’

As I have made clear throughout the thesis, the movement for food sovereignty was initiated by peasants and small farmers, and continues to be led by them. As the uniting narrative of La Via Campesina, it is in the first instance, and to some extent in the final analysis, a defensive strategy, aimed at enabling peasants and small farmers to continue to live, work and reproduce themselves and their communities as peasants and small farmers. It follows that a key arbiter of the success or otherwise of the movement is the extent to which the conditions of the global peasantry, both quantitatively in terms of sheer size, and qualitatively in terms of dignified livelihood opportunities, have been improved. The qualitative issues I have considered elsewhere: here the focus shifts to the quantitative aspect of the question.

Nettie Wiebe, when asked to identify the single greatest failure to date of La Via Campesina, nominated ‘the inability to hold our ground, literally, as the displacement of small farmers and rural communities continues and the corporate concentration ramps up’.\textsuperscript{106} What she is describing is the perceived failure of La Via Campesina to halt the centuries-long process of ‘de-peasantisation’, which I discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. Amongst scholars of both liberal and radical persuasions, the ‘death of the peasantry’ was assumed to be consequent on the global trend of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century towards urbanisation, and is regarded as a defining feature of capitalist (and state socialist) modernisation.\textsuperscript{107}

Yet the question persists: has the peasantry in fact ‘died’? If not, is it in the process of dying? Undoubtedly, there has been a decades-long trend towards declining rural and farming populations across the world as a percentage of the total population of each country, with the trend especially notable in the core capitalist countries where the industrialization of agriculture and the ideologies of ‘efficiency’ and ‘productivity’ have been most comprehensively embraced. At the same time, the

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Interview with the author, 15.9.10.
\textsuperscript{107} Both Weis (2007 op cit., 24-5) and Bello (2009, Food Wars, op cit., 12) cite with varying degrees of disapproval the confident statement by Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm that ‘[t]he most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of the [20\textsuperscript{th}] century, and one which cuts us off for ever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry’: 289. Bello also dissects the views of Oxford University Professor of Economics Paul Collier, who wrote during the 2008 global food crisis that the solution to world hunger lay with increased production by large commercial farms and the embrace of genetically modified technology: Collier, P., 2008, ‘The Politics of Hunger: How Illusion and Greed Fan the Food Crisis’, Foreign Affairs, 87(6), 67-80.
peasantry has persisted in many places, so that at a global level there are still 450 million farms, ‘85% of which are smallholder farms of less than 2 hectares’, with the bulk of these producing for subsistence or local market consumption. Further, while the proprietary seed market is indeed dominated by corporations, ‘approximately three-quarters of the world’s farmers routinely save seeds from their harvest and grow locally-bred varieties’.

Paradoxically, it is arguably the case that ‘there are far more peasants than ever before’ in terms of total numbers, rather than as a proportion of the total population; with estimates suggesting that as much as ‘two-fifths of humanity’ still lived in small-farm households at the end of the 1990s. Recent research suggests that the numbers of ‘small farmers increased by 220 million [worldwide] between 1990 and 1999’. In part, this is a simple function of a still rapidly growing global population in the post-World War II era. At the same time, this outcome would appear to contradict the comfortable generalisation that all impoverished peasants will opt for wage labour at the first opportunity. It would also suggest that at the macro level Nettie Wiebe is perhaps too pessimistic in her assessment of the failure of the peasantry to hold its ground. Amongst other factors, successful programs of redistributive land reform consolidate the peasantry and enhance its growth, which is one of the reasons why such reform is a central demand across most peasant organisations in the South.

Of particular interest are trends in the United States, as measured by the most recent (2007) Agricultural Census conducted by the US Department of Agriculture. This Census found that in the five year period 2002-2007, 300,000 new farms commenced operation, with a ‘net increase of 75,810 farms’, representing a rate of increase of slightly under one per cent per year. Just as significant as the net increase in farm numbers was the nature of the new farms, being smaller, having ‘more diversified production’, and run by ‘younger operators’.

The Census also assessed economic aspects of farm production including ‘organic, value-added, and speciality production, all of which are on the rise’. It therefore appears that a significant proportion of new farms are operating according to agro-ecological methodologies. It is also the case that many would be selling into local markets and community-supported agricultural initiatives, both of which have

---

108 ETC Group op cit., 8.
109 Ibid.
111 Altieri and Toledo op cit., 606, citing Toledo and Barrera-Bassols 2008 [ ref].
112 Paul Collier (op cit.) writes that ‘peasants…show little inclination to reproduce themselves. Given the chance, peasants seek local wage jobs, and their offspring head to the cities…’.
113 Altieri and Toledo op cit. note that the outcome of the 1910 Mexican Revolution was the world’s first redistributive agrarian reform, in which 11,000 large latifundios and haciendas were dismantled over the succeeding six decades, benefiting approximately 3 million peasant families in the process: 604.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
experienced an exponential rise in the US in the past two decades, as I discussed in Chapter 3.

The Census reveals a ‘continuation in the trend towards more small and very large farms and fewer mid-sized operations’, with the ‘majority of US farms [being] smaller operations’, with many dependent on off-farm income.\textsuperscript{118} What appears to be happening is that farm consolidation at the large commercial end of the sector is proceeding fairly rapidly, while at the same time the emergence of the local food movement is supporting, albeit at a small and tentative scale, an incipient process of re-ruralisation and a ‘new agrarianism’.\textsuperscript{119} While the new generation of US farmers may not be ‘peasants’ in the traditional understanding of the term, many, if not most, would fall within the description of the farming populations that La Via Campesina, and the Food Sovereignty movement, would seek to defend in their political economy of food. One manifestation of the ‘new agrarian’ movement in the United States is the slight growth in young, inexperienced farmers, many from urban backgrounds, who are choosing farming vocations over urban-based careers.\textsuperscript{120} Another is the renewal of highly depressed post-industrial areas through a remarkable growth in urban agriculture.\textsuperscript{121} Nettie Wiebe makes the point that imaginative forms of land tenure-ship can be important in terms of removing the barriers to entry of young people into farming:

\begin{quote}
[The NFU initiatives] have had a very good impact in terms of opening young people’s imaginations, that they might farm. So what you get now - and we have several of these around Saskatoon - you have plots of land that are being rented by groups of young people who go out and farm small portions. They don’t actually invest in the land, they haven’t got hundreds of thousands of dollars to invest obviously - they rent and share equipment, and rent small plots, and are starting to farm. For me, that’s very encouraging...\[While the conventional agricultural model requiring huge investments\] is [now] unviable, the possibility of restructuring policy, to have smaller operations, and in many cases shared and cooperative operations managed and run by young people, that seems to be a much better prospect.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} This movement is narrated in the Greenhorns documentary, released in 2010: \url{http://www.thegreenhorns.net/}, accessed 8.11.11. The Greenhorns describe their mission as being to ‘recruit, promote and support young farmers in America’. The 2007 Census reported a small increase of 2000 in the total number of farmers under 35 years of age: \textit{ibid}. \textit{See also} Hewitt, B., 2009, \textit{The Town that Food Saved: How One Community Found Vitality in Local Food}, Rodale, New York, who narrates the ‘agripreneurial revolution’ underway in the small blue collar town of Hardwick, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{122} Interview with the author via Skype, 15.9.11.
One of the innovations identified here by Wiebe is landsharing, which as I discuss below, is also a feature of the local food movement on the Coffs Coast. As with agro-ecology, such practices of sharing and co-operation can be conceptualised as emergent examples of the ‘circulation of the commons’. The trends towards diversified production and value-adding are consistent with similar trends identified in Europe by Dutch scholar Jan Douwe van der Ploeg. As I discussed earlier in the thesis, van der Ploeg conceptualises the peasantry by what he terms the ‘peasant condition’. Above all, this condition describes a ‘struggle for autonomy’ on the basis of expanding a ‘self-controlled and self-managed resource base, which in turn allows for those forms of co-production of man and living nature that interact with the market, allow for survival and for further prospects’. Since the resource base is expanded inter alia through soil fertility, the linkage to agro-ecology is explicit.

Van der Ploeg identifies multiple processes of re-peasantisation in diverse sites, embodied in various acts of resistance that he groups together as expressions of the ‘peasant principle’. These acts include both overt struggles, such as the land occupations of the MST in Brazil and the street protests of La Via Campesina against the WTO, but also the constitution of new forms of food-related transactions between producers and consumers, based on ‘relations of reciprocity’ and by reference to ‘use value, not exchange value’. For van der Ploeg, expressions of the local food movement such as Community-Supported Agriculture are to be understood as ‘acts of insubordination to Empire’, and as forms of ‘production and action [based] on innovativeness [and] on autonomous cooperation between producing [and consuming] subjects’.

In terms of my research questions, the evidence - albeit preliminary and tentative - for the existence of both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of re-peasantisation does suggest that the food sovereignty demands for the ‘right to farm’ and the ‘right for small farmers to produce food for their communities’ are achieving a certain impact. Such a conclusion is strengthened in cases, such as the resettlement over 25 years of 350,000 landless families by the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) through processes of social struggle and negotiation, where effective processes of redistributive land reform are supported by social and economic mechanisms - access to credit, housing, training, local markets and so on - that guarantee new generations of peasants and small farmers a dignified and

---

123 De Peuter and Dyer-Witherford op cit.
124 2008 op cit.
125 Ibid., 23-25. Later, van der Ploeg says that ‘[t]he peasant condition is composed of a set of dialectical relations between the environment in which peasants have to operate and their actively constructed responses aimed at creating degrees of autonomy in order to deal with the patterns of dependency, deprivation and marginalization entailed in this environment’: 261.
126 Ibid., 23. ‘Co-production’ refers to the ‘ongoing interaction and mutual transformation of man and living nature’; it includes on-farm value-adding (e.g. cheese-making) and agri-tourism: 24.
127 Ibid., 270-1. The peasant principle is ‘an emancipatory notion [which] implies that being engaged in the peasant condition needs to be understood as a flow through time that entails the promise of offering some way forward’, as regards the generation of more autonomous space: 273.
128 Ibid.
secure livelihood. At the same time, achieving such outcomes is a constant struggle, with agrarian reform processes in Brazil as in many other regions effectively grinding to a halt in recent years even as capitalist agribusiness continues to expand. However even though objectively the balance of forces still favours the globalising capitalist food system, the food sovereignty perspective of integral rural development, combining agrarian reform, agro-ecology and the building of co-operative social and economic structures, can form the basis of a transformative, broad-based national-popular alliance.

Food re-localisation - the third pillar of food sovereignty

As stated above, local food economies are seen as one manifestation of re-peasantisation; and indeed I have argued in this thesis that they constitute the third pillar of food sovereignty, together with redistributive agrarian reform and agro-ecology. In the context of the institutionalisation of food sovereignty in Ecuador, Ricardo Intriago makes the following observations:

In general, the [Food Sovereignty] law is excellent. The law sets the standard for small farmers, small fishers, and so on...Further, it speaks of the popular and solidarity economy, that is, the relation between the countryside and the city, whereby small farmers can sell directly to consumers...The law says that in each municipality public spaces must be made available for the fair trade in food, where farmers sell to consumers. [Unfortunately] not a single municipality in the country has implemented this [provision].

This ‘popular and solidarity economy’ is understood, in the Australian context, as the local food economy. In the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss two aspects of the development of this economy: a diversity of local food initiatives on the Coffs Coast; and the Food Connect model of Community-Shared Agriculture.

Local food on the Coffs Coast

In Chapter 3 I outlined the range of local food initiatives that are being developed on the Coffs Coast, and in Chapter 5 I discussed the extent to which they have received institutional and financial support. In this section I consider their economic and ecological impacts. I preface this discussion with the observation that the focus of the inquiry concerns the extent of the connectedness, and the trajectories and potentialities of these initiatives, rather than a quantitative assessment of the percentage of market share that local food initiatives have captured to date. Here I am foreshadowing my conclusion that, in Gramscian terms, the Food Sovereignty movement is not yet a counter-hegemonic force, but that it arguably

131 As the MST reports in their review of 2011,
The offensive by the forces of capital and the lack of political initiative of the federal government have made 2011 another bad year for Agrarian Reform. Only 35 areas were transformed into settlements, benefiting only 6,000 families.

132 Interview with the author, via Skype, 15.8.11.
133 Starr 2010 op cit., 486.
has the potential to become one; and I am concerned to tease out the extent and trajectory of that potential.

The local food economy consists, in its purest form, of local production for local consumption. Ideally, from the food systems perspective, local fresh production would support local processors and value-adders, who would in turn supply locally-owned retailers; and the nutrient cycle would be closed with local composting businesses recycling food waste and returning it to local farmers, growers and gardeners. The transport of produce from farms to processors and shops would again be coordinated through locally-owned and run transport businesses and wholesalers, whose businesses would constitute essential infrastructure for the efficient functioning of the local food economy.

Working alongside this monetised local food economy would be other, non-monetary expressions of local food. These would typically take different forms of self- and community-provisioning, such as backyard gardening, community gardens, school gardens, kerbside plantings, guerrilla gardening, edible streetscapes, and food swaps. These expressions of local food usually don’t make a direct monetary contribution to the local food economy, but they contribute indirectly by raising the visibility of local food and disseminating the values of a new culture based on more intimate connections with food. In other words, they begin to undermine the ‘common sense’ of the capitalist food system based on alienation and the cheap food complex (‘food from nowhere’), and to diffuse the new ‘good sense’ of food that is socially fair, ecologically healing, and connected. They are further manifestations of the ‘circulation of the commons’ in an emergent solidarity economy.

We have then, in the ideal scenario, a web of mutually supportive activities with multiple actors working to support each other in different ways and at different points within what can be conceptualised as a local food system. For local producers to sell locally, they need local markets and retail outlets; and for those businesses to be successful, they must in turn be supported by adequate local demand. To what extent do the current activities on the Coffs Coast approximate this ideal?

In terms of production, the larger volumes in the main categories - beef, dairy, bananas, blueberries, garlic - are shipped out of the region to the centralised wholesale markets in Brisbane and Sydney; and then some of the produce returns to the region (together with produce from many other regions) via the same markets. The big supermarket chains have centralised their own distribution systems, and (with few exceptions) do not source produce locally.

While the great majority of the food economy is not local, there are nevertheless clearly discernible local elements, and degrees of connectedness, which begin to

---

134 See Figure [1] on p19 of the Introduction to the thesis.
136 Interviews with local store managers and farmers, February-March 2011.
comprise a functioning local food economy. There are three key sets of actors here. The first are a few Coffs Harbour-based wholesalers who make a deliberate policy of sourcing some or all of their produce from local growers, rather than from the centralised wholesale markets in Brisbane and Sydney. The second are small retailers, and locally-owned wholefood stores, cafes and restaurants, that similarly privilege local produce. And the last is the small but growing network of growers’ markets in a number of centres in the region.

One wholesaler, Golden Dawn, has operated in Coffs Harbour for more than fifty years, and has traditionally serviced the local banana industry. This industry was, until the 1970s, Australia’s largest source of bananas. Golden Dawn only purchases locally grown produce. However, because it supplies the larger retailers, which have in recent years introduced more stringent accreditation requirements, they can only deal with the large commercial growers. Hence they operate with one foot inside an incipient local food economy, supporting local producers and facilitating local distribution; and one foot outside it, by supplying both local and non-local retailers.

A & D wholesalers, is more firmly integrated into the emerging local food economy. They source as much local produce as they can, and they supply locally-owned small grocers, restaurants and resorts. For both A & D, and the growers, the motivations are financial, as the owner, Felipe, explains:

The [big growers] will ring me and say we’ve got Lebanese Cucumbers, Sydney [market] are quoting $40, Brisbane $38, but with you we don’t have to pay the freight, you’re taking everything, the boxes don’t have to be new, they can be second-hand. We’ll charge you $30. The benefit to me is I save money, it’s a fresher product, and I’m buying locally. And not only am I buying locally, I’m selling locally, and it’s being consumed by locals. I sell to restaurants, pubs, fruit and veg stores…I’d definitely like to see more local produce…We [the three main wholesalers] all source as much local [produce] as we can. If anyone walks in here with something, I will buy it…

Felipe has made certain adjustments, such as second-hand boxes, which facilitate local growers supplying him. Amongst his customers, Felipe detects a preference for local produce amongst locally-owned and operated businesses:

The owners of businesses are the ones who care, the ones who know their business. Stefano from Fiascos [restaurant], he tastes his parsley, if the taste’s not right, he doesn’t want it. He never complains about price, just quality. If it’s local, he’ll take it, as long as the quality is good. Kim from Happy Frog pushes local - Bonville Fresh, Farmers’ Direct, Anuka - everyone wants local, they put it on their menu, it’s a marketing tool, they use it a lot.

The comment about Stefano highlights my earlier point: part of the transition to Food Sovereignty involves the transition from quantity (cheap food) to quality (good

---

137 “30 years ago we supplied 85% of Australia’s bananas. Today it’d be less than 3%, when Queensland’s not affected by an event”: Interview with Dave Norbury, Golden Dawn manager, 10.3.11.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid. Interview with the author, 8.3.11.
140 Ibid.
As an expression of Food Sovereignty, the trend towards food localisation supports this transition. Significantly, it does so by working within the existing (capitalist) market structures.

As elsewhere in Australia, the retail market for fresh produce is dominated by the major supermarkets; however an independent grocery sector does exist. In 2009 local business woman Kim Towner started the Happy Frog, a Coffs Harbour café / grocer selling fresh, dry and value-added produce. She started this business because she saw that, even though the two weekly Coffs growers’ markets were doing well, there was ‘still nowhere you [could] go and buy the local fruit and veg all the time’. Her ‘point of difference’ in the market was both local produce and sustainability. At first, she did deal directly with a lot of growers, but then found that too difficult to maintain for all her produce, so she turned to Felipe at A & D instead, knowing that he offered a wide range of local produce.

Thus we can see here firmly established networks and relationships between growers, wholesalers, retailers; and between retailers and their customers. Connectedness, the key organising principle of food sovereignty, is clearly observable.

Farmers markets are a new and rapidly growing phenomenon in Australia, with the Australian Farmers’ Markets Association (AFMA) reporting that since the first market commenced trading in 1999, in excess of 150 markets now (2011) operate around the country. There are, as discussed in Chapter 3, two weekly growers’ markets in Coffs Harbour (one run by the Council, the other by Kim Towner), and one fortnightly market in Bellingen.

The social connectivity and multi-functionality of farmers’ markets - in terms of healthy eating, food security, and local economic development - were highlighted

---

141 Interview with the author, 25.3.11.
142 He’s got a list of what he’s got that’s local – so we get the local stuff first, even if it’s a bit dearer. And he’ll know, he’ll say that’s Zuni’s strawberries, and that’s Dave’s lettuce, and so on. We know who they all are anyway, and we still get direct lettuce, herbs, beans, zucchinis, tomatoes, sometimes capsicums, bananas, citrus in season, potatos and pumpkins: ibid.
144 In 2010 a new market was established in Taylor’s Arm, a small rural community in the Nambucca Valley Shire, in the southern part of the Coffs Coast region. These markets are highly prized for their conviviality, atmosphere, and their contribution to community life, as Michael Burt, convenor of the NSW Farmers’ Association, says of the Taylors’ Arm market:

We don’t have enough local stallholders as yet, but it’s just been great for the community out there. There are some market gardeners with stalls there – where we are, it’s a lot of beef. But the atmosphere is just great – it’s the best thing that’s ever happened out there, we really needed it. You can get great local coffee, and bacon and egg rolls – it’s fantastic. It’s once a fortnight, pulling good numbers in. We’ve sold out of our finger limes there.

Interview with the author, 28.3.11.
by the AFMA in their submission to the Federal Government on its proposed National Food Plan.145

Farmers’ and growers’ markets also make a direct economic contribution to their local economies. A Rapid Market Assessment of the Coffs Harbour growers’ market showed that an estimated 2,600 patrons shopped at the market during its eight hours of operation, spending a total of $61,230 at the market itself, and additional $110,942 on additional shopping and other activities in the city centre. Averaged over the year, this meant that in excess of $3 million was spent at the market, and a further $5.77 million on additional shopping and activities.146

These findings are consistent with research undertaken for the Victorian Farmers’ Market Association into inter alia the visitation patterns and shopping behaviours of farmers’ market customers, as well as the economic and social impacts of farmers’ markets in Victoria.147

One area of potential connectivity, highlighted in the passage from the AFMA submission quoted above, is between farmers’ markets and food security networks; that is, charitable providers of emergency food relief to families and individuals in need. In the United States, where such practices are well established, this takes the form of farmers’ markets setting up systems which allow recipients of emergency government food relief (known as ‘food stamps’) to redeem these vouchers for fresh local produce, thereby improving health outcomes and supporting local growers and farmers.148 Nothing similar has as yet been established in Australia, even as demand for the Australian equivalent of food stamps - food vouchers - has

145 “Farmers’ markets deliver fresh food to urban and rural communities. They have the capacity to educate people about healthy eating, and can contribute to a reduction in obesity…They can underpin food security networks and can act as the hub of local food systems. Farmers’ markets can connect CSA farms with consumers, also providing a commercial outlet for community and school gardens. Farmers’ markets can promote food groups, food trails and farmgate fresh food outlets and can vitally connect isolated farmers with their peers and new customers”: AFMA op cit.

146 A Rapid Market Assessment is ‘a collaborative learning process in which a team of market managers and others study a host market’, gathering information to learn more about the market through two principle methods, attendance counts and dot survey: Lev, L., Brewer, L., and Stephenson, G., 2008, ‘Tools for Rapid Market Assessments’, Special Report 1088-E, Oregon Small Farms Technical Report No.6. The attendance count involves stationing researchers at each entry point to the market, and counting all who enter for 20 minutes during each hour of the market’s operation: ibid. The Rapid Market Assessment of the Coffs Harbour Farmers Market was undertaken by the market’s manager, the author, and two other volunteers, on 15.4.11. The results are held by the author and the Council, however they are as yet unpublished.

147 Victorian Farmers’ Markets Association, 2010, ‘Market Research Project Report’, October 2010. In terms of visitation patterns, this research reported that one or more persons from 53% of all Victorian households visited a farmers’ market at least once a year, with 25% of all households reporting a visitation frequency of at least once a month. The average spend by each customer at the market and surrounding local businesses was estimated at $70, representing a weekly contribution of $2 million into the local Victorian economy: ibid. The $2 million figure is based on an estimated 35,000 weekly patrons of farmers’ markets across Victoria.

148 One such example is the ‘Philly Food Bucks program’, a collaboration between the Food Trust and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, which augments the value of food stamps by an additional $2 in the form of the ‘Philly Food Bucks’: http://www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/farmers_market_program.php, accessed 11.11.11. An estimated 2 million food stamp recipients in the US participate in such programs: http://www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201110/s3337921.htm, accessed 11.11.11.
risen sharply in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis.\textsuperscript{149} The Coffs Coast region is no exception to this trend, however the potential synergies between emergency relief and local fresh produce have yet to be explored.\textsuperscript{150}

In terms of the trajectories for local food on the Coffs Coast, the first observation to be made is that the developments in this region are, as I have consistently argued in this thesis, part of a much larger and quite dynamic national and international trend. That trend, as I discussed in Chapter 3, is clearly in an expansionary phase: farmers’ markets are being continually established, community-supported agriculture initiatives are constantly emerging, the demand for community gardens is rising, and increasing numbers of individuals are growing food themselves in their own gardens.

The Permablitz movement is but one expression of this expansionary trend.\textsuperscript{151} The first Permablitz was held in Melbourne in 2006, and since then well over 100 have been held around Australia; and the movement has spread internationally, with Permablitz groups now formed in Istanbul, Hawaii, Sintra (Portugal), Dallas Texas, Montreal and Calgary.\textsuperscript{152} As it encourages a measure of self-reliance and the acquisition of the skills necessary to accomplish such a goal, Permablitzes and related events directly contribute to wider processes of de-commodification that challenge the logic and rationality of the globalising capitalist food system. Similarly, they are manifestations of the solidarity economy which is the immanent political-economic tendency of food sovereignty.

It is no coincidence that these expressions of the solidarity economy are increasing at a time of economic hardship and austerity. In the United States, sales of food gardening products reached $3 billion in both 2009 and 2010, representing a 20% increase on the pre-crisis figures of 2008.\textsuperscript{153} Similarly, consumer spending on food-related gardening in the United Kingdom rose 10% in 2009, clearly driven by government austerity, according to one retail analyst:

\begin{quote}
The impact of recession on the consumer mindset will be a lasting fillip to the gardening sub-sector. A heightened austerity is driving a trend towards ‘grow your
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{149} The Australian Council for Social Services found that, on a national level, community providers of emergency relief reported a 22% increase in demand for their services over 12 months, and a consequent 19% increase in the numbers of eligible recipients that they had to turn away because of lack of capacity to meet the rising demand: ACOSS, 2011, ‘Australian Community Sector Survey’, available at: \url{http://www.acoss.org.au/media/release/community_sector_unable_to_keep_up_with_demand_for_services_acoss_report}, accessed 11.11.11.

\textsuperscript{150} Emergency Food Relief providers - such as St Vincents de Paul, the Salvation Army, and Lifehouse Church - in the Coffs Harbour region, interviewed by the author in February and March 2011, reported a sharp rise in demand for all forms of emergency relief (electricity and medical assistance as well as food vouchers) since 2009. This is consistent with the ACOSS research, cited above. \url{http://www.permablitz.net}, accessed 12.10.10.

\textsuperscript{151} \url{http://www.permablitz.net/regional-groups}, accessed 11.11.11.

\textsuperscript{152} National Gardening Association, 2011, ‘Food Gardening Sales Total $3 billion for the Second Year in a Row: People are Doing More Lawn and Garden Activities themselves and Hiring Fewer Services’, available at: \url{http://assoc.garden.org/press/press.php?q=show&id=3457&pr=pr_research}, accessed 11.11.11.
own’, while the inexpensive nature of gardening as a pastime saw it grow in popularity amongst more frugal consumers.\textsuperscript{154}

Expectations about the short-to-medium term future of the globalising capitalist economy of course diverge significantly, from those who believe that growth has essentially come to an end, permanently; to those who argue that the recovery will soon be on the way.\textsuperscript{155} However, with even the new Head of the International Monetary Fund issuing dire warnings about the global economy facing a ‘lost decade’ of ‘weak growth and deflation’, it seems likely that the drivers impelling the expansion of the solidarity economy around food will be present for the foreseeable future.\textsuperscript{156} In the Coffs Coast region, the emergence of two community gardens in Bellingen, one in Coffs Harbour; two Permablitz groups (Bellingen and Coffs Harbour), and a seed savers’ network (Bellingen) are all expressions of this trajectory towards greater self-provision, self-reliance and an emerging solidarity economy. This solidarity economy is evidence of the organising principle of connectedness at work in the region, and suggests the movement in this region is slowly gaining in numerical strength, attracting public support and, as discussed in Chapter 5, attaining some measure of political credibility.

The trend towards localisation is observable amongst commercial growers, albeit for different reasons, as Michael Burt of the NSW Farmers Association explains:

I think you’ll see, and I’ve started to see it already, because of the changing demographics in the area, and the pressure on farm viability, there will be a strong trend towards local food and value adding. There will be a big role for the farmers’ markets, and the local supermarkets and retail outlets may have to look at it too, as a way of [distinguishing] themselves from the Coles and the Woolworths, by selling a lot of local produce. This is what the Coop in Macksville has been doing, after the opening of the Woolworths there last year. We’ve started to see a lot more local grown labelling in their veggie section. Which means there’ll be a [bigger] market for the local farmers.\textsuperscript{157}

At the same time, the central market system will continue to play a leading role in food supply chains, and the commercial growers and farmers, even as they supply more local outlets, will continue to use it, because the local market is just not big enough to absorb the volumes they produce.\textsuperscript{158} Thus, while existing distribution,
transport and supply networks will likely remain in place, demand for local food is growing. The question then becomes how can this demand be effectively met, and the emerging local food economy supported, in terms of marketing. As Michael Burt explains, farmers will be unable to cope with this burden:

The problem for farmers is that they don’t have the time to do a lot of the direct marketing themselves. Farming is a full-time occupation. It’s hard for them to go down to the big growers’ market in Newcastle every fortnight. The central markets will stay the same - but there will be more and more marketing of local food to consumers. There’s just some logistical and practical aspects that need to be addressed. Farmers don’t have the time to do that themselves, and that’s why the central market system is there.  

The ‘logistical and practical aspects’ are arguably key to the greater expansion of the local food economy; and I return to them in the Conclusion with a brief exploration of a new innovation emerging in the United States to address exactly these issues: the multifunctional food hub. Before moving on, however, I want to highlight two additional points regarding local food, in terms of my research questions. The first is the potential for it to be co-opted as simply another element of ‘consumer choice’ within the dominant supermarket system; and indeed this is already happening on the Coffs Coast, with one of the two major supermarkets sourcing directly from local growers and marketing the produce accordingly. Having regard to the largely negative role played by the supermarket ‘duopoly’ in Australia, the integrity and transformative potential of the local food movement will depend on its capacity to avoid the fate of being ‘just another shopping choice’.

Secondly, another danger facing the local food movement is the potential for over-zealous enforcement of food safety regulations that, according to some Food Sovereignty advocates in the United States, amounts to ‘harassment’ and ‘criminalisation’ of small-scale and even home producers.  

At the same time, the fact that authorities in certain regions appear to be attempting to suppress the local food movement is arguably evidence of its growing popularity and appeal, and the extent to which it is perceived as a threat by corporate agribusiness that stands to lose market share as the local food economy grows in popularity. The perception of such harassment, and the desire to assert local autonomy in the face of a perceived over-mighty and corporate-biased bureaucracy, is clearly one of the

---

159 Interview with the author.
factors behind the recent passage in a number of US municipalities of ‘Local Food and Community Self-Governance’ Ordinances (reproduced as Appendix F). This growing politicisation of the food system in the core capitalist country points towards a shift in the balance of forces.

**Robert Pekin & Food Connect**

In Chapter 3, I discussed the theory and practice of Community-Supported Agriculture, and the particular form that it has taken in Australia under the leadership of Food Connect and its founder, Robert Pekin. In the final section of this chapter, I further consider some of the particular features of Food Connect, with a focus on exploring the connectivities it has established amongst participants in an emerging solidarity economy, and offer some provisional thoughts about its trajectory. I pursue these matters further in the Conclusion.

Having been involved with Food Connect in a personal and professional capacity since 2009, and having observed the growth of the local and alternative food movement in Australia for a number of years, I believe it is no exaggeration to state that the existence of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) in this country is largely due to the energy, vision and commitment of one individual: Robert Pekin. This statement is not to eulogise or romanticise his personal achievements, considerable though they are. Rather, it is to recognise first, the capacity to effect broader social change that such individuals have; and secondly, that Food Connect as it exists today has been the culmination of many years of trial and error; a willingness to experiment, to fail, to observe; and to learn from mistakes.

One of the greatest strengths of Food Connect has from its earliest days lain in the quality and depth of the relationships that it has managed to foster. This was apparent in the emergence of the first iteration of Food Connect from the ashes of the multi-farmer Lockyer Valley CSA. Already in that first group of Brisbane-based subscribers to the failed CSA, a committed core of ‘mums’, as Robert Pekin calls them, met with him and insisted that the CSA be moved to Brisbane, and be set up as a dedicated business with Robert in charge, rather than the farmers.

Through the contacts he had built up over the years, Robert managed to effect a seamless transition to the new business, and it expanded rapidly, to around 600 boxes a week by October 2004. However, with the entire operation being run on a cash-basis out of Robert’s one-bedroom flat, matters quickly began to get out of hand and ‘the mums’, a number of whom were also working as part-time staff, stepped in once more to enforce a break of some months at the end of 2004.

---

161 As documented by the Food for Maine’s Future, whose mission is ‘to build a just, secure, sustainable and democratic food system to the benefit of all Maine farmers, communities and the environment’, the first of these Ordinances was motivated by state food safety rules which would prohibit the outdoor processing of poultry destined for sale, impacting smaller farmers. Amongst other matters, the Local Food & Community Self-Governance Ordinance purports to exempt from licensing and inspection requirements local food producers and processors where food is sold directly to the end consumer for the purposes of home consumption: Saving Seeds, Issue 12, Winter 2012, available at: https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1221/images/Saving%20Seeds%20Winter%202012%20Web.pdf, accessed 10.1.12.

162 The following discussion is based on a detailed semi-structured interview conducted with Robert Pekin on 2-3 November, 2011.
Despite working very long hours, Robert was not receiving any wage from the enterprise, and he pushed himself to the point of physical and mental exhaustion.\(^\text{163}\)

In 2005, Food Connect was re-launched, with the main drive coming once again from the subscriber ‘mums’, rather than the farmers.\(^\text{164}\) A business plan was prepared and Robert had an exploratory meeting with Bendigo Bank’s community arm, but no financing was available given the lack of previous business experience. So the enterprise was self-financed via a number of long-term (6-12 month) subscriptions.

On its re-launch Food Connect had a website and an online ordering platform, which were significant improvements, but ‘it was still [very] hard work’, as Robert recalls. Because the business did not have warehouse premises that allowed large trucks to make deliveries, Robert himself had to arrange all deliveries of produce at the Brisbane central markets, through individual agreements with farmers and independent transport companies. Initially this meant Robert going to the markets from 2 am to 4 am, however the drivers then decided to make life easier for themselves and Robert by organising for Food Connect produce to be located on pallets ‘hidden’ within coolrooms.\(^\text{165}\)

In devising this system and building relationships around it, Robert speaks of the level of camaraderie and trust amongst truck operators and fork-lift drivers who were keen to help Food Connect get a start by staying ‘under the radar’ of the normal market rules:

\[\text{[W]e were all on the same team, and the forkies too, because they were getting shafted by their agents. In [the central markets] it’s cut-throat, [a] complete [free] market economy, just gone mad, no sense of co-operation. So there was this camaraderie...In that miasma of activity my stuff would be figured out, there’d be a pallet there and a pallet here, and I’d pay the forkies a carton of beer a month. It was really fascinating, this barter economy, we were helping each other out. They would let me know of farmers they knew who might fit the bill, and the transport companies were all involved too. They could see that it was growing, and they could help it, they could pick up from farmers like they used to do in the old days. So all those relationships were coming back, and this was something that was completely un-thought of...it made me aware that this was another part of the local economy that had been completely routed. And it was a vital part of the link.}\(^\text{166}\)

Getting to know about the farmers who could potentially be suppliers of Food Connect was essential to developing the business and ensuring its long-term success. Often potential farmers were mentioned to Robert by word of mouth, and sometimes he would purchase good-looking produce from such agents purely in

\(^{163}\) When the break came, Robert says he ‘probably slept for about three weeks’: interview with the author.

\(^{164}\) The farmers were interested and ready to get involved again, says Robert, but it wasn’t them pushing for the business to re-start.

\(^{165}\) As Robert explains, to receive produce in the central markets as a seller, the normal practice is that you have to register with the market management, pay a license fee, and buy through one of the market agents. Because he was trying to minimise costs as a start-up business, and because he wanted to deal directly with the farmers, Robert decided to ignore these established norms.

\(^{166}\) Interview with the author, 2.11.11.
order to get the farmer’s details on the box, and then he would contact the farmer directly.\textsuperscript{167}

Even despite the chaotic experience with the Lockyer Valley farmers, Robert and his staff still paid insufficient attention to putting sound financial management systems in place, right from the start of Food Connect. This was something they got ‘badly wrong’, Robert acknowledges, and it took a ‘lot of time’ subsequently to get it properly resolved. Indeed as of early 2012, Food Connect still finds itself in a critical financial situation, with the need to raise tens of thousands of dollars to pay off accrued debts.\textsuperscript{168}

For Robert, the biggest single success of Food Connect is that it is still in existence, six years after its establishment. Despite its journey being a ‘really rocky road’, the reputation of Food Connect well exceeds any direct financial impact it may have made in terms of market share:

> We’re really well known. We’re still not doing as well financially as we hoped we would be by this stage, but beyond that, the successes are that we are almost an iconic part of Brisbane. So many people know of Food Connect, it’s become a Brisbane identity. It’s part of the fabric of food in Brisbane, this Food Connect thing, that’s up to something completely different to normal business models, and normal food business models.\textsuperscript{169}

Food Connect business models have been started in Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Bellingen; and Robert has been contacted numerous times by people in other towns and cities around Australia wanting to do the same thing. As he puts it, ‘the fact that so many people want to copy us is a pretty good indicator of our success’.

When he started Food Connect, Robert wanted not only to bring ‘farmers and city folk’ closer together, but also to ‘cause a ripple movement beyond food’; and he has seen this achieved in the many relationships that have been formed by and through Food Connect. Again, connectedness is the organising principle. One example of this are the investments that Brisbane-based subscribers have made in some of the Food Connect farms, to enable them to build holiday homes and establish bed & breakfasts on the properties, ‘so farmers have another source of income through agri-tourism’. Another example of the depth of the relationships that the model has succeeded in creating is the network of City Cousins, the ‘mums’ who have become ‘the backbone of the organisation’ and who, despite being to a certain extent neglected by the staff, have ‘really stuck at it’.

A third major achievement is the construction of a ‘non-mainstream’ food enterprise that was based on a hybridised product, certified organic plus ‘chemical-free, eco-friendly’ produce. Explaining the reasons for this combination ‘has been

\textsuperscript{167} After some months of ‘shady dodgy stuff’, Robert transitioned to paying a per-pallet fee to collect his produce via the Brisbane Market Unloading Service. Once Food Connect moved into premises large enough to accommodate semi-trailers, they started taking direct deliveries, always from the independent transport companies, with whom Robert has established a high degree of trust, such that the drivers let themselves in and out of the warehouse to make deliveries: interview with the author, 3.11.11.

\textsuperscript{168} Personal conversations, September–November 2011.

\textsuperscript{169} Interview with the author, 2.11.11.
an enormous load’ and ‘pure hard work’ to sell to potential new subscribers. Further, it has brought Robert into considerable conflict with the organic industry as a whole and many individuals within it, who have disagreed strongly with his decision not to sell only certified organic produce. However in his view this decision, and the commitment to stay with it, has been one of the key reasons for the impact Food Connect has achieved:

A lot of farmers believe in us, just because of that [commitment]. We’re not excluding any farmers from our process, we’re here for all farmers, and for all people who want to have good nutritious food...If I’d segmented the market, and said, right, we’re only going to go with organic produce, I don’t think we’d have had anywhere near the ripple effect, or the impact we’re having within the farming community, and the health [sector], who know that affordability is not where organics is at. If you look at it from the social justice perspective, in terms of treating farmers fairly, and making food affordable...That’s been the hardest thing to do, but I’m so proud of it. 170

Thus the hybrid version has allowed Food Connect to keep its produce affordable, comparable, Robert says, with the prices of conventional produce being sold in the major supermarkets, and less than half what would typically be paid in 100% organic markets and shops. Making ‘good food affordable’ has been ‘a hallmark’ of Food Connect, says Robert, but holding to this commitment – returning 50% of the food dollar to the farmers, and keeping the business’s margins low to maximise affordability, has come at a financial cost to Food Connect itself.

This spirit of sacrifice and dedication to a bigger cause can be observed throughout Robert’s career after losing his father’s dairy farm; and he has asked it not only of himself, but also of Food Connect and all who have worked for it. Arguably this reveals a contradiction in both Robert and Food Connect, because, on one level, the commitment to social justice for farmers and fairness for subscribers has been at the expense of decent terms and conditions for Food Connect staff, Robert included.

In terms of challenges, Robert mentions two in particular: trying to marry his own expectations about internal workplace democracy with efficient business operation; and the failure to combat the perennial phenomenon of customer ‘churn’. Both are linked, and contribute, to, a third major challenge: ensuring that the business is on a sound financial footing.

As someone who was strongly influenced by the values and history of the cooperative movement, Robert has also wanted to ‘be true to participatory decision-making in the running’ of Food Connect. While this was possible in the first couple of years with a very small and highly motivated staff, who were willing to spend unpaid time in after-hours meetings, he found that as the business grew, staff turned over and the motivations of the new staff changed, this became increasingly difficult. Many staff wanted to be paid to attend after-hours meetings, and since the financial situation of the business didn’t allow for this, Robert found that two dynamics were manifesting. One was that decision-making was becoming more centralised and autocratic, in the interests of business efficiency. The other

170 Interview with the author, 3.11.11.
was that some members of staff (himself included) were working 80-hour weeks, to compensate for those who were ‘only doing their job’.

With the third generation of staff now being recruited, the business has become much more professional, but at the same time is recovering some of the original spirit of volunteerism from its early days. Robert believes that with the combination of the two his original ideals of strong workplace democracy can be recovered, because all the staff will ‘contribute a small amount to the concept’, rather than a few contributing disproportionately.

Customer ‘churn’, whereby a business has a high turnover of customers, has been a constant feature of Food Connect since its inception; and has yet to be ‘successfully addressed’, according to Robert:

There’s probably 200 subscribers who have been with us over the long term, and will never leave us, and we probably have 1-2 of them join us each month. But 20 is our average new customers per week, and we only retain two of those 20. That’s been pretty constant over the years...it’s a 90% turnover, which is huge.\textsuperscript{171}

At first, Robert wasn’t concerned about this churn, because his belief was that amongst the one-million-plus residents of Brisbane, there had to be one thousand people who would ‘get’ the Food Connect model, and who would ‘buy into it without being a pain in the arse’:

That was my entire plan. Those one thousand people would tell their friends, and over time the world would wake up...[After 3 years] we started to address the churn - through education, the farm letter, me talking at events. But [these measures] haven’t addressed the churn. Professionalism in the boxes was an issue - at the start they were highly variable, the produce sometimes wasn’t great, because I had big ideals. [I thought that] [i]f there was a grub in their apple, they would chop the grub out, like people did in the old days. But [city folk] have been so attuned to the industrialised, glamour-food system and appearance, [so much so that] even for people who understood and got it, couldn’t understand why there were pests on the cabbage.\textsuperscript{172}

Eating locally, eating seasonally, accepting food that tastes good but may not look perfect - changing the culture around food in Australia in these directions has been hard work for Food Connect, and clearly constitutes a substantial barrier to the further expansion of the local food economy in this country. Educating customers to expect year-round availability and hence seemingly endless choice; for food to be ‘cheap’; and for it to look perfect, have become internalised as part of the contemporary common sense on which the capitalist food system rests. Challenging this now deeply-rooted culture, as Robert Pekin and Food Connect have discovered, is far from easy.

In keeping with its growing professionalism, one way in which Food Connect is now trying to tackle churn is through sophisticated marketing techniques.\textsuperscript{173} In this

\textsuperscript{171} Interview with the author, 2.11.11
\textsuperscript{172} Interview with the author, 3.11.11.
\textsuperscript{173} A strategy currently being discussed is a promotional campaign that links Food Connect with an appeal to the ‘inner radical’ inside us all, under the banner that Food Connect represents ‘food with
respect, the enterprise is working within the prevailing market logic, and utilising its technologies and strategies, in order to expand its sphere of influence and impact. This is reflective of a ‘Gramscian way of thinking’: understanding the context in which one operates; and taking advantage of the gaps and opportunities that it offers to advance a progressive political-economic project. In the process, the common sense of the capitalist food system can be critiqued on its own terrain, and the contours of the new good sense around food (ethical, fair, sustainable, resilient, local, and so on) are being mapped out. Of course these contours are readily susceptible to co-optation by the large retailers, and so the challenge for Food Connect and similar enterprises is to maintain their ‘point of difference’ in the market-place, which derives (in my assessment) from the breadth and depth of the relationships they create: their capacity to create and sustain connectedness, in place of alienation and separation.

Another strategy to become more financially viable is observable in the development of Food Connect itself, which has diversified from just supplying fruit and vegetable boxes to individual households (i.e. retailing), into wholesaling (supplying restaurants and cafes), catering and value-adding. In this, Food Connect is increasingly coming to resemble the emerging Food Hub sector, which, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, is rapidly growing in the United States. This sector emerged for two main reasons. First, in recognition of the need to scale up and diversify existing local food initiatives, which as discussed have been concentrated in forms of direct sales, to wholesaling and processing; and so achieve a much greater impact across the whole of the food economy. In the process, the social justice goals of improving the long-term viability of small and medium-sized farmers, and increasing the volume of good quality food reaching lower socio-economic groups, will, it is anticipated, be further advanced. Secondly, the creation of Food Hubs helps deal with emerging bottlenecks in the local food system, especially as regards aggregation, storage, cooling and distribution of fresh produce.

Research conducted by the US Department of Agriculture suggests that start-up capital, particularly in the form of government and philanthropic grants, has been important to the establishment of a majority of the Food Hubs. The author of this research, James Barham, makes the important point that there is a significant distinction between the supply chain of the mainstream commodity food system,

---


176 Kate Collier, manager of the Charlottesville Food Hub in West Virginia, stated that the $300,000 start-up grant they received was not enough, even with the very substantial in-kind support they received (existing warehouse infrastructure and a 60-acre demonstration farm): NGFN webinar _op cit_. The significance of such support can be seen in the fact that fully a third of Food Hubs are operating without any paid staff, according to the USDA research: Barham, J., 2011, ‘Regional Food Hubs: Understanding the Scope and Scale of Food Hub Operations. Preliminary Findings from a National Survey of Regional Food Hubs’, United States Department of Agriculture Marketing Service.
and the value chain of the emerging local and regional food system. The former is
transaction-based, one-off, commodity- and volume-driven, with suppliers being
interchangeable and thus competing for market access; while the latter is
relationship-based, has a longer time horizon, is centred on differentiated quality
products, suppliers are more likely to be unique, and is driven by co-operation.\textsuperscript{177} In
Barham’s words, ‘with a Food Hub there needs to be a much greater investment in
relationships, and it accordingly presents a range of challenges, but the
opportunities are great’.\textsuperscript{178}

This relationship-driven and co-operative nature of Food Hubs is illustrated by the
experience of the Local Food Hub in Charlottesville, West Virginia.\textsuperscript{179} This not-for-
profit enterprise grew out of the local food movement which started in the region
in 2006, and, according to its manager Kate Collier, its establishment was
motivated in particular by the ‘fall-out of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008’.\textsuperscript{180}
Their goal is to support local farmers by increasing the public’s access to locally-
grown food; and they do this through supplying local businesses and institutions,
about half of which are local public schools.\textsuperscript{181} Kate stresses that the establishment
of ‘good personal relationships with suppliers and buyers’ has been essential to
their success, as has diversification in terms of the numbers and types of clients and
market outlets.\textsuperscript{182}

A significant innovation adopted by the Local Food Hub has been the introduction of
a yearly ‘production planning meeting’ involving all their 50 small and medium-
sized family farmers, in which they plan out production schedules week-by-week
over the coming year, taking into account ‘high and low periods so as to even out
supply and avoid price collapses through gluts’.\textsuperscript{183} Following the meeting they
produce a ‘demand document’ which allows each farmer to submit a request to
supply a portion of the agreed production volume. Prices are determined following
the meeting and through surveys of central markets and other outlets, and are
agreed on a trust basis, rather than in a formal contract. This localised and
participatory planning was introduced following recognition that demand for local
food currently outstrips supply. The production planning innovation, together with
the Food Hub freeing up farmers’ time to concentrate on growing food, by assuming
responsibility for marketing the produce, has resulted, according to Kate, in a 30%
increase in local food production during 2010 alone.\textsuperscript{184}

A further factor in the success of the Local Food Hub, whose sales have risen from
$75,000 in 2009, to $375,000 in 2010, and an expected $600,000 in 2011, is its
‘high-quality sales team’, who have access to a range of ‘sophisticated marketing

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{177} Comments made during the NGFN webinar, \textit{op cit.}
\bibitem{178} \textit{Op cit.}
\bibitem{179} http://www.localfoodhub.org, accessed 1.6.11.
\bibitem{180} Comments made during the NGFN webinar, \textit{op cit.}
\bibitem{181} \textit{Ibid.} According to James Barham, over 50\% of all Food Hubs supply schools, and for 25\% of them
it’s their primary market: \textit{ibid.} The Local Food Hub has over 100 clients; apart from schools these
include local grocery stores, CSAs, and the multi-billion dollar food service provider Sysco.
\bibitem{182} Comments made during the NGFN webinar, \textit{op cit.}
\bibitem{183} \textit{Ibid.}
\bibitem{184} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{thebibliography}
materials that [Food Hub clients] can provide at point-of-sale to their customers, explaining the benefits of local food’. In Kate’s words, ‘We’re set up to make buying local as easy as possible’. Again, as with Food Connect, the Local Food Hub and similar emerging initiatives in the US and elsewhere are working within the market, using its tools and strategies, to re-orient the food system in quite radically different directions. As with Food Connect, these market-based approaches are built on the foundation of strong personal relationships.

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have presented a model of the political economy of food sovereignty, and compared it to the political-economy of the globalising capitalist food system. I have examined the growing agro-ecology movement, and the trends towards re-peasantisation, as reflective of the effectiveness to date of the Food Sovereignty movement and its campaigns. I have also analysed efforts to build a local food economy in Australia, with a particular focus on Robert Pekin as a pioneer in this field through the establishment of Food Connect.

A key theme which has emerged through this thesis is that, whereas the globalising capitalist food system runs according to the operating principle of alienation, the Food Sovereignty movement, as I have conceived it, is guided by the operating principle of connectedness. A key element of this connectedness is the quality and extent of the relationships on which the expressions of food sovereignty in agro-ecology and local food, are based. It is the building of these relationships, in my assessment, which has enabled the Food Sovereignty movement to expand so rapidly.

At the level of theory and critique, I have argued that food sovereignty is increasing in coherence in many respects, especially as regards agro-ecology. At the same time I have argued that there is a significant omission as regards the development of proposals addressing the needs of the majority of the working population in the core capitalist countries, rather than a singular focus on the needs of farmers. From the political perspective, this impedes the development of a convincing national-popular strategy and the building of broad-based alliances aimed at broader social transformation. These omissions, however, far from being fatal to the long-term effectiveness of food sovereignty as a social movement, indicate instead directions for future theoretical development and political praxis, including multiple opportunities for building broader alliances. This assessment is confirmed by the perspective adopted by the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement for 2012 and beyond.

The analysis undertaken in this chapter demonstrates that the Food Sovereignty movement clearly has momentum, which is important in terms of shifting the existing disposition of social, political and economic forces. The practices of agro-ecology are in a dynamic stage of development across much of Latin America, and beyond. La Via Campesina’s claim that ‘small farmers cool the planet’ is solidly grounded in the science of agricultural energetics and the growing recognition of

the sheer wastefulness of the globalising capitalist food system. It could justifiably be complemented with the claim that ‘small farmers feed the world’. Not content with staying in the niche realms of small-scale community-supported agriculture and farmers’ markets, local food activists and entrepreneurs, who represent the third pillar of Food Sovereignty, want to scale up the local food economy, and to grow and expand its social, economic and environmental impact, as witnessed in the recent emergence of Food Hubs across multiple sites in the United States.

At the same time, there remain significant challenges and barriers. In some places, peasants and small farmers may be ‘holding the ground’, but in many others they are not. Agrarian reform processes are stagnating, even where the peasantry is organised and mobilised. Capitalist monocultures destined for export, and therefore undermining of food sovereignty principles and aspirations, continue to expand in many countries. In the core regions of the capitalist food system, core elements of its common sense, notably an apparently deeply entrenched cultural preference for ‘supermarket food’ amongst the majority of the population, appears to be holding firm despite growing critiques and creation of alternatives. The local food movement faces both the constant risk of co-optation of its progressive ambitions, as has already arguably occurred with organic and fair trade produce, and the threat of outright harassment and suppression.

186 Martinez-Alier 2011 op cit.
Conclusion

Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will

Antonio Gramsci

The task I set myself in this thesis was to determine whether the Food Sovereignty movement was engaging ‘deeply and constructively’ with these tensions. I carried out that task by means of proposing and testing a hypothesis: whether the emerging Food Sovereignty movement is a potential counter-hegemonic political force that is capable of effecting transformative change in the globalising capitalist food system.

In this final chapter, I draw together and synthesise the previous seven chapters of the thesis, and set out my conclusions regarding the matter of the counter-hegemonic potential of food sovereignty vis-à-vis the globalising capitalist food system. I examine first the extent to which food sovereignty has critically engaged with the common sense of the system, and the extent to which it has successfully articulated a coherent ‘good sense’ in the form of a compelling and unifying political project. Secondly, I evaluate the degree of success of the Food Sovereignty movement’s attempts to influence the political and institutional context which sustains the expansion of the globalising capitalist food system. Here I discuss in particular the reliance on human rights by La Via Campesina, and the early moves towards the institutionalisation of food sovereignty in Latin America. Thirdly, I offer an assessment of the extent to which the Food Sovereignty movement has disrupted the principal circuits of the globalising capitalist food system, particularly in terms of the creation of parallel and alternative forms of social exchange around food through diverse manifestations of the local food movement, by reference to my Australian case studies.

These moments of evaluation will in turn allow me to arrive at an assessment of the existing balance of forces, as between the actors of the globalising capitalist food system and the proponents of food sovereignty. The analysis cannot, however, stop at that point. There are three further steps that I must undertake. The first, consistent with the perspective I have adopted with regard to social movement theory and analysis - namely, that the main focus concerns the trajectory of the movement under consideration, rather than a mechanistic assessment of what its ‘outcomes’ have been to date - is to consider the likely and potential ‘vectors of expansion’ of the Food Sovereignty movement.¹ The second is to consider its

shortcomings and contradictions. And finally, I need to briefly revisit the discussion of the context of the globalising capitalist food system, paying regard to its vulnerabilities and fragilities, and bearing in mind Gramsci’s insight that hegemony, far from being achieved and monolithic, is constantly in a process of being negotiated and renegotiated, according to changing historical conjunctures and opportunities.

Only at the end of what is in effect a six-stage analysis can I confidently make my assessment as to what constitutes the ‘effective reality’, and from there state my conclusion regarding the counter-hegemonic potential of the Food Sovereignty movement. And this conclusion itself is at best tentative and provisional, having regard to the extreme state of fluidity and the rapid pace of change which characterises the global panorama at the beginning of 2012.

**Common sense and good sense**

In the case of the food system, Gramsci’s conceptualisation of ‘deep hegemony’ assumes particular significance in the mass consumer societies of the core capitalist countries. I have argued that the complex of ‘cheap food’ is integral to the common sense of the globalising capitalist food system; and have discussed recent critical scholarship which suggests that this complex is, and always has been, structural to the successful functioning of the capitalist economy as a whole.¹ I discussed how there is a pervasive culture of cheap food in Australia, continually reinforced by supermarket ‘price wars’ and the proliferation of home brand product lines. This culture has been a key factor in the subjection of Australian farmers to the ‘cost-price squeeze’ that has been so damaging to farm viability.²

The common sense for many people runs even deeper, beyond price, to structure common understandings of where food comes from and how it is to be obtained. Consistent with a ubiquitous market ideology, it appears that the supermarket has become, for large numbers of people, the only place to buy food. Even when food at the supermarkets is much more expensive than other nearby outlets, it appears that many shoppers will prefer to purchase it there, whether for reasons of convenience, coupon inducements or other factors. As I discussed previously, a further element of this ‘deep’ common sense is the aesthetic standards of supermarkets, which privilege appearance over taste. What we see clearly at work here is the dynamic of contemporary, mass consumer capitalism towards homogenisation.³ For actors within the Food Sovereignty movement, such as Robert Pekin and Food Connect, these aspects of capitalist common sense - aesthetics, ‘cheap food’, the perception of ‘unlimited choice’ and the convenience of the ‘one-stop shop’ - are proving difficult to overcome. They constitute clear cultural and material barriers to the greater realisation of the transformative potential of the Food Sovereignty movement.

---

² This perception is, as I have discussed, confirmed by the empirical evidence, which shows that Australian farmers ‘must now produce, on average, four times the volume to earn half what their forebears did in 1950’: Henzell 2007, op cit.
³ Albritton 2009 op cit.
In the Introduction, I stated that the manner of framing the debate around food and agriculture determines to a significant extent the range of possible ‘solutions’ that might be proposed. In terms of the Gramscian method, how the debates are framed is key to underpinning the common sense of the system’s hegemony. Quite simply, the terms of the questions that are asked will be determinative of the range of possible answers. A central task of the Food Sovereignty movement has been to pose different types of questions - and to suggest different types of responses - to those typically asked by the leading actors within the globalising capitalist food system.

Even prior to the asking of the questions is the conceptualisation of the key problematic of the field under consideration. In the case of food and agriculture, the analysis undertaken in this thesis reveals that, for the globalising capitalist food system, there are two principal problematics, on the macro level. The first is that of ‘food security’, conceived as the ‘challenge of feeding the world’s growing population’; and this has typically been reduced to a mathematical formula, whereby the world’s food supply must either double, or nearly double, over the next few decades in order to meet rising demand. Once the problematic is conceived as largely one of supply, then, as I have discussed at some length, the ‘solution’ almost invariably is concentrated on boosting production.

This focus on production conveniently marries with the second key problematic of the capitalist food system, which is concerned with the social, political and technological challenges about how to raise levels of productivity, profitability and growth within the system. Here the concern is with what Jason Moore terms the ongoing generation of the ‘ecological surplus’ via the ‘cheap food complex’ which, for reasons discussed in Chapter 6, has become integral to the successful functioning of the capitalist system as a whole. Historically, this surplus has been produced through the inseparable dynamic of ‘productivity and plunder’; and this dynamic is clearly observable today in the form of the ongoing processes of accumulation by dispossession that typify globalising capitalism; and the promise of technology-driven yield increases through inter alia genetically modified organisms. Whether the ecological surplus can be renewed in an era of falling yields, rising austerity, increasing cost of living pressures and the encountering of biophysical constraints and contradictions is, as I have indicated, an open question.

The system’s heightened vulnerability because of this convergence of circumstances and internal dynamics is an issue that the Food Sovereignty movement ought to be emphasising at every opportunity. In focusing on this increasing vulnerability, the Food Sovereignty movement can draw attention to its own ontology of connectedness, contrasting this with the capitalist food system’s ontology of alienation, as evidenced in the ecological and social rifts. In the pan-indigenous cosmology of buen vivir, the Food Sovereignty movement has a potentially powerful

---

5 This also touches on questions of epistemology: ‘What sort of knowledge is produced...and its legitimacy and authority, are central to the ways in which global environmental problems become, or do not become, “problems” and how they are construed and composed’: Peet, R.; Robbins, P.; and Watts, M., (eds.), 2011, *Global Political Ecology*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon., 4.
6 Moore 2010 op cit.
philosophical and politically unifying alternative to the arguably failing capitalist cosmology of ‘economic growth’ and GDP. The current efforts to sustain ‘global economic growth’ and restore profitability through austerity are coming increasingly into conflict with the quality of life of large numbers of people, thus further exposing the system’s foundational principle of alienation. The challenge for the Food Sovereignty movement is to find ways to communicate effectively these theoretical insights, which can form the core of its ‘good sense’, in order to expand its size and political capacities.

The Food Sovereignty movement has made substantive progress in such directions. As I have shown through the thesis, a seminal achievement of food sovereignty activists and intellectuals has been to ‘problematize these problematics’: to disrupt the comfortable narrative that the challenge of ‘feeding the world’ is all about raising production, and that this must happen through the adoption of new technologies and via the imposition of the rigours of competition through the expansion of ‘free trade’ agreements.

Of course people must be fed, say food sovereignty advocates: the issue is by whom, and by what methods and mechanisms, and according to what rules. Here La Via Campesina and the Food Sovereignty movement have set up a series of oppositions - the antitheses to the theses of the globalising capitalist food system - such as agro-ecology rather than industrialised, input-dependent monocultures; fair trade rather than free trade; small and peasant farmers rather than corporate agribusiness; and local food rather than ‘food from nowhere’. Some of these are more fully developed than others: the fair trade agenda, as I have discussed, has received relatively little attention from La Via Campesina, which has concentrated its efforts on opposing the free trade agenda being pursued by the United States and its allies.7 By contrast agro-ecology, as I discussed in Chapter 7, has now become a transnational movement in its own right with an impressive and growing literature substantiating its claims to represent a fair and sustainable set of agricultural practices and methodologies, which collectively have the capacity to ‘feed the world’.

Food sovereignty proponents should observe the trajectory of the movement for agro-ecology, and seek to apply these lessons more broadly to other aspects of the food sovereignty agenda. The issue of trade has been, and continues to be, central to La Via Campesina and the broader Food Sovereignty movement. As yet, however, the Food Sovereignty movement has not really moved beyond its oppositional stance and rather vague generalities about the need for ‘fair trade’ based on relations ‘free of oppression and discrimination’ between men and women, and nation states. Yet a movement for fair trade, articulated and led by NGOs, has been

---

7 As discussed in Chapter 5, Nettie Wiebe of the Canadian National Farmers Union cites the ‘throwing of sand in the WTO gears’ as one of the main achievements of LVC; she does not mention the articulation of a coherent fair and transparent trade agenda that would meet the needs of the world’s small farmers. Further, she acknowledges that the free trade agenda has in some ways simply shifted venues, most recently in the form of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, involving the United States, Australia, Vietnam, Chile, Peru, Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia: see http://aftinet.org.au/cms/trans-pacific-partnership-agreement/trans-pacific-partnership-agreement, accessed 17.11.11.
in existence for some time, and has incorporated many small farmers.\textsuperscript{8} There are legitimate questions regarding the extent to which ‘fair trade’ has genuinely transformative potential, or whether it has simply been reabsorbed into the dominant circuits of the capitalist food system, whereby ‘fair trade’ products do little more than occupy certain spaces on the shelves of the supermarkets that increasingly exercise dominant control over the system as a whole.\textsuperscript{9} Nevertheless, if the Food Sovereignty movement wishes to be genuinely transformative - and therefore counter-hegemonic - it must develop, propose and where possible implement its alternative agenda of fair, transparent and democratic trade. In this way it can make a substantive contribution, both to its own development, and to the wider Fair Trade movement.

In Chapter 7, I demonstrated that the political economy of food sovereignty represents an authentic and in many respects a coherent alternative to the political economy of the globalising capitalist food system; and that through its ‘three pillars’ of redistributive agrarian reform, agro-ecology and food localisation, it genuinely responds to the key tensions of the capitalist food system. The authentic and transformative nature of the food sovereignty vision is given added weight through its explicit linkage to \textit{buen vivir}, which arguably represents a more compelling alternative to the capitalist dependence on GDP growth than Northern-originated concepts such as ‘steady state economy’ and ‘de-growth’.\textsuperscript{10} In any event, the emerging linkage of food sovereignty to developing post-growth theory and praxis means that it is beginning to tackle at a deep structural and theoretical level the central capitalist tensions of over-production, inequalities and ecological destructiveness.

At the same time, there are certain key omissions and ambiguities in food sovereignty which detract from the cogency of its critique, as well as its coherence and the universality of its appeal as a paradigmatic alternative. In the first place, the focus on the needs and priorities of small farmers has meant that the needs and priorities of workers have been inadequately addressed. No effort has been made to


\textsuperscript{9} Goodman and Johnston 2006. The contributions to the volume edited by Laura Raynalds and her colleagues (2007 \textit{op cit.}) highlight a central and ‘inherent contradiction’ of Fair Trade, arising from its twin drives ‘to operate simultaneously against the market [and] within [it]’: 223.

systematically integrate food sovereignty with broader movements for economic
democracy and the commons. As a matter of political strategy, this is a significant
omission in the core capitalist countries, where farmers constitute a tiny
percentage of the population. Secondly, it is unclear whether food sovereignty
explicitly aligns itself with post-capitalist movements, such as economic democracy,
or whether it wishes to be part of a movement for a reformed capitalism. This
ambiguity leads to a third weakness, which is the danger of passive revolution and
coop, especially as regards food localisation. I return to these matters in the
final part of this chapter.

Engaging with the political and institutional framework of the globalising
capitalist food system: the efficacy of human rights
In Chapter 5, I discussed at length the efficacy of human rights as vehicle for
transformative social and political change, in the context of the considerable
efforts being devoted by La Via Campesina to securing the approval of a new United
Nations Declaration on the rights of peasants. I demonstrated that there are many
reasons to be sceptical of the capacity of human rights to effect substantive
change, in the context of a highly stratified global polity characterised by
globalising capitalism. Sixty years of formal human rights ‘progress’ have not
coincided with substantive steps towards the eradication of forms of mass suffering
and oppression that continue to plague humanity. Hunger and malnutrition have
worsened in recent decades, and are projected to worsen further; and at the same
time the obesity pandemic has materialised as a new form of mass suffering which
has strong structural and systemic elements. Human rights instruments do little or
nothing to address these phenomena, in the absence of structural change in the
global political economy.

The experience with the institutionalisation of the human right to food at the
national level has at best been highly variable. As I demonstrated by reference to
the case of Guatemala, in countries where institutional capacity is weak, and where
governments are oriented to meeting the needs of foreign capital above those of
their own citizens, legislating for human rights is at risk of being reduced to mere
symbolism. The legal formalism of human rights, in other words, does nothing to
address or challenge the ontology of alienation that patterns capitalist social
relations.

Nevertheless the research on which this thesis is based, particularly interviews
carried out with La Via Campesina and the Indonesian Peasant League staff in
Jakarta, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of these limitations, and a
recognition that the real value of the attempt to secure a UN Declaration is to build
and unify the movement at its grassroots, so that it becomes prepared to wage a
long-term struggle to achieve political power at the national level. It is in this
sense, I conclude, that the human rights strategy has value and is effective; both as
a matter of political practice, and as a form of further diffusing and advancing the
Food Sovereignty movement’s ontology of connectedness. At the global governance
level, however, it has had little impact in altering the general trajectory of global
governance meetings and policy formation (G20, G8, World Bank and so on) which
has been clearly supportive of creating more opportunities for the greater expansion of the globalising capitalist food system.

A significant success for the Food Sovereignty movement has come in the form of the incorporation of food sovereignty principles into some national constitutions, and the enactment of laws to implement food sovereignty. In Chapter 5 I discussed the case of Ecuador, where this process of institutionalising food sovereignty is perhaps the furthest advanced. As one would expect, the institutionalisation of food sovereignty is not a simple and uncontested process. The conclusion to be drawn from the Ecuadoran experience to date is that, even where food sovereignty has been partially institutionalised, its full and substantive implementation requires a high degree of constant mobilisation and organisation by peasant, farmer and allied social movements. Vested interests opposed to the implementation of food sovereignty principles - above all, redistributive agrarian reform - are fully prepared in many different contexts to resort to violence to retain their privileges, and frequently do so.\(^{11}\)

**Disrupting the circuits of capitalist production and consumption: the significance of local food economies**

By way of preface to this section, a distinction must be drawn between circuits of food production, distribution and consumption in different geographic regions. In the North (which arguably now includes some of the more prosperous urbanised regions of the South), the capitalist food system has achieved a high degree of penetration, and food circuits are highly commoditised and market-based. In much of the South, as I discussed in Chapter 6, non-capitalist, peasant-based and localised food systems still cater to the food needs of a substantial portion, if not the majority, of the populations of many countries.

However, in the context of globalising capitalism, systemic and structural change must take place, as I have argued, in the core countries, particularly the United States. Here the early signs are encouraging. While still insignificant in terms of overall ‘market share’ and food provisioning for the mass of the population, multiple expressions of a growing local food economy are observable in many towns and cities, many of them financed and supported by federal and state governments, and philanthropic institutions, and motivated by health and local economic development concerns.\(^{12}\) Like Food Connect and farmers’ markets in Australia,

---

\(^{11}\) As I discussed by reference to Honduras. Even in Venezuela, which has arguably the most socially progressive government in all of Latin America in terms of advancing social, economic and democratic rights of ordinary citizens, the implementation of a land reform process has encountered violent resistance which the Chavez government has to date proved incapable of effectively addressing: Emersberger, J., and Sprague, J., 2011, ‘Impunity for Venezuela’s Big Landowners: Hundreds of Chavez Supporters have been Assassinated by Wealthy Landowners for Implementing New Land Policies’, [http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011111810548458225.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011111810548458225.html), accessed 15.11.11.

\(^{12}\) Hesterman, O.B., 2010, *Fair Food: Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Food System for All*, Public Affairs, New York. Hesterman discusses, for example, the ‘Fresh Food Financing Initiative in Pennsylvania, the first state policy that provides grants and loans to help develop and expand healthy food choices in grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods…In 2004…the Pennsylvania state government invested US$30 million in the program. This leveraged an additional US$90 million in economic development and private funding. In just over six years, the initiative helped finance the development of eighty-five new retail outlets, each of which offers healthier food choices…Estimates of
these elements of the local food economy are operating within the emerging cracks of the capitalist food system. By creating alternative spaces of social exchange, they are de-commodifying social relations around food, and have thus begun the slow work of transforming that system and the common sense that sustains it. These growing local food economies are ‘expanding the realm of the possible’, both at the level of imagination and in practice. They are increasing levels of consciousness that other means of organising social relations around food are feasible. In the process, a multiplicity of relationships is being established, through which the emerging ontology of connectedness is being diffused. At the same time, there are as I discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 7, ambiguities within the local food movement, questions regarding its transformative potential, and constant risks of co-option.

The balance of forces: capitalist food system vis-à-vis food sovereignty
I am now at the point where it is possible to state my conclusions regarding the balance of forces, synthesising the previous work in the thesis. In terms of their control over the political and institutional levers of the power, and the trajectory of economic expansion, as reinforced by the recent financialisation of the capitalist food system, there is little doubt that the political-economy of the globalising capitalist food system is dominant. The degree of its hegemony, however, in the ethical sense of being based more on consent rather than coercion, is rather less secure. The Food Sovereignty movement has successfully engaged with and disrupted key elements of the common sense underpinning the system’s hegemony; and has articulated what in many respects is a coherent and unifying new ‘good sense’ that is capable of replacing the common sense of the system. The movements for agro-ecology and food relocalisation are growing rapidly, and their multi-dimensional character and benefits are supported by a sizeable body of literature and scientific study. Even though redistributive agrarian reform has suffered reversals in many places, it appears to have still been sufficiently successful, when combined with agro-ecology and food relocalisation, to be bringing about some processes of re-peasantisation (in the South) and a ‘new agrarianism’ (in the North) which arguably show that the balance of forces is beginning, even slightly, to shift away from the main actors in the globalising capitalist food system. It will be remembered that, for these actors, the global peasantry (and, the number of jobs either created or preserved due to this initiative stand at 5,000…In Philadelphia alone, 400,000 residents now have improved access to healthy food in retail grocery outlets…”: 52.

13 One example of the impact that local food is having can be seen in the over-zealous policing of some local food events by food safety officials in the US. Thus, the owners of a CSA farm in Nevada were recently ordered to bleach and then destroy farm-sourced organic produce that they planned to serve to their invited guests at a ‘farm-to-fork’ dinner: Slavo, M, ‘Outrage: Government Forces Private Citizens to Pour Bleach on Home-Grown Organic Food’, http://www.shtplan.com/headline-news/outrage-government-forces-private-citizens-to-pour-bleach-on-home-grown-organic-food-video_11102011, accessed 23.11.11. The phenomenon has become so widespread that a documentary (‘Farmageddon’) about it was recently released, detailing, according to one review: http://localfoodfreedom-nevadacounty.org/blog/2011/08/farmageddon-at-the-vets-hall-aug-24/; accessed 23.11.11, emphasis in original. A Farmer-to-Consumer legal defense fund was established in
by extension, independent small-scale farmers) have at best a future as contract labourers in the capitalist imaginary of ‘highly efficient’ large-scale industrialised farms along the lines of the southern cone’s ‘Republic of Soy’.  

Food sovereignty - its ‘vectors of expansion’
Now I turn to the second, three-part stage of analysis. The discussion to date reveals that the balance of forces appears to be shifting in favour of the Food Sovereignty movement. What can be said about the trajectory of that movement, having regard to its history and development to date?

In the first place, the trajectory is one of growth, expansion and momentum. The movement is young - barely 15 years old - and yet in that time it has expanded to include hundreds of millions of people in nearly every continent in the world. The expansion in expressions of local food in the North - community gardens, backyard gardening, farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture, Food Hubs - has in some places (the United States especially) been exponential.

Secondly, the contemporary conjuncture of economic and financial uncertainty and austerity means that these expansionary tendencies are likely to continue for the foreseeable future. As I have discussed, growing numbers of ordinary people are literally ‘taking matters into their own hands’ and establishing much more direct and personal relationships with the sources of their food. In the process, they are both raising their own levels of consciousness regarding food and agriculture, and transforming themselves from the role of passive ‘consumer’ to active and engaged ‘food citizen’, as captured to an extent by the Slow Food’s terminology of ‘co-producer’, or Hannah Wittman’s concept of ‘agrarian citizenship’. The ‘grow-your-own’ trend is, as I discussed in Chapter 7, reinforcing a logic of de-commodification around food, and shifting the terrain of what is normal and natural. The trajectory is that social and political relations around food and agriculture are moving towards the direction of food sovereignty principles; and diffusing its ontology of connectedness.

Thirdly, these tendencies are being supported, to varying degrees, by governments and other institutions. Food sovereignty is being formally incorporated into laws and constitutions in some places. Environmental drivers, notably climate change and emerging resource constraints, mean that some governments are, to varying degrees, supporting the movement for agro-ecological methods of production and sustainable agriculture. Local and state governments, in Australia and elsewhere, are supporting the local food movement. In the United States, the support from the Federal Department of Agriculture has been instrumental in the growth of this movement since 1990.

2007 to ‘protect the rights of farmers and consumers to engage in direct commerce [and] protect the rights of farmers to sell the products of the farm and the rights of consumers to access the foods of their choice from the source of their choice’: http://www.farmtoconsumer.org/index.html, accessed 23.11.11.

14 This is the perspective advanced by Oxford University’s Professor of Economics, Paul Collier, who attributes the ‘stubborn refusal of the peasantry to disappear’ to certain ‘giants of romantic populism’, including what he terms the ‘love affair’ between the middle classes and the peasantry: Collier, P., 2008, ‘The Politics of Hunger: How Illusion and Greed Fan the Food Crisis’, Foreign Affairs, 87(6), 67-80.
New opportunities for further expansion continue to emerge. As I have discussed, one of the criticisms of local food has been that it is restricted to ‘niche’ markets serving the more prosperous layers of society; and that accordingly its impact on the mass provision of food has been, and will continue to be, minimal. In response, numerous individuals and groups in the United States have established multi-functional ‘Food Hubs’ over the last five years, with the explicit aim of ‘scaling up’ and ‘mainstreaming’ the local food movement. As indicated in Chapter 7, Food Hubs act as a type of locally-based ethical wholesaler, with the explicit goal of aggregating local produce and channelling it to local businesses and institutions. Depending on the available resources, they can also value-add produce, run demonstration farms to boost the capacity and knowledge of local growers, and work with local educational and job training providers to development business and employment skills of local residents. Alongside the apparent renaissance of the food co-operative movement in the United States, Food Hubs reveal the potential of the local food movement to achieve an impact well beyond the niche venues of farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture initiatives.

Food sovereignty - limitations and contradictions
Further work remains to be done in developing the coherence and universal appeal of food sovereignty as a genuinely compelling alternative to the globalising capitalist food system. The development of coherent and substantive proposals for a genuinely democratic and transparent fair international trading system, which is not merely directed at enhancing the ‘choice’ of ethically-minded supermarket shoppers in the North, would be a significant advance. Better still would be the implementation of such proposals, albeit on a small scale, as part of the internationalisation of the emergent ‘solidarity economy’.

I have mentioned at several points in the thesis the fact that the farmer-originated nature of food sovereignty means that relatively little theoretical or practical attention has been paid to the needs and priorities of workers, particularly in the Global North. This weakness must be addressed if the Food Sovereignty movement is to realise its transformative potential. It is however a significant opportunity, because the emerging theory and practice in fields such as the commons, the co-operative movement and economic democracy all have natural affinities with food sovereignty. As I have noted previously, all of these movements are expressions of the solidarity economy, which Brazilian author Euclides Mance describes as being practiced daily by millions of people,

[W]ho work and consume in order to produce for their own and other people’s welfare, rather than for profit. In a solidarity economy what matters is creating satisfactory economic conditions for all people. This means assuring individual and collective freedoms, generating work and income, abolishing all forms of exploitation, domination and exclusion, and protecting ecosystems as well as promoting sustainable development.

---

15 See http://ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs/food-hubs (accessed 15.6.11) for a discussion of the number and type of Food Hubs in operation in the US.
17 Mance 2007 op cit.
What distinguishes the actors within a solidarity economy is that they self-consciously choose to support each other, to buy, sell and supply one another, in preference to dealing with capitalist businesses. In this way, the spheres of activity of the solidarity economy progressively expand; the networks it establishes grow; and this also has political effects, in terms of ‘transforming the State, creating and reinforcing mechanisms of popular participation’. Clearly, food sovereignty is a manifestation of this solidarity economy; and La Via Campesina members, such as the MST in Brazil, are leading exponents of its practice, with their networks of worker-run co-operatives food stores and schools.

As I have indicated, forms of the solidarity economy are also being practiced in the most dynamic centres of the local food movement in the United States, such as Vermont, where producer and consumer co-operatives have been integral to the movement’s success. Interestingly, the effective and professional branding and marketing of local food have been another key element of its growth in Vermont. This confirms my argument that food sovereignty is able to work within the confines of the existing capitalist food system, expose its many shortcomings, and use its market-based tools to work towards transformative change, from within, in what I would regard as an authentic expression of Gramscian counter-hegemonic praxis.

It should be relatively straightforward for La Via Campesina to embrace the solidarity economy perspective and the forms of practice that it offers to broaden the scope of the Food Sovereignty vision to include genuine alternatives for workers in the North. This would provide a basis on which to overcome the antagonism I identified earlier between the interests of farmers, who want a good price for their produce, and workers, who want cheap food.

Part of the difficulty for La Via Campesina in explicitly embracing the theory of solidarity economics could perhaps lie in its explicitly post-capitalist nature, at least as it has been expounded by Mance. The originators of food sovereignty have been careful to stress that food sovereignty is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model, and therefore that it is not anti-capitalist per se, although they admit that it is certainly anti-corporate free trade, finance-driven capitalism. There is an ambiguity here. As I have discussed, food sovereignty in many places in the South, Latin America especially, is understood to form part of the development of ‘socialism for the 21st century’, as recent meetings of La Via Campesina’s agro-ecology trainers have made clear. That it cannot be explicitly discussed in such terms, for political and historical reasons, in countries such as Indonesia, does not, as I documented, alter the basic understanding of activists based in that country that food sovereignty points towards a new form of socialism. These developments provide a further opportunity for the theoretical and political development of food sovereignty, having regard to the difficulties in which the globalising capitalist food system – and the global capitalist economy more generally - finds itself.

18 Ibid.
19 Knupp, R., 2010, Lifting the Yoke: Local Solutions to America’s Farm and Food Crisis,
20 Interview with Nettie Wiebe, 15.9.10.
In developing his political theory, Gramsci paid particular attention to the risks of co-optation of progressive and potentially counter-hegemonic movements. Food sovereignty faces these risks, particularly as regards the growth of the local food movement in the North. The radical edge of organics has in many ways already been blunted, and arguably the same fate has befallen the Fair Trade movement. Certain forms of agro-ecology - such as ‘soil carbon farming’ - are readily susceptible to incorporation within the main circuits of the globalising capitalist food system and its continual search for the creation of new arenas of accumulation and speculation; in this case, the commodification of the atmosphere via the creation of emission trading schemes. As I have discussed, many agrarian reform processes have already been diverted in the ‘market-led agrarian reform’ promoted by the World Bank, a key objective of which is to establish land-titling processes to more readily facilitate the sale and purchase of land as a commodity.

In all these spheres, the challenge for the Food Sovereignty movement and its proponents is to maintain a clear sense of purpose and direction, and to develop a strong capacity for reflexivity and self-awareness, so that the tendencies of co-optation can readily be detected and guarded against. As Ricardo Intriago made clear in the Ecuadoran context of implementing food sovereignty in the face of a recalcitrant landed elite and a non-sympathetic executive branch, it is a question of maintaining high levels of consciousness and organisation, and constancy in what is inevitably a long-term process of change and struggle.

The globalising capitalist food system - vulnerabilities and fragilities
I have discussed these at length in Chapter 6, so I can be quite brief here. The globalising capitalist food system is facing crises of legitimacy, in terms of its manifest failure to eradicate hunger and in its simultaneous generation of an obesity pandemic; and crises of accumulation, in terms of severe difficulties in bringing about the conditions to generate a renewal of the ecological surplus. As Moore rightly indicates, the persistence of mass hunger is of little immediate consequence to the actors of the system; it is most certainly a humanitarian catastrophe for the people involved, but it has no bearing on the profitability of the system as a whole.21 The obesity pandemic creates difficulties of perception, but at worst is likely to mean tighter government restrictions on the freedom of corporations to advertise to children, and the quantities of salts, sugars and fats they can lawfully put into foods. Having regard to the history of the regulation of the tobacco industry, this process can take years, if not decades; and in any event other markets are becoming available where such restrictions are less likely to eventuate.

The more serious crisis concerns the reproduction of the ecological surplus which underpins the cheap food complex. The promised yield increases from GM have yet to materialise; and the costs of the various petro-chemical inputs on which the system depends for its productivity have risen steeply in recent years. Systemic shocks, whether ‘natural’ or human-induced, would likely have severe consequences for the effective functioning of the ‘just-in-time’ globalising

21 2010 op cit.
capitalist food system. Even in the absence of such a shock, the maintenance of finance-driven capitalism in its current state through the imposition of austerity is encountering growing levels of opposition. These in turn are being repressed, in what may arguably be a growing confirmation of Polanyi’s warning that liberal capitalist utopianism can only be sustained through tyranny. The resort to repression, if it has to be sustained over a length of time, signals the rise of coercion over consent, and the end of hegemony. The system, in other words, is highly vulnerable and actually quite fragile, even though it appears robust and strongly hegemonic from the perspective of most conventional analyses.

The existing ‘effective reality’: is food sovereignty a counter-hegemonic movement?

For Gramsci, the ‘effective reality’ was ‘a relation of forces in continuous motion’. The hegemony of the globalising capitalist food system has been sustained by a combination of political and economic forces that have secured its expansion through time and space, and its penetration into increasing spheres of social and individual life. Its founding assumptions have become naturalised, and for many people its operation constitutes the limits of what is possible.

However, the food sovereignty movement has disrupted this hegemony. Food sovereignty is a counter-hegemonic movement, with the qualification that its potential is only just beginning to be realised. In less than two decades it has brought together hundreds of millions of people from dozens of countries with diverse linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all united under the vision of a fair, sustainable, and resilient food system, where relations around food are de-commodified through more direct and localised exchanges. Its ontology of connectedness is being widely diffused, and daily enacted in a growing multiplicity of sites around the world.

The objective economic and ecological conditions are highly conductive to the further development of food sovereignty; and it has begun to secure political and institutional support in many places. While there is an ebb and flow to the dynamics within the movement, with advances in some places and losses in others, the overall trajectory is one of a movement in the ascendancy, with increasing momentum. The balance of forces is shifting, albeit slowly, towards the food sovereignty direction.

The development of food sovereignty is most advanced in the fields of agro-ecology and food relocalisation; and least advanced in relation to the development of alternatives to the employment relationship and free trade. There are, as I have indicated, significant opportunities for its further advancement here, as part of integrating food sovereignty into a wider emerging transformative movement that includes alternative forms of property, economy, finance and trade. The Food

---


23 1971 op cit., 172.
Sovereignty movement has engaged ‘deeply and constructively’ with the key tensions of the globalising capitalist food system.

My assessment about the prospects for the realisation of food sovereignty perhaps contradicts, in some ways, the views of La Via Campesina founder Nettie Wiebe, one of the originators of the concept:

I find myself less than optimistic when I note the current trend lines - but I am always hopeful...Optimism would have to be based on some realistic assessment of the trend lines, because optimism is based on looking forward on the basis of what you already know about, or can reasonably expect. Whereas hope is the imagined possibility of something better.

So when we look at the trend lines, they don’t look very happy. We continue to lose biodiversity. We are continuing to have major and minor, but a multitude, of changes going on, very few of which look like they’re enriching and enhancing the life-systems, most of which look like they’re destroying and undermining the life-systems on earth. Whether it’s old-growth forests, or salmon runs, or soil degradation, or birds of prey, or buffalo herds - you pick your favourite item to see whether it’s flourishing or not. The database on all of this, including on the numbers of small farms and farmers, doesn’t give you much room for optimism.

With echoes of Gramsci’s most famous aphorism (‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’), Wiebe eschews optimism, but embraces hope:

On the other hand, every time you put a seed in the ground, and it comes up, and it flourishes, and you get far more from it than you had expected, that’s a kind of minor miracle. We live in a world that has those miracles around us, and that for me is an opening to imagine that we could do [better]...It’s not just in a biological world; every time I sit in a room full of people whom I have not known before, and whom I then discuss with, and hear, and sing with, and find common ground with, and I feel the power of our togetherness and the possibility that that offers, I say to myself, There’s so much hope. There’s such a huge prospect of imagining and working towards, and finding, sometimes by miracle, a better world.

I can be pessimistic, but I can’t be despairing, I can’t be hopeless.24

Returning once more to the understanding of food sovereignty as a ‘farmer-led’ epistemology, and ontology of connectedness, what is being expressed here is both the collective capacity to expand the realm of what is possible, and to embrace ways of knowing that are beyond the purely rational: that are emotional, intuitive, even spiritual:

**Q: Do we need to move beyond rationality, towards the realm of faith?**

**A: Insofar as rationality is often conflated with prudence, and prudence is often narrowed down to that which is profitable, or serves me well, yes I think we do have to move beyond that narrow view of productivity, and management, and control. I think we do have to move beyond that. For one, that system is remarkably short-sighted, and**

---

24 Wiebe’s comments here point to her understanding of La Via Campesina and food sovereignty as a ‘hope movement’: see Dinerstein, A.C., and Deneulin, S., 2012, ‘Hope Movements: Naming Mobilization in a Post-development World’, Development and Change 43(2), 585-602.
remarkably cruel in many ways. So, insofar as one is not just a rational being, but also a compassionate being, and a living being, and an imaginative being, holding ourselves and our plans strictly within that which is prudent, seems to me that we’re short-changing ourselves. We’re limiting ourselves as human beings in terms of what we’re really capable of.

Ultimately, the strength of food sovereignty lies within this multi-dimensional, emergent and collectively-formed epistemology and ontology; and a diverse, expanding praxis. While the globalising capitalist food system is limited to a narrowly self-calculating – and increasingly self-destructive – rationality focused on accumulation and profit, food sovereignty is a project of creative and collaborative construction that is not so constrained, and is being actively undertaken by millions around the world. In a conjuncture of deepening crisis, when growing numbers of individuals and institutions are already embracing its principles and practices as the new good sense, food sovereignty’s prospects for transformative change, though far from assured, are promising.

25 Perhaps anticipating the Zapatista political epithet that ‘we make the road by walking’, Vicki Birchfield notes how ‘Gramsci railed against the notion of permanence or an end point to politics, and instead envisioned politics as an open-ended, continuously transformative process through which thought and action become unified’: 1999 op cit., 43.

297
APPENDIX A

DECLARATION OF THE FORUM FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, VILLAGE OF NYÉLÉNI,
SÉLINGUÉ, MALI, 27 FEBRUARY 2007

We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organizations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements have gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty. We are doing this, brick by brick, as we live here in huts constructed by hand in the local tradition, and eat food that is produced and prepared by the Sélingué community. We give our collective endeavor the name “Nyléni” as a tribute to and inspiration from a legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her peoples well.

Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed all the world’s peoples. Our heritage as food producers is critical to the future of humanity. This is specially so in the case of women and indigenous peoples who are historical creators of knowledge about food and agriculture and are devalued. But this heritage and our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism. Food sovereignty gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.

In Nyéléni, through numerous debates and interactions, we are deepening our collective understanding of food sovereignty and learning about the realities of the struggles of our respective movements to retain autonomy and regain our powers. We
now understand better the tools we need to build our movement and advance our collective vision.

**What are we fighting for?**

A world where…

…all peoples, nations and states are able to determine their own food producing systems and policies that provide every one of us with good quality, adequate, affordable, healthy and culturally appropriate food;

...there is recognition and respect of women’s roles and rights in food production, and representation of women in all decision making bodies;

…all peoples in each of our countries are able to live with dignity, earn a living wage for their labour and have the opportunity to remain in their homes, if they so choose;

...food sovereignty is considered a basic human right, recognised and implemented by communities, peoples, states and international bodies;

….we are able to conserve and rehabilitate rural environments, fish populations, landscapes and food traditions based on ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds, livestock and all other biodiversity;

….we value, recognize and respect our diversity of traditional knowledge, food, language and culture, and the way we organise and express ourselves;

…. there is genuine and integral agrarian reform that guarantees peasants full rights to land, defends and recovers the territories of indigenous peoples, ensures fishing communities’ access and control over their fishing areas and eco-systems, honours access and control by pastoral communities over pastoral lands and migratory routes, assures decent jobs with fair remuneration and labour rights for all, and a future for young people in the countryside;...where agrarian reform revitalises inter-dependence between producers and consumers, ensures community survival, social and economic justice, ecological sustainability, and respect for local autonomy and governance with equal rights for women and men...where agrarian reform guarantees rights to territory and self-determination for our peoples;

...share our lands and territories peacefully and fairly among our peoples, be we peasants, indigenous peoples, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, or others;

….in the case of natural and human-created disasters and conflict-recovery situations, food sovereignty acts as a form of “insurance” that strengthens local recovery efforts and mitigates negative impacts... where we remember that communities affected by disasters are not helpless, and where strong local organization for self-help is the key to recovery;
...peoples’ power to make decisions about their material, natural and spiritual heritage are defended;

...all peoples have the right to defend their territories from the actions of transnational corporations;

**What are we fighting against?**

Imperialism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism and patriarchy, and all systems that impoverish life, resources and eco-systems, and the agents that promote the above such as international financial institutions, the World Trade Organisation, free trade agreements, transnational corporations, and governments that are antagonistic to their peoples;

The dumping of food at prices below the cost of production in the global economy;

The domination of our food and food producing systems by corporations that place profits before people, health and the environment;

Technologies and practices that undercut our future food producing capacities, damage the environment and put our health at risk. These include transgenic crops and animals, terminator technology, industrial aquaculture and destructive fishing practices, the so-called White Revolution of industrial dairy practices, the so-called ‘old’ and ‘new’ Green Revolutions, and the “Green Deserts” of industrial bio-fuel monocultures and other plantations;

The privatisation and commodification of food, basic and public services, knowledge, land, water, seeds, livestock and our natural heritage;

Development projects/models and extractive industries that displace people and destroy our environments and natural heritage;

Wars, conflicts, occupations, economic blockades, famines, forced displacement of peoples and confiscation of their lands, and all forces and governments that cause and support these;

Post disaster and conflict reconstruction programmes that destroy our environments and capacities;

The criminalization of all those who struggle to protect and defend our rights;

Food aid that disguises dumping, introduces GMOs into local environments and food systems and creates new colonialism patterns;

The internationalisation and globalisation of paternalistic and patriarchal values, that marginalise women, and diverse agricultural, indigenous, pastoral and fisher communities around the world;
What can and will we do about it?

Just as we are working with the local community in Sélingué to create a meeting space at Nyéléni, we are committed to building our collective movement for food sovereignty by forging alliances, supporting each others’ struggles and extending our solidarity, strengths, and creativity to peoples all over the world who are committed to food sovereignty. Every struggle, in any part of the world for food sovereignty, is our struggle.

We have arrived at a number of collective actions to share our vision of food sovereignty with all peoples of this world, which are elaborated in our synthesis document. We will implement these actions in our respective local areas and regions, in our own movements and jointly in solidarity with other movements. We will share our vision and action agenda for food sovereignty with others who are not able to be with us here in Nyéléni so that the spirit of Nyéléni permeates across the world and becomes a powerful force to make food sovereignty a reality for peoples all over the world.

Finally, we give our unconditional and unwavering support to the peasant movements of Mali and ROPPA in their demands that food sovereignty become a reality in Mali and by extension in all of Africa.

**Now is the time for food sovereignty!**

*Reproduced from* http://www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290
APPENDIX B

PEOPLE’S AGREEMENT OF COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA

World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth

Cochabamba, 22nd April 2010

Today, our Mother Earth is wounded and the future of humanity is in danger.

If global warming increases by more than 2 degrees Celsius, a situation that the “Copenhagen Accord” could lead to, there is a 50% probability that the damages caused to our Mother Earth will be completely irreversible. Between 20% and 30% of species would be in danger of disappearing. Large extensions of forest would be affected, droughts and floods would affect different regions of the planet, deserts would expand, and the melting of the polar ice caps and the glaciers in the Andes and Himalayas would worsen. Many island states would disappear, and Africa would suffer an increase in temperature of more than 3 degrees Celsius. Likewise, the production of food would diminish in the world, causing catastrophic impact on the survival of inhabitants from vast regions in the planet, and the number of people in the world suffering from hunger would increase dramatically, a figure that already exceeds 1.02 billion people. The corporations and governments of the so-called “developed” countries, in complicity with a segment of the scientific community, have led us to discuss climate change as a problem limited to the rise in temperature without questioning the cause, which is the capitalist system.

We confront the terminal crisis of a civilizing model that is patriarchal and based on the submission and destruction of human beings and nature that accelerated since the industrial revolution.

The capitalist system has imposed on us a logic of competition, progress and limitless growth. This regime of production and consumption seeks profit without limits, separating human beings from nature and imposing a logic of domination upon nature, transforming everything into commodities: water, earth, the human genome, ancestral cultures, biodiversity, justice, ethics, the rights of peoples, and life itself.

Under capitalism, Mother Earth is converted into a source of raw materials, and human beings into consumers and a means of production, into people that are seen as valuable only for what they own, and not for what they are.

Capitalism requires a powerful military industry for its processes of accumulation and imposition of control over territories and natural resources, suppressing the resistance of the peoples. It is an imperialist system of colonization of the planet.
Humanity confronts a great dilemma: to continue on the path of capitalism, depredation, and death, or to choose the path of harmony with nature and respect for life.

It is imperative that we forge a new system that restores harmony with nature and among human beings. And in order for there to be balance with nature, there must first be equity among human beings. We propose to the peoples of the world the recovery, revalorization, and strengthening of the knowledge, wisdom, and ancestral practices of Indigenous Peoples, which are affirmed in the thought and practices of “Living Well,” recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship. To face climate change, we must recognize Mother Earth as the source of life and forge a new system based on the principles of:

- harmony and balance among all and with all things;
- complementarity, solidarity, and equality;
- collective well-being and the satisfaction of the basic necessities of all;
- people in harmony with nature;
- recognition of human beings for what they are, not what they own;
- elimination of all forms of colonialism, imperialism and interventionism;
- peace among the peoples and with Mother Earth;

The model we support is not a model of limitless and destructive development. All countries need to produce the goods and services necessary to satisfy the fundamental needs of their populations, but by no means can they continue to follow the path of development that has led the richest countries to have an ecological footprint five times bigger than what the planet is able to support. Currently, the regenerative capacity of the planet has been already exceeded by more than 30 percent. If this pace of over-exploitation of our Mother Earth continues, we will need two planets by the year 2030. In an interdependent system in which human beings are only one component, it is not possible to recognize rights only to the human part without provoking an imbalance in the system as a whole. To guarantee human rights and to restore harmony with nature, it is necessary to effectively recognize and apply the rights of Mother Earth. For this purpose, we propose the attached project for the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, in which it’s recorded that:

- The right to live and to exist;
- The right to be respected;
- The right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue it’s vital cycles and processes free of human alteration;
- The right to maintain their identity and integrity as differentiated beings, self-regulated and interrelated;
- The right to water as the source of life;
- The right to clean air;
- The right to comprehensive health;
- The right to be free of contamination and pollution, free of toxic and radioactive waste;
- The right to be free of alterations or modifications of it’s genetic structure in a manner that threatens it’s integrity or vital and healthy functioning;
• The right to prompt and full restoration for violations to the rights acknowledged in this Declaration caused by human activities.

The “shared vision” seeks to stabilize the concentrations of greenhouse gases to make effective the Article 2 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which states that “the stabilization of greenhouse gases concentrations in the atmosphere to a level that prevents dangerous anthropogenic inferences for the climate system.” Our vision is based on the principle of historical common but differentiated responsibilities, to demand the developed countries to commit with quantifiable goals of emission reduction that will allow to return the concentrations of greenhouse gases to 300 ppm, therefore the increase in the average world temperature to a maximum of one degree Celsius.

Emphasizing the need for urgent action to achieve this vision, and with the support of peoples, movements and countries, developed countries should commit to ambitious targets for reducing emissions that permit the achievement of short-term objectives, while maintaining our vision in favor of balance in the Earth’s climate system, in agreement with the ultimate objective of the Convention.

The “shared vision for long-term cooperative action” in climate change negotiations should not be reduced to defining the limit on temperature increases and the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but must also incorporate in a balanced and integral manner measures regarding capacity building, production and consumption patterns, and other essential factors such as the acknowledging of the Rights of Mother Earth to establish harmony with nature.

Developed countries, as the main cause of climate change, in assuming their historical responsibility, must recognize and honor their climate debt in all of its dimensions as the basis for a just, effective, and scientific solution to climate change. In this context, we demand that developed countries:

• Restore to developing countries the atmospheric space that is occupied by their greenhouse gas emissions. This implies the decolonization of the atmosphere through the reduction and absorption of their emissions;

• Assume the costs and technology transfer needs of developing countries arising from the loss of development opportunities due to living in a restricted atmospheric space;

• Assume responsibility for the hundreds of millions of people that will be forced to migrate due to the climate change caused by these countries, and eliminate their restrictive immigration policies, offering migrants a decent life with full human rights guarantees in their countries;

• Assume adaptation debt related to the impacts of climate change on developing countries by providing the means to prevent, minimize, and deal with damages arising from their excessive emissions;

• Honor these debts as part of a broader debt to Mother Earth by adopting and implementing the United Nations Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.
The focus must not be only on financial compensation, but also on restorative justice, understood as the restitution of integrity to our Mother Earth and all its beings.

We deplore attempts by countries to annul the Kyoto Protocol, which is the sole legally binding instrument specific to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by developed countries.

We inform the world that, despite their obligation to reduce emissions, developed countries have increased their emissions by 11.2% in the period from 1990 to 2007.

During that same period, due to unbridled consumption, the United States of America has increased its greenhouse gas emissions by 16.8%, reaching an average of 20 to 23 tons of CO2 per-person. This represents 9 times more than that of the average inhabitant of the “Third World,” and 20 times more than that of the average inhabitant of Sub-Saharan Africa.

We categorically reject the illegitimate “Copenhagen Accord” that allows developed countries to offer insufficient reductions in greenhouse gases based in voluntary and individual commitments, violating the environmental integrity of Mother Earth and leading us toward an increase in global temperatures of around 4°C.

The next Conference on Climate Change to be held at the end of 2010 in Mexico should approve an amendment to the Kyoto Protocol for the second commitment period from 2013 to 2017 under which developed countries must agree to significant domestic emissions reductions of at least 50% based on 1990 levels, excluding carbon markets or other offset mechanisms that mask the failure of actual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

We require first of all the establishment of a goal for the group of developed countries to achieve the assignment of individual commitments for each developed country under the framework of complementary efforts among each one, maintaining in this way Kyoto Protocol as the route to emissions reductions.

The United States, as the only Annex 1 country on Earth that did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, has a significant responsibility toward all peoples of the world to ratify this document and commit itself to respecting and complying with emissions reduction targets on a scale appropriate to the total size of its economy.

We the peoples have the equal right to be protected from the adverse effects of climate change and reject the notion of adaptation to climate change as understood as a resignation to impacts provoked by the historical emissions of developed countries, which themselves must adapt their modes of life and consumption in the face of this global emergency. We see it as imperative to confront the adverse effects of climate change, and consider adaptation to be a process rather than an imposition, as well as a tool that can serve to help offset those effects, demonstrating that it is possible to achieve harmony with nature under a different model for living.

It is necessary to construct an Adaptation Fund exclusively for addressing climate change as part of a financial mechanism that is managed in a sovereign, transparent, and equitable manner for all States. This Fund should assess the impacts and costs of
climate change in developing countries and needs deriving from these impacts, and monitor support on the part of developed countries. It should also include a mechanism for compensation for current and future damages, loss of opportunities due to extreme and gradual climactic events, and additional costs that could present themselves if our planet surpasses ecological thresholds, such as those impacts that present obstacles to “Living Well.”

The “Copenhagen Accord” imposed on developing countries by a few States, beyond simply offering insufficient resources, attempts as well to divide and create confrontation between peoples and to extort developing countries by placing conditions on access to adaptation and mitigation resources. We also assert as unacceptable the attempt in processes of international negotiation to classify developing countries for their vulnerability to climate change, generating disputes, inequalities and segregation among them.

The immense challenge humanity faces of stopping global warming and cooling the planet can only be achieved through a profound shift in agricultural practices toward the sustainable model of production used by indigenous and rural farming peoples, as well as other ancestral models and practices that contribute to solving the problem of agriculture and food sovereignty. This is understood as the right of peoples to control their own seeds, lands, water, and food production, thereby guaranteeing, through forms of production that are in harmony with Mother Earth and appropriate to local cultural contexts, access to sufficient, varied and nutritious foods in complementarity with Mother Earth and deepening the autonomous (participatory, communal and shared) production of every nation and people.

Climate change is now producing profound impacts on agriculture and the ways of life of indigenous peoples and farmers throughout the world, and these impacts will worsen in the future.

Agribusiness, through its social, economic, and cultural model of global capitalist production and its logic of producing food for the market and not to fulfill the right to proper nutrition, is one of the principal causes of climate change. Its technological, commercial, and political approach only serves to deepen the climate change crisis and increase hunger in the world. For this reason, we reject Free Trade Agreements and Association Agreements and all forms of the application of Intellectual Property Rights to life, current technological packages (agrochemicals, genetic modification) and those that offer false solutions (biofuels, geo-engineering, nanotechnology, etc.) that only exacerbate the current crisis.

We similarly denounce the way in which the capitalist model imposes mega-infrastructure projects and invades territories with extractive projects, water privatization, and militarized territories, expelling indigenous peoples from their lands, inhibiting food sovereignty and deepening socio-environmental crisis.

We demand recognition of the right of all peoples, living beings, and Mother Earth to have access to water, and we support the proposal of the Government of Bolivia to recognize water as a Fundamental Human Right.
The definition of forests used in the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which includes plantations, is unacceptable. Monoculture plantations are not forests. Therefore, we require a definition for negotiation purposes that recognizes the native forests, jungles and the diverse ecosystems on Earth.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples must be fully recognized, implemented and integrated in climate change negotiations. The best strategy and action to avoid deforestation and degradation and protect native forests and jungles is to recognize and guarantee collective rights to lands and territories, especially considering that most of the forests are located within the territories of indigenous peoples and nations and other traditional communities.

We condemn market mechanisms such as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and its versions + and + +, which are violating the sovereignty of peoples and their right to prior free and informed consent as well as the sovereignty of national States, the customs of Peoples, and the Rights of Nature.

Polluting countries have an obligation to carry out direct transfers of the economic and technological resources needed to pay for the restoration and maintenance of forests in favor of the peoples and indigenous ancestral organic structures. Compensation must be direct and in addition to the sources of funding promised by developed countries outside of the carbon market, and never serve as carbon offsets. We demand that countries stop actions on local forests based on market mechanisms and propose non-existent and conditional results. We call on governments to create a global program to restore native forests and jungles, managed and administered by the peoples, implementing forest seeds, fruit trees, and native flora. Governments should eliminate forest concessions and support the conservation of petroleum deposits in the ground and urgently stop the exploitation of hydrocarbons in forestlands.

We call upon States to recognize, respect and guarantee the effective implementation of international human rights standards and the rights of indigenous peoples, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples under ILO Convention 169, among other relevant instruments in the negotiations, policies and measures used to meet the challenges posed by climate change. In particular, we call upon States to give legal recognition to claims over territories, lands and natural resources to enable and strengthen our traditional ways of life and contribute effectively to solving climate change.

We demand the full and effective implementation of the right to consultation, participation and prior, free and informed consent of indigenous peoples in all negotiation processes, and in the design and implementation of measures related to climate change.

Environmental degradation and climate change are currently reaching critical levels, and one of the main consequences of this is domestic and international migration. According to projections, there were already about 25 million climate migrants by 1995. Current estimates are around 50 million, and projections suggest that between 200 million and 1 billion people will become displaced by situations resulting from climate change by the year 2050.
Developed countries should assume responsibility for climate migrants, welcoming them into their territories and recognizing their fundamental rights through the signing of international conventions that provide for the definition of climate migrant and require all States to abide by determinations.

Establish an International Tribunal of Conscience to denounce, make visible, document, judge and punish violations of the rights of migrants, refugees and displaced persons within countries of origin, transit and destination, clearly identifying the responsibilities of States, companies and other agents.

Current funding directed toward developing countries for climate change and the proposal of the Copenhagen Accord are insignificant. In addition to Official Development Assistance and public sources, developed countries must commit to a new annual funding of at least 6% of GDP to tackle climate change in developing countries. This is viable considering that a similar amount is spent on national defense, and that 5 times more have been put forth to rescue failing banks and speculators, which raises serious questions about global priorities and political will. This funding should be direct and free of conditions, and should not interfere with the national sovereignty or self-determination of the most affected communities and groups.

In view of the inefficiency of the current mechanism, a new funding mechanism should be established at the 2010 Climate Change Conference in Mexico, functioning under the authority of the Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and held accountable to it, with significant representation of developing countries, to ensure compliance with the funding commitments of Annex 1 countries.

It has been stated that developed countries significantly increased their emissions in the period from 1990 to 2007, despite having stated that the reduction would be substantially supported by market mechanisms.

The carbon market has become a lucrative business, commodifying our Mother Earth. It is therefore not an alternative for tackle climate change, as it loots and ravages the land, water, and even life itself.

The recent financial crisis has demonstrated that the market is incapable of regulating the financial system, which is fragile and uncertain due to speculation and the emergence of intermediary brokers. Therefore, it would be totally irresponsible to leave in their hands the care and protection of human existence and of our Mother Earth.

We consider inadmissible that current negotiations propose the creation of new mechanisms that extend and promote the carbon market, for existing mechanisms have not resolved the problem of climate change nor led to real and direct actions to reduce greenhouse gases. It is necessary to demand fulfillment of the commitments assumed by developed countries under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change regarding development and technology transfer, and to reject the “technology showcase” proposed by developed countries that only markets technology. It is essential to establish guidelines in order to create a multilateral and multidisciplinary mechanism for participatory control, management, and evaluation of the exchange of
technologies. These technologies must be useful, clean and socially sound. Likewise, it is fundamental to establish a fund for the financing and inventory of technologies that are appropriate and free of intellectual property rights. Patents, in particular, should move from the hands of private monopolies to the public domain in order to promote accessibility and low costs.

Knowledge is universal, and should for no reason be the object of private property or private use, nor should its application in the form of technology. Developed countries have a responsibility to share their technology with developing countries, to build research centers in developing countries for the creation of technologies and innovations, and defend and promote their development and application for “living well.” The world must recover and re-learn ancestral principles and approaches from native peoples to stop the destruction of the planet, as well as promote ancestral practices, knowledge and spirituality to recuperate the capacity for “living well” in harmony with Mother Earth.

Considering the lack of political will on the part of developed countries to effectively comply with commitments and obligations assumed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, and given the lack of a legal international organism to guard against and sanction climate and environmental crimes that violate the Rights of Mother Earth and humanity, we demand the creation of an International Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal that has the legal capacity to prevent, judge and penalize States, industries and people that by commission or omission contaminate and provoke climate change.

Supporting States that present claims at the International Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal against developed countries that fail to comply with commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol including commitments to reduce greenhouse gases.

We urge peoples to propose and promote deep reform within the United Nations, so that all member States comply with the decisions of the International Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal.

The future of humanity is in danger, and we cannot allow a group of leaders from developed countries to decide for all countries as they tried unsuccessfully to do at the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen. This decision concerns us all. Thus, it is essential to carry out a global referendum or popular consultation on climate change in which all are consulted regarding the following issues; the level of emission reductions on the part of developed countries and transnational corporations, financing to be offered by developed countries, the creation of an International Climate Justice Tribunal, the need for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, and the need to change the current capitalist system. The process of a global referendum or popular consultation will depend on process of preparation that ensures the successful development of the same.

In order to coordinate our international action and implement the results of this “Accord of the Peoples,” we call for the building of a Global People’s Movement for Mother Earth, which should be based on the principles of complementarity and respect.
for the diversity of origin and visions among its members, constituting a broad and democratic space for coordination and joint worldwide actions.

To this end, we adopt the attached global plan of action so that in Mexico, the developed countries listed in Annex 1 respect the existing legal framework and reduce their greenhouse gases emissions by 50%, and that the different proposals contained in this Agreement are adopted.

Finally, we agree to undertake a Second World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in 2011 as part of this process of building the Global People’s Movement for Mother Earth and reacting to the outcomes of the Climate Change Conference to be held at the end of this year in Cancun, Mexico.

Reproduced from http://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement/
APPENDIX C

THE SIX ‘PRIMARY MEDIATIONS BETWEEN HUMANITY AND NATURE REQUIRED FOR SOCIAL LIFE’

1. The necessary, more or less spontaneous, regulation of *biological* reproductive activity and the size of the sustainable population, in conjunction with available resources;

2. The regulation of the *labor process* through which the given community’s necessary interchange with nature can produce the goods required for human gratification, as well as the appropriate working tools, productive enterprises, and knowledge by means of which the reproductive process itself can be maintained and improved;

3. The establishment of *suitable exchange relations* under which the historically changing needs of human beings can be linked together for the purpose of optimizing the available natural and productive – including the culturally productive – resources;

4. The organization, *coordination*, and control of the *multiplicity of activities* through which the material and cultural requirements of the successful social metabolic reproduction process of progressively more complex human communities can be secured and safeguarded;

5. The *rational allocation* of the available material and human resources fighting against the *tyranny of scarcity* through the economic (in the sense of *economizing*) utilization of the given society’s ways and means of reproduction: and

6. The *enactment* and administration of the *rules and regulations* of the given society *as a whole*, in conjunction with the other primary mediatory functions and determinations.

Peasants of the World need an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants

I. Introduction
Almost half of the people in the world are peasants. Even in the high-tech world, people eat food produced by peasants. Small-scale agriculture is not just an economic activity; it means life for many people. The security of the population depends on the well-being of peasants and sustainable agriculture. To protect human life it is important to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the peasants. In reality, the ongoing violations of peasants' rights threaten human life.

II. Violations of Peasants' Rights
- Millions of peasants have been forced to leave their farmland because of land grabs facilitated by national policies and/or the military. Land is taken away from peasants for the development of large industrial or infrastructure projects, extracting industries like mining, tourist resorts, special Economic zones, supermarkets and plantations for cash crops. As a result, land is increasingly concentrated in a few hands.
- States neglect the farm sector and peasants receive inadequate income from their agriculture production.
- Monocultures for the production of agrofuels and other industrial uses are promoted in favor of agribusiness and transnational capital; this has devastating impacts on forests, water, the environment and the economic and social life of peasants.
- There is an increasing militarization and a number of armed conflicts in rural areas with severe impacts on the full realization of civil rights of peasants.
- As they lose their land, communities also lose their forms of self-government, sovereignty and cultural identity.
- Food is increasingly used for speculation purposes.
- The peasants’ struggle is criminalised.
- Slave labor, forced labor and child labor are still found in rural areas.
- Women’s and children’s rights are the most affected. Women are victims of psychological, physical and economic violence. They are discriminated in their access to land and productive resources, and marginalized in decision making.
- Peasants have lost many local seeds. Biodiversity is destroyed by the use of chemical fertilizers, hybrid seeds and genetically modified organisms developed by the transnational corporations.
- Access to health services and to education is decreasing in rural areas and peasants’ political role in society is undermined.

- As a result of these violations of peasants’ rights, today millions of peasants live in hunger and suffer malnutrition. This is not because there is not enough food in the world, but
because food resources are dominated by transnational corporations. Peasants are forced to produce for export instead of producing food for their communities.

- The crisis in the agricultural sector causes migration and the massive displacement and disappearance of peasants and indigenous people.

III. The policies of neo-liberalism worsen the violations of Peasants' Rights

The violations of peasants’ rights are on the rise because of the implementation of neoliberal policies promoted by the World Trade Organisation, Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), other institutions and many governments in the North as well as in the South. The WTO and FTAs force the opening of markets and prevent countries from protecting and supporting their domestic agriculture. They push for the deregulation in the agriculture sector.

Governments of developed countries and transnational corporations are responsible for trade dumping practices. Cheap subsidised food floods local markets thus forcing peasants out of business.

The WTO and other institutions force the introduction of food such as GMOs and the unsafe use of growth hormones in meat production. Meanwhile, they prohibit the marketing of healthy products produced by peasants through sanitary barriers.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has implemented structural adjustment programs (SAPs) leading to massive cuts in subsidies for agriculture and social services. Countries have been forced to privatize state companies and to dismantle support mechanisms in the agricultural sector.

National and international policies directly or indirectly give priority to transnational corporations or food production and trade. TNCs also practice biopiracy and destroy genetic resources and biodiversity cultivated by peasants. The capitalist logic of accumulation has dismantled peasant agriculture.

IV. The struggle of the Peasants to uphold and protect their Rights

Facing these realities, peasants all over the world are struggling to live. All over the world, thousands of peasant leaders are being arrested because they are fighting to protect their rights and livelihood. They are being brought to court by unfair justice systems, incidents of massacre, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, and political persecution and harassment are common.

The global food crisis in 2008 precipitated and exacerbated by policies and transnational corporations (which unilaterally act according to their own self-interest) clearly shows the failure in promoting, respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of peasants. This affects all people in the world, in developed and developing countries. While peasants work hard to ensure the sustainability of seeds and food, the violation of the rights of peasants damages the world’s capability to feed itself.

The struggle of the Peasants is fully applicable to the framework of international human rights which includes instruments, and thematic mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, that address the right to food, housing rights, access to water, right to health, human rights defenders, indigenous peoples, racism and racial discrimination, women’s rights. These international instruments of the UN do not completely cover nor prevent human rights violations, especially the rights of the peasants. We see some limitations in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as an instrument to protect peasants’ right. Also, the Charter of the Peasant produced by the UN in 1978, was not able to protect peasants from international liberalization policies. The other international conventions, which also deal with peasants’
rights, can not be implemented either. These conventions include: ILO Convention 169,
Clause 8-J Convention on Biodiversity, Point 14.60 Agenda 21, and Cartagena Protocol.

V. The Peasants need an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants

Because of the limitations of those conventions and resolutions, it is important to create an
international instrument to respect, protect, fulfill, and uphold peasants' rights -- the
International Convention on the Rights of Peasants (ICRP). There are already conventions to
protect vulnerable groups of people, such as indigenous peoples, women, children and
migrant workers. The ICRP will articulate the values of the rights of peasants, which will have
to be respected, protected and fulfilled by governments and international institutions. The
ICRP will be supplemented by
optional protocols to ensure its implementation.

During the Regional Conference on Peasants' Rights in April 2002, Via Campesina formulated
the Declaration of the Rights of Peasants through the process of a series of activities,
including the Workshop on Peasants' Rights in Medan North Sumatra on 2000, the
Conference of Agrarian Reform in Jakarta April 2001, the Regional Conference on Peasants'
Rights held in Jakarta in April 2002 and the International Conference of Via Campesina also
held in Jakarta, in June 2008. The text of the
declaration is attached to this document. It should form the basis of the ICRP, to be
elaborated by the United Nations, with the full participation of Via Campesina and other
representatives of civil society.

We are looking forward to the support of the people who are concerned with the peasants' struggle and the promotion and protection of the rights of peasants.

Declaration of Rights of Peasants - Women and Men

Peasants of the World need an International Declaration on the Rights of Peasants

The Declaration

Affirming that peasants, men and women, are equal to all other people and, in the exercise
of their rights, should be free from any form of discrimination, including discrimination based
on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or
Affirming that peasants, men and women, are equal to all other people and, in the exercise of their rights, should be free from any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, wealth, birth or other status,

Acknowledging that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant
on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political
Rights, as well as the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, affirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political and social,

Emphasizing that in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
States have undertaken to ensure the realization of the right to an adequate standard of
living for ourselves and our family, including the right to food, and our right to be free from hunger through the genuine agrarian reform,

Emphasizing that according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, all Indigenous peoples, including peasants, have the right to selfdetermination and that by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development, having the right to autonomy or self-government
in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions,

Recalling that many peasants all over the world have fought throughout history for the recognition of the rights of peasants and for just and free societies,

Considering that the current agricultural conditions threaten the lives of peasants, worsening the environment, decreasing peasants' productivity and decreasing the livelihood of the peasants,

Considering that peasants’ conditions are worsening because of governments’ exclusion of peasants from policy decision making, because of the use of military, and/or paramilitary groups to displace peasants and allowing transnational corporations to exploit natural resources,

Considering that capitalist globalization imposed through some international agreements has had a strong negative impact on the peasant sector,

Considering that peasants struggle with their own resources and with other groups who support the peasants’ demands for life, environmental protection and increasing productivity

Considering the increasing concentration of the food systems in the world in the hands of few transnational corporations

Considering that peasants constitute a specific social group which is vulnerable so that the realization of the rights of peasants require special measures to truly respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of peasants enshrined in international human rights law;

Acknowledging that small-scale peasant agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing can contribute to mitigate the climate crisis and to secure a sustainable food production for all;

Reminding States to comply with and effectively implement all their obligations as they apply to peasants under international instruments, in particular those related to human rights, in consultation and cooperation with the peasants,

Believing that this Declaration is an essential step forward the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms of peasants, including the elaboration and adoption of an International Convention on the Rights of Peasants,

Recognizing and reaffirming that peasants are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law,

Solemnly adopts the following Declaration on the Rights of Peasants:

Article I
Definition of peasants: rights holders
A peasant is a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, rely above all on family labour and other small-scale forms of organizing labour. Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities and they take care of local landscapes and of agro-ecological systems.

The term peasant can apply to any person engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, pastoralism, handicrafts-related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area. This includes Indigenous people working on the land.
The term peasant also applies to landless. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 1984) definition[1], the following categories of people are considered to be landless and are likely to face difficulties in ensuring their livelihood:

1. Agricultural labour households with little or no land;
2. Non-agricultural households in rural areas, with little or no land, whose members are engaged in various activities such as fishing, making crafts for the local market, or providing services;
3. Other rural households of pastoralists, nomads, peasants practising shifting cultivation, hunters and gatherers, and people with similar livelihoods.

Article II
Rights of peasants
1. Women peasants and men peasants have equal rights.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law.
3. Peasants (women and men) are free and equal to all other people and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular to be free from discriminations based on their economic, social and cultural status.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to actively participate in policy design, decision making, implementation, and monitoring of any project, program or policy affecting their territories.

Article III
Right to life and to an adequate standard of living
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to physical integrity, to not be harassed, evicted, persecuted, arbitrarily arrested, and killed for defending their rights.
2. Women peasants have the right to be protected from domestic violence (physical, sexual, verbal an psychological)
3. Women have the right to control their own bodies and to reject the use of their bodies for commercial purposes. All forms of human (women and girls) trafficking are inhuman and have to be condemned.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to live in dignity.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to adequate, healthy, nutritious, and affordable food, and to maintain their traditional food cultures.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Therefore, they have the right to have access to health services and medicine, even when they live in remote areas. They also have the right to use and develop traditional medicine.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to live a healthy life, and not be affected by the contamination of agrochemicals (such as chemical pesticides and fertilisers that are creating fertility problems and contaminating breast milk).
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to decide about the number of children they want to have, and about the contraceptive methods they want to use.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the full realization of their sexual and reproductive rights.
10. Peasants (women and men) have the right to safe water, transportation, electricity, communication and leisure.
11. Peasants (women and men) have the right to education and training.
12. Peasants (women and men) have the right to an adequate income to fulfill their basic needs and those of their families.
13. Peasants (women and men) have the right to adequate housing and clothing.
14. Peasants (women and men) have the right to consume their own agricultural production and to use this to satisfy their families’ basic needs, and the right to distribute their agriculture production to other people.
15. The right of peasants (women and men) to life and the fulfillment of their basic needs should be protected by the law and by the state, with the assistance and cooperation of others, without discrimination of any kind.

Article IV
Right to land and territory
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to own land, collectively or individually, for their housing and farming.
2. Peasants (women and men) and their families have the right to toil on their own land, and to produce agricultural products, to rear livestock, to hunt and gather, and to fish in their territories.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to toil and own the non-productive state land on which they depend for their livelihood.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to safe water and adequate sanitation.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to water for irrigation and agricultural production in sustainable production systems controlled by local communities.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to manage the water resources in their region.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to support, by way of facilities, technology and funds, from the state to manage the water resources.
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to manage, conserve, and benefit from the forests.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject all kinds of land acquisition and conversion for economic purpose.
10. Peasants (women and men) have the right to security of tenure and not to be forcibly evicted from their lands and territories.
11. Peasants (women and men) have the right to agricultural land that can be irrigated to ensure food sovereignty for growing population.

12. Peasants (women and men) have the right to benefit from land reform. Latifundia must not be allowed. Land has to fulfill its social function. Land ceilings to land ownership should be introduced whenever necessary in order to ensure an equitable access to land.
13. Peasants (women and men) have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.

Article V
Right to seeds and traditional agricultural knowledge and practice
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to determine the varieties of the seeds they want to plant.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject varieties of the plant which they consider to be dangerous economically, ecologically, and culturally.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject the industrial model of agriculture.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to conserve and develop their local knowledge in agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to use the agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing facilities.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to choose their own products, varieties, amount, quality and the ways of farming, fishing, livestock rearing, individually or collectively.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to use their own technology or the technology they choose guided by the principle of protecting human health and environmental conservation.
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to grow and develop their peasants varieties and to exchange, to give or to sell their seeds.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to food sovereignty.

Article VI
Right to means of agricultural production
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain funds from the State to develop agriculture.
2. Peasants (women and men) should have access to credit for their agricultural activity.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain the materials and tools for agriculture.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to water for irrigation and agricultural production in sustainable production systems controlled by local communities.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to transportation, drying, and storage facilities in marketing their products.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to be actively involved in planning, formulating, and deciding on the budget for national and local agriculture.

Article VII
Right to information and agriculture technology
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain impartial and balanced information about capital, market, policies, prices, technology, etc, related to peasants’ needs.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain information about national and international policies.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain technical assistance, production tools and other appropriate technology to increase their productivity, in ways that respect their social, cultural and ethical values.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to full and impartial information about goods and services, and to decide what and how they want to produce and consume.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to obtain adequate information at the national and international levels on the preservation of genetic resources.
Article VIII
**Freedom to determine price and market for agricultural production**
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to prioritize their agricultural production for their families and societies’ needs.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to store their production to ensure the satisfaction of their basic needs and those of their families.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to foster traditional local markets.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to get beneficial price for their production.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to determine the price, individually or collectively.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to get a fair payment for their work, to fulfill their basic needs and those of their families.
7. Peasants (women and men) have the right to get a fair price for their production.
8. Peasants (women and men) have the right to a fair system of evaluation of the quality of their product, nationally and/or internationally.
9. Peasants (women and men) have the right to develop community-based commercialization systems in order to guarantee food sovereignty.

Article IX
**Right to the protection of agriculture values**
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the recognition and protection of their culture and local agriculture values.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to develop and preserve local knowledge in agriculture.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject interventions that can destroy local agricultural values.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to be respected for their spirituality as individuals and as peoples.

Article X
**Right to biological diversity**
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to the protection and preservation of biological diversity.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to plant, develop and conserve biological diversity, individually or collectively.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject patents threatening biological diversity, including on plants, food and medicine.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject intellectual property rights of goods, services, resources and knowledge that are owned, maintained, discovered, developed or produced by the local community. They can not be forced to implement those intellectual property rights.
5. Peasants (women and men), individually or collectively, have the right to maintain, exchange, and preserve genetic and biological diversity as the richness of resources from the local community and the indigenous community.
6. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject certification mechanisms established by transnational corporations. Local guarantee schemes run by peasants’ organizations with government support should be promoted and protected.

Article XI
Right to preserve the environment
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to a clean and healthy environment.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to preserve the environment according to their knowledge.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reject all forms of exploitation which cause environmental damage.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right to sue and claim compensation for environmental damage.
5. Peasants (women and men) have the right to reparation for ecological debt and the historic and current dispossession of their territories.

Article XII
Freedoms of association, opinion and expression
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to freedom of association with others, and to express their opinion, in accordance with traditions and culture, including through claims, petitions, and mobilizations, at the local, regional, national and international levels.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right to form and join independent peasants’ organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, or any other organizations or associations, for the protection of their interests.
3. Peasants (women and men), individually or collectively, have the right to expression in their local customs, languages, local culture, religions, cultural literature and local art.
4. Peasants (women and men) have the right not to be criminalized for their claims and struggles.
5. Peasants (women and men) have to right to resist oppression and to resort to peaceful direct action in order to protect their rights.

Article XIII
Right to have access to justice
1. Peasants (women and men) have the right to effective remedies in case of violations of their rights. They have the right to a fair justice system, to have effective and nondiscriminatory access to courts and to have legal aid.
2. Peasants (women and men) have the right not to be criminalized for their claims and struggles.
3. Peasants (women and men) have the right to be informed and to legal assistance.

To have a proper Convention, there is a need to include chapters/parts on “state obligation” and “monitoring mechanism or mechanisms related to measures”, and other provisions similar to other international conventions.

Document adopted by the Via Campesina International Coordinating Committee in Seoul, March 2009
Food Sovereignty: A Future without Hunger

We, the Via Campesina, a growing movement of farm workers, peasant, farm and indigenous peoples’ organizations from all the regions of the world know that food security cannot be achieved without taking full account of those who produce food. Any discussion that ignores our contribution will fail to eradicate poverty and hunger.

Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security.

We, the Via Campesina reject the economic and political conditions which destroy our livelihoods, our communities, our cultures and our natural environment. The liberalization of trade and its economic policies of structural adjustment have globalized poverty and hunger in the world and are destroying local productive capacities and rural societies. This corporate agenda takes no account of food security for people. It is an inequitable system that treats both nature and people as a means to an end with the sole aim of generating profits for a few. Peasants and small farmers are denied access to and control over land, water, seeds and natural resources. Our response to the increasingly hostile environment is to collectively challenge these conditions and develop alternatives.

We are determined to create rural economies which are based on respect for ourselves and the earth, on food sovereignty and fair trade. Women play a central role in household and community food sovereignty. Hence they have an inherent right to resources for food production, land, credit, capital, technology, education and social services, and equal opportunity to develop and employ their skills. We are convinced that the global problem of food insecurity can and must be resolved. Food sovereignty can only be achieved through solidarity and the political will to implement alternatives.

Long-term food security depends on those who produce food and care for the natural environment. As the stewards of food producing resources we hold the following principles as the necessary foundation for achieving food security.

Food - a Basic Human Right
Food is a basic human right. Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity.

Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right.

**Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty**

We demand genuine agrarian reform which gives landless and farming people – especially women -- ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to Indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender religion, race, social class or ideology; land belongs to those who work it.

Peasant families, especially women, must have access to productive land, credit, technology, markets and extension services. Governments must establish and support decentralized rural credit systems that prioritize the production of food for domestic consumption to ensure food sovereignty.

Production capacity rather than land should be used as security to guarantee credit.

To encourage young people to remain in rural communities as productive citizens, the work of producing food and caring for the land has to be sufficiently valued both economically and socially. Governments must make long-term investments of public resources in the development of socially and ecologically appropriate rural infrastructure.

**Food Sovereignty: Protecting Natural Resources**

Food sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources especially land, water and seeds. We, who work the land, must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources and to preserve biological diversity. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agro-chemicals.

Long-term sustainability demands a shift away from dependence on chemical inputs, on cash-crop monocultures and intensive, industrialized production models. Balanced and diversified natural systems are required.

Genetic resources are the result of millenia of evolution and belong to all of humanity. They represent the careful work and knowledge of many generations of rural and indigenous peoples. The patenting and commercialization of genetic resources by private companies must be prohibited.

The World Trade Organization’s Intellectual Property Rights Agreement is unacceptable. Farming communities have the right to freely use and protect the diverse genetic resources, including seeds, which have been developed by them throughout history. This is the basis for food sovereignty.

**Food sovereignty: Reorganizing the Food Trade**
Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency.

Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices. This means that export dumping or subsidized export must cease. Peasant farmers have the right to produce essential food staples for their countries and to control the marketing of their products.

Food prices in domestic and international markets must be regulated and reflect the true costs of producing that food. This would ensure that peasant families have adequate incomes. It is unacceptable that the trade in foodstuffs continues to be based on the economic exploitation of the most vulnerable -- the lowest earning producers -- and the further degradation of the environment.

It is equally unacceptable that trade and production decisions are increasingly dictated by the need for foreign currency to meet high debt loads. These debts place a disproportionate burden on rural peoples. We demand that these debts be forgiven.

**Food Sovereignty: Ending the Globalization of Hunger**

Food sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organizations such as WTO, World Bank and the IMF. We demand the regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for transnational corporations.

**Social Peace: a Pre-requisite to Food Sovereignty**

Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalization in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanization and repression of peasants cannot be tolerated. We denounce the increasing incidence of racism in the countryside.

**Food Sovereignty: Democratic control**

Peasants and small farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. This includes the current FAO World Food Summit from which we have been excluded.

The United Nations and related organizations will have to undergo a process of democratization to enable this to become a reality. Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination.
Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues.

*Via Campesina*

*November 11-17, 1996 in Rome, Italy*
An Ordinance to Protect the Health and Integrity of the Local Food System
In the Town of (name of town), (name of county) County, Maine.

Section 1. Name. This Ordinance shall be known and may be cited as the “Local Food and Community Self-Governance Ordinance.”

Section 2. Definitions.
As used in this ordinance:
(a) “Patron” means an individual who is the last person to purchase any product or preparation directly from a processor or producer and who does not resell the product or preparation.
(b) “Home consumption” means consumed within a private home.
(c) “Local Foods” means any food or food product that is grown, produced, or processed by individuals who sell directly to their patrons through farm-based sales or buying clubs, at farmers markets, roadside stands, fundraisers or at community social events.
(d) “Processor” means any individual who processes or prepares products of the soil or animals for food or drink.
(e) “Producer” means any farmer or gardener who grows any plant or animal for food or drink.
(f) “Community social event” means an event where people gather as part of a community for the benefit of those gathering, or for the community, including but not limited to a church or religious social, school event, potluck, neighborhood gathering, library meeting, traveling food sale, fundraiser, craft fair, farmers market and other public events.

Section 3. Preamble and Purpose. We the People of the Town of (name of town), (name of county) County, Maine have the right to produce, process, sell, purchase and consume local foods thus promoting self-reliance, the preservation of family farms, and local food traditions. We recognize that family farms, sustainable agricultural practices, and food processing by individuals, families and non-corporate entities offers stability to our rural way of life by enhancing the economic, environmental and social wealth of our community. As such, our right to a local food system requires us to assert our inherent right to self-government. We recognize the authority to protect that right as belonging to the Town of (name of town). We have faith in our citizens’ ability to educate themselves and make informed decisions. We
hold that federal and state regulations impede local food production and constitute a usurpation of our citizens’ right to foods of their choice. We support food that fundamentally respects human dignity and health, nourishes individuals and the community, and sustains producers, processors and the environment. We are therefore duty bound under the Constitution of the State of Maine to protect and promote unimpeded access to local foods.

The purpose of the Local Food and Community Self-Governance Ordinance is to:
(i) Provide citizens with unimpeded access to local food;
(ii) Enhance the local economy by promoting the production and purchase of local agricultural products;
(iii) Protect access to farmers’ markets, roadside stands, farm based sales and direct producer to patron sales;
(iv) Support the economic viability of local food producers and processors;
(v) Preserve community social events where local foods are served or sold;
(vi) Preserve local knowledge and traditional foodways.

Section 4. Authority.
This Ordinance is adopted and enacted pursuant to the inherent, inalienable, and fundamental right of the citizens of the Town of (name of town) to self-government, and under the authority recognized as belonging to the people of the Town by all relevant state and federal laws including, but not limited to the following:

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, which declares that governments are instituted to secure peoples’ rights, and that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed.

Article I, § 2 of the Maine Constitution, which declares: “all power is inherent in the people; all free governments are founded in their authority and instituted for their benefit, [and that] they have therefore an unalienable and indefensible right to institute government and to alter, reform, or totally change the same when their safety and happiness require it.”

§3001 of Title 30-A of the Maine Revised Statutes, which grants municipalities all powers necessary to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the Town of (name of town).

§211 of Title 7 of the Maine Revised Statutes which states: “it is the policy of the State to encourage food self-sufficiency for the State.”

Section 5. Statements of Law.

Section 5.1. Licensure/Inspection Exemption.
Producers or processors of local foods in the Town of (name of town) are exempt from licensure and inspection provided that the transaction is only between the producer or processor and a patron when the food is sold for home consumption. This includes any producer or processor who sells his or her products at farmers’ markets or roadside stands; sells his or her products through farm-based sales directly to a patron; or delivers his or her products directly to patrons.
Section 5.1.a. Licensure/Inspection Exemption.  
Producers or processors of local foods in the Town of (name of town) are exempt from licensure and inspection provided that their products are prepared for, consumed, or sold at a community social event.

Section 5.2. Right to Access and Produce Food.  
(name of town) citizens possess the right to produce, process, sell, purchase, and consume local foods of their choosing.

Section 5.3. Right to Self-Governance.  
All citizens of (name of town) possess the right to a form of governance which recognizes that all power is inherent in the people, that all free governments are founded on the people’s authority and consent.

Section 5.4. Right to Enforce.  
(name of town) citizens possess the right to adopt measures which prevent the violation of the rights enumerated in this Ordinance.

The following restrictions and provisions serve to implement the preceding statements of law.

It shall be unlawful for any law or regulation adopted by the state or federal government to interfere with the rights recognized by this Ordinance. It shall be unlawful for any corporation to interfere with the rights recognized by this Ordinance. The term “corporation” shall mean any business entity organized under the laws of any state or country.

Section 6.2. Patron Liability Protection.  
Patrons purchasing food for home consumption may enter into private agreements with those producers or processors of local foods to waive any liability for the consumption of that food. Producers or processors of local foods shall be exempt from licensure and inspection requirements for that food as long as those agreements are in effect.

Section 7. Civil Enforcement.  
The Town of (name of town) may enforce the provisions of this Ordinance through seeking equitable relief from a court of competent jurisdiction. Any individual citizen of the Town of (name of town) shall have standing to vindicate any rights secured by this ordinance which have been violated or which are threatened with violation, and may seek relief both in the form of injunctive and compensatory relief from a court of competent jurisdiction.

Section 8. Town Action against Pre-emption.  
The foundation for making and adoption of this law is the peoples’ fundamental and inalienable right to govern themselves, and thereby secure their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Any attempt to use other units and levels of government to preempt, amend, alter or overturn this Ordinance or parts of this Ordinance shall require the Town to hold public meetings that explore the adoption of other measures.
that expand local control and the ability of citizens to protect their fundamental and inalienable right to self-government. It is declared that those other measures may legitimately include the partial 
or complete separation of the Town from the other units and levels of government that 
attempt to preempt, amend, alter, or overturn this Ordinance.

Section 9. Effect.
This Ordinance shall be effective immediately upon its enactment.

Section 10. Severability Clause.
To the extent any provision of this Ordinance is deemed invalid by a court of 
competent jurisdiction, such provision will be removed from the Ordinance, and the 
balance of the Ordinance shall remain valid.

Section 11. Repealer.
All inconsistent provisions of prior Ordinances adopted by the Town of (name of town) are hereby repealed, but only to the extent necessary to remedy the inconsistency,

Ordinance adopted by the towns of Sedgwick (5 March 2011), Penobscot (7 March 2011), 
Blue Hill (2 April 2011), Trenton (21 May 2011), Hope (8 November 2011)
Bibliography


Alperovitz, G., 2011, ‘America Beyond Capitalism: How Thousands of Co-ops, Worker-owned Businesses, Land Trusts, and Municipal Enterprises are Quietly Beginning to Democratize the
Deep Substructure of the American Economic System’,


Bellamy, A.J., 2006, ‘Responsibility to Protect or Trojan Horse? The Crisis in Darfur and Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq’, Ethics and International Affairs, 19(2), 31-54.


Berry, W., 2005, The Way of Ignorance and Other Essays by Wendell Berry, Shoemaker & Hoard, Berkeley, CA.


De Schutter, O., 2011a, ‘Promoting the Right to Food: Activity Report of the UN Special


Food and Water Watch, 2007, *Sowing the Seeds of Corporate Agriculture in Africa*,


Friends of the Earth, 2005, ‘The Oil for Ape Scandal: How Palm Oil is Threatening the Orang-utan’, www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/oil_for_ape_full.pdf, accessed 27.10.08.


International Monetary Fund, 2011, *World Economic Outlook* June 2011 Update


Knupp, R., 2010, *Lifting the Yoke: Local Solutions to America’s Farm and Food Crisis*.


La Via Campesina, 2001, ‘Our world is Not for Sale: Priority to People’s Food Sovereignty’,


352


Patel, R., 2010, The Value of Nothing, Black Inc., Melbourne, 43-4


Pfeffer, M.J., 1992, ‘Sustainable Agriculture in Historical Perspective’, *Agriculture and Human Values* 9(4), 4-11.


366


Vargas, M., and Chantry, O., 2011, ‘Ploughing through the meanders in Food Speculation’, *Mundubat*, 9, available at

Victorian Eco Innovation Lab (Larsen, K.), 2011, ‘Submission to the National Food Plan’, personal communication, 30.8.11.


