

Carleton University

Farming the Margins of Neoliberalism: Food Sovereignty in Canada

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## **Abstract**

Canadian civil society organisations and activists increasing participation in food governance during the neoliberal period has led to calls for food sovereignty, a discourse that has its origins with the peasants of the global South who found themselves at the margins of the global food system. However, as one of the world's largest exporters of agricultural products and supporter of trade liberalisation Canada is arguably at the centre of the global food system. What happens when the 'peasant way' and food sovereignty is adopted in a wealthy northern country? I argue that the emergence of food sovereignty discourse illustrates how food governance in Canada has shifted through the neoliberal period in two ways. First, farmers' authority and autonomy has been constrained and eroded through the neoliberalisation of agriculture. Second, the capacity and authority of urban food security organisations and activists has increased during the same period. Thus food sovereignty discourse for farmers sees neoliberalism as a site of resistance, while the adoption of food sovereignty discourse by community food security activists represents neoliberalism as a site of governance.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction <sup>1</sup>

In Canada, food sovereignty is increasingly being adopted by civil society organisations (CSOs)<sup>2</sup> to frame food governance. The most prominent organisation (and case study for this thesis) is The People's Food Policy Project (PFPP), a coalition of farmer organisations, international solidarity non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community food security NGOs that is in their own words creating Canada's first comprehensive food sovereignty policy. This is an intriguing development because food sovereignty was initially a resistance discourse produced by *La Via Campesina* - a transnational social movement organisation (SMO) of peasants and farmers at the margins of the neoliberal food system - for the inclusion of agriculture in World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements. However, as one of the world's largest exporters of agricultural products and as an adherent to trade liberalisation Canada is arguably at the centre of the neoliberal food system and therefore a beneficiary. This means that in

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis draws on a series of collaborations between Peter Andr e and myself. The collaborations were very synthetic so that rather than documenting the countless interventions I reference the following papers (Andr e and Martin 2010, 2009; Martin and Andr e 2010b, 2010a).

<sup>2</sup> A note on terminology. The groups that are represented in this work are classified into three types. First, civil society organisations (CSOs) are defined as "a field of power relations ... in support or opposition, to powers in state and market" (Cox 1999, 25) and are mutually constituted by the market and the state (Germain and Kenny 2005, 11). In other words CSOs are imbricated with the liberal (or neoliberal) state, and capitalist relations, rather than merely being outside the state or not the state. The category of CSO, encompasses the other two classifications. Non governmental organisations (NGOs) are formalised groups that are aligned in some way with state and market relations (Lipschutz 2005). Social movement organisations (SMOs) are less formal (although they may become formalised such as trade unions) and are constituted by a set of emotional commitments (Lipschutz 2001).

Canada food sovereignty discourse is emerging in a different context and will produce different effects and subjectivities.

The variegated effects of the neoliberalisation of Canadian agriculture are keenly felt by farmers. Farmers are now implicated in a universalised market which has the effect of constraining all but the largest farm operators. Farmers' dwindling numbers (they are currently around 1% of the population (Canada 2006)), urbanisation, and trade liberalisation has reshaped agriculture and as a result has reshaped the political and economic position of farmers. The neoliberal turn has constrained farmers by rolling out universalised standards and regulations that dictate how and what they should farm in order to access the market. In addition, the financialisation of agriculture has hobbled farmers with debt, further constraining their autonomy. The result has been an erosion of the rural communities that have sustained farming and agriculture in Canada. The universalised processes - whether standards, markets or flows of capital and their variegated effects - have also implicated other farmers and peasants around the world in similar struggles.

Canadian farmers are now implicated in a universalised market whereas non governmental organisations (NGOs) are now implicated in the provision of community social welfare services as the neoliberal turn has eroded support of universal programs. NGOs began to adopt food (in)security – an administrative discourse that has its origins in the 1974 Rome World Food Conference – to frame their growing participation in the provision of emergency food through food banks and other social projects in the 1980s.

However, as the roll back of state programs continued through the 1990s NGOs grew and eventually became stand alone community food security institutions. The institutions now provide ‘non emergency’ services from school lunch programs, and farmers’ markets to Good Food Boxes<sup>3</sup> and draw authority from mechanisms that parallel state models such as food policy councils and food charters. The community food security organisations are now creating authority in action by determining how social welfare is administered.

### **Food Sovereignty Background**

Food sovereignty grew to international prominence through the work of *La Via Campesina*, an international organisation established in 1993. *La Via Campesina* represents small-holder farmers, pastoralists, fishers and other food providers from around the world. It was created in order to establish a common front of resistance against the impending inclusion of agriculture (and especially the further liberalisation of agricultural trade) within the WTO in the mid 1990s (Desmarais 2007). *La Via Campesina* initially defined food sovereignty as “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity” (Ibid, 34). However, in 2000, it was expanded to include the “right of peoples to define their agricultural and food policy” (Ibid.). Food sovereignty has its origins in the farm organisations that felt that national policies that protected their interests were being stripped away by the neoliberal policies being instituted at national and international

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<sup>3</sup> The Good Food Box is a buying ‘club’ that centralizes the purchase of fresh produce and co-ordinates the regular distribution of produce boxes usually using volunteers in neighbourhoods. Coordination is often provided by food security organisations. The initial program was started in 1994 by FoodShare in Toronto and has since spread across Canada.

levels. For example, the WTO Agreement on Agriculture restricts governments' role in defining their own national agricultural food policies while at the same time requiring them to import at least 5% of national consumption of food (Desmarais 2007, 110). After over ten years of engagement with food sovereignty the definition was expanded once again at Nyeleni, Mali at the Forum for Food Sovereignty (See Appendix B for full Declaration). The declaration is summarised in the six pillars of food sovereignty used by the PFPP: food for people, values food providers, localises food systems, encourages local control, builds knowledge and skills, and works with nature. Significantly, at the end of the forum the declaration was read aloud by Colleen Ross, from the National Farmers Union (NFU) which illustrates the importance of Canadian farmer organisations' role in the adoption of food sovereignty.<sup>4</sup>

Food sovereignty increasingly is being targeted by academics<sup>5</sup> in a variety of empirical fora, from rural development (Patel 2009), international political economy (McMichael 2008) and social movements (Teubal 2009). However, food sovereignty has multiple meanings, depends on context (McMichael 2006) and is looking "increasingly odd" (Patel 2009, 665). Whereas food security is relatively easy to trace as a discourse food sovereignty is becoming more and more inconsistent in meaning (Patel 2009).

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<sup>4</sup> The Canadian representation also included Cathleen Kneen of both Food Secure Canada and the PFPP and Eric Chaurette of Inter Pares an international solidarity NGO and partner of the PFPP (Chaurette 2010).

<sup>5</sup> A survey of Google Scholar for the term "food sovereignty", limiting searches to Social Sciences shows the growth as follows 2000- 8 articles, 2001- 15, 2002- 20, 2003- 62, 2004- 64, 2005- 86, 2006-121, 2007-137, 2008-147, 2009-205.

At first glance food sovereignty is presented as a universal tonic for the universalised effects of globalisation and neoliberalisation, whether unfair trade practices (Desmarais 2003, 2002), hunger (Cohn and Yale 2006), the 2007-8 food crisis (Bello 2008; P. Nicholson and Delforge 2008; Rosset 2008), or environmental degradation (Cohn and Yale 2006) among others. By targeting neoliberalism (Patel and McMichael 2004, 248) or globalisation (Shiva 2003), a universalised discourse of struggle and rebellion is produced. However, upon a closer look two threads of literature emerge that have applications to the Canadian context. One thread focuses on the role of NGOs and the promotion of development projects and the second thread focuses on emancipatory social movements. The NGO literature focuses on the promotion of agro-ecological practices and the material realm through sustainable agricultural programs for farmers and farmer organisations (Cohn and Yale 2006; Altieri and Nicholls 2008), a second thread focuses on inequality whereby food sovereignty is promoted as a logic that can foster a democratisation of local and national food systems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2009; Teubal 2009). Holt-Gimenez identifies a divide between NGOs who support sustainable agricultural practices and the farm organisations themselves, as represented by *La Via Campesina*, with their more radical call for policy changes (Holt-Giménez et al. 2010). Desmarais (2007) also identifies a split in the early days of the establishment of *La Via Campesina* (in the early 1990s) between the NGOs that sought to speak for the emerging global farmers' movement and the farm organisations themselves.

There are three gaps and tensions in the literature that this thesis addresses. First, except for Kneen (2010) – who is actually one of the key leaders of the PFPP in Canada – and Desmarais (2007), there is little discussion in this literature about what food sovereignty means in a “wealthy northern country” (Kneen 2010, 229). In addition, most food activists in Canada are working in an urban context. However, urbanisation itself has been identified as part of the process of peasant and farmer dispossession that has produced food sovereignty (McMichael 2004). If food sovereignty is “rooted in agro-ecological relations” of small farms, as McMichael argues, how do urban programs fit in? There is little work critically examining the meanings of food sovereignty in these specific contexts.

Second, the literature tends to address food sovereignty at a fairly abstract level. It is presented as a guiding principle to foster the democratisation of local and national food systems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2009; Teubal 2009) a new political economy (McMichael 2008) and a new epistemology (Rojas 2007). McMichael argues, for example, that the food sovereignty lens politicises the food system (2008). However, work remains to be done in defining the multiple meanings and contexts of this discourse and what it means in day-to-day practice.

Finally, little work has been done on the subjectivities that are produced by food sovereignty and how authority is drawn (or constrained by) the discourse. Unlike the global South where property and wealth distribution are often at the center of food

sovereignty debates, the problematics of neoliberalism<sup>6</sup> are different in Canada. For example, there is little debate on sovereignty over resources or land redistribution as part of these projects, indigenous claims notwithstanding. Farms are almost exclusively held privately in Canada with no calls for land reform. Even recent land grabs in Canada such as the consolidation of massive farms upwards of 50,000 acres (Agrimony 2009; Ladurantaye 2009) have occurred with little public debate but are relegated to the business pages. Community gardens in Canada are located in public spaces, as are farmers' markets whereas most farms are privately held. Therefore in Canada, subjectivities and understanding of food sovereignty are shaped differently than those in the global South because the problematics of neoliberalism are different. The literature on food sovereignty is relatively silent on these issues to date.

This study intersects with a number of ongoing debates in agrifood studies: First, the emergent use of governmentality analytics in agrifood studies. Traditionally, agrifood studies have been framed through a political economy framework, so this research is a productive effort to unsettle academic debates by engaging in both frameworks. Second, these analytics illuminate the operation of governance that falls outside of formal institutions, and in particular civil society organisations, which have traditionally been framed through social movement theory. By framing this thesis with a hybrid theoretical lens of both political economy and Neo-Foucauldian analytics I am able to make new

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<sup>6</sup> "Neoliberalism is... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2).

connections as well as connect to past literature in agrifood studies. In addition, while academic debates and discussions are important this research has real world applications. First, this study has policy implications because it will help to illuminate alternative conceptions of food governance. Presently, Canada has no formal food policy. The rising calls for food sovereignty combined with political moves to forward a new vision of food policy by the federal Liberal and NDP parties makes this study timely and pertinent to public debate. Finally, by engaging in participatory research with the People's Food Policy Project this project is engaged in real world problems that activists negotiate in their day to day work. Therefore this research project can extend political horizons by helping to forward a vision for an environmentally sustainable food policy framework.

McMichael (2009a) argues that the 'peasant' way (in reference to *La Via Campesina*) is a challenge to the neoliberal subject. Allen and Wilson state "It is only when national sovereignty (under neoliberalism) is universally called into question that the artificial separation of politics from economics, defining capitalist modernity, is fully revealed" (2008, 52) so that alternative conceptions of political-economic sovereignty and subjectivity emerge. If food sovereignty helps to create linkages among peasants and other civil society forces and a means to reconfigure neoliberalism (Massicotte 2010) what is produced when food sovereignty moves to a wealthy northern country that arguably benefits, albeit unevenly, from neoliberalism? This leads to the research questions that structured this work.

### **Research Question**

The primary questions are shaped by Neo-Foucauldian analytics: How does the strategic deployment of food sovereignty open up new political, economic and social spaces?

(What is it producing? What is it limiting?). What subjectivities are being produced by this discourse and what are their effects on food activists? A secondary line of questions situates and contextualizes food sovereignty discourse in a political economy frame: What has food sovereignty emerged from and what it is a reaction to?

The primary argument of this thesis is that food sovereignty is produced by neoliberalism. My argument complicates the narrative of food sovereignty as merely resistance to neoliberal logic and practices. I argue that the emergence of food sovereignty discourse illustrates how food governance in Canada has shifted over the last thirty years in two ways. First, farmers' and their allies' use of food sovereignty discourse illuminates how farmers' authority and autonomy has been constrained and eroded, and is in fact primarily a resistance discourse. Second, by tracing the shift in discourse from "food security" to "food sovereignty" I am able to illuminate how the capacity and authority of urban food security organisations and activists has increased during the same period. Food sovereignty has two primary discourses in Canada: as "ethic" representing power relations produced from farmers' resistance and struggle against neoliberalism, and as "tactic" representing how community food security activists have gained authority from the strategic negotiation and leveraging of neoliberal logic and practices. Food sovereignty as "ethic" is a discourse of transnational solidarity and resistance. Food

sovereignty as “tactic” represents how urban food security activists have gained expertise and autonomy in the realm of food governance.

Food sovereignty for farmers sees neoliberalism as a site of *resistance*, while the adoption of food sovereignty by community food security activists represents neoliberalism as a site of *governance*. The first claims of authority and resistance is represented by Canadian farmer Colleen Ross’ statement at the Forum for Food Sovereignty Nyeleni, Mali,

Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed all the world’s peoples...our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism (Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007).

Wayne Roberts of the Toronto Food Policy Council and prominent leader of the food movement illustrates how neoliberalism is claimed as authority. He states: “Neoliberalism is rampant in the food movement, in other words get off our fucking backs” (ESAC panel 2010). By building on interviews with activists working on the People’s Food Policy Project and its effort to develop a “concrete food sovereignty policy”, this thesis explores how food sovereignty discourse is emerging in Canada and what it is producing and limiting.

### **Overview of Chapters**

This thesis starts by outlining the hybrid theoretical frame and methodology. In the review of political economy and Neo-Foucauldian analytics I highlight the tensions produced by this lens. To map out my methodological approach I explain my social

justice and participatory research positions as well as the methods and mechanics of the research process and analysis. The third chapter traces, in broad sweeps Canadian agricultural governance and three political economy periods; Staples, Keynesian and neoliberalism. This chapter explains how shifts in policy rationales facilitates particular state-farmer relations and reveals the complex governance relationships that effect farming in Canada. The crises of the 1970s are highlighted as the neoliberal project is tentatively introduced, and the periodisation underscores how the structural changes have eroded the authority of farmers. Chapter 4 is primarily a discourse analysis of food security and the subsequent uptake of food security by NGOs to frame their work. The chapter illustrates how from the 1980s community food security organisations have gained authority and autonomy as the state was rolled back with neoliberalism. The fifth chapter analyses the work of the PFPP and activists by tracing the discourse of food sovereignty. This chapter includes some of the unintended consequences of the new focus on farmers and recommendations for the PFPP as they move forward with their work. Finally, I conclude by pulling together many of the threads of the thesis and return to address the tensions that mark this work, as well as offer suggestions for future research directions.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theory and Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The context that food sovereignty discourse has emerged from in Canada is specific and produces different subjectivities in comparison to the global South. In order to theorise this context and how activists are able to draw from it or are constrained by it, and in turn gain or lose authority, I use a hybrid theoretical framework of Political Economy and Neo-Foucauldian analytics. The methodology is framed primarily by my normative social justice position as well as participatory community-based research. This means that I come to this research with biases towards certain theoretical frameworks but my theorisation was triggered by the activists I interviewed. My focus on agricultural institutions was provoked by activists with a farming background and their stories of rural poverty, farm debt and the role of capital and regulations (or “shitty rules” (I-5)) as a touchstone for their food sovereignty discourse. My focus on food security discourse was in response to NGO activists use of food security as a touchstone and reference when speaking about food sovereignty.

This approach is underscored by three assumptions that structure this thesis. First by adopting Neo-Foucauldian analytics in conjunction with a political economy framework, I aim to illuminate the context of power relations that are shaping food sovereignty discourse and how food sovereignty is shaping power relations. As a

consequence, I am able to situate the production of subjectivities within the Canadian food and agriculture political economy. Second, by engaging in participatory research I aim to critique and illuminate “a knowledge system which subordinates common sense [and in turn] subordinates common people” (Gaventa 1993, 30). This bias in approach allows me to privilege activists’ knowledge and reflect on my own position as researcher. Finally, and most importantly, this work uses critical theory, as derived from the ancient Athenian jurisprudential term *krisis*, the “art of making distinctions, an art considered essential to judging and rectifying an alleged disorder in or of the democracy” (W. Brown 2005, 5). The effect of this approach is to place me in a position where research and analysis is creative, normative and fragile. As a creative endeavour it opens up new possibilities and a normative position allows me to articulate my social justice aims. By underscoring the fragility, or “weak theory” (Gibson-Graham 2006) of the project I articulate my reflective posture and openness to critique and dialogue. Hopefully, this effort will help forward the aims of the PFPP. A caveat: There is a tension that I work with throughout this theoretical framing between uncertainty and argument, between political economy and a more discrete Neo-Foucauldian analytic as well as a normative posture and a dispassionate analysis. My interest is in highlighting the puzzles and questions that propelled me down this path. My job is to apply theory not as an unyielding frame but rather to use it as a set of guidelines as we move through the puzzles. As Harvey states, theory replaces one complexity we understand for one that we don’t, underscoring the uncertainty of our position as academics.

Food and agriculture have long been the focus of political economists and the first section outlines some of the major theoretical streams. Neoliberalism has also been extensively theorised by political economists and I outline Peck and Tickell's (2002) work that periodises neoliberalism. The political economy frame provides the context that is drawn on for authority. Neo-Foucauldian analytics provide a lens that is discrete and teases out the power relations of food sovereignty discourse. In particular I discuss discourse analysis and governmentality. Methodologically this chapter traces out the processes and mechanics of how I interviewed, researched and then analysed my findings. The hybrid theoretical frame combined with the participatory methodology has provided for a complex frame that I hope illuminates the intriguing quality of food sovereignty in Canada.

### **Political Economy**

The practices and power relations between the state, the market and CSOs are drawn out by the analytic of political economy. These relations are illuminated by focusing on primarily material changes that are then linked to ideological and institutional changes. A critical political economy lens highlights the importance of historicising material changes. In other words change is always possible as “the present society is no solid crystal but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing” (Marx 2007, 16). This approach is informed by a school of critical International Political Economy (IPE) as typified by Robert Cox. It is distinguished from the American IPE school as typified by Robert Keohane by the interdisciplinary and historical approach and straddles what has

been called the British and American schools of IPE by Cohen (2008). This section begins by tracing the political economy of Canadian food and agriculture in order to situate the genealogy of the PFPP as a social movement and in particular food sovereignty as a discourse in Canada.

Food and agriculture have long been the focus of political economists. Although this interest can be traced back to classical political economists such as Smith, Locke and the Physiocrats, most contemporary political economists are rural sociologists (Buttel 1990; Goodman 1981). Another prominent school are the international political economists who use Wallerstein's world system theory and have developed a regime analytic to explain shifts in the global food system (McMichael 2004; Friedmann 1992; Wittman 2009). In Canada, there is a school of political economists who focus on agriculture and food, and one might argue, take a more pragmatic approach and focus on policy and community engagement (MacRae 1999; Koc et al. 2008). Another group can also be slotted into international political economy but rather than world systems theory they draw on other theorists such as Gramsci (Andrée 2007) and South American thinkers such as Escobar (Massicotte 2010) in order to examine civil society responses. This brief review has illustrated the varied ways a political economy lens can be brought to bear. However, these analytics focus on discrete areas that do not fully illuminate food sovereignty in Canada. Although food sovereignty emerged from an international political economy this analytic does little to illuminate how food bank workers in

Toronto or farmers in Nova Scotia are negotiating changes over the last 30 years. In addition rural sociology is too discrete of a focus to include urban activists as well.

The political economy lens that is most helpful is Peck and Tickell's (2002) periodisation of the neoliberalism. This lens brings explanatory strength to the emergence of food sovereignty discourse as a product of neoliberalisation. They draw on the regulation approach which illuminates how capital accumulation is supported by a mode of regulation, which is normalised through institutions (Boyer and Saillard 2002). Regulation theory integrates analyses of political economy with analyses of civil society and the state, reflecting the complex relationships that enable and normalize the accumulation of capital. Production and consumption are highlighted by this approach and in turn, the *deus ex machina* regulation or how capital accumulation is normalised. In sum, regulation theory brings into focus how changing forms of the reproduction of capital are secured as a social relationship (Jessop 1990). In turn, Jessop (1990) reminds us that artefacts such as law and policy can be found in successive modes of regulation. These artefacts are often retooled and this explains how past policies are found cheek by jowl with neoliberal policies. Importantly, neoliberal projects have reformulated liberalism through internationalisation, crises of national economies, and in response to these changes there has been a rise of new social movements (Jessop 2002).

Peck and Tickell (2002) theorise neoliberalism as a historically specific process that privileges market solutions to regulatory problems and intensifies commodification often mobilizing market tools to leverage further capital accumulation, what they call

neoliberalisation. Neoliberalisation is distinguished from neoliberalism by its contingent and contested operation. The logic of neoliberalism is somewhat fixed but its operation - neoliberalisation - is variegated because of the heterogeneous regulatory landscape it encounters. That is, neoliberalisation is a process of translation where the logics of neoliberalism are adopted and/or rejected in specific sites and at specific times. In turn, the operation and effects are variegated and heterogeneous.

To give specificity to neoliberalisation Peck and Tickell (2002) periodise the tentative neoliberal projects in the 1970s, to the “roll-back” and “roll-out” of neoliberalisation through the 1980s and 1990s (2002). Throughout the 1980s there was a roll back of typical Keynesian state and collectivist projects where local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power (or what Rose has called responsibilisation (1999)) and international institutions were given power without responsibility (Peck and Tickell 2002, 386). The state on the one hand was ‘rolled back’ and withdrew from providing social services, and on the other hand prescribed a free market tonic for social and economic maladies and ‘rolled out’ trade liberalisation and other regulations that normalised capital accumulation. Social projects were localised and the market was universalised.

Neoliberalisation has been theorised through a political economy lens by numerous scholars (Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002; McMichael 2006; Patel 2006; Potter and Tilzey 2007; Prudham 2004) by discussing how the authoritative power of the state has been rolled back and/or rolled out to support capital accumulation. These more

generalised ideologies often become the touchstones that shape the navigation of relations. However, there are limitations to the regulation approach even with a more nuanced analysis of social normalisation. The discourse of food sovereignty is productive of subjectivities and while a political economy framing can illuminate contexts it is less satisfactory in tracing micro-politics.

Guthman's work serves as model in this regard. While political economy focuses on state relations and how capital relations are produced, a further analytic is needed to understand how activists negotiate and draw authority from (or are constrained by) neoliberalism. Guthman (Guthman 2008a, 2007, 2008b; Allen and Guthman 2006) argue that the governmentality analytic illuminates how neoliberalisation shapes subjectivities, and through this analytic offers an explanation for why neoliberalism figures so prominently in food politics.

Food sovereignty discourse targets neoliberalisation as a problematic and it is imperative to trace out a coherent story that illuminates how activists draw on it. As a result I have framed neoliberalism as a coherent project, and I describe its patterns and touchstones throughout my argument. However, the neoliberal project itself is much more contingent and flimsy because it is part of a particular set of power relations. The operation of power and how it is framed is expanded on in the next section.

### **Neo-Foucauldian analytics**

I use discourse analysis to interrogate food sovereignty because this analytic allows for a more complex reading of resistance and a governmentality analytic provides a more

complete reading of the power relations in the Canadian context. In particular, it shows what food sovereignty discourse is producing and what practices and effects buttress it. Governmentality provides explanatory strength to the operation of power because it “makes explicit the forms of political reason and ethical assumptions” by examining the problems of rule (Walters and Haahr 2005, 290). That is, by focusing on the problematics and how they are ‘solved’ this analytic can illuminate how activists are negotiating power through their work. This includes how they understand and engage with actually existing neoliberalisations either as a solution or as a problematic.

Discourse analysis is an active and political act because exposed power is “render[ed] ... fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1978, 100-101). The operation of power is not only shaped through language drawn from cultural narratives such as the adoption of particular terms, metaphors, and modes of reasoning, but discourses are also structured by social and institutional practices (Foucault 1978, 97). Discourse is shaped by a complex context including materiality and historical circumstance and the effect is to have a normalizing power in politics that shapes horizons and limits actions, in other words, discourse is productive and disciplinary (Andrée 2007, 24). However, Foucault has underscored that the relations of power are above all, productive (Foucault 1989, 276) so that actors routinely define and reproduce themselves and their interests in relation to dominant discursive frames, such as neoliberalism. As a result, some forms of resistance are enabled and produced both within and in relation to the existing discursive field. For example, food sovereignty has

been produced by a combination of power relations including the emergence of industrialised agriculture and free trade that are inarguably global practices with particular effects in the Canadian context. That said, the discursive context shapes how reality is described in authoritative and objective ways and which emerge and fade, or in other words, are contingent.

In order to understand the power relations that are traced through discourse analysis Foucault has identified a triangle of power:

Accordingly, we need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty – discipline – government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security (Foucault 1991, 102).

Rather than a singular understanding of power there are multiple configurations.

Importantly, Brown (2003) argues that Foucault's triangle of power (sovereign, discipline and government) is overdrawn in order to create analytics. These analytics then can help to illuminate the variegated effects and operation of power.

To apprehend how struggles are constrained or enabled the power relations that coagulate around food sovereignty discourse can be delineated. By making distinctions between power relations an overall analysis of society and its operation might be sketched out (Walters and Haahr 2005, 290). However, Foucault reminds us to attend to techniques that are articulated in local, regional, material institutions rather than more legitimized forms of power. In turn, analysis should be sensitive to how subjectivity is

produced and how techniques “work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours, etc.” (Foucault 1980, 78). In other words, I am able to illuminate how power relations operate and in turn the effects of food sovereignty as a strategic discourse by focusing on the micro-politics of food sovereignty discourse produced by food system activists.

### **Governmentality**

In *Security, Territory and Population*, Foucault defines governmentality as three things. First, it is the result of a process that transformed the Middle Ages “state of justice” into the “administrative state” that became “governmentalized” (2007, 108). Second, it is an ensemble of “institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics” (ibid.). Lastly, it is a type of power that leads to specific governmental practices and a “series of knowledges” (ibid). Governmentality is a historically specific mode that exists within late modern liberal or neoliberal democracies that includes how subjects govern themselves and not merely how to govern others. It is a fusion of government and rationality that has the effect of illuminating how governance is a combination of institutions and knowledges (W. Brown 2006). Governmentality is not totalizing, but one can identify patterns that are similar and related with ties that are both strong and weak. It is a pattern of practices that has a heterogeneous set of attributes that are related or tied, in some cases directly and in others quite tenuously. By focusing on the activities and practices of the subject the “conduct of conduct” is revealed. “Governmentality is in this

sense a complex in which the exercise of political power gets thought and organised in terms of the government of social and economic processes, and the promotion of the population” (Walters and Haahr 2005, 298). While it is important to sketch out initial definitions of governmentality as an analytic, Rose reminds us, it can also be a starting point to devise other theories (1999). Therefore, the governmentality analytic is a means to begin to theorise and reflect on food politics at a more discrete and particular level but is also productive of new theorisations.

The governmentality approach is a method for an empirical mapping of governmental rationalities and techniques. How then to map new forms of governance forwarded by civil society? Civil society operates in the space of community, and, it is the “correlate of a political technology of government – a transactional reality existing at the mutable and contestable interface between political power and that which is outwith its reach” (Rose 1999, 198 citing Burchell). It is forwarded by leftist intellectuals as the panacea to both the problems of the state and the market. Scepticism toward community as a site of effective political engagement may be warranted, nonetheless it is just as useful to look at the effects of the political rationalities being forwarded by civil society as it is to look at state produced political rationalities. By forwarding new conceptions and reframing political space outside conventional configurations new political spaces are created, which in turn creates new power relations.

The practices and the power relations produced in and around food and agriculture are drawn out by the analytic of governmentality. The governance of most agriculture and

food in Canada is underpinned by a universalised market which is rationalised through a combination of technological and productionist practices supported by state interventions. However, in reaction to the constellation of neoliberal practices and ideologies being produced by supra-national agencies food sovereignty discourse originated from the margins, specifically peasant organisations in the global South. Furthermore, food sovereignty discourse, is sketched out by SMOs in Canada as a governable space (usually community or local), and produces and structures subjects in specific ways.<sup>7</sup> Community becomes a site of a new subjectivity, a new individualized actor who is unique, localized and specific (Rose 1999). Most Canadian agriculture remains premised on a national export economy but food sovereignty discourse complicates the scale and site of governance and authority. Authority has slid from expertise located in the state to the right to choose as in ‘consumer choice’ and the ‘right to know’ provenance of food.

The governmentality approach has been criticized as privileging a neoliberal hegemony that blinds academics to new political opportunities instead of recognizing modest achievements of resistance (E. Harris 2009). While it is important to not ‘see’ neoliberalism everywhere there are real effects of neoliberalisation that must be taken into account as activists negotiate and contest it. In addition, it is important to recognize that neoliberalisation is a site of mobilisation, in particular for those who are using food

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<sup>7</sup> In the global South food sovereignty initially claimed its authority from national spaces although recently claims of authority are far more inconsistent (Patel 2009).

sovereignty in their work, as Harvey states “universalistic rhetoric can lead to unified oppositional rhetoric” (Harvey 2005, 178).

It is through the examination of the mechanisms of governance that operate outside of formal institutions that this analytic illuminates the emergent and contested areas of power. Power is not homogeneous but discrete and particular. As Inda states, “it is important to look not just at the forms of collective and individual identity promoted by practices of government but also how particular agents negotiate these forms at how they embrace, adapt or refuse them (2008, 11). By focusing on how activists negotiate food sovereignty discourse I am able to focus on and interrogate the “limits that are reached in fields of power and meaning” (Coombe 2007, 287). It is necessary to attend to the various scales and contexts at which identity claims are made. This is not merely a focus on resistance and power but how forms of struggle take up resources afforded by different regimes and discourses of power and the subject positions they offer (Coombe 2007). Historically, specific strategies use the available discursive resources in particular struggles. To avoid seeing power as static and fixed, then, the “historical sedimentation” (Coombe 2007, 287) must be sifted through in order to find points of difference and limits in order to go beyond them and expand the political horizon. The concept of governmentality “demands that we go beyond asking whether neoliberal rationality adequately represents society, to consider how it operates as a politics of truth” (Coombe 2007). As an analytic it illuminates the margins and contested spaces that are represented by food sovereignty within historically specific sites. It is because food sovereignty is

nascent in the Canadian context that it is a remarkable research site where we can examine this negotiation at the margins of resistance.

Brown (2006) extends the notion of how bodies are governed through *identity* rather than solely a rationalized calculation that is more typical of governmentality studies which build on Neo-Foucauldian scholarship:

Political subjectivity has shifted from unified across a nation to a fragmented hybrid set of multiple identities. A plural field emerges where political subjectivities are accessed through a range of resources and techniques of subject formation, that are outside the control of a coherent discourse of civility or the technologies of political government (Rose 1999, 178).

Inherent in this statement is the understanding that subjectivity itself is often on the margins and multiple. Activists draw on fluid and contingent vectors that are illuminated by tracing the discourse of food sovereignty. Subjectification is simultaneously individualizing and collectivizing. Identities are always collective and relational (Rose 1999, 46).

Whereas Foucault sought out sites such as prisons and asylums in order to represent articulations of a society's practice, the PFPP as a social movement represents a very different articulation. By following Foucault's study of practices – rather than institutions, theories or ideology – I am able to interrogate the sites where rules are imposed and reasons given and the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect. Food sovereignty is emergent, and practices are not set and are in fact unstable and open to improvisation. Consequently, specific programs such as the PFPP

may crystallize into institutions, inform behaviour and act as grids in the future.

However, the norms of any program are contested, negotiated and often rejected. The subjectivities that coalesce around a program are just as emergent as food sovereignty itself and the identities that are produced by it.

To theorise the production of food sovereignty by global civil society we can look to Lipschutz (2005). Global civil society is a manifestation of two dialogic forms. One works on morality through institutions whereas social movements work through productive power to transform the ethical behaviour to reconstruct the structural principles governing both domestic and global political economy. Importantly, NGO's, as part of global civil society, are constrained in their political action by their relationship to the state and focus on reform and are shaped by morality. They are participants along with the state and/or the market in neoliberal governance. NGOs often operate social services such as community food security groups providing social welfare services rather than work towards structural changes. Social movements produce ethics and Lipschutz offers some explanatory power to how the discourse of food sovereignty is somewhat fractured in the Canadian context between an ethic and a tactic which will be expanded on in Chapter 5.

Governmentality allows me to engage in an ongoing and lively conversation and debate and contribute to it with new empirical data. Combined with periodisation of neoliberalism I address the critiques that portray neoliberalisation's 'impact' on 'passive'

locals (Hart 2004, 91)<sup>8</sup>. My aim is to illustrate how neoliberalisation is a constitutive process and this study is a means to reconfigure understandings and practices. In sum, following Rose (1999) this thesis is not a sociology of social movements it is a genealogy of social movements. A genealogy traces out how discourse shapes subjectivity and as a result it is an attempt to trouble the present, in order to extend the capacity of individuals and collectivities to contest authority. However, the combination of a genealogy traced alongside a political economy framework produces a number of tensions.

### **Tensions**

This hybrid theoretical framework is not tidy and neat and the tensions produced by this framework cannot be fully resolved. The specific and particular quality to this research site resists theorisation due to the broad sweep of history combined with the interviews of activists who use food sovereignty in their day-to-day work. Nevertheless they can be traversed by recognising the weaknesses and strengths of each part of the framework.

By historicising capital accumulation and the social relations that support it the political economy framework makes gross generalisations that are in conflict with the more discrete Neo-Foucauldian analytics. For example, the discussion of the Canadian agricultural political economy focuses on the material and structural shifts over the last one-hundred years. This necessitates broad generalisations that elide the social relations that fall outside of conventional understandings of agricultural production and econometrics as well as the particularities and heterogeneity of agriculture in Canada. It

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<sup>8</sup> I have taken liberties with Hart's work. Her target of enquiry was globalisation I have substituted neoliberalisations

follows that the conception of power relations are framed by capitalism and this constrains alternative conceptions of resistance especially for those who are marginalised.

Neo-Foucauldian analytics do highlight the particularity and heterogeneity of power relations and this presents a tension of drawing too discrete a theorisation to food sovereignty and eliding the real effects of material shifts that shape it. The thesis negotiates through these theoretical tensions by using the political economic frame to broadly contextualise the changes in Canadian agriculture, and by drawing on this frame highlight the shifts that are particular to the last thirty years of neoliberalism and then draw very specifically on Neo-Foucauldian analytics to theorise the discrete power relations that are produced by food sovereignty over the last two years in Canada. By clearly theorising the temporal shifts from broad to discrete and from structural to discourse my aim is to reveal the internal logic or argument of the hybrid framework. Now I turn to my methodological approach.

## **Methodology**

### **Social Justice**

*The “disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition...is...the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.” Adam Smith*

This project is a modest answer to calls from agrifood scholars to work towards social justice by engagement of “real people in their real lives” (Allen 2008; Constance 2008; Friedland 2008). I align my work with Brown’s definition of *krisis* –that it is the art of

identifying and rectifying disorder (W. Brown 2005, 5). Social justice targets inequality as the primary disorder and it is here that I state my ethical stance. As Allen states [social justice] “reflects both an ethical position and tactical wisdom” in agrifood studies (2008:158). A tension has been identified between programs that support local food and the suitability of these programs to forward social justice (Allen and Wilson 2008), for example, and consequently, one must be cognizant of how ethical positions can obscure and hobble alternative positions. Working towards social justice is not merely a declarative position but instead a process of engagement; praxis illuminates power relations (Wakefield 2007). Engagement with participants has the additional benefit of tempering social justice soap boxing.

### **Participant/Community-Based Research**

*It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with humans. Edward Said*

Agrifood politics has been a site where the expertise of industry and the state has been privileged. It is through participatory research that some of this knowledge can be decentred. Gaventa states that “technical, expert knowledge has prevailed over knowledge derived from experience, common sense and citizenship” (1993, 22).

Expertise itself has shaped how problems are understood, and this leads to technical regulations defining political problems. Furthermore, the broad experiences of citizens are relegated to the sideline in debates that are framed by specialized knowledge. By

engaging with activists through participatory research I aim to privilege their knowledge, in order to assist in forwarding social justice aims.

Participatory research begins with a problem, often identified by key participants, who, with the researcher, design the project and shift the relationship. The initial problem or puzzle was the effectiveness of food sovereignty as a discourse for political mobilisation. There are various entryways along a continuum of participatory research, from the researcher being embedded in the target community itself to an associated relationship that is more academic and observatory. My position within this is towards the latter. The research was the outcome of discussions between myself and Amanda Sheedy, coordinator of the PFPP, and Cathleen Kneen, a member of the PFPP's management committee. My work involved primarily volunteer efforts such as editing some of the communication materials, assisting with compiling policy recommendations, taking minutes at meetings and acting as the Anglophone recorder at the weekend retreat for the animators in March 2010. These activities allowed me to assist the project as well as pursue my research efforts.

The researcher's role in participatory research is to assist the community in identifying a topic of investigation, ideally, as part of the community. As both researcher and activist, I am considered by the community to be an 'insider'. I have been working as part of this community from a number of different positions from active practice to more scholarly work. Park (1993) speaks of how participatory research blurs the line between knowledge and practice, because the action itself of researching is transformative. Most

importantly the assembled findings serve as topics for collective reflection (Park et al. 1993, 15). This is in line with Park's (1993) work that states that the explicit goal of participatory research is to forward a more just society, and this is the foremost reason it is an appropriate approach for this thesis. However, Park (1993, 2) undermines agency by stating that social justice targets the "oppressed and powerless", and here I take exception. Placing the academic in this position of targeting the oppressed and the powerless merely supports a relationship that 'knows'. My aim is rather to privilege knowledge that is not normally recognized by the academy, by illuminating the practice of food activists, and reflecting it back to them, through a series of reports and presentations, that included acting as a recorder at meetings.

While social justice is the goal of this project, its vantage is from a critical position that seeks to highlight the strengths as well as the limits of food sovereignty as a strategic discourse and I do not seek to forward the aims of PFPP in an unreflective or thoughtless manner. This means that I approach with the luxury of having time to reflect on the results and am able to take the additional step of analysing and present the results (somewhat) unencumbered from the workings of the PFPP itself.

Following Bondi (2005), I believe that it is through the knowledge of those on the margins that transformative work occurs, not from the centre. This approach also recognizes that there are various forms of resistance that are not always visible (Scott 1987; Ploeg 2008). The PFPP as a target project is important because it seeks to include

marginalised groups in the shaping of Canadian government policy. How those groups are defined and represented is one of the concerns of this work.

Finally, my aim is to privilege food activists' knowledge by making it the site of research study thereby troubling and decentring official knowledge that dominates the discourse of agrifood in Canada. It is because participatory research recognizes that "a knowledge system which subordinates common sense also subordinates common people" (Gaventa 1993, 30) that it is an appropriate part of my methodology. Following this, participatory research is a critique that challenges the assumptions of the status quo (Park 1993). This work is underscored by "weak theory" (Gibson Graham 2006) which means that the theory is not rigid and is presented so that it can be challenged and leaves openings for other interpretations. In practice this means that I have shared drafts of research with those who were interviewed and involved in the PFPP. Leaving openings for others to engage in the work is a challenge.

Whilst working on my research I would longingly read analysis of static or written texts and discussion of state or corporate documents. It is here that I realized the value and the difficulty of participatory work. In the past, especially looking at historical documents, I could work and interpret texts, create my own narrative with little challenge (Martin and Andrée, forthcoming). In this case, those who are represented by me are alive and well which means that they can question the analysis thereby shape the work and challenge my own tendency to make the work appear seamless and definitive.

## **Research and Analysis**

The research process has involved a series of conversations with the chair of Food Secure Canada, Cathleen Kneen, and the coordinator of the PFPP, Amanda Sheedy, in order to focus the research and coordinate access. The research involved interviewing nine activists (seven animators plus two key leaders) and attending a series of meetings. The meetings included: “*Serving Up Food Sovereignty in Toronto: Cooking Up a Plan for Action*”, where approximately 100 people attended including food producers, community leaders, academics, and agency staff; The Working Group on Canadian Science and Technology Policy multi-party policy roundtable entitled “*Exploring Food Sovereignty: Implications for Canadian Development Policies*” which included approximately seventy representatives from government, agriculture, industry, academia, and civil society; and a PFPP Kitchen Table meeting in Ottawa with approximately twenty-five people including students, academics, civil servants and interested public. Finally, in March 2010 I was the recorder for a three day retreat for the PFPP with approximately thirty-five participants and two facilitators.

Invitations to participate in the research were sent via email with the majority requiring at least one follow up to elicit a reply. All except one person readily accepted the invitation and this resulted in nine in-depth interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and were as short as 45 minutes and as long as 90 minutes, with most lasting about 60 minutes. Six of the interviews were conducted face to face and three were conducted via phone. All were followed up with email correspondence. The interviewees

were in Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, Quebec, and New Brunswick. During the interviews notes were taken and then revised immediately afterwards to fill in gaps and expand on the notes. In addition, the notes were typed and further expanded with thoughts and reflections on the process and discussion.

As Corbin and Strauss (Corbin 2008) state, the interview process is an opportunity to talk in depth about issues, both for the interviewer and those being interviewed. As a researcher I do not sit objectively, I sit subjectively, and as Finley has stated “it is vital for researchers to find ways to analyze how subjective and intersubjective elements influence their research ... the researcher engages in an explicit, self-aware meta-analysis of the research process”. What she refers to is reflectivity, which is a process of “outing” the researcher (Finlay 2002). The effect of the process is not only to highlight the impact of the researcher and give insight into the dynamics of the interview but opens up the process and enables scrutiny in order to evaluate the research process itself (Corbin 2008). By ‘outing’ myself and the research both conversations and interpretations are opened up and the limitations are also illuminated. For the purposes of this study reflexivity can be understood as a way to not only examine my own reactions, and the interview process dynamics, but as a way to limit my position as a researcher and to privilege the position of activists and their knowledge.

Importantly, the interview process included observations and reflections which were shared with the activists. This not only affirmed or clarified concepts it also was a time to share experiences and connections between myself and the activist, such as living

in small rural communities. I would also make connections between activists as seemed appropriate. For example, I was able to repeat statements from past interviews to confirm or to clarify concepts and understandings. These connections created links between the activists and also contextualized the activists within a group. This also was a way to determine who felt outside and where connections and silences existed as well. The limits of the researcher need to be constantly highlighted in order to situate the researcher as a learner as well as illuminate the hubris that often accompanies the 'researcher' position.

The analysis of the interviews was a lengthy process of trial and error. My first attempt was to code as per grounded research methodology. This produced fairly limited and somewhat static results. My results were fair but not as productive as I would have liked. I found some themes such as institutions and a theme of education but not much else. I then returned to Foucault's methodology of discourse and effects. This was more productive but not necessarily explanatory at this point. Finally, I began to use Clarke's Abstract Situational Map (Clarke 2003, 564) as an organising template. Situational maps make the usually invisible social relations of a research site more visible. The maps allow multiple positions because it highlights the relational and privileges complexity rather than simplicity. I found this to be thorough and very productive as well as adding explanatory strength to the disparate interviews. Through this map I was able to focus on and identify the silences found in some of the interviews and meetings. This meant that I was able to trace the margins and edges of the discourse.

To code the interviews and meeting notes I used Clarke's situational map for the elements that did not directly address food security or food sovereignty and used white index cards for the coding. I returned to the data with blue and red cards to track food security (blue) and food sovereignty (red). I specifically chose these to symbolize the cool response to food security and the more contested responses to food sovereignty. I found Coombe's (2007) article on the limits of governmentality helpful at this point and I started to look for the edges of use, the areas that were fuzzy and unclear as well as sites of certainty. The situational coding I used fell into the following categories: Individual human elements/actors, collective human elements actors, discursive constructions of human actors (both collective and individual), political economy elements, temporal, major issues/debates, silences, sociocultural elements, spatial elements and related discourses.

Further to this I reworked the sociocultural elements into a focus on farmers. I also reworked the related discourses into normative and ordering statements, policy and environmental references. These cards were also blue like the food security cards in order to develop and sort through context. I felt that it was important to underscore the borders and edges of the food sovereignty discourse. The most illuminating aspect of the analytic process was focusing on the limitations and in particular the silences. I was able to trace how the activists spoke (or did not) about backgrounds and work in reference to food sovereignty and how they negotiated these areas to bring authority to their discourses.

The limits of the methodology were a relatively small number of interviews and a rather grand scope of a thesis. While the methodology served the work well there are gaps and questions that I am still left with about food sovereignty. This may be simply because food sovereignty is emergent rather than institutionalised or codified – although academics are doing their best – or it may be due to the limits of the theoretical and methodological frames. On the one hand I think that the theoretical frame is too limited and I would like to draw on theorists who look at scale (Mahon and Keil 2009), environmental politics and neoliberalism (Hart 2004; Prudham 2008) as well as social movements and global politics (Andrée 2007). On the other hand my theoretical framing is quite complex and draws on numerous scholars for explanation. As a consequence the discussion may be too wide and shallow to fully discuss the theorisations I have drawn on. Thus my scholarly limits, both unrecognised, and self imposed are reflected in the thesis.

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and methodological approaches that have guided my research. The combination of political economy and Neo-Foucauldian analytics have produced a rich context from which to draw the discrete power relations that are shaping food sovereignty discourse and in turn trace how food sovereignty is shaping power relations of contemporary food activists in Canada. As a consequence, I am able to situate the production of subjectivities within the Canadian food and agriculture political economy. By aiming to critique conventional knowledge systems I

have engaged with weak theory which situates me in a place of uncertainty and the work in a place of accessibility. This has allowed me to, hopefully, privilege activist's knowledge, and reflects on my own position as researcher. By underscoring the fragility of this work I do not abandon my argument nor the story I have written but rather I stand by it as a site of engagement and dialogue.

## Chapter 3

### Setting the Table: 'From peace order and good government' to 'strong and free'

#### Introduction

A little over thirty years ago, in a period of rising unemployment, high inflation and energy prices, the People's Food Commission published a report, *The Land of Milk and Money*, critical of the Canadian food system and its effects on farmers, the poor, and other marginalised people. The report argued that a "crisis [in agriculture] worked its way through the food system" (People's Food Commission. 1980, 9). The structural inequities identified by the People's Food Commission have arguably been exacerbated rather than alleviated through 30 years of neoliberalisation, with the effects borne by the same marginal groups identified in their report including farmers.<sup>9</sup> Farmers' dwindling numbers [they currently represent around 1% of the population (Canada 2006)], urbanisation, and rise in trade liberalisation have reshaped agriculture and in effect have reshaped the political and economic position of farmers. The result has been, on the one hand, a complete erosion of the rural communities that have sustained farming and agriculture in Canada. On the other hand there has been an extension of solidarity between farmers and peasants beyond the national borders as trade liberalisation and attendant standards implicate them in a universalised market

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<sup>9</sup> A caveat: although this story portrays Canadian agriculture as homogenous I want to underscore that agriculture is varied and heterogeneous. There are Prairie mega farms 10,000s of acres owned by corporations, small hobby farms, medium sized dairy farms that are part of large supply management regimes as well as subsistence farms in Canada, and the interests of these farm operators are varied. That said, the structural changes traced in this chapter do represent a pattern of shifting contexts that I think are arguably representative.

This chapter traces the structural shifts in political economy of Canadian agriculture institutions in order to illustrate the context of food sovereignty discourse and its relationship to neoliberalisations. The primary objective of this chapter is to illustrate how farmers' authority has been eroded by tracing the Canadian agriculture political economy. It is structured around three analytic pivots that I argue are essential in order to understand and explain the emergence of food sovereignty. First, this is a historicized story because the legacy of past contestations remains in contemporary agricultural policies and it illustrates how farmers have been marginalised by the structural changes of the neoliberal turn. Second, food sovereignty was produced by and adopted from international fora, at the 1996 International Conference of *La Via Campesina* in Tlaxcala, Mexico. This is a Canadian story but it is also shaped by the power relations that make up an international political economy. Finally, this story is framed by an analytic of neoliberalisation in order to illustrate the dominant discursive, material and institutional changes that have facilitated the emergence of food sovereignty through the financialisation of agriculture. In order to trace these vectors this chapter asks the following questions: How did the Canadian political economic context foster the emergence of food sovereignty? How has this political economy been shaped by international and national contestations? Finally, how have the position of farmers and SMOs, and their struggles, changed over this period of time? In the next section I outline the variegated and layered governance of Canadian agriculture.

### **Canada's agricultural governance**

The process of neoliberalisation in Canada was generalized in Canada but it was also distinctive due to the geography, social history and the system of governance – in particular the division of powers between municipal, provincial and federal governments (Koc, MacRae, Desjardins, and Roberts 2008). Due to the constitutional arrangement of powers Canada's agricultural governance is quite complicated. Provinces have jurisdiction over agricultural products produced and sold within their borders, however, the federal arm has jurisdiction over inter-provincial trade and export markets. This is reflected in the complex jurisdictional structures of Canadian marketing boards; some boards operate under provincial legislation, others operate under federal authority and still others operate under joint authority of both levels (Veeman 1997). For example, in the hog sector, legislated single-desk marketing<sup>10</sup> continues in Ontario and Quebec, but ended in the Prairie Provinces in the 1990s. In addition, national programs for export are the norm but there also have been many examples of provinces promoting export on their own because of conflicts between the different production priorities such as the export of Alberta wheat versus the protected domestic market of Ontario pork. These divisions have allowed producers in the past to leverage and influence policy at the various levels (Skogstad 1987).

The complex organisation of constitutional divisions is important to understand but a more complete explanation can be gleaned by tracing how changes in policies are

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<sup>10</sup> Single desk marketing has a monopoly on purchasing, sales and usually equalises payments to growers. The Canadian Wheat Board is the most prominent example of single desk marketing.

rationalised. The neoliberalisation of agriculture required that trade liberalisation and consumer interests were privileged and state intervention was rolled back in favour of industry self-regulation. As a result, for example, federal regulatory reform in the mid 1990s “disengaged” the state from grading agricultural products and instead it became a responsibility of industry. At the same time, the harmonisation of sanitation and safety regulations was implemented in order to facilitate trade with the US and it was rationalised as a way to increase “consumer awareness” (Veeman 1997, 1557). This example illustrates how shifts in agricultural policy represent the roll back of the state as well as the roll out of regulations rationalised by references to neoliberal logics.

In addition to tracing policy and how it was rationalised, this section also highlights the financialisation of agriculture. The touchstone of neoliberalism is financialisation of everything (Harvey 2005) and the neoliberalisation of Canadian agriculture means that farms now require vast amounts of capital accessed through global markets and contracting agrifood corporations. Shifts in agricultural credit agencies illustrate how credit was first directed to farmers in order to fulfill a Canadian agrarian ideal associated with a Staples economy and shifted to a way to modernise and industrialise under the auspices of productivism during the Keynesian era and finally the financialisation during the Neoliberal era which has resulted in the marginalisation of many farmers.

In order to trace the discontinuities (and continuities) in policies the primary rationales that typify the Staples, Keynesian and the Neoliberal eras of Canadian agriculture are outlined. The eras may appear as unqualified shifts from one political economy to another but the historical sedimentation of past policies is found cheek by

in line with neoliberal policies today. Longstanding agricultural institutions that were formed in past eras remain today even though they may be perceived as anti-market and in conflict with neoliberal ideals. In contrast, other institutions such as credit agencies appear to be far more sensitive and operate as bellwethers to the ideological shifts of the different eras. This may be due to the fact that credit has implications beyond the institutions that are built around it. As a result, who gains and who loses access to credit has political and social ramifications (Germain 1997; Kirshner 2000).

Agricultural institutions illustrate how state support has swung from a concern first with farmers' welfare and the export of staples to social welfare as part of a modernising development project to the neoliberal era tenets of market liberalisation. That said, agricultural institutions were not established merely due to the good will of an interventionist state and the neoliberal turn does not exclude state intervention in practice. Rather the ongoing and concerted efforts of farmers and social movements to demand protection from the market are as old as Canada itself (Winson 1992). For example, the NFU challenged the railway baron's monopoly in grain transportation and in 1901, these conflicts led to swift intervention by the Canadian government, who sided with the farmers – a politically important class at the time. In fact, until the final two decades of the twentieth century, farmer activism continued to translate into provincial and federal policy interventions, from the creation of the wheat pools in the 1920s, the Canadian Wheat Board in 1935, and eventually the federal supply management during

the 1960s and 1970s, for the milk, poultry and egg sectors.<sup>11</sup> This complicates a reading of the political economy solely being shaped by the state alone; as it is also shaped by SMOs and struggles. The story begins at the turn of the last century when farmers were politically important.

This section traces the changes in agricultural institutions in Canada through the Twentieth Century with the aim of illustrating the rise of Canadian financialisation and the operation and processes of neoliberalisation. In turn, the impact on farmers and agriculture in Canada and the structural changes that have accompanied the neoliberal turn is highlighted.

### **History**

Before the Second World War the Canadian political economy was structured on an ideological framework of nation building, and agriculture was central to this early political imaginary along with the fur trade and fishing (Morton 1961). The organisation of the Staples era was apprehended through Macintosh' and Innis' thesis that national prosperity was founded on colonial staple production for markets in Europe. This framing highlights the ideological underpinnings that rationalised state interventions in agriculture.

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<sup>11</sup> Supply management not only places controls on imports of the specific commodities, but there are also supply management marketing boards for each industry that match production with domestic consumption. Thus the state is involved on a number of scales in protecting the domestic market from imports as well as directing production.

## **Staples Economy**

Canada's early agriculture history is best characterised by Innes' Staple thesis and its focus on exports. The nation's development was dependent on using natural resources to their full extent which included state support of technologies, such as the railway, in order to get the staples to the export market. The focus on export means that Canada has been shaped by the "prices, monopoly and market" of the international political economy (Innis 1937).<sup>12</sup> Canadian institutions were shaped by this staples economy and the state formalized its role in the agricultural economy with development of institutions that supported trade and export.

State policies initially attracted immigrants, with the Dominion Lands Act and other mechanisms of dispossession in order to supply its commodity dependent export economy in the late nineteenth century. Farmers were not enough and soon after the state began to provide technologies and resources to foster agriculture such as railways, agricultural colleges and public supported research (Kuyek 2007; Mackintosh 1936, 457), and credit institutions (Wolff 1910) in order to compete and "service" the export market (Morin 2001). The reliance of Canada on the export of raw or lightly processed commodities, or staples, produced an interventionist state to provide stable market conditions for the liberal Canadian order. In turn, an agrarian ideal of individually owned family farms provided stable and secure economic and social relations (Murton 2007).

Unlike the US experience where the production of the individualised yeoman farmer is

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<sup>12</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper but it is important to acknowledge that Canadian agriculture is founded on the dispossession of land. Accompanying the direct, forced removal of peoples, dispossession was buttressed and supported by disciplinary techniques and practices such as maps, numbers, and law that were all state projects (C. Harris 2004). I have argued that early colonial projects used "calculability" as a tool of dispossession (Martin, forthcoming).

considered to be resistant to collective actions (Guthman 2004) the Canadian experience, at least in the early part of the century, is different. Peace order and good government, was extended to the development of a national agricultural economy and the state produced collective institutions to support this ideal. However, even with the provision of railways, new seeds and agricultural specialists, more was needed to support farmers.

Agricultural credit was of little interest to private capital in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because unlike industrial credit the operation of agriculture was characterised as uncertain (Wolff 1910). In reaction, farmers and the state formed co-operative agricultural banks backed by the state and state-owned institutions such as the Canadian Farm Loan Board in 1927 were formed. The state stepped in to become the lender of last resort with credit institutions to support of the staples economy and the liberal agrarian ideal. In the 1920s and 1930s agriculture credit institutions were opened and operated outside of private banking laws and regulations (Mokyr 2003). While the state has built institutions that not only supported the staples economy they were rationalised as a way to protect the welfare of farmers from the market (Innis 1937). After the war a new rationale of productivism emerged.

### **Keynesian Welfare State**

The push for a productionist focused agriculture in the post-war period Keynesian period led to increased intervention from the state in order to modernise and industrialise which included the extension of credit, expertise and technological fixes that had begun in the Staples era. Productivity and efficiency were the key rationales and state programs

supported farmers by protecting them from the market, albeit unevenly, and providing credit and technologies in order to modernise. Modernising agriculture is the starting point or foundation of conventional economic development models (Rostow 1960, 1956) and was understood to create a path dependency to industrialisation and economic growth. For example:

[a] small purposeful elite can go a long way in initiating economic growth; but, especially in agriculture (and to some extent in the industrial working force), a wider-based revolution in outlook must come about not merely by both releasing workers to the cities, and feeding them, but also by earning foreign exchange for general capital-formation purposes (Rostow 1956, 42, and ft.).

Government intervention during this period usually sacrificed free-market principles with the goal of protecting and stabilizing agricultural markets for farmers in order to provide export income. Initially, farmers were the catalyst for government intervention in the market and soon these policies and programs became central to the agricultural economy of Canada. This is illustrated by a Senior Economist, in the Department of Agriculture who argued in 1947 for the importance of state support of farmers, in particular to;

...assist farmers in the organizing and administering marketing pools for the orderly marketing of their products ...I think we all recognize now, ... each nation must guard the position of its own people, while making every possible contribution toward developing sound international relationships...Canada has also, through legislation and in other ways, given other marketing aids such as those related to research, education, information, inspection, grading and many other service measures of this type designed to assist in correcting the maladjustments within agriculture and between agriculture and the rest of the economy...In these days when prices of agricultural products and levels of agricultural supports seem to be of overwhelming interest, we may remember that price is only one of the parts and sometimes one

of the least significant parts of a real national program for the long-range welfare of the farmers of this land! (Turner 1949, 10-16)

By arguing for the welfare of farmers as well as the focus on production and co-operative marketing programs the author underscores the purpose of the programs to assist farmers in the orderly marketing of their products. The term orderly marketing was used from the early twentieth century and illustrates that cooperative marketing programs were viewed as a guard to protect farmers from the uncertainty of the market.

Interestingly, the government now portrays this period not as one of state intervention but rather as farmers “hav[ing] always found a way to adapt” who were “servicing markets” with a “market-driven philosophy” (Morin 2001). Clearly it is not only a market driven past but rather in many cases orderly marketing protected farmers.

In the post-war period the state support of agriculture not only fulfilled an economic function but also a social legitimacy function (Tilzey 2006) and the state, both federally and provincially, not only assisted with credit but in all measures of support. The support included schools of agriculture and federal research agencies that produced new agricultural techniques and seeds. In addition there was infrastructure support, for railways and the subsidisation of grain transportation, as well as on farm support in the form of extension workers. During the Keynesian Welfare era state supported farm credit was one of the primary mechanisms to support agriculture modernisation and productivism. While there were a number of market regulations and price and income support that stabilised farm income, the use of credit was the primary way the state supported agriculture (Coleman and Grant 1998). For example, the Farm Improvement

Loans Act (1944) encouraged private lenders through a guaranteed loan program to modernise farms in Canada.

The underlying rationale for farm support was shifting from the focus on a staples economy to modernisation and industrialisation. The post-war productionist programs were wildly successful and the focus on production saturated the discourse and government policies as agriculture became more and more industrialised. Industrial agriculture depended on outside suppliers for inputs, or “agribusiness dependencies” (McMichael 2004, 3), whereas farms in the past had been somewhat self-sufficient in operation now outside sources supplied chemical fertilizers, pesticides and specialty hybrid seeds. The focus on increased capital expenditures required continued state intervention to provide credit where private capital was reluctant to go.

The productivist structural changes resulted in fewer and larger farms and had political consequences. Up until 1950, Mitchell (1975) argues, farmers were united by common enemies and a common concern of marketing their products, and supported by strong rural communities and farm organisations which won important concessions over the years. The post-war trends, he continues, created an increased disparity between large and small farms that splintered the previous united political position which he said characterized the 'farmer view' (Mitchell 1975, 14). These disparities have only been intensified through the neoliberal period.

### **Neoliberalism**

In the 1970s the cumulative effects of oil shocks, inflation, unemployment, and a four year fifty percent rise in food prices put labour unions, social activists and left leaning parties on the defensive (People's Food Commission. 1980, 8-9) at the same time as neoliberal ideology began to gain traction (Peck and Tickell 2002). The events during this time were likened to the 1930s Depression but were presented as an *economic* crisis rather than a political crisis (People's Food Commission. 1980, 8-9). The state remained relatively untroubled and options for action began to be limited to the market. This resulted in a roll back of typical Keynesian state and collectivist projects where local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power (or what Rose has called responsibilisation (1999)) and international institutions were given power without responsibility (Peck and Tickell 2002, 386) during the 1980s. The state, on the one hand was 'rolled back' and withdrew from providing social services during the 1980s and 1990s, and on the other hand prescribed a free market tonic for social and economic maladies. Social projects were localised and the market was universalised. This section traces how these events and shifts marginalised farmers and eroded much of their authority in the governance of food.

### **Tensions**

The 1970s represent a time of flux and tension as neoliberal ideologies were tentatively introduced. In 1971, Geoffrey Hiscocks, director of the Economics Branch of the Canadian Department of Agriculture stated:

The broad philosophical approach in Canada to agriculture has been that the federal government should provide the economic and legal framework and institutions for the self-development of farmers and the agricultural sector. Production and marketing of agricultural production takes place through the free enterprise system with prices of inputs and products determined in the market place (as quoted in Skogstad 1980, 89).

Less than one year later, the Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act (FPMAA), was enacted. This act meant that orderly marketing institutions could be established, the antithesis of “the free enterprise system” referenced above. The act led to the establishment of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency in 1973, the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency in 1974, and a National Chicken Marketing Agency in 1979 (Skogstad 1980). Skogstad portrays the establishment of marketing boards as a deviation from the federal government's role to assist the farmer to become more competitive in the market place (Skogstad 1980, 89) but it represents a tension that is seen throughout Canadian history. Political pressures from farmers have resulted in the establishment of institutions that protect them from the market; nevertheless, Canada's history and dependence on the export of agricultural products to the international ‘free market’ has also shaped policies. This tension results in free market ideology being espoused at the same time as institutions such as marketing boards that very much ‘interfere’ with the market are established, often to protect farmers.

The crises that shaped the 1970s also illuminates the tensions between farmers within Canada. For example, as the global food crisis unfolded in the early 1970s Western farmers saw it as an opportunity to increase exports and benefit from higher prices. Both trade and Western farm leaders fought against export controls, and supply

management programmes that they viewed as privileging Eastern consumers over Western producers (Fenton Cooper 1986, 663), as neoliberal ideologies were introduced against a background of oil, and food crises. At the same time productivist ideologies began to fall away and consumer interests began to be privileged as inflation became a problematic.

### **From Interventionists to Consumers**

The emergence of inflation and the concurrent rise in Canadian consumers concern about food prices during the 1970s produced a flurry of efforts. The establishment in 1973 of the Food Prices Food Board by then Prime Minister Trudeau and the House of Commons Committee on Food Prices in 1974 both linked farmers income decline and consumer price increases (MacRae 1999). Then Minister of Agriculture Eugene Whelan portrayed the conflict as between the farmer and the consumer stating “[agriculture] has taken a back seat to the glamour industries in our nation over the past 50 to 100 years. If the people are to have plenty of food, the industry can no longer be neglected” (Canadian Press 1974). In spite of Whelan’s blustery words and his efforts to support farmers, change was afoot. The establishment of marketing boards in the 1970s appears to be the last hurrah for interventionists.

International trade continued to shape Canadian policies and perhaps the pinnacle was in the 1980s and 90s with the ratification of free trade agreements. The Canada United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) (1988), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1994) and the Uruguay Round of talks that brought agriculture into the GATT and then the WTO significantly increased agricultural trade for Canada. In

turn there was a significant increase in agrifood corporation consolidation which resulted in deeper integration of Canadian farms into the North American industrial grain-livestock complex (Friedmann 1992). This means, for instance that Canadian calves are regularly shipped to US subsidized corn feedlots with cheaper processing due to lower labour costs and then back to the Canadian retail market. While changes in agriculture during the last 30 years have been likened to the structural adjustment programs in the Global South due to trade liberalisation (Qualman and Wiebe 2002) many of the state agricultural institutions remain in place protecting some farmers such as dairy and poultry producers while leaving others open to the vagaries of the market. That said, those who are implicated in the universalised market are now part of supply chains concentrated in a few powerful transnational food manufacturers that control production and marketing on a global scale. The effect of the concentration of power over the food system and contractual relationships “turns the farmer into a contractor, providing the labour and often some capital, but never owning the product as it moves through the supply chain” (Lang 2003, 26). So while some farmers are ‘protected’ by supply management other farmers are finding themselves merely part of a highly integrated vertical supply chain. Similarly, Western wheat and barley growers benefit from the single-desk export marketing monopoly of the CWB, while others, such as fruit and vegetable producers, compete individually on open global markets. Canada has a federal policy framework informed by neoliberal values nevertheless it has the layers and sedimentation of the post-war period of the post-war Keynesian era policies as well.

The roll out effects of neoliberalisation on farmers are at least two-fold. As part of liberalised trade a constellation of technocratic standards and laws have migrated to the farm level from supranational institutions such as the ‘roll out’ of sanitary and phytosanitary measures by the World Trade Organisation (McMahon 2009). These regulations rationalised as a way to assure quality and protect consumers, and dictate how and what to farm. For example, a recent shift in the Canadian Seed Breeder’s Act makes it more difficult to save seeds on the farm in order to ‘harmonise’ with similar seed regulations in Europe.

The second effect, and perhaps more constraining is part of what Harvey calls “the financialisation of everything” that characterises neoliberalism (2005, 33). While credit was initially used to support farmers and then modernisation the new production models now require large amounts of capital. The new global flows of capital have led to;

...impossible debt loads and the obscenity of farmers with half-million dollar investments having to seek off-farm income to pay operating costs. Meanwhile, farming is falling under the control of a neo-feudal off-farm aristocracy: Instead of the farmers owning the processing facilities as had been envisioned in the forties and fifties, the processors own the farm — and the farmer” (Schultz 2004, 10).

The financialisation is reflected in shifts in Canadian credit agencies during this period starting in the 1980s when the Farm Credit Canada (FCC), a crown corporation, was restructured to align with private credit and was no longer a lender of last resort (FCC 2010). This led to FCC interest rates coming in line with private credit. Changes in the provision of credit directly privileged larger operators and small and medium sized farmers in OECD countries would have a difficult time operating due to difficulty in

accessing credit (Coleman 2004). Further changes to the FCC in the 1990s meant that credit was now extended to new areas that diversified farms into areas such as agrifood and shifted credit to processors (FCC 2010). Coleman and Grant (1998) state that a coalition of agricultural producers, commercial banks as well as federal ministry officials pushed for the dissolution of more national project policies to market neoliberal policies. At the same time agricultural credit shifted from being primarily state supported to the private domain and increasingly global capital (Coleman 2004). Credit is focused less on farmers and farming and has shifted to support high priced tradable commodities and as a result credit is often only extended to export crops (Helfand 2001). The shift to supporting commodities rather than farmers has had devastating effects on all but the largest farm operators. The next section traces the impact of neoliberal policies on Canadian farmers.

### **Impact on farmers**

The neoliberal roll back of the 1980s and 1990s signalled that agriculture was no longer viewed as exceptional or fulfilling a social legitimacy function. Overall support levels to farmers were reduced substantially and spending shifted toward “non trade–distorting measures” that “comply with international trade agreements and ...[and] policy reforms have contributed to world agri-food markets that are more responsive to consumer needs”(Ash and Canada 1998). This shift is reflected in how the Agriculture and Agrifood Canada (AAFC) typifies agricultural support as “more distorting and less distorting” meaning that direct payment to producers and single desk marketers are

distorting (Canada 2006) whereas global standards and global credit is normalised and is considered less distorting all the while using the rationale of consumer needs.

The structural shifts in farming require massive amounts of capital in order to operate (Taylor 2004). Contract farms in particular now access capital through the global market provided by the contracting processors (Taylor 2004). Not surprisingly there has been a large increase in the use of production contracts in Canada (Azevedo, Chaddad, and Farina 2004). While contract farming is said to benefit farmers by increasing incomes the benefit is primarily reaped by farmers who are at the “top tier” and farmers’ bargaining positions are also weakened because buyers are in a monopsonistic position (Poulton 2005).

What have all these changes meant for Canada’s farmers and how has their position changed? On a global scale the restructuring has been a great success. Canada’s share of trade in agriculture and agri-food has increased over the past 15 years (Canada 2010). In 2008, Canada was the fourth-largest exporter and sixth-largest importer of agriculture and agrifood products in the world, with exports and imports valued at \$38.8 billion and \$24.9 billion, respectively (Canada 2010). These numbers reflect the integration of the North American grain livestock complex, where products travel back and forth between Canada and the US as well as the rationale for the continued focus on export markets by AAFC. In this respect there has been little change between Innis’ previous statement that “prices, monopoly and market” of the international political economy shape the Canadian economy. However, what these numbers elide is the position of the Canadian farmer.

According to AAFC between 1961 and 2001 the number of farms has decreased by half from 500,000 to 250,000 while at the same time production has tripled (Canada 2010). Following this it is no surprise that the size of farms has increased and in particular production is much more concentrated in very large farms, those that AAFC measures as having revenues of more than \$500,000 per year. In fact the production has increased only in the very large farms and has had a significant decrease in smaller farms with revenues under \$250,000 per year between 1993 and 2003, with capital intensive farms such as hog and greenhouse increasing in numbers and in value (Canada 2010). The outlook for smaller farms is grim because as on-farm income has decreased, non farm income has increased (see Figure 1) meaning that most small farmers are carrying the farm with second jobs. Interestingly AAFC presents these figures in a positive way: “Negative net farm income seldom converts into negative farm family income” and “farmers are managing market risks and volatility by relying on off-farm income” (Canada 2009). It is hard to imagine bankers “managing market risk” by taking on a second job.

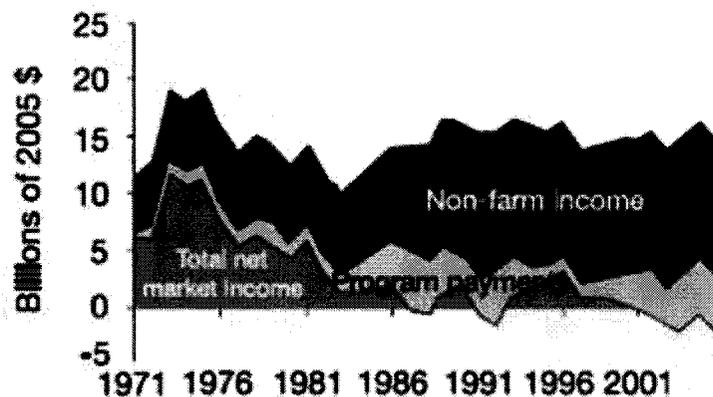


Figure 1: Total net income and estimated non-farm income in Canada, 1971-2005,  
Source: AAFC

While income is decreasing for many farmers the value of assets has steadily increased along with the capital intensive nature of farm production today. However, the down side is while the average farm in Canada has over \$1 million in total assets, total liabilities have more than doubled (see Figure 2).

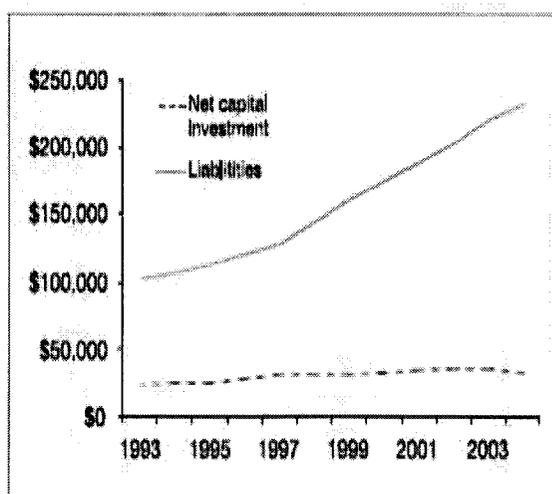


Figure 2: Average total liabilities and net-capital investments, all farms 1993-2004,  
Source: AAFC

These figures reflect the structural changes and financialisation of agriculture and since almost one-third of farm families experienced seven years or more of “negative net income farming” it is becoming the norm. What these numbers do not reflect, however, is the negative effect of these structural changes on farming communities and farm families including the loss of friends, businesses and rural services and increased levels of depression and family breakdown (MacRae, Henning, and Hill 1993).

Small- and medium-sized farmers have been marginalised by the neoliberal turn. At the same time there have been winners, primarily the very largest of farms that already had access to capital. In order to access capital many farms are now tied to highly restrictive production contracts that are part of industrialised agrifood production such as confined animal feeding operations and require heavy capitalisation. The result is that while small farmers have been marginalised, corporate agribusinesses have been able to leverage productivist agriculture and trade liberalisation to generate record profits (NFU 2008).<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In sum, this section has traced shifts in Canadian agricultural policy from the early Twentieth Century, and how farmers are implicated in structural changes due to the effects of neoliberalisations. The effects of the structural changes on farmers in Canada today and the culmination of thirty years of neoliberalisations implicated farmers in a

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<sup>13</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to further differentiate the variegated effects on all sectors of farmers such as those who are part of supply management vs. those who are not.

universalised market as illustrated by the rise of free trade agreements and the roll out of legalities and regulations. The marginalisation of farmers through rising debt and longstanding negative income have positioned many in similar situations as peasants in the global South and thus fostered space for the uptake of food sovereignty.

Farmers in Canada are not a homogeneous group and are increasingly stratified so that there are some who are protected from the market due to statutory marketing boards whereas others are impoverished because of the neoliberalisation of agriculture. The effect of these stratifications is to create a heterogeneous milieu where food sovereignty is representative of various positions. Some farmers are part of large export commodity producers whereas other farmers are marginalised by the very processes that benefit larger producers. In turn, these marginalised farmers look to others around the globe who are struggling with the same issues. These are primarily the farmers who are associated with the People's Food Policy Project. Take Colleen Ross of the NFU and an organic farmer from Iroquois, Ontario who was at the Forum of Food Sovereignty in Nyleni, Mali in 2007. She read the declaration produced by the forum which is the antithesis to large-scale commodity production and trade liberalisation. It reads in part:

We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organisations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements have gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty... Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed all the world's peoples...our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism. Food sovereignty

gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity.

These farmers are drawing on specific kinds of authorities as they call for food sovereignty and this demands a closer examination.

The neoliberalisation of agriculture combined with the structural changes of the Keynesian era has eroded the position of farmers politically and economically and in the 1990s the discourse of food sovereignty began to emerge from the margins of the global food system. Many farmers are adopting food sovereignty as a resistance discourse to neoliberalism as a means to gain authority over food governance. However, to fully understand how it is emerging from Canadian farmers a more complete context is needed. The agricultural policy and structural shifts that have produced food sovereignty discourse are not only a product of the last thirty years of neoliberalism but contain the 'sedimentation' of past eras. Farmers were initially supported as part of the Staples economy which produced a Canadian agrarian ideal. The Keynesian era was underpinned by the rationales of productivist logic combined with a social welfare. The result was that the neoliberalisation of agriculture had sediments of an agrarian ideal and an underlying productivist rationale firmly in place as they dovetail well with the neoliberal imperative of individualism and efficiency. However, past institutions that stand against neoliberal logics such as statutory supply management and single-desk marketing boards like the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) are threatened. For example, the current federal government has made a number of moves over the years to undermine them (NUPGE 2007), and most recently, the Conservative government announced budget cuts to the

Grain Commission (a body that supports the CWB) as well as the body that oversees the egg and poultry supply management bodies in an effort to “maximise government efficiency” (Government of Canada 2010).

The PFC’s 1980 report *In the Land of Milk and Money* highlighted the marginalisation of farmers and others in Canada. The commission and its report foreshadowed many of the effects of neoliberalisation and the responses of CSOs. The events of the 1970s were likened to the 1930s but rather than being a political crisis, they were seen as an “*economic crisis*” (my emphasis People’s Food Commission. 1980, 8-9). In addition as part of “Canada’s food system” both farmers and consumers were implicated in the same economic problematic where consumer’s concerns began to be privileged over producers (People’s Food Commission. 1980). The focus on an economic rather than a political problematic had the potential of constraining (and opening) how CSOs would respond. Finally, the PFC was modeled on the Canadian Royal Commissions, in particular inspired by the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry Report.<sup>14</sup> This modelling prefigured declarative food charters and food policy councils which would come to buttress urban food security organisations who increased their role in the governance of food because they act as parallel state mechanism. So, while farmers were becoming marginalised by the neoliberal turn NGOs began to gain traction and authority. The next section traces the ramifications for NGOs and their increasing role in the governance of food in Canada.

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<sup>14</sup> In 1974, the Trudeau government appointed Thomas Berger, then a B.C. Supreme Court justice, to investigate the proposed pipeline. He travelled to Yellowknife and 35 remote communities to hear from northerners. Berger concluded that an environmentally sound pipeline could be built through the Mackenzie Valley, but urged a 10-year moratorium on pipeline construction to allow time to settle native land claims. It is viewed as an important document that recognised indigenous rights, see Saul, (2008). *A fair country : telling truths about Canada*.

## **Chapter 4**

### **A Seat at the Table: From Food Security to Food Sovereignty**

#### **Introduction**

In 1980, the People's Food Commission produced *The Land of milk and money: the national report of the People's Food Commission* (People's Food Commission 1980) highlighting the plight of the marginalised, those involved in small-scale farming and fisheries as well as the “increasing impoverishment in cities and among Indigenous people” (PFPP 2010). Initially civil society organisations (CSOs) responded to the impoverishment with emergency food through food banks and other social projects in the early 1980s. As state social welfare projects were rolled back activists began to adopt food (in)security – an administrative discourse that has its origins in the 1974 Rome World Food Conference – to frame their increasing role in the governance of food. This has been accompanied by the institutionalisation of community food security NGOs. More recently, along with the launch of the PFPP, these organisations are tentatively adopting food security to frame their work. However, food sovereignty remains the touchstone discourse.

This chapter traces the uptake of food security and the subsequent emergence of food sovereignty discourse in order to illuminate how community food security groups have shifted from providing emergency social welfare in the early 1980s, to a position of administering social welfare and gained expertise in the governance of food. The

programs developed as the state rolled back after the neoliberal turn, and came to target communities for development and individuals for capacity building and skills development such as canning and community gardens. The urban food security programs are funded and created through partnerships with many levels of government, and the private sector and also include the development of stand alone projects that pay for themselves. Activists and organisations draw authority from and are buttressed by parallel state mechanisms such as food policy councils and declarative food charters. These community food security organisations have negotiated the neoliberal turn by creating programs that have the effect of creating authority in action and activists have become the experts in community food security. Taken together these shifts illustrate how food security organisations have gained authority during this period of time.

The story starts at the conclusion of the Second World War and the problematics of world food shortages and food surpluses framed in a discourse of “freedom from want” and the subsequent shift to “food security” discourse in the 1970s. The story is traced to the eventual adoption of “food security” CSOs in Canada as their social welfare provision became increasingly institutionalised. The second section traces the emergence of “food sovereignty” and its migration from transnational peasant forums to Canada and the subsequent uptake of the discourse by farmers and urban food security activists.

As a review, the terms that are used in this chapter include civil society organisations (CSOs) which encompass non governmental organisations (NGOs) and

social movement organisations (SMOs) and represent how groups of people gather either in support of or opposition to powers located in the state or market. Non-governmental organisations are more formalised and aligned in some way with state and market relations (Lipschutz 2005), whereas social movement organisations are less formal (although they may become formalised such as with trade unions) and are based on “emotional commitment to certain ends” (Lipschutz 2001).

### **Freedom from Want**

After the Second World War the problematic of world hunger and the attendant solutions proposed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) paralleled the Keynesian rationales of social welfare, productivism and state intervention. At the outset the FAO world food programs mirrored national agricultural programs, scaling them up to the global level based on the social welfare discourse “freedom from want”.<sup>15</sup>

The schemes were modeled on the successful Combined Food Board which administered agricultural production and distribution during the Second World War for the Allies and was steered by Canada, the US and Britain (Staples 2006, 75). It was thought that a world scheme could be administered by the FAO. However, in practice, the programs were less tied to a discourse of emancipation as the freedom from want suggests. Instead the problematic of agricultural production and surplus of the ‘West’ was

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<sup>15</sup> Freedom from want was identified by Theodore Roosevelt as one of the 4 freedoms ( Freedom of speech and expression, Freedom of religion, Freedom from want, Freedom from fear ) of which food was the first order thus the FAO was called to be organized. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations P. Lamartine Yates Journal of Farm Economics, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Feb., 1946), pp. 54-70.

tied to the problematic of hunger in the 'East'. The work of the FAO was to ameliorate these issues:

We cannot blink the fact that production capacity is centered in the West and consumption capacity in the East... Most of FAO's work in the scientific and technological fields will be directed to this end. But however vigorously these proposals are pressed the results will emerge slowly. Immense resistances have to be worn down and replaced by newer, more positive ways of living. Inevitably the modernization of Eastern agriculture must take decades to accomplish. Meanwhile many hundreds of millions of people will continue to lack enough to eat. In that situation it would be tragic if the West, having exhausted its own markets, had to close down on part of its productive capacity and then had to suffer all the unpleasant consequences of economic depression (Yates 1946, 68).

The problematic of hunger was viewed not as a political issue but rather as a technological issue. As a result, the FAO continued to promote its world schemes to administer "the orderly disposal of surpluses" and create food reserves throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s (Shaw 2007, 8). While none of the proposed schemes (e.g. World Commodity Commission, the International Commodity Commission, and the World Food Reserve) were ever implemented, they do illustrate how "freedom from want" was thought to be achievable through the technological administration of production and distribution. The discourse shifted when a food crisis emerged in the early 1970s with the collapse of the Soviet grain crop.

### **Rome Food Conference**

The food and energy crises of the early 1970s were the backdrop for the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome where the discourse of "world food security" emerged. In

contrast to the “freedom from want” discourse after the Second World War the food security discourse reflected what Hopkins (2009) has called the food aid regimen. The discourse had shifted to reflect the institutionalised food aid that had developed since the Second World War. However, articles and speeches from that time illustrated how food security discourse was underpinned by the problematic of agricultural production (L. R. Brown 1975; Excerpts From Kissinger's Speech at World Food Parley in Rome 1974). The solution to hunger was to send surplus crops all the while promoting the productivist technologies (N. K. Nicholson and Esseks 1978) that had served countries such as Canada so well. Food security discourse in ‘developing’ countries were portrayed as food ‘insecure’ and vulnerable (and this is reflected in the literature (Kirkpatrick and Diakosavvas 1985; Bush 1988)) thereby rationalising interventions by developed countries. This is notable because Canada’s role was as a provider of food aid and food (in)security was a problematic that occurred outside of Canada.

While the 1974 Rome Conference primarily affirmed the status quo of the food aid regime albeit with a new discourse, the conference also marked a shift in the participation of Canadian NGOs. With funding from the Canadian government a number of Canadian NGOs involved in international advocacy attended the Conference. The Canadian NGO delegation was characterised by Van Rooy as;

...part of a new activist community, largely in opposition to their governments ...[who] diagnosed the world food crisis as a political problem, based in the structure of North-South relations, while their

governments interpreted the crisis largely as a problem of technical production, exacerbated by difficult weather (Van Rooy 1997, 94-95).

The Canadian delegation was significant because it represented not only a concerted effort by the UN to open meetings to more public scrutiny but also represented a shift from the strictly state-to-state negotiations of past international stages and signalled the increased authority of NGOs.

### **Hunger is discovered in Canada**

The crises of the 1970s had a different effect on CSOs back in Canada. In the 1980s the problematic of hunger was not limited to the international context but was viewed increasingly as a Canadian domestic issue (Riches and CCSD 1986; Davis and Tarasuk 1994). In turn the discourse of food security began to shift from an international context to a domestic context. The first intervention by CSOs was the establishment of emergency food banks to ameliorate the effects of the roll back of social welfare programs.

Food banks were first organised in the early 1980s in response to increasing unemployment and poverty.<sup>16</sup> By 1992, food banks in Canada outnumbered McDonald's franchises three to one (Koc, MacRae, Desjardins, and Roberts 2008). There were two primary types of CSOs that established and supported food banks: charitable organisations (including churches) and organised labour (Riches and CCSD 1986). Food

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<sup>16</sup> The first food bank was established in 1981 in Edmonton (Koc, MacRae, Desjardins, and Roberts 2008).

banks were framed as a way to combat hunger and food insecurity as well as redistribute food surpluses (Riches 1986), although they later became a target for not addressing the systemic problems and this included becoming a distributor for the food industry's surpluses (Riches 1999). During their initial establishment, food banks had the support of various municipal regional and provincial governments. Koc et al. (2008) note that ambiguities in the federal-provincial governance structure created openings that could be exploited, primarily by municipalities, which resulted in unique civil society-local government partnerships as the federal government rolled back. Food banks, along with later efforts (in the late 1980s) designed to improve longer-term capacities of households to achieve their own food security through cooperative buying clubs, collective kitchens and community gardens, are exemplary of those openings.

These openings resulted in the development of municipally-sponsored food policy councils, such as the Edmonton Food Policy Council (1988), the Toronto Food Policy Council (1990) with their more radical analysis of the root causes of food insecurity in poverty, trade agreements, and federal agricultural policy. These councils began to buttress their work with declarative food charters that linked social justice claims to policy. For example, the Toronto Food Charter states "Food security is ... not just a set of problems. It creates opportunities" (Toronto nd), thereby centering food security as a link between the problematic of hunger and opening policy space for new programs. Just as farmers' interests were able to exploit the lumpy federal-provincial governance

frameworks in the early part of the last century so too have civil society organisations in the latter part of the century.

### **Food Security**

It was during the early 1980s that the actual phrase “food security” came to be used as a central organising concept for the work of civil society organisations active in food issues in Canada. For example, in 1991 the Dieticians of Canada published an official position paper entitled *Hunger and food security in Canada*.<sup>17</sup> The first mention of “food security” in a Canadian newspaper that did not have an international element was in 1992, when a Toronto Star article referred to a study in North York which found “there is hunger around us” (Josey 1992). The article focused on the new food policy council in North York, which was intending to “establish long- and short-term strategies for maintaining food security” (Ibid).

How was food security understood and acted upon from the 1970s to the 1990s?

First, food security was not just experienced at national and regional levels, but individuals and households were now the site of intervention— even in a wealthy country like Canada. As a result, food security was becoming an increasingly administrative discourse, associated with intervention at the level of the individual and the family. Furthermore, programs were increasingly framed in terms of food insecure individuals,

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<sup>17</sup> In 1985 the US passed the Farm Security Act which subsidised US farmers to the tune of \$100 Billion. There was also reference by farm organisations to Canadian food security in the context of free trade agreements threatening Canada’s national food sovereignty.

households and communities to provisioning for themselves. For example, the Nanaimo FoodShare Society's "Lunch Munch Program was the first project, whose focus is on building long-term food security through self-help and skill-building programs" (Barron 2002). In addition the Salvation Army's Good Food Box and the Food Bank's Community Outreach programs "[h]elp build capacity for food security by supporting self-help programs such as community gardens, community kitchens, gleaning projects" (High cost of eating 2004). The shift from emergency services to capacity building and self help illustrates how programs moved into the realm of the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2007).

Second, the food security problematic was no longer simply national. Since fewer national programs were targeting social welfare and while intervention by the state was being rolled back by the federal government, policies and programs began to emerge from municipalities and communities directly. As a result, food security was increasingly seen as being within the purview of a wide range of actors. By the 1990s, such diffuse networks of food governance led to partnerships that were unimaginable when food banks were first introduced as stop gap measures. For example, the Department of Health and Welfare was funding Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program that was developed in the mid-1990s by organisations such as the Stop 103 Foodbank in Toronto and a 1991 survey on food insecurity in Edmonton (Faulder 1991). The site of intervention was not universalised national programs but rather communities. As a consequence the programs

were administered by small disaggregated NGOs, often cobbling together funding from disparate sources.

Third, some of these organisations, including FoodShare and the Toronto Food Policy Council, also took it upon themselves to look for deeper structural (political and economic) causes for food insecurity. However, their discourse remained rooted within what can be called a social welfare problematic. While a range of contributing causes to food insecurity came under scrutiny, the focus remained on programs that had previously been the purview of federal government policy such as market intervention and full employment. For example, a survey by the Scarborough Hunger Coalition, reported that the most important factors that would “help them achieve food security” were “lower food costs, employment and affordable housing” (Infantry 1997), all of which are typically seen as social welfare solutions characterized by large provincial and federal government projects and programs. Toronto’s FoodShare, established in 1985 by then Mayor of Toronto, Art Eggleton, and others concerned about the growth of hunger and food banks that had taken place in the wake of the recession of the early 1980’s, is an example of an organisation that sought to implement a wider array of strategies for dealing with food insecurity (Moffett and Morgan 1999). In 1993, a newspaper article described FoodShare as planning “to change the political and economic situation as it affects "food security," with the aim of overhauling the food distribution system in this city” (Kane 1993).

### **New Partnerships**

By the end of the 1990s food security gained another face. Through the work of FoodShare and the Toronto Food Policy Council in Canada, along with similarly-oriented organisations across North America, the “food access” community was increasingly interacting with the “sustainable food production” community through initiatives like community gardens, Good Food Boxes and community supported agriculture. These movements came together through the larger concept of “community food security”. Community food security is defined as "a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Bellows and Hamm 2001). This framework emphasizes the use of community-based institutions and sectors, from agriculture to community development to public health to government assistance, to achieve food security for all households in a given area or region (CFSC 2009). Notably, this is another shift in scale. Food security was initially adopted at the global scale, and later reconfigured down to the individual and household scale. The community-food security movement had now set its sights on the “local” or “community” scale, reflecting their increased authority.

What does this story of food security discourse illuminate about authority and how it is drawn on and contested? As a ‘developed’ nation Canada was part of the world food security solution with its model of productivist agriculture in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the discovery of hungry Canadians in the 1980s was discordant with this

narrative. Food security could not be a national issue. It had to be translated to individuals, families and communities, a site where CSOs could intervene as state programs were rolled back. Food security provided the authority to frame the intervention into households and communities by these organisations. Food banks were initially a response to a “welfare crisis” (Riches and CCSD 1986). The interventions meant that they became institutionalised (Riches 2002) and “non-emergency” (Johnston and Baker 2005, 313). Concurrently, the establishment of food policy councils and formal adoption of food charters by municipalities, health boards and provinces – “citizen-based vehicles to engage their public institutions” (Koc, MacRae, Desjardins, and Roberts 2008, 132) - created a new source of authority to draw on as these programs were scaled up.

The CSOs were both advocating for the marginalised as well as providing programs of support; however, the limitations of these programs began to be revealed. Community food security was limited in scale and there was an effort afoot in Canada to establish a national civil society voice on food issues. This was precipitated by the need for civil society participation in the World Food Summits in 1996 and then the World Food Summit of 2002, echoing the initial participation of these groups in 1974 at the World Food Conference in Rome. This activity eventually led to the formation of Food Secure Canada-Sécurité Alimentaire Canada (FSC-SAC) in 2005. According to Koc et al. (2008), “the current challenge for FSC-SAC is how to make an impact within the increasingly reregulated policy decision system.” Some of the key activists within FSC-SAC launched the “People’s Food Policy Project” in 2008 (FSC 2009).

Patel states that food security discourse “mirrored the international political economy” and the market was a key site for state productivist policies (2009, 664), but this story illustrates how the Canadian context troubles his argument. More accurately, activists adopted the discourse of food security as a means to rationalise the needed intervention in individual self-help programs and local and community development. These programs could not replicate old state projects that had been left by the wayside by the neoliberal turn but they were shaped by the roll back of the state and, consequently, the roll out or re-regulation by the state. To draw authority new governance practices such as policy councils and charters were produced that did replicate, or at least parallel, state practices. While this story confirms Patel’s observation that civil society shifted food security discourse away from productivist programs to include more social concerns the adoption of this discourse happened much earlier in Canada (ibid). In addition, this story also confirms Patel’s observation that food security was the product of an international forum, or the international political economy in his words, although reconfigured in the Canadian context. The next section traces the adoption of food sovereignty by many of the same Canadian SMOs that built programs framed by food security, and who are now adopting food sovereignty to frame their work.

### **Food Sovereignty and the People’s Food Policy Project**

*Food sovereignty is going to become a critical issue in Canada and we have to ask ourselves: ‘Do we want to be beholding to other nations for our food? ...We can sink our heads in the sand and maintain the status quo, but that would relegate farmers to welfare*

*citizens in some capacity and nothing more than gardeners and livestock producers nothing more than petting zoos” Grant Etsell of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (Sharratt 2010).*

*food sovereignty ... is more trendy phraseology from the current fashion known as urban sustainability. Gary Mason, Globe and Mail columnist (2010).*

*Over and over again, the common theme was people were telling us we need some kind of a Canadian food strategy -- that we're in the process of losing control over our food supply. In other words, we're losing our food sovereignty. Alex Atamanenko, MP NDP.*

Like food security, food sovereignty has its origins as an international discourse.

However, from the outset food security was a state produced administrative discourse that was then adopted by civil society organisations as they increasingly participated in the governance of food. In contrast, food sovereignty has its origins in social movements, and in particular groups that have found themselves at the margin of the global food system - the small farmers and peasants of the global South who are primarily subsistence growers. Food sovereignty is a resistance discourse (or what McMichael calls a “counter movement” non-state concept (2004, 57)). How is the adoption of food sovereignty by Canadian social movement organisations (SMOs) emerging? Specifically, how does a discourse produced at the margins of a global food system emerge at the centre of that system and how does a counter-hegemonic discourse against neoliberalism emerge in a country that has fostered many neoliberal policies? This section traces the initial adoption of food sovereignty by the NFU in the mid-1990s to more recent invocations of food sovereignty leading up to the formation of the Peoples Food Policy Project (PFPP).

At the outset food sovereignty discourse was rooted in the interests of farmers and peasants, or in McMichael's words "farmer driven agriculture" (2004, 58). It follows then that as one of the founding members of the *La Via Campesina* the NFU played (and continues to play) a critical role in the uptake of food sovereignty discourse in Canada. For example, past NFU presidents played key roles in *La Via Campesina* and this work helped to radicalize the Canadian voice of small farmers. Nettie Wiebe, past NFU president stated in Desmarais (2007:143):

*Via Campesina* organisations are far more radical in their analysis than the NFU... It took these peasant movements to say unequivocally that the WTO is a malicious agenda against small farmers everywhere, and that we want agriculture right out of the WTO. It took the *Via Campesina* to say this in order to strengthen the NFU position here at home in terms of our critique of the WTO. I don't think we would have ever dared in our context to take such a position on our own. We would have been laughed right out of the room; it would have been such a marginal unlikely position here in Canada.

The NFU argues that WTO and free trade agreements fail not only Canadian farmers but are destructive to farmers worldwide in a 1999 submission to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade entitled "The effects of export-oriented agriculture on Canadian farm families, Canadian consumers, and farmers around the world". The submission references *La Via Campesina's* statements on the loss of national food sovereignty in order to illustrate the effects of neoliberalisation on farmers and nations (1999 NFU). This claim is interesting for two reasons. First, food sovereignty is understood as a national issue. This reflects the primary role of the federal government in the governance of agriculture in Canada as well as highlighting the effects of

neoliberalisation on farmers. Second, food sovereignty is presented as ahistorical. That is, the loss of food sovereignty suggests that it was a previous condition that has since been eroded.

Other farm organisations have also adopted food sovereignty. For example, in Québec the *Union Paysanne*, also a member of *La Via Campesina*, represents primarily smaller farmers similar to the NFU. In addition the *Union Paysanne* is explicitly against free trade which aligns with *La Via Campesina* :

*L'Union Paysanne a pour but de regrouper en une force collective organisée et représentative tous ceux qui sont en faveur d'une agriculture et d'une alimentation paysannes pour faire contrepoids au monopole de représentation syndicale et au puissant lobby de l'industrie agro-alimentaire et des promoteurs du libre échange en faveur d'un modèle industriel d'agriculture (Union Paysanne 2010a).*

However, more conventional organisations that represent large producers are also adopting food sovereignty, with a decidedly different intent (although there are overlaps).

The *Union des Producteurs Agricoles* (UPA) in anticipation of the 2005 WTO meeting in Hong Kong called on the federal government to promote food sovereignty. Laurent Pellerin, president of the UPA stated: “We produce for [the] domestic market...We don't bother with international rules” (CP Newswire 2005). And the UPA claims that the WTO rules threaten supply management and other forms of collective marketing and therefore call for food sovereignty in order to ensure food security (UPA). The upshot is that food sovereignty is viewed by the UPA as a means to protect the domestic market.

In 2008 the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) also began to adopt the language of food sovereignty. The CFA is a national umbrella organisation representing provincial general farm organisations and national commodity groups and at first glance the adoption of food sovereignty looks to align with the UPA. For example, it explains that every country has the right “to determine and define its own agricultural and food policy” (CFA 2010). However, the sentence continues “within the parameters of binding agreements it has chosen to enter into” (Ibid). The CFA’s “Farm and Food Sovereignty and Security Declaration” also emphasizes “the importance of both domestic and export markets for Canadian agriculture producers,” and “includes but is not necessarily limited to intensive modern livestock production methods, biotechnology and pest management products” (CFA 2008). Thus the CFA’s definition of food sovereignty includes the right to export food produced in Canada and to employ technologies such as Genetically Modified Organisms. This is in stark contrast to *Union Paysanne* and NFU’s position. For instance, the latter organisations’ recent promotion of a campaign in support of Bill C-474 which amends the Seeds Regulations to restrict the sale of new genetically engineered seed pending social and economic impact studies (Union Paysanne 2010b; NFU 2010).

As discussed in the last chapter, farmers are not a homogeneous group and it is no surprise that there are divergent views. These divergent views are being taken into consideration as the definition of food sovereignty continues to be teased out. For

example, Blouin et al's (2009) definition of food sovereignty includes elements of both perspectives. In their own words, their definition:

avoids references to peasant agriculture and avoids anti-capitalist rhetoric (neither of which are suitable to the Canadian context where peasant agriculture contributes about one eighth of total food production) while re-affirming sustainable development as the number one priority for food policy. The language used in the definition, particularly terms like 'sustainable development' and 'decent working conditions and incomes,' is also inclusive enough to unite productivist as well as alterglobalist organisations (Blouin, Lemay, Ashraf, Imai, and Konforti 2009, 4).

Besides farm organisations (including advocacy organisations such as Beyond Factory Farming) there are three other groups of actors that mobilize around food sovereignty in Canada: NGOs doing international solidarity and development work in the agricultural sector, including USC Canada and InterPares, aboriginal organisations (Devereaux 2008; Morrison, 2008; UN 2009), and urban "food security" groups (Toronto Food Policy Council 2009; Edmonton Social Planning Council 2009).<sup>18</sup> Taken together, this heterogeneous group of SMOs have adopted the discourse of food sovereignty in reaction to various struggles for farmer protection, aboriginal rights, and the fight against hunger.

In addition to the social movement activities documented here, 2008 and 2009 saw food policy tours conducted separately by two federal Members of Parliament, Alex Atamanenko (NDP) and Carolyn Bennett (Liberal), both referencing food sovereignty in

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<sup>18</sup> See Andrée and Martin (2009) for more detail on the shift from "food security" to "food sovereignty" in Canada.

their literature. In 2008 the NDP also adopted the People's Statement on Food Sovereignty as a general principle. Finally, in February 2010 the Federal Minister of State Gary Goodyear announced funding for the Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance totalling \$1 million. This research program will be based out of the University of Manitoba and references food sovereignty in its mandate (University of Manitoba 2010).

These latest developments show that the language of food sovereignty is now being adopted by Canada's mainstream political parties, organisations representing some of the largest commodity producers and by large scale federally funded research projects. To put it most simply, this has moved from being a discourse of the marginalised in the global South to being associated with organisations that are not marginal at all.

### **Conclusion**

It is no surprise that organisations such as the NFU and *Union Paysanne* use food sovereignty to frame their work and political aims because food sovereignty is a farmer driven discourse. These organisations are aligned with *La Via Campesina* and are not necessarily linked to the productivist practices that characterise most of Canadian agriculture as described in Chapter 2. However, there is another group of activists who are using food sovereignty in Canada and who are almost exclusively working in an urban context and have been framing their work, until recently, with the administrative driven discourse of food security.

This chapter illustrated how food security organisations have gained authority during the neoliberal period by tracing food security discourse. The uptake of the food security discourse along with the discovery of hunger in Canada framed the work of food security organisations. At the same time with the growth and institutionalisation of food security created new partnerships with new funding arrangements. These events created a set of disaggregated food security institutions which intervene at the community scale with novel social welfare programs.

The recent uptake of food sovereignty by urban food activists is puzzling if food sovereignty is only understood as “rooted in agro-ecological relations” of farmers in the global South, as McMichael (2006) argues. However, when framed in relation to food security and the growing role of urban food security organisations in the governance of food through self help and community development such as community gardens, skills workshops such as canning and Good Food Boxes, a different set of power relations are revealed and a different kind of ‘sovereignty’ is produced.

The subjectivities produced in an urban milieu are unlike the global South because the problematics of food sovereignty are different in Canada. Indigenous claims notwithstanding, there is little debate about who has sovereignty over resources, private property or land redistribution in Canada. As a result it is hard to imagine the same shifts in political subjectivities that are produced as a landless peasant calls for land redistribution and a Torontonians call for access to local food. That is, the tensions

produced by food sovereignty discourse in Canada reveal novel configurations of 'sovereignty' that are particular to the neoliberal era. The next chapter focuses on how contemporary activists use food sovereignty as a strategic discourse and the tensions that are revealed by it.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Farming the margins of neoliberalism: Activists and food sovereignty**

*The primary lens by which all policies will be screened is food sovereignty. In order for a policy to remain a part of the People's Food Policy it must advance at least one of the pillars and not contravene any other pillars. PFPP*

*The breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old moral economy of provision. (Thompson 1971, 62)*

#### **Introduction**

The last two chapters have outlined how food security organisations have gained authority and how farmers have lost authority in the governance of food during the neoliberal period. The introduction and subsequent uptake of food sovereignty by many Canadian farmers, NGOs, and SMOs is an outcome of these shifts. The most prominent organisation under the banner of food sovereignty is the People's Food Policy Project (PFPP). The PFPP's goal is to create a comprehensive food sovereignty policy by mobilising people in their own communities. These communities are rural and urban, marginalised and wealthy and span from coast to coast to coast. I have attended meeting and conducted interviews with activists the PFPP over the last eighteen months with the aim of interrogating the "limits that are reached in fields of power and meaning" (Coombe 2007, 284) of food sovereignty discourse in Canada. The previous chapter illustrated how food security remains the touchstone discourse for many activists and organisations. In contrast, food sovereignty discourse is emergent. This means that the

analysis and conclusions of this thesis must be considered preliminary and actually part of the conversation on what this concept means in the Canadian context.

The chapter begins with an outline of the PFPP's organisation and structure and follows with a discussion of the interviews and meetings with the PFPP activists. From the interviews I trace two primary threads of discourse and the effects of the discourse on the work of the activists. These are food sovereignty discourse as "ethic" representing power relations produced from farmers' resistance and struggle against neoliberalism, and food sovereignty as "tactic" representing how community food security activists have gained authority from the strategic negotiation and leveraging of neoliberal logic and practices. I end with some reflections on the unintended consequences of the discourse and discuss some of the fissures that have emerged. Following this I have provided a number of recommendations for the PFPP based on my findings. In particular I focus on the position of farmers in relation to the urban based food movement.

### **People's Food Policy Project**

The PFPP - in their own words - is a pan-Canadian network of citizens and organisations that is creating Canada's first comprehensive food sovereignty policy. It is in the middle of a two year program that supporters believe has the potential "to radically re-align the food system in Canada" (Kneen 2010). Their effort is primarily volunteer-driven, with coordination provided by a full time staff person hired with funding from Heifer

International.<sup>19</sup> The project is simultaneously an effort to mobilise citizens and to shape federal policy. The PFPP is the outcome of Pat Mooney of ETC suggesting to re-launch the People's Food Commission<sup>20</sup> at the Food Secure Canada (FSC) Assembly in the Fall of 2005 in Waterloo (Chaurette 2010).

Importantly, the initial suggestion by Pat Mooney was picked up by Eric Chaurette of Inter Pares, Cathleen Kneen of FSC and Colleen Ross of the NFU and Heifer International. A follow up meeting was held by PFC veterans Cathleen Kneen, Atlantic team, Jean Christie, National Coordinator, Pat Kerans, Commissioner, and new food activists Moe Garrahan, Just Food Ottawa, and Eric Chaurette, and the PFPP steering committee was struck (Chaurette 2010). The PFPP process is starting “where the PFC left off” (PFPP 2010) so that a large part of the process is to not only mobilise people in their own communities, but in addition to re-shape federal food policy. With that in mind the PFPP was officially launched at the biennial National Assembly of Food Secure Canada in Ottawa, November 2008.

The tagline of the PFPP was initially to “build food sovereignty from the ground up” (PFPP 2009). However, more recently the goals of the project have been articulated with more specificity and in a variety of forums. For example at a recent “Fireside Chat”

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<sup>19</sup> Heifer International is a multi-denominational Christian charity with farm roots based in the United States. While the PFPP has funding from Heifer International it also has in kind support from USC Canada, Inter Pares and is partnered with a wide variety of community and farm organisations across Canada.

<sup>20</sup> As a reminder, the People's Food Commission (PFC) was a civil society effort that produced *The Land of milk and money: The national report of the People's Food Commission* (People's Food Commission. 1980) which identified many of the structural issues that were beginning to arise in the late 1970s.

produced by the Population Health Improvement Research Network at the University of Ottawa, Amanda Sheedy, the national coordinator of the PFPP, stated that the project's aims were:

- to increase food policy and food sovereignty literacy;
- to support a grassroots movement in developing and adopting food policies and practices based in the principles of food sovereignty;
- to refine and adapt the concepts of food sovereignty within the Canadian context;
- to build capacity, communication and collaboration among peoples, regions and sectors;
- to facilitate ongoing policy analysis and advocacy for food sovereignty;
- to develop and advocate for a comprehensive national food policy at the federal level that is based in the principles of food sovereignty and will provide the framework and an enabling environment to foster the just and sustainable food systems that people have been building here in Canada and abroad (Sheedy 2010).

In the short period since the PFPP was established the aims of the organisation have clearly become more specific. However, at the same time, the aims remain somewhat abstract. How has the structure of the PFPP fostered these aims and what has been the process?

### **PFPP Organisation and Structure**

Along with the full time coordinator the PFPP is structured around a series of volunteer teams that reflect both an effort to be aligned with the marginalised and to articulate and work towards re-shaping food policy in Canada. The Indigenous Circle is the most

prominent demonstration of solidarity with marginalised groups. It was established to ensure the PFPP is

imbued with mutual respect between Indigenous communities and individuals and non-Indigenous communities and individuals. The Indigenous Circle's role is to remind us throughout the process of the ways in which we embody our colonial history and to assist us in working towards a new way of working (PFPP 2010).

The Steering and Management teams balance representation from the wider group with the day to day operations. "Animator" is the term that PFPP uses for grassroots organisers and they are already "engaged in leadership and community mobilisation on issues related to food sovereignty locally, regionally or provincially" (PFPP 2009). At the time of the writing there were between 20-25 animators and the PFPP hopes to double this number as people become more engaged in the policy aspects of their work for food sustainability and justice (PFPP 2010). The Policy Writing Teams are responsible for drafting and refining the People's Food Policy as it emerges from Kitchen Table meetings and contributions from the public engagements. The policy writing teams include academics, civil servants, farmers, NGO staff and various community organisers. The senior editors are primarily academics with particular expertise in the area of food policy. The broad representation of volunteers and the time and resources being contributed to the project are significant. That said, there are still issues regarding limited funding which at the time of the writing was set to run out in early 2011.

### **PFPP Process**

The first concrete project of the PFPP was a series of brochures that described food sovereignty and was used in the effort to mobilise citizens. Along with a website the brochures outlined the theory and practice of food sovereignty through stories intended to illustrate the six “pillars” of food sovereignty established by *La Via Campesina* conference in Nyeleni, Mali, in 2007 – Provides Food for People, Values Food Providers, Localises Food Systems, Puts Control Locally, Builds Knowledge and Skills, and Works with Nature (see Appendix A). These brochures framed discussion at the Kitchen Table meetings hosted by animators. The aim of the Kitchen Table meetings was two-fold. First, they are forums to mobilise interest in food policy and food sovereignty and second they are being used to gather information to create “Canada's first food sovereignty policy” (PFPP 2010). The meetings are structured for information sharing as well as to produce policy statements primarily written by the participants.

The Kitchen Table meetings and a general call for input among sympathetic SMOs elicited over 267 policy submissions, which seventy volunteers then drew on to produce a 10 chapter draft “People’s Food Policy” in early 2010. The draft policy was distributed for feedback and a national policy retreat for the animators and many of the policy writers was held in March 2010. At the time of this writing three out of ten discussion papers have been posted for review on the PFPP website.

The goals for the latter half of 2010 are to re-draft the policies while at the same time mobilising individuals and groups to take action on the policy proposals. The formal PFPP platform and action agenda will be launched at the biennial FSC-SAC Assembly in November 2010. The PFPP characterises its work as consisting of four layers:

- policy asks,
- evidence to support the asks such as reports and studies,
- stories that reflect lived experience, and
- existing policy that are presented in relation to the asks (Sheedy 2010a).

It remains to be seen how the PFPP will resolve the tension between limited resources and their ambitious agenda. Furthermore, Kneen, one of the leaders of the PFPP, recognises the ongoing tension between a creating a ‘big tent’ that is inclusive and the “programme of food sovereignty as an alliance of the marginalised” (Holt-Giménez 2010, 231).

I inserted myself early on into the PFPP process in the spring of 2009 by having conversations with Cathleen Kneen and Amanda Sheedy and over the next year I attended meetings, and conducted interviews with animators and key leaders of the PFPP. I talked extensively with activists one on one as well as being immersed in the discussions (and conflicts) of meetings and informal discussions over drinks. It might be expected that farmers would be at the centre of discussions about food sovereignty but they were just as conspicuous in their absence. This silence was intriguing. There was a

fissure between those who spoke about farms and those who did not. From this fissure I was able to trace two threads of discourse that, I argue, illuminate how food sovereignty is emerging in Canada and the tensions that are contained in it.

### **Food Sovereignty as “ethic” and “tactic”**

The interviews and the series of meetings revealed two variants of food sovereignty discourse: food sovereignty as *ethic* draws authority from lived farm experience. It is a discourse of resistance to the neoliberal turn and its universalised effects and in turn this produces solidarity. Food sovereignty as *tactic* draws authority from the work of activists in community food security organisations and is produced by the roll back effects of the neoliberal turn which has opened up space for their increased role in the governance of food. Both discourses are political while each illuminates specific limits to the power and meaning of food sovereignty as well as the authority it enables or constrains. Notably, these discourses have some parallels to splits between practitioners (as *ethic*) and advocates (as *tactic*) that have been associated with other food sovereignty social movements (Desmarais 2007; Holt-Giménez 2010). However, there are differences which are linked to the Canadian political economy context that I pick up on in the latter part of the chapter.

The first thread of food sovereignty produced by the activists is as “ethic”. The term “ethic” is used here within a framework of a moral economy (Edelman 2008; Scott 1976; Thompson 1971). It is about both personal and collective responsibility and about

who has moral authority to determine what should be done. This discourse became distinctive when several activists introduced food sovereignty by speaking extensively about their lives on farms. Two individuals recalled their childhood experiences on subsistence farms. One spent his childhood summers with his grandparents on the Prairies (I S4 2009) while the other grew up as part of a large family in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia (I S6 2010). Another activist, who now works for a small NGO in Ottawa, moved to Alberta from the Netherlands where they now have a dairy farm (I S1 2009). As part of a seventh generation fruit farm in the Niagara peninsula a fourth activist recounted how hard her family has to work (I S5 2009). The independent BC activist stated:

I think that I have an ingrained instinct for community, likely based on growing up in a family of 13. I was the runt and the eighth child. I experienced first hand the necessity of the division of labour relative to each person's ability, the mechanisms necessary to ensuring that each had enough - food, clothing, space in a bed, and that one has to learn to live together no matter anyone's mood, or personality quirks (I S6 2010).

Finally, and perhaps summing up the discourse is Cathleen Kneen, who was a farmer for many years in Nova Scotia and stated “It is an interesting piece because of the class solidarity it [farming]<sup>21</sup> brings” (I S8 2010). Put together, these interviews reveal real concrete and particular examples of how food sovereignty discourse operates in their material lives, and, which as Kneen points out produces solidarity.

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly Cathleen initially stated rural life but then specified that it was farming that was the key relation rather than rural.

These activists make connections to other farmers, and the effects of capitalism and inequalities. The discourse provides a language for talking about farmers “getting their fair share, getting their piece”(I S5 ) which aligns with Thompson’s definition of a moral economy where confrontations occur in the market-place but reflect a much wider set of relations based on mutuality (1971). A farmer-activist in Ottawa stated:

Farmers the world over have the same issues. They are enslaved on the treadmill...the symptoms are stronger in Canada...overseas farmers are often independent and not tied to agribusiness and they farm [mostly] without capital...and are not enslaved...The Canadian farmer does not have full sovereignty and must instead yield to the system...and have to be plugged into the financial system. (I S1 2009)

This farmer-activist’s concern was the larger inequities perpetuated by the financial system which limited the ability of farmers to work autonomously because they were hobbled by debt. He illustrated how “almost every farmer in Canada was in debt” by recounting a story of a hog farmer who asked for a small short term loan to pay the electricity bill until he could get the hogs to market. The bank was only willing to give him a much greater sum (about \$200,000) to modernise and renovate his barn. These statements are not merely political but “food sovereignty brings values” (I S6 2010) and I would argue an ethic.

These interviews reveal a political discourse built on struggle and solidarity, in Canada and globally. Colleen Ross, a farmer, stated “this is what we did in Nyeleni [a 2007 *La Via Campesina* meeting in Mali] and this is what we will do here ... this is a struggle” (Ross 2009). The food sovereignty as an ethic discourse declares solidarity with

the “marginalised” (I S8 2010) and the “underdog” (I S1 2009). This aligns with the PFPP structure that privileges the voices and experiences of aboriginal people. In addition, food sovereignty as ethic gains authority from international solidarity. For example, partner organisations such as USC and Inter Pares whose interest in “[adopting food sovereignty as a way to forward justice, and equity and purposefully do not use food security” (I S8 2010).

Finally, food sovereignty as ethic critiques neoliberal structural changes and the material effects on farms. For example, a staffer of a small Ontario NGO spoke very movingly about her family’s farm:

“I saw the three (grandfather, father and brother) of them work very hard ...and only one of them drew wages...only taking Sunday afternoons off... The NAFTA cherries from Washington State began to arrive three months early and the local fruit processors began to close” (I S5 2009).

This example shows that food sovereignty as ethic draws from lived experience and also links that experience to the effects of structural changes. Consider her discussion of the effect of trade liberalisation agreements on the family farm:

When ten acres were expropriated for housing infrastructure our family used the money to buy a second farm and planted juice grapes... after the Welches’ plant closed [due to consolidation] the grapes had to be sent to the US” (I S5 2009).

The result is the family annually loses \$5000 to \$6000 of the initial shipment due to quarantines placed on grapes at the border. Food sovereignty as ethic, therefore, is a

discourse that problematises the effects of neoliberalisations and highlights how farmers and others are marginalised.

The effect of food sovereignty as ethic is to position these activists in a grounded critique of neoliberalism. In turn, there are fewer limits on its use and in that sense neoliberalism is universalised and produces a discourse of solidarity. The activist who grew up on the Niagara fruit farm stated “I probably use the term 15 times a day” (I S5 2009). Further to this point as an ethic the discourse is described as being embodied, “food sovereignty is something you just know, it is innate” (I S1 2009). Colleen Ross stated “make [food sovereignty] a reality in your own home, in your own lives” (Ross 2009). This discourse draws from an ethic from a lived experience which in turn provides a grounded authority to critique inequities and build solidarity with marginalised farmers and others.

In contrast, those who did not reference a farm background are aligned with the discourse of food sovereignty as “tactic”. They generally worked for community food security organisations that had increasingly gained resources through the last 20 years as the state was rolled back as discussed in Chapter 4. This discourse became visible when I began to look for silences. When asked how they came to be involved in their activist work and how they understood their food sovereignty there was little reference to their experiences outside of work. With one exception, an activist who had come to the work through international development studies (I S3), these activists framed food sovereignty

in relation to their work. In fact, two activists were introduced to food sovereignty through their contact with the PFPP (I S2; I S7). The activists who employed this discourse tend to be cooler to food sovereignty. For instance, when a Toronto community activist first heard food sovereignty in 2008 via the PFPP she thought that it was both “academic and radical” and inaccessible to those she worked with (I S2 2009). The community development director said “The lingo sounds like a grad class” (I S7 2010). Food sovereignty as tactic, then, has clearer limits and is understood as abstract and potentially inaccessible to those who they advocate for.

Activists who use food sovereignty as a tactic are more prescribed and particular in their usage and were reluctant to use the term in certain settings. For example, while the executive director teaches food sovereignty “as one of the key concepts” in her university courses she stated that she “never uses food sovereignty or food security” in her “material work on food systems” (I S3 2009) reflecting the abstract quality of food sovereignty as tactic. She went on to state that food sovereignty “helps to frame and identify issues” but may not be a rallying cry such as “food sovereignty now!” (I S3 2009). In another example, a community development director in New Brunswick stated “I talk about food sovereignty with growers and those in the farmers’ union but in terms of other groups, I use food security” (I S7 2010). The result is that food sovereignty as a tactic is more discrete. As Debbie Field, executive director of FoodShare, in Toronto stated: [food sovereignty] “can move us forward but only in particular ways” (Field 2009a). So if food sovereignty as tactic is limiting where is authority drawn on? If activists who use food

sovereignty as an ethic draw authority from lived farm experiences where do the activists who use food sovereignty as a tactic draw authority from?

### **Food Security as Touchstone**

As a discourse there are clear ties between food security and food sovereignty. This is reflected in the last chapter and activists who used food sovereignty as a tactic were aligned with community food security NGOs that usually used food security in mission statements and strategic plans. As a result they were more likely to move back and forth between the two discourses. This shifting is related to the fact that food security continues to be aligned with formal organisations, whether community food security NGOs or by government agencies such as the recent CIDA food security initiative (CIDA 2009) rather than social movement organisations.

Those who were working within community development and food security NGOs seemed the most particular with their thoughts about food security and in turn this reflects that their authority is drawn from more conventional institutions. Consider Field's statement during a speech on food sovereignty that "government has to be put back in to make it work...for example a Minister of Food Security" (Field 2009a). The reference may be an uptake Minister of Food Security for Brazil,<sup>22</sup> but I think it is more reflective of the limitations of food sovereignty.

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<sup>22</sup> Brazilian Zero Hunger (*Fome Zero*) program initially had a Minister of Food Security and Hunger in 2003, however, at present the program is under the Minister of Social Development and Hunger.

The activists who use food sovereignty as tactic are associated with NGOs that are reliant on many funding partners,<sup>23</sup> which constricts the adoption of a radical discourse. At times this negotiation is acknowledged. A PFPP leader stated that when she was employed at a community food security organisation she learned to “work within food security and not use radical language but work with common values” (I S8 2010). Another activist stated “food security is a reaction to the situation ... and it is not a political statement like food sovereignty” (I S4 2009) and delineates food sovereignty from food security and the status quo. However, the connection is made clear between food security and food sovereignty because “food sovereignty was in food security but nascent” (I S8 2010). What this illustrates is not a conflation between food security and sovereignty but rather how the perceived radical nature of food sovereignty places real limits on its use as “tactic” that are not apparent with the “ethic” thread of discourse.

As illustrated in the last chapter NGOs have been developing programs under the rubric of community food security such as community gardens and Good Food Boxes that involve building the skills and capacity of marginalised people. Food sovereignty as tactic opens up room for new programs. For example, a community development director who works in the Maritimes for a National NGO focuses on “leveraging partnerships” and “we have found new possibilities for programs and community development” (I S7 2010). A new program, Community Food Membership trains individuals in food safety.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Foodshare’s funding is provided by foundations, government, the United Way and through program sales (Foodshare 2008).

She notes that this program emerged from this shift: “We could not have been behind this project without food security and food sovereignty” (I S7 2010). For this community activist, food sovereignty and food security are roughly aligned, and neither is especially political, but is a way to further the NGO’s work. The discourse bestows a rational authority and certainty as activists negotiate, take difficult decisions, make new links, and develop programs.

Food sovereignty as tactic is used to “problematise the food system” (I S8 2010) in order to frame their work, rather than as a resistance to neoliberalism. The discourse illustrates how activists are able create program opportunities as solutions to the ills of the food system. As an example of food sovereignty, an activist with FoodShare gave the example of a public food system (similar to a public transport system).<sup>24</sup> This is a concrete solution that can arguably help the marginalised, but importantly places the NGO into the role of expert and builds on its own successful models of Good Food Boxes and other community food security programs. What would change is that they would benefit from public funding. To be fair these are good programs and there is nothing wrong with using them as models for more ambitious programs but that is the salient point. These organisations have been growing and negotiating through the neoliberal turn very successfully. The fact that they now hold expertise is novel and this is reflected in their ambitions. This is unlike McMichael’s non-state concept of food sovereignty (2004)

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<sup>24</sup> This echoes Field’s (2009b) work and call for a public food system.

but it is a kind of sovereignty. These activists call for a strong role for the state, albeit at various scales of intervention which support their activities first.

Activists associated with NGOs are using food sovereignty as tactic to negotiate how and what they work on. It is used as a template. For instance, a staff member of Beyond Factory Farming (BFF)<sup>25</sup> stated: “I use food sovereignty as a lens for decision making” (I S4 2009). A community activist with FoodShare in Toronto also echoes this position by stating “I see it [food sovereignty] as framing an ethic around decision making” (I S2). By using food sovereignty they are bringing a particular kind of authority to their work, however, there are different kinds of authority.

The issue of legitimacy, that is who can use food sovereignty discourse with authority, is raised by the farmer-activist who directly questioned the overriding program of PFPP. His concern was the way that the PFPP was organised with NGOs at the helm pushing for change, and what this means for the structure of accountability:

[NGOs] might be using FS as a programmable idea ...is counter to *La Via Campesina*. *La Via Campesina* is a global network of powerless people drawing a line in the sand, they have an innate understanding of Food Sovereignty and no one had to do a program of education ... Within Canada food sovereignty is an adoption which is not accountable to the same ideal, it does not have membership roots... FSC is not in the interest of food sovereignty or Canadian farmers because the grit isn't there (I S1 2009).

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<sup>25</sup> A national organisation promoting socially responsible livestock production in Canada that emerged out of the rise of CAFOs in the 1990s as a consequence of trade liberalisation.

The issue of who is the legitimate voice for food sovereignty concerns this activist. Who is seen to be able to use food sovereignty discourse with authority in Canada? The small Ontario NGO activist told the story of the discussion of food sovereignty at a PFPP Kitchen Table meeting where a NFU representative was affronted by the PFPP pamphlets describing food sovereignty and the six pillars because they “kindergartenised it [food sovereignty] ... when it is taken out of the hands of the peasants it loses its integrity” (I S5 2009).

While it is important to trace out the limits of the discourse, there is not necessarily a strong dividing line between those for whom this discourse is tactic versus those who see food sovereignty as ethic. Even some of the ethic group, such as the BFF staffer, who has a farm background but who works for an NGO does not necessarily use food sovereignty publicly because “there are people who are scared of food sovereignty at the food security level ... and I don’t want to piss people off ... so I look for ways to pitch it from the side but not too out of bounds” (I S3 2009). He finds it cumbersome to use and rather than have to explain it he would rather forward the aims of food sovereignty and not use the term (I S3 2009). The independent activist in British Columbia who framed food sovereignty as an ethic, according to the categorisation, stated that “when I am hanging out at a farm meeting I am not necessarily going to use the word sovereignty” (I S6 2010).

What these diverse examples illustrate is that “food security” remains a dominant discourse and is considered safe. For most of those using food sovereignty, it remains limited to particular contexts. So while it is productive as a means to illuminate structural issues or to point to moral authority, activists are highly strategic in its usage so as not to alienate particular audiences because the political undercurrents of food sovereignty are seen as dangerous. For example, “food sovereignty creates the visual of we are going to go out there with our and guns” (I S7 2010). In contrast, in the hands of Canadians food sovereignty is not necessarily revolutionary. As the BFF staffer states, “the peasant issue is about revolution. It is not revolution in North America, not by any means” (I S4 2009).

Activists have found ways to negotiate the perceived dangerous margins by using the six pillars of food sovereignty. In many of the interviews the six pillars were referenced as a way to discuss food sovereignty without having to say food sovereignty. It is with the six pillars that there is some commonality with food sovereignty as ethic discourse. Recall the brochures produced by the PFPP as one of their initial projects that highlighted each of the six pillars as a way to introduce food sovereignty. As one activist, who referenced his farm background but works for an NGO stated “the six pillars offer a clarity and a succinct way to talk and not be seen as a crazy socialist” (I S4 2009). In other words, the six pillars are a way to critique capitalism and the food system itself without sounding too radical. This is one way the PFPP can bridge the divide from the status quo to a more radical orientation. The activist’s quote above illustrates how this tension is straddled.

The activists aligned with farmer solidarity were explicit in their critiques of neoliberal capitalism. Kneen makes the point that most Canadian farmers are “deeply embedded in the industrial model” and “corrosive individualism that is the hall mark of neoliberalism” which is diametrically opposed to solidarity (Holt-Giménez 2010, 230). In turn, Terry Boehm of the National Farmer’s Union stated that “farmers in Canada have absorbed neoliberalism” (Boehm 2010). Food sovereignty is a “rejection of neoliberalism” (I S3 2009) and is used to critique neoliberalism as well as distinguish it from the status quo and thereby illustrate not only a novel political imaginary but how neoliberalism is productive of the discourse. Other food activist projects have been critiqued for manifesting neoliberalism (Guthman 2008a) however, food sovereignty puts neoliberalism directly in its sights. That said, those who are aligned with community food security such as Wayne Roberts are more likely to negotiate with or even embrace neoliberalism as his quote in the introduction illustrates: “Neoliberalism is rampant in the food movement, in other words get off our fucking backs” (Wayne Roberts, ESAC panel at Congress 2010).

### **Discussion of tactic and ethic**

Although messy and overlapping, the two variants of food sovereignty are illustrative of three points. First, food sovereignty as ethic unites around a universalised discourse against neoliberalism that has led to a unified oppositional discourse, and therefore an emphasis on solidarity and struggle has emerged. One can see this illustrated among

those that use food sovereignty as an ethic as they told stories about the detritus effects of NAFTA free trade, farm debt and the close relationships that make up and enable a rural moral economy. The subjectivity produced is based on solidarity with farmers where authority is drawn from an ethic that is embedded, 'innate' and a reality in their *own* lives. Second, Lipschutz (2005) offers some explanatory power to how the discourse of food sovereignty is somewhat fractured. Social movements produce ethics but NGO's focus on reform because they are constrained in their political action by their relationship to the state. As one activist stated food is important but the work really is about "community building, capacity building and learning to make decisions together" (I S2 2009). Therefore food sovereignty as tactic has an external focus on *others* lives. It is not based on structural changes or changes in their own lives. Third, the meeting point between food sovereignty as ethic and tactic is where the authority to critique the agrifood system is grounded in personal experience. That is, activists who work in NGOs and use their lived farm experience to guide their work. For example the activist who worked for BFF. At the end of the interview a community food security activist wondered aloud if food sovereignty was looking back instead of looking forward. This comment is important because the subjectivity of the ethic is drawn from lived experience on farms and as tactic critiques the system but is looking forward to new opportunities and programs, ways to improve and reform. In other words, food sovereignty as a tactic is a means to negotiate through and with neoliberalism.

The food sovereignty as ethic discourse represents how the neoliberal turn has constrained farmers by rolling out universalised standards and regulations that dictate how and what they should farm in order to access the market. As a result food sovereignty as ethic is a discourse of transnational solidarity and resistance. Authority is drawn from the common experiences of inequity and marginalisation produced by the neoliberalisation of agriculture in Canada and globally.

Food sovereignty as “tactic” represents how community food security activists have gained authority from the neoliberal turn. Community food security NGOs now provide services and programs and draw authority from mechanisms that parallel state models such as food policy councils and food charters. The community food security organisations are now creating authority in action by determining how social welfare is administered. Thus food sovereignty as “tactic” discourse represents how urban food security activists have gained expertise and autonomy in the realm of food governance.

These two threads, ethic and tactic, are both produced by food sovereignty discourse in Canada and have commonalities. As noted above the six pillars of food sovereignty is one area there is overlap. In addition, there is a similar focus on the marginalised. Certainly food sovereignty as ethic has a stronger emphasis on solidarity but this does not mean the other thread discounts solidarity by any means. Either way the problematic for both is inequality but the proposed solutions are different. As a result

neoliberalism is negotiated differently. Importantly, food sovereignty discourse is sketched out as a governable space, and is a site for a kind of sovereignty to emerge.

What do these two threads of discourse tell us about sovereignty?<sup>26</sup> In conventional discussions sovereignty is understood as a supreme authority such as a modern state or a monarch. This research has illustrated that activists do not view the state as the exclusive sovereign nor the sole site of sovereignty. Activists who employ food sovereignty as ethic highlight the constraining effects of the neoliberalisation of agriculture such as farm debt or trade liberalisation. The state is not necessarily the principle focus because the universalised market is produced by regulations and standards that migrate from supra-national organisations such as the WTO. For these activists sovereignty is an assertion of moral authority fostered through struggle and solidarity. Recall the activists' stories that highlight the difficulties of farming and how moral economies sustained their families. This is supported by Edelman (2005) who observes that the rise of transnational peasant activism such as *La Via Campesina* also draws on historic moral economies. In turn, these activists link their struggles to other farmers and peasants - not to the state - thereby further reconfiguring our understanding of sovereignty. At the same time these activists do not discount the state entirely. The state has protected some farmers in the past but

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<sup>26</sup> A discussion of the multiple meanings of sovereignty is beyond the scope of this thesis but the discourse of food sovereignty points to how sovereignty has been reconfigured during the neoliberal era. This is not a novel argument. Many authors, (e.g. Sassen 1996, Ruggie 1998) have made similar arguments.

there is little indication that the present neoliberalisation will be turned back anytime soon.

Activists who employ food sovereignty as tactic highlight new sites of governance that are produced by the neoliberal turn. It is through their administration of these sites using the touchstone discourse of food security that they are able to negotiate through the effects of neoliberalisation. The problematic of neoliberalism is partially solved by their continued administrative interventions that have produced stand alone community food security institutions and their programs for community capacity and skill building. Food sovereignty is not wholly accepted and still emergent especially in relation to food security. However, the food sovereignty as tactic discourse points to how sovereignty is claimed by these activists to support their administration of food governance. Authority for food security NGOs is drawn from new sites of governance that have been abandoned by the state. The state is only one of many 'partners' from which resources are drawn therefore sovereignty is reconfigured to these new sites of food governance. Food sovereignty discourse legitimises food activists and their work in particular ways and illuminates an understanding of authority and power relations. Sovereignty is no longer the exclusive domain of the state for those who employ food sovereignty discourse. We can draw parallels between the work of (Holt-Giménez 2010) who identifies tensions emerging between advocates and practitioners in the global South.

My research and analysis suggests that authority for food security NGOs is drawn from new sites of governance, and authority for those aligned with farmers is drawn from a past moral economy. This both confirms and unsettles the tensions identified by Holt-Giménez. Parallels can be drawn because similar to Holt-Giménez's advocates food security NGOs have expertise. But the problematic (and the solution) are not located in the fields of the peasants; they are located in the neighbourhoods of Canadian cities where NGOs are creating new sites of food governance. The solution is not a counter-movement that confronts neoliberalism under the rubric of "agrarian citizenship" (McMichael 2006, 408) but it is individual capacity building and community development. To wit: "We are working to help to revive respect for these skills, and to make them available as tools to promote individual and community growth" (FoodShare 2010). This quote illustrates how the site of sovereignty and authority is an individualised actor whose growth is tied to the community rather than as a citizen tied to a sovereign state.

### **My farmer, the superhero: Unintended effects and farmer's representation**

While not directly addressed by activists a representation of farmers emerged at public meetings that echoes the ethic-tactic fissure. At public meetings<sup>27</sup> there was much discussion with what is wrong with the present system and what to do. Discussions that focused on farmers struck me as odd in contrast to the activists aligned with the ethic of

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<sup>27</sup> Guelph Organic Conference January 2010 and Serving up Food Sovereignty October 2009.

food sovereignty. Farmers were described as heroes and superheroes (Webb 2010) with suggestions to depict farmers on trading cards. In addition, there were exhortations to cultivate a personal relationship with “my farmer” much like “my physician” or “my dentist” (Webb 2010), as well as aspirational farmers.<sup>28</sup> Why this focus on heroic depiction? For the sake of theorising I summarise this discourse in the phrase “my farmer, the superhero”.

There has always been nostalgia for the pastoral and rural idyll (Bunce 1994) although it is a “queer and puzzling business” (Empson 1935 quoted in (Raban 2009)). In the cities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries poets would write idealised portraits of “simple people express[ing] strong feelings... in learned fashionable language” (ibid). Hetherington has identified a “blindness and contempt towards rural lives” that is part of the urban middle class in Canada (2005, 230). New organic farmers drawn to Nova Scotia never realise their imagined rural idyll due to the disparate history with conventional farmers who are already in place (Hetherington 2005, 109), to do so would be to erase past struggles and replace it with an organic ideal (Guthman 2004).

In Canada food sovereignty is a political imaginary that has the possibility to erase past farmer struggles in favour of a romanticised idyll rooted in the urban context. Agriculture has a taken-for-grantedness either as an artefact of the past or merely a

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<sup>28</sup> “I just quit my job in New York City and moved back to my home town Toronto and intend on becoming a farmer”. This elicited a response from some the farmers I spoke to in the audience of unease and even anger that their identity of farmers was being appropriated.

stepping stone in the development process (Rostow 1960). Either way agriculture, until recently, was not a problem site: productivism was triumphant, Canadians were well fed and exports grew year after year. The representation is no longer in poetry but the representation of the rural idyll now arrives through the apparatus of the market such as the spectacles of supermarkets (Johnston, Biro, and MacKendrick 2009), farmers' markets and school lunch programs (Allen and Guthman 2006) that are employing neoliberal rhetoric directed at consumers and consumer sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> An agricultural economist recently wrote "If you farmed today thank a consumer," a play on the bumperstickers "If you ate today, thank a farmer" (Schaufele 2010). Even food sovereignty itself is being reconfigured to consumer choice, for example, a "prominent argument used by farmers is food sovereignty... but food sovereignty also recognises the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced" (Charlebois and Langenbacher 2006). These examples indicate how central the position of the consumer is in the neoliberal context.

The recent rise of the food movement has focused attention back on farmers. It is not "blindness and contempt" for farmers. Rather it is a romanticising where urban consumers are advocating for farmers. However, consumer subjectivity means that political actions are limited to the market. The aspirational farmers and the elevation of farmers to heroes is, I believe, tied directly to consumer subjectivities which are crafted

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<sup>29</sup> "The basic idea of consumer sovereignty is really very simple: arrange for everybody to have what he prefers whenever this does not involve any extra sacrifice for anybody else" (Lerner 1972).

to bring authority to consumption. Guthman has pointed out that agro-food politics and cities are sites of neoliberalism (2008a) and I think that this story confirms this. However, a greater concern is what does the consumer subjectivity erase? Farmers solely depicted in relation to consumers, become exalted; unbound and untied from any moral economy, portrayed as individualised superheroes with no collective representation. The representation is not indicative of a shared experience, or responsibility, but possessed as ‘my farmer’. The processes and relationships that have sustained farmers such as an interventionist state or rural communities are elided when the market and consumers are privileged. While Nyers (2003) asks the question, does cosmopolitanism require the simultaneous production of abject others, the question we may well ask ourselves is - does consumerism require a simultaneous production of exalted others to match the spectacles of consumption?

### **Conclusion**

While activists who reference lived farm experience to support their ethic discourse take great pains to describe the effects of neoliberalism and struggle that is part of food sovereignty, activists in the tactic stream are far more cool and rational about food sovereignty. Even though many of the activists work as advocates for those who have been left unsupported by the roll back of social welfare programs, food sovereignty does not appear to be as ‘sticky’ in urban areas, and is being shaped by other contexts outside

rural moral economies. The result is food sovereignty has limits, in particular for those not linked directly to farms and farm life.

This story raises questions about how food sovereignty discourse is emerging in Canada, and in particular how the PFPP and its leaders will engage with food sovereignty discourse. Food sovereignty is being reconfigured in Canada. This means that its very emergence is unsettling. The unsettling creates new opportunities for the PFPP to leverage as they mobilize around food sovereignty, but it also troubles the taken-for-grantedness of comfortable positions.

As part of this thesis, and as a responsibility to the PFPP, I am making recommendations regarding the strategic use of food sovereignty in their work.<sup>30</sup> The most significant hurdle identified by this research is the fissure that pivots around lived farm experience and this is supported by the odd farmer imaginary as illustrated above. The danger of food sovereignty discourse as a political imaginary is that it may very well elide the relationships that have sustained farmers in the past such as the moral economies of rural communities, and state interventions. The challenge is how to craft food sovereignty to leverage the new sites of governance that have emerged in community food security and at the same time build, rather than erode, the authority of the very farmers that are idealised by consumer subjectivities.

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<sup>30</sup> The recommendations will be expanded on in a report directed to the PFPP along with a summary of the thesis.

The ideal may very well to know your farmer but this knowledge in of itself is based on primarily consumer subjectivity. Most farmers in Canada are in the business of producing commodities rather than the idealised market garden farming that supplies urban farmers' markets. The idealised depiction helps to engage eaters but it also obscures other ways of farming. The focus on the community scale also engages eaters but obscures the political conflicts that occur at the federal and provincial scales that often have far more of an effect on farmers, not to mention the migration of supra-national regulations and standards.

Keeping these tensions in mind I offer four recommendations: First, highlight the welfare of farmers as a responsibility. Obtaining good quality food is not based on the proper consumer choices but rather is through the care of farmers. Second, leverage the political and material resources of the community food security NGOs. Their increased authority can buttress and support openings for change. However, realise that food sovereignty has real limits in this milieu. Third, continue to build on the six pillars as a way to bring particular values to the discussion. The six pillars are a meeting point for both threads of the food sovereignty discourse in Canada. The battle will not be won by engaging in technocratic debates or exploiting consumer subjectivities but rather with building on values that cut across divides identified in this thesis. This means reflecting on what kind of institutions can protect farmers. That is, what would food sovereignty look like if it crystallised into an institution or collectivity? At present the food movement fosters neoliberal subjectivities to create individualised farmer-consumer relationships.

Not all eaters can know their farmers. There are far too many consumers in Canada and far too few farmers. Instead, use food sovereignty as a representative set of values and responsibilities that move beyond consumption.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Summary**

The emergence of food sovereignty discourse in Canada was initially linked to farmers' organisations and international solidarity NGOs but food sovereignty is moving out of the farmer's field into cities. The primary argument of this thesis is that food sovereignty is produced by neoliberalism. Trade liberalisation and the attendant standards and regulations have implicated farmers and peasants in a universalised market and triggered a resistance discourse particularly from those on the margins of the global food system. However, this is not the full story. While food sovereignty remains a discourse of resistance, in particular for those aligned with farmers, the emergence of food sovereignty discourse in Canada illustrates how food governance has shifted over the last thirty years.

The neoliberal turn has constrained farmers by rolling out universalised standards and regulations that dictate how and what they should farm in order to access the market. In addition, the financialisation of agriculture has hobbled those with small and medium sized farm with debt further constraining their autonomy. Combined with the productivist restructuring of agriculture the result has been an erosion of the rural communities that have sustained farming and agriculture in Canada. The universalised processes have also implicated other farmers and peasants in the same struggles. Therefore food sovereignty as "ethic" is a discourse of transnational solidarity and

resistance. At the same time neoliberalism not only has produced technocratic norms that dictate how farming can take place but it has also produced transnational social movement norms with the rise of organisations such as *La Via Campesina* and the People's Food Policy Project.

The roll out effects of neoliberalisation that are associated with supra-national organisations actually benefit those in the cities with low food prices.<sup>31</sup> The roll back of state programs mean that emergency food provision has become institutionalised and now provide 'non emergency' services and programs from school lunch programs, farmers markets to Good Food Boxes and draw authority from mechanisms that parallel state models such as food policy councils and food charters. These programs are buttressed by the administrative discourse of food security, and underpinned by claims of capacity building, and self-help. As a consequence food security organisations use food sovereignty discourse (and food security as the touchstone discourse) as tactic. So while food sovereignty for farmers represents neoliberalism as a site of *resistance* the adoption of food sovereignty by food security activists represents neoliberalism as a site of *governance*. That said neoliberalism for both threads is the target of food sovereignty discourse. The difference is how it is negotiated.

What do these two threads of the food sovereignty discourse tell us about power relations? In Canada food sovereignty discourse illuminates two different sets of power

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<sup>31</sup> Debbie Field acknowledged that food prices can set up conflict between farmers and the low income people her organisation assists (Field 2009b).

relations, one of governmentality and one of sovereign power. Recall the triangle of power – sovereign, discipline and government. Peasants and farmers are reacting to the real and debilitating effects the neoliberalisation of agriculture. In effect the universalised market is privileged above all else and individual farmers are tethered to it whether through contracts, debt, or liberalised markets. Concurrently, the erosion of rural communities and the interventionist state has left the farmer unsupported in comparison to most of the last century. In sum, the emergence of food sovereignty as ethic is produced in resistance to the market as a natural order (and central authority), or produced by the sovereign-like power of the universalised market.

Chatterjee has stated the governed “find ways of investing their collective identity with moral contents” (2004, 57) and the moral contents of the food sovereignty as ethic is shaped by farm experiences. This is supported by Massicotte who states in reference to food sovereignty, the “fight for social justice is anchored in lived experiences” (2009, 10). In the case of the interviews, among those who referenced the ethic discourse both the farmer’s and indigenous<sup>32</sup> experience was revered. Chatterjee argues that not only do the marginalised bend and stretch rules because of their position but they must “mobiliz[e] population groups to produce a local consensus that can effectively work against the distribution of power in society as a whole” (Chatterjee 2004, 66). To illuminate this I want to share the story of a farmer I spoke with in the last year. The farmer had been working a family farm over fifty years. Up until the last few years the

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<sup>32</sup> While not expanded on in this thesis the food sovereignty as an ethic discourse engaged both farmer’s and indigenous experiences. I have limited the paper’s discussion to the particularities of the farm experiences.

farm had done everything 'right'. The farm was productivist, tied to a commodity chain and part of a liberalised market; however, it had never made money. Recently, the farm disengaged from the conventional market and the regulations and standards that guide it. For the first time in their lives they were making money and at the same time doing everything 'wrong'. This puts them in a precarious position and open to prosecution by a number of jurisdictions. The only way the farm is able to continue is through the complicity and trust of the people they sell products to illegally. In this sense they are creating a local consensus that is working against what they see as an inequitable system. The actions represent how farmers in Canada are marginalised and impoverished by the present system and yet are able to leverage "sovereign action" (Lipschutz 2005, 767) with a local consensus. Lipschutz, quoting Chaloupka, states that "*authority has to be created in action*" (emphasis in original 2005, 766).

The power relations of food sovereignty as tactic are shaped by the normalisation of community food security organisations. If political subjectivity is understood as a process that has shifted from unified (e.g. citizenship) to a fragmented hybrid set of multiple identities and accessed through a range of resources and techniques (Rose 1999) the rise of urban food security organisations illustrate this as they have negotiated through the last thirty years of neoliberalisation by drawing on a range of techniques and practices. Authority is drawn from the successful negotiation and in some cases outright adoption of neoliberalism. Recall Wayne Roberts' statement that neoliberalism is rampant in the food movement. As food security institutions have been carved out of the space left behind by roll back neoliberalisation food security increasingly was used as an

administrative discourse. The language of capacity building, skills development and self-help began to shape programs. In other words, increasingly the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1991) or governmentality began to shape the work . As one activist stated “food sovereignty was nascent in food security” (I S8 2010), and for these activists food sovereignty discourse is tethered to food security. Non-governmental-organisations have taken on functions that had previously been the domain of the state, however, their adoption of ‘sovereignty’ has little to do with sovereign power. Rather than expanding the realm of the public community food security actions are constrained by the market and state permission.

Lipschutz is helpful here to explain how NGOs expand the realm of private action. NGOs focus on the provision of social welfare services because they rely on state permissions and business models to provide steady incomes. This constrains their ability to call for, or even work towards structural change. This effect is only intensified as community food security organisations become institutionalised. Thus their actions are necessarily constrained by the frame of the market as well as state permissions and the perceived radical nature of food sovereignty places real limits on its use as “tactic”.

Following the question that was raised at the end of the last chapter, does consumerism require a simultaneous production of exalted others to match spectacles of consumption? I argue that it does and this is illustrated by the odd portrayal of farmers at public meetings – “my farmer, the superhero”. This depiction of farmers erases the structures that have sustained farmers over the last one hundred years in Canada, whether state intervention and institutions, or rural communities. Instead the consumer is placed at

the centre and the farmer becomes a romanticised ideal. In the urban milieu, subjectivities are crafted to make sense of consumption. As a superhero the farmer swoops down onto the farmers' market and serves the consumer as *their* farmer and departs, mission accomplished. Therefore the farmer, solely depicted in relation to consumers, becomes exalted; unbound and untied from any moral economy, portrayed as individualised superhero with no collective representation. The representation is not indicative of a shared experience, or responsibility, but possessed as 'my farmer'. The relationships that have sustained farmers in the past such as the moral economies of rural communities, and state interventions that have sustained farmers have been elided in this representation.

### **Tensions**

The combination of political economy and Neo-Foucauldian analytics have produced a rich context from which to frame the structural changes of the neoliberalisation of Canadian agriculture in addition to drawing the discrete power relations that are shaping food sovereignty discourse in Canada. The framing of political economy may have been too rigid at times and that is a weakness of this framing. Whereas it is helpful to delineate and make distinctions between the Staples, Keynesian and Neoliberal eras the conclusion has been somewhat path dependant and unsurprisingly highlighted the production of neoliberal subjectivities. However, I hope that I have made some further distinctions that trouble a standard reading by focusing on farmers as a critical pivot. The average age of a Canadian farmer is in their early- to mid-fifties and getting older quickly (Statistics Canada 2006). In 2006 they had the highest median age of any occupation in Canada

(Statistics Canada 2006) and are products of an earlier time. This in itself is reason enough to trace the political economy of agriculture to understand the rationalities that underpin agriculture in Canada and farmer's subjectivities. Where political economy is rigid, Neo-Foucauldian analytics are discrete. The particularity of the lens to the abstract can be limiting. The intention of this thesis was to not necessarily bridge all the tensions inherent in a hybrid framework, but rather to use the framework to negotiate through both the material and the abstract and the historical and the contemporary and highlight the puzzles and questions along the way. Hopefully, I was able to situate the production of subjectivities within the Canadian food and agriculture political economy coherently.

### **Contribution to literature**

There are three areas in which this work has contributed to the literature. First, this work extends the meaning of food sovereignty in a wealthy northern country and into cities. By tracing the emergence of food sovereignty this work has troubled previous conceptions of food sovereignty as solely an agrarian citizenship produced from small scale agro-ecological relations. Second, food sovereignty has been portrayed at a fairly abstract level and little work has been done on the day-to-day practice of it. Through interviews and working closely with the PFPP this work has begun to trace out what food sovereignty means in practice and how activists understand their work. Finally this work has identified two threads of discourse that are produced by food sovereignty and how authority is drawn (or constrained by) the discourses in relation to neoliberalism. In addition this has highlighted the effects of neoliberalism in Canada and how community

food security organisations are gaining authority and how farmer's authority is being eroded.

### **Areas for further Research**

This work has spurred a number of productive areas for further research. The term "food systems" is used by activists and academics to indicate webs and networks of relationships. It would be fruitful to do a genealogy of food systems in order to trace its emergence and if it limits or constrains SMOs. Food system implies a rational intent and as if there is an invisible hand or someone in control behind the curtain when in fact I think it is much more contingent and accidental. It appears to initially be a health discourse, i.e. a diet system for individuals (1930s-40s), and then during the 1970s it appears to be taken up by agricultural economists in a big way in relation to energy and agriculture in the US. A second area that would be interesting is the role of academics and international solidarity NGOs in the production of food sovereignty discourse. This would focus less on how it came to emerge in Canada (or elsewhere) but how the discourse travels and who is forwarding it. Finally, it is clear that an area that needs further research is how the discourse of food sovereignty is being produced in urban areas. As the food movement continues and there is rising interest in urban agriculture this may prove to be a fruitful area.

### **Implications**

Food sovereignty is presently being used by the PFPP as a way to frame policy. In addition the increased efforts of the food movement and federal political parties mean that this study is timely. By critically examining how food sovereignty is emerging in

Canada this study has policy implications because it will help to illuminate these conceptions of food governance. Political moves to forward a new vision of food policy by the federal Liberal and NDP parties make this study timely and pertinent to public debate. In addition, as a participatory research effort this project has highlighted some of the problems that activists and the PFPP will have to negotiate.

Although this story raises some questions about how food sovereignty discourse is emerging in Canada, the PFPP and its leaders are highly sophisticated in their political strategy and practices. They do not see the fissure I have identified as serious and in fact are working to change these divisions (Chaurette 2010). This has included a concerted and authentic effort to be reflective and sensitive to the marginalised and in fact the leaders who were interviewed were the most passionate in this regard. The PFPP was modelled after the People's Food Commission which foretold many of the structural changes that have been rolled out over the last thirty years. Hopefully, the PFPP will be able fulfill the PFC's promise and leverage the resources and mobilise communities around food sovereignty to forward structural changes, in particular for marginalised farmers, here and elsewhere.

During the interviews I was moved by the passion of the activists who had lived farm experiences. For example, the father of one of the activists said "If we had food sovereignty five years ago we could have saved the farm". Edelman (2005) observes that the discourse of present day peasants is not focused on the specifics of technocratic rules and laws of the WTO but rather they draw on moral norms to challenge the present system. This has been shown to be the case with food sovereignty as ethic. However,

food sovereignty as tactic the discourse draws on a different set of authority, one that requires state permission and more often than not works within the market frame. These tensions raise questions for how activists are going to forward their aims and political goals-together.

This thesis has illustrated how food sovereignty discourse as a new political imaginary in the hands of those in authority may very well elide the relationships that have sustained farmers in the past such as the moral economies of rural communities, and state interventions. As one urban activist observed food sovereignty looks to the past, and I would argue for good reason. The challenge is how to craft food sovereignty to leverage the new sites of governance that have emerged in community food security and at the same time build, rather than erode, the authority of the very farmers that are idealised by consumer subjectivities.

## **Appendix A**

### **The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty**

*Developed at Nyéléni 2007*

#### **1. Focuses on Food for People:**

- puts people's need for food at the centre of policies
- insists that food is more than just a commodity

*Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.*

#### **2. Values Food Providers:**

- supports sustainable livelihoods
- respects the work of all food providers

*Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.*

#### **3. Localises Food Systems:**

- reduces distance between food providers and consumers
- rejects dumping and inappropriate food aid
- resists dependency on remote and unaccountable
- corporations

*Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists*

*governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.*

#### **4. Puts Control Locally:**

- places control in the hands of local food providers
- recognizes the need to inhabit and to share territories

- rejects the privatization of ‘natural resources’

*Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.*

#### 5. Builds Knowledge and Skills:

- builds on traditional knowledge uses research to support and pass this knowledge to future generations
- rejects technologies that undermine or
- contaminate local food systems

*Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.*

#### 6. Works with Nature:

- maximizes the contributions of ecosystems
- improves resilience
- rejects energy intensive, monocultural,
- industrialized, destructive methods

Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

## **Appendix B Nyeleni Declaration**

We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organizations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisher-folk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers, environmental and urban movements have gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Selingue, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty. We are doing this, brick by brick, have been living in huts constructed by hand in the local tradition, and eating food that is being produced and prepared by the Selingue community. We give our collective endeavor the name "Nyéléni" as a tribute to and inspiration from a legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her peoples well.

Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed all the world's peoples. Our heritage as food producers is critical to the future of humanity. This is specially so in the case of women and indigenous peoples who are historical creators of knowledge about food and agriculture and are devalued. But this heritage and our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism. Food sovereignty gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.

In Nyéléni, through numerous debates and interactions, we are deepening our collective understanding of food sovereignty and learned about the reality of the struggles of our respective movements to retain autonomy and regain our powers. We now understand better the tools we need to build our movement and advance our collective vision.

What are we fighting for?

A world where...

...all peoples, nations and states are able to determine their own food producing systems and policies that provide every one of us with good quality, adequate, affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food;

...recognition and respect of women's roles and rights in food production, and representation of women in all decision making bodies;

...all peoples in each of our countries are able to live with dignity, earn a living wage for their labour and have the opportunity to remain in their homes;

...where food sovereignty is considered a basic human right, recognised and implemented by communities, peoples, states and international bodies;

...we are able to conserve and rehabilitate rural environments, fish stocks, landscapes and food traditions based on ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds, livestock and other biodiversity;

...we value, recognize and respect our diversity of traditional knowledge, food, language and culture, and the way we organise and express ourselves;

... there is genuine and integral agrarian reform that guarantees peasants full rights to land, defends and recovers the territories of indigenous peoples, ensures fishing communities' access and control over their fishing areas and eco-systems, honours access and control over pastoral lands and migratory routes, assures decent jobs with fair remuneration and labour rights for all, and a future for young people in the countryside;

...where agrarian reform revitalises inter-dependence between producers and consumers, ensures community survival, social and economic justice and ecological sustainability, and respect for local autonomy and governance with equal rights for women and men;

...where it guarantees the right to territory and self-determination for our peoples;

...where we share our lands and territories peacefully and fairly among our peoples, be we peasants, indigenous peoples, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, or others;

Šin the case of natural and human-created disasters and conflict-recovery situations, food sovereignty acts as a kind of "insurance" that strengthens local recovery efforts and mitigates negative impacts... where we remember that affected communities are not helpless, and where strong local organization for self-help is the key to recovery;

...where peoples' power to make decisions about their material, natural and spiritual heritage are defended;

... where all peoples have the right to defend their territories from the actions of transnational corporations;

What are we fighting against?

Imperialism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism and patriarchy, and all systems that impoverish life, resources and eco-systems, and the agents that promote the above such as international financial institutions, the World Trade Organisation, free trade

agreements, transnational corporations, and governments that are antagonistic to their peoples;

The dumping of food at prices below the cost of production in the global economy;

The domination of our food and food producing systems by corporations that place profits before people, health and the environment;

Technologies and practices that undercut our future food producing capacities, damage the environment and put our health at risk. Those include transgenic crops and animals, terminator technology, industrial aquaculture and destructive fishing practices, the so-called white revolution of industrial dairy practices, the so-called 'old' and 'new' Green Revolutions, and the "Green Deserts" of industrial bio-fuel monocultures and other plantations;

The privatisation and commodification of food, basic and public services, knowledge, land, water, seeds, livestock and our natural heritage;

Development projects/models and extractive industry that displace people and destroy our environments and natural heritage;

Wars, conflicts, occupations, economic blockades, famines, forced displacement of people and confiscation of their land, and all forces and governments that cause and support them; post disaster and conflict reconstruction programmes that destroy our environments and capacities;

The criminalization of all those who struggle to protect and defend our rights;

Food aid that disguises dumping, introduces GMOs into local environments and food systems and creates new colonialism patterns;

The internationalisation and globalisation of paternalistic and patriarchal values that marginalise women, diverse agricultural, indigenous, pastoral and fisher communities around the world;

What can and will we do about it?

Just as we are working with the local community in Selingue to create a meeting space at Nyeleni, we are committed to building our collective movement for food sovereignty by forging alliances, supporting each others' struggles and extending our solidarity, strengths, and creativity to peoples all over the world who are committed to food sovereignty. Every struggle, in any part of the world for food sovereignty, is our struggle.

We have arrived at a number of collective actions to share our vision of food sovereignty with all peoples of this world, which are elaborated in our synthesis document. We will implement these actions in our respective local areas and regions, in our own movements and jointly in solidarity with other movements. We will share our vision and action agenda for food sovereignty with others who are not able to be with us here in Nyeleni so that the spirit of Nyeleni permeates across the world and becomes a powerful force to make food sovereignty a reality for peoples all over the world.

Finally, we give our unconditional and unwavering support to the peasant movements of Mali and ROPPA in their demands that food sovereignty become a reality in Mali and by extension in all of Africa.

Now is the time for food sovereignty!

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