

# **Food Sovereignty as Multiple Resistances: The Honduran Movement in Global Context**

**by**

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## Abstract

Food sovereignty reconciles the local and global in its creative political imaginary of the meaning of sovereignty that justifies “multiple resistances.” This research explores this reconciliation of local and global through the case study of the food sovereignty project being advanced by *campesino* organizations in the Aguán Valley, Honduras, as situated within the dynamic nexus of local and global discourses, movements, and material realities. I argue that food sovereignty reconceives sovereignty as multiple, fixed and relational. The food sovereignty project invokes state sovereignty as a tool of resistance against the global corporate food regime, while also pushing to open new spaces for multiple sovereignties in both form and jurisdiction. As a collective rights framework, food sovereignty movements mobilize human rights frames to address immediate needs while continuing a long-term struggle for communal rights rooted in “alternative” peasant ways of living and working. This case study also raises questions about the relationship between different political and agroecological expressions of food sovereignty. While local and global food sovereignty discourses and practices are largely congruent, it is important to also consider how other tensions exists within and across different movement spaces. Food sovereignty holds great creative potential but also faces considerable challenges to the realization of its emancipatory project.

**Keywords:** Food sovereignty; multiple resistances; social movement communication; *campesino* movements; Honduras; Aguán Valley

*This work is dedicated to popular resistance movements  
in Honduras, particularly the campesinas and  
campesinos of the Aguán Valley, whose strength and  
resistance in the face of repression are an inspiration  
for all those struggling for justice. Que la lucha sigue.*

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## List of Acronyms

ADROH	<i>Asociación para el Desarrollo Rural de Honduras</i> (Association for Rural Development of Honduras)
ANACH	<i>Asociación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras</i> (National Peasant Association of Honduras)
ANAAFE	<i>Asociación Nacional para el Fomento de la Agricultura Ecológica</i> (National Association for Ecological Agriculture Training)
ARCAH	<i>Articulación Campesina de Honduras</i> (Honduran Peasant Articulation)
ASOCODE	<i>Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo</i> (Central American Association of Peasant Organizations for Cooperation and Development)
CLOC	<i>Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo</i> (Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organization)
CNRP	<i>Coordinadora Nacional de Resistencia Popular</i> (National Coordinator of Popular Resistance)
CNTC	<i>Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo</i> (National Centre of Rural Workers)
COCOCH	<i>Consejo Coordinador de Organizaciones Campesinas de Honduras</i> (Coordinating Council of Peasant Organizations of Honduras)
COFADEH	<i>Comité de Familiares de los Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras</i> (Committee of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras)
COPA	<i>Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán</i> (Coordinator of Aguán Popular Organizations)
COPINH	<i>Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras</i> (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Movements of Honduras)
FENACH	<i>Federación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras</i> (National Peasant Federation of Honduras)
FNRP	<i>Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular</i> (National Front of Popular Resistance)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IAASTD	Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development
INA	<i>Instituto Nacional Agrario</i> (National Agrarian Institute)
IPC	International Planning Committee
LIBRE	<i>Libertad y Refundación</i> (Freedom and Refoundation)

MARCA	<i>Movimiento Auténtico Reivindicativo Campesino del Aguán</i> (Authentic Reclamation Peasant Movement of Aguán)
MCA	<i>Movimiento Campesino del Aguán</i> (Peasant Movement of Aguán)
MCRGC	<i>Movimiento Campesino Refundación Gregorio Chávez</i> (Gregorio Chavez Peasant Refoundation Movement)
MOCSAM	<i>Movimiento Campesino de San Manuel</i> (Peasant Movement of San Manuel)
MST	<i>Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra</i> (Landless Rural Worker Movement)
MUCA	<i>Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguán</i> (Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán)
OFRANEH	<i>Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña</i> (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras)
UCIH	<i>Unión Campesina e Indígena de Honduras</i> (Women and Indigenous Peasant Union of Honduras)
WTO	World Trade Organization

# **Chapter 1.**

## **Introduction**



At the edge of La Panamá, a *campesino* community in the Aguán Valley of northern Honduras, we stood next to waist-high corn stalks and young citrus trees. Within close walking distance there were a diversity of fruit and vegetable crops and livestock, including lemon, orange, and banana trees; cucumber, tomato, and yucca plants; a chicken coop, and a few pigs. A humble fence served as a dividing line between La Panamá and the adjacent property, Finca Paso Aguán, an African palm plantation owned by the Aguán region's largest and most notorious landowner, Miguel

Facussé. The stark contrast between the towering oil palm trees on one side of the fence and the still maturing corn stalks on the other struck me as a perfect visual symbol of two different agricultural paradigms and entire worldviews both present in the Aguán, but in contradiction and intense conflict. While La Panamá's diverse subsistence agriculture symbolized the peasant way of small-scale collective farming, a maintained connection with the land, and the regional struggle for peasant dignity and food sovereignty, Facussé's Finca Paso Aguán palm plantation symbolized profit-driven industrial agriculture and its trends of privatization, concentrated ownership, and ecological, social, and cognitive monoculture. This place represented, conflict, resistance, and struggle.

We were a delegation of human rights observers in solidarity with Honduran popular resistance movements, visiting communities in the Aguán and elsewhere to learn about their struggles.<sup>1</sup> Juan Casasola,<sup>2</sup> a leader of La Panamá's peasant movement, *Movimiento Campesino Refundación Gregorio Chávez* (MCRGC), had met us as we arrived in the community. We had just passed over the Aguán River, the source of fertility of the land in the region that makes it so highly coveted for agribusiness and yet another symbol of the region's deep agrarian conflict. As we had turned onto the narrow road leading into La Panamá, I had noticed hanging at the entrance a large banner of the *Plataforma Agraria*, declaring the community's participation in a resilient region-wide peasant movement and "agrarian platform" uniting Aguán peasant groups in a concerted struggle. The families in La Panamá were not only practicing peasant agriculture by growing a wide diversity of subsistence and cash crops, they were also defending this way of life.

When Juan met us, he was already ready to tell us about his movement's attempts to reclaim their rights. He was also ready to recount the violence and dispossession that local peasants had faced as part of their resistance. He took us to this specific spot at the edge of La Panamá to give his testimony because it was a place

<sup>1</sup> I participated in a Rights Action Educational Delegation in Honduras from March 16 to 23, 2013, led by Karen Spring and Grahame Russell of Rights Action. A summary of the Delegation and its findings is available online (Right Actions, 2013a).

<sup>2</sup> This name is a pseudonym.

with tragic significance for his community and its movement. If there had been any doubt before, based on his testimony it quickly became clear to us that these were disputed lands, implicated in a struggle between La Panamá peasants and the neighbouring landowner. Juan told us that this was the place where the namesake of the MCRGC movement, Gregorio Chavez, was disappeared; community members found Chavez's abandoned machete, marking the place where he had worked the field for the last time. Juan broke off on the details, telling us he had already written his testimony at length, and that he would rather share that document than recount the story yet again.

The few but brutal details Juan did recount were enough to highlight the intense tensions at this particular boundary, and the broader conflict it represented. The disappearance of a community leader was a tragic and unforgettable injustice for La Panamá, and it fuelled their resolve to mobilize to defend and reclaim their land and livelihood, and the entire way of life represented by their farm and the community of peasants that worked it. Despite facing extreme repression for their mobilization at the hands of police, military, and private security guards acting in concert to protect the private interests of Facussé and the Aguán's other two regional land-owning oil palm magnates, peasant movements in the Aguán like the MCRGC of La Panamá struggle to protect and reclaim their land to use it productively and develop their communities in the pursuit of food sovereignty.

## **Situating Local and Global in my Approach to Food Sovereignty**

*Food sovereignty movements operate at a plurality of social and political scales, from the local grassroots, to the national and the global. Diverse strategies are used at multiple levels to challenge states, multinational corporations, and multilateral trade institutions including the WTO that perpetuate commodified food systems.... [L]ocal resistance that appropriates meanings surrounding food sovereignty links local and global, offering insights into alternative practices that seek to secede from the unsustainable global capitalist model of mass consumption and unlimited growth.*

- J. Ayres and M.J. Bosia, 2011, p. 60)

Although food sovereignty emerged and has gained traction within the transnational peasant movement La Via Campesina, it is a fundamentally local project. Food sovereignty is enacted as an alternative in practice and a response to how relations of food, agriculture, and production manifest in specific local contexts. While food sovereignty movements are part of a global struggle and maintain a critique of transnational processes, their resistance and action largely plays out in local and national spaces. In calling for a reimagined form of sovereignty, food sovereignty projects do not propose the dissolution of the state, but rather call on the state to exercise its sovereignty in a way that empowers food producing peoples to be food sovereign and determine their own agricultural practices and food relations. In this way, efforts in global and national spaces within the food sovereignty movement play a largely facilitating role in creating the conditions for the construction and realization of an emancipatory experience of food sovereignty on a localized scale.

Given the embeddedness of local food sovereignty projects in national and transnational processes and the deep interconnectedness between different scales of movement activity, this research project explores the relationships and reconciliation between different movement spaces in the case of food sovereignty. My research combines analysis of global food sovereignty discourse as a foundational for exploring how food sovereignty is taken up in local movement practice and how its meaning is interpreted in grassroots food sovereignty projects. In particular, in this research I focus on the case study of peasant movements in Honduras at the national level and at the local level in the Aguán Valley region and their efforts to build food sovereignty. I highlight local spaces as the scale of radical alternative building, while maintaining attention to how this articulates and reconciles with national and transnational movement spaces and their political projects. This is in accordance with Ayres and Bosia's (2011) approach to understanding food sovereignty, which argues that "alter-globalization" is misapplied when the single focus is large-scale mobilizations, as smaller, micro-encounters and localized responses are part of a broader and more nuanced process of transnational diffusion of resistances, struggles, and reformulations over sovereignty at multiple political and social scales" (p. 60). Through interrogating the relationship and reconciliation between local and global, this research explores how different movement spaces contribute to the lived experience of food sovereignty among food producers and

the potential to realize at local scales the emancipatory and creative potential for anti-neoliberal alternatives offered in the framework of food sovereignty.

## **Food Sovereignty as “Sovereignty” Reworked**

The meaning of sovereignty within food sovereignty is a radical reconceptualization of mainstream understandings of sovereignty. Traditional state-centric approaches to sovereignty rely on the demarcation of clear boundaries and borders, as the sovereign exercises control over a body politic within a particular geographic territory. Food sovereignty, however, while not necessarily dismissing the nation state as a sovereign entity, shifts the locus of sovereignty away from state-centricity, challenges bounded territory as the determining factor of who has control, and opens the possibility for multiple sovereignties, in terms of both jurisdiction and the type of control sovereignty enables. While food sovereignty is approached as a local phenomenon, the “scale” at which food sovereignty is to be achieved remains ambiguous; indeed, the very definition of food sovereignty is not prescriptive, stating instead that peoples, communities, and nation states can all be food sovereign and exercise their autonomy in determining their own food and agricultural policy. While the definition can be subject to critique for perceived lack of clarity, this ambiguity also can be read as intentional, allowing for a diversity of interpretations of food sovereignty in specific contexts. I argue that while food sovereignty is “fixed” in local contexts and geographies, it is also at the same time “open” in its relationship to other food sovereignty movements in international networks.

The food sovereignty movement, on both a global scale and within its place-specific manifestations, struggles against the global corporate food regime (McMichael, 2013a), its discourses of food and agriculture, and how it manifests in specific spaces of the food system. Local expressions of food sovereignty are related to and derive meaning from the way in which the corporate food regime takes shape in local contexts, because it is autonomy from the corporate food regime that food sovereignty seeks. They are also related to and derive meaning from one another in networked social mobilization, communication, and a transnational resistance corresponding to the macro-

level food regime that is inseparable from micro-level oppression and dispossession related to land, agrarian politics, and food production.

Food sovereignty was and is being produced within specific historical, social, and political contexts. The peasant movements that make up the transnational networks and the concepts of food sovereignty that they advocate are mutually constituted; the relationship between the concept of food sovereignty and the formation of political subjectivity in local and transnational movements is not unidirectional. Rather, the relationship is such that the networked resistance of a transnational peasant movement already constituted informs the meaning of the movement's central concept of food sovereignty, and the meaning food sovereignty as an evolving political concept informs the mobilization and communication activities of the movement. Importantly, both the movement and the discourse of food sovereignty are at their foundation linked to material realities of peasant struggles for access to productive resources and the defense of land, livelihood and "the peasant way" of living, working, and knowing.

## **Research Question: How do the local and global reconcile?**

Given this inseparability of food sovereignty as movement, as discourse, and as experience, and relatedly, the inseparability of food sovereignty as local phenomenon and its larger global context within which it is implicated, the central research question guiding this work seeks to address this complexity of food sovereignty. Thus, this research asks: how do the local and global reconcile in the project of food sovereignty? Understanding and approaching food sovereignty as a project allows for thinking about the movement that builds that project, as well as thinking about the project itself, and what sovereignty means or looks like within the project of food sovereignty. Thus, exploring this question of the place of the local and global within the project of food sovereignty requires (re)thinking about social movements and (re)thinking about the concept of sovereignty, both through the lens of the reconciliation of the local and global. Furthermore, and importantly, discussing food sovereignty as a "project" distinguishes it

from being an “endgame,”<sup>3</sup> like the project of neoliberalism that it opposes, food sovereignty is ongoing and open-ended. While the project of neoliberalism unfolds according to the logic of market forces, however, the project of food sovereignty seeks radical change based on sustainable (and regenerative) processes of ecological and social reproduction and transformation.

Food sovereignty is immanently place-based, particular to local conditions and contexts. However, it also responds to the injustices of global neoliberal economic relations, and more specifically a global neoliberal food system similarly characterized by dispossession and injustice, including food and land insecurity, epistemic and boipolitical violence, and the denial of dignified livelihood for the producers at the foundation of the world’s food supply. In this context, movements for food sovereignty seek to build an autonomous alternative in practice, while also working through traditional institutional political mechanisms of the nation state as they seek to create the local conditions, or social and political “room to maneuver,” that may help to enable the realization of the emancipatory potential of food sovereignty. In this way, food sovereignty movements seek to bend the sovereignty of the nation state in their favour, repurposing state sovereignty not as a tool of social control and legitimate violence within its borders, but rather, as a first line of defense against the economic exploitation of neoliberal global political economy. Simultaneously, food sovereignty movements and projects propose new, open, and multiple sovereignties, based not on territoriality, borders, and force, but on justice and sovereign control as an experience in practice, as a social, political, and ecological relationship that is being enacted, but also evolving and finding its maturity.

Through analysis of global food sovereignty discourse represented in La Via Campesina and the case study of the movement for food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley, Honduras, I argue that the reworked nature of sovereignty itself within food sovereignty represents a reconciliation of local and global. The case of food sovereignty in Honduras provides a thought provoking example of anti-neoliberal movements using both the strength of state sovereignty and autonomous forms of resistance (in

<sup>3</sup> This wording of contrasting a “project” and “endgame” is borrowed from Des Freedman (2008), who uses it to characterize the neoliberal project: “Neo-liberalization is, above all, a project and not an endgame” (p. 42).

international solidarity with other movements) as complementary, although perhaps seemingly contradictory, tools of resistance and alternative building in anti-neoliberal struggle. The unique character of sovereignty within the project of food sovereignty is pivotal in the justification and reconciliation of these multiple forms of resistance in the building of the alternative and emancipatory collective rights framework and project of social, ecological, and cognitive justice embodied in food sovereignty.

However, I also argue that the inherent complexity of food sovereignty calls for questioning reconciliations not only between the different movement “scales” of local and global, but also between different expressions of food sovereignty in practice within and across local, national, regional, and transnational movement spaces. Within food sovereignty, the meaning of sovereignty is fixed, relational, multiple, and collective. It calls for a strengthening of the external sovereignty of the state, while challenging internal sovereignty and opening new space for who can be considered “sovereign.” While social movements call on the state to “fix” the necessary conditions that are foundational to food sovereignty, such as agrarian reform, these movements also maintain openness across national boundaries in constructing a deterritorialized aspect of food sovereignty rooted in solidarity.

In this way, there is a communicative tension between establishing fixed meanings and creating open spaces. This reflects a tension between different forms of resistance in institutional political projects and autonomous politics in decentralized spaces. Given the reconciliation of local and global in the nature of sovereignty proposed, however, institutional politics and autonomy both “fit” within this alternative vision of sovereignty, though there may be considerable challenges to its realization in practice. Furthermore, the ways food sovereignty is expressed in practice raises further questions about the disconnects and potential for reconciliation between political and agroecological orientations within the movement as different expressions of food sovereignty, and how simultaneous openness and fixity of meaning may help or hinder such reconciliation.

## **Food Sovereignty as Discourse, Experience, and Social Movement**

In this research, looking at the project of food sovereignty means understanding food sovereignty as a discourse, as an experience grounded in place and context, and as a social movement communication network. This parallels the goal of the research to better understand the concept of “sovereignty” within food sovereignty movements, exploring “sovereignty” as a discourse, as locally contested/enacted politics, and as a relationship, to demonstrate that this conception of “sovereignty” is a radically reworked one. The case study discussed at length in Chapter 4 of movements for food sovereignty in Honduras, and more specifically the Aguán Valley region of northern Honduras, aims to explore these interconnected aspects of food sovereignty and demonstrate the ways in which food sovereignty embodies great creative potential, but nevertheless faces challenges, particularly in negotiating multiple and overlapping forms of resistance. Food sovereignty movements reject and create alternatives to their biopolitical dispossession through a rights-based framework that represents a reconfiguration of sovereignty as both “fixed” and “relational.” Movements are both singular in their conditions and struggle for local autonomy, and yet they are relational within the “open” global multitude of internationally networked food sovereignty movements, which informs multiple forms of resistance—perhaps appearing at times to be at cross-purposes—in striving to reconstruct a new form of sovereignty, or the multiple sovereignties that food sovereignty embodies.

As such, food sovereignty pushes the boundaries of traditional sovereignty and seeks to establish new sovereign entities rooted in specific cultural, social, and geographic contexts. It does not seek to abolish or dissolve the state as a sovereign unit; land reform is a central tenet of the food sovereignty program, which is something to be achieved through the state, and some analyses indicate how the state can be used to achieve redistribution and limit local insertion within global neoliberal (food, economic, and intellectual property) regimes. However, food sovereignty also seeks to establish a new logic of who has and can have power and control, shifting the balance of power to peoples and communities to decide their own social and economic organization and their relationships with food and nature. According to the logic and project of food

sovereignty, sovereignty is not “zero sum.” A plurality of food sovereign entities can simultaneously fight for their own food sovereignty, which is contextual and multiple, in jurisdiction and form (material, political, and representational).

## **Food Sovereignty as Social Change Communication**

Food sovereignty is inherently communicative, as it has developed as a framework for expressing the concerns and demands of underrepresented groups whose needs are not being met by the dominant food discourses and their related agricultural policies and programs that perpetuate established power structures. Food sovereignty’s materially rooted project of transformative social, political, and ecological change that corresponds with the discourse is also communicative insofar as processes of alternative building and the communicative experiences involved also inform the meaning of food sovereignty and its communicative potential for social change. Importantly, as Dutta (2011) argues, “communicative erasures go hand in hand with structural erasures” (p. 40), and communicative erasure is in fact foundational to material erasure (p. 58). Resistance, argues Dutta (2011), is a “defining feature” of communicative processes and practices for social change, “discursively constituted as efforts that stand in opposition to the organizing framework of the dominant structure that perpetuates the inequities across the globe” (p. 26). Movements and projects that seek to build transformative change through food sovereignty are grounded in material inequalities and material struggles, but communicative processes nevertheless go hand in hand in projects of transforming social structures and enacting food sovereignty in practice.

The approach to social change communication that I use to explore the research question of the reconciliation between local and global is not one of mapping the networks of communication between local and global movement spaces. Rather, my approach is based on the experience of communicative processes within a ritual view of communication, or what Dutta refers to as the “process-based framework to communication for social change” (p. 32). This approach:

...focuses on the shared spaces of interpretation and meaning making through which communication comes to constitute social realities. Communication is seen as constitutive, as an active process of meaning making through which individuals and communities come to understand their contexts and act upon them. (Dutta, 2011, p. 32)

In the subsequent chapters I explore the meaning-making processes in local and global movement spaces of food sovereignty as constitutive of the communicative project of transforming discourse and thereby also affecting material transformation.

In accordance with Dutta's (2011) "culture-centered approach" to social change communication, my research attempts to account for "the dynamic relationship between the symbolic and the material" (p. 62) in the case of food sovereignty. As such, I explore the meaning of food sovereignty in close conjunction with the material realities and experiences of rural injustices and struggles to build food sovereignty as an alternative project in practice. Attentive to and critical of communications scholarship that reifies the immaterial and foregrounds meaning-making at the expense of recognizing "the role of material interventions," Dutta argues for an analysis of meanings "in relationship to class structures, material inequities, and structural oppressions" (p. 62). Following this approach, I discuss the meaning of food sovereignty as it has evolved as discourse within global networks at length in Chapter 3. Then in Chapter 4, I foreground the material oppressions of peasant movements in Honduras as an "entry point" into further discussion of food sovereignty meaning-making processes and its emancipatory and transformative potential in challenging structural and material injustices. In this way, I aim to ground my analysis of the meaning and enactment of food sovereignty in the material conditions and struggles of grassroots peasant movements in the Aguán Valley.

## Why study food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley, Honduras?

My research is based on the case study of the *campesino* movement in Honduras, particularly the movement for food sovereignty among peasant groups in the Aguán Valley region of northern Honduras. In the Aguán Valley, a "new" generation of *campesino* movements, mobilized in the 2000's but with deep roots in historical peasant and labour movements, struggles for land access, comprehensive agrarian reform, and

increasingly, food sovereignty. These *campesino* movements are also engaged in a popular resistance movement for national democratization and “refoundation” of Honduras. These demands were born from the coup d'état on June 28, 2009 that ousted the democratically elected president Manuel “Mel” Zelaya and have been strengthened in the ongoing political crisis under a government that popular movements see as a continuation of the coup regime. This case study is important and appropriate because despite severe repression experienced by grassroots peasant movements in a particularly heated agrarian conflict, they nevertheless are engaged in the discourse of food sovereignty and actively building “food sovereignty projects” as alternative models of food production and distribution in practice. The case study is also representative in many ways of neoliberal trends in the global food system and the attendant response from peasant movements. On one hand, Honduras is representative of the ways that peasant agricultures are undermined by transnational agribusiness and states are complicit in the concentration of land and resources. On the other hand, Honduran peasants, and more specifically the Aguán Valley movements, are also representative of a new age of social movements on a global scale struggling against the global corporate food regime with sophisticated demands for autonomous control and environmental stewardship.

There has been an intense concentration of land ownership in the Aguán Valley, primarily into the hands of three agro-capitalists: Reinaldo Canales, Rene Morales, and Miguel Facussé. This concentration of resources has also compounded the “the progressive displacement of basic grain production by export crops,” demoting Honduras from being “one of the main basic grain producers in Central America” to a situation of food insecurity and dependence on imports to fulfill half of the country’s food needs (FIDH, 2011, p. 8). All three large landowners in the Aguán Valley dedicate their land to the production and processing of African oil palm, a monocultural crop celebrated by the UN Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) as a biofuel eligible for carbon emissions trading with industrialized countries to reduce their emissions in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol. These landowners have also received financing from national and international institutions for the expansion of African palm (see FIDH, 2011, p. 10). This contributes to a changing agricultural landscape in the region:

...Honduras currently produces more than 300 metric tons of African palm oil, almost 70% of which is exported. This plant is now cultivated on 120 thousand hectares (compared to 40 thousand during the 90s and 80 thousand in 2005), the majority of which is situated in the northern parts of Colón, Atlántida, and particularly in the Valley of Aguán. (FIDH, 2011, p. 8)

The Aguán Valley is among the most fertile arable land in the country and is thus highly coveted, particularly for the production of African oil palm.

This situation in the Aguán is in line with global agricultural trends, and the corporate food regime's shift from food to fuel (and finance). Throughout the world, there has been a monopolization of farming resources, concentration of land ownership, and a rise of intensive industrial agriculture, resulting in the deterioration of traditional agroecological crop methods and collective farming. The increasing prevalence of monoculture production cripples the potential for self-sufficiency, threatens environmental sustainability, compromises ecological and economic resiliency, and is often accompanied by violations of human rights. Indeed, this is the experience of peasant farmers in the Aguán Valley, where land ownership has become intensely concentrated and monocultural farming dominates the region. The challenges faced by peasant movements in this conjuncture, and how they struggle to overcome them in the pursuit of food sovereignty, is worthy of further investigation given its relevance to a large cross-section of peasant movements on a global scale in distinct, but similar, contexts of resource privatization and concentration and the increasing industrialization of agriculture, often for export.

The unfavourable political climate in Honduras, particularly since the 2009 coup d'état ousting a democratically elected president, is representative of the difficult national policy environment faced by the majority of landless and land-poor peasant struggles for rights to land and livelihood. While a handful of countries have implemented national legislation that speaks to food sovereignty and its related framework of rights (including Senegal, Mali, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Nepal, and Bolivia [Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012, p. 264; see also Beauregard, 2009]), the antagonistic relationship between social movements and the state in Honduras is more representative of the global norm. As Rosset (2009a) explains:

The majority of the countries in the world do not enjoy governments committed to state-led redistribution of land based on expropriation, with or without compensation to former landowners. This is the fundamental cause behind the phenomenal rise in land occupations and reclamations—land reform from below—being carried out by a new generation of sophisticated social movements around the world (p. 119).

Rosset (2009a) includes Honduras in a lengthy list of countries where peasant movements are executing such “land reform from below” in pursuit of food sovereignty despite lack of institutional state support (pp. 119-120). Such “bottom up” processes of building food sovereignty are critical tactics in the “new generation” of peasant movements, and Honduras is representative of this global trend.

The case of the food sovereignty movement in Honduras demonstrates that although the global food system and its injustices are transnational, the nation state is significant and a critical space of action for resistance movements. As Dutta (2011) argues, “[a]lthough transnational hegemony enacts its power beyond the traditional boundaries of nation states, nation states continue to be relevant as they serve as key players in co-creating agendas of transnational hegemony and carrying out these agendas globally” (p. 47). Although Honduran peasant movements are acutely aware of the transnational processes that create the local conditions of injustice that they experience through the mechanism of the nation state and particular neoliberal policies, their resistance and struggle to build alternatives are local in nature. Although this struggle for food sovereignty plays out in local and national political spaces, the embeddedness of local food sovereignty projects within a transnational context and transnational struggles reiterates the importance and relevance of questioning the reconciliation of local and global in the project of food sovereignty. Indeed, Honduras is significantly implicated in the history of transnational peasant organizing through La Via Campesina. Honduras hosted the international office of La Via Campesina for eight years (in the initial years of the food sovereignty program) and is now home to a regional office of La Via Campesina in Central America. This history is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Although Honduras is perhaps a weak example of a community or nation “reaching a state of food sovereignty,” grassroots movements demonstrate strong efforts

in “pursuit of a *pathway towards* food sovereignty” (McKay and Nehring, 2013, p. 24, original emphasis). Honduran and specifically Aguán movements are making important inroads in building food sovereignty at the grassroots level. In celebration of such achievements, the *Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguán* (MUCA) was recognized as a Food Sovereignty Prize honouree in 2012, awarded annually by the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance (Food Sovereignty Prize, 2012; see also Food First, 2012).<sup>4</sup> MUCA is one of a number of Aguán movements and the most advanced in the region in implementing “food sovereignty projects,” but the movement also acts as a mentor in supporting other movements in their efforts to reclaim land and advance food sovereignty, both within the Aguán and other regions. This solidarity and collectivity is also characteristic of the food sovereignty movement at large.

Perhaps most notably, it is in the face of the most intense agrarian conflict seen in Central America in recent years that peasant movements are advancing this collective project of food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley (Edelman, 2012). Honduras offers an example of food sovereignty as an ongoing struggle; the movement is still bourgeoning and faces many structural and often violent challenges. However, I argue that this reinforces the relevance of Honduras as a case study of food sovereignty as an aspirational project yet to be built (as a “pathway towards”), and the multiple and overlapping forms of resistance involved in advancing such a struggle in local and national spaces.

## Methodology and Methods

In this research, I investigate both the transnational food sovereignty movement in general and the food sovereignty movement in the Aguán Valley, Honduras in particular. I consider their interrelationship as a networked movement and their

<sup>4</sup> Inaugurated in 2009, the Food Sovereignty Prize describes itself as a counterbalance to the World Food Prize: “While the World Food Prize emphasizes increased production through technology, the Food Sovereignty Prize champions solutions coming from those most impacted by the injustices of the global food system. In honoring those who are taking back their food systems, the Food Sovereignty Prize affirms that nothing short of the true democratization of our food system will enable us to end hunger once and for all.” (Food Sovereignty Prize, 2012)

reconciliation of food sovereignty discourse and a new expression of sovereignty in practice. Given my ontological and epistemological assumptions and that one of the goals of this research is to study the “lived experience” of food sovereignty “from the perspectives of those who live it and create meaning from it,” qualitative methodology was most appropriate (Oktay, 2012, p. 28; see also Grix, 2002).

More specifically, my research was structured using grounded theory as a form of inductive thematic analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 2012; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is a research process of generating or constructing theory “grounded” in systematic observation of social phenomena and “real-world situations” (Lingard, Albert, and Levinson, 2008, p. 459; Oktay, 2012, p. 4). Grounded theory is an appropriate methodology when generating or constructing theory is the primary aim of research (Strauss and Corbin, 1997, p vii). In a grounded theory approach, the “materializing theory” that emerges as “categories take shape” drives the data collection and analysis process in research (Locke, 1996, p. 240). Grounded theory aims to minimize the influence of assumptions and expectations about the research process and its findings in order to develop theory directly from the data collection process. Rather than testing a predetermined hypothesis, grounded theory allows theory to emerge from field research. However, beyond being just a process of theory “generation” rather than theory “verification,” it is also “grounded” in field observations and experience (Glaser and Strauss, 2012, pp. 12-15). This “systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research” ensures that the resultant theory will “fit” and “work” in the intended context to fulfill the purposes of social research (Glaser and Strauss, 2012, p. 3).

Within my grounded theory approach, there were three elements in my research process: 1) historical research, 2) document analysis, and 3) qualitative interviewing. The historical research positions global food sovereignty discourse and Honduran social movements and agrarian conflicts in historical context. This situates food sovereignty within the historical emergence of a transnational peasant movement and the current political conjuncture in Honduras as a product of historical processes including Honduran agrarian reform, neoliberal restructuring, and the political crisis caused by the 2009 coup d'état. The document analysis draws primarily on declarations issued by La Via Campesina and international gatherings related to food sovereignty to provide the

foundation for an analysis of food sovereignty as discourse, and how that discourse has changed and evolved since the initial launch of food sovereignty. The documents of Honduran *campesino* organizations are invoked to a lesser degree, given the limited existence and availability of such documents, in comparison to the well documented and accessible activity of La Via Campesina International. Finally, semi-structured interviews with leaders and spokespersons of Honduran *campesino* movements provide insight on the organizational identity, history, and goals of local movements; distinct organizational understandings, interpretations, and applications of food sovereignty in movement context; movement issue framing and broad strategic direction; and communication and networking activities as related to movement goals and challenges. This was a process of elite interviewing, which enables interaction with individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic in question and considered experts in their particular area (see Marshall and Rossman, 1999, 113-14).

Participation in two human rights observation delegations in Honduras in January 2012 and March 2013 served as an important foundation for this research project. Both were educational delegations in solidarity and accompaniment with the national resistance movement in Honduras. This broad-based movement consolidated through the formation of *Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular* (FNRP, National Front of Popular Resistance, in translation) in the immediate aftermath of the coup d'état on June 28, 2009 and has continued to be engaged in an ongoing struggle for democratization. These delegations involved meeting with and hearing political analysis from key figures in various social movements, including peasant movements in the Aguán Valley. The 2012 delegation was titled Honduras Delegation on Food Sovereignty and co-organized and led by Alliance for Global Justice, Rights Action, and Food First. It facilitated my introduction to Honduran agrarian politics and the movements for land, democracy, and food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley. During this delegation, my colleagues and I traveled to seven *campesino* communities, where we heard testimonies of dispossession, landlessness, and human rights violations. These testimonies, however, also detailed *campesinos'* fight for justice and their implementation of "food sovereignty projects" through agricultural and economic diversification. We met with the leaders of several Aguán cooperatives and also attended a regional Congress, during which

*campesino* organizations discussed the collective priorities of the movement and internal strategies of their resistance.

The 2013 delegation, which focused on the Honduran resistance movement more broadly, served as a starting point to my field research upon arrival in Honduras, providing an invaluable re-introduction to the current political context and activist groups involved in the ongoing resistance movement. Both delegations, the political perspectives shared by members of diverse movements (particularly Aguán activists), and the analysis and insight offered by delegation leaders, specifically by Karen Spring and Grahame Russell of Rights Action and Tanya Kerssen of Food First, contributed greatly to the development of my own understanding and analysis of social and political issues in Honduras and provided a crucial foundation for conducting further research in an informed way.

## **Interview Process and Participants**

Primarily, I conducted interviews with representatives of grassroots peasant movements in the Aguán Valley and representatives of national level *campesino* organizations working to support various grassroots movements in different parts of the country. Within *campesino* organizing in Honduras, movement representatives (particularly those working at the national level) use the language of first, second, and third “level” to refer to different organizational bodies in the movement. “First level” refers to what I call grassroots peasant movements, “second level” refers to national level organizations, and “third level” refers to larger networked alliance of many organizations articulated under a single umbrella. The peasant and agrarian activists I interviewed all represented the first or second level, though some also spoke about third level organizing given their involvement or leadership roles in such networks. The interviews I conducted with these participants are the “core” to my research, but additional interviews also provided valuable insight and context. In addition to interviewing Aguán and national level *campesino* organization representatives, I also interviewed representatives of human rights organizations; researchers and observers of the *campesino* movement; and *campesino* activists not directly involved in the Aguán, but nevertheless experiencing the common context of national agrarian politics and in mutual solidarity

with Aguán movements. The interview protocol for core interviews consisted of questions about the history of the movement; primary problem identification; short and long-term movement goals; national and international communication strategies; the role of national and international networks in the movement; and the role and meaning of food sovereignty in the movement, or other food frames (see Appendix A for full interview protocol).

In total, I conducted 28 interviews, 11 of which were what I have referred to as core interviews with representatives of Aguán *campesino* movements or national level *campesino* organizations. Beyond these core interviews, I conducted:

- Three interviews with land rights/food sovereignty activists at the grassroots level outside the Aguán region;
- Five interviews with activists either directly involved in or in solidarity with Honduran resistance movements;
- Three interviews with representatives of human rights organizations in Honduras;
- Three interviews with Honduran researchers of peasant movements and social movements more generally;
- Three interviews with representatives of communication networks that support social movements.

Although I conducted 28 *interviews*, I refer throughout my thesis to *interviewees* when attributing quotes because some interviews had more than one participant (see Appendix B for a complete chart of interviewees and their organizational affiliations). For example, I conducted one interview in the office of La Via Campesina with two representatives of different national peasant movements at once, ADROH and UCIH (one participant was also a representative of the “third level” peasant articulation ARCAH), and another interview in the office of CNTC involved five participants, each representing a different region or issue area of CNTC’s work at the national level. In both of these examples, I had been expecting to meet one person, as had been the case with many other interviews I had arranged. Although additional participants changed the dynamic of conducting interviews and caught me off guard (especially in the case of CNTC), it also added richness to the interview process. Most notably, in reflecting on these interviews in particular, the fact that my contact in each case had invited other

participants to be involved in the process struck me as highlighting the degree of camaraderie and collectively not only at the grassroots level, but also among national level organizers.

Potential interviewees were identified during the delegations in which I participated, through online research, on the basis of referral, and through personal networking at various events. Correspondingly, interviewees were recruited by e-mail, phone, or in person, depending on the process of identification and the contact information available. I attended events directly related or relevant to the struggles of *campesino* movements that not only complemented but also furthered the interview process by providing opportunities for meeting and recruiting interview participants. Such events included:

- Several press conferences at the offices of La Via Campesina or COFADEH in Tegucigalpa, where statements were often issued by various Aguán and national level *campesino* organizations;
- A public event to expose evidence implicating Miguel Facussé in the disappearance of peasants in the Aguán Valley, convened by MCRGC with the organizational support of COFADEH and solidarity of Aguán movements;
- A gathering (*encuentro*) of Honduran Indigenous peoples (traditionally peasant farmers or fisherfolk) in Vallecito, where Indigenous groups from different regions of the country discussed their individual and collective issues, goals (including food sovereignty), and strategies, and the need for increased collaboration and solidarity between Indigenous groups;
- The International Workers' Day March on May 1 in Tocoa, Colón, attended by Aguán peasant, labour, and other social movements;
- A forum on ecological agriculture in Tegucigalpa convened by the *Asociación Nacional para el Fomento de la Agricultura Ecológica* (ANAFAE) and attended by various NGOs and peasant movements;
- A presentation in the office of La Via Campesina given by Costa Rican agroecology and biodynamic farming practitioners/activists in summary of a week-long field school workshop they had facilitated with Honduran peasant farmers affiliated with La Via Campesina.

All of these events contributed in some way to my understanding of peasant movements and movements for food sovereignty, my awareness of organizations in the movement and the relationships between them, and facilitated introductions with movement actors who later become interview participants.

## Analyzing Interview Data

During and after conducting interviews, data was analyzed through a process of inductive loose coding to identify emerging themes, relationships, and tensions within the interview data. This analysis was conducted through “memoing” to develop ideas about codes and relationships between concepts and themes in the interviews. These memos and codes were organized into broader categories as patterns and connections between ideas and observations began to emerge within the data. After initial close reading of interview data to identify initial themes emerging from “text segments that contain meaning units” (Thomas, 2006, p. 241), I continued to revisit these themes in relation to one another as part of a process of situating individual categories within a broader framework for understanding the data. Moving between theme and category analysis was an important process because it made me realize new themes as well as the relationships between themes and categories. Though this process, I distilled complexities and initially “messiness” of the themes into categories of relationships, overlaps, and tensions between individual “meaning units” that resonated as part of a particular story about Aguán movements and food sovereignty I think I heard and observed.

According to the logic of grounded theory, the theoretical findings of the research emerged through an ongoing process of “sense-making” of the data and linking discrete themes to larger thematic categories to identify the principle findings presented in Chapter 4. This sense-making process included keeping a journal to record observations, reflections, and initial analysis during field research; presenting preliminary research findings at a conference at the conclusion of my field research, and again during the writing process; charting interview data as a means of organizing and developing categories; and using sticky notes to be able to cluster themes into categories and visualize emergent ideas. Writing was a particularly important element in this sense-making process. As Glaser (2012) explains, writing is inherently part of the grounded theory method; it “is not something to be done after the research is done,” but “integrated” into the research process and methodology (p. 2). In my own process, writing out components of the research findings at various stages, beginning during field research, was part of the process of identifying the relationships between individual

themes in the data and understanding how the various findings about social movements, agrarian conflict, and politics more broadly in Honduras “fit” within answering research questions specifically about food sovereignty.

## **Reflecting on the Interview Process: Did I impose Food Sovereignty?**

I recognize that there is the possibility that I—as not only an outsider of the movement, but also a foreigner with marked class (and other) privileges—imposed language and frameworks on the movement leaders with whom I spoke by asking them to discuss particular concepts and not others. Indeed, this is something that I felt the need to be sensitive to throughout my field research. Although the main thrust of my research had been from the beginning to research the “food sovereignty” movement in Honduras, I could not be sure that all organizations I would speak with would consider food sovereignty a relevant concept or action item within their respective movements. Although the delegation I joined in 2012 in Honduras was ostensibly focused on *campesino* movements through the lens of “food sovereignty,” upon speaking to *campesino* leaders, it very quickly becomes apparent that the intensity of the agrarian conflict means that “food sovereignty” is not always present at the forefront of these struggles. More often than not, an issue frame other than food sovereignty is the first to be mentioned by *campesino* activists to capture the nature of the struggle in the Aguán.

To reflect this awareness, my interview protocol began with questions about the history of the movement, the current context, and broad goals of the organization as a *campesino* movement. Based on a semi-structured interview approach, the orientation of questions then transitioned either to communication strategy and networking activities within the movement or the organizational interpretation of food sovereignty. Semi-structured interviewing allowed me, as the researcher, to pick up on themes from the conversation and select the order of subsequent questions accordingly. In many cases, the interviewee mentioned food sovereignty as a an element of the movement before I asked questions about food sovereignty initiatives.

In the initial phase of my field research, I became very aware that Honduran social movements engaged in the discourse of food sovereignty do not self-identify as

“food sovereignty movements,” nor is there a consolidated national movement for food sovereignty. Rather, diverse peasant and Indigenous movements mobilize food sovereignty as one frame within their respective movements. As I quickly realized that referring to a Honduran “food sovereignty movement” may in fact be somewhat of a misnomer, I became very aware of my potential to impose language and self-conscious of the fact that I may have mischaracterized or misinterpreted the movement. I dealt with this by leveraging the semi-structured nature of the interview process, looking for cues in the language of the interview participants to expand on concepts, or introduce different concepts in a way that built on those already discussed. While this approach to conducting interviews was first and foremost concerned with being respectful of the personal experiences and language choices of interview participants, I must also acknowledge that this approach was also a means of addressing my own discomfort with potentially forcing a shift from an issue frame (from one of social movement criminalization or human rights abuse to one of food sovereignty, for example) in an insensitive way.

When asking interviewees about their organization’s engagement in the food sovereignty movement or discourse, the question was first framed as an inquiry into whether food sovereignty was relevant to the interview participant’s organization. For example, if the participant had not already mentioned the keyword food sovereignty, I would phrase the question as follows: “Some peasant movements, such as X and Y, use the language of food sovereignty in their struggles. Is your movement also talking about food sovereignty?” The subsequent question, given that all interview participants indicated that their respective organization had some level of engagement with food sovereignty discourse, was what the concept meant for their organization. Responses to this question were diverse and rich. For example, some interview participants spoke at length about the “food sovereignty projects” being implemented by their organization in accordance with their food sovereignty vision. Others linked the discussion of food sovereignty more explicitly to agrarian reform, implying that *campesino* groups cannot be food sovereign without the approval of new comprehensive agrarian reform legislation. One representative of the *Movimiento Campesino de San Manuel* (MOCSAM), a peasant land reclamation movement of sugar cane workers near El Progreso, replied to the question by saying that although MOCSAM is discussing food sovereignty and

considers it an important concept, the movement's interpretation of food sovereignty is not yet formulated. He explained that MOCSAM is only beginning to engage in the issue area of food sovereignty, to great extent through the vicarious experience, solidarity, and support of their allies in the Aguán, especially the *Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguán* (MUCA) (Interviewee 34).

Asking questions about the use of the concept of food sovereignty and how it is interpreted by organizations not only allowed for an exploration of the meaning of food sovereignty in different contexts, but it also revealed the nature of the movement itself and the lenses through which movements understand food sovereignty. Ultimately, as all interview participants confirmed that their respective organizations are concerned with food sovereignty to some degree, it seems clear that the food sovereignty frame is relevant to Honduran peasant movements. However, food sovereignty is not always the primary frame invoked, though it is related to other frames. Incorporating these concerns in the research process helped me to introduce the topic of food sovereignty in interviews in a way that was well received by interview participants. Reflecting on these considerations also contributed to my interpretation of the research findings and developing a more nuanced reading of the many peasant movements in Honduras and the role and meaning of food sovereignty within them than that which I initially had at the outset of the research process.

## **Political Economic Contexts: Laying the Foundation for Discussion and Analysis**

Through maintaining communications with La Via Campesina and other organizations and engaging with the discourse and practice of building food sovereignty, Honduran movements are linked into a transnational network of food sovereignty advocates. However, these *campesino* movements are also implicated in a specific national political context with a corresponding political project of democratization. In the next section, I discuss the global political economic context of food sovereignty that is highly relevant to grassroots peasant movements and their demands for food sovereignty. Moving from general to specific, I then discuss the national context in Honduras and situate Honduran peasant movements and their calls for democratization

and food sovereignty in relation to the logic of the Honduran state, particularly since the 2009 coup d'état that marked a significant political rupture. Finally, I close this chapter with a brief summary of the main arguments of the succeeding chapters.

## **Global Political Economy: Food Sovereignty in Global Context**

Food sovereignty was introduced and has developed as a response to a world condition of rural crisis. It has continued to gain momentum in the ongoing context of food insecurity, made particularly evident by the drastic, and still unresolved, worldwide food price increases of 2007 and 2008 (FAO, IFAD, and WFP, 2013; Holt-Giménez 2009; Rosset, 2009b; Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe, 2010). In 2008, widespread famine and record hunger among poor populations coincided with “record harvests and record profits for the world’s major agrifood corporations” (Holt-Giménez, 2009, p. 143; see also Patel, 2007), which reveals the great paradox of the global food regime. In response to this condition of “world hunger amidst global plenty” (Araghi, 2003), a global “counter-movement” has mobilized to address the issues of a food system that—though currently in crisis—has long been ill.

Compounding historical marginalization of the rural poor, the global project of neoliberalism, which began in the 1970's to replace the previously nationally oriented “development project” (McMichael, 2012), has displaced and disenfranchised landless and near landless peoples, particularly throughout the global south. Neoliberal economic policies at national and international levels, including processes of trade liberalization, export oriented production, subsidy reduction, credit privatization, structural adjustment, and the proliferation of cheap food imports, have sabotaged the viability of peasant and small-scale farming (IPC for Food Sovereignty, 2006). Subjected to unfeasible credit terms and unable to compete with inexpensive food “dumping” in local markets, the rural poor have faced diminishing access to land and viable livelihood. Industrialized reorganization and internationalization of food systems has threatened peasant agriculture, decreasing self-sufficiency in conjunction with escalating food dependency (Holt-Giménez, 2009; McMichael, 2012). Large land grabs, often coercive in nature, have occurred as private landowners seek a solution to the crisis of capital over-

accumulation and capitalize on the dire straits of the peasantry in a neoliberal era of financialization (Holt-Giménez, 2012; McMichael, 2013a; Rosset, 2011; Torrez, 2011).

Through these developments, a process of agrarian “reform” directed by the laws of the market, with a strong bias toward commercialization, liberalization, privatization, and financialization has resulted in a crisis of rural life and of the food system that food sovereignty now seeks to reconcile. While multilateral institutions propose “green” capital and market-based solutions to the condition of world hunger and environmental degradation, “[n]eoliberal retrenchment has met growing resistance by those most affected by the crisis” (Holt-Giménez, 2009, p. 142). Through the discourse and politics of food sovereignty, peasants and smallholder farmers are challenging the involvement of multilateral institutions including the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization in matters of food production, advocating viable alternatives to “WTO style agricultural liberalization” (McMichael, 2009c), market-oriented rural development, and other destructive neoliberal policies (Edelman and James, 2010; McMichael, 2010; Rosset, 2006; La Via Campesina, 1999; La Via Campesina, 2010).

In response to this context and increasingly unfavourable political and economic conditions for having a dignified life in peasant agriculture, food sovereignty expresses the right of people and communities to define and determine their own agricultural and food policy. It focuses both on the international political and policy framework of the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and other international institutions, and on the national political sphere where national policies can contribute to the reduction of rural poverty and hunger. It addresses the political inadequacies of the concept of food security, namely the absence of a discussion regarding the “social control of the food system” and its productive resources (Patel, 2009, p. 665), the power dynamics inherent to food relations, and the critical questions of decision-making authority at the levels of production, distribution, and consumption.

Contrary to some critiques, food sovereignty is not a program for rural isolationism, a rejection of trade, or a call for a return to an idyllic, romanticized rural past. However, it does demand a radical reorganization of trade relations and agricultural policies such that the rights and well being of small producers, rural

communities, and the natural environment are respected. Furthermore, as noted by Henry Saragih, current secretary general of La Via Campesina International, the Via Campesina slogan “Globalize the struggle, globalize hope!” demonstrates that the organization and its program of food sovereignty are “not opposed to globalization;” they are, however, “anti-WTO and anti-neoliberalization” and in opposition to the “model of capitalist development and globalization model of the IMF, the WB, and the WTO” (quoted in Desmarais, 2013, pp. 5-6). The alternative model that food sovereignty proposes involves a rejection of “a tradition of modernity in which everything is privatized and local knowledge has no place,” focusing instead on “recapturing traditional, local, or farmers knowledge, and combining that knowledge with new technology when and where it is appropriate to do so,” in order to contest the prevailing vision of “modernity” (Desmarais, 2007, pp. 38-39). Food sovereignty expresses alternative modernities.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, food sovereignty is “as much a space of resistance to neoliberalism, free market capitalism, destructive trade and investment, as a space to build democratic food and economic systems, and just and sustainable futures” (Focus on the Global South, 2013, p. 1). It is a program against a particular political, economic, and trade orientation, but it is also a program for something different, and works to build alternatives in practice for the advancement of more autonomous, ecologically sustainable, and socially and cognitively just agricultural production and food relations. Gaining meaning from what it is not, food sovereignty and its multiple sovereignties are inherently relational, but they are also simultaneously fixed in specific local realities and alternatives built by grassroots movements. In Honduras, Aguán peasant movements

<sup>5</sup> Development discourses upheld by international financial institutions promote technical solutions to achieve “modernization” and “development,” and agriculture is very deeply embedded in Western capitalist modernization projects. That is, technological modernization as a development strategy is particularly celebrated in the agricultural sector as a means of increasing production, but this often has devastating consequences for small farmers, as is demonstrated by the effects of Green Revolution, structural adjustment programs, the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture, and corporate control over seeds through genetic engineering and intellectual property regimes (see Dutta, 2011, pp. 96-122; Holt-Giménez, 2009; Holt-Giménez and Altieri, 2012; Patel, 2007; Patel, 2012; Shiva, 2000). In contrast, through the framework of food sovereignty, peasants and small farmers reject this “food totalitarianism” (Shiva, 2000) that has come to characterize the “modernized” neoliberal global food system and propose alter-modernities through their own alternative development narratives and localized agricultural models.

construct their alternative modernity of food sovereignty in response to the global corporate food regime that finds expression locally through a particular enabling national policy contexts. Peasant movements and food sovereignty are embedded in and simultaneously respond to local, national, regional, and transnational dynamics, proposing (and demonstrating) alternatives to global neoliberal political economic trends by carving out local spaces of resistance within particular national contexts.

## **Political Economy in Honduras: Post-Coup Neoliberalism and Dispossession**

The fundamental logic since 2009 in Honduras under the post-coup government has been one of radical “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2005), using Indigenous and peasant land as a political and economic bargaining chip in a quest to serve to the interests of private capital through extreme neoliberal policies. This is accompanied by the use of fear, violence, and intimidation as the toolkit of social control to mitigate the threat of social movements, which, paradoxically, continue to grow in strength and numbers despite ongoing repression of their resistance. In this context, a number of neoliberal projects have pushed existing land conflicts to crisis extremes and instigated new struggles for control over land and resources. These conflicts are between peasant and Indigenous communities claiming rights to land and resources and the transnational capitalist class executing large-scale land and resource grabs with the help of the enabling policy of the post-coup regime (see Robinson, 2003).

Contemporary political economy and trends of dispossession in Honduras must also be linked to the country’s historical integration into the global economy through export industries and the attendant processes of exploitation under global capital. Honduras is often cited as the original and quintessential “banana republic” in reference to the national economy’s subordination to U.S. fruit companies and reliance on agro-exports, primarily bananas, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (Acker, 1988; Anderson, 2009, p. 26; Eraque, 1996). The U.S. fruit companies also exercised considerable power in national politics, particularly when they found a strong ally in the National Party dictatorship in power from 1932 to 1949 (Ruhl, 2000, p. 49). The banana industry overwhelmingly benefited foreign investors, leaving the local population to cover

the costs, and this legacy of imperial oppression through foreign investment deepened as the international fruit companies diversified and strengthened their hold on the Honduran economy (Acker, 1988, pp. 67-68). Compounding a long history of repression under U.S. imperialism and foreign fruit companies in the “banana republic” years, industrial development pursued in the name of free trade over the past two decades—most notably the development of the maquiladora sector, but also agriculture, tourism, and extractive industries—has proved similarly exploitative. By the turn of the twenty-first century, as a result of neoliberal transformations and economic restructuring, “remittance republic,” “tourist republic,” or “maquiladora republic” had become more apt descriptors of the Honduran national economy (Anderson, 2009, p. 26). What has remained through time, however, has been the subordination of Honduras vis-à-vis global capital, the transnational division of labour, and (primarily Northern) domination. This reveals a continuing legacy of imperial relations in structuring Honduras’s political and economic position in the realm of global politics, trade, and development.

Although a strong current of neoliberalization has unfolded in Honduras over the past two decades, there has been a particularly aggressive advancement of the neoliberal agenda since 2009. On June 28, 2009, a coup d'état ousted former President Manuel “Mel” Zelaya Rosales. Zelaya is a member of a wealthy Honduran elite family and was democratically elected in the Liberal Party, but he increasingly began to shift his politics under the pressure of Honduran social movements in the course of his presidency. While Zelaya did not stray drastically from neoliberal path, he did instigate social reforms and take action that demonstrated changing political priorities, including increasing the minimum wage, implementing a moratorium on mining concessions, entering in negotiations with *campesino* movements to settle land conflicts, forming an alliance with the Bolivarian Alternative, and supporting Honduran constitutional reform. The increasingly progressive direction of Honduran politics was reversed with Zelaya’s ouster, giving way to an about-face under the post-coup government of Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo Sosa of the National Party. Lobo’s administration (January 2010-2014) and that of his National Party successor Juan “JOH” Orlando Hernandez (inaugurated in January 2014) are popularly regarded as illegitimate, having been elected under unusual or fraudulent circumstances and demonstrating ongoing corruption, repression, impunity, and the use of fear and intimidation as means of social control. Despite a growing sense

of regional resistance of neoliberal in Latin America (Connell, 2010, p. 33; Dello Bueno, 2010, p. 19), both Pepe Lobo and Juan Orlando have deepened neoliberal entrenchment in Honduras.

In this context, popular sectors of society face severe repression either directly at the hands of the state, through increasing militarization and corrupt police forces, or indirectly through paramilitary bodies, endorsed through the state's complicity, the reign of impunity, and the unwritten state policy of unfailing support of accumulation by dispossession and the interests of national and transnational capitalist elite. The immediate aftermath of the June 2009 coup saw an escalation of grave human rights abuses, including the suspension of constitutional rights, arbitrary detainment, repression, torture, and assassinations (CCIC Americas Policy Group, 2010). Under the subsequent post-coup regime, the country's human rights situation has continued to deteriorate in conjunction with impunity for injustices.

Ongoing rights violations, repressive militarization, and widespread institutional corruption in the wake of the coup has galvanized existing social movements and also opened new spaces of collective resistance. In a matter of days after the coup, the *Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular* (FNRP, National Front of Popular Resistance, in translation) officially formed in the capital city of Tegucigalpa to protest the unconstitutionality of the coup and de facto president Roberto Micheletti and to demand the return to Honduras of the ousted President Zelaya from his exile in Costa Rica. The FNRP created a forum for the expression of a wide range of social groups, including labour unions, teachers, students, LGBT activists, women's groups, peasants, Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples, and human rights defenders (Frank, 2010). Despite their diverse agendas, these movements came together under collective demands.

Progressive resistance movements have long existed in Honduras, but the constitutional affront of the coup and the trajectory that followed brought new fervor to social movements and introduced to the struggle new resisters who were "woken up" by the coup. Although the array of social issues in Honduras and their corresponding social movements were certainly not born out of the events of 2009, the coup and its

consequences have intensified existing social struggles and, in many cases, also thereby solidified and strengthened such resistance movements. The FNRP and its participating movements have remained actively in resistance “against the constant violations of human rights and the rapid retreat of the workers’ victories” (FARP, 2011, para. 4). Popular resistance remained relevant given the apparent fraudulence of the post-coup electoral process (an election that continued as scheduled in November 2009) and a proliferation of state-sanctioned violence and mounting culture of impunity in the wake of the coup. Despite strong protests against the coup regime and the condemnation of the November 2009 elections by the FNRP, EU, UN, and Carter Centre (Frank, 2010; Fasquelle, 2011), Pepe Lobo entered office as president with the endorsement of the United States in January 2010 (Ruhl, 2010, p. 94).

Since 2009, the Honduran government has further privatized natural resources and opened mining concessions through aggressive new mining legislation, privatized and decentralized the education system, contracted the chartering of rivers for private hydroelectric projects, negotiated new free trade agreements, furthered counter-agrarian reform and corporate monopolization of farming resources, supported mega-tourism projects, and pursued the development of “model cities.” In conjunction, in May 2011 the government hosted an economic conference titled “Honduras is Open for Business” to attract foreign investors, featuring presentations of new projects and legislation that would facilitate financing and offer priority interest rates and tax exemptions to potential investors (Alvarenga, 2011). This model of a corporate sell-off of Honduras in a piecemeal fashion has recently been further enabled through the approval of the Development Promotion and Public Debt Restructuring Act, a contentious new piece of legislation that “authorizes the Lobo administration to employ the nation’s natural territory and the ‘idle’ resources it contains as collateral to investors who can then exploit concessions for future profits” (Carasik, 2013, para. 12).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The law, in Spanish called the Ley de Promoción del Desarrollo y Reversión de la Deuda Pública, was ratified July 22, 2013. The law was passed quickly under “unusual and controversial congressional rules” with a lack of transparency (Beeton, 2013, para. 1), and human rights activists and critics of the law warn that the law “will only intensify the exploitation of resources for the benefit of foreign investors and the country’s own economic elites and exacerbate the illegal dispossession of indigenous and campesino communities” (Carasik, 2013, para. 12).

Such recent legislative approvals and the prevailing development model in Honduras, which seeks to procure investment capital through a corporate sell off of Honduran territory to extractive, tourist, energy, and agro industries, are exemplary of the state strategy of addressing deepening economic crisis. Honduras remains among the poorest countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranking only above Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Haiti according to the United Nations Development Program index of human development (UNDP, 2013). Historically in Honduras, “both the subordinate and the dominant classes were...the least developed in Central America” (Robinson, 2003, p. 118), the power of the oligarchy paled in comparison to that of others in the region, and “the state economy was the most backward” (Robinson, 2003, p. 118). This historic impoverishment now coincides with a deep fiscal crisis, characterized by Honduras’s “inability to pay both its domestic and foreign bills” and the pressing concern of being “unable to pay for state services ranging from education to security” (Kinosian, 2013, para. 3). The domestic economy “depends on remittances from more than a million Hondurans living abroad (many in the United States) and exports of bananas and coffee plus textiles from the maquiladora manufacturing sector” (Ruhl, 2010, p. 95). Honduras is also a resource rich country, and attempts to grow export sector as one “bright spot” in the economy can be seen in the proliferation of exploitative mining, resource, and land-based projects since the coup. Demand for African palm, for example, has doubled since the year 2000 (Mills, 2013, para. 7).

In Honduras, the neoliberal push and increasing foreign direct investment dovetail with a legacy of imperialism, giving way new modes of constituting power and control and signaling a direction of national “development” that cater to interests of global capital and results in the encroachment of a corporate and privatized model to nearly all geographic areas of the country and all corners of social life. Furthermore, increasingly repressive responses have been dealt to social movements that seek to oppose this national ideological framework centered on keeping Honduras firmly integrated in transnational markets and strengthening relationships with global capitalist elite. The current political economic context in Honduras represents a fusion of the Honduran state with the power of corporate capital, where political aperture exists only for the transnational capitalist class. However, cutting across these “development” projects and their attendant repressive consequences, there is a dynamic relationship of

repression and resistance; the further the state drives the neoliberal agenda, the more the grassroots movements push back and strengthen their resistance efforts.

## **Summary of Chapters**

In this chapter, I have outlined my approach to studying food sovereignty as a discourse, practice, and social movement that construct a local experience of food sovereignty within specific national conditions and in relation to the global corporate food regime. I argue that food sovereignty presents a reimagined form of sovereignty that is multiple, fixed, relational, and collective. This vision of sovereignty reconciles local and global by the very nature of its alternative political imaginary, which simultaneously strengthens and challenges the sovereignty of the state, restricting the power of global capital and the corporate food regime but enabling political openings for local food sovereign spaces. While this framework of food sovereignty holds great creative and emancipatory potential as an anti-neoliberal alternative, the multiple forms and scales of resistance involved in such a project pose considerable challenges to its realization. Indeed, these questions about and tensions between multiple forms of resistance and different expressions of food sovereignty in practice are precisely the challenges with which food sovereignty movements and projects must continue to grapple, in Honduras and elsewhere and across local, regional, and transnational scales.

In Chapter 2, I explore theoretical approaches to the political projects of left social movements and their communication processes. Namely, I review Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy and Hardt and Negri's multitude as fundamentally different communicative models and political projects, yet simultaneously characteristic of movements for food sovereignty. I propose "multiple resistances" as a useful theoretical framework for further analysis in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how food sovereignty has evolved to reach its current political maturity as a concept that expresses the autonomy of peoples to be self-determinate in food and agriculture, and I develop my argument that food sovereignty reworks and challenges mainstream understandings of sovereignty. A brief genealogy of food sovereignty and contrasting food sovereignty to other discourses of food and agriculture outline the discursive and communicative development of food sovereignty within La Via Campesina as an

inherently political and open-ended (through principled) concept. Through an analysis of food sovereignty in contrast to theories of sovereignty tied to the state and territoriality, I argue that the sovereignty of food sovereignty is not a zero sum game, but encompasses multiple sovereignties that are fixed and relational. In Chapter 4, I move from the generalized discourse of La Via Campesina to the specific case of food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley, Honduras. I argue that while Aguán movements seem to largely align with the political definition and reimagined form of sovereignty represented in generalized food sovereignty discourse of La Via Campesina, there are also challenges and tensions involved in practical implementation of this vision as it demands pursuing seemingly separate political projects and forms of resistance. The struggle to build food sovereignty is inherently complex, and differing expressions of food sovereignty in local practice, such as political and agroecological expressions, suggest the potentials for divide and lack of reconciliation within the movement do not fall strictly along spatial (local versus global) lines, but rather between different movement expressions.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I conclude my argument with reflections on what can be learned from other movement contexts and gesture toward possibilities for future research. I argue that there is political congruence between the transnational food sovereignty frame as expressed by La Via Campesina and the grassroots food sovereignty vision in the Aguán. However, Aguán movements are not prepared to fully embrace agroecology, revealing a rift between political and agroecological expressions of food sovereignty. Although the reconception of sovereignty within food sovereignty negotiates local and global dynamics, it also calls for a transformation of systems and structures across all scales to be fully realized. To make sense of multiple forms of resistance, multiple scales, and multiple movement expressions that all constitute food sovereignty and its multiple sovereignties, we must think about food sovereignty as a process rather than a completed state. Food sovereignty is a response to specific local and national contexts and seeks to create a sovereign space autonomous from the global corporate food regime, so it must be pragmatic and functional, but also aspirational to continue the radical and emancipatory path of the food sovereignty framework. While we may question the articulations of food sovereignty and how they engage in particular forms of resistance at a given moment, perhaps we also have to

accept that food sovereignty is always incomplete and evolving. Related political projects enable and create the conditions for the advancement of food sovereignty, but in turn, food sovereignty also provides a viable framework and democratic ethos to inform other and broader political alternatives anti-neoliberal projects.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Theoretical Framework**

*Both [radical democracy and the multitude] respond to the crisis of left politics caused by the collapse of state socialism and the rise of neoliberalism. Both start in Marxism, but depart in heretical directions. Both are influenced by postmodern or post-structuralist thought. And both have been produced over the very period when the Internet, and the digital in general, has become a field of radical activism...[They] are, however, different. They flow from separate and hostile historical sources, diverge in their theoretical premises, and are aligned with distinct political movements, practices, and strategies.*

- N. Dyer-Witheford (2007, p. 191)

### **Theoretical Overview**

In this chapter I review Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) theory of radical democracy and Hardt and Negri's (2001; 2004; 2009; 2012) theory of multitude as seemingly fundamentally different political projects, yet simultaneously characteristic of the (Honduran) food sovereignty movement. Radical democracy and the multitude have distinct implications for how to think about social organization and communication, political participation and subjectivity, and the political project of left movements. Radical democracy is defined by closure, articulation, and process, while the multitude is about opening, circulation, and being. Despite this divergence and even irreconcilability of the two theoretical perspectives, radical democratic pluralism and the politics of the multitude are nevertheless in conversation with one another, which, in conjunction with their unique limitations, points to the need for further development of a theoretical "middle ground" to articulate between and extend the two discourses. Together, radical democracy and the multitude are helpful for capturing the dynamics of multiple forms of resistance of the Honduran food sovereignty movement and its creative project of

multiple and overlapping sovereignties. Furthermore, the tensions between the two also help to point to some of the potential tensions and struggles within the movement and project of food sovereignty itself as an anti-neoliberal re-imagination for the possibility of another world (or worlds).

Although the Laclau and Mouffe concern themselves with domestic politics and Hardt and Negri address the transnational, radical democracy cannot simply be subsumed within the multitude. The core political goals of each theoretical perspective do not align and their strategies for social transformation are fundamentally different, and thus it would be too simplistic to suggest that radical democracy can be easily incorporated into the multitude as a plateau of the rhizomatic network. Laclau and Mouffe's theory works within hegemonic frameworks of liberal democracy to radicalize but ultimately maintain the system of institutional politics based on *state* sovereignty and the articulation of diverse political identities. Political participation in this context constitutes the expression through struggle of plural subjectivities (Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007, p. 9). Radical democracy's post-Marxist sensibility is instructive for progressive politics in greatly broadening conceptions of oppression, but at the expense of discarding the core Marxist critique of capital and thereby neglecting the social problems for which global neoliberal capitalism is largely responsible. Alternatively, central to Hardt and Negri's theory are the critiques of capitalism and institutional politics, including the concept of national sovereignty. According to Hardt and Negri (2004), the project of the left must "challenge all existing forms of sovereignty as a precondition for establishing democracy" (p. 353). Instead, they advocate for the establishment of "open source sovereignty" (p. 340), a global form of social organization that unhinges knowledge production from individual particularity and enables collaborative problem solving and social innovation. While radical democracy works within the frame of capitalist ideology but offers a radical reconceptualization of hegemonic discourses in the reconfiguration of institutional politics, the project of the multitude positions itself outside the system, using the capitalist logic of deterritorialized networking to enable unbounded information sharing to resist against the segregating potential of state sovereignty and the structures of global capital itself.

I argue that these two political projects are both visible in the way in which food sovereignty rethinks the meaning of sovereignty. Food sovereignty's alternative political imaginary of sovereignty involves both a *reterritorialization* of sovereignty to enable true external sovereignty of the nation state,<sup>7</sup> and the *deteritorialization* of internal sovereignty of the state to enable multiple sovereignties, not strictly limited by territoriality and in solidarity across boundaries. While food sovereignty projects seek to constitute sovereign political power through the nation state, they simultaneously seek to deconstruct the sovereign political power of the state in its historical capacity as a tool of global capital. As an alternative to and space that is "sovereign" of global neoliberal capital, specifically the global corporate food regime, food sovereignty projects construct new forms of political power, participation, and sovereignty through multiple forms of resistance that implicate them in seemingly separate political projects, though ultimately reconciled given the reworked character of sovereignty in food sovereignty projects. In this way, food sovereignty's proposal for alternative formations of political power and participation bridges the "fixed" politics of radical democracy and the "open" politics of the multitude within a single political project of an alternative vision of multiple (food) sovereignties. As an issue frame, food sovereignty bridges the communicative models of radical democracy and the multitude; food sovereignty is loosely defined to be broadly encompassing of difference, with a particular focus on autonomous self-determination (in a collective sense) of the meaning of food sovereignty in particular contexts through further framing processes. In this way, to the extent that food sovereignty fixes meaning as an issue frame, it "fixes" "openness" and thereby creates a communicative framework that brings together radical democratic and multitudinous models of communication in a single political project.

I now turn to an overview of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of radical democracy and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of plateaus as a foundation of the rhizomatic model developed in Hardt and Negri's work on the multitude. I also invoke literature regarding social movement framing as a practical expression of Laclau and Mouffe's concept of chains of equivalence and communication networks as a manifestation of

<sup>7</sup> Pitts (2010) argues that third world countries are perpetually "quasi-sovereign" as their sovereignty is "deeply compromised through laws, institutions, and practices dominated by the great powers" (p. 223).

Hardt and Negri's multitudinous plateaus. Although these theoretical approaches may have similar and overlapping "values," their core political goals and associated structural and strategic elements reveal fundamentally different political projects. I then propose "multiple resistances" as a framework to capture simultaneous engagement in and the reconciliation of these differing political projects.

## Radical Democracy

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is an important contribution for laying the foundation of post-Marxism and developing the concept of radical democratic pluralism as a political project of the left. First published in 1985 in the context of Soviet decline the attendant discrediting of and "dissatisfaction" with Marxist theory due to its perceived failure (Witheyford and Gruneau, 1993, p. 70), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* revitalized Marxism for a new political moment. Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) analysis does not completely eschew classical Marxism, but rather, interrogates and extends it, recognizing its strengths but also its limitations in pursuit of a deeper conception of subordination and the radical potential of social organization. This political project follows the tradition of "democratic revolutions," constituting a struggle for equality and liberalism (p. 184) that does not reject liberal democracy, but rather, "deepens and expands it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy" (p. 176).

Central assumptions underpinning Laclau and Mouffe's political theory include the idea that contemporary political and social life is characterized by a plethora of different forms of oppression and that conflict is a foundational aspect of radical politics. Contestation cannot and should not be eliminated or suppressed, but rather, it must be embraced as an indispensable characteristic of healthy democratic process. Liberal democratic attempts to "insulate" politics from contestation or "efforts to suppress political recognition of antagonistic conflict" constitute the "real threat to democracy" (Cunningham, 2002, p. 192). The antagonistic character of social relations, according to Laclau and Mouffe, must not only exist within public spaces, but also must be institutionalized in order to preserve and encourage democratic political culture. In this

conception of antagonism, Laclau and Mouffe extend the classical Marxist analysis of class conflict to acknowledge a diversity of forms of subordination and oppression, and by extension, political subjectivity. They do not deny the political significance of class struggle, but importantly, they do not privilege it over other social relations. Outside the realm of relations of production, other social spaces likewise manifest unequal power structures and antagonistic relations, and thereby constitute sites for different forms of political expression. Radical democracy thus challenges the “essentialism” and determinism of the necessarily classist foundation of classical Marxism. The identity politics of radical democracy involves the expression of a plurality of political subjectivities inspired by any number of social struggles—feminist, anti-racist, environmental, etc.—broadly captured in the highly diverse category of “new social movements” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 159).

The “newness” of these movements, according to Melucci (1994), marks a break from class conflict in favour of collective action (p. 103), in which “the collective search for identity is a central aspect of movement formation” (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield, 1994, p. 10). Pluralism and social indeterminacy are at the core of Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) construction of “a new political imaginary” (p. 152), but it is also crucial to note that meaning and the discourse of difference are not inherently or absolutely fixed (p. 111). Identities are contingent, contextual, and relational, and thus the production of meaning is necessarily a perpetual and iterative process. Meaning is forged, they suggest, through antagonism, the process whereby these differing identities come into contact and threaten one another. It is through this relational articulation and expression of threat that identities are constituted and reconstituted and become discourse (p. 105). The “openness of the social” (p. 113) enables partial fixation of meaning as discourses move and interact, but the “constant overflowing of every discourse” (p. 113) ensures the ongoing re-articulation and re-construction of identity, difference, and social practice. The potential of meaning or political identity to become concretized and reified is therefore seen as detrimental to democracy; the processual character of radical politics demands constant negotiation of political subjectivity through articulation and antagonism.

New forms of subordination in advanced capitalist society, stemming namely from the “commodification, bureaucratization, and increasing homogenization of social life” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 164), inspire new corresponding forms of resistance. These fragmented struggles connect through forming chains of equivalence, which link them “structurally to other struggles” (p. 170) while not compromising their autonomy and discrete political identity. Indeed, the autonomous character of social struggle is necessary for the organic development of individual movements and the creation of antagonism (p. 132). Importantly, while this autonomy may tend toward fostering individualism, the logic of equivalence exists in conjunction with recognition of irreducible plurality (p. 184). Challenging essentialism, accepting contingency, and embracing the “unsutured character of the social” (p. 192) fosters antagonistic interaction and the affirmation of meaning through equivalence. This structures the social basis of a radical democracy, within the context of a unified project for democratic society.

## Multitude

In contrast to Laclau and Mouffe, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri developed their theory of the multitude in a very different historical moment, with a distinct set of socio-political considerations. *Empire* (2000) was written during the 1990's in an era of intensified neoliberal “globalization;” it focuses specifically on theorizing new forms of geopolitical power and social order in this context of increasing global integration of capital, culture, and politics. More importantly for a discussion of counter-hegemonic social organization, *Multitude* (2004) was written from a vantage point of a growing alter-globalization or global social justice movement, galvanized by the WTO summit protests Seattle in 1999, the G8 protests in Genoa in 2001, and the inaugural meeting of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001. These events led credence to the theory that political discontent and social unrest in disparate locations around the world are interconnected as “elements of a common cycle of struggles” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 215) against the neoliberal hegemony of Empire. Hardt and Negri’s work reflects on the fragmentation of social and cultural life and the global interconnectivity that characterize postmodernity.

An important theoretical foundation of Hardt and Negri's political philosophy is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. The theory of multitude draws on and extends Deleuze and Guattari's concept of plateaus and rhizomes as a systems model of networked social relations and political mobilization. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) develop a model of assemblage based on multiplicity and heterogeneity, in opposition to hierarchically tiered structures. Unlike arborescent lineages, which anchor an entire system through a central structure, rhizomes are anti-genealogical, non-hierarchical, and decentered. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the rhizome "ceaselessly establishes connections" (p. 7) and thereby aggregates diverse actors and actions into an assemblage. "Superficial underground stems" connect individual multiplicities to other multiplicities, or plateaus, which construct the rhizome (p. 22). Points of "rupture" (p. 9) within the rhizome are not detrimental to the entire system; the decentered and horizontally dispersed "lines of deterritorialization" (p. 9) enable "offshoots" (p. 21), continuity, or the heterogeneous explosion of plural "lines of flight" from a single point of segmentation (p. 10). Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari note, "one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways" (p. 12). The lack of center spreads plateaus, the nodes of the rhizome, across a flat plane such that "[e]ach plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau" (p. 22). A rhizome is a complex, interconnected, and networked structure with "no beginning or end" (p. 25). While the transcendent arborescent model is a system oriented around external causes and thus has predetermined limits of possibility, the immanent rhizome is a model contained within itself, for the ontology of immanence is that everything is being, or life (Deleuze, 2001). The rhizome thus challenges linear unity and meta-narratives in the interest of fostering multiplicity through the networked connectivity of plateaus.

The decentered assemblage of the rhizome is at the foundation of the political project of the left that Hardt and Negri develop in the multitude. According to Hardt and Negri (2000), the process of neoliberal economic and cultural globalization has created an era of Empire, a new biopolitical ruling logic and "global form of sovereignty" (p. xii), within which the power of the nation-state has declined relative to the ascendancy of global capital. In this context, there are new forms of oppression that transcend national boundaries, as well as a perpetual state of borderless civil war on a global scale. Hardt

and Negri contend that, given this unrestrained global reach of structures of exploitation and biopower, nationally oriented conceptions of civil society are insufficient for imagining and theorizing the potential for social organization and radical responses to oppression within the realm of transnational politics. They argue that multiplicity and interconnection are not only characteristic of global capital, but also of the forces of counter-movement against it (see also Castells, 2000; Chesters and Welsh, 2006, p. 97), which seek to democratize globalization by using the strengths of capitalism against the system itself. The multitude presents a theory of a global resistance against Empire based on the networked mobilization of biopolitical subjectivity as a collective form of struggle.

The multitude is a deterritorialized and sprawling collection of decentered, heterogeneous nodes; it is rhizomatic. In multitude, “groups are not unified under any single authority but rather relate to each other in a network structure” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 86). This network consists of “singularities that act in common” within an “irreducible multiplicity” (p. 105). In this way, the multitude is based on commonality, but not without a degree of fragmentation and dispersion. Although the distributed network of multitude “appears formless” (p. 91), it consists of “innumerable independent forces” (p. 91). The multitude is not reducible to a succinct identity, whether political, economic, cultural, or otherwise. Hardt and Negri democratize resistance by challenging “exclusionary” conceptions of exploited classes. Like Laclau and Mouffe (2001), they reject the political privileging of the working class upheld by orthodox Marxism and instead acknowledge new immaterial forms of capitalist oppression within postmodern globalization. But whereas Laclau and Mouffe point to the formation of relationships between identity-based political subjectivities (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity, etc.), Hardt and Negri identify immaterial labour as the source of diverse expressions of resistance that constitute plateaus, or nodes, of the rhizome. These are all connected to innumerable other individual struggles in such a way that the multitude is not simply the “people” as undifferentiated “masses,” but a global populace whose differences are recognized without allowing their singularities to become blockages to the expression of a collective resistance through distributed networks. Hardt and Negri’s focus on immaterial labour appears to efface the real material oppression and material forms of resistance that persist in industrial and “information economy” societies alike, and food

production is one foundational form of material labour that underlies all other forms of production. This bias toward immateriality in their analysis of political subjectivity is noticeable in the four subjectivities they outline as characteristic of the multitude: the indebted, the mediatized, the securitized, and the represented (Hardt and Negri, 2012). These subjectivities are not representative of subaltern and material labour struggles. However, despite this focus on immateriality in understanding subjectivity, Hardt and Negri's emphasis on the common as a political project has clear material elements.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, the multitude is organized non-hierarchically, such that the rhizomatic root system is subterranean, connecting nodes or bulbs of the multitude that then grow into unique expressions of the global movement across a horizontal plane of connectivity. These singular expressions collaborate in the biopolitical production of the “common,” which is a source of social life (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 188) representing a new and democratic form of sovereignty that enables biopolitical control over the “goods and services that allow for the reproduction of the multitude itself” (p. 206). Building on the foundation of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic plateaus, the multitude is defined by immanence, “an ontology in which there is nothing ‘beyond’ or ‘higher than’ or ‘superior to’ Being” (Smith, 2003, pp. 47-48). The multitude is immanent because it produces and reproduces itself through being, where there is no predetermined transcendental order and the “being” (and “becoming”) of the multitude is the aggregation of networks. Thus, the common is never fixed or preexisting, for there is no transcendent externality to establish it, but it must be developed organically by the “productive activity of singularities in the multitude” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 206). In this way, the multitude “produces in common” (p. 196), but simultaneously it also is reproduced *through* the common and “serves as the basis for future production” (p. 192). In order to avoid corruption of the social through capitalist appropriation, the multitude must constantly struggle against Empire for control over the production of the common through its own multitudinous biopolitical activity (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 171) to invigorate the potential to forge alternative and democratic social relations; this is the essence of “revolution” in a postmodern era in which “informatization” has displaced material production.

Thus, the theory of the multitude does not deny or undermine the relevance of local context. Rather, counter-hegemonic movements are simultaneously “specific to the national situation” yet also “common to all those who suffer and struggle against the global exploitation and hierarchy of the global system” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 216). Through open communication between decentered networks of rhizomatic nodes within the cycle of struggles, “[e]ach struggle remains singular and tied to its local conditions but at the same time is immersed in the common web” of shared knowledge (p. 217). However, this assumption of the “vertical” integration of the multitude—the transcendence of local struggles to the scale of a global resistance movement—effaces the existence of and denies the need for local articulation of political subjectivity. In the local to global expression of social movements within multitude, there is at best little exploration of the horizontal communicability between unique social actors, how they articulate their social and political agendas, and how they, within their differences, collaborate in waging a collective struggle. Bridging Laclau and Mouffe with Hardt and Negri can begin to rectify this, which is what I propose through a framework of “multiple resistances.”

## Distinct Political Projects

Evidently, the political project of the left is theorized very differently in the works of Laclau and Mouffe, and Hardt and Negri. Although on a basic level they share somewhat similar “values” of diversity, popular participation, and communication, there are fundamental and characteristic divergences at the core of their political theory. Their differing perspectives on relationship formation between social actors, the expression of political subjectivity, the relationship between movement activity and the state or institutions, and the “location” of civil society not only demonstrate the dissimilarities that define them, but perhaps suggests an irreducibility of the political projects of radical democracy and the multitude.

Written from very different historical perspectives with distinct theoretical foundations, Laclau and Mouffe, and Hardt and Negri’s work extend their political projects for democratization in largely dissimilar directions. Laclau and Mouffe’s lack of attention to globalization, international division of labour, and networked communication

now renders their theory “strangely dated,” as it effectively “misses some of the most dynamic aspects of contemporary social transformation” (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, p. 402). In a context where issues have become global “both in terms of their consequences and the effort that will be required to do something about them” (Wenman, 2009, p. 115), substantial theoretical engagement with democratic politics requires an expansion of social movement theory beyond the purview of the nation state. Hardt and Negri, however, emphasize the globalization of oppression and resistance to the extent of creating a reductionist network analysis that precludes particularity. While the deterritorialization of transnational capital and global ascendancy of neoliberalism necessitate consideration of a correspondingly global civil society and counter-hegemonic movement, national sovereignty and identity are still relevant despite this internationalization of the political. State sovereignty has changed, but it has not disappeared (Montagna, 2008, p. 353); the nation state mediates between the structures of global capitalism and mass resistance movements (Lewis, 2002, p. 3). The intensified interconnectedness of capital and the globalization of oppression implicates movements in the context of global struggles, yet social actors identify with and respond to the unique conditions of national social and political life. Hardt and Negri’s attention to the problematic of global capitalism and the potential for networked social organization across boundaries is an important contribution to social movement theory, but the incorporation of a theory of articulation of particular political subjectivity, similar to Laclau and Mouffe’s chains of equivalence, will provide a valuable corrective to leftist political thought and the apparent spontaneity of the multitude’s connectivity and its politics of resistance.

## **National Specificity versus Deterritorialized Empire**

Radical democracy is theoretically sound in accounting for a specifically national context and focusing on the process of democracy and political action as one that involves antagonism between different subjectivities. It describes a process in which distinct social movements unite in their difference, put aside their individual demands and focus on the common project, which they collectively frame by coming into conflict with each other, bringing their own subjectivities to the common struggle, which is particularly characteristic of resistance in times of (political) crisis. However, the

limitation of this attention to national context is that it fails to recognize the international structures and power relations that also shape local politics and oppression.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, despite its call for a “radical” democratization, it ultimately seems to be a project in liberal democracy and not actually all that radical. It does not, for example, problematize global (neoliberal) capital as a force to be reckoned with in the course of achieving radical democracy, and does not for that matter insert the national structures of radical democratic pluralism in institutional politics into global political structures and systems. Anti-neoliberal movements struggle to shift local and national conditions of neoliberal oppression, but also respond to a global system as a target for eventual macro-level change.

In contrast to the multitude, radical democracy’s attention to the importance of local context provides a “groundedness” that is lacking in multitude. Multitude suggests that diffuse movements connect, globally, somewhat spontaneously through their likeness to one another and their commonality of “being against” Empire as a common enemy. Thus in comparison to multitude, what is useful about radical democracy is its focus on process, the formation of political subjectivities, and how social movements are actually constituted (through communication), as well as giving attention to the space of the local/national. The theoretical strength of multitude, however, is that it does assign a logic to the collective resistance of geographically diffuse movements; according to Hardt and Negri, disparate groups form a networked resistance that uses the strength of global capital against the system itself. However, this theorizing is largely an abstraction, and there is little attention to how movements develop as political subjectivities and as networks and what is the role of communications in such processes (despite mention of the importance of communication). Confusion also stems from the way in which Hardt and Negri use the term multitude (simultaneously and without explanation) in two different senses: first, multitude as a diffuse and global movement *already constituted*, and second, multitude as a political project *yet to be built*.

<sup>8</sup> Granted, Laclau and Mouffe first wrote in 1985, and perhaps it is a matter of their theory being slightly “outdated,” but in the preface to their 2001 edition, Laclau and Mouffe express their belief in the continued relevance and applicability of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* despite historical changes.

However, despite this critique of multitude's abstraction, Hardt and Negri's most recent work, *Declaration*, is in fact quite grounded in real social struggles, particularly the "wave of protest" that began in 2011 (including Tunisia, Tahrir Square, the Spanish Indignados, Occupy Wall Street, etc.). According to their analysis, "each of these struggles is singular and oriented toward specific local conditions" (p. 5). Though perhaps seemingly obvious, this analysis was absent from *Multitude*, which instead seemed to leave movements simply "being" in an ambiguous multitudinous space against Empire, with an implicit assumption that the state itself does not (and cannot) wield any power, neither as a force of oppression nor resistance. In *Declaration*, however, Hardt and Negri do acknowledge that local context is critical, that the apparatus of the state can be a mechanism of social change, and that the relationship between social movements and the state (not just Empire) is an important one. They seem in this regard to be specifically influenced by the case of the Pink Tide in Latin American:

From the 1990s to the first decade of this century, governments in some of the largest countries in Latin America won elections and came to power on the backs of powerful social movements against neoliberalism and for the democratic self-management of the common. These elected, progressive governments have in many cases made great social advances, helping significant numbers of people to rise out of poverty', transforming entrenched racial hierarchies regarding indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, opening avenues for democratic participation, and breaking long-standing external relations of dependency, in both economic and political terms, in relation to global economic powers, the world market, and US imperialism. When these governments are in power, however, and particularly when they repeat the practices of the old regimes, the social movements continue the struggle, now directed against the governments that claim to represent them. (pp. 53-54)

Hardt and Negri thus acknowledge that the state has not "disappeared," or been completely subsumed within Empire, but that it does exercise power over people and does hold potential as a tool of social movements for neoliberal resistance.

In *Declaration*, Hardt and Negri also argue that the strategy of encampment or occupation seen throughout these movements of 2011—which, they note, stands in contrast to the nomadic character of alter-globalization struggles, a la Seattle 1999 and other anti-WTO protests—further reflects and is a result of the fact that these

movements are “so deeply rooted in local and national social issues” (p. 6). However, remaining true to their autonomous Marxist orientation, their favouritism for movements that circumvent the state and seek ways to “change the world without taking power,” in the words of Holloway, is still evident, such as, for example, in their enthusiastic praise of the Spanish Indignados for their refusal to participate in elections. In conjunction with this local specificity, however, they still maintain the idea of a diffuse and globally interconnected network of struggle, or a multitude that is rhizomatic. Despite difference and particularity of the “singular conditions and local battles” of different movements, these diffuse movements do “speak to one another” within a “common global struggle.”

## **Communication as political process: New Social Movements and Open Networks**

For Laclau and Mouffe, the agents of radical democracy are the new social movements, and they communicate through the articulation of chains of equivalence, in which diverse social actors express their political subjectivity, engage in antagonistic interactions, and establish points of commonality to inform collective struggles. As DeLuca (1999) explains, in a postmodern, poststructuralist moment—the context of the new social movements—“the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily” (p. 334). New social movement literature captures this temporary fixing in the concept of “framing,” acts of social and political meaning construction to identify issues, commonalities, and collective strategies within movements. Collective action framing serves both “mobilizing” and “activating” purposes (Resnick, 2009, p. 57) and is regarded as fundamental in understanding social movements and their development (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 612). According to Benford and Snow (2000), framing:

...denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them. (p. 614)

Social actors engage in framing activities to produce and reproduce ideas and meaning, which never “grow automatically” from existing structures, relations, or ideologies, but must be politically signified through communicative processes of struggle and negotiation. Through these dynamics, action framing is a key mechanism in facilitating “correspondence between personal and collective identities” as well as the “enlargement of personal identity” through movement participation (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 631). This points to the iterative and processual character of radical democratic politics, which contrasts greatly with the “being” of the multitude. Collective action frames represent the input and perspectives of diverse groups in a communally debated shared meaning, which continues to shift as the movements engage in the dynamic and ongoing process of reframing.

In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri also identify the critical role of communication in the multitude and the production of the common, but they do not expand on how political subjectivities are expressed or negotiated and multiplicities established between plateaus, the spaces of “intensive networking” of new social movements (Chesters and Welsh, 2005, p. 192). While their work is “populated with references to media and communication processes” (Bratich, 2011, p. 306), they simultaneously, and paradoxically, have “relatively little to say about the particulars of media and information technology” (Shukaitis, 2011, p. 330). Hardt and Negri emphasize that multitude is defined by its diversity and the particularity of local struggles is amplified through the multitude, yet they do not offer a clear discussion of how this rhizomatic assemblage articulates and communicates to form the global equivalent of what Laclau and Mouffe term “chains of equivalence.” Thus, despite claims to the heterogeneous character inherent to the multitude, the apparent spontaneity of its collectivity and potential to act in concert suggests that the multitude has an orientation toward universality, unity, and commonality, not difference reconciled communicatively. Without an explanation of how diverse singularities actually form linkages through communication, the essential component of how to actualize the theory of the multitude in real political practice is lacking. Although the multitude seems to be a hopeful and progressive political project, it remains unclear how it is realistically and feasibly exercised in praxis. According to Laclau (2001), the project of the multitude renders politics “unthinkable” because the connectivity of “being against” that defines the multitude fails to address the “conditions

of implementation,” or modes of communication, that unify fragmented subjectivities in strategic political alliance.

However, Hardt and Negri’s *Declaration* offers a corrective to *Multitude*’s failure to elaborate on the centrality of communication. In elaborating the concept of the common, Hardt and Negri also explore how actors within the multitude interact communicatively in the collective making of the common, or what they refer to as the act of “commoning.” The communicative process is not unlike Laclau and Mouffe’s chains of equivalence, albeit expressed as a more fluid exchange than the processual structure of radical democratic pluralism. Through communicating in the making of the common, a material and immaterial shared space, diverse subjectivities interact and exchange, contributing to the formation and reformation of political subjectivity in the process:

The action of “commoning” must be oriented not only toward the access to and self-management of shared wealth but also the construction of forms of political organization. The commoner must discover the means to create alliances among a wide variety of social groups in struggle, including students, workers, the unemployed, the poor, those combating gender and racial subordination and others....Commoning does not involve, of course, imagining that identities can be negated such that all will discover they are, at base, the same. No, the common has nothing to do with sameness. Instead, in struggle, different social groups interact as singularities and are enlightened, inspired, and transformed by their exchange with each other. They speak to each other on the lower frequencies, which people outside of the struggle often cannot hear or understand. (p. 69)

Laclau and Mouffe’s chains of equivalence link up and articulate diverse struggles while not compromising their discrete political identity. Similarly, here Hardt and Negri outline a process of subjectivities engaging in difference. However, whereas chains of equivalence and social movement issue framing suggest that diverse subjectivities construct and capture a shared reality through framing while leaving their individual identities and positions in tact and unaffected, Hardt and Negri also emphasize the way in which distinct actors and movements mutually transform one another in their interactions and their construction of a common political project. Through theorizing the communicative act of commoning, Hardt and Negri also bridge the materiality and immateriality of struggle. The common implies a material and productive foundation of

political subjectivity, in addition to immaterial aspect of representation, organization, and identity, and the immateriality of discourse on which Laclau and Mouffe focus.

Furthermore, Hardt and Negri also add a valuable addition to their earlier theorization of communicative processes by exploring a diversified conception, not limited to online communication and digital social networks as tools of movement building. The paradigmatic embodiment of this multitudinous model of communication is the Internet, which reflects the context of networked society in which Hardt and Negri conceived of their theories of empire and multitude. Like a rhizome, the Internet manifests a collection of complex networks in which any actor can be connected to innumerable others in a web-like fashion. A number of scholars have operationalized the communication of the multitude in digital communication technologies, specifically the Internet (Broadfoot, Munshi, and Nelson-Marsh, 2010; Olivier, 2007; Wolfson, 2011), and many have studied the use of digital networking by social movements such as the Global Social Justice movements and the Zapatistas during the coming of age of the World Wide Web. However, as Olivier (2007) emphasizes, the communication of the multitude need not be “monodimensional” or reduced to “information-exchange” transactions, but rather, should diversify its approaches to pursue “every communicational avenue...to ‘get through’ to authorities everywhere” (p. 54), both on and offline. Thinking outside the boundaries of digital communications, Osterweil (2004), for example, explores the potential of “open space” at the World Social Forum as a cultural and communicational dynamic for “reinventing the political” and radicalizing “what social transformation looks like” (p. 505; see also Chesters and Welsh, 2005). Rhizomatic communication and information sharing, whether facilitated by the Internet or interpersonal human social networks, connects and constitutes the multitude, “allowing different strata to see commonalities” (Wolfson, 2011, p. 374) and act in collective political resistance.

Similarly, furthering this theory of physical space as “open source,” in *Declaration* Hardt and Negri also argue that the communication *experience* of being together that has taken place within occupations and encampments (in their various forms in different movements throughout the cycle of struggles beginning in 2011) has been an important aspect of the respective struggles that contributed to the formation of new political

subjectivities and created spaces for imagining a different kind of political participation and constituent process. Indeed, for Hardt and Negri, social movements and their communicative processes are constituent processes: “movements have declared a new independence, and a constituent power must carry that forward” (p. 8). However, while movements continue to be patient in the development of a constituent process, these movements need to respond to immediate needs (though preferably for Hardt and Negri immediate needs will not be met through electoral means).

While Hardt and Negri draw throughout the book on examples from the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and European examples, in exploring the communicative elements of “being together” they also point to the EZLN as a prime example of the “communicative capacity” of the encampment model. They made reference to Chiapas in *Multitude* as well, but with a different focus. When referencing Chiapas in *Multitude*, they describe the EZLN as “the hinge between the old guerilla model and the new model of biopolitical network structures,” focusing on the decentered and horizontal movement structure and their use of communications technologies, ie. the Internet, to disseminate information nationally and internationally. Of course, their affinity for the famous autonomous movement is not surprising, but bringing it up in *Declaration* in the context of exemplifying the communicative experience that contributes to the formation of political subjectivities and political possibilities is a new development since *Multitude*. In *Declaration*, they again point out the groundbreaking use of the Internet for widespread sharing of communiqués from rural Chiapas, but they also go beyond the level of social movement communication as online networking: “Even more important and innovative [than internet communications], though, are the communicative networks and political truths created in the Zapatista community practices of collective self-government” (p. 28). This is an important and instructive addition to the theory of the multitude for identifying the communicative practices of social movements that go beyond digital networking and online organizing, instead accounting for the lived communication experience within grassroots movements and how this fosters political creativity for new constituent processes. This emphasizes the communicative process of multitude as a process of *being* and *becoming* through open spaces of shared meaning making (de Sousa Santos, 2011).

Given the historical context of their writing, Laclau and Mouffe's original work on identity politics does not address the potential of digital communications for advancing their political project. Nevertheless, with the recent popularity of digital technologies in academic discussion, many practical applications of radical democracy similarly acknowledge the Internet as the site of popular participation in politics (Dahlberg, 2007; Dahlgren, 2007; Pickard, 2006a; 2006b). However, these studies adopt a very different communicative focus than those subscribing to the theoretical framework of the multitude. While rhizomatic analyses of online communications pay particular attention to their networking potential, radical democratic perspectives emphasize the discursive and processural character of the use of digital communication technologies. Radically democratic conceptions aim to preserve the antagonistic character of politics in online interactions and seek to avoid tendencies toward the formation of reductive "swarm intelligence" resulting from the organization of "like-minded" groups in online spaces. In this line of thinking, to be radically democratic, online projects must not only enable diverse expression, but also actively encourage contestation in order to realize the counter-hegemonic potential of the Internet and to avoid the reification of online and offline structures of power and domination (Dahlberg, 2007). Unlike the multitudinous conception of digital communication as an open free flow of information unifying discrete global actors to emergently constitute the commons, radical democratic politics in online spaces is understood as maintaining the interactive, iterative, and antagonistic essence that defines collective action framing and the articulation of political subjectivity. While in radical democratic projects the subject works against the space, in multitudinous projects the subject is the space.

Radical democratic analyses of "offline" interpersonal communication processes similarly focus on the centrality of identity and the discursive elements of texts and interactions. Such studies operationalize radical politics as movements and activism that are decisively identity-based (Apostolidis, 2009; Esteva, n.d.), social spaces of democratic individual expression allowing the articulation of subjectivity and difference, such as media (Ahadi and Murray, 2009), and structured opportunities for antagonistic politics through discussion, debate, and negotiation of meaning in institutional contexts, such as government and legal settings (Apostolidis, 2009; Esteva, n.d.; Postero, 2010). As with digital communication technologies, radical democratic perspectives of offline

interactions address the opportunities for self-expression or articulation, interactivity, and antagonistic potential of communication processes between social actors.

Thus, although a central dynamic to both radical democracy and the multitude is the communicative process, these manifest differently in each perspective. While radical democracy seeks closure and fixation of meaning and discourse, however temporarily, through antagonistic collective action framing, the rhizomatic organization of the multitude is always opening and disseminating knowledge and meaning. In both cases, the political ontology involves a productive process. However, while for radical democrats this process is about inclusion and exclusion, mobilization and immobilization, and creating boundaries through frames, the multitude can only produce the common through absolute openness of networked flows and communicative experience. Thus, the communicative and organizational model of the multitude is “open source,” in both material and immaterial spaces. The commons is both material and knowledge, and therefore negotiates immaterial identity and material state through commoning.

These fundamental differences of radical democracy and the multitude manifest in framing activities and open communication put these two projects of democratization at cross-purposes. Although collective action framing is dynamic, flexible, and always shifting, it is nevertheless a process of compartmentalizing meaning. The multitude, in contrast, is a limitless expanse of plateaus of knowledge, never constrained by boundaries, but contributing to the collective condition of “being against.” The process of closing and fixing meaning, however momentarily, is essentially the complete opposite of opening and sharing; the constant motion of the multitude in production of the common is interrupted by the halting movement of radical democratic action as it moves through processes of framing, antagonism, and reframing to suture political subjectivity for fleeting moments. Demonstrating these potential tensions, in the case of Independent Media Centers (IMCs), or Indymedia—which can be analyzed as a space of radical democratic politics or multitudinous networking (see Kidd, 2003; Kidd, 2004; Pickard, 2006a; Pickard, 2006b; Wolfson, 2012)—some scholars and activists have noted how the centrality of *process* may function impede *progress* (Pickard, 2006b, p. 332). This definitive difference in communicative mechanisms is due to the foundational

characteristics of each perspective. The ontology of immanence of the multitude suggests that meaning and the political are inherently organic in the global “flesh” of multitudinous resistance, whereas Laclau and Mouffe emphasize that the space of the political cannot be born without social actors and identity groups engaging in interactions that become political through antagonism. Thus, while the logic of equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) necessarily looks “beyond” in order to articulate political subjectivity through contestation, Empire is an “open site of conflict” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 404) in which the resistance of multitude is “already present,” such that “politics is everywhere, and everything is political” (Dean, 2004, p. 278).

Although the distinction between framing and open networks demonstrates how the projects of radical democracy and the multitude may find themselves at cross-purposes, it is also a point of intersection as a moment of meaning and knowledge production in both spheres. Identity groups involved in local political struggle for radical democracy can also, simultaneously, be part of the global multitude, necessitating consideration of how to reconcile the conflicting politics in the two. It is possible that, to some extent, the openness in transnational politics and the networked sharing of knowledge and discourse within the multitude can contribute to the articulation of difference in the local context and inform the antagonistic issue framing and struggle for meaning transpiring on the radical democratic level. The acquisition of knowledge from the information rhizomes of the multitude may contribute to shaping the evolving identities engaged in radical democratic politics and strengthening the grounds for social groups to “threaten” other identities as new or different ideas begin to circulate, thereby advancing antagonistic articulation and reframing activities. Likewise, knowledge production in local politics can also subsequently be distributed within the multitude.

However, given the distinguishing communicative features noted above, this reciprocity between radical democracy and the multitude is limited. Discourse produced through framing activities may be subject to “expiry” as a result of the nature of radical democratic pluralism; the ongoing processes of revisiting, reassessing, and negotiating meaning, ideas, identities, and action agendas to (re)articulate and (re)frame the political may function to interrupt the “flow” of multitudinous networks. More importantly, assuming a mutual exchange of meaning and the incorporation of radical democratic

projects into the rhizomatic structure of the multitude is reductionist for its failure to acknowledge the irreconcilability of the two stemming from the fundamental differences of their core political goals and, relatedly, political strategies.

## **Multiple Resistances: Political creativity in multiple forms of struggle**

Understood separately, both approaches also have their own limitations that may lead to reductive analysis of social mobilization and the potential for political change. A radical democratic theory and praxis may be criticized for fragmentation, individualism, and movement discontinuity. Since meaning is constructed through the expression of individual projects, movements based on identity politics may have the potential to become “‘narcissistic’ celebration[s] of the particularism of identities” (as cited in Chesters and Welsh, 2006, p. 133). According to Chesters and Welsh (2006), movement networks offer a “degree of continuity” and “relatively stable point of reference” for individuals and groups to build identities in fragmentary social contexts (p. 117). However, Hardt and Negri’s close attention to networked organization privileges connectivity at the expense of recognizing the “diffuse and interactional nature” (Chesters and Welsh, 2006, p. 130) of rhizomes. In focusing on connectivity and not the process of establishing that connectivity or the capacity for action resulting from it, this perspective lacks a discussion of which groups do and do not participate in the multitudinous resistance. In this way, Hardt and Negri fail to draw attention to the possibility of exclusion or domination occurring within the multitude despite its nonhierarchical and apparently inherently democratic organization. As Pickerill’s (2007) case study of Australian Indymedia elucidates, tendencies toward exclusion nevertheless exist in open source, networked contexts, lending credence to the critique that “simply being ‘open’ is not enough to widen these spaces of resistance” (p. 2682). The singularity of inclusion and exclusion as part of the constitution of political subjectivity is highly relevant to analyses of global power structures, hegemony, and resistance, yet absent from Hardt and Negri’s theory.

Hardt and Negri’s deterritorialization of resistance and shift in perspective from state centricity to the globalized oppression of Empire, however, opens space for a

creative rethinking of political struggle and social organization. This is valuable counterpoint to the theory of radical democracy, within which the creative potential of the social and political imaginary is restricted, limited to seeking reform through the hegemonic space of institutional politics. While the radicalization and true democratization of institutional political spaces are noble goals and would contribute to the building more just social and political orders, the transformative and emancipatory potential of a radical democratic political project is limited, confined to the spaces of traditional politics that have historically been oppressive, monolithic structures of social control and capital accumulation. However, in decentering the state as the agent of political change and placing the political in the everyday through biopolitics, Hardt and Negri introduce the potential of social struggles to be not only rejections of injustice, but also creative processes that put forward new systems of alternatives in action, in multiple (and non-traditional) political spaces. According to Hardt and Negri (2012):

Rebellion and revolt, however, set in motion not only a refusal but also a creative process. By overturning and inverting the impoverished subjectivities of contemporary capitalist society, they discover some of the real bases of our power for social and political action.... (p. 68)

This perspective establishes an openness of political participation and social change, but it also precludes the traditional spaces of nation state politics as potentially complementary and strategic component of radical struggles for social transformation.

This creative process is embodied in the political project of the commons as collective material and immaterial space. The commons—and the corresponding “commoner” who has a “productive character” and produces the “common” through the act of “commoning,” or making the common—also represents the extension of the “open access” principle of the multitude in online spaces to lived, material space and experience. Hardt and Negri define the common as physical space and resources, and also information, and they describe the commoner as a social actor that struggles to make available these resources:

The commoner is thus an ordinary person who accomplishes an extraordinary task: opening private property to the access and enjoyment of all; transforming public property controlled by state authority into the common; and in each case discovering mechanisms to manage, develop,

and sustain common wealth through democratic participation. The task of the commoner, then, is not only to provide access to the fields and rivers so that the poor can feed themselves, but also to create a means for the free exchange of ideas, images, codes, music and information.... The commoner is a constituent participant, the subjectivity that is foundational and necessary for constituting a democratic society based on open sharing of the common. (p. 68-69)

The political project of “commoning,” or constructing the commons through constituent processes, thus proposes a creative reimagining of political participation and political space. This is important for theorizing food sovereignty as a way of rethinking the political space and relationship of sovereignty. Food sovereignty as a reworked form of sovereignty comes from somewhere, and creative imaginaries of political participation are part of the mutual formation of political subjectivity and political projects that inform and formulate food sovereignty. Hardt and Negri’s theorization of “commoning” is also valuable in the sense that it accounts for political agency but also the productive autonomy of social actors and speaks to both natural productive resources and informational resources in the creation of the common. However, the common is situated as a space carved out against the oppression of the nation state, and thus precludes the possibility of social movements, and “commoners,” using the mechanism of the nation state as a tool to help to carve out spaces of being in common against the oppression global neoliberal structures, such as the global corporate food regime.

## **Multiple Resistances Framework**

Radical democracy is instructive for acknowledging diverse subjectivities and the potential for democratizing traditional institutional political processes, while the multitude is instructive for empowering diffuse transnational actors with a creative potential to effect change in an era of globalized networked society. However, the complexity of local and global oppression, social organization and political mobilization, and the multiple and overlapping forms of resistance strategically incorporated in the struggles of anti-neoliberal social movements suggest a more integrated and nuanced theoretical framework might be appropriate.

In my analysis, I use the concept of “multiple resistances” as framework to capture the reconciliation of radical democratic and multitudinous political projects

represented in food sovereignty as a creative political imaginary. This multiple resistances framework accounts for simultaneous political action in multiple political “spaces” or “scales” of resistance, bridging radical democracy’s focus on the nation state as a scale of action and multitude’s focus on transnational context and emancipation through autonomous means. Reflecting the material, communicative, and identity bases that constitute political subjectivity and its formation, multiple resistances encompass both material and representational forms of struggle. While institutional politics serve as a space to “fix” forms of political representation and policy conditions, autonomous politics grounded in self-determination and solidarity creates a space and political experience of “openness.” Movements seek to advance food sovereignty simultaneously through institutional political and autonomous means. Food sovereignty calls on the state to fix a form of external state sovereignty as a defense against the global corporate food regime, while also opening spaces for new forms of localized sovereignty and political, representational, and material autonomy. As an issue frame, food sovereignty fixes meaning in a way that *fixes openness*, and this communicative framework establishes the foundation for engagement in multiple resistances. As a theoretical framework, “multiple resistances” reconciles these seemingly separate political goals and strategies in a single political project that uses both the state and deterritorialized autonomous alternative building as multiple tools of struggle in resistance against neoliberal capital.

## **Multiple Resistances in practice: The Honduran Case**

As a material and representational struggle for multiple political, economic, and communicative sovereignties and a reworked form of sovereignty, food sovereignty projects participate in local and global movement spaces simultaneously, seeking autonomy from the global food regime but responding to and acting within local/national political economic realities. The reworked meaning of sovereignty within food sovereignty bridges radical democratic and multitudinous political projects for institutional political process in national forms of sovereignty and open political processes in “open source” deterritorialized sovereignty. While food sovereignty is “fixed” in local contexts (and geographies), it is also “open” in its relationship to other food sovereignty movements in international networks. Food sovereignty is at once a call

for *reterritorialization* of our food system (including reasserting the role of the state in issues of food and agriculture) and a call for *deteriorialization* of our understanding of sovereignty and who can be sovereign, thus embodying characteristics of projects of both radical democracy and the multitude. In this way, food sovereignty represents multiple resistances.

Particularly in the immediate aftermath of the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras, but also in its ongoing wake, diverse and historically separate social movements galvanized around a common political project of national democratization as the unconstitutionality of the coup and injustice of post-coup human rights abuses and impunity emerged as collective issue frames. In the spirit of radical democratic pluralism, social movements set aside their particular struggles to contribute to common political project of national resistance, and subsequently, to the formation of a new political party for participation in the electoral process to seek change, or reform, in the direction of liberal democracy. Through their participation in such institutional political spaces, Honduran food sovereignty movements also pursue their "sovereignty" through radical (liberal) democratic attempts to democratize the state and to institutionalize a national policy framework to enable the achievement of local food sovereignty. However, in a context of complete lack of political will to implement progressive agricultural policy and transformational agrarian reform, Honduran movements follow an autonomous strategy of building grassroots alternatives. Theoretically, Hardt and Negri's approach is instructive here, for it allows for thinking about both oppression and resistance outside the realm of formal politics and places the locus of the political in the everyday through biopolitics. In this theoretical and practical strategic direction, autonomous resistance forms a constituent processes, and deterritorialized "sovereignty," in the form of multitude creating in common, is the political project.

Thus, while the project of food sovereignty seeks to challenge traditional borders and boundaries to assert a new sovereignty, the strategies in the case of Honduras also reproduce a form of *national* sovereignty that enables the global system of subjugation. In the hopes of the social movements, however, and as other examples in the Pink Tide have demonstrated, the exercise of state sovereignty within transnational relations can also serve as a form of resistance to assuage the onslaught of global neoliberal

oppression when the state mechanism is kept in check by the pressure of social movements. Nevertheless, as a political project of multiple resistances—that is, a political project at the intersection of radical democracy and the multitude encompassing what appear to be two fundamentally different and perhaps irreconcilable political projects—the project of food sovereignty poses interesting and important questions for social movement theory and practice about the potential for emancipation, creativity, and future challenges embodied in multiple resistances to realize the goals of anti-neoliberal movements, including movements for food sovereignty.

## **Chapter 3.**

# **Food Sovereignty as Global Representational Struggle**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the evolution of the concept of food sovereignty as an international discourse and issue frame that “fixes openness,” expressed most clearly in the work of the transnational peasant organization La Via Campesina. This sets a foundation to explore, in the next chapter, how that discourse finds expression in the Honduran food sovereignty movement and informs multiple resistances. First, I introduce this discussion by contextualizing historically and politically the emergence of La Via Campesina as a transnational peasant network and the progenitor of the concept of food sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> Through a genealogical method, I argue that food sovereignty has matured politically into a radical, creative, and politicized counterframe and alternative to other food and agricultural discourses and their respective solutions in practice. I then turn to a discussion of how the definition of food sovereignty presented by La Via Campesina, in its current political maturity, represents a radical reconception of traditional state-centric understandings of sovereignty, as well as a new rights framework for the social reproduction of peasant ontology, epistemology, and “method,” or peasant ways of living and doing. The sovereignty embodied in food sovereignty challenges the “boundedness” of states, asserting instead a call for multiple sovereignties based not on the territoriality

<sup>9</sup> Although La Via Campesina is credited with the introduction of “food sovereignty” and certainly responsible for the widespread proliferation of the language, Heller (2013) notes that the “precise origin of the term is unclear” (p. 97), and some research indicates that the term “food sovereignty” was already circulating among grassroots peasant organizations as much as a decade before La Via Campesina officially adopted the use of the term food sovereignty and “launched” it as a central movement concept (Edelman, 2013; Edelman, 1999, pp. 102-103; Heller, 2013, p. 97).

of physical space, but rather, on the experience of being sovereign and “being” or “doing” food sovereignty in specific local contexts in relation to other paradigms and other (food) sovereign bodies. I invoke the multiple resistances framework introduced in Chapter 2 to make sense of the multiple sovereignties of food sovereignty as a political project that reconciles radical democratic and multitudinous projects and calls for multiple forms of resistance to build food sovereignty in practice.

The formation of political subjectivity in local and transnational movements and the concept of food sovereignty are mutually constituted. Food sovereignty is not immanent to the social movements that (now) struggle for it, nor was the concept developed in a social or political vacuum. La Via Campesina was already a transnational network of social movements before the “launch” of the concept of food sovereignty, and food sovereignty as a concept has evolved and matured within these networks. Furthermore, La Via Campesina and its network of social movements, too, have continued to develop around the pillar of food sovereignty as central project. On a local level, the “idea” of food sovereignty comes from “somewhere”—which may be directly from La Via Campesina or through horizontal networked relationship between grassroots movements—and local understandings and expressions of food sovereignty are also informed by the knowledge and experience of other movements. This “embeddedness” of food sovereignty within transnational agrarian movements already constituted, and the further concurrent development of both concept and movement, highlights the multitudinous and relational character of food sovereignty. The formation of political subjectivity within the movement informs the development of understandings of food sovereignty and how that sovereignty takes shape for movements in their local expressions; these local expressions respond to, derive meaning from, and are related to the local place-specific manifestation of the global food regime, precisely against which the transnational movement as a whole collectively struggles on a global scale. As such, this section considers the social movement that seeks to build the project of food sovereignty, as well as the project of food sovereignty itself by tracing the development of the concept, and more specifically what the meaning or enactment of sovereignty is within the project of food sovereignty.

## **“The Peasant Way:” Introducing La Via Campesina and Food Sovereignty**

La Via Campesina emerged from a collective will to challenge neoliberal agricultural policies and as a response to the exclusion of the interests of those who produce food for the world—peasants and small farmers from the global north and south—from the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations (Desmarais, 2007, p. 77). This action on their common discontent was of course timely, as the GATT negotiations would soon after consolidate the creation of the WTO and its Agreement on Agriculture, ultimately further enabling dispossession of the peasantry around the world and significantly shaping the current injustices of global trade, food, and agricultural relations. The leaders behind the formation of La Via Campesina recognized the threat to the lives and livelihoods of small producers represented in the shift to a world economy controlled by the logic of the market, which would soon catalyze an *en masse* regression of agrarian programs and structures—achieved through the long struggles of rural activists—as national governments became increasingly embedded in the global neoliberal project (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013, p. 3). Its central concept and project of food sovereignty, introduced by “actively appropriating and inventing language” (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p. 161) to represent the right of peoples, communities, and nations to self-determination in food and agricultural policy and production, has entered into the discourse of food and agricultural movements throughout the world, offering a framework of rights, autonomy, citizenship, and an alternative to the hegemonic neoliberal model of trade and development. Ultimately, the growing industrial-corporatization of agriculture and desire to construct alternative models in both the global north and south consolidated La Via Campesina around shared values and goals: “an explicit rejection of the neoliberal model of rural development, an outright refusal to be excluded from agricultural policy development, and a firm determination to work together on common struggles” (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013, p. 3).

The impetus for the formation of La Via Campesina largely came from Latin America, where the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo* (CLOC), formally constituted in the early 1990’s, served as a forerunner to the

foundation of La Via Campesina by demonstrating the need for regionally integrated coordination of rural movements. This historic connection of La Via Campesina to Latin America is unsurprising given that “Latin America is the region of the world with the most unequal distribution of land and income,” and that Latin America was particularly hard hit by the “sharp decline in living standards” that accompanied the wave of neoliberal policies that swept the region in the 1980’s (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p. 154). Simultaneously, while CLOC was developing in Latin America, organizations of peasants and small farmers in other parts of the world, namely India, Europe, and North America, were also realizing that the problem of neoliberalism could only be confronted through transnational struggle (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p. 156), and transnational networks were indeed burgeoning. In this way, “La Via Campesina was born as the wave of peasant dissatisfaction and movements...hooked up with each other as a transnational social movement, or *globalization from below*” (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p. 156, original emphasis).

Thus, in 1992, the idea to create La Via Campesina emerged at a meeting of peasant and small farmer organizations in Managua, Nicaragua, with representatives from Central America, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe, and the following year, 1993, a conference uniting peasant and farmer organizations from throughout the world in Mons, Belgium, became the First International Conference of La Via Campesina that officially constituted it as a transnational rural social movement (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p. 156).<sup>10</sup> At its first conference, La Via Campesina identified itself as a political movement representing the voices of peasant organizations and marked its distance from NGOs, establishing a principle of autonomy from the NGO sector that had previously eclipsed the voices of grassroots peasant organizations by always speaking

<sup>10</sup> To date, La Via Campesina has had six international conferences, hosted every three to five years in different locations around the world: 1) Mons, Belgium, 1993; 2) Tlaxcala, Mexico, 1996; 3) Bangalore, India, 2000; 4) Sao Paolo, Brazil, 2004; 5) Maputo, Mozambique, 2008; and 6) Jakarta, Indonesia, 2013 (see [viacampesina.org](http://viacampesina.org)).

on their behalf.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the professionalized, technically project-based, and upwardly accountable structure of NGOs, La Via Campesina's identity as a social movement means that it aims to be democratically organized, accountable to the grassroots, oriented toward political goals, and has the capacity for mobilization of a large social base (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, p. 159). However, this distinction as a peasant movement and commitment to autonomy also created tensions with NGOs, some of whom were not readily willing to accept a "subordinate role" to popular organizations and La Via Campesina after having earlier experienced, in many cases, an expansion of responsibilities to include "advocacy, electoral politics, and delivery of services" during the proliferation of NGOs, particularly in the 1970's (Desmarais, 2007, pp. 98-99).

These tensions again flared in a struggle over "the conceptual framework for future action" with La Via Campesina's introduction of food sovereignty as a central concept and project (Desmarais, 2007, p. 130). According to the often recounted "origin story" of food sovereignty (Edelman, 2013, p. 2),<sup>12</sup> La Via Campesina inaugurated the concept of food sovereignty at its Second International Conference in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in 1996, three years after its First International Conference. This new framework proposed a radical reframing of food and agricultural issues. As peasant people began to speak for themselves through La Via Campesina with this new language, the introduction of the food sovereignty framework also challenged NGOs within the space that they had previously dominated. These divergences in discourse also underline

<sup>11</sup> According to Borras (2010), this determination for peasant self-expression and the attendant critique of NGO domination was inherited from the Central American transnational movement organization *Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo* (ASOCODE), a founding member of La Via Campesina. ASOCODE was "famous for articulating what was perhaps the first systematic TAM [transnational agrarian movement] critique of NGOs" (p. 785). Despite its later (and ironic) bureaucratic inefficiency and eventual decline, ASOCODE originally "built its platform on the self-appointed task of taking back the 'voice' of peasant movements from the NGOs and asserting that peasant could represent themselves" (Borras, 2010, p. 785). The historic relationship between ASOCODE, as a representative of Central American peasant movements, and La Via Campesina is further discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> This "origin story" fails to account for occasional use of food sovereignty terminology informally among grassroots peasant networks prior to its appearance within La Via Campesina discourse (see Edelman, 2013).

ideological differences in the perceived action agenda to address issues of rural crisis. However, these ideological differences also imbue food sovereignty with much of its meaning as a grassroots alternative for “another world.” The delegates of the Tlaxcala Conference declared that there will be no solution to food crises, global hunger, and malnutrition “without the active intervention of those that grow food” (Via Campesina, 1996b, para. 5), demonstrating the desire of peasants to speak for themselves to voice a radicalized and politicized perspective that challenged the reformist approach traditionally followed by NGOs. As McMichael (2008) explains, “[r]ather than raising questions about the trajectory of a given narrative, the food sovereignty movement questions the narrative itself” (p. 19); this narrative in question is that of neoliberal capitalism, whose ascendant and oppressively ubiquitous free market logic has had, and continues to have, destructive consequences for ecology, community, and social reproduction of peasant and indigenous cultures.

Through food sovereignty, peasant movements have not only asserted independence from the NGO sector, but also and more importantly their desire for autonomy from the neoliberal logic of the global corporate food regime, as expressed in their determination to “create a rural economy which is based on respect for ourselves and the earth, on food sovereignty, and on fair trade” (Via Campesina, 1996b, para. 1). The use of food sovereignty as a framework for understanding food and agriculture and, importantly, the relations of power and control they embody, is an exercise of peasant movements’ communicative or representational sovereignty to frame and address issues of food and agriculture on their own terms. Food sovereignty derives relational meaning from opposition to the global corporate food regime, but also from differentiation from the food and agricultural discourses that ultimately serve the food regime’s neoliberal agenda. Peasant movements’ assertion of autonomy or communicational sovereignty can be read as the first of a series of multiple sovereignties sought by and embodied in food sovereignty. The use of food sovereignty as a discourse to capture a new representational struggle (rooted in material realities) also further highlights the relational nature of food sovereignty and the particular conception of sovereignty it represents.

Although food sovereignty was not immediately widely supported when it was first officially launched in the international arena at the World Food Summit in 1996, it

has since gained great momentum. In 2002, it became the namesake of the NGO/CSO Forum on Food Sovereignty at the World Food Summit: Five Years Later, and in 2007, an International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Mali “helped consolidate a global food sovereignty movement” (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013, p. 6). Since the formation of the organization, but more specifically since the inauguration of food sovereignty, La Via Campesina has been credited with reframing debates on food and agriculture on a global scale through its engagement in what Borras and Franco (2009) call “knowledge politics.” Importantly, La Via Camepsina has successfully put redistributive agrarian reform back on the agenda (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013, p. 7; Guttal, Rosset, and Mendonça, 2006. p, xiv; Purwanto, 2013; Rosset, 2009a, p. 127), which has been complemented at the national policy level with the inclusion of food sovereignty in national laws or constitutions in Senegal, Mali, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Nepal, and Bolivia (Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012, p. 264). La Via Campesina has also fought for the recognition of food sovereignty at the international level, and has been successful in instigating negotiations and discussions in the United Nations Human Rights Council over the Declaration of Peasants’ Rights (men and women), in the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization over the inclusion of the language of food sovereignty in its reports, and food sovereignty was also mentioned in the high-profile International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD, 2009; see also Ishii-Eiteman, 2009).<sup>13</sup> However, although there have been concerted efforts from La Via Campesina and others to introduce food sovereignty at the international level, as Beuchelt and Virchow (2012) observe, “there seems a lack of clarity in how to implement global food sovereignty as an international policy and the

<sup>13</sup> IAASTD was a four-year international initiative under the co-governance of FAO, GEF, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, the World Bank and WHO that reported on agricultural knowledge, rural livelihoods, science and technology, and environmental sustainability. It discusses the consequences, current and future challenges, and policy options associated with increased agricultural productivity through destructive industrial methods. It also aligns with many of the tenets and values of food sovereignty movements through attention to the improvement of rural livelihoods and achievement of socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable development. The report acknowledges the benefits of agroecology and the importance of widespread adoption of such methods in the context of food and environmental crises. Many of the report’s findings align with the values of food sovereignty (Ishii-Eiteman, 2009, p. 692), and it also briefly defines food sovereignty (Feldman and Biggs, 2012; IAASTD, 2009). However, the report was intended to be “policy relevant” but not “policy prescriptive,” and it thus “stops short of calling on nations to take steps to assure their own and respect others’ food sovereignty” (Ishii-Eiteman, 2009, p. 692).

consequences of implementing such a policy" (p. 265), including the danger of diluting its potency as a political concept through institutionalization.

While La Via Campesina has advanced the politics of food sovereignty at the transnational level, the movement is constituted of dialectical local, national, and global interests, actions, and agents. Transnational agrarian movements have been instrumental in reframing debates, but real struggles and resistance are carried out at a local level. In this context, the concept of food sovereignty can be interpreted and practiced on a local community, national, and regional scale, and there remains definitional ambiguity to allow for open interpretation and application in specific contexts. Indeed, as Patel (2007) notes, one of the strengths of the food sovereignty movement is its ability to encompass both individual and *collective* rights. Food sovereignty is a people's movement and a "bottom up" process (Desmarais, 2007; German, 2009; McMichael, 2009a), rooted in decentering power and reclaiming rights and resources. With an emphasis on community and democracy, food sovereignty resists, and proposes an alternative to, the strong ideology of individualism that underpins neoliberal policy and politics, instead favouring principles of collectivity and participation. Food sovereignty as a concept was born out of an already constituted grassroots movement that recognized the need for increased transnational solidarity and organizing in order to confront and fundamentally change the structural oppression inflicted on small farmers, peasants, and other rural and landless people, by the global corporate food regime. Since its inauguration as a concept, food sovereignty as a movement has continued to evolve, developing ways of communicating, organizing, and building in practice a project of food sovereignty that is fixed in local context but part of a networked multitude that supports a struggle for multiple sovereignties and collective rights.

## **Defining Food Sovereignty and its Core Principles**

Food sovereignty can have a plurality of specific interpretations unique to the needs of individuals and communities that seek to achieve it. The food sovereignty framework embodies multiple resistances and reconciles the communicative characteristics of Laclau and Mouffe, and Hardt and Negri. In framing and fixing meaning, food sovereignty simultaneously seeks to maintain an openness of meaning to

allow for open processes, politics, and self-definition. Food sovereignty is a framework that aims to advance a broadly encompassing representational struggle that takes shape in accordance with local material realities, creating a conceptual and communicative basis for multiple resistances through a vision of multiple sovereignties.

Over the past decade and a half since La Via Campesina inaugurated food sovereignty as a concept and primary issue area, definitional variations and interpretations have proliferated. The difficulty in succinctly defining the term, therefore, does not stem from a dearth of attempts to do so. Indeed, as Raj Patel (2009) notes, “[f]ood sovereignty is, if anything, over defined” (p. 663). Broadly defined, however, it constitutes the struggle for and defense of rural livelihoods, local production, socially just trade relations, and sustainable, agroecological methods against the corporate industrial food complex (Bello, 2007; Borras, Edelman, and Kay, 2008; Desmarais, 2007). In the words of the Statement on Peoples’ Food Sovereignty, one of the most common definitions of food sovereignty:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture policies; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets, and; to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production. (Via Campesina, et al., n.d., p. 1)

Adding to and complementing this definition, the oft-cited Nyéléni<sup>14</sup> Declaration of the International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali, in 2007, states:

Food sovereignty is the right of people 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

<sup>14</sup> The International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Mali, also called the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty, and the Nyéléni Declaration that it produced are named after a historical local peasant woman named Nyéléni to honour her work as a farmer, saver of seeds, and her role in cultivating food security in the region (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013, p. 6).

consume food at the heart of the food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations...[and] offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime.... Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture.... Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all.... Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations. (Nyéléni, 2007, p. 3)

As these definitions highlight, food sovereignty introduces the voices of the powerless into the global discourses of food, agriculture, and rural development, advocating for the incorporation of the interests of the rural poor in policy agendas, particularly agrarian reform, which is also a foundational pillar of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty as a discourse for understanding food and agriculture is a representational struggle for the recognition, legitimacy, and autonomy of issue framing from the political, cultural, and class perspective of peasant communities. Built on the foundation of this political and cultural position, food sovereignty implies self-determination in matters of food and production, freedom from oppression, rights to a dignified way of life, and respect of rural knowledge. Based on values of equality, justice, and transparency, food sovereignty seeks to localize control of the food system, reconnect nature and community, and redistribute rights to land and resources to those at the foundation of the world's food supply (Nyéléni, 2007; Desmarais, Wiebe, and Wittman, 2010). Fundamentally, the people and communities that seek to achieve food sovereignty have the autonomy to determine its specific meaning in local context.

As the above definitions illustrate, the concept of food sovereignty is multifaceted and inherently open to interpretation, stacking many values and meanings within one overarching idea. The scale at which food sovereignty is to be achieved remains intentionally ambiguous, allowing peoples and movements to determine its specific meaning in context and operationalize it accordingly. This diversity and breadth embodied in the concept renders it difficult to look at comprehensively, but it is important to recognize that “[t]he genesis of the concept was designed precisely to prevent the kind of pinning-down of interpretation” that comes with attempting to iron out the details of the concept and universalize it (Patel, 2009, p. 670). Therefore, it is a violation of “the

first rule of food sovereignty” to attempt to “pin down” and define it with concrete or rigid definitions (Patel, 2009, p. 670).

However, although specific expressions differ based on local context and interpretation, there are foundational elements that are common to varying understandings and applications of food sovereignty. Importantly, these principles “are not a checklist of separate ‘things to do,’” but rather, “they are integrative goals of a praxis that play out differently from one organisation, locale, region, country, and transnational setting to the next” (Boyer, 2010, p. 334). This speaks to the diversity within the realm of food sovereignty, pointing to the fact that despite core values, ethics, and goals, interpretive differences emerge when it comes to “the measures needed to implement or realize the principles” in the pursuit of food sovereignty (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, p. 15).

At the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, La Via Campesina officially launched the food sovereignty concept and released a statement that has since served as the basis for other declarations expanding on the meaning and programmatic goals of food sovereignty. In this statement, *Food Sovereignty: A Future without Hunger* (Via Campesina, 1996a), La Via Campesina outlined seven principles of food sovereignty, which have essentially remained the core focus of all subsequent definitions of food sovereignty and are broadly subscribed to by all its advocates:

- 1) Food as a basic human right,
- 2) Genuine agrarian reform,
- 3) Protection of natural resources,
- 4) Reorganization of food trade,
- 5) An end to the globalization of hunger,
- 6) Social peace,<sup>15</sup> and
- 7) Democratic control.<sup>16</sup> (Via Campesina, 1996a)

<sup>15</sup> This includes the right to freedom from violence and the idea that “[f]ood cannot be used as a weapon” (Via Campesina, 1996a, p. 3)

Alternatively, representatives of the 2007 International Forum for Food Sovereignty, including La Via Campesina and other civil society organizations, expanded a different list of six pillars of food sovereignty as part of the Nyéléni Declaration, detailing that food sovereignty:

- 1) Focuses on food for people,
- 2) Values food providers,
- 3) Localizes food systems,
- 4) Puts control locally,
- 5) Builds knowledge and skills, and
- 6) Works with nature. (International Steering Committee, 2007, p. 1)

The Nyéléni Declaration pillars use different language, but express largely overlapping priorities with the principles put forward originally by La Via Campesina. Both emphasize social and environmental sustainability through democratic and local control; gender, generational, and racial equality; a rejection of food as a commodity; and a reorganization of trade relations to empower the people and communities that produce food, rather than transnational agri-business and international property rights regimes. While the six pillars express the collectivity of food sovereignty, they do not summarize some of the core, defining elements of project of food sovereignty included La Via Campesina's seven principles. The six pillars, for example, do not speak to the importance of agrarian reform as foundational to food sovereignty, despite the fact that the same declaration also states that food sovereignty "promotes a genuine agrarian reform and defends access to, and the sharing of, productive territories free from the threat of privatisation and expulsion" (International Steering Committee, 2007, p. 1).

<sup>16</sup> La Via Campesina and supporters of food sovereignty also give great attention to gender relations and the importance of recognizing the rights of women farmers, who produce up to 80 percent of food in the world's poorest countries, and over 50 percent of food globally (Mehra and Hill Rojas, 2008; Nyéléni, 2007). This is represented most clearly in La Via Campesina's Global Campaign to End Violence Against Women, launched in 2008 (Via Campesina, 2012, p. 5). This attention to gender equality and the rights of women can be included as an eighth principle of food sovereignty (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005), or alternatively, it can be considered subsumed within the seventh principle of democratization, which states that "[r]ural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues" (Via Campesina, 1996a, p. 3).

The comprehensive agenda of food sovereignty expressed in both the seven principles of La Via Campesina and the six pillars of the Nyéléni Declaration are further distilled and summarized in four action areas put forth as a program proposal by the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty:

- 1) The right to food: A rights-based approach to food and agricultural policy, captured succinctly by promotion of the right to food;
- 2) Agroecological approaches to food production: Agroecology as a mainstream agricultural model, enabling agro-ecosystems that are productive (including economically productive), environmentally sustainable, socially just, and culturally appropriate;
- 3) Local access to and control of natural resources: Access to productive resources for smallholder farmers and other food producers, including genuine agrarian reform; and
- 4) Agricultural trade and food sovereignty: Equitable trade policies and a focus on local markets, which includes fair prices for agricultural producers and an end to food dumping. (IPC for Food Sovereignty, 2009; Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, pp. 14-15)

The overlap between this and previous the lists speaks to the commonality and universality of the foundational principles or pillars, and it also offers a useful consolidation of the longer lists through a simplified categorization of themes.

Evidently, there is no consistent definition of food sovereignty to which all of its advocates subscribe. Nonetheless, what is consistent is that the definition of *sovereignty* within the discourse is a reworked one, referring primarily not to the sovereignty of nation states, but rather, to the localized autonomy of people and communities, focusing particularly on the democratization required in the shift toward more localized food systems and agricultural relations. However, although food sovereignty shifts the locus of sovereignty from the state to the people, it does not dismiss the role of the nation state, which can have an important role in policy development, implementation of agrarian reform, and negotiation of more favourable trade relations that consider the rights of peasants, fisherfolk, and other small producers.

In addition, the political analysis of food sovereignty also acknowledges the impact that international level policy decisions have had on the lives of local farmers and food producing communities. In highlighting the “negative interference from international

policies on the lives of local communities,” food sovereignty calls attention to “the need to re-assert local autonomy in order to solve the problems of poverty and hunger,” while still considering what can and should be regulated at the local, national, and international levels (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, p. 33). Furthermore, locally specific food sovereignty movements—implicated in global political economy but responding to a particular national policy environment and building alternatives within the material reality of grassroots communities—exchange knowledge and experiences through a networked transnational social movement. In summary of the state and non-state actors and local and global factors involved, Gürcan (2014) argues that “...the genuinely emancipatory potential of food sovereignty is realized only if local struggles can be tied to both national and transnational solutions that rely upon a progressive alliance among numerous social movements and left-leaning governments” (p. 204).

Food sovereignty is fixed in local contexts, enacting grassroots alternatives and calling for state responses to help carve out a food sovereign space in relation to the of the neoliberal food regime, but it is also correspondingly transnational in scope as a networked resistance to the global political economic conjuncture of neoliberal capitalism and the way it structures relations between communities, food, agriculture, and nature. Presenting an alterative model of development that places decision-making authority on food and agriculture issues and control of resources in the hands of local communities and those who produce food, while creating and maintaining meaningful relations across borders, food sovereignty challenges the political project of neoliberal globalization and advocates a system where the agricultural production of food and the social reproduction of community can be based on a “peasant” logic, not the logic of the neoliberal market.

## **Political Maturation of a Concept: A brief genealogy of food sovereignty**

The reconceptualization of traditional sovereignty and the decisive focus autonomy of local communities within food sovereignty is a conceptual orientation that has taken shape as food sovereignty has matured and developed as a discourse and practice. When La Via Campesina first proposed and introduced food sovereignty as a

concept, the definition gave greater attention to the state as an actor, as demonstrated by its declaration coinciding with the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, which stated:

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.  
(Via Campesina, 1996a, p. 1, emphasis added)

This original definition of food sovereignty focuses on the achievement of national self-sufficiency. This aligns with Edelman's (1999) research, which suggests that the language of food sovereignty, or *soberanía alimentaria*, emerged among peasant organizations in Central America (specifically Costa Rica) as early as the 1980's to refer to "national food security" (p. 102). In a context of declining production of basic grains as a result of structural adjustment, removal of national agricultural supports, and other disincentives for growing traditional crops such as maize, Costa Rican peasants drew a connection between the inability to support food consumption needs at the household level with the food insecurity of the national "household." In this conjuncture, the inability of the nation to meet its food needs was linked discursively with the sovereignty of the nation, using the language of *soberanía alimentaria* to represent national food security (pp. 102-103). Early definitions of food sovereignty presented by La Via Campesina similarly focus on nation self-sufficiency and the *autarky* of the nation state; however, the definition later evolved and broadened to focus more on *autonomy* of nations as well as peoples and communities.

At the Third International Conference of La Via Campesina in Bangalore, India in 2000, the first since food sovereignty was inaugurated, representatives continued to demand food sovereignty, but a clear definition was not put forward; the discourse in declaration documents largely conforms to the nationally oriented conception of food sovereignty first presented in 1996. Highlighting the interconnection between a policy of a food sovereignty and agrarian reform, the Bangalore Declaration expressed that "food sovereignty [is] understood as the right of all people to plan their agriculture so as to first satisfy with priority all it's [sic] national population, with abundant, cheap food of good quality" (Via Campesina, 2000, para. 14). Again, this discourse maintains an emphasis on national agricultural planning and national autarky, though it does locate the social control of the food system in the hands of "people" within a food sovereign context. As

Rosset (2013) observes, the Bangalore Declaration framed land as a resource “to be distributed to produce food for *people*, rather than exports for the global economy” (p. 724, emphasis added). In the Bangalore document, a link was thus explicitly forged, perhaps for the first time, between agrarian reform and the project of food sovereignty (Rosset, 2013, p. 724), though nevertheless remaining largely focused on autarky.

However, in 2001, a slightly revised definition of food sovereignty appeared in the declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty held in Havana, Cuba. This statement reorients the definition of food sovereignty to invoke the discourse of the human right to food (discussed in further detail below). It also shifts from being focused almost exclusively on food production and providing for food needs to demanding inclusive processes of policy development, thereby emphasizing food sovereignty as an expression of *autonomy*. The Havana Declaration thus takes the scale of food sovereignty away from the state and suggests it is a right to be delivered to people and communities:

We define food sovereignty as the peoples' right to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food that guarantee the right to food for the entire population, on the basis of small and medium-sized production, respecting their own cultures and diversity of peasant, fishing and indigenous forms of agricultural production, marketing and management of rural areas, in which women play a fundamental role. (Havana Declaration, 2001, p. 4)

The declaration of the 2002 independent NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Rome as a parallel to the FAO World Food Summit: Five Years Later similarly emphasized food sovereignty as a right as well as drawing attention to the varying loci at which food sovereignty can be achieved. It also highlighted the “failure” since the 1996 World Food Summit to address issues of food insecurity and that world hunger can only be confronted by “fundamentally different policies” and presented food sovereignty as “the fundamental approach” necessary, stating:

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and

culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies. (Via Campesina, 2002, para. 8)

The vision of food sovereignty was again expanded at the 2007 International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Selingué, Mali, which represented an “important landmark in the building of connections between international networks and social movements” working toward the common goal of food sovereignty (Stedile, 2007, para. 1). The Nyéléni Declaration of the 2007 International Forum has become a core food sovereignty document and its description of food sovereignty is among the most often used definitions (cited above). The Forum emphasized food sovereignty as related to the political sovereignty of peoples, defines food sovereignty as a right (with particular attention to the right to food), and identifies food sovereignty as “the common ground, starting point and guiding theme for achieving economic, social and political justice” (Nyéléni, 2007, p. 16).

The discourse of food sovereignty frequently acknowledges that national governments can and do have a role, while the locus of sovereignty is peoples and communities, whose rights can be protected through their national level policy decisions. Importantly, however, the concept of food sovereignty is not simply about nations having adequate food for all and ensuring access to that food. Rather, the concept goes further to ask important questions about what food is available, how food is produced, by whom, under what conditions, at what scale of production, and with what ecological consequences. Food sovereignty is, therefore, an inherently political concept that goes beyond technical issues of the amount of food available in order to deliberately probe and challenge the structural power dynamics of the global food system and demand redistribution and democratic control within the world’s food and agricultural relations, placing at the center peasants and small-scale agricultural producers, who are the foundation of the global food system. It is also therefore a concept that asserts representational or communicative sovereignty, framing issues of food and agriculture from the perspective of peasant and food producing peoples and proposing (and creating) alternatives informed by “peasant” understandings of food, land, and community.

## **Food Sovereignty as Counterframe and Communicative Sovereignty**

Since it was first inaugurated in 1996, food sovereignty has developed conceptually and has been adopted by an expanding base of social movements as a rallying cry and as a vision of an alternative model of agricultural production and trade relations. Its impact on discourse, thought, and action has demonstrated food sovereignty's "great transformative potential" (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 15), but also points to the importance of acknowledging the specific context that allowed food sovereignty to emerge as a powerful concept and to be met with support from grassroots movements. Indeed, "food sovereignty did not arise in a conceptual or political vacuum" (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 15), but rather, food sovereignty joins a lineage of different historical frameworks that have been used to understand and describe food relations and issues of food access. Therefore, food sovereignty must be understood as both a response to and the "intellectual offspring" of earlier discourses of "food security" and the "right to food" (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 15), concepts with which the discourse of food sovereignty is in conversation but to which food sovereignty ultimately proposes an alternative. It is useful to understand these earlier discourses and the conditions that produced them in order to contextualize the emergence of food sovereignty and how it challenges—but also relates to—previous frameworks for addressing food, hunger, and agricultural issues.

Like the other food and agricultural discourses that have preceded it, food sovereignty emerged within a particular "food regime," which both produced and is challenged by the new discourse of food sovereignty. The food regime concept enables an historical and geopolitical analysis of global food relations, the political economy of food, and the interrelations between configurations of capital accumulation and particular food and agricultural systems (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009b; McMichael, 2009c; McMichael, 2013a). As defined by Friedmann and McMichael (1989), the intellectual authors of food regime analysis, the food regime concept "links international relations of food production and consumption to forms of accumulation broadly distinguishing periods of capitalist transformation" (p. 95), which is useful in unpacking "the strategic role of agriculture and food in the construction of the world capitalist economy" (McMichael, 2009c, p. 139).

The current food regime is a corporate food regime, also called the neoliberal food regime, characterized by a global food-fuel agricultural complex (McMichael, 2009b; McMichael, 2009c). Unlike earlier food regimes, which were ruled either by colonial empires or by the nation state, the organizing logic of the corporate food regime is the neoliberal market (McMichael, 2009b, p. 285). Although food sovereignty is a product of this particular historical moment and food regime context, it is distinct from previous food related frameworks not only because it was “created by the oppressed rather than the powerful in the world food system” (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 16), but also because it seeks to attack the food regime that produced it, in an effort to reconstruct in its place a food system based on dignity, rights, and social, economic, and cognitive justice. Thus, while food sovereignty was only able to develop due to the specific context of the corporate food regime, as a concept it “reframes the issues so as to explicitly reject [the] structure and ideologies” of that regime (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 16), offering instead an alternative model for food, agricultural, and trade relations. It does, however, still engage with food frames from previous food regimes, including the right to food and food security discourses, and renders them relevant to food sovereignty as a project to address issues of hunger and food access.

The concepts of the “right to food” and “freedom from hunger” emerged as universal food access frames with the consolidation of the post-war food regime, and the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights enshrined the right to food and ascribed “legal force” to the concept (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 19). Like the food regime and development model that produced these discourses, the right to food and freedom from hunger both emphasized the role of the nation state in addressing issues of food and hunger, encouraged reliance on U.S. food aid, and embodied the Cold War political ideologies, ultimately limiting the scope and creativity of official food frames (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 21). These frames were thus consistent with the postwar development project that was attempting to engineer the newly independent “third world” as part of a political project supporting an emerging dynamic of global power relations (McMichael, 2012). In this way, the approaches to food issues born out of the right to food and freedom from hunger concepts also reproduced the assumptions of the postwar “development doctrine” and U.S. anti-Communist foreign policy informed by modernization theory, which assumed a universal and linear progression from “traditional” to “modern” society

through the achievements of U.S-style industrialization and technological advance, particularly in agriculture. In the realm of food issues, this development model included dependency-fostering U.S. food aid policy that functioned as a geopolitical tool to contain the threat of communist expansion by discouraging newly independent “third world” countries from aligning with the Soviet Bloc (Engerman, Gilman, Haefele, and Latham, 2003; Gilman, 2004). This “development” approach served as justification to export the model of modern industrialized agriculture and technology from the West to “underdeveloped” countries throughout the globe as a means of enabling them to “catch up” through cultural and technological shifts brought by the Green Revolution, rupturing the autonomy of subsistence farmers and fostering dependency on industrial inputs by encouraging a move away from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture (Desmarais, 2007, p. 45, 47). By simply reproducing the assumptions and approach of the postwar development project (McMichael, 2012), particularly in encouraging food “dumping” and fostering relations of dependency between peripheral countries and the surplus of cheap grains from the U.S. as a means of addressing problems of hunger and malnutrition in the global south, the right to food and freedom from hunger concepts served as institutional discourses that were not capable of challenging the existing food regime, and instead contributed to maintaining it.

The discourse for framing global issues of food and hunger was reconceptualized in conjunction with the decline of the postwar food regime, brought into crisis by the world food crisis in 1972 and 1973. Although “food security” was also first introduced in the postwar era, “profoundly linked to the concept of national security and to the capacity of each country to produce its own food” (Valente, quoted in Edelman, 2013, p. 9; see also Simon, 2012), the concept (re)emerged as official discourse at the 1974 World Food Conference with a “narrowed” definition (Edelman, 2013, p. 9; see also Fairbairn, 2010), reframing the thinking about food and hunger and paving the way for the development of a new food regime (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 22). Despite the chronic problems of the food system that prompted the development of the food security concept, initial food security discourse nevertheless remained “rooted in the ideology of the failing postwar food regime” (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 22), which maintained an ideological focus on the nation state as the central mechanism for the achievement of national development through market intervention and a paradoxical combination of domestic

agricultural growth and external food aid. Government representatives at the World Food Conference agreed on the need to increase agricultural production, including an intensification of the Green Revolution and strategies to decrease trade barriers (Desmarais, 2007, p. 40). Although food security “attempts to remedy a faulty system, it does so without questioning the dominant political-economic wisdom” (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 22), which is a direct result of the fact that, “[l]ike the right to food and freedom from hunger, food security was conceptualized in the corridors of global power” (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 22). In this way, although food security discourse proposed to address food issues, it fundamentally perpetuated the existing logic of the global food system and continued to exclude from the conversation those at the foundation of global food production.

The food security discourse later shifted to reflect the structure and discourse of neoliberal globalization and the emergent corporate food regime (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 24). Consolidated in the Uruguay Round of WTO negotiations, a new focus on the household level—rather than the national level—as the locus of food security decreased the role of governments in addressing food issues and reframed food security as a matter of individual purchasing power within a global context of liberalized agricultural markets (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 24). This shift in food security discourse thus parallels a global political economic transition from the development project to the project of neoliberalism, which has placed the question of food security in the hands of global agricultural markets while the nation state has been tasked with the work of maintaining a favourable economic climate for the expansion of trade relations and constantly renegotiating its insertion in the global economic system. In this process, the World Bank and IMF delivered structural adjustment packages to most developing countries and urged the deregulation of agricultural markets to enable cheap foreign agro-exports to flood local markets, all in the name of “trade-based food security” (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, p. 6). The creation of the WTO and its Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) further consolidated the agricultural liberalization agenda and aimed to increase market access and export competition by reducing tariffs, export subsidies, and domestic government support (Desmarais, 2007, p. 49). By the time governments met at the 1996 UN World Food Summit, levels of food insecurity were rising, yet the strategies proposed to confront the crisis were “remarkably similar” to those agreed upon in the 1970’s, including increased

biotechnology in agricultural industrialization and a “new Green Revolution” (Desmarais, 2007, p. 41). Furthermore, as made particularly clear in the World Food Summit’s failure to identify “mechanisms for the equitable distribution of resources” (Desmarais, 2007, p. 41), the definition of household food security also “purposely ignored how or where food is produced” (Boyer, 2010, p. 325), a critical shortcoming that food sovereignty discourse would later bring to light with sharp criticism. For the meantime, however, these official food frames further enabled the development of the still-consolidating corporate food regime through the convenient alignment of food security discourse with existing U.S. food and agricultural policy and the power of the agro-industrial complex in ever expanding regimes of free trade.

Given the limitations of the food security concept to truly challenge structures of power and inequality within the food system, the corporate food regime has in turn given rise to a new discourse of global food relations, the discourse of food sovereignty, which is the first frame that seeks to overturn the regime within which it was created. While food security ultimately reproduces much of the foundational logic of the food regime from which it emerged by failing to question the power dynamics that structure it, food sovereignty differs drastically as a “counterframe” to food security and a “self-conscious rejection” of all that is embodied in the corporate food regime and neoliberal development project (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 27). Unlike the right to food, freedom from hunger, and food security discourses, which were food frameworks imposed from above and intellectually engineered by the global political economic elite, the concept of food sovereignty is a discourse from below, introduced in the participatory and grassroots spaces of the transnational rural social movement La Via Campesina. The vision of food sovereignty, therefore, goes beyond basic reforms of the food system, calling instead for an outright overhaul that would create a new regime entirely on the basis of an alternative trade and agricultural paradigm rooted in democratic, dignified, and transparent relations.

As a response and challenge to both the dominant discourse of food security and the corporate food regime, the concept of food sovereignty deeply politicizes issues of food and agricultural production. It draws attention to the power relations that structure the agro-industrial food system and the corporate food regime, and thereby challenges

the narrative of the current global food system as a natural and neutral outcome of market forces (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 28), which has imbued food sovereignty with “greater transformative potential” than the assumptions and approaches to food and hunger embodied in earlier frames (Fairbairn, 2010, p. 31).

In conjunction, however, food sovereignty also speaks to and incorporates earlier frames within its vision and goals. In summary of the differences between these food frames but also how they are complementary, food security can be understood as a *technical* concept, the right to food can be understood as a *legal* concept, while food sovereignty is a distinctly *political* concept (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, p. 15). As expressed in a declaration of La Via Campesina coinciding with the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, Italy (from which La Via Campesina was excluded), “food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security” (Via Campesina, 1996a, p. 1). Furthermore, since food sovereignty advocates consider food a basic human right, “the right to food can therefore be seen as a tool to achieve [food sovereignty]” (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, p. 11).

In addition to the history of the right to food discourse detailed above, the concept of food as a fundamental human right re-emerged in the 1990’s “at the forefront of political struggles against neoliberal restructuring of agriculture in the global South” (German, 2009, p. 129). However, as represented by the 2003-2004 negotiations on the FOA “Voluntary Guidelines” on the human right to food, the idea of food as a human right has been “stripped of its critical potential and aligned with the neoliberal project” as a result of being “recast as a policy goal, instrumentalized in terms of a policy approach and proposed as the economic freedom of the individual” (German, 2009, p. 138). The right to food discourse has thus been the subject of an ideological struggle between marginalized land-poor peasant and indigenous groups challenging the hegemonic agro-economic model and the global forces that seek to depolitize and hollow out the discourse to ideologically support the neoliberal project. Nonetheless, it is still an important concept among organizations working on the project of food sovereignty,

particularly FIAN International<sup>17</sup> (and its Honduras section), which primarily advocates realization of the right to adequate food, but also supports food sovereignty. As detailed above in the various definitions and foundational pillars of food sovereignty, the concept invokes the right to food as a core element of the achievement of food sovereignty, and it presents a broad framework that is “more conducive to the realization of the right to food” than earlier less radical approaches (Wiebe, as quoted in Desmarais, 2007, p. 131).

Although food sovereignty engages with the “right to food” discourse, the approach also “has been critiqued for focusing on the *individual* human right to food, rather than the structural problems of agricultural development, food production, and consumption within the world economic system” (Wittman, 2011, p. 92). Via Campesina ultimately has created a new framework to contribute to developing “an alternative conception of rights” through food sovereignty (Claeys, 2013, p. 2). In 2004, the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty clarified the relationship between the right to food and food sovereignty through the inclusion of “individuals,” in addition to countries, communities, and peoples, in the definition of food sovereignty, an amendment that highlights food not only as a human right, but also as an individual right, in accordance with the discourse of human rights organizations advocating the right to food (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, p. 12). However, this definition of food sovereignty is not currently used by La Via Campesina, which continues to use a definition that focuses on *collective* rights. Indeed, “Via Campesina’s ambivalent approach to the ‘right to food’” reveals that the peasant perspective of food sovereignty is “at odds with both the liberal and social-democratic approaches to human rights” (Claeys, 2012, p. 848). This emphasis on the rights of *communities* and *peoples* as opposed to the rights of individuals fundamentally aligns with La Via Campesina’s larger rejection of neoliberalism as a totalizing political project. Embodied in food sovereignty, as Claeys (2013) argues, this still-consolidating “new conception of human rights” led by La Via Campesina:

<sup>17</sup> Formerly known as Food First Information and Action Network, FIAN is now officially referred to only by its acronym.

...emphasizes the collective dimension of claims over the individual one; targets the various levels where food and agricultural governance issues ought to be deliberated, from the local, national, regional to the international; and provides the tools to fight neoliberalism and capitalism in agriculture, through the defense of autonomy and equality-reinforcing food systems. (pp. 2-3)

Thus, although food sovereignty is in conversation with both the right to food and food security concepts, it ultimately challenges the individualism and neoliberal orientation embedded in those discourses and seeks to reframe the debate and the demands within food and agriculture on the basis of a new rights framework embodied in food sovereignty as a collective right of peoples, communities, regions, and nations.

As a counterframe to food security and other discourses that ultimately frame food and hunger issues to align with neoliberal policy agendas, food sovereignty seeks to introduce the voices of the dispossessed food producers of the world into conversations about food and agriculture and ask critical questions about power and control within the food system. Thus, food sovereignty seeks to remedy the material reality of food system injustices by addressing the peasant experience of landlessness or land poverty and other forms of dispossession, but it also embodies representational or communicative significance for the peasant people and communities who express, represent, and defend their ways of life through food sovereignty. Peasant movements have made a representational choice to express themselves through food sovereignty as opposed to other discourses, and “[t]he keyword *sovereignty* suggests a meaningful shift in how subaltern actors choose to understand themselves” (Heller, 2013, p. 266, original emphasis). The simultaneous fixity and openness of the food sovereignty framework means that peasant groups subscribe to a particular analysis and way of thinking about food and agriculture, while also maintaining considerable autonomy in determining and defining what food sovereignty means and looks like within their specific context.

As an issue frame and as an experience in practice, food sovereignty is never a *fait accompli*; rather, food sovereignty by definition involves local framing processes and material practices to construct the meaning and “being” of food sovereignty. Thus, through the act of invoking the language of food sovereignty, peasant movements “[i]n linguistically reclaim personal and community agency” (Heller, 2013, p. 266). More

broadly, in the realm of addressing material dispossession of peasants and the injustices of the global corporate food regime, “the keyword *sovereignty* expands the horizons of what could be thought and said about the causes and effects of hunger, landlessness, and neoliberalism generally” (Heller, 2013, p. 264, original emphasis). Thus, food sovereignty—a complex and at times ambiguous concept that consists of a range of principles and meanings all fundamentally related to the democratization of the food system—is a project encompassing multiple sovereignties that ensure social and cultural reproduction of peasant life and livelihood, as well as economic, environmental, and community well being. The specific meaning of sovereignty within these multiple sovereignties of food sovereignty will be further explored in the follow section.

## **Reconceiving Sovereignty: Understanding the “sovereignty” of food sovereignty**

As an expression of non-state autonomy and as a counterframe to other food discourses, food sovereignty represents a reconception of traditional state-centric understandings of sovereignty and a new rights framework that challenges individualized conceptions of sovereignty. Appropriating the language of “sovereignty” as a frame to express a progressive project for food and agriculture, food sovereignty shifts the meaning of sovereignty by separating it from the state, but nevertheless draws on the central ideas of authority, control, and jurisdiction associated with traditional understandings of sovereignty. Indeed, the questions about power and control in the food system that food sovereignty asks in critiquing and adding to the shortcomings of other depoliticized food frames are one of its main contributions to debates on food and agriculture; while the language of food *security* expresses concern about freedom from the threat of hunger, food *sovereignty* expresses a concern for matters of power, control, and decision making authority in the food system and freedom from food “dumping” and other unjust consequences of the global corporate food regime.

However, despite maintaining some of these central broad themes, the sovereignty of food sovereignty challenges the traditional “boundedness” of states by pushing to expand understandings of who can conceivably be sovereign, and it is this political imaginary that justifies and reconciles multiple resistances. As an issue frame,

food sovereignty fixes new meaning, while also opening new spaces for political creativity. As a political project of multiple resistances, food sovereignty shifts from monolithic state power to multiple sovereignties of peoples *over themselves*, based not exclusively on the territoriality of physical space and border politics, but rather, on the experience of “being” sovereign and “doing” food sovereignty, fixed in local contexts but also in relation to the global corporate food regime and the multitudinous transnational movement.

Below I will briefly discuss the historical origins of and current debates over the meaning of sovereignty to further explore the concept in the context of food sovereignty. Despite the debates around sovereignty, this brief exploration of its meaning demonstrates that traditional conceptions of sovereignty are closely tied to the questions of political authority and its locus, the state, and territoriality. Edelman (2013) rightly points out that analyses of food sovereignty have been lacking in a thorough exploration of the meaning of sovereignty, and that the conceptions of sovereignty of some of the most influential contemporary theorists, such as Agamben, fall short of evoking the democratic, participatory, socially just ethos for which food sovereignty strives (p. 12). By “drawing on conventional languages,” the term food sovereignty “appears problematic” (McMichael, 2013a, p. 147). Indeed, there is a disconnect between the image of the absolutist, indivisible authority of the state sovereign in a permanent state of exception or global civil war and the image of a grassroots emancipatory project embodied in food sovereignty. Thus, read alongside the genealogy of food sovereignty in the above sections, this brief discussion of understandings of sovereignty helps to highlight the extent to which food sovereignty represents a reconceptualization of traditional understandings of sovereignty, particularly in its challenge to state-centricity (and analogous individualism), territoriality, universality, and singularity through its collective rights framework and alternative fixed (but not territorial), relational, and multiple sovereignties that are not mutually exclusive.

However, although food sovereignty presents a challenge to traditional understandings of sovereignty, the extent of debate over its meaning also demonstrates that sovereignty is evidently already undergoing “positive reconceptualization” (Prokhorovnik, 2007, p. 1), which could include food sovereignty. This aligns with

McMichael's (2009a) argument that food sovereignty is among the novel conceptions of sovereignty, democracy, and citizenship that address the transformation of society and politics within the crisis of sovereignty and the broader crisis of neoliberalism, which as a political project brought the deterioration of Westphalian notions of national sovereignty. Accordingly to McMichael (2009a), the crisis of sovereignty involves an "erosion of citizenship rights," "exclusion and displacement," and growing interest in developing alternatives to the hegemonic system (p. 38). Counter-movements recognize the inherently "social, ecological, cultural, and political" (McMichael, 2009a, p. 33) nature of global and local processes of life and governance, highlight new and increasingly intricate conceptions of citizenship, and move beyond the rule of the market to reimagine notions of sovereignty. McMichael draws on Beck's dichotomy of first and second modernity—the first emphasizes national sovereignty, whereas the second is increasingly diverse, diasporic, and "post-national"—arguing that food sovereignty is one example of the autonomy, globality, and shifting sovereignty of the transition to the second modernity. Thus, food sovereignty can be understood as one of many contributions to a rich discussion and genesis of new ways of understanding and enacting sovereignty in a global neoliberal world where nation states, global capital, and autonomous grassroots groups form a constellation of multiple and overlapping sovereignties of various forms and jurisdictions.

In conjunction with many acknowledging the contested nature of the concept of sovereignty, questioning its utility as a concept for understanding the current political conjuncture, nationally and internationally, many are also hesitant to state a clear definition, instead focusing on the conceptual issues and debates to further inform thinking about sovereignty and how it is to be reconceptualised for a new historical moment. Cynthia Weber (1995), for example, offers a general definition of sovereignty as "the absolute authority a state holds over a territory and people as well as independence internationally and recognition by other sovereign states as a sovereign state," but follows this immediately with a caveat that the specific meaning of sovereignty remains "fuzzy" among theorists (p. 1). In appropriating the language of sovereignty, therefore, the concept of *food* sovereignty thus faces definitional challenges in its very genesis, inheriting the legacy of sovereignty's conceptual ambiguity and lack of theoretical consensus. In another sense, however, food sovereignty joins the

conversation at an apt moment, precisely when debates on sovereignty are rethinking the concept and beginning to question its traditional nature—as indivisible, absolute, discrete, and territorial—to forge new understandings of sovereignty that reimagine social and political organization in response to historically distinct global political dynamics and crises.

The conception of sovereignty most often invoked is that of Western modern state sovereignty, which includes internal and external dimensions of ultimate authority over a bounded territory and non-interference within the international state system based on mutual recognition of self-determining sovereign entities. Sovereignty, however, is a historically, spatially, and geopolitically specific concept with unstable and changing meanings. Daniel Philpott (2001) argues that two critical paradigm shifting historical moments have shaped the modern understanding of state sovereignty and are crucial to understanding the organization of sovereign states in the international system. The first moment was the consolidation of a state system in Europe, particularly through the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and the second was the end to colonial rule in the post World War II era and the consequent dissemination of the European system of sovereign states throughout other parts of the world (Philpott, 2001). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, seeking to answer questions about the relationship between ruler and ruled, Jean Bodin theorized sovereignty to refer to the absolute, exclusive, and indivisible authority of rulers or monarchs to legislate and rule as the final power above the law (de Benoist, 1999, pp. 101-103). The Westphalian conception of sovereignty maintained this absolutism, but identified the state as the sovereign entity. The French Revolution was a process of transferring the sovereignty held by the monarch as absolute to the people of the nation (de Benoist, 1999, p. 105; Barken and Cronin, 1994, p. 115), and thus through the “appropriation and celebration” of the nation, “the concept of national sovereignty finally emerged in European thought in its completed form” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 101). Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, therefore, the “locus of authority” within sovereignty was “distributed downwards,” moving “from God to king, and then from king to people” (Bartelson, 1995, p. 4), then eventually according to some theorizations, “from these peoples to humanity as a whole” (Bartelson, 2011, p. 93).

Historically, prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century—and the second major impetus for the dissemination of a truly international system on the basis of state sovereignty according to Philpott's (2001) analysis—this idea of sovereignty, especially external sovereignty, applied only to the European state system; while European nation states consolidated as sovereign, imperialist, and “self-interested entities,” principles of non-intervention and recognition of independence did not extend to the rest of the world, and thus “[s]overeignty has been associated with arbitrary and rapacious power politics” (Cohen, 2012, p. 29). Through decolonization, however, the model of social organization according to sovereign nation states—which as Pemberton (2009) explicitly notes, is only one form of “organizing social experience” and humanity (p. 2)—was exported (at least nominally) outside of Europe to the newly independent states to enable their self-determination and recognition within international politics. However, as Inayatullah and Blaney (1995) note, this “promise of sovereignty has often been unfulfilled” (p. 3).

Early definitions of sovereignty speak to a “supreme authority” that is “vested in the state and only the state,” which essentially has been maintained in subsequent definitions of modern state sovereignty (Pemberton, 2009, p. 1). Indeed, Hinsley's (1986) definition of modern state sovereignty—which Inayatullah and Blaney (1995) invoke as a “provisional” definition given its importance as a “classic conceptualization of sovereignty” (p. 11)—states that sovereignty “originally and for a long time expressed the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in a political community” (cited in Kalmo and Skinner, 2010, p. 2). However, given “ever-growing fragmentation” and new “limits to even the most absolute authorities” (Kalmo and Skinner, 2010, p. 2), others such as Tully advocate understanding sovereignty and its authority in a “non-absolutist sense” (cited in Kalmo and Skinner, 2010, p. 3). In such “non-absolutist” conceptions, the “state” as sovereign refers “not to a passive and obedient community living under a sovereign head, but rather to the body of the people viewed as the owners of sovereignty themselves” (Skinner, 2010, p. 30).

This leads to a distinction within thinking about sovereignty between perspectives that emphasize the negative or abusive potential of the absolute authority sovereignty affords and perspectives that conceive of sovereignty as essentially democratic. While the former point of view focuses on the state as sovereign, the latter focuses on the

people as constituents of the nation state that entrust it with legitimate authority of popular sovereignty. As Prokhovnik (2007) explains, sovereignty “is seen in the political theory tradition as associated with ‘good’ concepts like democracy, self-government and constitutionalism, and in the Foucauldian tradition with ‘bad’ concepts like domination, regulation, and oppression” (p. 13). Conceptions of sovereignty informed by Foucault, such as those presented by Giorgio Agamben (2005) and Mitchell Dean (2001), conceive of sovereignty as the biopolitical power over life through death, a definition that calls attention to the potential slippery slope between governments acting as a “good despot” for social improvement and more coercive, destructive, and ultimately “demonic” forms of rule (Dean, 2001). Agamben (2005) expands on Derridean conceptions of justice and responds to Carl Schmitt’s understanding of the sovereign as “he who decides the state of exception,” or the right of the sovereign to do away with law and exercise violence in crisis situations. Invoking the case of National Socialism as an extreme example of the sovereign’s power in the state of exception, as well as more moderate examples, Agamben demonstrates that the state of exception, and its characteristic violence and power structures of suspended law, can become a permanent state where the “exception” becomes the norm. Agamben thus calls attention to the dangerous potential for sovereignty to enable abuse, injustice, and the biopolitical control of life through death through the creation of “bare life” in the permanent state of exception of modern state sovereignty. Such definitions that emphasize state sovereignty as opposed to popular sovereignty are reminiscent of Weber’s definition of the state as claiming “monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory” (cited in Vaughan Williams, 2009, p. 2) in their focus on violence or force and domination.

However, in the opposing camp, sovereignty is seen as essentially democratic, and although abuses of power are possible, the sovereign answers to its constituents, and thus the popular will of the people is achievable through the mechanism of the nation state, which can advance its interests in both national and international political realms. As Pemberton (2009) argues in support of the overall democratic “thrust” of sovereignty, “[a] truly democratic polity is one in which the sovereignty of the state is solidly and widely anchored to the community,” thus reducing the potential for the abuse of power by the sovereign (p. 4). Popular sovereignty, following the revolutionary

achievement of the French Revolution in shifting relations of power, gives agency to the people “as subjects and objects of the law, or as makers as well as obeyers of the law” (Benhabib, 2007, p. 21). This view thus regards the power of the sovereign not as a “demonic” potential, but rather, as serving as a mechanism to respond to the will of the people collectively embodying popular sovereignty. Sovereignty is thus seen in this conception as “a claim to popular democratic legitimacy vested in a territorial state,” which stands in stark contrast to the opposing conception of sovereignty that recognizes the “often violent origins of such statehood” and its defense of territoriality (Agnew, 2009, p. 1).

Despite these divergences in conceptualizing the sovereign state as “absolute” or “populist” (Skinner, 2010), consistent across these theories is the centrality of the locus and power of authority to the concept of sovereignty. Food sovereignty similarly asks probing questions about the locus of decision-making authority and control in the food system, demanding redistributive justice. Food sovereignty is fundamentally a project for the “bottom up” enactment of sovereignty. This differs from the dominant discourses on sovereignty—including definitions of modern state sovereignty as well as radical reconceptions such as “Empire” (Hardt and Negri, 2000)—in which sovereignty is a top-down and centralized power structure that *acts upon* peoples and territories. Although those following the perspective of popular sovereignty as essentially democratic may take issue with this analysis, suggesting that sovereignty is of the people and ensures the state respect their will, even these democratic “populist” versions of sovereignty are nevertheless top down in the sense that the “people” of the nation must act through the mechanism of the state; they are thus not only *homogenized* (the “people,” a “constituted synthesis,” is not the “multitude,” which in its multiplicity is “a plane of singularities” and an “inconclusive constituent relation” [Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 103]), but also limited in their potential for popular participation, democracy, and sovereignty as a form of empowerment. For Hardt and Negri (2000), who ultimately reject the state as a sovereign entity in contemporary global politics altogether, popular sovereignty—despite its apparently “liberatory” potential—is simply “a further extension of the subjugation and domination that the modern concept of sovereignty has carried with it from the beginning” (p. 102). Here, Negri’s distinction between constituent power and constituted (sovereign) power is also instructive (as cited in Nielson, 2004). As Negri explains:

When constituent power sets in motion the constituent process, every determination is free and remains free. On the contrary, sovereignty presents itself as a fixing of constituent power, and therefore as its termination, as the exhaustion of the freedom that constituent power carries. (as cited in Nielson, 2004, p. 65)

Traditional conceptions of sovereignty—whether absolute, statist, or popular—act through the mechanism of the state as constituted sovereign power, are inherently hierarchical and top down forms of sovereignty, and thus disallow true constituent processes. Food sovereignty, in contrast, is about people self-determining and implementing their own food and agricultural systems *for themselves*.

Food sovereignty thus strives for *bottom up* constituent processes that respond to diversity and seek democracy, justice, and alternative and collective forms of citizenship based not only on participation in the affairs of the state and its neoliberal market, but also in socio-cultural reproduction and grassroots environmental stewardship—or what Wittman (2009a; 2009b; 2010) refers to as “agrarian citizenship,” involving the socio-ecological “reworking” (Wittman, 2009b), “repairing” (Schneider and McMichael, 2010), or “healing” (Clausen, 2007) of the metabolic rift. Schneider and McMichael (2010) further argue that an “epistemic rift” accompanies the material metabolic rift (as Marx described) that “privileges a capital logic” (p. 479), as the rural-urban division of labour removes from the countryside “culturally, historically, and geographically specific knowledges about farming practices and local ecosystems” (p. 477). In this context, Schneider and McMichael (2010) argue that food sovereignty movements represent a form of “epistemic restoration” and “a multiplicity of socio-ecological experiments which are thoroughly political in re-linking the social and the ecological at democratic scales” (p. 482). Food sovereignty is a broad framework that fixes meaning in a way that is open to multiple knowledges and diverse material and socio-cultural experiences to inform processes of multiple resistances to reconstitute political power and justice. Food sovereignty’s pursuit of self-determination and alternative collective and agrarian citizenships embodies not only demands for political representation, but also cognitive justice, as part of a grassroots constituent process in which de Sousa Santos’s metaphor of “ecologies of knowledge” displacing the current “monoculture of knowledge” is rendered particularly apt (de Sousa Santos, Nunes, and Meneses, 2007).

Some analyses of sovereignty have called for the concept of sovereignty to be unhinged from territoriality or removed from a state-centric analysis. John Agnew's (2009) study of sovereignty and globalization, for example, "questions the ready association between sovereignty and territory," instead suggesting that globalization furthers "an already complex relationship" between the two (p. 2) and presenting a concept of "effective sovereignty" not essentially married to territoriality (though his case studies exemplifying his four "sovereignty regimes" focus on states as the locus of sovereignty). Benhabib (2007) also acknowledges historical processes of the "uncoupling...of *jurisdiction and territory*" in relation to sovereignty (Benhabib, 2007, p. 26, original emphasis). However, for Benhabib (2007), this involves a process of the sovereign state transferring, knowingly or unknowingly, jurisdictional authority to "non-statal private and corporate bodies" such that "the citizens from whom state protection is withdrawn...become dependent upon the power and mercy of transnational corporations and other forms of venture capitalists" (p. 26). Thus, while historically (through imperialism, *maquiladoras*, and other forms of capitalist expansion) the negative consequences of such shifting power relations has disproportionately taken a toll on the citizen populations of the countries whose sovereignty is in compromise, the (re)arrangement of jurisdictional control proposed by food sovereignty seeks to distribute authority "downward" (in the sense of a traditional power hierarchy) to enable participation and autonomy of the historically marginalized, oppressed, and excluded. Central to the creativity of multiple sovereignties is the use of multiples resistances to leverage traditional institutional political power and true state sovereignty to fix the national political conditions to enable the realization of localized political processes and sovereign autonomy from the global corporate food regime.

Foucauldian conceptions of sovereignty are also not explicitly territorial, as they consider "borders" of governmentality not strictly along geographical lines, but through biopolitical ordering within the spatial limits of the state. Developing such a theory of sovereignty removed from geopolitics, Agamben (2005) discusses "citizenship" in contrast to the concept of "bare life" to describe the inside/outside relationship of sovereignty and highlight the state of being "outside" as something "fundamentally *interior* to the Western bio-political juridical order" (Vaughan-Williams, 2009, p. 744, original emphasis). Vaughan-Williams (2009) introduces the term "generalised bio-

political border” to describe Agamben’s “alternative border imaginary” (p. 746) and its shift from understanding sovereign borders as territorial limits to the sovereign’s production of bare life as (non-territorial) “spaces” banned from political life and thus outside of the sovereign. According to Agamben, the “ban” from citizenship is a matter of being inside or outside, and thus bare life takes meaning from its relationship to the sovereign. Food sovereignty could be thought of similarly, as it defines itself in contrast to the corporate food regime; it is not inside, but in being outside, it still takes meaning from its relationship of distance from that which is inside. The fundamental difference, of course, is that food sovereign entities are not “banned” from the corporate food regime, but rather, occupy a space “outside” as a function of their *desire* to be outside of and autonomous from the corporate food regime. While the concept of the ban and Agamben’s understanding of sovereignty as not explicitly territorial helps to elucidate the immanent relatedness of sovereignty and complicate the dichotomous inside/outside conception of borders, it is insufficient for capturing the sovereignty embodied in food sovereignty, which imagines and enacts new sovereignties that place themselves actively, voluntarily, and intentionally “outside” existing biopolitical (b)orders.

The question of territoriality and the state as sovereign is linked to another debate within sovereignty that pertains to the relevance or character of sovereignty in the international state system in a post-globalization world. While some have argued that processes of globalization have eroded state sovereignty, rendering it at least problematic and out-dated if not entirely irrelevant to contemporary international politics, others have maintained that the sovereign state remains an important actor—and thus sovereignty remains an essential concept—in global political theory and praxis. The latter view argues that “sovereignty remains a potent force” and thus pronouncements of the “end of sovereignty” must be “rooted in a misunderstanding” of its meaning (Bartelson, 2006, p. 469). Alternatively, Agnew (2009) argues that in what is far from an either-or debate on sovereignty and globalization in an inherently complex world, globalization has not fundamentally impacted sovereignty, but rather, has exposed the “myths” of sovereignty and thus enabled its reconceptualization. Responses to the nature of sovereignty and the reasons informing its need for reconceptualization depend in part on the disciplinary perspective of the analysis; political perspectives see the decline of the nation state giving way to a concentration of power in the hands of supra-

state forces of domination, whereas international law perspectives see the basis of state sovereignty superseded by a “cooperative” political-legal system of “cosmopolitan justice” (Cohen, 2004, p. 2).

Exemplary of perspectives predicated on the dissolution of state sovereignty as a result of new global structures of domination, Hardt and Negri’s (2000) *Empire* argues that it is not nation states but the deterritorialized and (ambiguous) ubiquity of Empire that now wields sovereign authority in global politics. In their conception, the ultimate fusion of sovereignty with capital has given way to capital, international institutions, and powerful states as sovereign in the constellation of forces that make up the generalized biopolitical rule and new social and political order of Empire. Hardt and Negri’s conception of sovereignty thus diverges significantly from the notions of modern state sovereignty rooted in territoriality, for Empire constitutes a “new global form of sovereignty” that “regulates...global exchanges,” “governs the world,” and knows no limits; Empire is uninhibited by national territorial boundaries (p. xi-xii). Following a more nuanced logic that acknowledges the shifting terrain of sovereignty and governance but denies the complete decline of the state, theories of new constitutionalism describe the new condition of sovereignty as transferring “privileged rights of citizenship and representation to corporate capital” such that “[t]he mobile investor becomes the new sovereign political subject” (Gill, 1998, p. 23). Perhaps it is less globalization in general, but neoliberal capitalist globalization in particular that poses theoretical and practical challenges to the concept of sovereignty as the power and reach of capital increases. As Jens Bartelson (2006) in summary of Thomas Ilgen explains:

While the history of sovereignty culminates in its concentration in the nation-state, it is challenged by the market economy and its natural tendency to expand beyond the politically defined boundaries of states. Consequently, crucial features of state sovereignty have been weakened, such as...the power to define and defend territorial borders... (p. 466)

Indeed, many theorizations of the state of sovereignty in the age of globalization—including theories of Empire and new constitutionalism—share a common understanding of the ever-growing power of corporate capital and big finance as a significant threat to both the nation state and its sovereignty as traditionally understood.

The challenge to the territoriality of sovereignty presented by global capital and its unrestricted flow across borders brings to light a relationship between sovereignty and capitalism from which food sovereignty also distances itself. This sovereignty-capital nexus is recognized by Hardt and Negri (2000), who state that “[m]odern European sovereignty *is capitalist sovereignty*” (p. 87, emphasis added), as well as by Jayasuriya (1999), who describes the “political form” of sovereignty as “distinctive of capitalism” and thus central to and contingent upon international economic relations (p. 432). Inayatullah and Blaney (1995) argue that “a society of sovereign states presupposes a capitalist division of labour” (p. 11) and that the logics of sovereignty and capitalism are “intertwined” such that capitalism depends on sovereignty but also “frustrates” its realization (p. 4). The sovereign state continually negotiates and renegotiates its insertion within the global economy and, by extension, within the international division of labour. The uneven division of core and peripheral states in the global capitalist economy and division of labour is contrary to the logic of an international system of sovereign states as being “formally equal,” for “the compulsions of global capitalism appear as a direct threat to sovereignty, particularly for those occupying the least advantaged positions” (p. 14). Capitalism and state sovereignty are linked, but the relationship is paradoxical for while sovereignty enables the state to participate in global capitalism, the very logic of capitalism challenges the state’s potential to be sovereign. In proposing multiple sovereignties and variegated jurisdictions within state territory and engaging in economic forms of resistance in negotiating their insertion into capitalist and neoliberal logics, proponents of food sovereignty challenge and oppose the capital-sovereignty nexus to create politically *and* economically sovereign spaces “outside” of—yet in relation to—the global corporate food regime, the ultimate expression of a neoliberal capitalist logic within food and agricultural systems.

Another perspective on the dissolution of state sovereignty is the view that state sovereignty “has evaporated in favour of an international rights regime” (Bartelson, 2006, p. 470). Despite differences within this theoretical camp, the perspective is informed by calls for “humanitarian intervention” that structure a global legal framework that supersedes state sovereignty in the name of human rights, suggesting that sovereignty must be rethought, if not abandoned, in this new context of global cosmopolitanism. Cohen’s (2004) approach to the question of sovereignty within this conjuncture pivots on

a compromise of state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention that calls for a “strengthening of supranational institutions, formal legal reform, and the creation of a global rule of law that protects both the sovereign equality of states based on a revised conception of sovereignty and human rights” (p. 3). Similarly—though focusing less on institutional legal frameworks and more on human rights information networks and education—Kathryn Sikkink (1993) argues that international human rights regimes present a strong challenge to state sovereignty and its assumption of anarchical non-intervention, resulting in “a gradual, significant, and probably irreversible transformation” of state sovereignty as a result of human rights and “international issue networks” (p. 411). International interventions in the affairs of a state on the basis of human rights—which combine “moral and material pressure” to achieve change (Sikkink, 1993, p. 437)—reconstitute sovereignty by “reconstitut[ing] the relationship between state, its citizens, and international actors” (p. 415) and “altering...the scope and limits of [states’] sovereign authority” (p. 440) within the international sphere of influential issue network actors. In this conception, state sovereignty has not disappeared, but is being reconstituted. When the state-centricity of sovereignty is questioned, the humanitarian intervention or cosmopolitan human rights regime approach re-centers the focus of analysis upon the *individual* as sovereign.

This parallel between individual and state and the shifting locus of sovereignty (as a preliminary challenge to the state centricity of the concept) is exemplified in a 1999 UN General Assembly speech presented by then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (1999):

State sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined—not least by the forces of globalisation and international co-operation.... At the same time individual sovereignty—by which I mean the fundamental freedom of each individual, enshrined in the charter of the UN and subsequent international treaties—has been enhanced by a renewed and spreading consciousness of individual rights. (para. 4)

Annan’s (1999) presentation of “two concepts of sovereignty” is exemplary of the humanitarian intervention perspective on sovereignty that suggests that the “basic rights of individuals are not the exclusive domain of the state but are a legitimate concern of the international community” (Sikkink, 1993, p. 441), such that the individual replaces the

state as sovereign. Pointing to a “progressive individualization of international law,” Cohen (2004) argues that “the dignity and integrity of the individual and her right to protection—the core principle of human rights law—is and should replace sovereignty as constitutive of global (rather than international) relations” (p. 7), thus similarly advocating the individual rights in favour of state sovereignty.

Such international human rights regime perspectives that re-inscribe sovereignty upon the individual challenge the state centricity and territoriality of sovereignty. In addition to the humanitarian intervention perspective, Inayatullah and Blaney (1995) also draw a “close analogy” between the sovereignty of the state and sovereignty of the individual in their analysis of the relationships between sovereignty and capitalism, noting that both the sovereign individual and sovereign state enable and are “frustrated” by capitalism (p. 5). Market concepts of “consumer sovereignty” and the political, economic, and *ideological* project of neoliberalism that naturalize such discourses of individualism and self-fulfillment further this analogous individualization of the sovereign, particularly in an international political economic conjuncture that questions the continuation of state sovereignty. Hoffman (1997) calls for a “post-statist” understanding of sovereignty detached from the state, suggesting that the concept of sovereignty “can only be (provisionally) justified if it contributed to the creation of (poststatal) communities in which the sovereignty of *individuals* as relational and autonomous beings take root” (p. 23, emphasis added). Though helpful in decentering the state-centricity of sovereignty and imagining the formation of alternative political communities, Hoffman (1997)—like those following the humanitarian interventionist perspective—nevertheless recreates the sovereign as an individual being. Food sovereignty, however, as a project that seeks to “reconnect food, nature, and community” (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe, 2010), presents a new rights framework that challenges the individualism of both human rights regimes and the neoliberal market, proposing instead a *collective* conception of rights that seeks to foster not only alternative relations of production, but also alternative social relations of reproduction on the basis of community, respect for nature, and creation of a common. In fixing a reworked rights framework, food sovereignty creates a new openness in thinking about and enacting rights that challenges the limitations of individual human rights and brings thinking about rights in line with a collective experience of justice. Indeed, as Desmarais, Wittman, and Wiebe argue (2011),

“perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of food sovereignty is that it forces us to rethink our relationships with one another” (p. 20) as relationships of collectivity and equality (gender, racial, generational).

Jens Bartelson (2006) critiques the authors of the edited work *Reconfigured Sovereignty* for their failure to satisfactorily distinguish between sovereignty and autonomy in their theorizations of the new character of sovereignty, for such great ambiguity around the concept suggests its redundancy (p. 467); this is a thought provoking question in the context of food sovereignty as well. The definition of food sovereignty in its current political maturity is also very much about autonomy (in contrast to earlier definitions largely focused on autarky), but the distinct language of sovereignty also draws on a political and international conceptual heritage that deeply politicizes the project that food sovereignty seeks to build. Definitions of sovereignty speak to a “political community” of the sovereign, and Bartelson (2006) also notes that sovereignty is “profoundly political in nature” (p. 469). A fundamental goal of the food sovereignty discourse and movement is the re-politicization of food and agricultural issues and to ask important political questions about the loci of power and control in the global food system, and thus invoking sovereignty—an inherently political concept—is fitting.

Critically, though, food sovereignty is a project for multiple sovereignties that distances itself from the association of sovereignty strictly with state territoriality and the use of force or violence. Instead, it focuses on self-determination and autonomy as forms of decision-making control and authority over food and agriculture in ways that *fragment* the sovereignty of the state, but do not seek to overthrow it as part of a “zero sum game” of who can be sovereign. In this way, the definition of sovereignty embodied in food sovereignty is much more akin to Indigenous sovereignty than it is to traditional conceptions of modern state sovereignty. Food sovereignty has parallels to Indigenous movements, namely overlapping goals and values of self-determination and political autonomy and defense and preservation of a cultural way of life and identity as workers of the land and stewards of environmental wellbeing. According to Otero and Jugenitz (2003) Latin American Indigenous (often also peasant) struggles “challenge national borders from within” such that states must “expand their borders within” (p. 520) to recognize and accommodate Indigenous culture, demands for land, self-government,

and respect for their group values of collectivity and the commons that are “considered central to the cultural reproduction of indigenous identity” (p. 504).

Similarly—but stated differently to establish conceptual distance from the territorial connotation of “borders within” the state—food sovereignty challenges the *internal* sovereignty of the state through a proposed fragmentation of the internal legal political order, asserting new “sovereign” or autonomous decision-making bodies that enable decentralized governance and “multiple” sovereignties. In conjunction with challenging internal sovereignty, food sovereignty calls for a strengthening of *external* sovereignty to negotiate the degree and nature of the state’s insertion within international neoliberal capitalist trade and policy regimes. Jayasuriya (1999) suggests that globalization does not erode or dissolve state sovereignty, but instead produces “complex sovereignty,” a form in which sovereignty originates from no single point but is diffused through various state agencies and institutions in a “polycentric legal order that directly contradicts the ‘monistic’ legal order implied by an internally unified state” (p. 441). For Jayasuriya (1999), the increased autonomy of institutions such as central banks and the politico-juridical formation of the European Union are prime examples of the “multiple layers of governance” and deterritorialization that characterize “complex” sovereignty. While this is quite different from the decentralization of sovereignty proposed by the project of food sovereignty, Jayasuriya’s conception of sovereignty is nevertheless instructive for conceptualizing sovereignty in a way that is neither strictly territorial nor “zero sum” and accounts for internal fragmentation and emergent autonomous bodies in conjunction with the continuity of the state’s sovereignty, albeit “transformed.” Jayasuriya (1999) explains that the institutionalization of internal sovereignty was “one of the major achievements of the nineteenth century State,” as it rendered the state “the exclusive center of all authoritative decisionmaking” (pp. 437-438). Food sovereignty disrupts this internal sovereignty by proposing peoples and communities exercise decision-making authority over food and agricultural issues, establishing a “polycentric” political order. Indeed, Iles and Montenegro (2013) also use the idea of “polycentric governance,” in conjunction with the concept of “relational scale,” to understand the inherently relational nature of food sovereignty and its “multiple determinations of scale,” suggesting that by “defying ready boundary-making,” “the food system itself is polycentric” (p. 11).

Sovereignty is historically, politically, socially, and economically contingent; in the current moment of widespread political dissatisfaction and the crisis of neoliberalism, food sovereignty (and other movements and discourses) are reconfiguring the domain of sovereignty and working to decentre status quo power relations through redistributive projects that call for new and multiple formations of sovereignty that dovetail with the old to fragment state sovereignty internally (to enable local autonomy) and to reassert state sovereignty externally (to bring the state “back in” to issues of food and agriculture and act as a first line of defense against neoliberal policy and the exploitation of the corporate food regime).

Food sovereignty is fixed in local context, politics, and geographies, but this is “place-based” as opposed to territorial; such are matters of grassroots control over land and resource access and ways of living and working (*jurisdiction*), as opposed to authoritative control on the basis of fixed borders dictating who is “in” and who is “out” (*territory*). Although inseparable from the materiality of land, food sovereignty is less about territoriality and more about “being” and “doing” food sovereignty in the project of *becoming* food sovereign through participatory and democratic projects of a food system by people with nature (in contrast to corporations with biotechnology) for people, nature, and community. Food sovereignty is relational in deriving its autonomy from differentiating itself from what it is not, the corporate food regime, as well as in relation to other food sovereign entities. Although traditional conceptions of sovereignty are also relational in the sense that the definition hinges on the dimension of external sovereignty—mutual recognition in the so called “anarchic” international state system and an agreement of non-intervention into the affairs of other sovereign states—this is a negative right of the sovereign. The relational character of food sovereignty, on the other hand, is a positive right and positive relationship not only of non-interference, but rather, of *solidarity*, interdependence, cooperation, and deterritorialized community (it is worth noting that humanitarian intervention, though motivated by social justice and human rights, is not synonymous with solidarity). Iles and Montenegro (2013) elucidate this nicely when they counterpose the implied “boundary-making” of sovereignty to the observation that “food sovereignty movements often call for growing cooperation and interdependence” (p. 1). Food sovereignty is also multiple in its *form*—not just the legitimate use of force—and *jurisdiction*; for food sovereignty, sovereignty is not mutually

exclusive or a “zero sum” game. Rather, food sovereignty disagrees with the perceived erosion of the nation state and acknowledges the need to bring the state “back in” to issues of food and agriculture, but it also suggests a need for a new kind of sovereignty in the current global political economic conjuncture, recognizing, too, that global political economy and more specifically the global corporate food regime do have a large impact on the affairs of local small scale farmers.

The issues outlined here of the fixed, relational, and multiple character of sovereignty in the context of food sovereignty are also being struggled with in the Honduran food sovereignty movement, and will be further explored in a discussion of that movement, its proposals, and the political, economic, and communicative resistance of grassroots peasant organizations of the Aguán Valley in their struggle to build democracy and emancipatory food sovereignty.

## Conclusion

This chapter has situated the concept of food sovereignty—in its current political maturity and as expressed by the transnational peasant movement La Via Campesina—historically, socially, politically, and discursively to argue that food sovereignty is a political project that is fixed, relational, and multiple, as well as inseparable from food sovereignty as a social movement. Situating food sovereignty within the historical context of the transnational peasant movement that introduced and has advanced the concept demonstrates how the movement for and discourse of food sovereignty are mutually constituted. The genealogy of the concept of food sovereignty, aside from simply showing the conceptual development of food sovereignty since the formal “launch” of the concept by La Via Campesina, highlights the way in which food sovereignty is an open space and open-ended process of meaning making and alternative building; the intentional definitional breadth of food sovereignty creates conceptual and political space within which diverse movements can find their own expressions of food sovereignty in congruence with their unique placed-based social, ecological, and material reality. As described by the multiple resistances framework, food sovereignty as an issue frame fixes the meaning of food sovereignty as an open process to be defined through further issue framing in local contexts. Contrasting food

sovereignty to historically dominant discourses for approaching food and agricultural issues highlights food sovereignty's inherently political nature as well as the multiple forms of sovereignty it embodies; the "strategic essentialism" (McMichael, 2013b, p. 6) and discursive or representational choice to frame problems and resistance in terms of food sovereignty represents an exercise of communicative sovereignty, the first in a series of multiple sovereignties sought by food sovereignty advocates. Finally, the discussion of food sovereignty in contrast to traditional conceptions of sovereignty gets to the core ways in which food sovereignty is a radical political discourse and project. Representing a significant rethinking of the concept of sovereignty and who can conceivably be sovereign, food sovereignty renders sovereignty unbound from state-centricity and territoriality, thus instigating a creative process for imagining meaningful alternatives not only of how to produce food, but also how to organize social, political, and economic relations through multiple resistances.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Food Sovereignty as Local Experience in Practice**

*We are not birds to live in the air, we are not fish to live in the water, we are peasant men and women who need to live on the land.*

*– Slogan of Aguán peasant movements*

*The hopes and dreams of MUCA is really that our compañeros who are part of our organization at least have assured food sovereignty. Even with all this ‘war’... against the peasants, we are developing alternative projects; projects that assure us that our compañeros have...a balanced diet. We ourselves produce vegetables, we produce meat, fish, chicken, beef, pork, we produce yucca, we produce plantain, we produce corn and we are already selling at the market...[and] our example is being imitated by other peasant groups.... That is one of our goals, to create development with alternative projects and support other organizations in solidarity... so that they can create their own development. But we always have the permanent threat.... When we demand justice in our country we are beaten and imprisoned.... So, these are our dreams, to continue advancing not only in our own peasant groups, but that this example be copied by other national organizations, and perhaps, then, to share these experiences with other organizations to articulate through communication with other organizations to see in what ways we can exchange experiences, so that we can make a more articulated struggle. Because the struggle of the poor must be universal throughout the planet; we all have the same problems, the same goals, and the same enemies.*

*– Interviewee 5, representative of MUCA*

### **Introduction: Turning from global context to local practice**

This chapter builds on this definition of food sovereignty as fixed, relational, and multiple developed in the previous chapter to demonstrate how this creative potential and the challenges for enactment it presents are finding expression and being

negotiated in the Honduran food sovereignty movement. More specifically, this chapter draws on data collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews, conducted primarily with representatives of grassroots movements in the Aguán Valley and national level peasant organizations, to explore the real and potential successes, challenges, and tensions embodied within multiple resistances—including political, economic, and communicative strategies in both grassroots autonomous and institutional political spaces—involved in building the project of food sovereignty in Honduras, specifically in the Aguán Valley.

In this chapter, I begin by situating Honduran movements within the transnational peasant network and its discursive space of food sovereignty. This is followed by a historical account of the situation in the Aguán Valley to contextualize and introduce the current land conflict and human rights crisis in the region, which is at once both a “regionalized” and “internationalized” struggle—though nevertheless emblematic of general challenges faced nationally by the Honduran peasant sector—for its regional specificity and intensity and international visibility. This historical perspective on contemporary peasant struggles in the Aguán provides a foundation understanding the place and purpose of multiple forms of resistance (grassroots action, national politics, and international networking) currently exercised by the “new” Aguán movements as peasant communities implicated in both a struggle for Honduran democracy on a national scale and in a struggle against the corporate food regime in an international context of neoliberal food relations.

From the basis of this historically constituted dual struggle of peasant movements—against national anti-democratic power structures and a global neoliberal food regime—I make three arguments about how to understand food sovereignty in Honduras. First, I argue that, like the global discourse, food sovereignty in Honduras represents a collective rights framework that goes beyond the individualized and short-term orientation of “human rights” as traditionally understood and advocated, though human rights frames are also mobilized to address immediate needs and threats. Second, I argue that the strategic movement goals of “re-territorializing” food and agriculture and “de-territorializing” the sovereignty involved in building a local project of food sovereignty in Honduras demonstrate a reconception of traditional notions of

sovereignty that activates a potential for multiple sovereignties. Finally, I argue that my research suggests that tensions exists within the project of food sovereignty between politically oriented and agroecologically oriented expressions of the movement—not necessarily along local to global lines—which not only highlights the inherent complexity of food sovereignty and the challenges to the realization of its emancipatory project, but also calls attention to the need for movements to account for and reckon with both the local and global dynamics that shape the food system.

### **Situating Honduran peasant movements in transnational networks**

It is difficult to trace specifically when the concept of food sovereignty came into widespread use in Honduras, particularly among grassroots organizations. While Edelman (2013) suggests that food sovereignty entered the discourse of Honduran peasant organizations informally as early as the beginning of the 1990's (prior to its formal adoption by La Via Campesina), Boyer's (2010) research a decade later found little evidence that food sovereignty had entered the discourse of Honduran peasant unions in a significant or widespread way, especially among "rank and file" grassroots activists. Though not synonymous with the use of La Via Campesina language or a general subscription to food sovereignty, Honduran peasant organizations have an established relationship with La Via Campesina, which has deep historical ties to Central America. Central American peasant organizations (including the *Consejo Coordinador de Organizaciones Campesinas de Honduras*, COCOCH, the Honduran Coordinating Council of Peasant Organizations, in translation) united in 1991 to form the *Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperacion y el Desarrollo* (ASOCODE), which subsequently played an important role in furthering regional and transnational integration of rural movements by encouraging and participating in the formation of both CLOC and La Via Campesina (Deere and Royce, 2009, p. 24; Edelman, 2008, p. 230). ASOCODE represented Central American peasant organizations at the First International Conference of La Via Campesina in Mons, Belgium in 1993, when it was officially constituted as a transnational movement representing peasants, small producers, and rural peoples (Via Campesina, 1993, p. 73), and Central American peasant leaders were also involved in La Via Campesina's small number of founders (Edelman, 2008, p. 230). Once constituted, La Via Campesina

drew on the region's experience as "one of the first and most dynamic centers of transnational peasant organizing" stemming from its "long tradition of cross-border solidarity and flows of people" (Edelman, 2008, p. 249) and "decades, if not centuries" of familiarity with "transnationalism" (Edelman, 1998, p. 74). At the Second International Conference of La Via Campesina in Tlaxcala, Mexico in 1996, when the concept of food sovereignty was inaugurated, Honduran peasant organizations were represented by COCOCH. COCOCH was formed in 1990 and "remarkably survived the neoliberal assault on peasant unions, lands and livelihoods of the 1990s" (Kerssen, 2013, p. 87), playing an important role in national and regional peasant politics through uniting Honduran *campesino* organizations under a national umbrella, participating in ASOCODE at the Central American level, and in La Via Campesina at the transnational level.

Throughout the 1990's and into the 2000's, both COCOCH and ASOCODE had influential roles in their respective spheres of peasant politics and rural organizing, but more recently the terrain has shifted, ultimately transferring greater emphasis to La Via Campesina in place of both of these organizations. COCOCH hosted La Via Campesina in its Tegucigalpa office from 1996 to 2004, when La Via Campesina's world headquarters were located in Honduras, and it later also offered to host ASOCODE in 2001 in an effort to sustain and rejuvenate the organization when it was in decline. As ASOCODE faced impending demise, its presence became increasingly limited to online spaces and it thus grew to be irrelevant as an organization. Although ASOCODE as an organization faced collapse for various reasons, it nevertheless gestures to the "chronic difficulties" faced by peasant and rural movements throughout Central America, which have been due in part to internal organizational weaknesses, but also to the fact that the context within which peasant organizations operate has become less favourable with diminishing political opportunities, declining importance of the agricultural sector in national economies, and increasing out-migration from the countryside (Edelman, 2008, p. 239). In the case of ASOCODE, the organization gradually ceased to exist, and ultimately in 2004 its network of member organizations "formally dissolved ASOCODE and created a new regional entity, La Via Campesina Centroamericana" (Desmarais, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, in the wake of the Honduran coup, rifts within the movement along political lines have prompted a break from COCOCH and the articulation of new

organizational alliances around La Via Campesina Honduras as a central movement actor and advocate.

Nevertheless, despite these divides, the grassroots movements in the Aguán and national level peasant organizations, consolidated within La Via Campesina, are mobilizing the discourse and practice of food sovereignty, articulating their struggles with consideration of the international context in which they are implicated, and demanding a progressive alternative, in policy and practice. Discursively, food sovereignty within Aguán peasant communities—understood as a call for land access and peasant autonomy and voice in food production and agricultural policy—is largely consistent with the discourses within La Via Campesina. This understanding of food sovereignty embodies a struggle for political, economic, and representational sovereignty in the Aguán, identifying the role of the nation state, as a recognized sovereign entity in the international state system, to limit the extension of neoliberal land and agricultural policy in Honduras and pursue instead integral agrarian reform legislation in the interests of peasants and other landless or land-poor small producers facing precarious land and resource access. At the same time, communities work to secure land access through their own terms and create food sovereign communities through their available means. Adoption of the language of food sovereignty in the Aguán itself represents an exercise of communicative sovereignty as peasant communities frame issues in their own terms—distinct from hegemonic transnational and national governmental discourses, which prefer the language of “food security”—and propose political and economic alternatives that are built from the ground up, and indeed are already in practice in some communities.

La Via Campesina has been an important actor in food sovereignty movements. Peasant movement in Honduras have an established history with La Via Campesina, and the relationship between them has become more pronounced as decline of some organizations and divisions between others within the movement has shifted greater to importance to La Via Campesina. Ultimately, however, food sovereignty only takes root in a meaningful and productive way when advanced by grassroots movements in accordance with their priorities; while La Via Campesina may foster and develop movements’ engagement with the food sovereignty frame, food sovereignty cannot be

imposed because it is a framework that calls for local framing processes to fully define it. As a project of multiple resistances, food sovereignty hinges on this local framing and autonomous politics, in conjunction with national and transnational priorities, articulated in part through La Via Campesina.

## **Generalized social struggle and Aguán movements in historical context**

Rural social movements in Honduras have an established history. They constitute an important part of the history of social struggle and resistance in the country (see Sosa, 2013), and today's rural social movements are a product of historical processes of movement and counter-movement. However, the contemporary *campesino* movements in the Aguán Valley and throughout the country are also part of a new age of social movements. After close to two decades of relatively weak social movement activity in comparison to preceding strength—undermined by repressive conditions of the 1980's and neoliberal reforms of the 1990's, then compounded by the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998—Honduras was ripe for change and a “new generation of social movements” was indeed beginning to emerge (Shipley, 2012). By the late 1990's, regional popular movements that separately had been gaining momentum began networking and collaborating on actions, leading to the consolidation of the *Coordinadora Nacional de Resistencia Popular* (CNRP) in the early 2000's (Shipley, 2012). The CNRP would serve as a forerunner to and provide the foundational movement structure of the *Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular* (FNRP) that formed in Tegucigalpa immediately following the 2009 coup and quickly became the most important and centrally unifying resistance organization. Aguán movements, too, have been involved in the CNRP since its early years through their regional articulation in the *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán* (COPA),<sup>18</sup> which joined the CNRP in 2001 (Interview 19). Campesino organizations also have participated actively in

<sup>18</sup> COPA formed in the Aguán Valley in 1997, and since 2000, it has been involved in the constitution of various Aguán movements. Its diverse constituency of grassroots organizations includes unions, peasant, youth, and women's groups, and community organizations. COPA focuses on the defense of human rights and the struggle against impunity regionally within the Aguán Valley (Interview 19).

the FNRP and subsequently the *Partido LIBRE* (the new political party that formed out of the Resistance movement after the coup to participate in the November 2013 general election), and the peasant movement has been an important element in the national resistance, in part because among all the social groups experiencing injustices, *campesinos* especially have been the target of the government's repression; more specifically, the most repressed region of Honduras since the 2009 coup has been the north coast, which includes the peasant communities of the Aguán Region (Rights Action, 2013b).

Although it is important to situate Honduran social movements in the context of the 2009 coup d'état, the Aguán *campesino* movements, like other social struggles throughout the country, were not born in the events of June 2009. Campesino movements in the Aguán and throughout Honduras are anchored in historic labour and peasant struggles, particularly the momentous banana worker strike of 1954, whose participants subsequently underwent a process of "re-peasantization" as a result of the mechanization of the banana industry that was increasingly displacing rural workers.<sup>19</sup> These labourers had a "different organizational mentality" as the experience of being landless *campesinos*-cum-labourers shaped a "totally different world view" (Interview 8). As banana workers, they also became experienced in movement organizing and union politics, and upon returning once again to the peasantry they contributed to organizing *campesinos* and the subsequent constitution of the first *campesino* organization, *Federación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras* (FENACH, National Federation of

<sup>19</sup> Mario Posas (1987) argues that the 1954 strike was a key antecedent to the organization of peasant unions at the end of the same decade (p. 3). According to Posas (1987), as a result of the "objective and subjective conditions created by the 1954 general strike," North Coast peasant groups were able to organize "relatively rapidly" and achieve "powerful regional peasant organization" (p. 3). Posas (1987) contrasts this situation in the North Coast to other geographical areas in Honduras where the potential for peasant mobilization stagnated despite having the "objective conditions" that warranted their organization (p. 3). Months after the strike, there was also a major flood that contributed to the mass dismissal of banana plantation workers (about half of a workforce of 35,000), heightening the landlessness of the rural population (Edelman and Léon, 2013, p. 1708; Posas, 1987, p. 3; Ruhl, 1984, p. 49). Edelman and Léon (2013) argue that the "combination of idle land and massive landlessness fuelled the growth of combative peasant movements," such that "the North Coast, where most of the banana plantations were based, become the centre of the national peasant movement" in the years following the 1954 labour strike (p. 1708).

Honduran Peasants, in translation),<sup>20</sup> in the late 1950's. Campesino movements in Honduras were traditionally the strongest in Central America (Merrill, 1995), and rural agrarian movements played a pivotal, if not determinant, role in the achievement of agrarian reform legislation in 1962,<sup>21</sup> and again in 1975, that distributed land to land-poor peasants and spurred the expansion of the agricultural frontier through the colonization of the Aguán River Valley.<sup>22</sup> Then a jungled economic backwater, the richly fertile land of the Aguán Valley is now very highly coveted, sought after by the region's large landowners for the expansion of their African palm agro-empires,<sup>23</sup> while *campesino* communities struggle to defend and reclaim their rights to land and livelihood within the territory that reform sector *campesinos* colonized and made suitable for agriculture. There are primarily three large landowners that monopolize land holdings in the Aguán Valley, whose names are widely known: Reinaldo Canales, Rene Morales, and the most infamous of the three both within local communities and throughout the country, Miguel Facussé, a regional palm oil magnate, the largest land owner in Honduras, and a

<sup>20</sup> FENACH never received legal recognition from the Honduran state. The first campesino organization to officially be recognized was *Asociación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras* (ANACH, National Association of Peasants of Honduras, in translation) constituted in 1962, coinciding with the signing of the Agrarian Reform Law that same year (Posas, 1987, p. 7). FENACH experienced the most success among Honduran resistance groups in the 1970's, though it never managed to achieve the same revolutionary potential as movements in neighbouring countries, like the Nicaraguan Sandinistas or guerrilla movements in Guatemala and El Salvador (Shipley, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Although the first agrarian reform was interrupted by a coup d'état in 1963, a brief war with El Salvador (referred to as the "Soccer War") at the end of the 1960's, primarily concerning immigration issues and border disputes, contributed to an increased sense of patrimony and served to reinvigorate demands for land (Interview 8). Many banana workers were from El Salvador, and after the Soccer War, the Honduran government expelled 130 thousand Salvadorans from the Honduran countryside, which "contributed to increasing land pressures" (Ruhl, 2000, p. 29).

<sup>22</sup> The first agrarian reform redistributed land in the form of individual parcels, whereas the second agrarian reform redistributed land to cooperatives under collective possession system and the creation the *Empresa Asociativa Campesina* as a new "alternative legal figure" (Posas, 1987, p. 10).

<sup>23</sup> African palm is a non-traditional, non-food crop in Honduras. The origins and tensions of African palm production in the region are further explored later in this chapter.

member of the oligarchy identified as a major backer and instigator of the coup (Frank, 2010, p. 10).<sup>24</sup>

Although Honduran *campesino* movements were impressively strong from the 1950's to 1970's, "all the agrarian reform processes that were handed out in the majority of Latin American countries were a response to the *threats* of popular movement protest" (Macías, 2001, p. 51, emphasis added). Honduran agrarian reform functioned to appease the peasantry and, in conjunction with other factors, contributed to the waning strength of movements. Heavy militarization under the occupation of U.S. forces executing regional counterinsurgency strategy throughout the 1980's—and the attendant repression—left radical progressive movements feeble, still dealing with the violent reality of the 1980's, and poorly equipped to mount a concerted resistance against the new wave of dispossession brought on by the total shift to neoliberal politics at the turn of the decade. Although the involvement in U.S. counterrevolutionary strategies served to stave off the imposition of structural adjustment and austerity measures throughout the 1980's, the subsequent defeat of the Nicaraguan Sandanistas in 1990 (and the attendant decline in U.S. funding and tolerance for "Honduran economic intransigence" [Ruhl, 2000, p. 55]) shifted the political economic focus of Honduran elite toward neoliberalization (Anderson, 2009, p. 27; Robinson, 2003, p. 128). Throughout the decade, promotion of nontraditional agricultural exports, expansion of the maquiladora sector, and structural adjustment catered to the interests of international capital, but left behind domestic market needs (Robinson, 2003, p. 130). Newly forged free trade agreements resulted in industrial development through exploitative maquiladora expansion and economic hardship for small agricultural producers in the face of open markets flooded with powerful foreign competition (Frank, 2005, p. 18). Furthermore, as Salgado et al. (1994) argue, the agrarian reform process—intended to provide access to credit, technical assistance, and land ownership rights for peasant producers—also had the

<sup>24</sup> Facussé is also implicated in campesino struggles on the southern coast of Honduras, where land conflicts revolve around local land dispossession for Facussé's tourism development project. He has also been linked to the drug trade and 2011 Wikileaks cables revealed that the U.S. Embassy in Honduras has been aware since 2004 that Facussé imports cocaine, thereby illustrating that "U.S. 'drug war' funds and training...are being used to support a known drug trafficker's war against campesinos" (Frank, 2011, para. 2).

“secondary effect” of putting in place “the cornerstone for the development of a land market” through the “standardization of [land] titles” (p. 6).

Although there was popular resistance against the implementation of neoliberalism in Honduras, neoliberal, “anti-popular politics” soon succeeded in dismantling popular movement protest (Sosa, 2013, p. 114). Campesino movements were particularly battered by the introduction in 1992 of the Agricultural Modernization Law under the hard line neoliberal government of National Party president Rafael Callejas, known for policies of austerity, privatization, currency devaluation, structural adjustment, and a focus on growing export markets. As Sosa (2013) explains, the new Agricultural Modernization Law was “designed to serve the interests of transnational corporations and agro-export capital, without considering the interests of the majority of the population concentrated in rural areas in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty” (p. 90). Land distribution through agrarian reform had all but ceased to exist in the late 1970’s, peaking from 1972 to 1975 and ultimately distributing 120,000 hectares among 35,000 land-poor families (Merrill, 1995). In the 1980’s, with the legal mechanisms of land reform already dysfunctional, occupation by squatting regained its popularity as a tactic to obtain land titles (Merrill, 1995). The 1992 Agricultural Modernization Law signaled that “neoliberalism [had] arrived in the countryside” (Sosa, 2013, p. 129) and formalized the *de facto* disappearance of agrarian reform processes in Honduras. Although the agrarian reform of the 1970’s is regarded as “incomplete” by the peasant sector for its failure to deliver adequate technical support to the newly formed *campesino* cooperatives or offer a “true” redistribution of land (it left the *latifundistas* and the political and economic power of the land owning oligarchs undisturbed), the 1970’s agrarian reform law did include measures to ensure that land distributed in the reform process remained under peasant ownership (Merrill, 1995). The new law, however, eliminated maximum property limits and reversed the legislation that deemed reform lands inalienable (requiring they be returned to the state for redistribution to other land-poor peasants), instead introducing a market-driven model of land access and ownership and “effectively accelerat[ing] the transition in the countryside to full capitalist agriculture and the emergence of a market in land” (Robinson, 2003, p. 131). This neoliberal turn in reconceptualizing land as a commodity signaled an ongoing pattern of systematic displacement of peasant and indigenous populations for the benefit of private

capital and accumulation of the basic means of production by dispossession, compounding historical struggles over land and resources throughout the country, particularly the struggles of *campesino* communities of the Aguán Valley.

This new private market for land as a commodity enabled a wave of coercive land grabs that exploited the weaknesses and economic vulnerability of peasant groups; from 1990 to 1994, there was a re-concentration of land ownership of over 70 percent in the Aguán Valley and surrounding areas of the Atlantic coast, which stands out in stark contrast to the ten percent national land re-concentration average within the same period (Kerssen, 2011, para. 7). Though previously declared “the capital of agrarian reform” in the mid-1970’s, the Aguán Valley came to be “the capital of agrarian *counter-reform*” (Macías, 2001). Combined with the increasingly dire straits faced by subsistence agriculturalists in an ever more unfavourable political economic environment; opportunism of some peasant leadership and corrupt decision making as a result of “little linkage between [cooperative] leaders and associates” (Salgado, 1992, p. 87); and systemic efforts on behalf of the government to coopt or sew division in the movement, the Agricultural Modernization Law and its political implications all but devastated *campesino* movements. Internally divided and coopted, *campesino* movements all but disappeared from the scene of popular struggle (Sosa, 2013, p. 130). Analyzing the agrarian situation in the early aftermath of the introduction of the Agricultural Modernization Law, Hugo Noé Pino et al. (1992) wrote that it was “...not an exaggeration to say that never before has the Honduran *campesino* movement been so divided in numerous and useless groups and sectors as it is today” (p. ii). Pino et al. (1992) accordingly called for analysis and comprehension of the agrarian situation to enable the *campesino* movement to “recuperate its old belligerence and build new unity in order to fight for its common goal: land recuperation and a just and profound agrarian transformation” (p. ii). Although *campesino* movements were a determinant factor in the formation of a great number of *campesino* cooperatives throughout the 1970’s, by the 1990’s, “the influence of these organizations [had] declined considerably” (Salgado, 1992, p. 95), in a political moment where “agrarian reform and *campesino* organizations [were] discredited” (Salgado, 1992, p. 99) and peasant land access became increasingly precarious.

Already weakened and unable to recover under the neoliberal assault that continued throughout the 1990's, the destruction of Hurricane Mitch that ravaged Honduras in 1998 added injury to insult, quite literally, for *campesino* communities, and the unfavourable context was only set to continue as Mitch enabled a moment of disaster capitalism in Honduras and the government pushed a wave of shock doctrine-style reforms and privatization (Klein, 2008), reasserting the strength of the neoliberal agenda which already had proven to worsen conditions for the majority of Hondurans (Anderson, 2009, p. 27). However, "the phenomenon of Mitch, which was disastrous by its nature, generated positive elements" by "unleashing" an organizational process that constituted the "common thread" of the then soon-to-be revitalized Aguán movements and other positive developments, namely the "resurgence of agrarian reform, the peasantry, peasant organizations, [and] civil society and its prophetic character" (Macías, 2001, p. 25). Indeed, an important progenitor of the "new" Aguán movements, the MCA or Peasant Movement of Aguán, links its recent history to events and experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch (Interview 20).

While there was a period of relative inactivity of social movements in Honduras in comparison to their strong historic presence, leading up to the coup they were certainly regaining strength and momentum and putting considerable pressure on the Zelaya government. Between 1992 and 2000, social protest "decayed", largely impacted by the destruction of unions and *campesino* organizations, which were traditionally central actors in dynamics social change (Sosa, 2013, p. 112). However, since 2001, social movements have "reactivated" in response to threats to land and labour rights, privatization, and the destruction of natural resources, constituting a "new cycle" of struggles with a new repertoire of movement tactics (Sosa, 2013, pp. 113-114). Indeed, it was as a result of the demands and pressure of social movements that Zelaya implemented progressive reforms such as increasing the minimum wage, placing a moratorium on mining concessions, and opening the discussion for the possibility of a popularly supported national constituent assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution. Following his ouster, Zelaya became a symbol of the resistance as the movement rallied around the unconstitutionality of the coup and the exile of the country's democratically elected president. However, critics from the Resistance are quick to remind that Zelaya was no bastion of radical left politics; he was a Liberal oligarch, savvy of his need to

appeal to different sectors of Honduran society for support given the relative loss of power of the elite group to which he belonged vis-à-vis oligarchic factions more well connected to transitional capital, such as magnates of the maquiladora sector (Shipley, 2012; see also Ruhl, 2010, pp. 97-100). Thus, it would be a disservice to the long struggle of Honduran social movements *not* to acknowledge that Zelaya's presidency, and most certainly the coup:

...would be much better be understood as the *culmination*—not the start—of a long period of reorganizing and rebuilding of social movements in this country that had, by the time Zelaya took power, already reached levels of mobilization not seen since the 1970s. (Shipley, 2012, para. 5, original emphasis)

Nevertheless, although a concerted movement indeed already had been rising, the coup did impact social movements and the organization and character of the national resistance. Namely, the coup produced the “unintended consequence of uniting an otherwise fragmented group of organizations in to a broad coalition” under the FNRP, that consolidated in the immediate aftermath of the coup and quickly became the most important and visible organization within the popular movement (Shipley, 2009).

Indeed, the formation of the FNRP, and subsequent collective action, has demonstrated a new expression of social struggle in Honduras that has coalesced around the demand for democratization after the coup. The transition to democracy in Honduras occurred, at least nominally, in the early 1980's, and thus the coup represented a rupture of thirty years of building institutional democracy, in a country with a history of military juntas and dictatorial rule. However, the coup has brought to stark realization that democracy “entails more than free and fair elections and a military that answers to civilian authority”, but also civic and political rights, political protection, and civilian access to justice, which some analyses suggest are democratic mechanisms that were already faltering before the execution of the coup (Altschuler and Corales, 2009, para. 3). In light of this potentially unstable system of democratic governance even prior to June 2009, the element that marks the difference between pre- and post-coup struggles is the clear realization of the need for popular movements to make the question of national democratization a central issue, regardless of the specific circumstances and individual demands of each movement faction. Importantly, the

conversation about democracy in Honduras has deepened with the coup. Honduran popular society “will no longer be satisfied with a simple return to the constitutional order” and thus demands not only a reinstatement of democracy (August, 2009, para 1), but movements also pursue more substantial national democratization through the call for a constituent assembly for the re-foundation of the Honduran state.

Thus, it is clear that the coup has created a sense of unity around the political project of democratization and identified a common enemy upon which diverse movements can agree. This is consistent with Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) theory of radical democracy and its framing processes, and also central to how peasant movements engage in multiple resistances as part of a project of food sovereignty. Where disagreement lies within this broad-based unity is in the exact course of action to take in order to address and remedy the problems faced, and although this line of difference has always existed, it became especially clear when the option emerged of pursuing the electoral process through the formation of a new political party. Thus, both expressions of the Resistance movement—the social movement faction referred to as “comprehensive re-foundation” and the new political party LIBRE, named for the Spanish words freedom and re-foundation—believe in the importance of national re-foundation through constituent assembly, but the ideological division is a matter of which strategies and tactics to pursue in the path to get there:

*Partido LIBRE* thinks that they’re going to push change—social change—through the elections, and the *comprehensiva refundacional* think that the way of doing it is through the base, grassroots-based work, community work, education, activism, and struggle, and not necessarily through elections. (Interview 4)

The path toward a constituent assembly began under Zelaya’s presidency. On June 28, 2009, a non-binding poll was scheduled—which never came to fruition, as the coup was executed against Zelaya that very morning—to gauge support for the inclusion of a referendum question on the ballot of the next general election (November 2009) asking whether or not Honduran voters agreed to hold a national constituent assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution, last written in 1982. Opposition to the constituent assembly was a central motivation for the perpetrators of the coup, and thus it quickly fell off the political radar of the coup-regime, who accused Zelaya of violating the

Honduran constitution in his attempts to hold the non-binding poll.<sup>25</sup> In the aftermath of the coup, demand for the constituent assembly and the founding of a new Honduran republic became ever stronger as participants in the Resistance movement found new ways of doing politics and practicing democracy (including *self-convening* through the *autoconvocatoria constituyente* to organize a constituent process to write the text of a new constitution (FNRP, 2011) in the context of a state and government they condemned as unconstitutional and illegitimate. The coup represents a fundamental loss of the country's democratic structures and mechanisms, but it can also be seen as a rupture in of ways of thinking and imagining what democracy can look like in the country.

Although one of the outcomes of the coup was that it had the impact of causing some individuals to "wake up" and become politically active and causing some organizations to radicalize their politics, a strong social base was already active in the struggle; social movements existed long before the coup. However, the coup changed the conditions within which movements struggle, clearly identifying the perpetrators of the coup and their coup regime as a common foe and the goal of national democratization as a common political project, which ultimately strengthened popular movements. On a macro level:

The coup and its repercussions over the last four years have polarized Honduran society. At odds are those hoping to change the status quo and reject the interests behind the 2009 coup—largely the FNRP and the political party that grew from that movement, the LIBRE party—and those that perpetrated and/or supported the coup and hope to maintain the status quo—largely business elites, the two traditional political parties (the National and Liberal Parties) and its allies. (Spring, 2013, p. 3)

<sup>25</sup> Zelaya's initiation of the potential process of a constituent assembly is often used as justification for the coup, suggesting that through the constituent assembly he was attempting to manipulate the constitution in order to extend his presidency beyond the single presidential term legally allowed by the Honduran constitution. However, this allegation is invalid given that the poll to be held on June 28, 2009 was to be a non-binding poll; the result would dictate whether the referendum question about the constituent assembly would be included in the November 2009 election. Zelaya could not possibly be re-elected in the next election, as the primary elections had already happened and he was not on the ballot. Furthermore, even in the circumstance that the non-binding poll led to inclusion of the referendum, and the referendum resulted in the constituent assembly, Zelaya would already have finished his term as president and therefore not possibly have been capable of executing a Chavez-style extension of his presidential term, as he is often accused.

Thus, in the context of this polarity of competing potential directions of the country, although there are disputes within the political left about the exact course of action that popular movements should take to achieve social and political change—whether through the electoral process or through grassroots mobilization and struggle—what is important is that the conversation about, and struggle for, true democratization is taking place, and the coup represents a moment of rupture that has caused this conversation to fundamentally deepen. Honduran social movements do not simply want a return to status-quo democracy as it was before the coup; their vision is for a more substantial democratization by way of constitutional re-foundation through a democratic and participatory constituent process.

Importantly, what seems clear is that social movements have been gaining strength throughout the past decade and especially since the coup, and thus regardless of the direction of the country following the November 2013 general election—in which the traditional parties and the new LIBRE Party, as an electoral expression of the Resistance and the FNRP, participated but resulted in the re-election of the right wing National Party despite widespread claims of electoral fraud—social movements will not give up on their struggles. In this context, social movements, including the peasant movements of the Aguán Valley, follow dual strategies of grassroots mobilization and autonomous social struggle to advance their specific movement demands, in conjunction with institutional political strategies in the sphere of traditional politics as multiple resistances to pursue the shared goal of national democratization.

## The Character of Struggle of “New” Aguán Movements

In the case of Aguán *campesino* organizations, the 2009 coup d'état and ongoing political crisis indeed have exasperated the struggles of peasant movements, but this context also has vitalized and unified the movement, which responds to repression with heightened resistance. Since 2009, *campesino* organizations in the Aguán Valley have been actively reclaiming land through staging land occupations and maintaining permanent settlements on reclaimed land, perpetually facing the threat of eviction without notice by the national police or military and violent harassment by the private security guards of large landowners. Land occupations by *Movimiento Unificado*

*Campesino del Aguán* (MUCA, Unified Peasant Movement of the Aguán, in translation) in December 2009 and *Movimiento Campesino del Aguán* (MCA, Peasant Movement of the Aguán, in translation) in May 2010 blazed the trail for a wave of assertive movement tactics in the Aguán—not unlike those taken by Brazil’s landless worker movement that have enabled the successful provision of land to hundreds of thousands of poor families. On a national day of peasant resistance and land reclamation on April 17, 2012, the International Day of Peasant Struggle celebrated by La Via Campesina, *campesino* organizations throughout Honduras occupied some 10,000 hectares of land, 6000 hectares of which were retained by peasants while the remainder saw peasant occupiers removed from the land following the action (Interview 23). While established movements have adopted more radical tactics, new land movements in the Aguán also have consolidated and become politicized in response to the heightened repression.<sup>26</sup>

Consistent with the generalized context of social struggle in Honduras, *campesino* movements, too, were in an era of resurgence and were gaining strength in the years preceding the coup. In 2000, in what was described at the time as the largest land occupation in Honduran history, the MCA launched a land reclamation campaign targeting the territory of the former *Centro Regional de Enrenamiento Militar* (CREM), a U.S. Regional Military Training Centre whose land transferred to the *Instituto Nacional Agrario* (INA, National Agrarian Institute, in translation) once no longer in military use (IRBC, 2003). Later the same year the government began a transfer of the former CREM lands to the MCA, but the land reclamation did not end the tension between *campesinos* and security forces or large regional landowners, which escalated into more violent confrontations later in the decade. Opening the new millennium with an assertive land occupation and reclamation campaign, the MCA is considered to be the “forefather” of the new Aguán movements. Following its example, MUCA consolidated in 2001 after a

<sup>26</sup> For example, *Movimiento Campesino Refundacional Gregorio Chavez* (MCRGC, Refoundational Peasant Movement of Gregorio Chavez in translation) formed in July 2012 in response to the discovery and exhumation of community leader Gregorio Chavez in a palm plantation (owned by regional palm-oil magnate and largest land owner Miguel Facussé) neighbouring the campesino community (Heine, 2013). In the same month, July 2012, *Movimiento Organizado Campesino Recuperación del Aguán* (MOCRA, Organized Peasant Reclamation Movement of the Aguán, in translation) also consolidated and began a process of land recuperation process in the Aguán involving at least 600 campesino families (MUCA, 2013).

period of instability and frequent membership fluctuations since its antecedents in the mid 1990's (Irías, 2011, p. 19). MUCA initially pursued legal action through the Court against the large agro-exporters who had acquired Aguán land illegally through invalid land sale transactions, particularly following the approval of the Agricultural Modernization Law. By the mid 2000's, however, due to the failure of these judicial demands to produce successful results, MUCA shifted its strategy to encompass "new forms of struggle", launching a major demonstration and blockade in 2006 and its first farm occupation in 2007, all the while maintaining the central demand of "legal clarification of the land buying and selling process" in the Aguán (Irías, 2011, p. 20). As Macías (2001) argues, this "relaunch" of peasant movements and demands for agrarian reform was historically significant given the "de-campesinization of Honduran farmland" and apparent disappearance of *campesinos* as a socio-economic class through "the devastating process of buying and selling of land, which reached its peak in the year 1997" (p. 167). In this context, the events of 2000 (and those since) "indicate that neither agrarian reform nor the *campesino* movement in Honduras is dead" (p. 167).

Along with other social reform efforts and under the pressure of social movements, Zelaya entered into negotiations with MUCA in early 2009 prior to his ouster and agreed to grant land title to certain *campesino* communities through Decree Law 18-2008 (APRODEV, 2011). However, the positive progress this process achieved was ultimately interrupted by the coup, which peasant leadership interpreted not only as an assault on President Zelaya, but also "a coup d'état against MUCA", leaving the movement once again "without response or solution to the legal land situation" (quoted in Irías, 2011, p. 20). Thus, the post-coup Supreme Court's decision to declare land-granting process of Decree Law 18-2008 "unconstitutional" (APRODEV, 2011, p. 15), halting and reversing the progress that Aguán *campesino* movements had made through negotiations with ousted ex-president Manuel Zelaya, further aggravated the agrarian situation in the Aguán and demonstrated the limitations of pursuing change through legal frameworks under the elite-biased politics of the post-coup regime, which seems to also maintain repression, corruption, and impunity as *de facto* state policies.

Thus, the new Aguán movements began to take shape as early as 2000, coinciding with the broader rise of social movements at the turn of the century, but their

resistance has strengthened since 2009 with the intensification of the agrarian conflict and the repression perpetrated against *campesinos* in the wake of the coup. These “new” movements are deeply linked to historical struggles, but also take a distinctly new character. This “newness” of the *campesino* movements of today in comparison to the agrarian movements of the mid to late twentieth century is a matter of the actors, demands, and tactics that define them, as well as their critique of the system that they seek to reconstruct in a more democratic manner.

One distinction is the recent “urbanization” of movements through the use of communications technologies and the participation and leadership of youth within the movement (Interview 10). In the historic rural movements, the participants and beneficiaries were primarily men; both women and youth were excluded from the agrarian reform processes of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Despite legal inclusion of female agriculturalists under certain circumstances during the Honduran agrarian reform of the 1960’s, “the predominant norms of the sexual division of labour served as a barrier to women’s incorporation in the agrarian reform, [though] the law explicitly provided for at least female heads of households to be potential beneficiaries” (Deere, 1985, p. 8.), “there are peasant women [and] peasant youth of both sexes who are fighting for the defense of agrarian reform and democracy” as “direct participants” (Interview 9). Thus, the active participation and increased inclusion of women and youth in the affairs of the *campesino* organizations has introduced a new dynamic to agrarian movements and politics. The participation of youth leaders, in particular—which has brought a new generation of leadership, communication strategies, and city presence into the struggle—is a contributing factor in the perceived “urbanization” of movements, despite movements fundamentally maintaining their traditional rural identity.

While Aguán movements are “new” in discourse and practice, this “newness” in the Aguán is nevertheless through the lens of traditional demands, and fundamentally at the foundation of these new movement demands remains the issue of agrarian reform. As a Honduran researcher of social movements explained when I asked about the kinds of language used in the Aguán to frame peasant struggles, the way of framing issues among the new Aguán movements represents:

...a hybrid of the old discourse of agrarian reform with new elements including problems of natural resources, problems of food sovereignty, which is a discourse of Via Campesina, and more general problems. But I think that the theme of agrarian reform and land continues to be a central issue that is the core point. (Interviewee 9)

Influenced by La Via Campesina, the new discourse is “more open” (Interview 9). It encompasses traditional demands for land and agrarian reform, but it also encompasses new demands that reflect their needs as citizens and as producers, responding both to their particular human rights situation as well as the crisis of control and destruction of natural and biological resources, as expressed in their quest for food sovereignty.

Thus, perhaps more importantly than the demographics of participants and leaders in the new Aguán movements that distinguish them from the past generation of agrarian struggles, contemporary grassroots rural movements and their individual organizers have a perspective that deepens and extends the level of analysis and scope of demands of traditional historic peasant movements. Today’s Aguán movement activists recognize the international proportions of their struggles and the way in which dispossession at the grassroots level is a consequence of both national and international politics and policy. This awareness informs both their political analysis and the demands of the movement. Indeed, as Kerssen (2013) explains:

The new peasant movements [in the Aguán], rooted in historic struggles for agrarian reform, go beyond traditional peasant demands. Theirs is a radical critique of the dominant model and the institutionalized takeover of community-controlled food, land and markets by a globalized elite. (pp. 88-89)

This dynamic of “going beyond” the demands of previous generations while remaining anchored in agrarian history is what Kerssen (2013) calls the “new juncture of agrarian politics” (p. 88). In this juncture, La Via Campesina promotes the concept of food sovereignty as a demand for peasant organizations throughout the world, and organizations in the Aguán Valley and elsewhere in Honduras are engaging in multiple resistances by working toward this vision and actively building community-level alternatives to the currently dominant agricultural model, while also pushing for institutional political and policy changes to further support and enable such projects.

## Food Sovereignty as Collective Rights Framework

The case of the *campesino* movements in the Aguán Valley is marked among Honduran and Central American agrarian movements because it is not simply a land struggle, it is also an acute human rights situation; indicating the severity of the conflict, Marc Edelman (2012) has characterized the Aguán region as “a district that has witnessed the most acute agrarian conflict in Central America in the past fifteen years” (p. 9). In this context, the movements and resistance in the Aguán, though fundamentally land struggles, are often framed in terms of human rights. However, despite the veritable human rights crisis resulting from severe repression, the Aguán *campesino* movements maintain a globally conscious, historically situated political analysis, in which the mobilization of “human rights” frames is only a partial representation of the understanding of “rights” within long-term, communally motivated goals, expressed through the discourse and vision of food sovereignty.

The use of human rights frames evidently corresponds to the deterioration of Honduras’s human rights situation since the coup, and more specifically to the crisis-level intensity of human rights abuses in the Aguán. Particularly since the coup, in response to the land reclamation efforts of peasant movements, there has been an escalation of repression in the Aguán, not the least of which has been heavy militarization (with U.S. financial support)<sup>27</sup> of the Aguán region and other rural areas.<sup>28</sup> As a report on human rights abuses in the Aguán Valley attributed to military forces summarizes:

Impunity surrounding violations is so prevalent that it appears to constitute a policy of the state. Security forces apply the law unequally, criminalizing *campesinos* while providing protection to the local businessmen, some reported to engage in drug trafficking. High-ranking

<sup>27</sup> U.S. police and military funding to Honduras is under the auspices of the Central America Regional Security Initiative, an initiative intended to halt the passage of narcotics to the U.S. via Central America. Honduras is a hot spot on the narco-trafficking corridor from South to North: “Almost half of the illicit drugs that enter the United States pass through Honduras” (Witness for Peace, 2011, para. 7).

<sup>28</sup> Since the coup, military has also adopted police functions in urban areas. In advance of the November 2013 general election, the government also introduced a new hybrid military police force (see Frank, 2014; Joyce and Sheptak, 2013).

government officials have distorted the nature of the conflict, accusing *campesinos* of engaging in criminal activities and claiming that an armed movement is operating in the region, unsubstantiated accusations that wrongly position *campesino* movements as the object of anti-terrorism and anti-narcotics operations just as regional security initiatives are being promoted by the international community. (Bird, 2013, p. 4)

The military-aid complex thus supports the suppression of social movements. In the Aguán Valley, a series of military occupations of the zone in the wake of the coup have placed *campesino* communities under constant surveillance. Military and police often act in concert with the private security guards of large landowners to violently evict communities or otherwise harass and intimidate them (Bird, 2011; CCR, 2011; Kerssen, 2011), suggesting that the mandate of the military in the Aguán is not to protect the people, but to protect the interests of regional large landowners and private capital.

Honduran big media have furthered this systematic campaign to criminalize the activities of social movements.<sup>29</sup> Although the *campesinos* in the Aguán are peaceful movements, practicing nonviolent tactics and remaining unarmed except for their machetes,<sup>30</sup> media have advanced an ongoing campaign to frame *campesino* communities in the Aguán Valley as violent, heavily armed, clandestine guerrilla movements, allegedly supported by Venezuela and the FARC, through falsified evidence (McCain, 2013; Rios, 2010, p. 1; Via Campesina, 2013).<sup>31</sup> Media representation thus

<sup>29</sup> Commonly referred to as *golpista* media, indicating their support of the *golpe de estado*, or coup d'état. Coup-perpetrating oligarchs, who are part of the elite group that constitute the "visible face of the coup," own and control the largest Honduran media (Paley, 2010). The ten most powerful families in Honduras dominate not only telecommunications and media (print, radio, and television), but also other sectors including manufacturing, banking, food and beverage, energy, and soccer teams (Carroll, 2009, Morazán, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Some *campesino* activists who have received death threats and other forms of intimidation also carry handguns for personal protection purposes.

<sup>31</sup> In 2010, the prominent Honduran daily newspaper *La Prensa* launched a campaign titled "Terror in the Bajo Aguán," telling the story of guerrilla groups in the Aguán (La Prensa, 2010, see also Fawkes, 2010). In April 2013, *La Prensa* ran a series of articles with a similar thrust, complete with links to the original "Terror in the Bajo Aguán" multimedia campaign (McCain, 2013). *La Prensa* is owned by Jorge Canahuati Larach, who is among the visible perpetrators of the coup (Paley, 2010). Larach also owns two other major newspapers, *El Heraldo* and *Diez*, and numerous food and beverage labels (Morazán, 2009). These specific examples published in *La Prensa* are part of an ongoing, concerted media campaign against *campesino* movements to criminalize social struggle and frame the story of the Aguán region in favour of the land-owning oligarchs.

places the blame in the land conflict on *campesinos*, obscuring the fact that peasant movement leaders are routinely targeted with psychological harassment, kidnapping, physical violence, and assassination, disguising the role of large landowners and the complicity (and cooperation) of the state, military, and police in the extreme repression in the region since the coup. Since 2010, when the post-coup regime was inaugurated, more than 100 *campesinos* have been killed in the Aguán, and these injustices have not been investigated, let alone seen the perpetrators brought to justice (see Bird, 2013; FIDH et. al., 2011; Spring, 2013). The assassination in 2012 of human rights lawyer Antonio Trejo, who was working on the legal case of a *campesino* movement to reclaim former cooperative lands to which the communities have documented legal title, is a particularly telling symbol of the motivations behind much of the violence and targeted intimidation against the *campesino* communities and individual activists in the Aguán (see Bird, 2013, pp. 31-32; Ríos, 2012).

Although an historical perspective is central to the analysis of *campesino* movements, most activists frame the core issues experience by the peasant sector through pointing to this intense criminalization of social struggle—in conjunction with a general condition of complete impunity—as the principle problem faced by *campesino* movements. Exemplary of this perspective is the following analysis of criminalization and agrarian crisis offered by an Aguán activist, representing MUCA, when I asked what the principal problem facing the movement is in the present:

The most complex problem right now is the *criminalization* against the peasant struggle...as a government policy.... [T]here is a belligerent peasant movement struggling to recuperate the land that is necessary to produce our food [but] the land is concentrated in the hands of the large landowners, [and] they only use it for large monocultures: palm, sugar cane, banana. This is something that doesn't contribute to food sovereignty; it's only to accumulate capital. That's the biggest problem our organization faces, and due to that there's a criminalization plan against the struggle today, and especially against the [movement] leadership, including, in some cases, using false testimony of people that lend themselves to harm the process of struggle....

The Agricultural Modernization Law in 1992 permitted land to become concentrated in few hands, and this has provoked an increase in migration of peasants from rural areas to urban areas, and has enabled the enormous food crisis that we have today, and an agrarian crisis that has already claimed over a hundred lives in the last three years.... This is all because as peasants we don't have a legal

framework to be able to have access to land. There's the Agricultural Modernization Law that is contradictory to...the Constitution, because this law is not agrarian reform, but counter-agrarian reform. And that's why we have this great crisis and the plan of criminalization against the [peasant] leadership, who have political clarity in the struggle for the right to access land. (Interviewee 32)

Current land conflicts are products of history, and the insistence of the peasantry to struggle for rights—in increasingly antagonistic circumstances since the coup—has been met with repressive and violent criminalization. As a representative of the national peasant organization ANACH, the first officially recognized national peasant organization in Honduras and traditionally one of the most important peasant unions in the Aguán region, explained when I asked a question about balancing a prolonged struggle against immediate needs and threats:

To produce food as a peasant in Honduras is to be a criminal, that's how they see it. The authorities are in collusion with the large landowners and send someone to kill the peasants who are struggling.... They've criminalized the *campesino* struggle; to be a *campesino*, as I say, is synonymous with being a delinquent in Honduras and they send someone to kill and silence you, because the peasantry has risen up now with more strength. (Interviewee 22)

A representative of CNTC, another national peasant union, echoed this sentiment when discussing the history and role of CNTC. He explained that although CNTC was created with the intention of defending peasant rights, especially land rights due to the great inequality of land tenancy in Honduras, the organization has also had to defend the “very right to life” of peasants:

Peasants in Honduras have been mistreated, they have criminalized us; the simple action of wanting a piece of land in order to produce food for your family criminalizes you, they see you like a criminal. (Interviewee 26)

The everyday acts of peasant life and livelihood—growing food and accessing land for small scale production—are criminalized and met with violence in the current political conjuncture, which severely undermines the human rights of peasants, including rights to food and dignified life, and also impedes their potential achievement of the rights embodied in food sovereignty.

Given this level of immediate threat to *campesino* communities and the violence and repression they experience at the hands of military, police, and private security guards and *sicarios* (hit men) in attempts—often violently—to criminalize the peasant struggle, the use of human rights as an issue frame is not surprising. When asked about the problems the movement is facing, a representative of COPA, a regional human rights organization in the Aguán, explained that in the post-coup situation of generalized impunity and injustice, the mere survival of social movement organizations has been a major challenge and struggle; in this context, national and international communications and human rights networking have been fundamental in enabling movements “to survive until today” (Interviewee 18). The importance of national and international human rights based communication and denunciation is also echoed at the grassroots level, where activists acknowledge the significant role of such communications in their individual and collective survival.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, in this context of ongoing and severe human rights abuses, the focus on human rights is a decisively communicative strategy to address their immediate insecurity and solicit support for fulfillment of immediate needs, while the more long-term alternatives-based strategy and policy-oriented political activity continues. Despite the immediate reality of not only landlessness, but also an intense and violent human rights crisis, *campesino* movements fighting for life and livelihood are not limited in their analysis, goals, or strategies to their immediate day-to-day necessities. Rather, the long-term project of food sovereignty is an ongoing continuum punctuated by short-term priorities; human rights frames are mobilized in moments of immediate need—often in

<sup>32</sup> This mode of communication and international solidarity, an essential element in the grassroots movement, seems to be less of a priority among national level peasant organizations, whose representatives indicated that the national human rights organization in Honduras, COFADEH, takes responsibility for responding to human rights concerns (Interview 21; Interview 22; Interview 25). Compared to grassroots level organizations, there seems to be a greater emphasis among national level *campesino* organizations on parallel networking activities—that is, the exchange of information and relationship building internationally with other like-movements advancing *campesino* struggles and working in areas of agrarian issues and food sovereignty. Although this type of interchange happens on the local level as well—and although this sharing of experiences on a regional and international level is seen as valuable, though restricted by resource limitations—the primary focus of international communication contributing to the daily struggle among the Aguán movements in this particular political conjuncture is building relationships with international human rights organizations that offer support through denunciations.

individualized and very focused ways—but food sovereignty as a long-term project represents and struggles for a *collective* rights framework based on the social reproduction of alternative, communal, “peasant” ways of living and knowing.

The development of this ongoing collective rights framework is particularly visible in movement communities with some security of land access and their implementation of what they refer to as “food sovereignty projects”. These projects are part of a larger, long-term vision of building an alternative model of food production and distribution within the region. As one of the organizations at the forefront of this regional struggle, MUCA is the most active movement in the Aguán in terms of advancing alternative projects of production and distribution in its cooperatives, and food sovereignty is a key component of their communications and organizational identity. Their orientation is toward the long-term *buen vivir* of their communities,<sup>33</sup> and they take great pride in their projects that advance a capacity for self-sufficiency and food sovereignty. Their projects focus on food production and community infrastructural development, including a chicken coop project, dairy processing, fish farms, basic grain and vegetable cultivation, coffee plantation, potable water development, community schools, health clinic, and community planning for family plot distribution. In 2012, MUCA was recognized as an honouree of the annual Food Sovereignty Prize, awarded by the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance.

This long-term vision of cooperative-level and eventually regional food sovereignty is firmly rooted in community; it is an alternative, peasant-led model for grassroots community development, which—though frequently interrupted by individual human rights abuses—goes beyond the *individual* focus of human rights to construct a framework for *collective* rights based on local community and region-wide food

<sup>33</sup> Although *buen vivir* (or *vivir bien*) translates loosely to “good living” or “living well,” its meaning extends beyond modern Western understandings of wellbeing. As Eduardo Gudynas (2011), drawing on the South American experience of *buen vivir*, explains: “The richness of the term is difficult to translate into English. It includes the classical ideas of quality of life, but with the specific idea that well-being is only possible within a community. Furthermore, in most approaches the community concept is understood in an expanded sense, to include Nature. *Buen Vivir* therefore embraces the broad notion of well-being and cohabitation with others and Nature. In this regard, the concept is also plural, as there are many different interpretations depending on cultural, historical and ecological setting.” (p. 441)

sovereignty. As an Aguán movement leader explained when I asked how the MUCA movement started its productive (cooperative) projects:

Our objective was to recuperate land in order to have these projects...we wanted to produce but didn't have land to do so. So, to recuperate land in order to be able to start to produce on it. We have done a study of the '80s that the Aguán was the breadbasket<sup>34</sup> of Central America. So we want to reactivate that again now, that the Aguán Valley be a breadbasket of Central America. We've done this because if we do a study of the years of the '80s to the '90s, there was a lot of work, it generated a lot of employment, trade increased. And if we do a study of the '90s to the present, employment decreased, misery increased, and the granary of Central America that was the Valley was lost. Now it's been dedicated only to monoculture: palm, palm, palm. So sometimes we've been analyzing that, we have studied and because of that now we have wanted to recuperate land in order to work it and use it productively. And to generate employment. Imagine that in some farms there were only 20 people working when Miguel Facussé had [the land]. Now there are 200 families working daily. There are 200 now! And the money, all the surplus, stays there.... So we, as I said, have recuperated land, and similarly we bring this message to all the *campesino* movements. *The message is to have land and work it, to develop ourselves collectively, not individually. Everything, everything is collective, that's the way we work.* (Interviewee 6)

Movements maintain a fundamentally collective orientation. Nevertheless, in discussing the balance between short-term priorities and such collective goals, a number of movement leaders highlighted the challenges that human rights abuses—and the condition of immediate insecurity that this creates—pose to the movements' effective implementation of projects and realization of collective goals. However, these leaders particularly emphasized the continuation and progress of the ongoing struggle for collective rights, however impeded by individual human rights abuses in the immediate term. When I asked a representative of the MUCA leadership how the movement balances these immediate struggles with the prolonged struggle for food sovereignty, he explained that, despite the severity of human rights abuses, such repression cannot terminate the larger collective struggle:

<sup>34</sup> This is my figurative interpretation and translation of the Spanish word *granero*, which literally translated means a place for storing grain, a granary. It can also mean a place abundant in grains, that is, a grain producing region, or figuratively as I have interpreted it, a "breadbasket."

They are struggles based on creativity.... But thanks to the people that are alert and watchful and in some way collaborate giving us information, because somehow or another they know that our cause is just, we are alive. And we balance our survival with the support of the grassroots; while we survive, resisting the campaigns they mount against us, our comrades are working in the field, developing the projects..... We live in a very difficult situation, in anxiety..... It's a very difficult way to work when we have commitments with the state to pay for the land we negotiated, but to them it doesn't matter if we pay or don't pay. What matters to the large landowners is that we [as leaders] no longer exist so that we don't give a good orientation to the people that are behind us. What they don't know is that they can stop us for a very short time but that after that new people will step forward with the capacity to lead and drive a people that needs it. And that behind us there are thousands and thousands of people with a hope. (Interviewee 5)

Expanding on this in response to a similar question, a fellow movement leader explained the relationship and balancing of the distinct but closely related struggles dealing with human rights threats and the ongoing alternative building:

We have survived, we live daily with this persecution [and] threat, and at the same time, we're working in the Aguán region. That is, we have two big scenarios: challenges to move forward and to be able to do so. One, because grassroots people that are not recognized, they are good...they are working normally. But for people like us [as movement leaders], to be able to survive is another struggle.... [I]n order to produce we just propose projects and we produce and...fill the needs of such a project as we see them, and so we go on daily, working and growing, right? Of course, if there wasn't so much persecution, so much threat, we'd be much better able to dedicate ourselves one hundred percent toward a macro-project in the Aguán region and be able to advance much more rapidly in order to develop that department. (Interviewee 6)

Thus, the long-term, collective goals of food sovereignty are pursued regardless of the interruptions caused by human rights abuses, but their effective realization is certainly complicated and frustrated by such immediate insecurities. That is, while the criminalization of MUCA leadership poses a significant barrier to their community development, the long-term struggle and alternative building is ongoing, though punctuated by such short-term, immediate threats and crises of human rights.

The relationship of the short-term mobilization of human rights as part of a long-term struggle for peasant-led development in the Aguán as the collective right to food sovereignty is also represented in the *Plataforma Agraria Regional Campesina del Aguán* (PARCA, Regional Agrarian Platform of Aguán Peasants, in translation) created to facilitate increased regional integration to advance collective struggles. PARCA aggregates Aguán peasant movements as a unified body to voice the demands and denunciations of the movement.<sup>35</sup> Structurally, two representatives, one man and one woman, from each organization in the Aguán region make up the Platform, working in committees related to health, education, projects, spokespeople, and various administrative capacities. The role of the Platform is thus to provide a body through which the movements can collectively denounce human rights abuses and make public demands for structural change. Its creation represents the recognition of not only the importance of unifying separate organizational struggles to advance the movement collectively, but also of creating a space to both address human rights crises and develop a collective rights framework, maintaining the communal orientation of the movement despite individualized immediate needs:

The decision to create an Agrarian Platform responds to the need to give more force to the demands of the peasant sector in the Aguan Valley, which since 2009 has been suffering violence and incessant repression, accompanied by systematic criminalization of the struggle for land access and the right to food. (Trucchi, 2013, para. 2)

Further situating the creation of the Platform in the context of peasant struggles in the Aguán, a movement leader explained:

We are facing unprecedented agrarian, food, and human rights crises. There cannot be development in the country if land tenure is not democratized, thus ending an exclusionary and extreme neoliberal model that was imposed by the international financial institutions and that has continued to deepen poverty. United and mobilized we are going to demand the structural changes that we need. (quoted in Trucchi, 2013, para. 12)

<sup>35</sup> Participating organizations in the Agrarian Platform include: MUCA, MCA, MCR, MCLP, MCO, EACI, MCSA, MARCA, MOCRA, CNTC, ANACH, MCRGC, MC LD, and the *Observatorio Permanente de Derechos Humanos del Bajo Aguán* (see PARCA, 2013).

Communiqués released by PARCA regularly denounce specific human rights violations, the repressive ongoing military occupation of the region, and the injustice of systemic impunity, and demand structural change in the form of transformational agrarian reform. In addition, however, unification through PARCA is also oriented toward a larger grassroots vision, a vision that could be summarized as a vision for food sovereignty. As a movement representative from the Aguán explained when I asked about the role and function of the Agrarian Platform:

We decided to create an agrarian platform to unite all the peasant organizations in the Aguán.... We want to make a central storehouse...and this is going to be the central storehouse that will distribute to all of the peasant movements—to all of the settlements where there is [food] consumption—in order to consume our own products...So in this way we're going to...produce basic grains, we're going to have an internal market and a better price ...and we're going to consume what we produce, or to say, we're going to have the raw material product and we're going to consume internally. That is our objective. To not buy beans or corn, for example...that comes from the large companies, from the large landowners, we're not going to consume that. And also, at the same time, we will generate more projects [based on the unique needs of each peasant settlement, in order to address]...all the basic necessities. (Interviewee 6)

This description of the partial objectives of PARCA, as a platform for strengthening the unity of separate movements, demonstrates a vision of regional autonomy and self-sufficiency. Thus, the Agrarian Platform represents a convergence, or at least a negotiated balancing of, the short-term, immediate need to denounce violence and abuses and demand the respect of basic human rights (in conjunction with the national project of democratization and the advancement of citizenship rights) with the long-term priorities of striving for food sovereignty and building the corresponding alternatives (exercising their power for resistance as economic actors and advancing their rights to access productive resources and participate in the economy autonomously as producers), both strengthened through the increased articulation of the separate movements in the region.

Despite urgent needs and threats, the movements do not stagnate in the immediate moment or restrict their objectives to individual or short-term goals; while respect for their human rights and end to the current severe repression is a necessary

condition for the continuation of their struggles, it is not sufficient for the satisfaction of their true movement objectives, which are based on collective understandings of rights. Rather, Aguán *campesino* movements demand fundamental change beyond status-quo democracy and business-as-usual agro-industrial domination and resource monopolization in the region. While there are moments of crisis that punctuate the movement and require specific issue framing and responses to such individual issues, problems, or conflicts, the building of community-based alternatives continues forward as if on a continuum, moving despite interruptions because of human rights abuses. This continuum connects the local movements to a global struggle for food sovereignty in diverse communities, which is in solidarity with the local struggle and helps inform it, and which the Aguán movements hope to inform as well by teaching what they are learning and enabling others to do similar projects. Thus, balancing these priorities, the *campesinos* do not simply denounce that with which they do not agree, but they also present an alternative social, economic, and agricultural model in practice, which is a collective rights model of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty as a collective rights framework moves beyond the instrumentalism, individualism, and inherently hierarchical framework of human rights to propose new forms of social and political participation rooted in justice. This is a material and representational struggle, which is central to multiple resistances. Food sovereignty is a rights framework that fixes rights as open and collective and justice as an emancipatory experience for those who seek food sovereignty. In accordance with the multiple resistances framework, food sovereignty involves an element of autonomous action and implementation as part of advancing a creative political project that reconciles fixing meaning and opening new spaces as communicative and political processes.

## **Food Sovereignty as Reconceived Sovereignty**

In the pursuit of food sovereignty and rural justice, peasant movements follow two broad strategic directions at once. First, they enact grassroots, autonomous movement strategies in an attempt to build local level autonomy and sovereignty. In this strategic direction, movements execute land occupations and independently implement alternative food production projects, despite adversarial responses from the state and

elite landowners, in attempts to reclaim their rights to land and peasant livelihood. This is done in conjunction with institutional political goals and a policy agenda to pressure the state to regulate land tenure and create a framework for land redistribution enabling secure access by peasant peoples. To this end, peasant movements recently participated in the electoral process through the newly formed left political party (*Partido LIBRE*) born out of the electoral branch of the national resistance movement, and the peasant sector has also proposed the *Ley de Transformación Agraria Integral*, a proposal for comprehensive and transformational agrarian reform, to the National Congress, as of yet to no avail (see La Via Campesina, SARA, and Vamos al Grano, 2011).

The proposed legislation seeks to establish the foundational conditions for peasants and food producers to be able to build food sovereignty, but it does not fix a definition of food sovereignty. It proposes the creation of the *Secretaría de Estado en los Despachos de la Reforma Agraria y la Soberanía Alimentaria* (SERASA) to restructure administrative organization and to contribute to the realization of agrarian transformation (La Via Campesina, SARA, and Vamos al Grano, 2011, p. 10). It also proposes the creation of the *Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario y de Soberanía Alimentaria*, which would be responsible for “establishing the urgent policies and functional coordination to achieve the objectives and intended purposes” presented in the law (p. 10). The proposed law also includes plans for the implementation of supports for peasant agriculture in the form of: technical assistance programs; access to credit for small producers through alternative financial systems; democratic consultation of *campesino* communities (including the participation of women, youth, and ethnic groups); land expropriation to support the social function of land; the promotion of organic peasant agriculture; stipulations for peasant enterprises recognized by the law (their rights and prohibitions), including the right of every cooperative affiliate to build a house and have a family garden space; and other articles that support and promote dignified peasant agriculture, community development, and food sovereignty at the local level.

As the approval of the genuine and transformative agrarian reform legislation remains pending, in a context of a complete lack of political will to concede to popular

interests, movements mobilize multiple forms of resistance to defend their rights as producers and as citizens. In their capacity as producers, communities advance productive projects and work toward building an alternative agro-economic model based on community, ecological preservation, and food sovereignty, in rejection of the dominant model—not only in the Aguán, but throughout the world—of high input, chemical intensive, monocultural, export-oriented agricultural production that favours large corporations and debilitates the viability of small scale and peasant agriculture. In the realm of citizen rights, peasant activists also engaged in electoral politics. Although the movements that constitute the national resistance and the *Partido LIBRE* are far from ideological unity regarding the participation in the electoral process and the potential for change that it engendered, *campesino* organizations at the grassroots and national level were hopeful that the opportunity for democratization through the polls would help to advance their demands for agrarian reform, and they actively participated as candidates.<sup>36</sup>

Importantly, the movement also has continued its grassroots struggle in conjunction with directing energy toward electoral politics, for although the electoral process represents a potential for change, it also has limitations and many activists are critical of the assumption that the success of LIBRE would have been able to solve all the political, social, and economic injustices that social movements struggle to change. In this conjuncture, Immanuel Wallerstein's (2004) analysis of anti-systemic movements in periods of transitions seems instructive:

<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately for popular social movements, a fraudulent electoral process in November 2013 led to the “election” and inauguration of National Party candidate Juan Orlando Hernández (former head of the post-coup National Congress), even though LIBRE’s candidate Xiomara Castro had led the polls as the favoured presidential candidate. As a result, the demands of popular movements continue to be silenced. Although there is formal representation and opposition in the National Congress with 36 elected LIBRE members (Palacios, 2014b) who give “absolute support” to campesino organizations (Zelaya, 2014), the *de facto* situation since the inauguration of the new government is that elected LIBRE Congresspersons have been systematically excluded from various processes, including not being allowed to have representation in the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (Palacios, 2014b). The LIBRE opposition has also faced violent repression. In a peaceful demonstration of their discontent (with the support of social movements) outside the National Congress on May 13, 2014, many elected LIBRE officials were brutally attacked and beaten by police (Palacios, 2014b). In light of other instances of targeted violence, LIBRE members have expressed that they feel they are being denied the rights of political opposition and representation, instead facing repression under a “dictatorship in Honduras” (Palacios, 2014a).

...anti-systemic movement cannot neglect short-term defensive action, including electoral action. The world's populations live in the present, and their immediate needs have to be addressed. Any movement that neglects them is bound to lose the widespread passive support that is essential for long-term success. But the motive and justification for defensive action should not be that of remedying a failing system but rather of preventing its negative effects from getting worse in the short run. This is quite different psychologically and politically. (p. 272)

Indeed, what the Honduran left seems to agree upon is that even though LIBRE may not solve all of the problems and conflicts within which movements struggle for rights and justice, LIBRE's electoral success would inevitably produce something better than the governance popular movements have experienced at the hands of the highly corrupt post-coup regime. In this sense, participation in the electoral process can be understood as a protective measure by social movements to ensure that while their ongoing, long-term grassroots struggles continue, the adverse conditions they currently face will not continue to get worse, and perhaps the new political party will be capable of producing political aperture for popular movements within which to raise their demands. As other examples throughout Latin America demonstrate, elected governments with a social movement base can be a force for attempting to resist the assault of global neoliberalism and the power of the transnational capitalist class, and these governments can be responsive to the pressure of social movements. However, disillusionment with the Pink Tide also demonstrates the importance of maintaining ongoing grassroots mobilization in conjunction with electoral routes of social and political change.

As discussed in previous sections, the autonomous grassroots strategies of land occupation and the implementation of productive projects have been central to the advancement of movement goals, very much in spite of the lack of structural institutional support and legally assured land access for peasants through agrarian reform legislation. On one hand, the challenges faced by peasants and the political shortcomings that restrict their access to land and resources are linked historically to the 1992 approval of the Agricultural Modernization Law. As a national peasant leader of ANACH explained while recounting the historical antecedents of the peasant movement in Honduras:

This Agricultural Modernization Law is logically what is bringing us a lot of deaths in the Aguán Valley and other areas, because we can no longer do agrarian reform through laws, because we don't have [any such laws], so we have to do *agrarian reform through force*. (Interviewee 22)

In this context, as a national peasant leader of ADROH and organizer of “third level” articulation of *campesino* movements explained when I asked her to describe the important historical context informing present-day peasant movements:

For us, right now the peasants in Honduras are doing *agrarian reform in practice* through land recuperation, because in Honduras land is in the hands of the oligarchy, in the hands of the large landowners—without legal documents—only because they took possession of the land and made themselves owners, and the *campesinos* are left in the hillsides. (Interviewee 20)

On the other hand, the post-coup political context and government, characterized by a complete lack of political will to offer to peasant groups anything but dispossession, catering instead to the interests of private landed and foreign capital, renders ever more critical the tools of grassroots, autonomous resistance and alternative building. After a peasant leader of MUCA explained to me that the government’s priorities and projects are “only to accumulate capital” and “do not contribute to food sovereignty,” I asked him to discuss the peasant movement’s long-term vision and objectives despite the criminalization being faced. Situating specific peasant-led food sovereignty projects pursued by Aguán movements in the context of government disinterest in (or contempt for) the community development of peasants, he emphasized the advancement of autonomous forms of resistance and resilience building in spite of the inexistence of political aperture:

We continue to implement projects, like expanding the tilapia farming project, we’re also producing broiler chickens...[and] we have cattle ranching, milk, and dairy product projects. This is going to contribute to food sovereignty, just as we are also producing basic grains and, of course, producing African palm, which is the raw material for oil production. This is what is immediate and this we have developed *without the support of the government or any other organization*. So, we have as a goal to continue strengthening these projects that contribute to food sovereignty, as well as to continue with residential area projects. We have developed residential area projects in the communities; right now we are developing potable water projects

[and] implementing electricity projects in the communities. *The Government of Honduras should have done this, but it doesn't do so for the dispossessed sectors, for the peasants...* (Interviewee 33)

At the same time, movements also seek to achieve change through institutional political means, which involves pressuring the government to approve favourable legislation to advance the demands of peasant movements and participating in the electoral process for national democratization. In light of the crisis of the coup, peasant movements have pursued new forms of resistance, asserting their own representational sovereignty to speak for themselves, on their own terms, while participating in a larger, comprehensive project of democratization. As a national peasant leader summarized while recounting important historical factors in shaping the movement and what could be seen as positive outcome of the coup:

...through the crisis we have succeeded in uniting ourselves, regrouping ourselves, searching for other weapons of struggle. Now we make up part of a political process, now we as peasants no longer want others, the intellectuals, to do things for us; we want to be the protagonists of change, we want to be at the front, that our ideas are taken into account and to also be able to execute those ideas if necessary. (Interviewee 22)

The exercise of peasants' communicative sovereignty in seeking to influence the frames and terms of debate is evidenced in the collective proposal to Congress for Integrated Agrarian Transformation, which speaks in the language of food sovereignty. As Javier Suazo (2012) argues, this peasant language of food sovereignty, which holds as central the implementation of agrarian reform legislation, is vastly different from the government's language of food security (represented in the current Nutritional Food Security Law), which does not consider reforms to the Agricultural Modernization Law and "assumes that agrarian reform has nothing to do with food security" (p. 314).

Indeed, for some peasant movements more than others, the approval of the transformative agrarian reform law would provide a necessary foundation for building food sovereignty. When I asked a peasant leader if his movement, MCA, had been working in the area of food sovereignty like other movements in the Aguán Valley, he

explained MCA's understanding of food sovereignty in relation to proposed agrarian reform legislation:

For food sovereignty, what we have been talking about since 2008 [has been] the Integral Agrarian Reform decree. Because MCA would benefit from the Integral Agrarian Reform decree—or is going to benefit, because it is assumed that in another year it will be approved...because we're going to receive land that we have not received...and within the policies planted in that law, we could give priority to food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is not what the government is always saying, which is food security... (Interviewee 19)

The implicit assumption that the agrarian reform law will be approved hinges on hope in the electoral process (now known to have failed due to electoral fraud in the November 2013 election). Indeed, given the utter lack of political will to create a favourable policy environment to protect the rights of peasants and other marginalized groups, the approval of the proposed agrarian reform law is closely linked to electoral politics. When I asked a representative of La Via Campesina to discuss the principal problem facing *campesino* movements in Honduras, he highlighted the severe criminalization and repression, but also described the development of the peasant movement in the wake of the coup:

It's a struggle for the democratization of the country...the whole *campesino* movement is participating around LIBRE, which is Freedom and Refoundation.... The peasant struggle has been criminalized in this country. And all these peasant groups, organizations, and movements are fighting for a new Integrated Agrarian Transformation Law, which now doesn't only involve land, but we are also talking about water, forests, financing, and equal access for women and youth...the '74 agrarian reform did not consider women and youth much. Today, they are direct participants in the process of the proposals that we have in the National Congress, but we don't have hope that it can be approved right now unless we win in the next election through LIBRE. Although we are mobilized, we go to Congress, we pressure, influence, make an impact, press conferences, the government doesn't take heed...because it's a strong political action, approving an agrarian reform law. So, that's what we are fighting for right now and the democratization of the country. (Interviewee 8)

Particularly among national-level peasant organizations, but also among the grassroots, there was considerable hope in the electoral process and the LIBRE party to bring change not only for peasants, but also for all popular sectors of Honduran society

through national democratization and left politics as a break from traditional bipartisanship.

This institutional political strategy is waged in conjunction with grassroots autonomous forms of resistance outlined above, which seek to implement community-level projects to build alternatives in practice, while the larger democratization and policy-oriented project remains pending. By calling on the state as an institution to regulate food and agriculture (through regulating land access with agrarian reform legislation), food sovereignty represents a *reterritorialization* of food and agriculture, demanding that food be seen as a local issue, in contrast to the globally undifferentiated and corporatized approach to food brought by the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture and the neoliberal food regime more broadly.

However, food sovereignty as a project is in no way married to the state, nor is it limited to national borders; the transnationalism of La Via Campesina as a social movement is perhaps case in point. An Aguán peasant movement member and volunteer with the *Observatorio Permanente de Derechos Humanos del Bajo Aguán* reinforced this perspective in a discussion about the role of communication networks in the movement. When I asked her if the movement is sharing what it learns from its projects with others, she explained that although food sovereignty is by its nature a local reality, the issues and crises to which it responds are shared internationally, and thus there is an interest in growing the movement by aiding parallel groups in other countries to follow the example of food sovereignty:

The ideology of the peasantry in Honduras is not that food sovereignty is only for Honduras. Because in reality not only in Honduras is there a food crisis. And so the idea is to inspire the struggle, in a way that this space, which is an open space, involves all the societies of different countries that are in the same economic level as the peasant movements in Honduras. And so that is the objective, to inspire food sovereignty from here, from our country, Honduras. (Interview 18)

Thus, by also pursuing autonomous resistance and local development strategies, fixed in specific contexts but also in solidarity with one another, food sovereignty also represents a *deterritorialization* of the absolute sovereignty and borders of the state, opening space for the exercise of multiple sovereignties within and in relation to the state

and the corporate food regime, as well as in relation to other food sovereign entities in conversation across borders.

Importantly, the conversation about food sovereignty in Honduras is not a *national* one. National level strategies are exercised, including the proposed law for Agrarian Transformation, but the articles of that proposed legislation seek to enable food sovereignty on a *local level*. In Honduras, in addition to *campesino* movements (in the Aguán and elsewhere), there are other movements that also talk about food sovereignty, namely indigenous communities. Like the movements in the Aguan, indigenous communities similarly face land dispossession, forced eviction, non-consultation, and threats to their cultural reproduction. For example, the Garifuna, struggling against mega-tourism developments and the expansion of African palm monocultures along the coast where they traditionally have lived as fishing communities (Interviewee 15); the Lenca, mostly struggling against resource privatization and the concession of rivers for hydroelectric projects (Interviewee 12); and the Maya Chorti, facing struggles similar to those of other *campesinos* groups with the government failing to follow through on land distribution promises (Interviewee 13); are all struggles that invoke the discourse of food sovereignty as a goal of the movement. Seen in light of this breadth and diversity, food sovereignty can then be understood as a response to dispossession that is encompassing of difference; grassroots communities mobilize alternatives in practice fixed in specific local context, while remaining in conversation—in national and international movement spaces—with diverse groups advancing distinct but related projects of food sovereignty. A national “Honduran” food sovereignty as such is not the objective, but rather, food sovereignty is something to be achieved by local communities as sovereign entities.

This highlights how food sovereignty is *multiple*, which is a fundamental characteristic for justifying and reconciling the multiple resistances in which food sovereignty movement engage. Food sovereignty is a project that consists of not only one monolithic sovereign, but of a multitude of sovereigns that are not mutually exclusive, but can be complementary and in solidarity. It removes the locus of sovereignty from the state (though it still calls on the state to participate) and highlights how these multiple food sovereignties are fixed in very specific local contexts. In this

way, food sovereignty opens up the realm of who can conceivably be sovereign, challenging the internal sovereignty of the state by proposing multiple sovereignties where communities can take control of their own food and agriculture. This delinks sovereignty from a border-policing territoriality of who is “in” and “out,” because even though food sovereignty is immanently connected to land as a form of material production and social reproduction, food sovereignty is about the creation of open space, in relationship to and in solidarity with other food sovereign entities. On the other hand, food sovereignty calls for a strengthening of external sovereignty of the nation state by calling the state “back in” to issues of food and agriculture. Together, these constitute multiple resistances. Proposals like the Agrarian Transformational Law call on the state to act as a first line of defense against the global neoliberal food regime to help enable the realization of local food sovereignty, which is defined in relation to and based on its difference from the food regime. The sovereignty of food sovereignty is not a “zero sum game”, but rather calls for the exercise of the sovereignty of the state within an international system while also opening space for multiple sovereignties – in terms of both form (political, economic, and communicative) and jurisdiction – within the state.

This reworked character of sovereignty within food sovereignty is central to understanding and reconciling multiple resistances as the political project of food sovereignty movements. While the project of food sovereignty seeks to challenge traditional borders or boundaries to assert a new sovereignty on a local level, the strategies in the case of Honduras also reproduce a form of national sovereignty that has historically been responsible for the implementation of oppressive global political economic structures in a national context. However, if the state can be used as a gatekeeper to stand against or at least negotiate the imposition of neoliberalism, then it may serve as a tool for moving “beyond” neoliberalism by creating space for (anti-neoliberal) social movements to maneuver in building their own alternatives (and alternative sovereignties). Peasant movements are mounting a resistance in political spaces as citizens, participating in the larger national democratization movement and invoking the discourse of human rights and calling upon the solidarity of international human rights organizations to pressure the Honduran government and other authorities to put an end to the repression. On the other hand, their long-term vision food sovereignty constitutes a form of autonomous resistance as productive labourers within

the economic spaces, as opposed to strictly (traditional) political ones, and this is a struggle against both the corruption of the national government and the injustices inflicted by the regional landowners and transnational agro-capital. These strategies constitute multiple resistances that are not contradictory, but are reconciled through an alternative political imaginary in which an anti-neoliberal political project—food sovereignty—is constructed through multiple state and non-state (and non-corporate) sovereign entities in conjunction. In this way, multiple resistances bridges radical democracy’s politics of fixing meaning and multitude’s politics of openness through this single political project of multiple sovereignties. The case of Honduran food sovereignty movements thus challenges us to think about and account for multiple resistances in conjunction—both autonomous and institutionally politically oriented—as viable options for anti-neoliberal social movements.

## **Movement Tensions: Political and Agroecological Expressions of Food Sovereignty**

The Aguán Valley is home to large monocultures of African palm, grown by both peasant cooperatives and private large landowners alike. The apparent tensions embedded in the production of African palm, specifically in its relation to food sovereignty (as discourse, movement, and practice) in the region, highlights key conclusions about the inherent complexity of the project of food sovereignty; the decisively localized expression of food sovereignty fixed in specific contexts; and the existence of divisions or gaps within the movement that occur between agroecological and political movement expressions, not necessarily along local and global lines. The pursuit of food sovereignty is inherently tied to land as a productive resource and source of place-based social reproduction, and thus the relationship between palm production, food sovereignty, and the political (as opposed to agroecological) orientation of Aguán movements is inseparable from the underlying struggle for land access that informs movement strategy and agricultural practice.

African palm is a non-traditional crop in Honduras, and it was first promoted among reform sector peasants and planted in the Aguán in the early 1970’s. Given the difficult conditions of the Aguán prior to its “colonization” and the lack of technical and

infrastructural support for peasants in the process, there were high abandon rates in the early agrarian reform (Kerssen, 2011, para. 3). Learning from these earlier failures and problems of abandonment, the Honduran state and INA began heavily promoting African palm in the 1970's, offering credit, technical support, and infrastructure for peasant cooperatives that agreed to grow palm (Kerssen, 2011, para. 3). Although African palm is a non-food (oil and biofuel), export oriented crop, as Edelman (2013) points out, much of the production of African palm in the Aguán Valley is for the Honduran market (for the production of processed snack foods) and for export to Mexico (for the production of cosmetics) (Edelman and Léon, 2013, p. 1700).

Although Aguán peasant movements are increasingly critical of palm and the agricultural paradigm that it represents, they continue to grow it for various reasons, not the least of which is the fact that when they recuperate land from the large landowners through land occupation and other reclamation processes, the fields are already sown in and producing African palm. Furthermore, northern Honduras has long since been transformed into an “agro-industrial landscape” through the historical domination of foreign owned banana plantations and the later introduction of African palm as an export cash crop (Kerssen, 2013, p. 113). In this context, Kerssen (2013) argues that the “fate” of peasant movements has “primarily lied with oil palm”, and thus “Aguán struggles have largely focused on the right to control and benefit from oil palm, the region’s most economically important crop” (p. 113). Thus, “none of the Aguán movements...have abandoned oil palm completely as a development tool” (Kerssen, 2013, p. 117). Rather, “[o]il palm remains a strategic part of the vision—specifically, oil palm that is peasant-controlled from production to processing to retail”—in addition to the food production and “economic diversification projects aimed at putting whole economies back in the hands of local communities and families” (p. 117, original emphasis). Indeed, as Edelman and Léon (2013) argue, although much of the conflict and violence in the Aguán is linked to palm production, among peasants “there is no opposition to the crop itself, but rather *to who is producing it and how*” (p. 1713, emphasis added).

However, as a monoculture that is highly chemically intensive to produce, African palm is ecologically destructive and does not actually produce food for people. Movements with a vision of food sovereignty are thus increasingly critical of palm

production, explaining that palm impedes food sovereignty. The words of the president of an Aguán peasant cooperative reflected this critique. As we walked with two others through an African palm plantation in the community (en route to the cooperative's developing fish farming project), he explained that in available spaces, the cooperative is growing corn, plantain, and other crops, using organic methods in accordance with a collective decision made in community assemblies to eliminate the use of chemicals that was "killing the earth." The palm, however, requires chemical inputs, and he noted this has various health implications. When I asked, then, how palm figured into the community's long-term vision, he explained:

Currently, palm cultivation is not sovereignty. We survive, but these large projects—they are called palm monocultures—harm food sovereignty because they take large tracts of lands to plant this crop, and the people, the peasants, they are forced to buy their land.... So palm does not contribute to food sovereignty. We live with it, the palm, because of the situation in which we find ourselves. (Interviewee 16)

While the cooperative is still producing palm, it also cultivates basic grains and vegetables with organic methods. Attention to environmental sustainability and the critique of the current emphasis on palm monoculture are deepening as movements advance a more comprehensive agenda of objectives that not only concerns the traditional agrarian question of land ownership, but also speaks to the protection and control of natural and productive resources. This aligns with the overall "newness" of the Aguán movements and the way in which their analyses and demands "go beyond" that of the traditional peasant movements.

Despite this "newness", however, the "classic" peasant demand for land holds true. As a researcher of Honduran peasant movement history explained, grassroots organizations actively talking about and enacting food sovereignty understand that discourse in relation to their historic and ongoing demand for (transformative) agrarian reform as part of their struggle for land access (Interviewee 2). Indeed, a leader of the national peasant organization of ANACH similarly stated: "Food sovereignty and agrarian reform are the cornerstones of our struggle and for that we need the first means of production: *land*" (Interviewee 22). Movements remain closely tied to questions of land access, as demands for land in the current state of land insecurity remain central.

Aguán peasants lament the decline of domestic basic grains production by local Honduran farmers and condemn the market logic of land use that undercuts the viability of small-scale peasant agriculture in the name of the expansion of corporate agro-industry and the maintenance of the landed oligarchy's power. With an orientation beyond immediate day-to-day necessities, Aguán movements are critical of the agricultural model that pervades the region (and the entire global food system for that matter), and strive to build a long-term alternative under the framework of food sovereignty. However, this new language and vision of food sovereignty as a representational and political economic material goal and part of the deepening political consciousness characteristic of the "new" Aguán movements hinges foundationally on having access to land on which to exercise one's food sovereignty. Thus, in the Honduran context, central to the movement for food sovereignty is the accompanying political, economic, and communicative struggle to secure collective access for peasants to land, which is their sustenance of life and livelihood both economically and culturally.

As an Aguán peasant leader explained while discussing the historical context of the movement, previously, peasants "had the freedom to plant corn, plantain, yucca, what is necessary to at least have a food supply [and] food security." However, with the repeal of agrarian reform through the introduction of the Agricultural Modernization Law and the attendant campaign to delegitimize the peasant need for land, "the [peasant] cooperatives collapsed because they no longer had the economic freedom to continue living" (Interview 5). He continued:

We see how the injustices, the inequality stimulated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that corrals the people, leave them without natural resources, without land which is the generator of life, which is what generates food sovereignty. And all our people are unprotected and more vulnerable, where they don't have somewhere to plant, where they don't have somewhere to live, and they are forced to sell their labour power, which is only used until a certain age.... So it's for this that the people of our country are fighting to recuperate life, to recuperate the land that is their sustenance. (Interviewee 5)

The Agricultural Modernization Law effectively enabled the monopolization of farming resources, restricting peasant access to land as an essential productive resource for the maintenance of their livelihood as subsistence farmers. This undermined their autonomy

as producers and as labourers, and their cultural freedom to lead a dignified life and livelihood as peasant peoples, all of which the project of food sovereignty aims to reclaim, but is underlined by land access.

Some Aguán movements, facing the instability of landlessness of their communities and an utter lack of political aperture to acquire land through judicial and political processes, have been forced to re-purchase land, at prices much higher than those that the large regional landowners initially paid, since the transactions were accompanied by coercive measures to persuade *campesinos* to sell or were acquired illegally.<sup>37</sup> In addition to the repression that has continued unabated despite these legal agreements with INA to recuperate occupied lands financially, the payment requirements in these land purchases put considerable pressure on *campesino* communities and make them dependent on cultivating African palm. The land payments create financial difficulties, but furthermore, as a movement representative explained, within various movements “a food crisis has developed because of the payments” (Interviewee 17), bringing into stark realization that palm does not feed communities, especially when the profits are going toward the burdensome land payments. As the same movement member continued, “this is why [peasants] are trying to advance projects that are sustainable for the family, because palm cultivation does not give enough to cancel the fees that [they] have to pay” in order to secure their access to land (Interviewee 17). Given this developing critique of the monocultural, export-based agricultural model that dominates the Aguán region through the exclusive focus on African palm, initiatives among Aguán movements to build food sovereignty focus on crop diversification, organic

<sup>37</sup> As Edelman (2012) explains, “[p]easant leaders declared that they acquiesced ‘under pressure and under threat’ and the terms include a premium price for Facussé [the largest landowner in the Aguán] and onerous loans for MUCA,” the first movement to make an agreement with INA to recuperate occupied lands through financial means (p. 9). However, although peasant movements have acquiesced and agreed to re-purchase the land, the payment agreements have far from settled the regional land conflicts. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath—within weeks—of MUCA reaching an agreement, “a new wave of violence swept the region, as police, military and private guards attacked peasants who continued to reclaim land and to protest the ongoing repression” (p. 9). Although even President Lobo, popularly condemned as illegitimate both in Honduras and throughout Latin America, “acknowledged that in Honduras an error had been committed and that there had been an agrarian counter-reform that now needed to be corrected,” such a “correction” will evidently face grave challenges given the “close links between Lobo and the large landowners” (Edelman, 2012, p. 9).

or agroecological (non-chemical intensive) farming methods, and the production of basic food crops for local consumption within peasant communities.

However, these alternative production projects and other initiatives also require land, and the precariousness of land ownership and access experienced by peasant communities in the region is a significant barrier to the advancement food sovereignty through alternative food production and distribution. Demands for land in the region and respect for peasants' rights to land and food are central to the Aguán movements, and it is this intimate relationship between land, livelihood, food, and survival for peasant communities that positions genuine agrarian reform as a central demand of *campesino* movements and as an important precursor for the achievement of food sovereignty. I asked a representative of the *Movimiento Auténtico Reivindicativo Campesino del Aguán* (MARCA) to expand on the idea of a regional sovereignty in the Aguán that had been mentioned earlier. He explained that although the community currently finds itself dependent on palm, the movement maintains a long-term vision of food sovereignty, and are currently initiating productive local projects to offset their dependence on palm in the land they have available:

*Sovereignty is to try to not just maintain the palm monoculture, to not depend only on that. It is the defense of food, to fight for other types of projects for the wellbeing of the family. To speak of a struggle for sovereignty is to say that we all have the same right...[to] food security. This is the intention, but what is essential is to get land, which is what we are waiting for, that our rulings [from the Court regarding land titles] will come out favorable for us. That is the fundamental thing we are waiting for in order to then get into food sovereignty.... We as MARCA have stayed a little behind in this sense [compared to others in the region].... [but] we are preparing some 60 *manzanas* in order to plant vegetables, corn, yucca, all of that.... There we're preparing an area and we feel happy because, as we said, to not depend on palm but to have a cultivation project of basic grains and vegetables helps our families a lot and to not depend so much.* (Interviewee 10)

Thus the difficult relationship between land access and autonomy makes itself clear; material and social reproduction of peasant livelihood are inextricably linked to land access and their position in relations of production. Peasant communities do not want to be dependent on palm and instead desire food sovereignty, but given their current lack of autonomy—because they effectively have no access to land, they have to purchase it,

and have to grow palm in order to make the payments—they find themselves in a situation where they have few options, politically, economically, and thus productively. Nevertheless, the above excerpts demonstrate the Aguán peasant vision of building grassroots alternatives based on subsistence, equitable local markets and regional autonomy and self-sufficiency, and decreased reliance on African palm.

However, despite this critique of African palm production as a barrier to the realization of food sovereignty, there remains an underlying tension, because the same movements that condemn palm also have aspirations of eventually developing peasant owned palm-processing plants, which ultimately represents a vision for continued reliance on palm, with some crop diversification. As a leader of MCA explained when I asked him what are the long-term vision and objectives of the movement:

There is land that we could cultivate in trees, citrus, or timber in order to make a bit of an environmental buffer and to produce as well. There are crops that can be produced in the long-term. Likewise, of the palm we have... we [say]: 'Well, our proposal is to have *our own oil processing plant* so that we can take the gains of the raw material, of the oil', even though it may only be oil. Because, what happens now? Here we produce no less than some 1000 to 1500 tonnes of palm. We receive the raw material and [the processing plants] pay us as they wish. We sell it to René Morales, ... Reinaldo Canales, and sometimes to Facussé. They are the ones who keep the gains of what the raw material has produced. In reality, the [peasant] movement just works, makes raw material. We think that what we produce, the benefit it gives us, is maybe 30-40% what a palm plantation could give [with a processing plant]. In this way, we always remain as the workers, little as beneficiaries. (Interviewee 19)

In a great paradox, peasant communities producing palm currently sell the harvested palm fruit (the raw material product) to the large regional landowners for processing, the same landowners largely responsible for the repressive situation in which peasants are living. In this context, the peasant cooperative Salamá, the only regional peasant cooperative *not* to lose, sell, or subdivide its land in the neoliberal onslaught and land grabs of the early 1990's (as a result, at least in part, of strong and rotating cooperative leadership, which helped to eliminate corruption and opportunism of peasant leaders), stands as a symbol of the hypothetical level of development of peasant communities in the Aguán. Founded in 1970 as the first peasant cooperative in the Aguán region, Salamá was initially dedicated to the production of basic grains

(particularly maize), but later shifted its productive focus to the cultivation of African palm through the introduction of palm-promoting government policy and infrastructure (Macías, 2001, pp. 71-82). As Kerssen argues (2013), “Salamá offers an example of a socially oriented palm enterprise, rooted in democratic ownership and participation. It stands in stark contrast to the expansionist private palm oil corporations that offer no benefit to communities except few, poorly paid jobs” (p. 111). The Salamá cooperative owns and operates a palm processing plant, keeping both production and processing of palm (and its revenues) within the peasant community, and thus represents for other regional peasant movements a successful example to follow.

In this way, despite criticism against African palm production through the perspective of food sovereignty, movements still feature palm production within their visions of food sovereignty, albeit in a more autonomous way given their aspirations for peasant owned and operated palm oil-processing facilities. As a leader of MUCA explained following a description of the movement’s achievements in building food sovereignty through various projects:

We’re advancing in this sense [developing food sovereignty projects without the support of the government]. We also have as a vision to somehow, someday, to be able to have a palm oil extraction plant, and also to be able to have a granary...to be able to generate, in better conditions and in a more adequate way, the basic grains that our families consume. (Interviewee 33)

Food sovereignty embodies the right to self-determination in how people and communities choose to participate in the food system. This vision of food sovereignty speaks to the right to produce palm and establish peasant-owned processing plants as a sovereign decision. Autonomous palm production is thus featured alongside other forms of autonomous agrarian politics and food production.

On one hand, there is a strong critique among Aguán movements of African palm as an impediment to food sovereignty, while on the other hand, long-term visions for community and food sovereign development feature a continued reliance on palm (in conjunction with sustainably produced and diversified food crops), with peasant control extending beyond palm production to also include processing. This tension in the Aguán

over questions of palm production, food sovereignty, and land access offer insight into the nature of food sovereignty as a movement and local project.

First, this tension indicates the inherently complex nature of achieving food sovereignty. There are many factors contributing to the local inability to “be” food sovereign, including the instability, insecurity, or unviability of local markets, which are flooded with cheap imported grains (highly subsidized in the U.S.), rendering competition by local farmers difficult. Although palm does not feed families, it is more economically profitable in the short-term, creating dependence for the fulfillment of basic needs (and needs such as loan payments). Food sovereignty is a response to the way in which the global food regime finds expression in specific local contexts. However, it is also not a program for rural isolationism, and thus, the movement and practice of food sovereignty, in the Aguán and elsewhere, need to reckon with such local and international dynamics that shape the food system.

Second, and importantly, the tension between food sovereignty and palm production suggests that divides or gaps within the food sovereignty movement are between politically oriented and agroecologically (practice) oriented expressions of food sovereignty, rather than between the local and global of the movement. While primarily (agro)ecologically motivated grassroots peasant movements tend to be strictly opposed to chemically intensive agriculture and support the production of native and creole crops through sustainable methods, Aguán peasants maintain a place for palm production in their movements and their practice of food sovereignty.

In Honduras, La Via Campesina and the national peasant organizations aligned with it are very focused on the political aspects of the struggle. Like other levels of the *campesino* movements, La Via Campesina has been engaged in electoral politics and the leader of Via Campesina Honduras was on the ballot for the November 2013 elections as a LIBRE candidate, in addition to the ongoing campaign to pressure for approval of agrarian reform legislation. In the wake of the coup, the international priorities of La Via Campesina were reshuffled to give more attention to national political priorities, namely the resistance movement and rebuilding the democracy of the Honduran state in a time of crisis (see Boyer, 2010). Aguán movements, too, could be

described as being more developed politically than in terms of their agroecology (which is also identified as central to food sovereignty), though they are pursuing productive agricultural projects with organic methods. Despite the physical distance of La Via Campesina in the capital city from the grassroots movements in the countryside, it does offer support to the grassroots through training and capacity building, and La Via Campesina Honduras is also working to expand its horizons in the area of sustainable production and alternative farming practices.<sup>38</sup> However, as a leader of the *Asociación Nacional para el Fomento de la Agricultura Ecológica* (ANAFAE), an agroecologically oriented, national level peasant organization, commented when I asked if there are organizations that are working in both agroecology and politics:

If you ask Via Campesina they will tell you that, yes, they are [doing agroecology], but I feel that they are less in the area of agroecology [and] more in the area of policy, of land access, etc., which isn't bad, as I said, but it's not enough. (Interviewee 32)

Although their discourse and practice includes elements of environmental sustainability and organic agriculture, the political aspects of struggle nevertheless take precedence both within the Aguán and at the national level of La Via Campesina Honduras.

However, even within Honduras this is not synonymous across all spaces of peasant struggle. Although Honduras has historically had a strong peasant movement focused on political demands of land access and agrarian reform, it has also been home to important agroecological movements and practice, including the grassroots *Campesino a Campesino* movement, a grassroots farmer-to-farmer agroecology education network, that has flourished throughout Central America and had presence in

<sup>38</sup> In May 2013, for example, La Via Campesina hosted a group of activists from Costa Rica working in the areas of agroecology and biodynamic farming to lead a week-long workshop culminating with a public presentation and press conference to share the focus of their movement and the work they do to promote sustainable farming in Costa Rica, and increasingly, throughout the Central American region. At that meeting, the leader of Via Campesina stated that although much of what the Costa Rican representatives spoke of and brought to the workshop in Honduras was new to La Via Campesina Honduras, La Via Campesina as an organization is trying to expand into this area and looks forward to being able to do so further. There are other movements in Honduras that already maintain more of a concerted focus on agroecology as opposed to political incidence, such as ANAFAE, the National Association for the Promotion of Ecological Agriculture.

Honduras (see Holt-Giménez, 2006); the Loma Linda farm outside of Tegucigalpa, which has had historical significance as a sustainable agriculture (including erosion control and water and soil management demonstration areas) education center (see Smith, 1994), though it experienced significant setbacks after Hurricane Mitch and the passing of the farm's founder; and farms in the south of Honduras practicing agroecology for the past 20 years, which stand as beacons of the success of sustainable farming (see [www.anafae.org](http://www.anafae.org)).

The political focus on the importance of agrarian reform permeates across the local level of Aguán movements, the national level of Honduran peasant organizations (including the national chapter of La Via Campesina), and the international level of the movement represented in La Via Campesina International. However, agroecological movements such as those listed above do not necessarily converge in a concerted way with the politically oriented peasant movements, despite being largely complementary struggles. When I asked a leader of the agroecologically-oriented ANAFAE, also focusing politically on food sovereignty, if and how agroecology and politics are complimentary, he discussed the tensions implicit in food sovereignty *without* agroecology, such as the above example of Aguán food sovereignty in conjunction with palm production:

We can't be in a political struggle without having practical actions; and in reverse, if we stay in our plot [of land] we don't transcend the policy framework. Probably in the framework of the Honduran peasant movement there is a deficit, because it seems to me that the struggle of Honduran peasant movements is more political and less technical. It's more common to find efforts from the peasant movements for land, and very few efforts for an alternative model of production. There is a clash here between two models in contradiction; on one hand, food sovereignty as utopia is the focus, but food sovereignty has as a fundamental element the ability to realize ecological agriculture as the productive model. But if food sovereignty is my model, my utopia, and what I am implementing is Green Revolution, then there is a contradiction. It seems to me that this theme has to continue to be debated, because it is a theme that philosophically, conceptually, has to be very clear to have coherence. Because you can easily think that you are fighting for food sovereignty discursively, but through actions I am reaffirming the model. (Interviewee 32)

Thus, the divides within the movement seem to exist between political and agroecological expressions of the movement. However, the assumption cannot be made that this lack of reconciliation between agroecological and political focuses is the result of a gap or tension between local and international spaces, as grassroots movements are evidently politically motivated. Rather, in local spaces in Honduras, these movements are simultaneous and very much related, and there is an articulated acknowledgement of the importance of further developing networks to strengthen and construct these links.

This divide between agroecological and political movement expression, the tension between food sovereignty and palm production, and the political focus on agrarian reform and land access of Aguán peasant movements in particular reinforces food sovereignty as a *fixed* in specific context while nevertheless *related* to *multiple* other (food) sovereignties and movements. As has been discussed, the alternative of food sovereignty is a response to the way in which the global food regime has taken shape within specific national and more local spaces. The introduction of African palm to the north coast of Honduras coincided closely with the colonization of the Aguán, and thus palm is deeply embedded in the regional economy even though it has undercut peasant agricultures. Furthermore, as Edelman and Léon (2013) argue:

It needs to be emphasized...that [Aguán] peasants are producing and expanding the area in African palm for both cultural and economic reasons. Most peasant organisations are still paying for the land they occupy and African palm is one of the few viable cash crops in the region (in terms of market access, production knowledge, and financial and technical support). African palm production has become prestigious in the Aguán, evoking images of a better life related to effects of the land reform of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as to the image of success attached to those cooperatives (and the communities linked to them) that were not dismantled in the early 1990s, such as the Salama Cooperative. (p. 1714)

Thus, given the historical and political context in Honduras and how the global corporate food regime manifests itself in the Aguán Valley in particular, Aguán peasants have a well-developed political project and less agroecological focus, and palm as part of food sovereignty is specific to local conditions and how the food regime has taken shape.

Furthermore, to understand the seemingly contradictory but instrumental focus on African palm, Kerssen's (2013) analysis of the relationship between food sovereignty and palm in the Aguán is instructive:

Aguán movements may not have rejected oil palm production or fully embraced agroecology, but they *are* engaged in an ongoing discussion about food sovereignty among themselves and with transnational movements like Via Campesina. But in the Aguán (and indeed everywhere), food sovereignty has to be pragmatic. It has to work for *now*, if imperfectly, in the embattled context in which peasants find themselves. (p. 118)

In Honduras, multiple food sovereignties find expression in unique ways, evolving collectively and separately. The specificity of the situation in the Aguán informs a particular movement focus, which involves a focus on land access and a vision of peasant controlled palm production and processing.

The relationship between agrarian politics and agroecological practice, between the multiple resistances of institutional political and autonomous movement strategies, highlights a tension and a gap within the movement that does not occur along local and international lines, but between the differing focuses of politics, or policy, and agroecology. Given the diversity embodied in the concept of food sovereignty, such differences are to be expected, as food sovereignty finds definition in specific local contexts, in relation to the local character of the corporate food regime. As an issue frame that lays the foundation for multiple resistances, food sovereignty fixes openness; that is, food sovereignty provides a framework that is broadly encompassing of difference but is, by definition, open to interpretation and shaped by the local conditions and contexts of those seeking to be food sovereign. Thus, a political focus above all else, as is the case in Aguán movements, cannot be considered a misinterpretation or misrepresentation of food sovereignty. Rather, given the local context and the movement issue framing processes, this politicization is the expression that need be taken by food sovereignty for the advancement of local movement goals and peasant community well being at this particular moment. Furthermore, food sovereignty is, by definition, a *politicization* of food and agricultural issues, albeit with an additional emphasis on agroecology, which is itself a political act.

Nevertheless, some movements are creating space for politics and agroecology within their movement strategies, remaining highly engaged in political struggle but finding grassroots reconciliation of the political vision in practice through food production and agricultural projects to benefit the community regardless of political efficacy in the polls and policy proposals. In the Aguán, continued production of African palm further highlights the local specificity of food sovereignty, which is tied up in the central question of land access that sheds light on the nature of Aguán peasant movements in particular, and Honduran peasant movements broadly, as more developed politically than they are agroecologically.

## Conclusion

The case study of the movement and practice of food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley of Honduras uncovers real creative potential and challenges for realization embodied within the project of food sovereignty represented transnationally in La Via Campesina. First, encompassing a project for the realization of collective rights, food sovereignty proposes a new rights framework that goes beyond the individualized conception of human rights as part of a broader challenge to the individualizing market logic of the project of neoliberalism. Second, the multiple resistances involved in the struggle to build food sovereignty—broadly summarized into the categories of institutional political and autonomous movement strategies—demonstrate the reconceptualization of sovereignty within food sovereignty as simultaneously a deterritorialization and reterritorialization of sovereignty. Finally, the tensions within Aguán movements between food sovereignty and African palm production reveal the inherent complexity and place-based diversity of food sovereignty as a framework that fixes openness, as well as the tendency for divisions between primarily political and agroecological movement expressions. While food sovereignty as a discourse, movement, and practice holds great emancipatory potential for food system democratization and for the imagination and creation of alternative social, economic, and political organization, it also raises important questions about anti-neoliberal struggle, in theory and practice. The next and final chapter will reflect on such questions.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Conclusion**

My research of the *campesino* movement for food sovereignty in the Aguán Valley of Honduras, in transnational context, has sought to explore the question of how the local and global reconcile in the project of food sovereignty. Within the scope of this research question, I have explored food sovereignty as a social movement and as a reconceived form of sovereignty that is fixed, relational, multiple, and collective. While the evidence suggests that there is at least a preliminary reconciliation of local and global, the way in which this takes shape raises further questions about the logistical feasibility of food sovereignty and brings to light the complexities (and attendant potentials and challenges) embedded within the project of food sovereignty.

Furthermore, although the food sovereignty frame is mobilized in local and transnational movement spaces, it is important to ask how there may be tensions that cut across these different movement spaces. That is, it is not simply a question of local versus global, or how the local reconciles with the global, but also how other tensions and challenges permeate across and within these spaces. As the Honduran case study demonstrates, it is equally if not more important to think about food sovereignty as experiencing divides between political struggle and agroecology practice, rather than along local and global lines.

In this chapter, I begin by summarizing my main arguments about food sovereignty and particularly how it finds expression in the Aguán Valley of Honduras. In summarizing these arguments, I also reflect how these findings suggest that separating food sovereignty analytically into dichotomies (and synergies) of local and global may not be the most important way to conceive of food sovereignty movement and practice when the primary concern is the experience of rural justice and emancipatory food and

agricultural relations in practice at the grassroots. Following the summary of my main arguments, I revisit the political strategies of Honduran *campesino* movements and their corresponding communicative activities in the project of building food sovereignty. I look briefly to other examples in the region of attempts to build food sovereignty institutionally or from the grassroots, and what these experiences, and their successes and challenges, suggest may be relevant considerations and practices for other movement contexts. I then reflect more broadly on the political focus of this research, which has strengths and limitations, and how this points to a potential to shift the analytical approach to understanding food sovereignty from local versus global to more nuanced and complex forms of investigation that reflect the inherent complexity and creativity of food sovereignty. Finally, I identify priorities for further research in the field of food sovereignty and communication in anti-neoliberal social movements and highlight scholars and activists that are already doing valuable work in these directions. I close with some final remarks about the potentials and challenges of food sovereignty and questions raised by this research about the project of food sovereignty and anti-neoliberal struggles engaging in multiple forms of resistance.

## **Food Sovereignty is Sovereignty Reconceived: Fixed, Relational, and Multiple Sovereignties**

Although early declarations of La Via Campesina demonstrate that its use of food sovereignty initially expressed national self-sufficiency, this definition and framework for understanding food and agricultural issues has evolved into a more radical political and ecological project. La Via Campesina's definition of food sovereignty shifted from autarky to autonomy, calling for the right of not only nations, but also people and communities to have self-determination and decision-making control in food and agriculture issues. With early definitions closely tied to the nation state as the locus of control, state-centric sovereignty remained unchallenged. However, further evolution of the concept and a new political maturity focused on autonomy of peoples revealed that food sovereignty proposes a reconceived form of sovereignty. This sovereignty challenges both state-centric and individualized conceptions of sovereignty, offering instead a framework for collective rights in multiple sovereignties that are fixed in local realities but also relational

to other sovereigns. In this formation, the state is an important sovereign entity in building food sovereignty. However, while the food sovereignty proposal calls for strengthening the external sovereignty of the state as a line of defense against transnational agro-capital and neoliberal free trade that damages local agricultural viability, it simultaneously challenges the internal sovereignty of the state by calling for multiple sovereignties within the state, and not constrained by state borders. The state is a tool in the struggle to be sovereign and autonomous from the corporate food regime and its neoliberal food relations.

This reconceived form of sovereignty proposed within food sovereignty, as represented in La Via Campesina, is largely congruent with the understanding of food sovereignty and the strategies for building it enacted on the local level in the Aguán. Aguán peasant communities have a vision for food sovereignty, and other peasant and indigenous groups in the country also have similar (but specific) goals of building food sovereignty, fixed in their own particular struggles, but in solidarity with one another. These multiple (food) sovereignties are not competing in a zero sum game; they call on the state as a sovereign to provide the conditions for building a project of food sovereignty through transformational agrarian reform, but they also construct their own local sovereignties through grassroots projects. The way that Aguán activists talk about food sovereignty and the way their movements strategically work toward that project demonstrate a congruence between local food sovereignty and the transnational discourse; that is, the way that the La Via Campesina definition of food sovereignty reimagines sovereignty is largely visible in the way that local movements conceive of it and are constructing it in practice.

However, while there is definitional congruence, and faithfulness to this definition of reconceived sovereignty in the way it is being enacted in practice, the local and global have different and specific roles in contributing to the realization of such reimagined sovereignty. The global level plays a largely facilitating role, both in terms of working to create the conditions at the international level to enable local food sovereignty and in terms of creating opportunities for horizontal networking between diverse and diffuse local movements. At the transnational level, getting the WTO out of food and agriculture, for example, which is a significant campaign of La Via Campesina (see La Via

Campesina, 2001), is an important effort in enabling nation states to have true external sovereignty and be able to negotiate the extension of neoliberal agricultural and trade policies within their geographies. The campaign to get the WTO out of food and agriculture is to put decision-making authority about food and agriculture back into the hands of states, with true external sovereignty, to empower and advance the interests of multiple other subnational (food) sovereigns.

However, acknowledging that the local and global have different roles in the advancement of a common alternative vision of sovereignty of peoples and nations also raises questions about what a global level project of food sovereignty *means* for food sovereignty in practice. Attempts to institutionalize food sovereignty as official discourse in the Food and Agriculture Organization or in a UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, for example, may run the risk of diluting or domesticating the radical politics and proposals of food sovereignty. Given the goals of food sovereignty to better the lives of food producers and improve the economies and resource access of agricultural communities, the success and efficacy of such global level efforts to institutionalize and implement food sovereignty from the “top down” must be assessed based on their contributions to local efforts to build food sovereignty.

The local and global “reconcile” insofar as the redefinition of sovereignty in food sovereignty negotiates local and global dynamics in and of itself, and the official definition of food sovereignty internationally in La Via Campesina is largely subscribed to by local *campesino* movements in the Aguán Valley. This reconciliation is the foundation of multiple resistances. However, the definition of food sovereignty outlined by La Via Campesina is also very broadly encompassing of difference. Local expressions of food sovereignty may subscribe to and emphasize some aspects of the general program of food sovereignty while giving less attention to others, in accordance with local and national historical, political, economic, cultural, and ecological contexts. There is a broad alignment of local and global, but there is also a distinction between the roles and goals of each movement space as well as differing interpretations of food sovereignty at the grassroots level depending on specific conditions and priorities. Accordingly, perhaps the most important question to ask in thinking about the project of food sovereignty is not a question about reconciliation between local and global. Rather, perhaps a more

relevant and pressing question is one that asks about the reconciliation of differing expressions of food sovereignty advocacy and practice *within and across* local and global movement spaces alike.

## **Food Sovereignty is a Collective Rights Framework**

Campesino movements in the Aguán experience severe human rights abuses under repressive military and paramilitary forces protecting the interests of private landed capital in the region. Many *campesino* activists at both the grassroots and national level identify the criminalization of social struggle, particularly of peasant struggle, as the greatest challenge faced by rural movements in the current political moment. In this context, Aguán *campesino* movements mobilize human rights frames to garner national and international solidarity to denounce abuses and pressure authorities for respect of basic human rights. Often, human rights frames focus on specific individual cases of activists who have been criminalized and targeted with repression, whether threatened, kidnapped, tortured, or otherwise oppressed. Human rights frames are also mobilized to respond to larger threats to entire communities, such as when a peasant settlement faces impending eviction or is being harassed by military or police.

These human rights frames are often focused on threats to individual activists or a specific community, they address the short-term needs and immediate threats to *campesino* movements, and function to rally the support and defense mechanisms needed to enable the survival and continuation of the larger peasant struggle. Peasant movements do not exist to counter human rights abuses. Rather, peasant movements experience human rights abuses *because of* their real political demands and implementation in practice (through land occupation and alternative production projects) of a vision of peasant autonomy and food sovereignty. While the long-term food sovereignty project continues, this continuum is punctuated by human rights threats and corresponding human rights framing to respond to such crises. Human right framing is a survival tactic and short-term, individualized issue frame. Food sovereignty, however, is oriented toward a long-term project as a proactive framework for collective rights of peasant communities and the Aguán region at large. Food sovereignty is a rights framework—Raj Patel (2009) describes it as a “right to have rights”—but rather than an

individualized framework, food sovereignty is focused on collective wellbeing of local entities advancing food sovereignty as a communal project.

This collective rights framing under the banner of food sovereignty is congruent with the discourse of collective rights within La Via Campesina. However, if we are to understand this alternative collective rights framework as an “alternative agrarianism” (McMichael, 2013b, p. 21) that also encompasses reworked relations between food producing communities and the environment, thinking about the reconciliation between expressions of food sovereignty in different movement spaces needs to go beyond the political. As Wittman (2009a; 2010) argues, the alternative rights framework of food sovereignty represents a new form of citizenship—an agrarian citizenship—that reworks the metabolic rift socially, culturally, and ecologically. As such, although there is congruence between La Via Campesina and grassroots understanding and enactment of food sovereignty in Aguán movements in terms of the *political* definition of food sovereignty as a framework for collective rights (rather than individual rights), the reconciliation of this political frame with *ecological* framing of food sovereignty as a socio-ecological right grounded in agroecological practice must also be explored.

## **Food Sovereignty Shows Tensions Between Politics and Agroecology**

In the Aguán, expressions of food sovereignty emphasize land security and peasant autonomy in using land productively for community development and food production to enable food security and an end to hunger in rural communities. Campesino movements struggling for land and livelihood acknowledge that the African palm production that dominates the region impedes food sovereignty, as palm is non-food crop, reduces biodiversity by being farmed as a monoculture, and requires high external (chemically intensive) inputs. Despite this critique, palm nevertheless occupies a space in the long-term vision of Aguán peasant movements, as cooperatives aspire to have peasant owned palm-processing plants to keep the benefits of their agricultural products in their communities by extending the limits of their control from harvesting to processing. This vision of a continued reliance on African palm, along with crop diversification and organic practice, reveals a tension with the broader food sovereignty

program and some of the movements' own discourse, which advocates environmental stewardship and peasant organic farming, rather than intensive agro-industrial farming methods.

This particular expression of food sovereignty in the Aguán highlights the extent to which, though implicated in transnational networks and global context, food sovereignty is fundamentally a local phenomenon that takes shape in accordance with specific local conditions and needs of peasant groups. As Edelman and Léon (2013) argue in support of a historical perspective to analyze land grabbing processes, “[t]he case of the Aguán suggests...that to understand current agrarian conflicts, it is necessary to grasp the historical dynamics that created the conditions of possibility for current forms of both dispossession and resistance” (p. 1700). The “new” Aguán movements are a product of historical processes of agrarian reform and counter-reform, and thus the agrarian conflicts in the Aguán are highly politicized, and peasant movements forefront democratization and restructuring of agrarian politics to enable peasant access to land and productive resources.

This tension also highlights that although the local and global in the project of food sovereignty may have mutual influence on the overall movement and its discrete manifestations, it is also highly relevant to question the reconciliation of political and agroecological movement expressions within and across different spaces of the movement. The definition of food sovereignty according to La Via Campesina is broad enough that it is encompassing of a diversity of experiences of dispossession and expressions of food sovereignty, such that local and global largely reconcile. In focusing on food sovereignty as a political project, the Aguán as the local level reconciles with the global (political) project of La Via Campesina. However, the agroecological efforts of other grassroots peasant movements in Honduras—and perhaps within the Aguán, as movements and their visions of food sovereignty continue to evolve—are in tension with a political vision that lacks a practical environmental element. If we are to identify rifts or gaps within the food sovereignty movement that might inhibit its potential to take root and go to scale across diverse contexts, a lack of reconciliation exists not between local and global, but between political advocacy and agroecological practice at the grassroots level in Honduras and across national and transnational spaces. This also brings to light

a tension between creating openness and fixing meaning. If food sovereignty is to be determined according to the autonomous decisions of local groups, yet food sovereignty is expected to be agroecological, there is a communicative contradiction.

## **Institutionalizing Food Sovereignty versus Building Autonomy**

Aguán peasant movements are engaged in a national resistance movement for democratization and the constitutional refounding of Honduras. In part, this radical democratic project is a time-specific response to the 2009 coup, which marked a rupture of 30 years of institutional democracy in the country. In addition to rallying diverse social movements (separately gaining strength in the years leading up to the coup) around a common issue frame and political enemy in the coup regime, the coup and the events that followed also functioned to deepen the conversation about and demands for democracy among popular movements. This process has not been without contention, as longstanding divisions within the movement manifested particularly clearly in the debate over whether to engage in the electoral process through forming a new political party as a branch of the national resistance movement or to continue the grassroots struggle in the streets as a means to achieve social and political change.

Campesino movements, among many others, have supported and been involved in electoral political processes through the LIBRE party. While certainly contributing to the broad-based radical democratic project for national democratization, such democratization efforts on the part of *campesino* movements are also part of furthering their own movement-specific demands and strategic goals. On a generalized and national level, democratization under a progressive government would change the conditions of struggle of social movements, many of which currently face extreme repression and criminalization for their resistance. National democratization and election of LIBRE party candidates also serves an instrumental role in furthering the institutional political demands of peasant movements, namely their proposals for transformational agrarian reform that have remained pending in National Congress since the proposal was first submitted in 2011.

Campesino movements demand that the state play a facilitating role in their food sovereignty project. The movement is not anti-statist, but it is also not state-centric. By pursuing a radical democratic project and the fixation of meaning (in the proposal for transformational agrarian reform), *campesino* movements pressure the state to create the conditions that would enable grassroots movements to further their visions for food sovereignty and be autonomous of corporate controlled agriculture and transnational agro-capital. Importantly, the proposed law for transformational agrarian reform does not fix a definition of food sovereignty, though it does mention food sovereignty and propose the creation of institutional supports to facilitate its realization. Rather, the proposed law lays out a comprehensive plan for social and economic policies to create the conditions to enable peasant groups to achieve food sovereignty. Although the law is national in scope, it does not exude nationalistic sentiments or include proposals for building food sovereignty on a national scale. Rather, it focuses on more localized conditions, facilitated through national institutional structures, such as the creation of regional offices of institutional bodies to facilitate the application of the law and handle disputes.

Radical democratic, institutional political demands and the proposal for transformational agrarian reform represent a challenge to the dominant paradigm and seek to carve out protections for peasant farmers against neoliberal food relations. By not fixing a definition of food sovereignty, this leaves openness for building food sovereignty in practice, with the necessary foundations in place, such as legal mechanisms for land access and political recognition for peasant cooperatives and other productive enterprises. In this way, the fixation of meaning through the radical democratic and institutional political project works for foster a favourable and democratized national environment to further the abilities of peasant movements to focus on their long-term project of food sovereignty. The ambiguity of the definition of food sovereignty within the proposed law maintains a degree of flexibility and openness for peasant groups to be engaged in deterritorialized and potentially cross-border conversations and activities to built a food sovereignty that is relational and multiple and based in solidarity.

Given the lack of political aperture in institutional political spaces, however, Aguán *campesino* movements have simultaneously used autonomous resistance

strategies to build their food sovereignty from the grassroots. Large-scale land occupations have been an important movement strategy in accessing and reclaiming land in the Aguán for peasant use. The projects being implemented, where land security permits, focus on economic and agricultural diversification and community development.

However, the autonomous form of building food sovereignty in the Aguán does not fully represent an alternative to the neoliberal agricultural model. Certainly, the cooperative organization of peasant producers with democratic decision-making structures and equally shared incomes for all roles in the cooperative represents an anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist alternative in practice, and land reclamation by occupation is powerful political and communicative act. At the same time, however, these cooperatives also produce African palm as a monoculture with chemically intensive methods; the same agricultural methods promoted by the Green Revolution that further enabled the widespread industrialization and neoliberalization of agriculture in much of the global south. Although some crops are being produced organically and there is a clear goal to produce more food crops to be consumed locally by peasant communities, palm monocultures still figure prominently in current—and visions of future—peasant agricultural production in the Aguán. Nominally, this suggests a need for increased autonomous resistance in the form of agroecological and truly alternative production practices to develop a concerted challenge to the regional neoliberal food and agricultural relations, including relations of production and relations of reproduction (involving both people and the environment).

Yet the continued reliance on African palm and its income generating potential is also a pragmatic decision to fulfill the material needs of peasant communities. This reiterates the extent to which food sovereignty is inseparably fixed in local context and takes shape in accordance with local realities and food and agricultural relations in the construction of alternatives. There is also a critique already present among the Aguán movements of palm production and monocultural agriculture as inhibitors of food sovereignty, and the individual movement and shared regional vision of food sovereignty continues to evolve in an ongoing process. In this way, a food sovereignty project in practice can be seen as a “real utopia;” it has idealistic goals and visions, but it also has to work for now while creating transitional steps that move the project toward that utopia

(Wright, 2010). Food sovereignty and decreased reliance on palm is a long-term project, but food sovereignty is also open ended and ongoing and has to work for the needs of communities striving to be sovereign in the present. That is, food sovereignty is defined as being, becoming, and the experience of being sovereign. If sovereignty represents local decision-making authority and control in food and agricultural issues, and the Aguán expression of this sovereignty includes monocultural farming and African palm production, then this is a “sovereign” decision in accordance with local needs.

Nevertheless, this does raise questions about the long-term power and potential of the concept of food sovereignty. Through more widespread adoption of food sovereignty as a movement frame, the movement has potential for growth and greater impact, but it also has the potential of becoming diluted and corrupt by “local interpretations” that stray from the goals and core values of food sovereignty. Agarwal (2014) highlights the potential disconnect between the outcomes of sovereign decision-making and the underlying values of the food sovereignty project at large, which may not necessarily align in practice:

Choosing not to farm for self-sufficiency, choosing not to grow food crops, choosing not to grow organically – these are all democratic choices, subject to the constraints that farmers face. There can thus be a serious conflict between the aims of the food sovereignty movement and what many farmers may choose to do. (p. 13)

Agarwal (2014) summarizes this tension as the challenge of “reconciling democratic choice and the promotion of a particular kind of agriculture” (p. 3). Food sovereignty is fundamentally open, empowering local groups to determine the extent and nature of their own involvement in conventional and alternative food systems. However, this political commitment to openness may be complicated and compromised by the types of decisions it enables, which may not fully align with the comprehensive ecological and anti-neoliberal goals of food sovereignty. Not only does this apply to politically motivated food sovereignty movements that lack an agroecological practice. Equally, expressions of food sovereignty as agroecological and production oriented efforts to build local or individual self-sufficiency without a corresponding political project renders food sovereignty a libertarian project of self-reliance absent of the radical and collective politics that food sovereignty has developed.

## Reflecting on Food Sovereignty as a Local and Global Political Project

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on political aspects of food sovereignty in discussing the definition and maturation of the concept *politically*. Politicization of food and agriculture and politicizing responses to hunger and food insecurity are certainly central to food sovereignty. However, the other cornerstone to food sovereignty is agroecology and environmental stewardship. Expressions of food sovereignty that focus more on environmental sustainability advocate agroecological and organic food production methods and are highly involved in anti-GMO campaigns to protect Indigenous crop varieties and ecological biodiversity. Largely, mentions of agroecology throughout this thesis have emphasized how peasant forms of agricultural production are a *political* act, rather than how they also have tangible ecological benefits. The nature of food sovereignty, fixed in local reality, is such that some elements of the global La Via Campesina program are more visible than others in local practice. Food sovereignty encompasses diversity of peasant movements throughout the world, and thus it is reasonable that a project of food sovereignty has to be some things and not others at any given time in a given place and context.

The agrarian situation in the Aguán, as framed by *campesino* movements, demands a political solution to land and food insecurities. That political demand and alternative is represented in the food sovereignty frame. Indeed, food sovereignty is always a political solution, because it asks deeply political questions, makes political demands, and is a concerted politicization of otherwise depoliticized ways of approaching food and agriculture, such as food security. Nonetheless, coming from a tradition of land struggles (in contrast to those coming from a of particular cultural practices, for example), Aguán movements combine their historical antecedents in agrarian politics with the “new” issue frame of food sovereignty to manifest resolutely political goals and approaches rooted in such political aspects of food sovereignty.

Given this distinctively political nature of Aguán movements and their core goals and movement strategies that advocate political change to address agrarian conflict and grassroots land and food insecurity, a political lens is an appropriate analytical approach,

but it also has limitations for its failure to incorporate ecological aspects of food sovereignty. This strong politicization of Aguán peasant movements (in accordance with La Via Campesina's transnational anti-neoliberal critique), and their corresponding vision of food sovereignty that is politically mature but agroecologically weak, calls for reframing the question to move away from focusing on local versus global. Rather, in light of this research, I propose a shift to questioning the potential and challenges involved in reconciling political and agroecological expressions of food sovereignty for the construction of a diverse but concerted movement to reimaging and rebuild alternatives to the global corporate food regime.

While local, national, regional, and transnational dynamics within food sovereignty are dialectical, efforts to advance food sovereignty within and between all movement spaces must be assessed for their impacts on local realities and how they are able to support and advance food sovereignty at the grassroots level. Furthermore, when it comes to exploring and understanding the lived experience of peasant people in being food sovereign and experiencing rural justice in practice, the reconciliation of diverse expressions of food sovereignty not only across these local, national, regional, and transnational spaces but also within the same "scale" becomes relevant and critical to the project of food sovereignty in theory and practice and how they can build true alternatives politically, socially, and ecologically.

## **Social Movements and the State: Learning from Other Contexts**

Comparing the Honduran experience and simultaneous use of institutional political channels and autonomous forms of resistance to other movements for food sovereignty in different political contexts is useful for highlighting the relevance of multiple forms of resistance. I will briefly draw on Brazil and Venezuela as case studies to compare to Honduras, highlighting the suggestions for movement strategy and action that can be drawn from these examples. While Venezuela may be iconic for its efforts in land distribution, Brazil and more specifically the MST Landless Worker Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*) provides a model that resonates more strongly with many movements in countries where the state is not supportive of

land reform nor leading initiatives to reform the agricultural sector. In Brazil and other contexts where there is a lack of political will to support agrarian restructuring, autonomous strategies are particularly crucial. In Venezuela, where the state has been a significant actor in promoting food sovereignty and land reform processes, the continued challenges despite institutional support highlight the limitations of strictly “top down” approaches to implementing food sovereignty.

In the case of Venezuela,<sup>39</sup> although Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution prioritized land reform and made a commitment to reform of agriculture policy, the situation remains tenuous. In the *Bolivarian Constitution* approved by popular referendum in 1999, three articles “address portions of the framework of food sovereignty” (Beauregard, 2009, p. 26). The government enacted the *Law of the Land* to address agrarian reform in 2001 and the *Law of Food Security and Food Sovereignty* in 2008 (Beauregard, 2009, p. 26). The state also has implemented various supporting programs, including cooperative development, Communal Councils, food distribution alternatives, agroecological institutes, and land reform (Beauregard, 2009, p. 27; see also Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2010). These complementary initiatives are “based on public space creation, autonomy and sovereignty at local levels, participation, and capacity building” as the way toward building food sovereignty in Venezuela (McKay and Nehring, 2013, p. 13).

Despite the institutional support, the process has been constrained by various factors, including the resistance of large landowners, class conflict, and the “relative lack

<sup>39</sup> Venezuela has a particularly long agricultural history, as Spanish colonizers did not think the area was mineral rich, and thus crop production emerged very early as a key economic driver (Wilpert, 2006, p. 249). Although agrarian reform legislation was first introduced in 1960, after the initial years of the law, the program ceased to be implemented by successive governments, and it effectively became a reform of land tenancy, but not of land ownership (Wilpert, 2006, pp. 251). By the end of the century, land distribution remained grossly unequal, with a small percentage of large landowners (5 percent) controlling the majority of the land (75 percent), much as they had prior to implementation of the 1960 agrarian reform (Wilpert, 2006, pp. 251-252). In the interim years, a land market based on buying and selling developed, large landowners began to “expel campesinos from their land” more and more, and companies increasingly became the owners of land as opposed to individual people (Wilpert, 2006, p. 252). The more recent land reform and food sovereignty programs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have to reckon with the legacy of this agrarian processes that have dispossessed small farmers in the transition to a neoliberal capitalist market in land and agriculture.

of organization of the peasantry into an actor" in advancing land reform (Rosset, 2009a, p. 119; see also Beauregard, 2009, pp. 32-34). Opponents of land reform, namely economic and landholding elite, accuse the government of an "assault on private property" (Wilpert, 2006, p. 259), undermining the legitimacy of the reform process and making the government seem radical within both national and international spaces for attempting to implement such perceived anti-private property reforms (Wilpert, 2006, p. 264). Similar to the situation in some rural areas in Honduras, Venezuelan *campesinos* continue to face difficulties of "ruthless landowners who are intent on maintaining control over their *latifundios*," corrupt national police and military, paramilitary forces, narcotraffickers, and a "relatively lawless, insecure, and chaotic" general condition in the Venezuelan countryside (Wilpert, 2006, p. 260). It seems clear that even if agrarian transformation were to be implemented in Honduras, the regional agro-capitalists in the Aguán would not easily cede to the reforms; grassroots resistance, resilience, and "bottom up" processes would be a necessary counterpart to "top down" strategies. Although the state can have a powerful role in creating the conditions for food sovereignty, "the generation of empowerment through participation and transformation of the social relations of production and property are important processes challenging the workings of the corporate food system" (McKay and Nehring, 2013, p. 26). In Venezuela, the state has led efforts to make agricultural planning a participatory and democratic process (Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2010, p. 273).

Evidently, a favourable policy environment is insufficient to establish the conditions for viable local food sovereignty and rural justice; peasant resistance and autonomous movement building remain central. Indeed, overall weakness suffered by Venezuela peasant organizations creates further challenges for the implementation of agrarian transformation. Despite "hav[ing] a sympathetic government, the peasants are not in a position to exert enough pressure on the government to force it to make sure the land reform is fully implemented" (Wilpert, 2006, p. 260). While institutional political support and state-led processes can be helpful, the case of Venezuelan peasant movements and state reform initiatives demonstrates that grassroots autonomous strategies are critical in ensuring that agrarian reform is actually carried out in the interests of peasant groups and contributes to fostering food sovereignty.

In Brazil, the MST has seen considerable success in advancing food sovereignty and “land reform from below” without formal support from the government. Even though the country “lacks a comprehensive agrarian reform policy,” peasant land occupations have been successful in establishing “agrarian reform settlements” that positively affect local economic development (Rosset, 2009a, p. 116). This speaks to the varying relationships between state, social movements, and land reform processes in the achievement of food sovereignty, the political and communicative power of autonomous movement strategies, and importantly, the multiple channels and forms of resistance that are part of gaining access to productive resources. The success of the MST in Brazil has “set the standard” for other landless and land-poor movements throughout the world, and land occupation has become “one of the central tactics in the contemporary struggle for land reform” (Rosset, 2009a, p. 120). In addition to Brazil, other countries have also seen an upsurge in land occupations as a means of reclamation, including Honduras, as well as Mexico, Nicaragua, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and others (Rosset, 2009a, pp. 119-120).

Furthermore, the MST also fuses radical peasant politics, including food sovereignty, with ecological stewardship through “actively integrating” both “peasant advocacy with agroecological practice” (Holt-Giménez, 2009, 152). As Holt-Giménez (2009) explains:

Though the MST initially promoted industrial agriculture among its members, this strategy proved unsustainable and economically disastrous on many of its settlements. In 1990 the movement reached out to other peasant movements practicing agroecology, and at its fourth national congress in 2000, the MST adopted agroecology as national policy to orient production on its settlements.... The integration of agroecology into the new agrarian movements is a welcome development because it helps advance forms of production that are consistent with the political and social goals of food sovereignty.... (p. 153)

The MST, therefore, is a particularly relevant example for Honduran food sovereignty movements,<sup>40</sup> given the similar political contexts of the inexistence of agrarian reform legislation, the importance and popularity of land occupation as a movement strategy, and the integration of agroecological practice with peasant politics in a way that Aguán movements are arguably lacking.

Venezuela as an example of state-led agrarian reform and food sovereignty initiatives demonstrates the limitations of a legal or policy framework to facilitate thorough and complete agrarian transformation. Other countries, such as Brazil, do not enjoy the same favourable orientation of state policies—however limited or challenged those policies may be in praxis—and thus “land reform from below” is a viable, and indeed essential, approach to building food sovereignty and its necessary condition of land access for rural and peasant peoples. While *political* processes through mutually reinforcing institutional and autonomous channels is essential to pursuing radical peasant projects of food sovereignty and transformative agrarian change, a corresponding grassroots project of agroecological production is also necessary to enact the social, economic, political, and ecological vision of food sovereignty in practice as a true alternative to industrial agriculture. For Honduran movements, these examples point to the importance of maintaining strong grassroots resistance and autonomous forms of struggle in conjunction with working to advance agrarian reform through the state to provide the *conditions* for food sovereignty. However, food sovereignty itself and must be built from the bottom up, and agroecological practice is an important counterpart to the political project of self-determination that truly completes food sovereignty as an autonomous and anti-neoliberal alternative to the corporate food regime.

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Aguán movements already look to the MST as a strong role model and maintain communication with the movement. When asked in an interview about the role of international networking in the movement and its contribution of such communication to the struggle at home, one Aguán (youth) movement leader recounted having the opportunity to visit and study with the MST in Brazil. He explained how this was an important experience for him personally as an activist and for the larger struggle as he brought what he learned back the movement (Interviewee 6).

## Potential for Future Research

In this section, I present potential areas for future research in the burgeoning scholarship on food sovereignty. I also identify related themes of communication in anti-neoliberal social movements that warrant further research and attention in movement praxis. Some of these suggestions for further research have emerged directly from the findings presented in the evidence from this project, while others relate to the limitations of this research project or gaps within the broader food sovereignty literature. I also identify scholars already investigating these areas and whose work represents strong and important contributions to the field.

As I have argued above, the lack of reconciliation in practice of agroecological movements and political expressions of food sovereignty suggest that further research is warranted in this area. Such research should explore what the barriers are to this sort of movement convergence and the practical challenges involved in developing a more concerted and integrated struggle for alternative food and agricultural politics and praxis. A valuable contribution to such research might include case studies of food sovereignty movements or projects that have bridged agrarian politics and agroecological practice in a meaningful and effective way, as well as conditions and movement strategies enabling such reconciliation. My research suggests that although food sovereignty movements support agroecology in name, there may be limited practical application of such alternatives. Where the movement is more developed politically than ecologically, the implementation of a true alternative to the corporate food regime in practice at the grassroots may be limited. On the other hand, as Holt-Giménez (2009) argues, though it is now not unusual to hear food sovereignty being used in grassroots agroecological farmer networks, “there are few, if any, avenues for them to exercise this commitment politically” given their lack of integration into farmer advocacy organizations (p. 152).

Relatedly, but moving beyond potential division among movements that all subscribe to the language of food sovereignty, further research is also warranted to explore divergences between food sovereignty and other kinds of food movements, despite sharing largely overlapping goals and visions. Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck (2011) provide a valuable foundation and analytical framework for beginning to

approach such questions.<sup>41</sup> Their research outlines “neoliberal” and “reformist” trends within the corporate food regime and “Progressive” and “Radical” trends within global food movements. According to the framework, Progressive movements “advance practical alternatives to industrial agri-foods,” but do not go as far as Radical movements in their calls for structural change, redistributive rights, and food sovereignty (p. 115; see also Holt-Giménez, 2009; 2010). As Holt-Giménez and Shattuck right argue:

The systemic divergence within the food movement is visible in the different constituencies and strategies of organizations working for immediate food aid to the hungry and those struggling for structural change to prevent hunger in the first place.... Under pressure, these fractures could lead to more divergence and fragmentation within the food movement, undermining the possibility of [food] regime change. (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011, p. 135)

Indeed, if food movements and theorists are to imagine the transformative potential of true food regime change, the ability of diverse expressions within the global food movement to reconcile, or at least converge strategically, will be an important question.

Perhaps relatedly, the extent to which “peasantness” has been rendered a political identity and the role this has in peasant movements may be relevant to further analyses of food sovereignty, agrarian politics, and peasant studies. Peasant movements, especially landless peasant movements, are class struggles in a traditional sense. Through land grabs and other forms of dispossession, many peasants are forced to become waged labourers, lacking access to land as the basic means of production. Traditional peasant struggles, such as those waged in Honduras in the 1960’s and 1970’s, fought for land reform to redistribute the productive resource of land and enable

<sup>41</sup> Eric Holt-Giménez (2006) has also done extensive research on farmer-to-farmer extension networks in Central America for the promotion of traditional indigenous agroecological methods. Such methods have demonstrated their efficacy and resilience, particularly in studies conducted in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch that compared conventional farms to those practicing soil erosion prevention techniques such as terracing, as well as other agroecological practices (pp. 67-76). These movements, though extremely strong in terms of cross-border relationship building and agroecological practice, are not engaged in political advocacy, focusing instead on grassroots education. Where and how the farmer-to-farmer movement and ideology has influenced politically oriented movements, or analyses of why there have traditionally been separations between the two types of movements, are important questions to grapple with in social movement and food sovereignty theory and in movement practice.

peasants to be producers. The “new” peasant movements in the Aguán and elsewhere maintain these class struggles for land and productive autonomy, but they also “go beyond” their predecessors. Food sovereignty, seed sovereignty, and other movements that strive to preserve and reassert peasant knowledge and livelihoods constitute this “newness,” and this raises the question of how “peasantness” is understood and invoked in movements as not only a class position, but also a political identity. Equally as important, if not more so, to understanding the formation of “peasantness” as an identity is the analysis of how identity factors intersect with class in the formation of political subjectivity within peasant movements, including movements for food sovereignty.

Research on the political subjectivity and class and identity politics of Indigenous peasant movements, though evidently different, may provide a useful starting point for similar research concerning non-Indigenous peasant movements. Otero and Jugenitz’s (2003) research on Indigenous peasant struggles in Latin America and their resultant theory of “Political-Class Formation,” for example, is a valuable framework for synthesizing the importance of both class and identity that may have some relevance for non-Indigenous peasant movements (see also Otero, 2004). Similarly, Courtney Jung’s (2008) research explores intersections and transitions between race, class, and ethnicity in the adoption of Indigenous identity by Zapatista peasant rebels and its implications for the movement as a tool of struggle. While “peasant” identity holds no such “moral force” as Indigenous politics (Jung, 2008), there are attempts to institutionalize the rights of peasants in the UN (see Edelman and James, 2011; Claeys, 2012), and thus such identity factors may become relevant to a wider range of peasant movements, beyond those identifying as Indigenous. However, in the challenging process of “institutionalizing subversion” (Claeys, 2012), the benefits of such institutionalization as a way to legitimize “peasant” identity politics also need to be appropriately weighed against the potential for institutionalization to enfeeble radical peasant politics (and their class analysis), such as food sovereignty.

Another future area of research emerging from this project is the question of how to integrate “food sovereign” food producing communities into (anti-capitalist) global trade flows in ways that help rather than hinder the realization of food sovereignty’s emancipatory potential. This question is especially important for producers of export

crops, such as African palm, but also food crops that can be produced more sustainably such as tropical fruits and coffee. The project of food sovereignty prioritizes feeding local communities, strengthening local markets, and focusing on local trade, but it is also not a program for rural isolationism. Ultimately, questioning the reconciliation of local and global has to extend beyond movement spaces of producers to those at the other end of the supply chain. If food sovereignty is to go to scale as a political, economic, and agricultural project, producers' efforts to build food sovereignty have to be mirrored in and respected by alternative sourcing and distribution practices concerned with social and environmental justice.

One critical aspect of food sovereignty research not discussed in this thesis is the issue of gender relations in the food system and the role and rights of women in rural communities, visions of food sovereignty, and their attendant agrarian reform processes. On a global scale, feminization of agricultural labour is a major trend of the corporate food regime. Women farmers produce up to 80 percent of food in the world's poorest countries, and over 50 percent of food globally (Mehra and Hill Rojas, 2008; Nyéléni, 2007). Gender relations and the rights of women farmers occupy an important place in discussion within La Via Campesina and grassroots peasant groups. While a number of scholars acknowledge the centrality of transformed gender relations within the food sovereignty project and some adopt a specifically gendered or feminist lens (Desmarais, Wittman, and Wiebe, 2011; Sachs, 2013; Wiebe, 2013), Park and White (2013) argue that "few attempts have been made to systematically integrate gender into food sovereignty analysis" (p. 1). The importance of such research in Honduras is also evident given the recent release of a report on the situation of rural women in Honduras and their ability to access land and credit (Irías, 2013), as well as the longstanding existence of national peasant organizations specifically focused on women's peasant mobilizations.

Another important area of consideration for both social movements and researchers is the articulation of rural and urban movements. This includes the articulation of rural agrarian movement with urban food movements, but also urban class struggles more broadly to create synergies and a concerted movement for building anti-neoliberal alternative in countryside and city alike. The integration of rural movements

with the struggles of the urban poor has been an important factor of success for the Brazilian MST, which has integrated *favela* dwellers into its already established rural agrarian movement largely focused on land occupation and reclamation through the idea of “rurban” settlements (Stedile, 2002, p. 92). The significance and efficacy of this movement building strategy for the MST suggests the potential relevance of similar movements in other contexts as well in order to realize similar benefits of having a concerted and united front for building alternatives across rural and urban spaces for countering neoliberal hegemony. The potentials and challenges, or the disconnects and synergies, in terms of movement communications and the articulation of political subjectivity in the process of bridging urban and rural struggles may also be an important area of inquiry to contribute to understanding and furthering such movements in practice.

Urban movements, specifically urban food and agriculture movements, also warrant further research and movement development for their pragmatic and material benefits (in addition to their political potential) of building resilience in the face of climate change, fostering genuine food security, and remedying the metabolic rift to regenerate nature in urbanized environments. Such urban food and agriculture movements are likely to have growing significance, as increasing out-migration from country to city and trends of urbanization push society toward becoming a “planet of slums” (Davis, 2006). The potential for integration of a food sovereignty framework into these movements, and what food sovereignty means in urban environments where food production is not a primary livelihood, are relevant topics of research for scholars of food sovereignty and urban agriculture alike. Schiavoni’s (2009) study of New York City and its urban food movements as a “particularly fertile ground for a food sovereignty movement” (p. 686) is representative of this type of research in the global north. In the global south, studies of the success of urban agriculture and agroecology in Cuba in greatly contributing to the country’s foodstuffs and increasing food security are also an important precursor for exploring the role and potential (politically and ecologically) of urban agriculture and urban food movements in building food sovereignty and social and economic alternatives to neoliberal capitalism (see Altieri and Funes-Monzote, 2012; Febles-González, Tolón-Becerra, Lastra-Bravoc, and Acosta-Valdés, 2011). Furthermore, in Honduras specifically, food politics and food justice initiatives are gaining traction in urban areas; a recent report details urban agriculture projects in Tegucigalpa and the

tangible benefits of urban gardens (Plataforma Agraria, Madre Tierra, and Crece, 2013). The report is titled “Urban Hopes, Food Security and Food Sovereignty,” and yet the role of food sovereignty in these “urban hopes” or how urban garden projects contribute to urban food sovereignty is not discussed, further flagging the integration of the food sovereignty framework in urban movements as an important area of inquiry.

Finally, turning away from food sovereignty to questions of communication in social movements and the political projects of anti-neoliberal social movements, I advocate research that is grounded in the social experience of movement activists. In communications, this means not privileging digital networks over more traditional forms of media and communication experiences within and between social movements. Although social media and other online communication tools have undoubtedly played a role in enabling social movements, digital communication technologies should not be reified. Ultimately, these are tools of social movements that exist in offline spaces. Focusing too intently on the immateriality of social movements in digital networks risks effacing the critical movement development that takes place in physical space through real interactions, as well as the existence and legitimacy of movements less “connected” to the online world but rooted in real material struggles. Furthermore, the apparent spontaneity of social media obscures the articulation that occurs in online spaces, creating strong links within and between movements through digital tools, and real solidarity through recognition of common interests, goals, or enemies and mutual support in like projects of anti-neoliberal struggle.

## Conclusion

One of the contributions of this project is its analysis of what sovereignty *means* within food sovereignty, a topic that has perhaps received too little attention in studies of food sovereignty. I have sought to interrogate the meaning of sovereignty within food sovereignty, how it finds expression in practice, and how this vision of sovereignty is a reconceptualization of traditional and state-centric notions of sovereignty focused primarily on territoriality in a way that “reconciles” local and global. This analysis of the meaning of food sovereignty has helped to shed light on the multiple forms of resistance—institutional political strategies through the mechanism of the nation state

and autonomous forms of struggle—as not mutually exclusive but coexisting in a negotiated way (in accordance with local conditions) in the advancement of a reconceived vision of multiple sovereignties.

This begins to address Edelman's (2013) concern that “[t]he nature of ‘sovereignty’ itself...is rarely scrutinized in the food sovereignty literature or by food sovereignty movements, most of which find themselves in adversarial relationships with the states in which they operate” (p. 19). Movement strategies that work through the nation state, Edelman argues, “imply strengthening the states with which the movements are typically in conflict” (p. 19). While this is indeed the reality, the meaning of sovereignty within food sovereignty, as explored in my analysis, demonstrates that the ideal of food sovereignty is to create a condition of multiple sovereignties where local food sovereigns simultaneously benefit from strengthening the external sovereignty of states while also challenging the internal sovereignty of state.

Although Aguán movements and other advocates of food sovereignty rely to some extent on the state in building local food sovereignty, the state is intended to play a largely facilitating role. Furthermore, in Honduras, the transformation of the state through a political project of democratization and constitutional refoundation underlies the demands on the state. These demands propose institutionalization of the necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for building a project of food sovereignty in practice at the local level with the facilitating support of democratized state structures and policies that aim to enable autonomous grassroots realization of the emancipatory potential of food sovereignty. Of course, such a radical political project will inevitably face challenges in its realization in practice. This is why transitional moments, actions, and formulations of food sovereignty are valid and necessary steps in working toward such a transformative project with implications for social, political, economic, food, and agricultural relations. Nevertheless, the creative potential of food sovereignty is a valuable contribution to political imaginaries for anti-neoliberal alternatives.

Although there is congruence between food sovereignty as a frame at the transnational level in La Via Campesina and the local level in the Aguán, the congruence is in the political aspects of the food sovereignty project. Indeed, at its core, food

sovereignty challenges the depolitization of food issues within food security and its reliance on market mechanisms to feed the hungry and asks deeply political questions about power and control within the food system. Food sovereignty proposes a redistribution of productive resources to the peasant, small and medium sized farmers who produce food for the world. In the transnational discourse of La Via Campesina and in the Aguán (and Honduras more generally), agrarian reform is a fundamental aspect of this redistributive transformation of agricultural relations of production and local and regional food systems. However, food sovereignty does involve a significant ecological project, and the ecological goals of food sovereignty cannot be discounted, even though they are not centrally present in the implementation of food sovereignty in the Aguán.

Food sovereignty is a radical and creative political project that fundamentally politicizes issues of food and agriculture by calling into question local and global food system power dynamics that serve transnational agribusiness to the disadvantage of peasants and small farmers. Food sovereignty's reconception of sovereignty as multiple sovereignties and collective rights framework has great emancipatory and creative potential, but also challenges of realization and implementation. Food sovereignty demands autonomy from the corporate food regime, but also assigns a role to the state in building local sovereignty and carving out spaces of resistance. In this struggle, the state and its sovereignty and autonomous resistance are seen as tools to enable anti-neoliberal struggle to build alternative spaces "outside" and in relation to the corporate food regime. This challenges the clear delineation between autonomous and electoral means to achieve anti-neoliberal goals. Food sovereignty is an ongoing process, not to be achieved by reaching a clear endpoint, but continuing to be built and defined. This open ended process is demonstrated by how food sovereignty discourse of La Via Campesina has evolved from a project of national self-sufficiency to one of local autonomy, as well as how the vision of food sovereignty in the Aguán continues to develop separately in different movements and collectively in the region. Food sovereignty questions structural power relations in food and agriculture and proposes an alternative to the neoliberal food regime by assigning a role to states in protecting the interests of locally sovereign entities, while empowering those local sovereigns to have decision making authority over their own food production and distribution processes.

Although the transformation of the state is a valuable and perhaps necessary component of anti-neoliberal struggle, for food sovereignty to be enacted the state must not be monolithic. Sovereignty must be multiple in a way that affords the state the ability to resist transnational capital as a truly sovereign entity without creating a zero sum game in which the state is the sole sovereign over a national territory. Rather, the framework of food sovereignty proposes multiple sovereignties that challenge the internal sovereignty of the state, enabling local levels to have autonomy in how they organize, represent themselves, and how they participate in the food system. In this formulation, the state becomes a tool of social movements (specifically food sovereignty movements) to negotiate between the local and global. In this way, social movements propose to use the tools of neoliberal capital against the system itself, in which case the movement also need be aware of how such a strategy may reproduce the oppressions and exclusions of global capital or the state.

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## **Appendix A. Interview Protocol**

### **Context and introduction:**

Can you tell me a bit about the history of agrarian reform and land struggles in Honduras, as well as how it relates to your organization?

What is the current political context? How is food sovereignty part of this context?

### **Organization and aims:**

What is the primary problem faced by your organization?

What are the aims of your organization?

What are your main (broad) strategies for advancing and achieving these aims?

Strategically, do you focus on working in local/national spaces or on international networking? What is the reason for this focus? What are some examples of working in national spaces? Of international networking?

Do you find these two priorities to be complementary or in tension with one another?

### **Food Sovereignty:**

What is food sovereignty (according to your organization)? What is your ideal vision for food sovereignty?

How does your organization enact principles of food sovereignty (right now)?

What are the barriers to enacting food sovereignty?

What do you need to achieve your food sovereignty vision and how do you work toward that goal?

### **Communication:**

What do you see as the overall role of communication in the movement?

What forms of communication are most important in the movement and why? (meetings, networking, phone, internet, other publications, etc.)

Do you network with other *campesino*/food sovereignty organizations in other regions of Honduras and outside Honduras? If so, can you tell me which ones? What is the nature of the relationship and your communication?

What other organizations/movements do you communicate with, nationally and internationally, other than *campesino*/food sovereignty organizations? What is the nature of the communication?

How do you balance the priorities of focusing on your own day-to-day struggles versus communicating and sharing information/knowledge with other movements? Do you find these tasks to be complementary or in tension with one another?

Do you have any resources or publications that are part of your communication strategy (website, blogs, pamphlets, etc.)? Is it possible to have access to these materials?

**Conclusion:**

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Is there anyone else you can think of who I should talk to as well?

Do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix B. Summary of Interview Participants

Interviewee <sup>42</sup>	Role of participant	Description of organization	“Scale” of focus	Name of organization	Date	Location	Interview Number
1	Journalist, activist	In solidarity	International	Escribanas, FIRE	22 Mar. 2013	Tegucigalpa	1
2	Researcher	Research	National	UNAH	27 Mar. 2013	Tegucigalpa	2
3	Activist, author, filmmaker	Honduran resistance	Local, national	Independent	30 Mar. 2013	Tegucigalpa	3
4	Activist	In solidarity	Local, international	Voz de Abajo	1 Apr. 2013	Tegucigalpa	4
5	Secretary	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MUCA	4 Apr. 2013	Tegucigalpa	5
6	President	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MUCA	4 Apr. 2013	Tegucigalpa	5
7	Director	Human right organization	National, international	FIAN	4 Apr. 2013	Tegucigalpa	6
8	Representative	Peasant organization	National, international	La Vía Campesina	16 Apr. 2013	Tegucigalpa	7
9	Researcher	Research	National	UNAH	17 Apr. 2013	Tegucigalpa	8
10	Movement member	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MARCA	24 Apr. 2013	San Isidro, Aguán, Colón	9
11	Movement member, volunteer	Human rights organization	Local (Aguán)	Observatorio Permanente de Derechos Humanos del Bajo Aguán	24 Apr. 2013	San Isidro, Aguán, Colón	9
12	Coordinator	Indigenous peasant movement	Local (non-Aguán)	COPINH	27 Apr. 2013	Vallecito, Colón	10
13	Representative	Indigenous peasant movement	Local (non-Aguán)	Maya Chortí	27 Apr. 2013	Vallecito, Colón	10
14	Activist	In solidarity	International	Independent	28 Apr. 2013	Vallecito, Colón	11
15	Community radio host	Indigenous movement	Local (non-Aguán)	OFRANEH, Wagia Radio	29 Apr. 2013	Vallectio, Colón	12

<sup>42</sup> Interviewee numbers listed as they appear in the text if cited. This number differs from “Interview Number” in the final column because, as discussed in Chapter 1, a single interview involved more than one participant in some cases. In the text, quotes are attributed to individual interview participants by using the corresponding “Interviewee Number.”

Interviewee <sup>42</sup>	Role of participant	Description of organization	"Scale" of focus	Name of organization	Date	Location	Interview Number
16	Cooperative President	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MUCA	30 Apr. 2013	La Lempira, Aguán, Colón	13
17	Movement member	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MUCA	30 Apr. 2013	La Lempira, Aguán, Colón	13
18	Coordinator	Human rights organization	Local (Aguán)	COPA	1 May 2013	Tocoa, Colón	14
19	Movement leader	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MCA	1 May 2013	Guadeloupe Carney, Colón	15
20	Director	Peasant organization	National	ADROH (also ARCAH)	3 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	16
21	Director	Peasant organization	National	UCIH	3 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	16
22	Director	Peasant organization	National	ANACH	3 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	17
23	General Secretary	Peasant organization	National	CNTC	6 May 2013	Comayaguela	18
24	Regional rep. (Colón)	Peasant organization	National	CNTC	6 May 2013	Comayaguela	18
25	Social Work Secretary	Peasant organization	National	CNTC	6 May 2013	Comayaguela	18
26	Finance Secretary	Peasant organization	National	CNTC	6 May 2013	Comayaguela	18
27	Enterprise Development and Forestry Secretary	Peasant organization	National	CNTC	6 May 2013	Comayaguela	18
28	Director	Peasant organization	National	CODIMCA	7 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	19
29	Administrator	Communications network	National	RDS-HN	7 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	20
30	Activist	Peasant movement	Local (non-Aguán), international	Biodinámica Costa Rica	13 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	21
31	Director	Peasant organization	National	ANAFAE	15 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	22
32	General Secretary	Peasant movement	Local (Aguán)	MUCA	15 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	23
33	Movement member	Peasant movement	Local (non-Aguán)	MOCSAM	18 May 2013	Coowle, San Manuel Cortes	24
34	Community leader, community radio host	Indigenous movement	Local	OFRANEH, Faluma Bimetu Radio	19 May 2013	El Triunfo de la Cruz	25

Interviewee <sup>42</sup>	Role of participant	Description of organization	"Scale" of focus	Name of organization	Date	Location	Interview Number
35	Communicator	Human right organization	National	COFADEH	22 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	26
36	Activist	In solidarity, human rights organization	Local, international	Rights Action	23 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	27
37	Researcher, consultant	Research	Local (Aguán), national	Independent (formerly Red Comal)	24 May 2013	Tegucigalpa	28