



School of GeoSciences

DISSERTATION

For the degree of

MSc in Environment and Development

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August 2012

Theorizing Food Sovereignty:
An analysis of public and academic discourse

Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been composed by me and is based on my own work.

Signed,

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Date: 15 August 2012

Word Count: 19,980

Abstract

Food is at the nexus of a truly striking range of the global political, environmental, economic and human rights issues we face today, from climate change and water scarcity to poverty and economic stability. The consolidation of each step of food production in the hands of just a few companies has siphoned value and wealth from rural areas, edging out small producers and forcing farmers to become a part of the corporate production system. The food sovereignty movement has become one of the most outspoken critics of the globalization of the neoliberal industrial model of agriculture. The development of the global food sovereignty movement over the last two decades constitutes a significant political and social response to the inequalities present in and perpetuated by global food production and distribution systems. Recognizing the growing influence of the food sovereignty movement, this project posits that the movement may be seen as a modern expression of centuries-old debates about political and legal sovereignty. Thus, I attempt to analyze the theorization of the food sovereignty movement in relation to the historical evolution of the concept of sovereignty, and to anticipate what implications the present-day dialogue about sovereignty may have for the ongoing theorization of food sovereignty. A brief overview of the origins and historical development of the political and legal concept of sovereignty provides background for the development of food sovereignty and the political landscape into to which it emerged. Next, an analysis of the public and academic discourse on food sovereignty attempts to discern the “theorization” of the concept through the words and actions of food sovereignty movements, drawing as well on the body of academic work on food sovereignty and the use of the concept in policy and governance. By examining the movement’s self-conception, the political claims and justifications presented, the values system, organizational practices and structures, and forms of social and political action, the way in which the food

sovereignty movements of the world have crafted a theory of food sovereignty begins to materialize. This working theory of food sovereignty is then framed in relation to other recent developments within the scholarship and practice of sovereignty, particularly studies of the fragmentation of governance and the international legal concept of permanent sovereignty over natural resources.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Betsy Olson for her extreme generosity with her time, guidance, and encouragement in the defining stages of this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrea Nightingale for taking on the supervision of the project in Dr. Olson's absence, as well as for her thoughtful and helpful revisions. In the early days of my work, Dr. Michel Pimbert was kind enough to respond to an unsolicited email, review an early proposal, suggest reading material, and affirm the general concept. Finally, having coerced AmirHossein Imani and Sinead Fortune into taking on what is by no means "light reading" on their own time, I would like to thank them for their compassion and constructive comments.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Food is at the nexus of a striking range of global political, environmental, economic and human rights issues, from climate change and water scarcity to poverty and economic stability (Allen and Wilson, 2008). The standard industrial model of agricultural production is a high-input, highly-mechanized, land-use-intensive system which attempts to increase productivity through manipulation of chemical and biological inputs. This model is accompanied by a market strategy promoting trade liberalization, commodification of agricultural products, specialization and comparative advantage; the promotion of these policies by governments, multilateral agencies, and corporations has been key to the establishment of the global corporate food regime characterized by the consolidation of land ownership, agricultural inputs, production and processing under a handful of corporations (Menezes 2001; Alkon and Mares 2012). Two companies, Archer-Daniels-Midland and Cargill, are believed to control $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world's grain trade and processing, while Monsanto alone controls 41% of the US market in maize seed and 25% of the global market for soy seed (Vorley, 2003; GRAIN, 2007). Consolidating the processes of food production in the hands of just a few companies siphons value and wealth from rural areas, edging out small producers and forcing farmers into the corporate production system (Patel, 2007). Meanwhile, consumer choice is restricted and directed by large agribusinesses to reflect what they profit the most from growing. The spread of this model has been accompanied by serious environmental, social, and economic impacts. Every country is experiencing the fallout of global patterns of food production and consumption, but these effects are most intensely felt in the developing world (Clay, 2011).

The food sovereignty movement has become one of the most outspoken critics of the globalization of the neoliberal industrial model of agriculture (Wittman et al., 2010). While critiquing neoliberal policy and the global corporate food regime, food sovereignty presents itself as a remedy to many of the environmental and social crises the world faces (Alkon and Mares 2012; Catchlove 2007). Food sovereignty activists promote a food regime explicitly prioritizing production of food for local and domestic consumption, fair prices for producers, and local control of the natural resources required for food production, thereby creating greater distribution of wealth and re-establishing links among food production, communities, and their natural environments, bringing equity and social justice back into discussions of food production (Alkon and Mares 2012).

Recognizing the growing influence of food sovereignty, I posit that the movement may be seen as a modern expression of centuries-old debates about political and legal sovereignty. Thus, this project analyzes the theorization of the food sovereignty movement in relation to the historical evolution of the concept of sovereignty, and anticipates what implications the present-day dialogue about sovereignty may have for the ongoing theorization of food sovereignty. A brief overview of the historical development of the political and legal concept of sovereignty provides background for the development of food sovereignty and the political landscape into to which it emerged.

Next, an analysis of the public and academic discourse on food sovereignty attempts to discern the theorization of the concept through the words and actions of food sovereignty movements, drawing on the body of academic work on food sovereignty and the use of the concept in policy and governance. By examining the movement's self-conception, the political claims and justifications, the values system, organizational practices and structures, and forms of social and political action, the way in which the food sovereignty movements of the world have crafted a theory of food sovereignty begins to materialize. This working

theory is then framed in relation to other recent developments within the scholarship and practice of sovereignty. Two of these developments in particular are explored, namely the international legal principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, and scholarship analyzing the fragmentation of governance and its implications for sovereignty.

Food sovereignty movements are growing in global importance, gaining recognition and legitimacy, and continuing to develop and refine their basic concept and policy framework. From an examination of the movement's theory and practice, an observer stands to learn not only what food sovereignty is and what it stands to contribute, but also a great deal about the rapidly changing political and legal climate which shapes political action; local, regional, and national economies; the "modern state"; and changing governance structures.

1.2 The Global Food System and Its Effects

In addition to economic pressures, global food production and distribution regimes cause intense ecological strain. It is argued that food production is the greatest source of anthropogenic impact on the planet (Clay, 2011). It is a necessary activity, and yet contributes significantly to climate change, biodiversity loss, many types of pollution, water scarcity, land use change and deforestation, and topsoil loss. Agriculture produces 10-12% of total global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, an amount comparable to the total emissions of the transportation sector (IPCC 2007a; IPCC 2007c). Climate change in turn threatens serious impacts on future agriculture; in some areas, the projected effects are dramatic: by 2020, parts of Africa could see yields reduced by 50% (IPCC 2007b).

The above example is intended to illustrate the scale of environmental damage caused by global food production systems as they stand today, but does not begin to touch on the full scope of the ecological impacts. Among these are catastrophic biodiversity loss (Rockstrom et al., 2009; WWF 2012), water scarcity from irrigation (International Rivers, 2008; Clay,

2011) widespread overfishing leading to population collapse (see Jackson et al., 2001; Tidwell and Allan, 2001; FAO FAD, 2010), unprecedented topsoil loss and the disruption of the global sediment cycle (see Syvitski et al., 2005; Isabirye et al., 2006; Ruyschaert et al., 2008), deforestation and conversion of land for agriculture (see Syvitski et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2007), the massive dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico caused by pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers (see Allen and Wilson 2008), and the much more complex issue of ecosystem disruption, threatening such essential ecosystem services as climate regulation, pollination, and soil formation (UNEP, 2011). However, the environment is not the only casualty of global food production systems.

The global corporate food regime, and the international organizations backing it, promised that industrial food production could feed the world and eliminate hunger and malnutrition, but that has not happened (Bello and Baviera, 2010). According to Cargill, 90% of the food grown in the world does not cross national borders, and a full 70% of total global food production comes from small-scale producers (Rosset, 2006; UNEP, 2011). Yet billions of dollars are made every year through speculation on and trade in commodity crops and futures. One estimate from Barclays Capital reported \$126 billion invested in food commodities in 2011 (out of a total of \$340 billion in all commodities) (Levitt, 2011). Meanwhile, valuable agricultural land and resources are being diverted into ethanol production. In 2008, one-third of US maize was used for ethanol, twice what it was just 3 years before. This rapid and unprecedented shift by the world's largest producer of maize, and the pattern of shifts to grain production for ethanol, resulted in price inflation not seen for a generation. Profits from speculation, combined with the growing share of production for biofuels, would seem to suggest that global trade in and commodification of certain staple crops are not about feeding anyone, but simply about making a profit. Yet these forces are intimately tied the crop prices paid to farmers and the food prices paid by consumers worldwide (Allen and Wilson, 2008).

Recently, a research team produced a model which very accurately reproduces the food prices from January 2004 to January of 2012, and according to the model, the two dominant predictive factors of the behavior of food prices during that period were investor speculation and conversion to ethanol production (Lagi et al., 2012). Amid volleys of calls for regulation and equally vociferous defenses of the practice, speculation on food commodity futures has continued apace, and once again we face rising food prices and the possibility of a food price bubble predicted by the Lagi et al. model to take place the end of 2012 (FAO, 2010; Lagi et al., 2012).

The global food crisis of 2007-2008 illustrates a “perfect storm” of economic and ecological factors. In 2006, land devoted to growing food crops was being rapidly converted to fuel crops, and by the winter of 2007, food prices began to rise dramatically, in spite of harvests reported by the FAO to be 1.5 times demand. By 2008, the world’s poor were experiencing record levels of hunger while growers were turning in record harvests and agrifood companies were making record profits. Food price increases were exacerbated by insufficient grain reserves, oil prices, the aforementioned shift into production for agrofuels, as well as the use of 70% of the world’s cereals for grain-fed beef production. In June 2008, the World Bank reported that global food prices had risen 83% in just 3 years. Food price increases sparked food riots around the world, commonly in countries which had formerly had food surpluses (Holt-Giménez, 2011). The effects have been felt most acutely in nations like Haiti which have disassembled their domestic food production systems under direction from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other “Washington Consensus institutions.” As a result of the duration and intensity of the crisis, increases in food prices have begun to affect middle-class people in the First World¹ (Allen and Wilson, 2008). In all countries, food price increases disproportionately impact the poor, particularly poor women. In many parts of

¹ My use of “First World” is intended to emphasize the attitude of primacy on the part of wealthy, industrialized nations rather than affirm that perception.

the developing world, poor families regularly use as much as 70-80% of their income on food. Likewise, the poor in urban “food deserts” of the global North are experiencing increased hunger and malnutrition (Holt-Giménez, 2011).

It is often repeated that food production must double by 2050 to meet the demands of a projected population of 9 billion (UN Department of Public Information, 2009). This estimate is closely tied to the prevailing model of agricultural production and, perhaps more importantly, the widely established economic policies of trade liberalization, commodification, and specialization. The belief in an unavoidable and direct correlation between population increase and food production has often been used to justify such practices as further intensification, increased use of chemical pest management and fertilizers, and land grabs to increase food and agrofuel production for export (Zoomers, 2010; Schneider et al., 2011). Food sovereignty, however, proposes an overthrow of these models and presumes to address the root causes of the problems inherent in the highly-subsidized “industrial agrifoods complex” (Holt-Giménez 2011, p.312). Unsurprisingly, the radical alternative such movements present has met with strong resistance from corporations and governments, and sometimes violence. In the last twenty years, more than 1,425 rural activists have been assassinated in Brazil – a government estimate – but only 79 cases were brought to trial (Patel, 2007).

Concern about the impacts of current models of food production and distribution is becoming more commonplace. The UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food presented a report in 2004 to the Commission on Human Rights in which he explored “the reasons why international trade in food and agriculture is not necessarily benefiting the vast majority of the poor and marginalized people, but rather creating even greater marginalization and inequality,” and among them he referenced inequitable WTO trade rules and the potential for monopoly

power of multinational corporations over food production systems and natural resources (Ziegler, 2004, p. 2).

1.3 Methodology

Literature review has been the main research tool at all stages of this project, encompassing more than 100 documents. The academic literature informing this project comes from a wide variety of peer-reviewed journals and academic books in the fields of international law, international relations, development studies, political and legal theory, economics, political ecology, the natural sciences, and human and political geography.

The academic literature on food sovereignty is widely supportive of the movement's goals and methods, presumably due in part to the relationships and history of many of the academics with the movement. I found almost no academic writing directly critical of the concept of food sovereignty, though some supplied constructive criticism geared toward the improvement of methods, goals, and policy of the movement. Much of the academic work on food sovereignty has been contributed by a small group of scholars, many of whom have been or remain active in the food sovereignty movement and who publish both in peer-reviewed journals and through NGOs. In addition to the academic literature, a variety of "white" and "grey" sources were used, among them white papers, policy briefs, reports and press releases from multilateral organizations and agencies, scientific bodies and research organizations. I also drew on international treaties, charters, conventions and resolutions, particularly in the sections connecting international legal sovereignties to the ongoing evolution of food sovereignty. For my analysis of the self-conception of food sovereignty movements, I utilize promotional materials, reports, web content, statements and policy documents from civil society organizations promoting food sovereignty, as well as public actions carried out by or supported by food sovereignty movements and the reports of these

actions from a variety of sources. The direct use of these sources is also supported and informed by academic analyses of this same body of material.

To interpret the discourse of the food sovereignty movement, I employed a combination of qualitative discourse analysis approaches, taking into account rhetorical, stylistic, and semiotic elements to try to contextualize the wide variety of types of material. The social context of language has been important as I have attempted not only to analyze the discourse, but also anticipate the “spirit” and motivations behind it. Instead of using coding software, I thematically coded the documents to identify the ideas which I use to organize the section on the discourse of food sovereignty.

Chapter 2

A Genealogy of Sovereignty

It has been a common refrain within political theory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that sovereignty as a concept is ambiguous and of questionable value. Academics have argued that the ideas of sovereignty and even the state may no longer be useful to legal and political thought, an assertion usually linked to changes in international political and legal structures, globalizing and interdependent markets, multinational corporations, increasingly complex systems of governance, and a reorientation toward human rights as a guiding principle of international governance (Kalmo and Skinner, 2010; Skinner, 2010). Whether or not sovereignty as a concept will continue to be functional, there can be no question of its influence on political and international legal history, the national histories and cultures of numerous countries and peoples, and the modern international legal system (Abi-Saab, 1991). Far from being a theoretical exercise, conceptions of sovereignty impact international politics, law, and policy on a large scale. Food sovereignty movements have placed themselves in the midst of a huge, diverse, and volatile body of work on one of the most contentious and potent concepts in human history. How they choose to place themselves within that history may have incredible importance for the future of the movement. Through their choices about political action, they find themselves navigating an eroding “Westphalian” nation-state and the potential for new forms of governance emerging in response to increasing globalization and fragmentation. The food sovereignty framework prioritizes community authority over the state, implicitly claiming the justifications of popular sovereignty in their assertion that people have the right to define their own food systems. However, it is not just the past, but also the future of sovereignty which holds importance for the food sovereignty movement. In a later chapter, I will discuss two recent developments in

the study and theorization of sovereignty which I argue may be useful as in an attempt to situate food sovereignty in the context of the evolving dialogue on sovereignty. These are the international legal principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, and the work of a number of scholars studying the fragmentation of governance, and each has been influenced by the history of sovereignty discussed below. Analyses of the fragmentation of governance contest many of the core principles of traditional sovereignty, such as the indivisibility of sovereignty and the permanent “personhood” of the state, while permanent sovereignty was developed as a way for post-colonial nations to counteract the effects of the Westphalian model of sovereignty, which justified European colonization. The brief overview below offers background to those concepts of importance to food sovereignty and to the socio-political world it inhabits.

Discussions in English about statehood, states, and their powers, seem to have begun in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. At the time, the state was primarily discussed as a body of persons under the authority of a monarch or ruling body, with the understanding that the public “body” cannot function without a head, and is obligated to obey that head. French political theorist Jean Bodin was largely responsible for the idea that sovereignty is indivisible, and thus could not be shared or distributed among separate agents, but should be vested in a single entity, such as the head of state or ruling group, which had responsibilities toward the body (Bodin, 1576; Donaldson, 1989; Skinner, 2010).

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 is often seen as foundational in the establishment of sovereignty as the key principal in the international law of the time and, in many ways, of international law up until the twentieth century (Schrijver 1997; MacCormick, 1999). The “Westphalian” model of territorially-discreet sovereign nations is blamed by some for the European pursuit of Empire, resulting in colonization and the exploitation of natural resources, land, and labor (Emel et al. 2011). This model eventually resulted in the

development of the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, which was created to protect the rights of post-colonial states. However, Westphalian sovereignty has only ever been an ideal, and was frequently violated even in its heyday, often (tellingly) because of competing interests and principles in asymmetrical power relations, circumstances which have been a constant challenge to the exercise of state sovereignty, and thereby to theories of sovereignty for centuries (Krasner, 1999). Certainly, as studies of the fragmentation of governance suggest, global economic interests and unequal political power relations remain among the chief forces compromising traditional state sovereignty.

Also during the early 17th century, critics emerged, rejecting the image of society as a headless body depending on a sovereign for guidance and insisting that the body politic, the people themselves, were equally capable of possessing sovereignty and its functions, and indeed were its rightful owners (Skinner, 2010). Supporters of popular sovereignty were outmatched, however, and the “divine right of kings” has been remembered as the defining political paradigm of the age. However, the doctrine of popular sovereignty remains influential today, enshrined in the founding documents, constitutions, and political traditions of many nations. The principle has also influenced proponents of community governance structures, as will be discussed later.

By far the most influential critic of the idea that people were the natural possessors of sovereignty was Thomas Hobbes, whose 1651 book *Leviathan* is a foundational text of political theory. For him, absolute sovereignty of the state was necessary both for the safety of the people and for stable domestic and international politics (MacCormick, 1999). Hobbes spoke of the state not as a group of people, but as a constructed abstract entity. His famous description of human life without social constructs as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” is intended to emphasize what people stand to gain from investing in the social contract of government and civil society more generally (Hobbes 1651, p. 113). His conclusion is not

that people need to be ruled, like some royalists claimed, but that governance systems should be constructed with the consent of every person (Skinner 2010, p. 35). Through this consent, people remain responsible for the actions of whomever or whatever body has been assigned sovereign authority. Individuals may relinquish power, but not responsibility: “For that which the representative doth, as actor, every one of the subjects doth, as author” (Hobbes 1651, p. 181). These representatives have obligations to act at all times in the interest of the commonwealth. The individual or group in this role is not acting as a private person, but as the holder of an office, or in Hobbes’ terms an “artificial person” created to act on behalf of the people, the true authors of government (Hobbes 1651, p. 147). Just as a representative is “personated,” gaining the office of representative, so also is the state. Hobbes and others who promoted the idea of a constructed “person” of the state were instrumental in creating modern understandings of the location of sovereignty, though they varied in opinion about to what degree this sovereignty was transferred, allocated, or accessible to the state’s representative (whether monarch, assembly, or other form). Many modern societies continue to believe that governments originate with a social contract, a belief which would be unlikely to change under the alternative forms of governance we are beginning to explore.

Though there were of course many dissenting opinions and alternative formulations, including Jeremy Bentham’s radically different utilitarian approach, no school of thought succeeded at eliminating the personhood of the state as a legal concept. While the debate continued well into the twentieth century, another shift was taking place, in some ways constituting a much more fundamental change. Changes in the political landscape during the twentieth century, such as the rise of major international political organizations and international courts, caused some to question whether sovereignty and the state were useful concepts in an environment where the actions of individual “sovereign” states were subject to restrictions posed by international bodies (Brown, 2002; Skinner 2010). In the wake of the

Second World War, the scope of international law opened up dramatically. Individual human rights become a major concern, even a guiding value, changing the sovereignty landscape dramatically (Brown, 2002). More recently, the meaning and value of sovereignty has been shaken by the increasing power of international organizations and the policy regimes they promote and enforce (Sassen, 1996).

Sovereignty in an absolute sense has been increasingly qualified as international law and politics have raised questions of interdependence, interference, and jurisdiction (Schrijver 1997). Today, many theorists claim that the concepts of sovereignty and of the state as a discreet political entity are outdated or even detrimental. Others have attempted to reformulate sovereignty to account for the changes in the modern world, among them the increasing fragmentation of governance driven by international legal and political bodies, multinational corporations, and political and economic interdependence. These changes in sovereignty are an important part of the political context which produced the food sovereignty movement, as well as the principle of permanent sovereignty and studies of the fragmentation of governance.

Chapter 3

The Public and Academic Discourse on Food Sovereignty

The following analysis of the public and academic discourse on food sovereignty endeavors to create a picture of the food sovereignty movement from its own words and actions, drawing on the analysis of academic contributors and the historical, economic, and social contexts they offer, and also looking at the impacts the movement has had on policy and governance. The goal of this analysis is to clarify the “theorization” of food sovereignty – specifically, how the movement sees itself, what they claim and how they rationalize those claims, the values system which drives and directs their choices, their organizational structures and practices, and finally forms of political and social action. Though not comprehensive, the following summary attempts to construct an accurate portrait of the food sovereignty movement, and to capture the spirit of this ambitious approach to food production and rural development.

3.1 An Introduction to Food Sovereignty

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. (LVC, 2007)

Any definition can only serve as a starting point in an attempt to understand food sovereignty, because of the nature of the concept of food sovereignty itself and the diversity of the groups involved in its development. The food sovereignty movements of the world vary greatly in their origins, specific goals, and methods, which profoundly enriches the meaning and potential of the concept of food sovereignty, while simultaneously loading the term with complexities. The nature of food sovereignty also defies simplistic definition, placed as it is

in the midst of social, cultural, economic, and environmental processes. Food production is merely the point of entry into this complex framework, which attempts to reconfigure the relationships of individuals and communities to food, agriculture, natural resources, disenfranchised groups, their own cultural and natural heritages, and to other farming communities worldwide.

These diverse movements come together with clarity on a number of points, such as their condemnation of neoliberal economic policies, which the global food sovereignty movement believes are responsible for the recent global food crisis, chronic hunger and malnutrition, environmental degradation, and the loss of access to land and livelihoods among the world's small farmers (Menezes, 2001; Rosset, 2006). Moreover, the self-determination and autonomy of communities, regions, and even nations is threatened by this food production regime and the development model it frequently serves (Pimbert, 2009).

Though it has its origins in Latin America, the food sovereignty framework has lent itself to movements for popular control over the food system from all over the world, which take their form from the unique social, cultural, ecological, geographical, and political situations they inhabit. Some of these movements take a very local, grass-roots approach like the Standing Rock Nation of the Sioux, who hope to protect the availability of gathered and gardened traditional foods and strengthen their local food economy by employing a food-assistance voucher system valid at farmers' markets within the reservation (Ruelle et al., 2011). Others have adopted a more top-down strategy, among them the Korean Peasant League and Korean Women Peasants Association, who have focused on getting food sovereignty onto South Korea's national agricultural policy agenda (Burmeister and Choi, 2012).

Food sovereignty has its roots in the experiences of peasant farmers and their own critical analyses of their situations. The founding members of the movement were responding to pressures on small-scale agriculture and farming communities, many stemming from changes

in national and international agriculture policies during the 1980s and '90s (Wittman et al., 2010) A global crisis in food prices during that time frame forced millions of farmers off the land and into global migrant flows, motivating many to pursue agriculture reform (Rosset, 2008).

The International Peasants' Movement, La Via Campesina, came into being under these circumstances (Alkon and Mares 2012). La Via Campesina (LVC) was founded in 1993 by a group of farmers' representatives, and has grown to include millions of "peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world" (LVC, 2011b). It functions as an umbrella organization for about 150 member groups in 70 countries, representing between 150 and 200 million people (Patel, 2007; LVC, 2011b). Though by their own admission, "La Via Campesina does not own food sovereignty," the organization has been the primary voice of the movement since its conception (Wittman et al. 2010, p. 7).

Food sovereignty came into being in the spring of 1996 in Tlaxcala, Mexico at LVC's second major conference, where the term was introduced in a working group to describe the proposed alternative approach to agriculture and food production (Nicholson and Delforge, 2008). In November 1996, proponents brought the working concept to Rome, where the FAO World Food Summit was being held, and presented the idea at a parallel NGO forum. Though not a part of the main Summit meetings, the event served to bring the idea into wider public debate for the first time (WFS NGO Forum, 1996; Rosset, 2006). The growth of the movement is evident in the fact that during the 2002 World Food Summit: five years later, a similar NGO forum was held solely to discuss food sovereignty, and was attended by more than 400 representatives of farmers' groups and other civil society organizations, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food (Ziegler, 2004).

Since 1996, local, regional and national food sovereignty groups proliferated, and forums for dialogue, training, and information-sharing have been created to serve the needs of the growing movement. Today, the food sovereignty movement primarily consists of loose conglomerates of national movements, coordinating under umbrella organizations like La Via Campesina, and participating in policy forums like the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty and the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty (IPC, 2009; LVC 2007; LVC 2011a). Through these autonomous and loosely-structured organizations, people's movements retain the ability to act individually, hold more than one affiliation, and make choices about which projects or types of action best serve their own organizational priorities. This openness reflects the values of the movement and keeps food sovereignty as inclusive and responsive as possible. Flexibility is important because the implications of food sovereignty vary by region and country; in many parts of the developing world, food sovereignty means protecting local economies against corporate forces, the effects of trade agreements, and aid and development programs which threaten local markets. Food sovereignty movements in highly industrialized nations need not only to preserve small producers and local markets, but recreate linkages between the producers and consumers. The challenges are significant, but food sovereignty activists believe their framework offers the tools to achieve this (Catchlove 2007).

While emerging from and responding to diverse circumstances, food sovereignty movements are surprisingly similar. The forces which affect peasant farmers worldwide follow a strong pattern, leading farmers to focus their opposition on the co-opting of land, natural resources, and governance processes, as well as on market-driven neoliberal economics and development models. The approach of the food sovereignty is essentialist in its adherence to self-determination and local control, and while the food sovereignty framework is the binding force of the "global movement," as I will point out, the self-conception of food sovereignty

organizations emphasizes their roles as members of a network of movements rather than branches or chapters of an international organization. As I will describe, the leadership of the food sovereignty movement takes place at the grassroots level, maintaining a decentralized leadership structure. However, I suggest that this structure also works against the development of a fully-theorized, standardized concept and policy framework for food sovereignty of the kind that would be produced by a hierarchical, centralized international organization.

3.2 The Self-Conception of the Food Sovereignty Movements

In an attempt to draw out the theorization of food sovereignty as a concept, it is important to begin with the self-conception and public speech of the activists and advocacy groups comprising the food sovereignty movements, as well as the ways in which their self-conception is expressed through the structures and actions of the organizations comprising the food sovereignty movement. Food sovereignty movements have spoken volubly about their identities, goals, methods, and about the food sovereignty movement as a whole, providing ample material for the level of analysis needed for this project.

Above all, food sovereignty movements present themselves as a part of a network of democratic peasant's movements, and see food sovereignty as a right or set of rights of which they are the natural holders (PFSN, 2007; WSF, 2008; LVC, 2011a, 2011b). Expressions of independence and self-determination, of rejecting outside attempts to usurp control, run deeply throughout food sovereignty activism, particularly in discourse at the local and regional levels. The following statement from Versatanarayanam, an Indian farmer and Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS) member, expresses that feeling and the policies it leads to very clearly.

Our message is this to the world: we the farmers need to stand on our own two legs. We don't want financial assistance, we know how to do this with our

own resources. We don't want to be dependent on the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank... What they give, they give to spoil us. We're not beggars, we're creators. We have self-respect, and we can be self-reliant. We can control our own resources. (Quoted in Patel 2007, pp.42-43)

At international levels, this takes the form of assertions of the capabilities and capacities of peasants, small farmers, and farming communities (LVC, 2007). Instead of fragmenting the food sovereignty movement, the right of community self-determination has become a point of connection, facilitated by information-sharing and capacity-building activities (see WSF, 2008; LVC, 2010).

Equally essential to the identity of the food sovereignty movement, is a direct, open, and unequivocal rejection of neoliberal models and reasoning. In the words of a long-time leader within LVC, Paul Nicholson, "We cannot defend farmers' interests without challenging the neo-liberal system as a whole" (Nicholson and Delforge 2008, p. 457). Not only is this position essential to group identity, but it may be a key to the effectiveness of the movement. In a study comparing US food justice movements to the food sovereignty framework, Alkon and Mares (2012, p.2) found that food sovereignty alone expresses direct opposition to the corporate food regime. Food security and food justice approaches, they concluded, can coexist with the dominant industrial agricultural and distribution models and thus "fail to challenge a neoliberal political economy" that passes responsibility for services from the state to the market, even though the constraints on the projects in both case studies came from neoliberal policies. The authors conclude that projects which do not directly oppose the corporate food regime or neoliberal policy risk implicitly affirming the idea that individuals and communities, not the state, are responsible for addressing problems not of their own making but produced by global or market forces. Also, because government policies rather than capitalism and neoliberalism in general are seen as the sources of injustice, such movements are likely to focus on alternative markets rather than systemic or policy reforms (Alkon and Mares, 2012).

I would relate this work to the very origins of the movement and the sources of its success. Food sovereignty movements have drawn their power, and indeed their very unity, from rejection of neoliberal economics, which predict that peasant farmers should be driven more by their competition with one another in global markets rather than their common role in an industry monopolized by agribusinesses. This failure to comply with the predictions of standard economic models both points to and affirms the importance of food sovereignty's uniting rejection of the neoliberal economic model, which activists believe produces divisive market forces, to the detriment of the world's peasants and small farmers.

3.3 The Claims and Rationale of Food Sovereignty

In the words of Eric Holt-Giménez, "Food sovereignty is essentially a political demand, one that cuts through reformist proposals to address the power structures at the root of the corporate food regime" (2011, p. 318). It is not enough to make political claims, however. The claimant must support the demands, and conceptualizations of food sovereignty do this in several ways. Definitions of food sovereignty from a wide variety of advocacy, academic, and policy sources seem to use two different but not mutually-exclusive descriptors for food sovereignty. Some describe food sovereignty as a right or group of rights, appealing to political and legal systems at mostly national and international levels. Others present food sovereignty as a framework for agriculture and food production. A number of sources use both. Each has its implications – to frame food sovereignty as a right implies that the lack of it is a potentially actionable violation of rights. Alternately, the view of food sovereignty as a framework presents an alternative to the existing policy regimes which the movement has argued against. The two formats are not mutually exclusive, and I argue that they complement each other well in providing both the fortitude of political demands as well as a policy regime illustrating what food sovereignty would mean politically.

Food Sovereignty as a Right

Most of the commonly-cited definitions begin with food sovereignty defined as the right of a nation, community, a people, or a country (Menezes 2001; Ziegler, 2004; Nyeleni, 2007). I have not found any sources which present food sovereignty itself as an individual right, yet some protected groups (women, the “landless”) are not fully-constituted communities either. What rights are claimed by the community or nation vary slightly. Below are some representative examples, all from within the food sovereignty movement.

Food sovereignty is...

- “...the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce the staple foods of its peoples, respecting their productive and cultural diversity” (LVC 1996, in Menezes 2001, p. 30)
- “...the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies” (2002 WFS Forum on Food Sovereignty, quoted in Ziegler 2004, p. 10)
- “...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” (Nyéléni, 2007)
- “...the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable

development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets, and; to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources” (PFSN, 2007)

I identify three main claims, namely, the right to productive capacity; the right to define food policy and production systems, and (less commonly) the right to food itself. These claims are often worded to protect the particularly ecological and cultural values which may be affected by food production. Food sovereignty movements are rarely explicit about the theoretical source of these rights, though many implicitly point to the human rights paradigm. The UN Special Rapporteur on Right to Food has suggested a relationship between food sovereignty and right to food, but food sovereignty movements have not seemed to respond, certainly not to find an international legal justification for any of their claims (Zeigler, 2004). In the later section exploring applications of sovereignty theories to food sovereignty, I will present several other well-established international legal rights to which food sovereignty could potentially appeal.

In some instances, the rights claims made by food sovereignty movements have been validated by inclusion in national legislation, and have even been enshrined in several national constitutions, such as those of Bolivia and Nepal (Nicholson and Delforge 2008). Nepal’s interim constitution, enacted in 2007, referenced food sovereignty in several sections. Under Article 18, “Rights regarding employment and social security,” it is affirmed that “Every citizen has the right to food sovereignty as provided for in the law,” and the editors went so far as to assure in a footnote that “ We have confirmed that ‘food sovereignty’ is the phrase deliberately chosen.” (*Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 (2007)*, p. 68). Part 4, “Responsibilities, Directive Principles and Policies of The State,” Article 33(h) assures that

the state has the responsibility “to pursue a policy of establishing the rights of all citizens to education, health, housing, employment and food sovereignty” (78).

According to the LVC member All Nepal Peasants’ Association, the inclusion of food sovereignty in the Interim Constitution “intends to address the problem of squatter dwellers, bonded agri-labour, hired wage earners, cow boys and sheep herders and bring them under the social safety net.” They also point out that the provisions should help marginalized groups participate in state functions, particularly “dalits, indigenous people, Madhesi, Muslims and other marginalised nationalities and sectors including disabled, handicapped people of remote areas” (ANPA, 2006). However, in May of 2012, after years of extended deadlines, Nepal’s Constituent Assembly failed to agree on a permanent version of the constitution, leading the Prime Minister to dissolve the Assembly and call for new elections, leaving the fate of the constitution unclear (Parajuli, 2012).

Food Sovereignty as a Framework

Another common way of describing food sovereignty, one found largely in academic analyses of the movement, is as a framework, paradigm, or alternative model (Ziegler, 2004; Rosset, 2006, 2008; Pimbert, 2009; Alkon and Mares, 2012). Descriptions of the food sovereignty “framework” tend to present it as a policy regime with particularly wide-reaching economic, environmental, and social-justice implications. While the rights conception of food sovereignty casts neoliberal policies and their results as a violation of peasants’ rights, the framework conception analyzes the effects of neoliberalism and presents targeted alternatives. While the discussion of food sovereignty as a framework is the product of academic analysis and does not appear to explicitly originate in the discourse of food sovereignty movements, this approach is consistent with the way food sovereignty movements themselves frequently talk about the wide-reaching implications of food regimes. Food sovereignty movements use

food as an entry point into a complex web of social, cultural, economic, and ecological needs and processes; food is not just the source of nutrition, but of livelihoods and sustainable communities, a carrier of traditions and genetic resources, and potentially a tool of equity and social justice. The framework approach thus illustrates the movement's position that food and food production are intimately related to not only health and livelihoods, but communities and migration, environment and biodiversity, cultural traditions, social networks, and innumerable other elements of daily life, particularly in rural agricultural communities (Rosset, 2006). Many of those links have been broken by corporate industrial food production regimes, but the food sovereignty movements present the food sovereignty "framework" as a means for their repair (Patel, 2007; PFSN, 2007). As Catchlove (2007) so succinctly stated, "food sovereignty is intrinsically about connection to land and connection to place" (15). This connection is deeply felt and understood by the communities comprising food sovereignty movements, including those who find themselves "landless," whether by forced migration or declining social and economic status. However, as mentioned above, these people are more likely to talk about food sovereignty in terms of their rights and what those rights afford rather than to present food sovereignty as a comprehensive framework they wish to enact. Within the food sovereignty movement, the comprehensiveness of their approach is seen not as a constructed strategy, but rather a natural result of their most basic claims and values. This claim was aptly captured by Peter Rosset in the title of his 2006 book – "Food is Different!" Indeed, the food sovereignty movement claims that food and agriculture are special by nature, for their cultural, environmental, and social implications as well as the power food has as a daily human need (Rosset, 2006) For these reasons, they claim, food and agriculture should not be used to manipulate nations or people, and both the food sovereignty framework and the rights claimed by food sovereignty movements resist the use of food as an economic or political manipulator (Menezes, 2001). Food sovereignty policy frameworks are

carefully designed to prevent this kind of manipulation by corporations or foreign governments, suggesting prohibitions on dumping and calling for restrictions and regulations on trade in food and agriculture commodities, to name just a few provisions (PFSN, 2007). Food sovereignty's proposal that food has importance far beyond its physical properties and trade value has an academic and policy corollary in the principle of multifunctionality, which scholars of food sovereignty have used to describe parts of the holistic vision presented by activists. Multifunctionality was pioneered by the EU, which attempted to use the concept to protect subsidies for EU farmers, but other nations have since taken up the idea. Applied to food production, multifunctionality describes the many roles of agriculture outside of producing tradable commodities. Agriculture obviously provides livelihoods, but it can also preserve the landscape, perpetuate traditions, and be the mechanism of food security. On these grounds, food sovereignty activists argued that food should be treated differently in trade agreements (Rosset, 2006). As I will argue later, the principle of permanent sovereignty could be used to assert the rights food sovereignty movements claim in this regard.

3.4 The Values System of Food Sovereignty

Clearly, though food sovereignty directly addresses agricultural production, activists see the concept as necessarily extending to other social issues. Food connects every person and every community, making it an ideal starting point for widespread change. In other words, "food sovereignty suggests that it is impossible to explore how food is produced, traded and consumed without questioning the whole fabric of global economics and society" (Catchlove 2007, p. 15). Thus, the "values system" of food sovereignty extends far beyond the farm.

The list of “Main Issues” at ViaCampesina.org reveals the nature of these connections:

- Agrarian Reform and Water
- Biodiversity and Genetic Resources
- Food Sovereignty and Trade
- Women
- Human Rights
- Migrations and Rural Workers
- Sustainable Peasant’s Agriculture
- Youth!

(La Via Campesina, 2012)

Food sovereignty attempts to promote comprehensive democratic rural reform, with the full participation and direction of rural communities, rather than through investment-oriented economic growth (Patel, 2007). Among the guiding values of this reform are social justice and equity, community control of resources, and the preservation of cultural values and traditional knowledge. These values, which are responsible for the formulation of La Via Campesina’s main issues listed above, are explored in more detail below.

Social Justice and Equity

Fair representation of women and other disenfranchised groups in decision-making about the food system is of central importance to food sovereignty movements (Catchlove 2007; Harcourt 2008). As pointed out by the All Nepal Peasants’ Association in reference to the Nepali Interim Constitution, food sovereignty can be a political tool to bring a wide variety of traditionally disenfranchised parties into the political process, and can be used to address gender, caste, ethnic, religious, economic, age, and even disability discrimination (ANPA, 2006). A number of the member organizations of LVC were, in fact, formed to give a voice

to disenfranchised groups, among them the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras del Ecuador (indigenous and black Ecuadorans); Pastoral da Juventude Rural (Brazilian rural youth); and Consejo Asesor Indígena (indigenous Argentines) (LVC, 2008).

The rights of women have been of particular interest to the food sovereignty movement since its founding. The promotion of gender equality has followed two main threads, namely a human-rights-based argument promoting social change, and a simultaneous awareness of the importance of women to global food production. According to the FAO, women in the global South own less than 2% of the land but grow 60-80% of the food (Patel, 2007, p. 302).

However, this dedication to the rights and capabilities of women is not without its challenges, particularly in some rural farming communities. Said one man, a part of one of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers' Movement's encampments, "I always thought I knew better than a woman. Better than my wife. But in the camp, it was often the women who saved us, who kept us from being defeated. They were strong! Now that we have been farming for ourselves, well, I have learned to trust my wife's opinion in running the farm too. I am still kind of sexist, I guess, but I have learned" (Patel 2007, p. 208). This anecdote illustrates the transformative potential of the food sovereignty values system, which has both internal and external transformative functions, as well as the semiotic importance of organizational structures in reproducing values, as will be discussed below.

Perhaps the clearest example the structural reinforcement of gender equality comes from LVC's International Coordinating Committee, which consists of one man and one woman from each region (Nicholson and Delforge 2008). In addition to the guarantee of women in leadership positions and the active inclusion of women in national and regional movements, there are quite a few women's food sovereignty movements within LVC, including member organizations in Korea, Nepal, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, El Salvador, and

Honduras (LVC 2008). In a symbolic recognition of the importance of female peasants, the World Forum for Food Sovereignty was named for a female farmer in Malian legend, Nyéléni (Catchlove, 2007; Nyéléni Europe, 2011).

Community control of natural resources

Another of the values consistent among global food sovereignty movements is the protection of community access to natural resources, from land and water to the genetic resources of traditional seed varieties. The private ownership and manipulation of genetic resources draws strong opposition from food sovereignty movements, which widely oppose the production, trade, and dumping of genetically-modified (GM) crops and livestock and the use of GM food aid (PFSN, 2007). Many developing nations, especially those in tropical regions with high levels of biodiversity, are under particular pressure from the WTO and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, and strongly oppose any patenting or marketing of genetic resources (Menezes, 2001).

However, the biggest impediment to food sovereignty in most parts of the developing world is lack of access to and control of land (Borras and Franco, 2010). Paul Nicholson notes that while politically the food sovereignty platform broadly targets neo-liberalism, “on the ground, it is translated into more struggles for land” (Nicholson and Delforge, 2008). Among scholars of food sovereignty, the consolidation of ownership and rejection of communal landholding is seen as a major factor in the subversion of small farmers and landless producers (Alkon and Mares, 2012). In many areas, this has been largely driven by the shift to agrofuel production, which not only takes land away from small farmers, but away from food production altogether (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2010). Food sovereignty movements thus argue that land reform is needed to rebuild the small farming sector and increase capacity to

produce food for people rather than crops to export for livestock feed and agrofuels (Rosset, 2008).

Illustrating the primacy of land reform to food sovereignty, the global food sovereignty movement includes a number of “landless” peasants’ movements which are trying to reclaim access to agricultural land. Among them is the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers’ Movement (MST), which came about in response to Brazil’s long history of consolidated land ownership. Since the founding of MST in the 1970s, the organization has led one million farmers in occupying and cultivating unused agricultural land, building communities with schools and healthcare as well as livelihoods (Patel, 2007). Land ownership patterns and power relationships are very difficult to alter; land reform alone will not permanently change them, but must be supported by other social programs like health care and education to have a lasting effect (Patel, 2007; Borras and Franco, 2010).

Culture and traditional knowledge

Another extension of the food sovereignty values system is the preservation of cultures and traditional knowledge. Movements frequently discuss the value of “traditional knowledge,” an inclusive term which includes farming methods, sustainable practices, locally-adapted seed varieties, knowledge of local ecosystems, and cultural characteristics like food preparation (LVC, 2007). The most visible example of the food sovereignty movement’s value for cultural heritage and the accompanying body of knowledge is in the repeated mentions of “culturally appropriate” foods and food production systems which can be found in many of definitions of food sovereignty (Ziegler, 2004; Nyéléni, 2007). Food sovereignty activists often point to culturally appropriate foods as an essential element of food sovereignty, at risk in even the most powerful nations (Menezes, 2001).

The protection of traditional knowledge includes both the prevention of its loss and the prevention of “knowledge-capture” by corporations which intend to privatize and commodify (Shiva, 2000; WSF, 2008; Ruelle et al., 2011). For example, the TRIPS agreement mentioned above does not recognize traditional knowledge, opening the door for corporations to profit on the cultural heritage and hard work of global peasants (FOE, 2001). This loophole includes traditional plant varieties, which are the product of generations of agricultural technique. In India, traditional farmers developed 200,000 varieties of rice including saline-resistant plants for coastal waters and an extra-tall variety to survive Ganges floods; today, their most famous achievement, Basmati rice, is owned by RiceTec (Shiva, 2000).

The 2007 Nyéléni conference included a working group on the preservation of traditional knowledge (Catchlove 2007), and the 2007 Declaration of Nyéléni included the following:

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.
(LVC, 2007)

This statement is very clear about the practical importance of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge and skills, but also expresses their rich meaning to rural agricultural communities. To food sovereignty movements, the preservation of this knowledge is a part of returning control of the food system to communities at the local level, and as such is both an alternative to and a method for fighting the neoliberal corporate food production regime.

3.5 The Semiotics of Organizational Structures and Practices

The food sovereignty movement is comprised of a wide variety of local, regional, and national groups, some of whom participate in larger umbrella organizations, while others

maintain no such associations but identify themselves with the food sovereignty movement or have adopted food sovereignty as a portion of their own agendas (Nicholson and Delforge, 2008). This autonomy gives individual groups a flexibility of association and action, and makes it possible for a wider variety of rural and social justice organizations to participate in the food sovereignty movement while maintaining their own organizational priorities. These loosely structured relationships and their practices mirror the goals and values of the food sovereignty movement, serving a semiotic function. It is this function I attempt to draw out in this section.

The single characteristic most evident among food sovereignty organizations is their democratic framework, which is the result of food sovereignty's values - the people most affected by the global food system were the source of the movement, and they remain its driving force (Patel, 2007). The prioritization of democratic processes has necessitated decentralized structures, which attempt to keep decision-making as accessible to the movement's base as possible. In studies of governance, this approach is known as subsidiarity, and has been the subject of some academic work on sovereignty and changing governance structures. The possible implications of subsidiarity for food sovereignty will be explored in the subsequent section.

LVC serves as an example of democratic, decentralized structures. There is no organizational head, and the International Coordinating Committee is charged with coordinating, rather than directing, the nine regions into which members organizations are divided. The decentralization of power among the regions is a key operating principle of LVC. The Committee is comprised of two elected delegates (as mentioned earlier, one man and one woman) from each region, chosen democratically by that region's member organizations (LVC, 2011b). This structure presents challenges in an organization the size of LVC, which coordinates almost 200 million people by proxy (Nicholson and Delforge, 2008; LVC,

2011b). The membership base of LVC and the food sovereignty movement in general largely consists of people who work the land and are involved with food sovereignty on a volunteer basis. In addition, communication with rural participants can be inconsistent, but, in the words of LVC representative Paul Nicholson,

...the slow pace of our movement is the price we pay to maintain cohesion and develop consensus by communicating and consulting with our network in several languages. It might be very inefficient, but at the end of the day, it also gives us strength and a greater capacity to act when the decision is shared by all. (Nicholson and Delforge 2008, p. 458)

The Nyéléni Forum also illustrates this focus on grassroots decision-making. During the five days of the conference, members held regional and sectorial discussions, as well as themed working groups considering food sovereignty in relation to such varied topics as forced migration, conflict and disaster, and trade policy. Interest groups representing environmental concerns, women, and youth, were also present, and on the final day, politicians from around the world were invited to discuss the integration of food sovereignty into national policies (Catchlove 2007, p. 14). The forum serves another semiotic function; as mentioned earlier, the name Nyéléni has intentional symbolic value. A Malian representative named Ibrahim describes it this way: "In Mali there is a powerful symbol which could serve as the symbol of food sovereignty. It's a woman who left her mark in the history of Mali, as a woman and as a great farmer. When you mention her name everyone knows what this name represents. She is the mother who brings food, the mother who farms, who fought for her recognition as a woman in an environment which wasn't favorable to her. This woman was called Nyéléni. If we use this symbol everyone in Mali will know that it's a struggle for food, a struggle for food sovereignty" (Nyéléni Europe, 2011). The name Nyéléni has since become synonymous with the Forum, and her legend remains a poignant symbol for of the food sovereignty movement and a reminder not only of the importance of women in agriculture, but also of the spirit of resistance and resilience (Catchlove 2007).

Many of the people's movements and NGOs promoting food sovereignty now also work together through the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty. Like LVC and the Nyéléni conference, the IPC is not a centralized structure or body, but instead a forum for networking, dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and debate among groups that identify with the food sovereignty agenda (IPC, 2009). The democratic, decentralized structure exemplified by these organizations "implies a diversity of solutions, not a monoculture, not an approach owned and patented by a single corporation," illustrating the connection between the practical and symbolic elements of organizational structures (Patel 2007, p. 317).

3.6 Forms of Political and Social Action

International protest action has traditionally been one of the food sovereignty movement's strongest tools (Nicholson and Delforge 2008). LVC has held numerous "anti-neoliberal globalization marches" at WTO ministerial conferences in Geneva (1998), Seattle (1999), Cancún (2003), and Hong Kong (2005), and has also taken part in massive protests all over the world against IMF, World Bank, Group of Eight, and other multilateral organizations (Rosset, 2006; Desmarais 2007). Some of these protests have been successful at shutting down talks, as was the case at the infamous "Battle of Seattle" during the WTO Fourth Ministerial Meeting in 1999. Those protests and the media coverage they received brought the concerns of anti-trade-liberalization movements to a global audience like never before (Naiman, 2000; Patel, 2007). During a protest on the first day of the WTO's Fifth Ministerial Conference in Cancún, Korean farm leader Lee Kyung Hae stabbed himself to death with a penknife while shouting "WTO kills farmers" and wearing a shirt emblazoned with that same phrase. That action led to a worldwide response from farmers' movements, who took up the motto "We are all Lee" and declared the day of his death an International Day of Protest against the WTO (Desmarais 2007; Patel, 2007). Cancún serves as a tragic illustration of the

both the centrality of protest action to the food sovereignty movement and the desperate situation of many global peasants. They also led to some serious attention to the cause; UN Special Rapporteur on right to food Jean Ziegler later wrote in a report, “In the light of the Cancún debacle, it is now imperative to examine and understand this emerging concept of food sovereignty” (Ziegler 2004, p. 10).

As the movement has aged and gained momentum and legitimacy, dialogue with national and international governance structures has become a possibility. Lobbying at both the national and international levels has become a significant element in the strategy of the food sovereignty movement, and is often undertaken through food sovereignty’s international organizations. Activists have frequently addressed organizations like the UN and FAO, which serve as “international spaces for advocacy” (Holt-Giménez, 2011). Action at this level is particularly necessary because of the global influence of the parties which oppose food sovereignty, from multinational corporations to foreign governments.

Advocacy at the national level is commonly but not exclusively undertaken by local, regional, and national food sovereignty movements. Policy documents are a common approach; the People’s Food Sovereignty Statement, for example, contains numerous policy recommendations for both national and international governments (PFSN, 2007). Though it takes the form of a policy proposal rather than a legislative draft, the “Food from Family Farms Act,” proposed for 2007 US Farm Bill by the National Family Farm Coalition clearly addresses itself to national governance structures and makes numerous suggestions for national agriculture policy (NFFC, 2007). Some academic observers place a great deal of importance on national advocacy; Burmeister and Choi (2012) insist that “In effect, the success of transnational movements like LVC in challenging global institutions may rest on how well their member affiliates are able to play domestic agri-food politics.” (Burmeister and Choi, 2012, p. 247).

The sharing of information and techniques for agriculture, conservation, and advocacy has been key to enabling the food sovereignty movement's political and social action, as well as being a form of social and political action in itself. Such capacity-building has an important role in food sovereignty. As Ruelle et al. (2011) point out, capacity is a precondition for food sovereignty, and agroecological knowledge has a special role in food sovereignty (Altieri and Nicholls, 2008; Alkon and Mares 2012). The Latin American group Campesino a Campesino provides perhaps the best example of a decentralized information-sharing network. The farmers of Campesino a Campesino build independent networks to communicate with each other and share ideas, techniques, seed, and more. These networks have proved effective in many cases; for example, it was Campesino a Campesino rather than the government that effectively introduced agroecological methods to Cuba (Patel, 2007). This rejection of the privatization of knowledge can be seen as one way in which the theoretical opposition of food sovereignty movements to neoliberalism translates into practice.

Global food sovereignty forums serve as clearinghouses of member-generated content; both Nyéléni and the IPC have training and information-sharing functions (Nicholson and Delforge, 2008; IPC, 2009). However, because of the global spread of communications infrastructure, food sovereignty organizations at every level are able to publish their own content, and do so prolifically. LVC, FoodFirst, Friends of the Earth, and dozens national and regional organizations publish extensively, and many of the reports produced are collaborations among food sovereignty organizations, frequently authored at least in part by rural peasant activists (FIAN and LVC, 2004; FSPI, 2006; WSF, 2008)

3.7 Discussion

The above overview attempts to analyze the theorization of the concept of food sovereignty by its practitioners. From the materials, speech and action of the extremely diverse global

food sovereignty movements as well as the academic work on the subject, a working theory of food sovereignty begins to emerge. In these sources, the food sovereignty movement is presented as a democratic, equitable network of peasants, the original and natural holders of rights regarding the land and food production, who demand their independence from the market-driven neoliberal model of industrialized corporate food production. Food sovereignty itself can therefore be described as that set of rights, that claim to self-determination, and the framework of policies and values which make that possible. Its political claims to rights are reflected in the emphasis on political protest and open opposition to government policies which violate its values system. The claim of the right to self-determination is affirmed in the decentralized structure of the movement and its constituent organizations, as well as the protection of local and traditional knowledge and forms. As discussed above, the theory of food sovereignty goes far beyond simple claims to political rights, but it is these claims which are the primary object of the next section, in which the ongoing theorization of food sovereignty will be presented in the context of the political and social history of sovereignty.

Chapter 4

Application of Sovereignty Theory to Food Sovereignty

As mentioned earlier, it is an underlying supposition of this project that food sovereignty emerged as a part of the evolution of the political and legal concept of sovereignty. As they continue the ongoing process of theorizing food sovereignty, food sovereignty movements thereby have the option of drawing on political and legal sovereignty traditions and, more specifically, certain modern developments within those traditions.

I have selected two current developments in sovereignty scholarship to illustrate the potential for food sovereignty of identifying with and exploring other theories of sovereignty. Firstly, I will explore scholarship on the “fragmentation of governance,” which is like food sovereignty is concerned with sites of authority and accountability. Next, I will give an overview of the international legal principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, which was developed to protect the right to economic self determination in situations of coercion and oppression.

4.1 The Fragmentation of Governance

Government, as a political norm, is changing. In particular, many academics have noted an erosion of national authority. By extension, this has threatened the concept of sovereignty, which has historically been strongly linked to the concept of the state (Lipping, 2010). More particularly, the scope of state control over domestic activities seems to be contracting. Many of the powers and responsibilities traditionally held by states have been redistributed, frequently to non-state actors such as NGOs and corporations, but also to local or regional governments and international organizations. Governments are less able to exert control over

transnational processes like the movement of people, capital, goods, and ideas across their borders (Krasner, 1999). This decentralization of authority and movement away from exclusively governmental forms has been accompanied by increasing social and political interdependence, which also creates challenges to national authority (Camilleri and Falk, 1992). In light of these new circumstances, a classical understanding of governance no longer seems to fully account for evolving phenomena in international relations (Camilleri and Falk, 1992; Lipping, 2010).

Some theorists have asserted that the increasing fragmentation or diffusion of responsibility, authority, and political power necessitates a new understanding of sovereignty; in other words, “that there is simply no longer a specific person or body of persons whose actions are equivalent to that of the state,” and therefore sovereignty must also be plural (Bellamy, 2000; Kalmo and Skinner 2010, p. 15). The globalization of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is frequently cited as the chief driver of the sweeping changes in national and international governance. Two of the key features of this globalization, global economic growth and the spread of communications networks, have resulted in dramatic changes in the processes of governance and accountability (Sassen, 1996). The consequences of these changes are as yet unknown, but it is certain that they will affect the meaning and function of sovereignty.

Food sovereignty bases its claims to rights not on the state but on the people, conceived of as communities and individuals with a natural connection to land rather than as the constituting body of the state. The fragmentation of governance and the questions it raises for sovereignty may allow for the radical re-thinking of the management of the food system, such as is proposed by the food sovereignty movement. As we shall see below, both the fragmentation of governance and the flexibility of political action it enables offer a framework for the types of changes food sovereignty movements hope to make, but also create space for the growing

power of private corporate interests. Thus, among recent developments in the scholarship of sovereignty, the work on the fragmentation of governance has potential to be of great importance to food sovereignty movements and the ongoing theorization of food sovereignty. To identify its relevance to the theorization and practice of food sovereignty, I look at fragmentation of both national and international governance structures, focusing on the theoretical separation of sovereignty from the state, the redistribution of sovereignty and governance functions to supra- and sub-national levels, and the privatization of governance.

Separation of Sovereignty from the State

Sovereignty and the state have been inextricably linked for much of their respective histories, particularly through the Westphalian model of international politics. Lipping describes this relationship as a “peculiar liaison in which they reciprocally support, empower and legitimate each other”: the state claims sovereignty, while sovereignty is understood as essentially belonging to the state (2010, p. 187). This relationship, which has been so imbedded in the political development of the modern world for centuries, cannot be easily severed, even though it may no longer accurately describe international politics. Even today, state sovereignty is often cited as the basis of equality among nation-states (Camilleri and Falk, 1992).

One of the primary concerns regarding the demise of sovereign statehood has been the fear that loss of state sovereignty constitutes a threat to democracy. Popular sovereignty has often been considered an underlying premise for state sovereignty, with “the people” understood as a pre-political body and the nation-state thus seen as the property of the sovereign people (Hobbes, 1651; Skinner, 2010). According to this way of thinking, the transference of powers away from the state, for example to an international body, threatens the democratic rights and participation of the citizenry. Such theorists point out that the European Union, for example,

has made the target of democratic action less clear, and its legislative mechanisms include no direct democratic control (MacCormick, 1999).

The perceived decline of the state has been received with great diversity of opinion. In addition to the approbation and concern, there are those who argue that the only way to salvage the concept of sovereignty is to de-link it from the traditional conception of the state (Lipping, 2010). Some have focused on disarticulating sovereignty from the territory, creating instead a concept of sovereignty “situated in the webs of global relations and flows of capital, knowledge and power” (Emel et al. 2011, p. 72).

Theoretically, new governance structures could be designed to achieve humanistic or democratic goals, to make political space for historically disenfranchised groups, to protect policy priorities like the environment, or to keep certain functions under local control. The possibilities are largely unexplored, though grassroots social movements have pioneered some new forms of governance, one of which will be discussed below. Food sovereignty has demanded shifts in authority and governance of food production systems and natural resources. In the political context of fragmenting governance structures, food sovereignty movements could find the political space they need to renegotiate their sovereignty in relation to their governments and the international community. However, changing established structures is always risky, and there are other governance trends involved which may affect the outcomes of the restructuring, as discussed below.

Redistribution of sovereignty and governance functions to supra- and sub-national levels

Frequently, the form that the “fragmentation of governance” takes is the redistribution of governance functions to levels hierarchically above and below the national government. A number of academics have explored what happens to sovereignty when states transfer some

powers up to international bodies and devolve others down to infra-state bodies. Some of the possibilities of each are outlined below, using the EU as a case study for international governance and briefly exploring subsidiarity as an option for structured devolution of powers from national governments.

Some of those analyzing the redistribution of governance have recognized the potential for more functional, equitable, and efficient governance structures, and have suggested models for a style of governance embracing different authority distributions. For example, Armitage (2008, p. 7) suggests that “multi-level governance,” could provide opportunities to build governance structures which “may facilitate learning and adaptation in complex social-ecological circumstances,” like those of food production systems. Such structures could make connections between community management and regional and national governance structures to enable dialogue, collaboration, and a mutual exchange of knowledge and experience, processes which build capacity at each level (Armitage, 2008). Food sovereignty movements have been working to make those connections between communities and existing governance structures, as well as to facilitate capacity-building and knowledge exchange among communities. However, while food sovereignty movements’ political action has primarily focused on promoting policy regimes, I argue that studies of the fragmentation of governance suggest that they could benefit from promoting governance structures adhering to their values, such as the multi-level governance described by Armitage. Another formulation which would be compatible with food sovereignty policy and values is “adaptive co-management,” a type of commons management defined by Ruitenbeek and Cartier (2001). Adaptive co-management refers to a “long term management structure that permits stakeholders to share management responsibility within a specific system of natural resources,” and could likely be adapted according to the framework of community food sovereignty (Armitage 2008, p. 16).

Perhaps the most widely visible example of the transference of state powers is international organizations. The twentieth century produced a crop of extra-national political and legal bodies, among them the UN, WTO, IMF, World Bank, and the European Union (EU), all of which have implications for sovereignty and the state. The EU has been a focal point for academic work on changing concepts and practice of sovereignty, and is often presented as the harbinger of “a new form of legal and political order,” bringing with it forms of politics beyond the state (MacCormick 1999, p. 167). Indeed, with its many supra-national bodies, some have argued that the EU “is a clear example of a voluntary contractual arrangement that contradicts Westphalian sovereignty” (Krasner 1999, p. 226). However, the issue is not merely one of state sovereignty, but also of state effectiveness. A number of theorists have noted the decreasing effectiveness of state action and the blurring of the line between the national and the international (Camilleri and Falk, 1992). When a state finds itself unable to regulate or control, such as with the transnational issues mentioned above, it may choose to compromise sovereignty and pass certain responsibilities to international bodies. In a global climate with many capitalistic, highly market-oriented economies, trade has become one of the domains in which international bodies have become the preferred actors. It is often the case that international competition disincentivizes national economic regulation, as multinational corporations have widely asserted that regulation will stunt productivity and the confidence of their international business partners. In many countries, national politics makes it difficult for policymakers to legislate economic regulations, so international bodies become a preferable site for international economic governance, even though international regulation can be undermined by lack of national-level regulation (Camilleri and Falk, 1992). While some national governments have political incentives to delegate certain elements of governance to international bodies, the devolution of powers to regional and community governance structures has often been resisted. Some of the nations of the global South have

been the pioneers of sub-national governance structures, such as in the example of participatory budgeting below.

Much of the support for community governance references democratic ideals of popular sovereignty which are rooted in 16th and 17th century political thought. While popular sovereignty is the theoretical foundation of many modern governments, the reality of political participation in most democratic states seems to contradict the claim that governments derive their authority from popular sovereignty (Camilleri and Falk, 1992). Yet political participation is an important process, not only to good governance, but to the human experience, and increasing options for individual political participation opens up possibilities for the satisfaction of people as citizens and as members of communities. As MacCormick states, “The forms of political decision-making that are required in a satisfactory human existence must be as close to the individuals affected as is reasonably possible. It is in the ‘little battalions’ that people can really participate in decision-making with a sense that their voice makes a difference, and can through interaction with others become fully responsible beings, participating in communal governance” (MacCormick 1999, 167)

Forms of political participation have been developed which attempt to address that desire for participation in the governance structures directly affecting a community. These innovations intend to promote the participation of communities in their own governance, which may serve to address problems of accountability, transparency, and stakeholder engagement.

Participatory budgeting, originating in Brazil, is one such approach. Introduced by the Workers’-Party-led government of the state Rio Grande do Sul, the process allowed public assemblies to set annual investment priorities for government spending. This move was not without its political motivations, and the direct inclusion of communities in budgeting became highly contentious political issue in the region, with each side claiming the other was standing in the way of “true democracy.” Though celebrated in academic circles,

participatory budgeting has as yet not been widely tested or refined to address its major problems, has not been as successful at accomplishing its stated goals as promised, and has fallen within the standard pattern of partisan policy tactics (Goldfrank and Schneider, 2006). Yet in spite of these weaknesses, participatory budgeting represents both an example of the fragmentation of governance and a potential method for addressing some of the risks of changes in governance. Additionally, the food sovereignty movement has pursued the approach of direct engagement, and can perhaps learn from some of the failures of participatory governance, particularly in regard to political manipulation of stakeholder engagement in political processes.

Perhaps the most well-established codified principle of devolved governance comes from the EU. The principle of subsidiarity, which was first established in the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, requires that matters are handled at the least-centralized level competent to deal with them, while the central authority handles only those things which cannot be adequately managed at other levels. Subsidiarity is included in the Preamble of the Treaty on the European Union as a founding resolution, namely “to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity” (EU 1992, p. 15). Though EU subsidiarity may not grant powers to communities, the principle has the potential to be an incredibly important one to the restructuring of national and international governance structures which may take place as traditional sovereign-state governance structures are outmoded. Subsidiarity could be used to establish new democratic structures, ones which place decision-making as close as possible to the constituents affected. The theoretical implications of this have yet to be fully explored, but subsidiarity has some strong supporters, among them MacCormick, who writes, “The idea of subsidiarity points us to better visions of democracy than all-purpose sovereignty ever did” (MacCormick, 1999, p. 126).

Privatization of Governance

In a number of the above scenarios, the fragmentation of governance is presented as an opportunity for restructuring, potentially for the better. However, there are other factors which exert a strong influence over governance, and which directly challenge the values of the food sovereignty movement and many of the proponents of community governance. Perhaps the most powerful of these forces is the push for privatization, driven by wide acceptance of the market-driven neoliberal economic model. A number of governments have come to rely heavily on private contractors, the US government among them. Though the increasing transfer of powers from public to private governance has taken place without much scrutiny, there are those who perceive it to be a threat to democratic principles. *The New York Times*, rebranding a term from the 1930s, recently asserted that private contractors have become the US government's "Fourth Branch" (Verkuil, 2007).

As the use of private contractors has become common, and the benefit and utility of the practice has been accepted by some influential international organizations. In the words of a document on public governance published by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

Reducing the cost of government by downsizing, outsourcing and improving government efficiency, is but one of the challenges faced by governments worldwide in their effort to maximize value for citizens. What is equally important, in the process of government reinvention which societies are currently undergoing in building the government institutions for the 21st century, is to implement policies and initiatives to promote transparency and accountability in public administration, and policies which foster an environment of trust in the private sector. Good public governance also underpins good corporate governance. (2007, p. iii)

In this statement, reducing the size, and potentially the scope, of a national government is presumed to be a universal objective. The necessity of maintaining or building transparency and accountability under these circumstances is clearly noted here, and is certainly a common concern of scholars and practitioners of governance. Perhaps most interesting is the last

phrase, which places “policies which foster an environment of trust in the private sector” on equal terms with transparency and accountability. While certainly it is desirable for corporate partners to be well-managed and responsible, it is a testament to the prevalence of changes in governance that the entire private sector is here treated as a necessary partner in governance rather than an object of governance.

Privatization assumes that the market will be able to improve on the services currently provided by the government (Verkuil, 2007). Yet trusting the market has its downside, when the market incentivizes private actors against the interests of governance structures. It is suggested that regulatory fragmentation can reduce costs for private actors, and may also make it easier for them to participate in rule-making, potentially compromising policy. A further risk is that fragmentation of international governance could potentially allow businesses to choose to work within a country or regulatory structure with fewer demands or regulation, creating a “race to the bottom” of deregulation among states attempting to compete for business (Biermann et al., 2009).

Though privatization can (but certainly does not always) increase efficiency and improve performance, it oversteps its bounds when it leads to the outsourcing of actual political and policy decisions. This is a legitimate concern, for the reasons described above and because when agencies outsource tasks either resulting in or because of personnel downsizing, some of the work of both formulating and implementing policy can be passed to the contractor. Personnel reductions can also result in lack of oversight (Verkuil, 2007). This can be seen as a part of a broader trend, described by Camilleri and Falk: “In this emerging global system, characterized simultaneously by centralization and fragmentation, the key influences, decisions and outcomes do not correspond with the choices of sovereign wills and are not contained by the boundaries within which they operate” (1992, p. 77). Some scholars threaten that the delegation of government powers to the private sector undermines the capacity to

govern. Perhaps the biggest risk of utilizing private contractors is the potential gradual loss of governmental ability, efficiency, or personnel to perform the outsourced function (Verkuil, 2007). An institutionalist analysis of organizational structures point out that once capacity is diminished or lost, it can be very difficult to regain: “Institutional structures become locked in because of economies of scale, hardware-software complementarities, network externalities, agglomeration externalities, and other processes that make it instrumentally irrational for an actor to alter a given pattern of behavior once it is initially chosen (often for haphazard and idiosyncratic reasons)” (Krasner 1999, p. 226). The implications of privatization include theoretical as well as practical concerns, particularly regarding the nature of public service and democratic governance. Verkuil (2007) argues that public services cannot be performed by the private sector without changing the nature and implications of the process. Public and private sector employees have different goals and operate under different limitations. Thus, the decision to bring in private contractors should be made very carefully, with due consideration to the potential loss of present and future governance capacity.

Discussion

The fate of the sovereign state is uncertain, though it is likely that its role will change significantly in the coming decades. The decreasing effective scope of state authority, the influence of transnational processes, and increasing global integration and interdependence point to the need for new governance structures and processes which better represent public interests in a rapidly changing political climate. In the midst of the forces of globalization and increasingly overpowered by international economic ideologies, some suggest that the state may become primarily a site of conflict and negotiation among these and other influences, functioning “as the principle area of conflict, giving expression to and institutionalizing the

tensions between competing values, interests and organizational principles,” operating “more as a vehicle of struggle than as a vehicle of sovereignty” (Camilleri and Falk 1992, p. 254).

As we have seen, sovereignty disarticulated from the state may open up the field to configurations of governance with the potential for new, equitable, humanistic and democratic governance structures, and grassroots social movements have been among the first to explore the potential of these alternate forms. These frameworks may offer food sovereignty movements the political space both to negotiate their policy agenda and to be a part of the creation of governance structures which represent their values of decentralization, democratic participation, and social justice.

There is ample evidence to suggest that we need to be thinking about governance differently. Making connections among international, national, regional and local governance are scholars of multi-level governance and subsidiarity, which attempt to re-locate authority closer to the affected constituency. Both theories offer frameworks for the structural integration of the types of representation and interaction promoted by food sovereignty. I argue that most significant implication for food sovereignty movements of scholarship on the fragmentation of governance is the potential for the integration of governance regimes into the food sovereignty platform. The global food sovereignty movement has danced around the concept of alternative governance in its discussions of community sovereignty and its focus on decentralization and equitable, democratic organizational structures, and certainly, individual organizations have worked to change their native governance structures. The movement as a whole, however, has not directly promoted new governance structures. I suggest that the emergence of governance models which align with the movement’s goals and values suggests that the food sovereignty movement should consider whether to integrate governance regimes into the food sovereignty framework.

4.2 The Principle of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources

Another development within sovereignty studies which offers lessons for the evolving self-conception of the food sovereignty movement is the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources. This principle, hereafter “permanent sovereignty,” is a fairly recent development which is utilized primarily in international law. Developed in the 1950s, permanent sovereignty is due for modern exploration. It offers a basis for altering inequitable economic arrangements, in the original context resulting from directly oppressive colonialism, but which today may be the result of coercive economic arrangements. The original focus on foreign capital also finds a modern corollary through international trade agreements like the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. Finally, through provisions protecting a people’s native means of subsistence and the inclusion of economic activities, permanent sovereignty could be used to assert the right to define agriculture systems which is a central tenet of food sovereignty.

The principle of permanent sovereignty, expressed briefly, is that “Every State has and shall freely exercise full permanent sovereignty, including possession, use and disposal, over all its wealth, natural resources, and economic activities” (UN General Assembly 1974, Article 2(1)). A fairly well-established but relatively minor point of international law, permanent sovereignty is the subject of scores of United Nations (UN) resolutions and a moderately-sized body of academic work, most dating from between the 1950s and 1990s.

The principle of permanent sovereignty emerged in international law in the years following World War II, as newly independent states created by the decolonization process sought to establish themselves and their rights to self-determination. As described by Hossein (1984), “The principle was originally articulated in response to the perception that during the colonial period inequitable and onerous arrangements, mainly in the form of ‘concessions’ had been imposed upon unwary and vulnerable governments” (ix). Permanent sovereignty offers states,

and arguably peoples, a basic premise for attempting to alter ‘inequitable’ arrangements regarding the exploitation of their natural resources by foreign investors. While there are certainly still numerous cases of exploitation by foreign and multinational corporations, in the current highly globalized world economy, much of the manipulation of less-powerful economies takes place through market pressures and terms of trade, and the principle of permanent sovereignty may have offer a way for nations to challenge such impositions on their sovereignty. However, very little work has been done on permanent sovereignty since the mid-1990s, though I would argue the topic is ripe for new exploration. For example, I have found no work that directly addresses the implications of the World Trade Organization for permanent sovereignty, but the increasing role of international governance in relation to the declining authority of states calls for such an analysis. As I will argue, food sovereignty may find itself the heir apparent of permanent sovereignty as it attempts to establish economic, environmental and cultural rights for disenfranchised populations and take action against inequitable economic arrangements under neoliberal economic policy regimes and international trade organizations.

Since its emergence during debates in the UN General Assembly in the 1950s, permanent sovereignty has evolved from a simple political assertion to an international legal principle, largely through resolutions and other processes of the UN (Schrijver, 1997; Abi-Saab, 1991). Former International Court of Justice judge Georges Abi-Saab describes the significance of permanent sovereignty this way:

By bringing the principle of sovereignty – which had been confined until then to the political context – explicitly to bear on the use and disposal of natural resources, it purported to highlight the continuous and unseverable link between sovereignty and self-determination; sovereignty serving not only as the protective legal shield of the political outcome of self-determination, namely independence, but also as the permanent guarantee of its effective exercise in the economic field beyond accession to formal independence” (1991, p. 597).

Thus, not only is permanent sovereignty the first explicit connection of sovereignty with natural resources, it is the first codified application of sovereignty to anything beyond problems of international politics, referring particularly to the ongoing exercise of self-determination in the economic realm.

The first appearance of the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources was its introduction by representatives of Chile in the UN Human Rights Commission in 1952.

Following a period of heated debate, a modified version of the original language was adopted in 1966 as a part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Abi-Saab, 1991; UN General Assembly, 1966). As stated in the Covenant, “All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence” (Part I, Article I, paragraph 2). This final sentence is of great import - not only may a people not be deprived of a means of subsistence, *their own* means of subsistence is protected. Additionally, the situation of this right as a part of a larger cluster of national economic rights is significant, extending what seems like a natural individual and community right involving basic needs and cultural heritage to a much broader scale. It is this right to self-determination of means of subsistence which food sovereignty movements claim as their own.

Like food sovereignty, permanent sovereignty makes claims to both economic and environmental sovereignty. Specifically, it attempts to address what limits, if any, can be placed on states in regard to foreign economic interests within their territories, which has been a contentious question for centuries. The resolutions of conflicts over just such interactions between capital-importing and capital-exporting countries reflect the balance of power between these two types of states. One way in which capital-importing states have

attempted to shift the balance of power has been the pursuit of the protection of international law for their economic sovereignty, often through claims to permanent sovereignty (Abi-Saab, 1991). This pattern is replicated in the circumstances which produced food sovereignty: global flows of commodity crops, agrochemicals, and seed can stand in for capital, and policy documents like the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture are the resolutions of (trade) conflicts between importing and exporting nations, accurately reproducing the power relationships of the parties. Food sovereignty, likewise, is an attempt to address the imbalance with a claim to economic rights. Though an imperfect metaphor, this illustrates a way in which food sovereignty can be seen as a successor of permanent sovereignty – the dominant industrial agrifood complex and the international trade policies protecting it have become a primary tool for the manipulation of less-powerful nations, and food sovereignty attempts to undercut that whole power structure with a basic claim to political and economic self-determination. Permanent sovereignty could be a tool to accomplish that goal.

Parallels aside, there are two primary challenges to the potential utilization of permanent sovereignty by food sovereignty movements. The first is the ambiguity of the unit possessing permanent sovereignty; different formulations alternately refer to “states,” “nations,” and “peoples.” Clearly, the right of a *people* to determine use of their natural resources, to define economic activities, and to a self-determined means of subsistence means something very different from the right of a *state* to do so. As a result, in order for food sovereignty to make use of the principle of permanent sovereignty, it would be very important to establish the rights of peoples as well states to permanent sovereignty. According to Schrijver (1997, p.9), in reference to permanent sovereignty, “the term ‘peoples’ was originally meant to refer to those peoples which had not yet been able to exercise their right to political self-determination.” It seems, however, that it is implied by most international law that ‘peoples’ disappear once they belong to a state, unless they are somehow discriminated against, or are

designated ‘indigenous peoples.’ Even in those circumstances, however, ‘peoples’ are treated as an object rather than subject of international law (Schrijver, 1997).

Over the last five or six decades, there have been significant changes regarding who holds the legal right to determine what is done with natural resources. In the 1950s, permanent sovereignty belonged to ‘Peoples and nations,’ or ‘underdeveloped countries,’ because of the usefulness of the idea in discussions of the right of peoples to self-determination and its potential for promoting economic development (Schrijver 1997, p. 8). As decolonization became less of a focus, the understanding of permanent sovereignty as a tool for self-determination for peoples fell away, and the right of to use natural resources for development became the focus. By the 1970s, permanent sovereignty had been formally extended to all states, though the obligation of using that right in the interest of the nation and its peoples remained, and some discussion of the rights of indigenous peoples emerged. However, outside of colonial or occupied peoples, states rather than peoples have remained the primary holders of permanent sovereignty in international legal discourse (Schrijver, 1997).

The second challenge to food sovereignty movements in utilizing permanent sovereignty, closely related to the first, would be the ambiguous relationship between communities (potentially, “peoples”) and the state with regard to international political action. In an international law context, peoples would most likely need to take action through their states. Food sovereignty organizations have frequently directed their political action toward such “international spaces for advocacy” as the FAO and other United Nations bodies (Holt-Giménez 2011, p. 324). As a result, they may be favorably situated to connect the rights of peoples with national and international action and advocacy. Certainly, food sovereignty movements have directly appealed to national governments in public statements like “Priority to Peoples’ Food Sovereignty,” released in anticipation of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Doha (Our World is Not for Sale Coalition, 2001; Wittman et al. 2010).

Additionally, developing effective forms of action at the national level and working relationships with national governments would likely increase the effectiveness of food sovereignty movements locally and regionally as well as nationally and internationally. References to permanent sovereignty in UN resolutions and other official documents rarely state any objectives for its exercise, merely referring to use by peoples and states for their own ends and in the best interest of the people, or even more strongly, in the exclusive interest of the people, as stated in Article 21 of the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Organization of African Unity, 1981; Schrijver, 1997). While states are obligated to utilize natural resources in the best interest, even exclusive best interest, of their populations (though they operate without much oversight in this matter), it is up to the state whether to solicit input from that population on what those interests are. Short of human rights violations, such processes are a largely matter of domestic policy. International law only comes in to play "when a state manifestly discriminates against a certain people and can thus no longer claim to be 'possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or color'." (Schrijver 1997, pp. 9-10, quoting UN GA Resolution 2625).

In the General Assembly, permanent sovereignty has been used to reaffirm the rights of peoples living under colonial domination or foreign occupation, or under racial domination (Schrijver, 1997). While the first two are political conditions, the last is a social justice condition which could serve as a precedent for claims of class discrimination, should the food sovereignty movement choose to pursue that avenue. Central to their message is that control over food production and consumption has been taken away from rural farmers and consumers, the very people who plow the land. They have widely chosen to identify themselves as "peasants" or "*campesinos*," and that identification as something of a "farmers'

class” could put them in an interesting position regarding discrimination and social justice claims.

As mentioned above, a significant impetus for the development of permanent sovereignty was the desire to challenge arrangements perceived as inequitable which had been made with foreign investors over resource use or extraction; as a result, the emerging concept was invoked either during or in response to high-stakes nationalization cases such as the takeover of United Fruit Company properties by the Guatemalan government in 1953 (Schrijver, 1997). The concept of permanent sovereignty has continued to be associated with nationalization of industries for much of its history, which may account for some of the resistance from capital-exporting nations (Abi-Saab, 1991). In fact, the exploration of these rights has at times been called “resource nationalism” by commentators, and is said to be experiencing resurgence under leaders like Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, who has formally abrogated standing contracts with international companies, and other Latin American leaders who have been elected on promises of explicitly opposing neo-liberal economic policy regimes (Emel et al., 2011; Birdsall et al., 2011).

Most of the nations of Latin America have followed a sadly familiar pattern, with consistently high inequality related to a history of foreign exploitation of natural resources, which concentrated income in a ruling class and exported much of the remainder to colonial powers. Though many of the resources exploited were of an extractive nature, namely gold, silver, tin, and copper (and more recently, petroleum), there were agricultural examples of this pattern as well, notably sugar (Birdsall et al., 2011). Unfortunately, many of these patterns have been reproduced in the post-colonial era, though with different actors and scripts (Emel et al., 2011). In the last several decades, many Latin American nations have made marked improvements in inequality, some more sustainably than others, and these successes have frequently been linked to redistributive social policies (Birdsall et al., 2011).

It is no coincidence that Latin America has also been the birthplace and home of the food sovereignty movement, which has both the long history of exploitation and more recent history of attempts to address the resulting inequalities, for example through permanent sovereignty, dependency theory, populist and social democratic redistributive policies, and now food sovereignty.

In line with the early concern over nationalization, the focus on foreign capital has defined the dialogue about permanent sovereignty for most of the last half-century. Commentators from capital-exporting countries have focused on how to reconcile permanent sovereignty with obligations states might have under contracts or international law (See Hyde, 1956).

Many of these Western scholars have taken permanent sovereignty as a challenge to certain international legal concepts, or seen it as a way for states to sidestep the constraints of their international responsibilities. Alternately, some international legal scholars and practitioners from the developing world have seen permanent sovereignty as a way of addressing limits imposed by international laws which represent foreign economic interests, and have even cast opposition to the concept as originating in a fundamental failure to understand the degree to which developing countries have been stripped of their sovereignty for the economic benefit of others (Schrijver, 1997)

Over the lifetime of permanent sovereignty, the range of natural resources and activities covered by the principle and the language used to describe them has expanded. Wealth, natural wealth, sometimes simply “resources,” and ultimately economic activities were all at times included in the scope of permanent sovereignty; the varying terminologies have been used in official documents without much consistency. The introduction of economic activities into the definition of permanent sovereignty came in 1970 as a part of the resolution of the International Development Strategy for the Second UN Development Decade. First-world countries and scholars have consistently (and sometimes successfully) opposed the inclusion

of economic activities, though there are examples of these governments using it to their own advantage as well (Schrijver, 1997).

The inclusion of economic activities in permanent sovereignty is very important in establishing the right of peoples, or at least of states, to determine use of their resources. In the case of food sovereignty, this could potentially be invoked as protection for the right to determine the types and scale of agricultural production, the rights of producers, and the environmental standards governing food production. One argument on behalf of including economic activities has been that control over production is a key element in the market value of the product, and therefore of the resource (Schrijver, 1997). That is certainly the case in agriculture; organic production, fair-trade practices, and agricultural methods (e.g. shade-grown coffee) certainly affect market price. The inclusion of ‘economic activities’ thus seems to be a promising point of connection between permanent sovereignty and food sovereignty, and could also be used to reinforce claims to self-determination of food production systems.

The 1970 review of the UN Declaration of Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations affirmed the elements of sovereign equality in the original UN charter, and outside of some rephrasing, added only one point, namely that “Each State has the right freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems” (GA Res. 2625 (XXV)). This addition, asserting economic rights in an even broader context than permanent sovereignty, seems to protect the inclusion of economic activities in the principle of permanent sovereignty. Reinforcing the connection is the fact that a clause affirming the right to “free disposal of [states’] natural wealth and resources,” an explicit inclusion of permanent sovereignty in a key document, only barely failed to elicit consensus due to a difficulty with the language (Abi-Saab 1991, p. 598).

The right to economic self-determination is affirmed in any number of other UN charters, resolutions, and other documents, some of which contribute to a more complex understanding of the idea. The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States (GA Res. 3281(XXIX), 1974) includes the language that economic, social, political, and cultural decisions of states should be made “in accordance with the will of its people, without outside interference, coercion or threat in any form whatsoever.” This qualification of the exercise of permanent sovereignty may be helpful in addressing the challenges to food sovereignty mentioned earlier, namely the meaning and rights of “peoples” and the relation of such peoples and their states. One more benefit to looking at international law more broadly, also illustrated here, is the more thorough inclusion of coercive, as well as directly oppressive, violations of sovereignty.

Certainly one way in which the potential significance of permanent sovereignty has changed since its introduction is through the dramatic increase in public and scientific environmental awareness which has taken place over the last half-century. Though most of the writing on the topic was done decades ago, even at that time there was an increasing emphasis on the obligation of states to use and manage resources sustainably, both for their own benefit and that of the planet as a whole (Schrijver, 1997). For example, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which governs the use of marine resources, declares that states retain permanent sovereignty “for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources” (Article 56). Describing ecological matter and processes as ‘natural resources’ can be interpreted as an inherently economic approach. Natural resources have been taken for granted for centuries, considered simply a cog in the machine of an economy. Recently, there has been more recognition of the intrinsic value of natural resources and processes (Schrijver, 1997). Indeed, though ecosystems services as such were not yet a part of the wider dialogue, the 1994 UN Convention to Combat Desertification

defines 'land' as "the terrestrial bio-productive system that comprises soil, vegetation, other biota, and the ecological and hydrological processes that operate within the system," a rather sophisticated description which captures the interrelated nature of resources often artificially delineated as land, water, timber, and wildlife (Part I, Article 1(e)). Today, the burgeoning ecosystems services approach offers a combination of economic reasoning and ecological awareness, and thus could take an important place in discussions of permanent sovereignty, either through the inclusion of economic activities in the definition of permanent sovereignty, or through the economic corollary of self-determination. Similarly, arguing the economic value of ecosystems services could strengthen an appeal of food sovereignty movements to the principle of permanent sovereignty.

For the purposes of this project, I have presented permanent sovereignty as a predecessor of the food sovereignty movement. As the initial goals motivating claims of permanent sovereignty centered on protecting and reinforcing the sovereignty of newly independent states and other developing countries, and allowing people not under self-government to reap the benefits of their natural resources, it seems reasonable to characterize permanent sovereignty as a right meant to address inequitable economic relationships. In this way, it may offer something to the food sovereignty movement, which attempts to alter a lack of control over food production caused in large part by inequitable economic relationships and limitations enforced by the World Trade Organization and other multilateral organizations. Like food sovereignty, permanent sovereignty emerged in response to economic conditions which were placing developing nations at a severe disadvantage in the global marketplace and directly impacting quality of life for their people. The nations which introduced permanent sovereignty identified foreign economic interests as a primary driving factor behind these conditions, and formulated the principle to protect against manipulation of their natural resources, productive systems and economies. Food sovereignty movements, though

operating at different scales and lacking the legal status of national governments, share these concerns and objectives.

While the status of communities and peoples as holders of permanent sovereignty is somewhat ambiguous, with the state as a potential “gatekeeper” for the exercise of these rights, food sovereignty movements occupy an international advocacy position which may allow them to connect the rights of peoples with international tools for political action in a way that permanent sovereignty was unable to. As they lay claim to international political, economic, and human rights, food sovereignty movements could learn a great deal from the development of permanent sovereignty, which was successfully established as an international legal principle in the space of several decades, by parties attempting to correct historic and ongoing inequalities, and under opposition (though perhaps milder opposition than faced by food sovereignty activists). The content of the principle has much to offer as well. The usage of permanent sovereignty in General Assembly debates introduced claims based on social justice as well as political conditions of oppression, which may hold promise for the rights of the disenfranchised economic and social groups who are represented by food sovereignty movements. Finally, sovereignty over economic activities, and the right to perpetual self-determination more broadly, relate strongly to the rights which food sovereignty movements claim, and neither point has been adequately explored in international law.

As food sovereignty movements around the world continue to evolve, it is likely they will be called upon more and more to present and justify their claims. The role of food sovereignty movements as representatives of the peasants of the world is its most treasured feature, and the structure of the organization is intended to protect that function. It must be those people and their representatives to drive the evolution of the self-conception of the global food sovereignty movement. This is not done in isolation, for by their nature as social movements,

they are responding to dominant paradigms and all of the associated institutions, structures, and supporting arguments. Thus, an analysis of the relationship of food sovereignty to one of the most powerful global institutions and paradigms, that of international law and legal institutions, should leave food sovereignty movements more equipped both in the international political arena and in their own process of self determination. In this analysis of permanent sovereignty, I do not intend to make suggestions as to what the content of those choices should be, but rather to suggest points for discussion and clarification, and potential connections with international law. There are other international legal principles to which food sovereignty could appeal, but the formulation in the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources closely represents the interests and character of the claims of food sovereignty, and I argue that food sovereignty movements could potentially gain a great deal from the analysis of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, both as a legal concept and a modern manifestation of the evolving concept of sovereignty.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

Throughout this project, I have attempted to illustrate the pervasive influence of food production on the world, from its environmental impacts to its effects on the self-determination and autonomy of communities, regions and nations. The global food sovereignty movement presents the concept of food sovereignty as a remedy to many of the environmental and social crises the world faces through its direct opposition to the forces which it perceives as having caused these problems, among them neoliberal economics, the alienation of authority over the food system away from communities and nations, and the loss of access to land and natural resources.

The food sovereignty framework argues that food and food production are intimately related to not only health and livelihoods, but communities and migration, environment and biodiversity, cultural traditions, social networks, and innumerable other elements of daily life, particularly in rural agricultural communities. With this understanding of the multifunctionality of food and food production, food sovereignty attempts to promote comprehensive democratic rural reform, with the full participation and direction of rural communities.

Through my examination of the public and academic discourse on food sovereignty, I have attempted to tease out the theorization of food sovereignty, addressing both ontological and practical meanings of the term. In analyzing the self-conception of food sovereignty movements, their basic claims and rationales, the values system of the global movement, the semiotics of the organizational structures and practices, and the forms of political and social action which the movement has embraced, I have traced the themes which comprise a working theory of food sovereignty.

My analysis describes the food sovereignty movement as a network of democratic peasants' movements which claim food sovereignty as a right or set of rights of which they are the natural holders. They are committed to self-determination and unequivocally reject neoliberal models and reasoning. In addition to the political demand for rights, this theory of food sovereignty puts forth a framework for comprehensive democratic rural reform, focusing on food production and distribution systems and the relationships they entail. Guiding this reform are the values of social justice and equity, community control of resources, and the preservation of cultural values and traditional knowledge. In meaning and function, the food sovereignty movement's organizational structures, practices, and decision-making processes are designed to be decentralized, equitable, and democratic, allowing for flexibility of association and action among food sovereignty organizations and widening the scope of the movement. Finally, the food sovereignty movement has taken as its primary forms of political and social action national and international protest, lobbying and advocacy, as well as coordinated information-sharing and capacity-building activities within the movement. Yet food sovereignty activists see their broad-based goals for rural reform, social change, and environmental conservation not as a constructed political strategy, but rather a natural result of their most basic claims and values. Food production is merely a point of entry into this complex framework, which attempts to reconfigure the relationships of individuals and communities to food, agriculture, natural resources, disenfranchised groups, their own cultural and natural heritages, and to other farming communities worldwide.

This project proposes that food sovereignty may be seen as a modern expression of centuries-old debates about political and legal sovereignty; thus, I have analyzed the theorization of the food sovereignty movement in relation to the historical evolution of the concept of sovereignty, and suggested implications of the present-day dialogue about sovereignty for the ongoing theorization of food sovereignty.

I use two modern developments in sovereignty scholarship to illustrate the potential for food sovereignty of identifying with and exploring other theories of sovereignty, namely studies of the fragmentation of governance and the international legal principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources. To analyze the ways in which both national and international governance structures have experienced the fragmentation of their authority and control, I examined academic work exploring the theoretical separation of sovereignty from the state, the redistribution of sovereignty and governance functions to supra- and sub-national levels, and the privatization of governance. Decreasing state effectiveness has led to a shift toward “governance beyond the state,” which in certain policy domains, particularly those involving transnational issues, has blurred the line between national and international governance. This effect has been compounded by corporate influence and market forces which disincentivize national economic and trade regulation, shifting the burden to international governance structures.

The increasing role of privatization, driven by wide acceptance of the market-driven neoliberal economic model to which food sovereignty is so firmly opposed, has been enabled by the shifting sites of authority and the erosion of traditional governance structures. The transfer of powers from public to private governance, in large part through the growing reliance on private contractors, raises serious concerns about private influence in processes of policy creation and implementation, accountability, and potential present and future loss of capacity within governance structures.

However, these changes in global governance have also created the potential for the formation of new governance structures. Some innovative community governance structures have already been implemented by grassroots social movements in the global South, while political theorists and analysts have begun to develop theoretical models for multi-level and community governance. Pursuant to my analysis, I suggest that the food sovereignty

movement should consider incorporating into its platform the promotion of governance structures which reflect the values of the movement, complementing the food sovereignty policy agenda. Models like multi-level governance and adaptive co-management codify connections among communities and governance structures and therefore could be adapted to reproduce the relationships food sovereignty frameworks have attempted to promote among private, civil society, and governance entities.

The food sovereignty movement has not yet utilized international law in its pursuit of its rights claims, but there are certainly legal principles which have potential applications, and I have chosen the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources to illustrate this argument. Permanent sovereignty was developed by post-colonial governments to protect their right to economic self-determination, a goal shared by the food sovereignty movement. The two principles of sovereignty, a semantic comparison I make deliberately, evolved in similar circumstances as responses to similar sets of economic power relations, and make similar claims to economic and environmental sovereignty.

The initial goal of permanent sovereignty was to give colonial and post-colonial nations a legal tool to alter inequitable economic arrangements leading to the exploitation of their natural resources and to define economic activities with regard to those resources. The food sovereignty movement argues that the dominant industrial agrifood complex and the international trade policies protecting it have become a primary tool for the manipulation of less-powerful nations, and attempts to undercut that whole power structure with a basic claim to political and economic self-determination, a claim echoed by permanent sovereignty.

As adopted by the UN, permanent sovereignty protects the rights of peoples to *their own* means of subsistence, a right which is foundational to the food sovereignty policy framework. Though the food sovereignty movement would need to firmly establish the right of peoples and not just nations to permanent sovereignty, I suggest that the movement could build a

legal argument for the economic and environmental self-determination claimed through food sovereignty using the groundwork laid by the principle of permanent sovereignty. As I have pointed out, the international advocacy position occupied by food sovereignty movements may allow them to connect the rights of peoples with international tools for political action in a way that permanent sovereignty was not able to.

Because food sovereignty itself is less than twenty years old, the body of academic work on the topic is relatively small. This crossover between activism and academics is interesting, but perhaps merely a symptom of the newness of the movement; however, as food sovereignty has begun to garner more notice in a wider variety of disciplines, more academics have become interested in the implications of food sovereignty in their fields, leading to a noticeable increase in new academic contributors in the last five or six years. As food sovereignty scholarship is taken up by more and a wider variety of contributors, it will undoubtedly face stronger criticism; however, at this early stage, food sovereignty scholarship could likely benefit from some constructive criticism. An academic atmosphere with more diversity of opinion would challenge and refine the body of work on food sovereignty; I have personally noticed this dearth, and look forward to the work on food sovereignty in the coming years.

The food sovereignty movement itself, however, is less likely to be affected by this increased academic rigor, unless through the involvement of some academics in their roles as activists. This is not meant as a criticism, because I believe that the primary strength of the movement is that it is generated and guided by the world's peasants, who offer a huge range of experiences, beliefs, and opinions to the ongoing definition of what food sovereignty is and can be. I am of the opinion that this truly "grassroots" model should never be abandoned. The theorization of food sovereignty will play a defining role in the future of the movement, and it is my belief that in order to achieve its goals, the food sovereignty movement needs to

be more self-critical and self-aware, to identify weaknesses and gaps in their conceptualization and framework, and, as has been the basic premise of this project, to more fully theorize the concept of food sovereignty. They also need to consider utilizing existing frameworks, such as other theories of sovereignty and international legal structures to accomplish their goals.

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