



An increasing number of rural and urban-based movements are realizing some political traction in their demands for democratisation of food systems through food sovereignty. Some are pressuring to institutionalize food sovereignty principles and practices through laws, policies, and programmes. While the literature on food sovereignty continues to grow in volume and complexity, there are a number of key questions that need to be examined more deeply. These relate specifically to the processes and consequences of seeking to institutionalize food sovereignty.

The contributors to this book analyse diverse institutional processes related to food sovereignty, ranging from community-supported agriculture to food policy councils, direct democracy initiatives to constitutional amendments, the drafting of new food sovereignty laws to public procurement programmes, as well as Indigenous and youth perspectives, in a variety of contexts including Brazil, Ecuador, Spain, Switzerland, UK, Canada, USA, and Africa. Together, the contributors to this book discuss the political implications of integrating food sovereignty into existing liberal political structures and analyse the emergence of new political spaces and dynamics in response to interactions between state governance systems and social movements voicing the radical demands of food sovereignty.

Annette Aurélie Desmarais is Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty, University of Manitoba, Canada.

Priscilla Claeys is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, UK.

Amy Trauger is Associate Professor of Geography, University of Georgia, USA.

FOOD STUDIES / SOCIOLOGY / POLITICS

Cover image: Nyéléni Europe forum for food sovereignty

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
www.routledge.com


earthscan
from Routledge

Routledge titles are available as eBook editions in a range of digital formats

ISBN 978-1-138-24096-4



9 781138 240964

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN FOOD, SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

PUBLIC POLICIES FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Edited by ANNETTE AURÉLIE DESMARAIS,
PRISCILLA CLAEYS and AMY TRAUGER

Routledge


earthscan
from Routledge

PUBLIC POLICIES FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Social Movements and the State



Edited by ANNETTE AURÉLIE DESMARAIS, PRISCILLA CLAEYS
and AMY TRAUGER

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN FOOD, SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Thompson, S., Gulrukh, A., Ballard, M., Beardy, B., Islam, D., Lozeznik, V., and Wong, K. (2011) 'Is community economic development putting healthy food on the table? Food sovereignty in Northern Manitoba's Aboriginal communities', *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 14–39
- Trauger, A. (2014) 'Toward a political geography of food sovereignty: Transforming territory, exchange and power in the liberal sovereign state', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1131–1152
- Tuck, E., and Yang, W. K. (2012) 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–40
- Wolfe, P. (2006) 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 387–409

11

AUTONOMY, COALITION-BUILDING, AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL: TOWARDS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE U.S. SOUTH

Catarina Passidomo and Irene Van Riper

The global movement for food sovereignty connects disparate communities, peoples, and nations by emphasizing and fighting for the autonomy of people to imagine and shape their food economies in place-specific ways. While prioritizing the needs and experiences of local places and circumstances, the articulation of a global movement for food sovereignty also suggests the potential for broad coalition-building across disparate spaces and contexts. As Desmarais and Wittman (2014) have argued, struggles for food sovereignty are rooted in specific place-histories and need to contend with the particular challenges and opportunities of their locales, at the same time that they connect with and learn from efforts in other places. In this chapter, we present two community-based efforts in the United States South to achieve the preconditions of food sovereignty – although the historically marginalized communities we profile do not themselves use the term to describe their work. These preconditions include intentional autonomy over local food systems; strategic coalition-building and mobilization of local markets; and using food cultivation practices as a means of cultural and economic survival.

We consider two specific communities of colour in the Southern United States whose experiences in the past and present have enabled particular expressions of autonomy in the food system that serve as instructive examples of alternative pathways to food sovereignty. We demonstrate the centrality of specific place histories and experiences of oppression to the formulation of an ethos of food sovereignty. Because these two communities are located within the U.S. South, we also attend to the unique history and context of that region as one dominated by legacies of plantation agriculture and the racialized exploitation of labour. Following Trefzer *et al* (2014), we characterize “souths” not solely as geographic spaces, but also as sites characterized by particular relations of power. In that context, there exist many souths globally and within the United States – places

struggling with disinvestment, institutionalized racism, and structural inequality. We profile two such communities in this chapter. Both communities operate at different scales and with differing strategies for achieving autonomy within their local food economy. The first case is a loose network of African American farmers in the state of Mississippi, connected spatially and culturally through shared resistance to an oppressive state and temporally through the collective experience of the (long) Civil Rights Movement and its current manifestations in sustainable agriculture. The second community is the Mary Queen of Vietnam community of New Orleans East, Louisiana, whose presence in that place dates only to the 1970s, but whose experience of systematic and repeated trauma fosters resistance and resilience.

Beyond needing food to live, both communities have used food as a medium for cultural survival in the face of systemic oppression. In the present moment, food cultivation in the two communities represents a material and symbolic repudiation of earlier eras, such as the pre-Civil War, Jim Crow, and even Civil Rights periods, when powerful oppressors systematically denied democratic local control over food production and consumption to people of colour (cf. Daniel 2013). Growing food is also a means of cultural resistance and permanence in the face of constant and imminent change. Despite their similarities, the communities tell very different stories about the historic processes and contemporary conditions that can and do facilitate pathways towards food sovereignty for oppressed people.

This chapter is organized as follows. In the next section, we lay out the scholarly and broader social context for this research. We situate our research within a transnational movement for food sovereignty and consider the relevance for discourses and practices operating at various scales. This contextual framing demonstrates the need to consider food sovereignty movement(s) as embedded in particular places and as part of a diverse set of survival strategies among marginalized communities. Next, we briefly outline our methodological approach, followed by a depiction of our two case study communities. We conclude with a section analysing the case studies according to themes of place, history, and scale and within the context of the U.S. South. Our aim is to demonstrate the existential necessity of locally-controlled autonomous food practices in marginalized communities, while also showing that such practices can both create and maintain meaningful connections to a broader transnational movement for food sovereignty.

Context

The spatial expansion and decentralization of food sovereignty discourses and movements have generated significant scholarly interest in both the concept and practice of food sovereignty around the globe. La Via Campesina (LVC) first articulated the right to food sovereignty to global audiences at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome (Claeys 2014; NGO Forum to the World Food Summit 1996). The earliest definition of food sovereignty proffered by LVC was “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods

respecting cultural and productive diversity” (La Via Campesina 1996). Subsequent definitions shifted the focus from “nations” to “peoples”, signalling to some scholars that food sovereignty had become a “big tent, and the definition reflects that very well indeed” (Patel 2009, 666). While deeply familiar to scholars and activists today, the proclamation of a right to particular practices and autonomy regarding food was a radical act that sparked a decentralized yet global movement.

Two decades in, it is impossible to keep track of or articulate a singular “movement” (or definition) for food sovereignty. A Google search for “food sovereignty” in 2016 yields over 3.5 million hits, while a search in Google Scholar brings back nearly half a million results in English. The term food sovereignty is employed in diverse (sometimes paradoxical) contexts and at varied scales – from the documents of international rural development agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Programme, International Fund for Agricultural Development) and the constitutions of numerous states (Bolivia, Ecuador, Nepal, Mali, Senegal, and Venezuela), to the guiding principles of countless civil-society organizations operating at local, regional, national, and transnational levels (Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, and Grassroots International, for example) (Akram-Lhodi 2013, 1). This broad extension of food sovereignty discourse and practice suggests that pathways towards food sovereignty can and arguably should vary considerably, articulating the needs and demands of particular places and circumstances.

Food sovereignty's rights claims

A number of scholars write extensively on the broadening definitions and uses of the term food sovereignty. Agarwal (2014, 1248) notes the evolution of LVC's definition to ultimately include a “range of other rights, such as the right to manage land, and emphasizes peasant empowerment, family farming, and freedom from gender-related and other inequalities”. Claeys (2014) charts the evolution of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants as it enumerates these and other demands to articulate a broader “right to food sovereignty” as a human right. Borrowing from Benford and Snow (2000, 16), Claeys highlights LVC's powerful and effective use of a “rights master frame” to characterize food sovereignty struggles. This master frame positions rights at the centre of LVC discourse and “provide[s] a common language to peasants' and small-scale farmers' organizations that are politically, culturally, and ideologically different” (Claeys 2014, 2). Such framing also has limitations, including falling back on conceptions of rights that privilege liberal, Western ideologies (ibid.; Trauger 2014). Additionally, Patel critiques LVC's earlier definition of food sovereignty, which “puts those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies”, by pointing out that such phrasing “refers, unfortunately, to everyone” (Patel 2009, 666). Patel points to this rhetorical shift as an example of the allure of “big tent politics,” in which “disparate groups can recognize themselves in the enunciation of a particular program” (ibid, 666).

The “big tent” to which Patel refers has expanded to include not just new rights, such as those Agarwal enumerated, but also new claimants, and renewed discussion of who or what entity grants these rights. As Trauger (2014) notes, most food sovereignty narratives tend to fall back on the state as the guarantor of rights, even as they acknowledge the failure of the liberal state to “decommodify food and decentralize authority over decision-making” (10). Critically, Trauger argues, the liberal state is premised not on local autonomy or collective rights, but rather on modernist ethics of industrial streamlining and the proliferation of capital. Thus, any effort to achieve food sovereignty by “do[ing] democracy better” confronts the contradictions of private property and the sovereign liberal state.

These scholarly explorations provoke two related questions. First, is it possible that the ever-expanding “tent” of food sovereignty threatens to dilute the radical premise of a movement constructed by and for marginalized communities? Second, drawing on Wendy Brown’s (1995) theoretical engagement with rights and losses more broadly, can food sovereignty “offer an emancipatory force of rights claims on behalf of politicized identities” (p. 96)? Undergirding both of these questions is Brown’s observation of a paradox between the “universal idiom and the local effects of rights” which transpires on both “a temporal and a spatial level” (ibid., 97). The paradoxical nature of rights, she argues, prevents us from saying anything generic about the political or practical value of rights: “it makes little sense to argue for them or against them separately from an analysis of the historical conditions, social power, and political discourses with which they converge or which they interdict” (ibid., 98).

Brown argues that social movements using the discourse of rights run the risk of undermining the emancipatory potential of their projects by reinforcing the structures that contribute to social domination. She cautions against depoliticizing rights by observing that “rights necessarily operate in and as an ahistorical, acultural, acontextual idiom: they claim distance from specific political contexts and vicissitudes, and they necessarily participate in a discourse of enduring universality rather than provisionality or partiality” (ibid., 97).

Brown’s theoretical framing of rights helps us to see the potential harm in expanding the tent of food sovereignty’s rights discourse towards a broad human rights framework. Her emphasis on the historical and cultural context in which rights are denied, negotiated, or claimed suggests that food sovereignty discourses and practices may be most fruitfully considered not through the lens of universal rights – what Patel has termed “moral universalism” (Patel 2009) – but through specific struggles in particular places.

Finally, it is worth noting briefly scholarship that demonstrates the place-specific nature of rights claims in two specific instances. First, Merry (2006) demonstrates the powerful role of local actors for situating and making sense of (essentially “translating”) a complex (or vague) transnational idea like human rights. In fact, Merry argues, local leaders may subvert or resist human rights discourse as framed at a transnational level, in favour of interpretations that are more sensitive to or appropriate for local circumstances. Second, Kurtz’s (2015) investigation of food

sovereignty ordinances in rural Maine used biopolitics as a theoretical frame to show that each local ordinance was crafted to meet the social, economic, and political demands of the community that crafted it. Thus, this chapter builds on that work to further demonstrate the centrality of local place histories and contemporary opportunities and challenges for charting pathways towards food sovereignty.

Critical race theory

Critical race theory complements Brown’s perspective on rights by challenging liberal sovereignty and private property rights, customs which reproduce intersecting oppressions along the lines of race, class, and gender. Delgado and Stefancic (2001), for example, argue that relationships among race, racism, and power can only be truly recognized, and then dealt with, when individuals take up a “broad perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (p. 3). Within this call to action, they find that perspectivism, or, “the insistence on examining how things look from the perspective of individual actors”, necessitates a person-centred view of cultural life, including spatially and temporally situated claims to rights (p. 55).

Critical race theorist Patricia Hill Collins calls for a paradigmatic shift away from dialectical approaches to power imbalances and towards a subjectivity approach that emphasizes agency (Collins 2000, 275). She insists that ideas, including the people and contexts from which they come, are more important than the symbols that are attached to them. Following Delgado and Stefancic, and Collins, the idea that food sovereignty encompasses certain universal human rights must be levelled with critical theories that insist on perspectivist and intersectional approaches to power relationships.

U.S. Southern Studies

Engagement with recent Southern Studies scholarship allows us to deepen our understanding of place by thinking specifically about the region of the contemporary U.S. South as a space for enacting food sovereignty. The history of the U.S. South is characterized by waves of violence and disruption; indigenous displacement was followed by a nearly 300-year period of legal slavery, which ceded reluctantly to sharecropping, Jim Crow discrimination, and contemporary racial and class divisions. In *Critical Regionalism*, Douglas Reichert Powell argues that regions are at once defined by the particularities of their geographies and social histories, while they are at the same time linked to landscapes that span space and time in their similar relationships to structures of power and oppression. To understand a particular region as it exists in the minds of its inhabitants, one must understand the deep history of the place from the perspective of those who live there and remember it through the experiences of their kin. Powell’s (2007)

concept of place emphasizes the “complex relationship among places” whereby people in geographically distant localities may strategically link themselves for purposes of representation (p. 61–65). This global view takes the perspective that residents manipulate regional identity strategically in order to form interrelationships, coalitions, and a sense of collectivity with people in other regions to whom they feel connected. When working in solidarity with communities in different regions, people have an enhanced opportunity to assert their autonomy and reclaim material and psychological forms of power both locally and within the collective.

Scholars of the U.S. South have worked in recent years to position the region not as an exceptional or set-apart region but as a place deeply connected to the rest of the nation and world. In *Grounded Globalism*, James Peacock argues that “globalization has the capacity to fundamentally transform the South – not only economically, demographically, and, perhaps, politically, but also culturally and psychologically – to create an identity at once global and regional ...” (Peacock 2007, x). Indeed, the flow of people, ideas, and technologies into and out of the U.S. South is a centuries-old process, but accelerated rates of demographic change in recent years challenge the cultural and economic dominance of white southern ideology. By focusing on the realities and experiences of non-white U.S. Southerners, we embrace a contemporary understanding of the region that is attentive to its complexity and diversity, but which also acknowledges persistent white hegemony.

The structures that reproduce inequality have remained the same through centuries in the U.S. South, while the scale on which they operate has grown larger and more complex. In Mississippi as well as in the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, struggles for food sovereignty always hang in a delicate balance between autonomy and dependency. In both cases, working towards food sovereignty encapsulates a holistic concept of survival – physical, cultural, and psychological. With this epistemological framing, we now turn to a description of our methodology and case studies.

Methods and case studies

We employ a critical theoretical framework to our analysis of empirical data. Both authors engaged in ethnographic fieldwork in the U.S. South. Van Riper conducted research on small-scale agriculture, community and institutional relationships, and coalition-building amongst farmers and community leaders in rural Mississippi for eight months in 2015. Trips to the northern part of the state since 2009 informed Van Riper’s perspective of the region and allowed her to develop relationships within several communities. Participant-observation research was conducted at community development conferences in Coahoma and Lafayette counties, at Lafayette County farmers’ markets, at a state-wide agriculture non-profit organization, and on locally owned farms. Individual interviews were conducted with four male, African American, multigenerational farmers from northern, central, and southern Mississippi counties who have each described themselves as “small-scale”, “local”, or “family” farmers.

Passidomo spent five months living in and studying the food justice landscape of post-Katrina New Orleans in 2012, but her research there spanned several trips between 2010 and 2013. Interviews and participant observation with the Viet Village community that serves as one of the case studies for this chapter comprised a portion of that broader research project. Research on the Vietnamese-American community of New Orleans is based on interviews with community leaders, interactions with leaders and community members at the community’s Saturday farmers’ market and at city-wide food justice organizing meetings, and visits to numerous backyard aquaponics systems. Additionally, because the scope of organizing and work in the community has broadened since 2012, we draw on Internet materials, news articles, and more recent conversations with community leaders to complement and round out the ethnographic research.

African American farmers in Mississippi

The four participants in this case study do not constitute community in the physical sense of people connected by virtue of their spatial proximity. They are connected through the experience of being African American male farmers living in rural communities in Mississippi whose families have been farmers or farm workers for multiple generations. They maintain overlapping social networks that they have developed during their work at farmers’ markets, participation in academic conferences, and in collaboration with non-profit organizations. However, they reside in different regions of the state, and they do not interact regularly on a face-to-face basis. Through their shared profession and commitments to food autonomy, though, they constitute an example of what bell hooks has termed a “community of resistance”, defined by solidarity of vision forged in shared struggle against the “dominator culture” of whiteness and its suppression of women and nonwhites (hooks 2003).

These four farmers have chosen lives that centre around creating and maintaining food autonomy within their families and communities. Two of these individuals’ families have owned land since around the time of Emancipation and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished legal slavery in the United States. All four began farming during the 1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. They constitute individual parts of a larger community of resistance in Mississippi that is defined by place, race, a history of slavery and disenfranchisement, landownership, and by the experience of freedom realized through control over one’s own food production. Brought together in vision and spirit in response to the violence and political oppression in Mississippi’s history, small-scale black farmers today, as in the past, constitute a community of resistance because of their pursuit of autonomy through agriculture and their self-realized experience of freedom that dominator culture has attempted to deny them.

Frank Green,¹ a Yalobusha County farmer in his mid-60s, runs a 400-acre family farm that produces timber for commercial markets as well as mushrooms and herbs for local farmers’ markets. A native of Yalobusha County, his parents

purchased the land when he was a child. However, his family has owned land since shortly after the close of the Civil War, when ex-slaves and the descendants of slaves first had the opportunity to become landowners. Today, his family's sustained relationship to place is central to his philosophy about freedom and autonomy. "It's part of the tradition of my family history, it's the enjoyment, it's the freedom, and it gives other people an opportunity to enjoy what I enjoy", he explained in an interview.

While Emancipation-era land redistribution programmes allowed an estimated 40,000 African Americans, including Frank Green's family, to obtain land in the south, the vast majority were duped by the promise of "forty acres and a mule" (FSC/LAF, n.d.a). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the physical and cultural survival of Mississippi African Americans was continually tested as peonage systems such as sharecropping, convict leasing, and tenancy prevented most from achieving freedom through land-ownership. The number of black-owned farms in the U.S. peaked at 925,000 with a total of 16 million acres in 1920 before plummeting to a low of 18,000 farms and 3 million acres in 1999 (Daniel 2013, xii). These losses were the *intentional results* of a complex web of interactions between the policies of racist institutions at local, state, and federal levels (ibid.).

John McGowan, a commercial fruit and vegetable farmer in Tate County, grew up sharecropping cotton in the 1960s and developed a love for vegetable farming despite his own negative associations with plantation agriculture. After a 20-year career as an Extension Agent at the Mississippi State University, he returned to his own land and began a successful commercial vegetable operation in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, he established one of the first farmers' markets in the mid-South and now feels a great responsibility to both feed and employ his community. In an interview he put it like this: "If there wasn't farming, somebody wouldn't eat. Not just local; everywhere. Everything that you see comes out of a can – some farmer grew it somewhere. So my philosophy about farming is we need it. We got to have it in order to feed the mouths that need to be fed". Not only does McGowan see himself as central to his local community's survival, he also recognizes his position as part of a global community of small, place-based farmers who help sustain rural communities through traditional social networks and economic markets.

While McGowan purchased land and started a small farming business, the majority of black farmers were struggling to stay afloat and fighting to keep their land. In Mississippi, one of the most successful organizing efforts in this fight was and still is the operation of for-profit agricultural cooperatives. With a history in the state that dates back to the 1940s, cooperatives were instrumental to the successes of local Civil Rights actions throughout the 20th century (Cobb 1992, 241), and they continue to serve as a source of economic power for low-resource farmers today. By pooling capital and profits, farmers are able to sustain the viability of their property and generate higher profits than they would as individual farmers. Twenty-four farm cooperatives in Mississippi are currently members of the state-wide organization Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (MAC), founded in

1972, which is in turn the state's representative in the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF), established in 1967 (MAC 2015). Along with their mission assisting low-resource farmers in saving, protecting, and expanding their landholdings, the FSC/LAF has asserted itself as part of a "strong community based movement of organizations seeped in struggle, tested by time, experienced in fighting exploitation and knowledgeable of the tactics, tools and techniques needed to help people build their own property and progress" (FSC/LAF, n.d.b).

According to Rick Caldwell, a part-time farmer in his early 50s, active member of Attala County Self-Help Cooperative, and field agent for MAC, "a person fights for something when they realize they have something to lose by not fighting". Caldwell was raised in an African American community where family farming and gardening were central to his father's philosophy about self-sufficiency. His father passed along to him the sense of autonomy that land ownership brings a person, and today, he is passionate about teaching this philosophy to youth in his community. "I think that everybody has a right to feed themselves", he explained in an interview. He went on to say "A person needs to own their own. The independence of ownership makes for a stronger character in a person, and the more you have to manage something, the more influence you will have on your offspring". For Caldwell, the influence and trust that he has generated within his community are fundamental to his philosophy about farming. He believes that when a trusted community leader is able to counsel others about simple gardening methods, local people are then better equipped for long-term physical and cultural survival within an increasingly unstable national food system.

Ben Burkett,² a farmer in Forrest County and the retired director of MAC, grew up on family land originally purchased shortly after Emancipation. Since helping to establish the Indian Springs Farmers Association in 1981, Burkett has served as Mississippi state coordinator for FSC/LAF, is currently the board president of the National Family Farm Coalition, and is the North American representative on LVC's International Commission on Food Sovereignty and Trade. His philosophy about farming and land ownership spring from the values of the Civil Rights Movement, and he now identifies with a global community of small farmers similarly affected by transnational trade policies. For Burkett, global movements have no substance when they are not deeply rooted in local work; as he explained at a food sovereignty forum at Indian Springs, "for a good system to work, you need local control" (in Van Riper 2016, 87). Multigenerational knowledge and place-based experiences have produced his deep attachments to land and give him reasons to fight in a larger, global struggle.

Mary Queen of Vietnam community, New Orleans, Louisiana

Vietnamese immigrants began arriving in the Southern United States in large numbers following the Communist victory in Saigon in 1975 (Airriess 2002). Many settled along the Gulf Coast, where the landscape and climate were conducive to pursuing familiar livelihood strategies of fishing and farming; the Catholic

Archdiocese of New Orleans in particular offered asylum to thousands of Vietnamese refugees (Southern Foodways Alliance 2013a). Most Vietnamese immigrants settled in Village de l'Est, on the easternmost edge of Orleans Parish. The 15 miles separating "Viet Village" from the New Orleans swarming with tourists, brass bands, and hand-held hurricanes feels a distance too short to account for such a shift in the feel of the place. In an interview with Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance, Linh Garza,³ whose family owns the iconic Dong Phuong bakery, describes growing up in the neighbourhood her friends called the "Far East": "because it's pretty much as far east as you can get before you get ... outside of Orleans Parish itself ... I think growing up in New Orleans East, it's not New Orleans ... We lived out here and it was just a very close-knit community with all the Vietnamese market in here, the Vietnamese community in here. It was different" (Southern Foodways Alliance 2013b). When the Vietnamese began settling in this territory at the edge of Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, the population was 90 percent African American. Prior to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the neighbourhood remained predominantly African American but had a large and growing Vietnamese-American population, as new waves of Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Americans settled in the community over the past several decades (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center n.d.).

The traumatic events of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, followed by the British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, significantly altered the composition and character of the neighbourhood and shifted the population to majority Vietnamese-American. Because of the community's economic and cultural reliance upon fishing as both a livelihood strategy and an indispensable element of their identity, the oil spill was particularly devastating. The 87-day leak, which caused 4.9 million barrels of oil to pour into the Gulf of Mexico, threatened the permanent destruction of fishing industries along the Gulf coast (On Scene Coordinator Report on Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill 2011). While the fishing industry more broadly has recovered, the spill had long-term consequences for fisherfolk communities. The Vietnamese community in New Orleans, in particular, suffered tremendous losses. As Tap Bui of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Center explained, for Vietnamese, fishing was not just livelihood, but somatic and cultural existence: "With the loss of livelihood, mental and physical health issues increased. Particularly for the older Vietnamese, it's really a case of 'I fish, therefore I am'" (in Green 2013).

Recognizing the existential threat posed by an inability to fish, the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Center (MQVN CDC), which community leaders established in May 2006 to assist with rebuilding efforts following Katrina, held a two-day summit with fisherfolk that had been displaced by the spill. The purpose of the summit was to determine how the community would achieve long-term economic and cultural recovery. Community leaders determined that recovery would entail a creative reintroduction of fishing and agriculture into the livelihood strategies of the community. The MQVN CDC applied for, and received, a series of grants to construct backyard aquaponics systems throughout the community, and later expanded to develop the Viet Village Urban Farm.

In the period immediately following the economic collapse precipitated by the BP oil spill, the MQVN CDC opted for a decentralized approach to economic and cultural recovery. Aquaponics – a system that combines traditional plant cultivation with fish farming – could be practiced on a variety of scales but also required significant technical expertise and training. For that reason, the MQVN CDC used initial funding from Oxfam America to construct a demonstration facility, where community members could come to learn about aquaponics. An additional function of the demonstration facility was the production of plants and fish that could be sold to local restaurants and at the Saturday community farmers' market.

The construction and utilization of the demonstration facility at the MQVN CDC's office led to the creation of the VEGGI farmers' cooperative and the collaborative construction of several backyard aquaponics systems throughout the neighbourhood. The MQVN CDC assisted with marketing and distributing fish and produce from backyard systems to New Orleans restaurants and food coops. Some backyard growers sold at the weekly Saturday farmers' market, an iconic community market that has been an institution in Village de l'Est since the 1970s. As Daniel Nguyen, the project director of MQVN CDC's VEGGI Farmers' cooperative, explained in an interview, "With all the systems, there's a portion of every farmer's plot or system or backyard that's dedicated to just them – their families and neighbours and friends and extended family".⁴ The extensive network of backyard aquaponics systems enabled the community to deal with the ongoing challenge of food access in a neighbourhood technically characterized as a "food desert" because of its lack of grocery stores, while also supplementing incomes and livelihoods that had collapsed in the wake of the oil spill.

Limited access to capital resources meant that the community had to rely on cultural and human capital to address urgent needs during difficult times. Daniel explained that self-sufficiency, creativity, and community solidarity were central to the work of rebuilding a sustainable local food economy in recent years. "Everything that we're doing ... we replicate and do things homemade to save costs. A lot of things, like self-insulating [the van], seeding yourself and not having to buy more seeds, creating your own filters, folks are looking into building their own tanks. Everything is done by us because we can't afford to pay someone else to do things for us. All the greenhouses are made by the growers themselves". Daniel characterized the work of the Farmers' Cooperative and the MQVN CDC as a grassroots response to the slow pace of change: "This is sort of like a community answer to the oil spill and just the overall economic situation, and environmental situation in New Orleans. Instead of waiting for, say, the government to fix things, people want to do it themselves".

Discussion

In this section, we consider the ways in which each of the case study communities navigate relationships with broader movements for food sovereignty while also maintaining allegiance to and connection with their specific communities. We argue that the place-based histories of each community allow for paths towards food

sovereignty that are attentive to the realities of historic oppressions and contemporary landscapes of power and access. Thus, we analyse practices of food sovereignty among African American farmers in Mississippi and a Vietnamese-American community in Louisiana by paying close attention to each community's relationship to place, history, scale, and the region of the U.S. South.

Place

In order to understand the place-specific dynamics of these grassroots struggles in the U.S. South, we need to consider both the site and the situation of each place. Geographers use these terms to refer to the local setting and location of a place (its "site") and to spatial relations between a place and its surrounding region (its "situation"). While site and situation typically refer to physical features and to practical connectivity amongst places, the socio-cultural and historical features of a place are also deeply embedded in its site and situation. For example, Christopher Airriess (2002) describes the character of landscape and place for Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants in New Orleans as "an expression of the refugee adaptation process in a foreign physical and social environment" (p. 228). Conversely, African American farmers descended from generations of people occupying roughly the same territory for over a century, but with starkly varying degrees of autonomy, have developed a sense of place deeply tethered to their history and labour in Mississippi.

Despite the differing tenures on their respective sites, each of these communities maintains situations marked by relative isolation. Airriess (2002) describes the Vietnamese-American community in New Orleans as a "cultural island" characterized by spatial separation from the rest of the city. The four African American farmers described here are each part of rural, tight-knit communities originally formed around black land-ownership. The demographics and political boundaries of towns in these localities have changed over time, but the areas still remain culturally isolated and relatively autonomous within the state as a whole. In many ways, the isolated "situation" of each of these communities has helped to foster significant internal cohesion and community development and has allowed community members to seek strategic alliances outside of their communities.

African American agricultural communities in Mississippi are characterized by ageing populations of farmers, out-migration by young people, and an ever-tightening agricultural market, prompting many to adapt their farming and marketing strategies. For Ben Burkett, this has meant forming strategic coalitions with national and international small farmers similarly affected. For Frank Green, this means selling at the largely urban and white farmers' markets of Oxford as well as training his young nephews and niece to work on the farm, harvest, and sell at the markets.

Despite the spatial and cultural gulf separating Village de l'Est from downtown New Orleans, commercial connectivity between the two is crucial to the continued viability of the Vietnamese community's fish and vegetable production. While much of that production is for home and community sustenance, the city's

many markets and restaurants provide the income necessary to maintain cultivation practices. Because they maintain autonomy over production and distribution processes, the marketing and sale of foods in these communities is precisely what enables them to sustain agrarian livelihoods.

History

The histories of loss characterizing these two communities have been central to their conceptualization of place and to the articulation of their unique struggles towards food sovereignty. Political disenfranchisement and land dispossession have characterized the collective experience of African American farmers in Mississippi for centuries. Historians Daniel and Asch describe the repeated attempts of local and federal officials to starve farm workers out of the Mississippi Delta after mechanization rendered human labour obsolete in the mid-20th century. Daniel (2013, 11) explains that blacks were intentionally forced from their land due to federal subsidies that helped only the largest farms prosper. Asch (2008) adds that local institutions were complicit in this forced emigration when, in 1955, the Delta Council in Coahoma County decided not to fund industrial development for job creation or public education because "rural areas with a heavy concentration of Negroes at the present time may have few Negroes ten years from now" (p. 130–131). Not only did black farmers face the physical loss of land, they also faced cultural and psychological loss of their land-based heritage and sense of place. Food sovereignty for many African American farmers in Mississippi can be both an immediate survival mechanism and a method for asserting one's right to physical and cultural survival. It is a method of sustained resistance to an oppressive state, and its manifestations today are a testament to the deep resilience and sustainability of those communities.

In the case of Village de l'Est, the experience of being uprooted and resettled in a new territory is relatively recent. While many of the community leaders directing the construction of backyard aquaponics systems and the urban farm (and writing grant applications to help fund these projects) were born and raised in the United States, their parents' and grandparents' experience of war, flight, and resettlement is prominent in the younger generation's activism and sense of place. Compared to immigrants who migrate voluntarily, Airriess argues that refugees possess a "stronger spiritual attachment to their home country" because they left by force rather than will (Airriess 2002, 229). The Vietnamese, in particular, created communities of shared experience, having suffered decades of political persecution and oppression even before migrating to the United States as refugees. Food cultivation and consumption expressed attempts to "stay Vietnamese" (Aguilar-San Juan 2009) and served as "crucial vehicles for conveying a tangible, sensual experience to members of the community that bridged the experience of displacement" (Truitt 2012, 329). Growing familiar vegetables in traditional ways, while allowing for the adoption of new technologies and practices, has allowed the community to maintain a tether to Vietnam but also to engage with the broader New Orleans social and economic fabric.

While their histories differ in important ways, the similarities between marginalized agricultural communities in the U.S. South emphasize the importance of viewing acts of food autonomy as self-conscious survival mechanisms deeply rooted in historic experience that sustain the physical, psychological, political, economic, and cultural health of a given community.

Scale and context within the U.S. South

Another similarity between the two communities is their engagement with various scales for advancing local food production and distribution. Ben Burkett's affiliation with a range of international organizations is one example of the ways that he and other black farmers are globalizing their local struggles and achieving higher visibility in an international arena. With Burkett, the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives has formed strategic alliances with FSC/LAF, Via Campesina, Slow Food, and individuals including scholars, farmers, philanthropists, and politicians. As a component of this work, MAC has sent representatives to Ghana over 30 times in the past 10 years and has gained international recognition as a leader in the global food sovereignty movement and as a representative of black farmers in the U.S. South. MAC's engagement in food sovereignty discourses has benefited the global movement, but it also serves a powerful and strategic purpose for MAC's member farmers. In its coalition-building and global activism, MAC takes advantage of the power of publicity and has successfully connected its local work to a global discourse of social and environmental activism.

The scale of practice for the Village de l'Est is also strategic and variable. While the localized movement for food autonomy there began as an effort to revitalize a devastated economy, community members understood that autonomous redevelopment of their food and economic system would require alliances with individuals and institutions outside the community. Grants from national and international foundations supported construction of community and backyard aquaponics systems. Local and regional markets helped to grow and sustain those systems. However, the community has only sought out partnerships that would support their efforts while permitting community autonomy. As a community with persistent ties to Vietnam, the Village de l'Est is emblematic of a transnational, 21st-century South, where new waves of immigrants are continuing to challenge old ideas about who counts as Southerners. At the same time, the South continues to be a region dominated by agriculture, relying upon the labour of immigrants and people of colour.

By strategically linking their situations to broader conversations and economic networks, both communities have been able to navigate "complex relationship[s] among places" (Powell 2007, 61), and have used their intersectionality to claim both local and global identities as it suits their purposes. Both communities' work functions within historical timelines that bind the past to the present while anticipating the future. Thus, their contributions to international conversations about rights are dependent on the extent to which their own local places experience or strive for political, cultural, and physical autonomy.

By claiming their right to food cultivation and the continuation of culturally-specific food practices from an emplaced perspective, Vietnamese-Americans in New Orleans and African American farmers in Mississippi achieve senses of power and autonomy that can be used to strengthen international conversations about how food sovereignty may be manifest in the context of 21st-century globalization. Taken together, these case studies illuminate solutions to Brown's paradox between the "universal idiom and the local effects of rights" (Brown 1995, 97) by demonstrating the futility of stripping food sovereignty's rights claims of their locational specificity. Under this framework, then, there can be no singular global food sovereignty movement. Instead, there are groups of marginalized people who strategically form coalitions in solidarity with other communities facing political disenfranchisement and systematic disempowerment.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the food sovereignty struggles of marginalized communities and demonstrated that although they possess great capacities for adaptability, their lives and life-systems are increasingly threatened. For the communities we profiled, grassroots struggles to realize food sovereignty are very often matters of life and death, as well as cultural survival. We argue that theories of food sovereignty can and should continue to move "beyond food" to account for systemic marginalization and injustice (Passidomo 2013). They must remain grounded within the original framework of "globalization from below" that LVC conceived and that farmers and fisherfolk all around the world still embody (Desmarais 2007, 114). This framework represents a deep and consistent appreciation and space for local struggles in the face of and in response to the forces of globalization.

While the communities that we have described here demonstrate the resilience and embeddedness in place that we find is so crucial to theories of food sovereignty, we must also acknowledge the persistent challenges that they face. Perhaps because of their embeddedness in place and historic resilience within landscapes of oppression, the two communities face specific challenges as globalization increasingly becomes an everyday reality. For ageing populations of African American farmers in Mississippi, it is becoming more difficult to adapt to the large-scale changes that globalization brings. The realities of the digital divide, out-migration, and urbanization within an increasingly complex political system make it difficult for relatively isolated individuals to compete. The sustainability of traditional and local knowledge systems is challenged as global information systems invisibly direct world events and economic markets. For the Vietnamese-American community in New Orleans, successful progressive community food systems will rely on the sustained energy and creativity of young people deeply rooted in their families' histories and conceptions of the connections between place and food. Like the African American farmers in Mississippi, however, this community will need to navigate a path forward that is both locally-controlled and practically sustainable.

For marginalized farmers and fisherfolk in the U.S. South, sustained resistance to oppressive, and sometimes life-threatening, policies on local, state, and federal levels has characterized their collective American experience – for centuries in the case of African American farmers, and decades in the case of Vietnamese-American fisherfolk. Thus, the effects of globalization, neoliberalism, and global agribusiness that small-scale agriculturalists in the South are facing today are hardly new experiences. In their sustained resistance, in their intimate relationships with hierarchies of power, and in their deep resilience to repeated attacks on their livelihoods, the individuals in these case studies represent unique experiences of place, region, and nation. At the same time, these case studies offer the global food sovereignty movement a chance to take an introspective look at the work it is doing. Does it start with individual experiences and local realities before growing to encompass collective and universal experiences? We hope that fellow practitioners will continue to adopt a critical view of food sovereignty that assesses power relationships openly and always from the grassroots level up.

Notes

- 1 This case study uses pseudonyms.
- 2 Unlike other narrators in this section, we use Ben Burkett's real name, because of his public presence.
- 3 This case study uses the real names of participants.
- 4 D. Nguyen. Interview conducted on April 6, 2012. New Orleans, LA.

Bibliography

- Agarwal, B. (2014) 'Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: Critical contradictions, difficult conciliations', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1247–1268
- Aguilar-San Juan, K. (2009) *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Airriess, C.A. (2002) 'Creating Vietnamese landscapes and place in New Orleans' in K. Berry and M. Henderson (eds) *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place*, University of Nevada Press, Reno, NV
- Akram-Lodhi, A.H. (2013) 'How to build food sovereignty', Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue International Conference, Yale University, 14–15 September
- Asch, C. M. (2008) *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer*, The New Press, New York and London
- Benford, R. D. and Snow, D. A. (2000) 'Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, pp. 611–639
- Brown, W. (1995) *States of Inquiry: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ
- Claeys, P. (2014) 'Food Sovereignty and the recognition of new rights for peasants at the UN: A critical overview of La Via Campesina's rights claims over the last 20 years', *Globalizations*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 452–465
- Cobb, J. C. (1992) *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford
- Collins, P. H. (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge, New York

- Daniel, P. (2013) *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC
- Delgado, R. and J. Stefancic. (2001) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, New York University Press, New York
- Desmarais, A. A. (2007) *La Via Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants*, Pluto Press, Ann Arbor and London
- Desmarais, A. A. and Wittman, H. (2014) 'Farmers, foodies and First Nations: Getting to food sovereignty in Canada', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1153–1173
- Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF) (n.d.a) 'Significant dates on Black land loss & land acquisition', www.federationsoutherncoop.com/files%20home%20page/landloss.htm, accessed 10 January 2017
- FSC/LAF (n.d.b) 'History', www.federationsoutherncoop.com./files%20home%20page/history.htm, accessed 10 January 2017
- Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (n.d.) 'Village de l'Est neighborhood snapshot', <http://www.datacenterresearch.org/pre-katrina/orleans/10/56/snapshot.html>, accessed 7 July 2016
- Green, J. (2013) 'In New Orleans, a Vietnamese community bounces back with urban agriculture', *The Dirt*, <https://dirt.asla.org/2013/06/10/in-new-orleans-a-vietnamese-community-bounces-back-with-urban-agriculture/>, accessed 7 July 2016
- hooks, bell. (2003) *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, Routledge, New York and London
- La Via Campesina (LVC) (1996) 'Tlaxcala Declaration of the Via Campesina', (*Declaration of the Second International Conference of Via Campesina, Tlaxcala, Mexico*)
- Kurtz, H. (2015) 'Scaling food sovereignty: Biopolitics and the struggle for local control of farm food in rural Maine', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 105, no. 4, pp. 859–873
- Merry, S. (2006) 'Transnational human rights and local activism: Mapping the middle', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 108, no. 1, pp. 38–51
- Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (MAC) (2015) 'Directory of Coops'. <http://www.mississippiassociation.coop/directory-of-coops/>, accessed 10 January 2016
- NGO Forum to the World Food Summit (1996) 'Profit for a few or food for all', (Statement at the occasion of the World Food Summit, Rome, Italy)
- On Scene Coordinator Report on Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (2011) http://www.uscg.mil/foia/docs/dwh/fosc_dwh_report.pdf, accessed 22 February 2013
- Passidomo, C. (2013) 'Going "beyond food": Confronting structures of injustice in food systems research and praxis', *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 1–5
- Patel, R. (2009) 'Food sovereignty', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 663–706
- Peacock, J. (2007) *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA
- Powell, D. R. (2007) *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC
- Southern Foodways Alliance (2013a) 'Sustainable South: VEGGI Farmers Cooperative' <http://www.southernfoodways.org/sustainable-south-veggi-farmers-cooperative/>, accessed 16 January 2017
- Southern Foodways Alliance (2013b) 'Interview with Linh Garza' <http://www.southernfoodways.org/interview/linh-garza/>, accessed 19 April 2017
- Trauger, A. (2014) 'Toward a political geography of food sovereignty: Transforming territory, exchange and power in the liberal sovereign state', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1–22

- Trefzer, A., Jackson, J. T., McKee, K., and Dellinger, K. (2014) 'Introduction: The global south and/in the global north: Interdisciplinary investigations', *The Global South*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 1–15
- Truitt, A. (2012) 'The Viet Village Urban Farm and the politics of neighborhood viability in Post-Katrina New Orleans', *City & Society*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 321–338
- Van Riper, I. (2016) 'If there wasn't farming, somebody wouldn't eat: Small scale agriculture, community autonomy, and food sovereignty in Mississippi'. Unpublished master's thesis, The University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi

12

YOUTH PRODUCING FOOD FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY: INSIGHTS FROM THE BASQUE COUNTRY

Joseba Azkarraga Etxagibel and Annette Aurélie Desmarais

Integrating more youth into agriculture and peasant/small-scale farmers' movements is a priority for many rural organizations involved in food sovereignty. The key international documents that define food sovereignty and articulate strategies for food system transformation often recognize both women and youth as unique social categories with particular needs and interests (Nyéléni 2007; La Via Campesina 2008, 2013). The interests and concerns of rural youth, for example, are among the priorities of La Via Campesina, the transnational agrarian movement that first introduced a peasant vision of food sovereignty in 1996.¹ Consequently, La Via Campesina has created specific political spaces for youth to exchange experiences, engage in dialogue and debate, develop a collective analysis, define strategies, and ultimately engage in collective action (Nyéléni Newsletter 2014).² The result has been enthusiastic youthful exuberance and creativity often infusing La Via Campesina gatherings, debates, and actions. While this is the organized, highly politicized, and more visible face of rural youth engaged in food sovereignty, there are other more quiet and day-to-day pathways by which youth engage in food sovereignty.³

This chapter sheds light on more hidden expressions of food sovereignty by analysing the motivations and experiences of Basque youth who have chosen to make a radical change of life by living as new agrarians and/or taking part in growing food to engage in self-provisioning.⁴ The activist experiences that we analyse have less to do with the politics of public protest than with prefigurative politics – that is, effecting change in the 'here and now' by creating alternative social structures and new ways of living, and by relating to one another while engaging in counter-hegemonic projects. As Carl Boggs (1978) reminds us, prefiguration is "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (p. 5) and anticipate the future liberated