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NATURE AND FOOD COMMODIFICATION. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: RETHINKING THE RELATION BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURE[1]

ABSTRACT
The article aims to explore the link between commodification of nature and commodification of food. The latter is in fact one of the most negative and controversial aspects of nature commodification. The examination of food commodification represents fertile ground for investigating the relationship between humans and nature. In this context, food sovereignty provides a useful paradigm that not only serves as an alternative to the current food regime, but also allows for the experiencing a different kind of relationship between humans and nature. Food sovereignty represents a unique social movement in which community, political, and cultural rights are intertwined with the issue of food. Through its multidisciplinary approach and its strongly ethical component, food sovereignty constitutes an opportunity in order to contrast the progressive commodification of nature and of the environment.

KEYWORDS
human, nature, food, commodification, food sovereignty, ethics

Introduction

Food is an essential element for the survival of human beings and the most basic human need. However, access to food is still one of the most serious problems in contemporary society. As reported by the FAO:

> The latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, published today, estimates that almost 690 million people went hungry in 2019 – up by 10 million from 2018, and by nearly 60 million in five years. High costs and low affordability also mean billions cannot eat healthily or nutritiously. (FAO 2020)

1 This article is the result of my 3 months research as a post doc researcher at the Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS SEE) of the University of Rijeka in 2020.

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The global outbreak of Coronavirus has made the contradictions of the current food regime even more evident. Social and political inequalities have emerged even more clearly as the no longer negligible symptom of a seriously ill society, which, although advanced and evolved, does not seem to be able to guarantee the freedom and fundamental rights of the individual. The access to food during the pandemic turned out to be one of the biggest problems still unresolved at a global scale.

As reported in the UNSG Policy brief:

> The COVID-19 pandemic is a health and human crisis threatening the food security and nutrition of millions of people around the world. Hundreds of millions of people were already suffering from hunger and malnutrition before the virus hit and, unless immediate action is taken, we could see a global food emergency. In the longer term, the combined effects of COVID-19 itself, as well as corresponding mitigation measures and the emerging global recession could, without large-scale coordinated action, disrupt the functioning of food systems. Such disruption can result in consequences for health and nutrition of a severity and scale unseen for more than half a century. (UNSG Policy brief 2020)

The commodification of food is at the root of the problems of malnutrition and hunger in the world.

As Magdoff points out "The contradiction between plentiful global food supplies and widespread malnutrition and hunger arises primarily from food being considered a commodity, just like any other" (Magdoff 2012: 15). As amply demonstrated by the theory of food regimes developed by McMichael and Friedmann, food as a mere commodity is the result of an economic and political process typical of capitalist society. The birth and expansion of neoliberalism have completely transformed the global food regime, resulting in the near absolute commodification of food and its transformation from a vital component of life into an instrument for speculative investment and profit at any cost, which do not benefit the producer or the consumer (Zerbe 2019).

The commodification of food is one of the most negative and controversial aspects of the commodification of nature, having a devastating impact not only on the life of human beings but also on the entire ecosystem.

In this regard, for many years now, food sovereignty has been fighting for democratic access to food as a strategy to reduce hunger, malnutrition and rural poverty. As it is well known, food sovereignty constitutes a completely different paradigm from food security. In fact, the concept of food sovereignty emphasises that the issue related to access to food is not at all a problem of insufficient trade, a simple problem of distribution or allocation, rather a matter of rights. This is a crucial point because the distinction between the two concepts rests on a diametrically opposite conception of food. Avoiding the issue of social control within the production and consumption system, the concept of food security remains tied to a vision of food as a mere commodity. Defining food as the fundamental right of every human being, food sovereignty, proposes a

de-commodified vision of food and represents an alternative paradigm both to food security and to the current food system.

The article aims to examine the concept of food commodification starting from the more general concept of commodification and neoliberalisation of nature. The first section will be devoted to analysing the traditional concept of commodification and neoliberalisation of nature in the academic literature. The second section will deal with examining the concept of food commodification through the lens of the theory of food regimes, showing how the commodification process is closely interconnected with the economic and political mechanisms of the current capitalist society.

Finally, the last section will examine the fundamental concepts of the food sovereignty movement showing how it is able to propose a de-commodified vision of food and a different perspective on the relationship between man and nature which relies on a Rights-based approach emphasising at the same time the most delicate aspect (i.e the concept of sovereignty) for its concrete application on a global approach.

1. Commodification of Nature. Definitions

> *A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether for instance they spring from the stomach or from folly makes no difference.*
>
> Karl Marx

The commodification and neoliberalisation of nature can be considered as the two sides of the same coin resulting from the capitalist system of production. The commodification and neoliberalisation of nature are, in fact, the two main processes through which the relationship between man and nature is experienced and conceived in the capitalist system of production.

To penetrate these two processes has a twofold function: (i) to highlight the negative effects of commodification of food and nature; (ii) to identify possible alternatives in order to promote a sustainable development and an equitable distribution of natural resources.

Due to a rich and growing literature on commodification it is difficult to find a single definition or conceptualisation. The same goes for the concept of nature's neoliberalisation, "a new and fast-growing geographical research about neoliberal approaches to governing human interactions with the physical environment" (Castree 2008a: 131), for the most part based on case study[2].

2 As the recent research by critical geographers shows so well, the last thirty years have seen an ever greater variety of biophysical phenomena in more and more parts of the world being subject to neoliberal thought and practice. To offer some examples: Mansfield (2004a; 2004b) has investigated new fisheries quota systems in the North

According to Appadurai's more generic notion of commodification: a commodity is anything exchanged or exchangeable. (Appadurai 1986). Other scholars, such as Ben Page for example, insist on the role of money in the commodification process. He states that commodification is "the process during which a thing that previously circulated outside monetary exchange is brought into the nexus of a market" (Ben Page 2005: 295). Similarly, Castree defines commodification as "a process where qualitatively different things are rendered equivalent and saleable through the medium of money" (Castree 2003: 278) and, Peter Jackson (Jackson 1999: 96) argues that commodification refers "literally, to the extension of the commodity form to goods and services that were not previously commodified". On the contrary, in her study of water supply in England and Welsh, Karen Bakker argues that "private ownership and markets do not necessarily entail commodification", rather resource commodification is a contested, partial and transient process, commodification is distinct from privatisation" (Bakker 2005: 543).

However, despite the existence of several definitions, it bears noting that all scholars agree that the commodification process is not something intrinsic to the things, but is rather an assigned quality brought about through an active process. As Kopytoff puts it, commodification:

> is best looked upon as a process of becoming rather than as an all-or-none state of being. Its expansion takes place in two ways: (a) with respect to each thing, by making it ex-changeable for more and more other things, and (b) with respect to the system as a whole, by making more and more different things more widely exchangeable. (Kopytoff 1986: 73)

This means that the use value of anything is systematically displaced by the exchange value. Prudham distinguishes two fundamental and interconnected aspects in the commodification process: *stretching* and *deepening*. The former is "the development of relations of exchange spanning across greater distance of space and time", the latter is "the systemic provision of more and more types of things in the commodity-form" (Prudham 2009: 125).

Pacific as a form of marketisation and enclosure; Bury (2005) has examined the sell-off of mineral resources in Peru to overseas investors; Bakker (2004; 2005) has scrutinised the post-1989 privatisation of British water supply and sewage treatment, and also water mercantilisacion in Spain (Bakker, 2002); Robertson (2000; 2004; 2006) has looked at the recent sale of wetland ecological services in the mid-western USA; Nik Heynen and Harold Perkins (2005) have explored why and with what effects public forests have been privatised in 'post-Fordist' Milwaukee; McCarthy (2004) has investigated the new 'right to pollute' among certain firms in the NAFTA area, and also community forest projects in North America (McCarthy 2005b; 2006); Prudham (2004) has traced the dire consequences of 'regulatory rollback' in the area of drinking water testing in Ontario; Kathleen McAfee (2003) has examined corporate attempts worldwide to commodify the genetic material of plants, animals, and insects; Haughton (2002) has examined the differential character of national neoliberal water governance frameworks globally; and Laila Smith (2004) has explored the effects of implementing cost recovery measures in the management of Cape Town's water supply. (in Castree 2008a: 136–137)

In his article 'Commodifying what nature?' Castree develops a synthesis of the concept of commodification which essentially refers to a Marxist approach. According to his analysis commodification is a process through which qualitatively different things are made equivalent and exchangeable through the medium of money. By taking on a general quality of exchange value, they become commensurable (Castree 2003: 278).

On a deeper level, as Castree aptly showed, commodification implies several interconnected aspects, which cannot be considered independently of one another. These aspects can be summarised as follows: a) privatisation, which is the assigning of a legal title over a commodity to a particular actor; b) alienability, described as the capacity of a given commodity to be physically and morally separated from sellers; c) individuation, separating a commodity from supporting context through legal and material boundaries; d) abstraction, which is the consideration of individual things as equivalent based on classifiable similarities; e) valuation, monetising the value of a commodity, and finally, f) displacement, spatiotemporal separation, obscuring origins and relations. The commodification process is produced as an interrelation of all these aspects and therefore implies a dynamic process and not a static quality of things. (Castree 2003).

Similarly, Appadurai writes that "the commodity is not one kind of thing rather than another, but one phase in the life of some things ... things can move in *and* out of the commodity state, that such movements can be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant" (Appadurai 1986: 14–17).

Considerable scholarship has explored the various ways in which highly specific, lively and unruly, material and contested 'natures', including water (Bakker 2003; Swyngedouw 2005); fish (McEvoy 1986; Mansfield 2003); trees (Prudham 2003; 2005); wetlands (Robertson 2006); fossil fuels and minerals (Bridge 2000; Bridge, Wood 2005); genes (McAfee 2003); organic foods (Guthman 2002; 2004) are extracted, cultivated, refined, processed, represented and made to circulate in the commodity-form, and with all manner of political and ecological implications (Prudham 2009: 129).

It therefore seems fair to state that, despite the different meanings through which the term of commodification is understood by various scholars, it is possible to isolate a fundamental aspect which – in my opinion – represents the fundamental constitutive feature of this concept: namely, the notion of abstraction.

Through abstraction it is in fact possible to dissolve the qualitative differences between things by making them equivalent or commensurable while, at the same time, dissolving their specificity. As Prudham put it, "*social relations of abstraction* are necessary in order for discrete things to be rendered commensurable and exchangeable, particularly where money is involved" (Prudham 2009: 129). Moreover, difference "is both dissolved but also renegotiated and reproduced in legible forms" (Prudham 2009: 129). It is through this mechanism that nature becomes governable, calculable and legible.

The commodification of nature involves a change in the way nature is conceptualised, and therefore, discursively represented. This process implies that the ecosystem is transformed by and for production. (A striking example is the

conversion of forests into plantations for fiber or other products). This entails that nature is treated as a capitalistic value. Natural entities become a vehicle for the realisation of profit and are subject to the pressure of the market, where the accumulation of wealth overrides other concerns. This results in putting a price on the ecosystem while forgetting to put a price on its exploitation. According to this perspective, nature is not conceived as an essential element for human life, but rather as a means to be possessed in order to be guaranteed the greatest possible profit. The commodification of nature implies a violent act of appropriation by human beings as well as an intrinsic denial of its systemic structure that systematically separates most of us from a real contact with the biophysical world on which we are, nonetheless, utterly dependent. This in turn obscures the social and environmental relations of production, allowing for nature's homologation. As Kopytoff points out, the production of commodities is also a cognitive and cultural process ... differences in whether and when a thing is a commodity *reveal a moral economy* that stands behind the objective economy of transactions (Kopytoff 1986: 64).

Thus, from a normative and ethical standpoint, one of the most negative implications is that the consumer is often not aware of what kind of social, environmental and power relations are being reproduced and supported trough the purchase of any commodity. As David Harvey says, "the grapes that sit on supermarket shelves are mute; we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they are from" (Harvey 1990: 423). This phenomenon has been defined by Marx as the "fetishism" of the commodity. Similarly, another essential aspect that is obscured in the commodification process is the amount of human labor required to produce a certain commodity. The exchange value, thanks to which the circulation of commodities is made possible, never reflects the human labor necessary to produce a particular commodity.

Particular attention must be paid to this aspect, since the reverse process, defined as de-commodification, can only be achieved by reversing the terms of this relationship. In fact, according to Sayer, consumption is a form of de-commodification in so far as it reverses the ontology of things from exchange value back to use value.

With all this in mind, and going beyond the purely formal aspects of the commodification process itself, it is necessary to contextualise the commodification of nature in a broader spectrum of relations that involves both the political and the economic aspects.

As Appadurai writes: "economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged. Focusing on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics,* construed broadly" (Appadurai 1986: 3).

Politics, private ownership and power relations play indeed a fundamental role in the process of commodification of nature; in fact, "politics is the link between regimes of value and specific flows of commodities" (Appadurai 1986: 57).

1.2 Neoliberalisation of Nature

As for commodification of nature, the neoliberal approach or market environmentalism is the specific policy, governance, that involves natural regulation through forms of commodification (e.g. Ecotourism, territorialisation). According to this perspective natural resources are more efficiently allocated if treated as economic goods, thus, market is the principal mechanism of allocation. In particular, as we will see later, the market, corporations, play a fundamental role in the process of commodification of food.

Nature is protected through investment and consumption (Hartwick, Peet 2003), and conservation cannot be achieved without addressing the difficult and systemic inequities and power relationships that are inextricably linked to so many of our global environmental problems today (McAfee 1999).

> Finance capital in the neoliberal era has penetrated Braudel's 'structures of everyday life' and in so doing has sought to remake human and extra-human nature in its own image. Beginning in the 1970s, finance capital has decisively reshaped the rules of reproduction for the totality of nature–society relations – extending, horrifically, to the molecular relations of life itself. (Moore 2011: 14)

Prudham and McCarthy claim that "neoliberalism is also an *environmental* project, and that is *necessarily* so" (McCarthy, Prudham 2004: 277, their emphasis). According to their study this nexus is better understood through a historico-geographically specific perspective. "Only specific case studies can unpack the complex interplay between neoliberal projects, environmental politics, and environmental change" (McCarthy, Prudham 2004: 279).

The issue of nature's neoliberalisation has been mostly addressed by scholars on the basis of specific empirical case studies. This method makes it more difficult to identify a single definition of this concept.

Notwithstanding, as Castree has shown in his study, it is possible to identify commonalities in the various studies that can be summarised as follows: privatisation; marketisation; deregulation; market proxies in the residual public sector and, finally, the construction of flanking mechanism in civil society (Castree 2008a: 142).

As Bakker has shown, "neoliberalisation unfolds as a range of strategies, which vary depending on the target and type of socio-nature" (Bakker 2010: 725).

This therefore means that neoliberalisation, as a multiple dimensions process, varies according to the type of nature that is considered (i.e. private property rights are more difficult to establish for some types of resources – such as flow resources – than others). Each resource, as Bakker points out, implies a differentiated neoliberalisation strategy. "Specific neoliberalisation processes will have very different trajectories and effects when articulated with different types of socio-natures" (Bakker 2010: 726).

A crucial element of the neoliberalisation of nature, from a strictly environmental point of view, is the fact that it is constituted by an apparent paradox. In fact, as Castree points out:

> These logics show that 'neoliberalism' is, in environmental terms, an apparent paradox: in giving full reign to capital accumulation it seeks to both protect and degrade the biophysical world, while manufacturing new natures in cases where that world is physically fungible. In short, nature's neoliberalisation is about conservation and its two antitheses of destroying existing and creating new biophysical resources. It is not reducible to one or other rationale alone. (Castree 2008a: 150).

Similarly, Bakker argues that:

> The neoliberalization of socio-nature must thus be understood as, simultaneously, a disciplinary mode of regulation, and an emergent regime of accumulation that redefines and co-constitutes socio-natures. A central irony of these processes is that they purport to present a solution to environmental crises which capitalism has played a role in creating. (Bakker 2010: 726–727).

Framed this way, neoliberalism would then be the way in which capitalism faces and tries to resolve its internal contradictions as well as the way the way in which our relationship with nature is experienced. In the words of Heynen and Robbins, neoliberalism capitalism "drives the politics, economics and culture of the world system, providing the context and direction for how humans affect and interact with non-human nature and with one another" (Heynen, Robbins 2005: 5).

Commodification and neoliberalisation are not the same thing, but two interconnected aspects, two internal processes of the same capitalistic system.

The commodification of nature constitutes a pivotal moment of capitalist society, an emblem of what Marx has defined as a metabolic rift, an irreparable rift between nature and society, "in the interdependent process of the social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself" (Marx 1981: 449).

> The metabolic rift underlies both the material and epistemic relations of capitalism. In separating agriculture from its natural foundations, the metabolic rift informs the episteme through which we analyse the value relations of commodity production. The abstraction of agriculture, and therefore the foundations of social production, means that value relations organise agriculture, and it comes to be understood in these terms. (McMichael 2009: 162)

Covering 4.4 billion hectares, over 50 percent of the earth's surface, agriculture remains today the dominant nexus between human society and nature (Kareiva et al. 2007).

For this reason, it can be said that the commodification of food constitutes one of the most evident and negative aspects of the commodification of nature, although, unfortunately, not the only one.

2. Food Commodification through the Lens of Food Regimes Theory

The commodification of food is perhaps one of the most problematic and controversial aspects of the commodification of nature and a determining factor of the current global food crisis.

According to the FAO report, in 2018 more than 820 million people suffered from hunger. Nine million more than in 2017. The Global Report on Food Crises 2020 appears even more dramatic due to the covid emergency; here we read in fact:

> The number of people battling acute hunger and suffering from malnutrition is on the rise yet again. In many places, we still lack the ability to collect reliable and timely data to truly know the magnitude and severity of food crises gripping vulnerable populations. And the upheaval that has been set in motion by the COVID-19 pandemic may push even more families and communities into deeper distress. (Global Report on Food Crises 2020)

An increase that has proven steady over the past three years. These data highlights the fragility of the global food system and the need for its urgent reform. According to some Scholars the food system is broken (Vivero-Pol 2017). To others, instead, "the food system is not broken, rather, it is working precisely as a capitalist food system is supposed to work". (Holt-Gimenéz 2017: 56).

The current crises in the globalising food system "are clearly connected, then, to the persistence of neoliberalism as a motivating ideology legitimating the unfettered commodification of food production and distribution and undermining national and local control over food policies" (Andrée, Ayres, Bosia, Massicotte 2014: 34).

Grasping the reasons and dynamics behind the commodification of food is of primary importance for at least two reasons. Primarily, to propose an alternative food regime that can tackle world hunger and allow us to redefine and rethink our relationship with nature in a way that is not that of domination or possession, based primarily on the superiority of the human being over the natural world.

Secondly, to shed light on how food is produced, consumed, allocated and wasted is also a way of understanding our relationship with the natural world, the position of man in relation to nature and therefore, to rethink it. Perhaps this might mean getting rid of the traditional anthropocentric vision and "interrogate the status of non-humans as political subjects" (Bakker 2010: 718).

But let's proceed step by step.

At the outset, it can be said that the commodification of food occurs according to the same process as the commodification of the natural world. It is the same dialectic according to which the use value is systematically displaced by the exchange value. As we have seen in the previous pages, the commodification process is not a static process, rather a process of becoming characterised by several interconnected phases. These aspects were thus identified by Castree in his article 'Commodifyng what nature?' in the following way: privatisation;

alienability; individuation; abstraction; valuation and displacement. All these aspects show how the notion of commodification implies a dynamic process, as acutely shown by Kopytoff, which take place in two ways: '(a) with respect to each thing, by making it exchangeable for more and more other things, and (b) with respect to the system as a whole, by making more and more different things more widely exchangeable' (Kopytoff 1986: 73).

In the recent Literature the issue of food commodification has been addressed through the lenses of the theory the theory of food regimes (FRT)[3] proposed by Mc Michael and Friedmann. This theory represents a fundamental contribution but, as we will see, it is not the only way to deal with the phenomenon of food commodification. According to this theory, the concept of food as a mere commodity is the result of an economic and political process.

In fact, food regime analysis emerged to explain the strategic role of agriculture and food in the construction of the world capitalist economy (McMichael 2009: 139).

According to McMichael:

> Food regime concept is a key to unlock not only structured moments and transitions in the history of capitalist food relations, but also the history of capitalism itself. That is the food regime is an important optic on the multiple determinations embodied in the food commodity, as a genus fundamental to capitalist history. As such, the food regime concept allows us to refocus from the commodity as object to the commodity as relation, with definite geo-political, social, ecological, and nutritional relations at significant historical moments. (McMichael 2009: 163)

For the purposes of this article, I find it particularly useful to address the commodification of food through the FRT for two reasons. The first is that, as with the commodification of nature, most of the literature on food commodification is based on case studies, thus it is not an easy task to identify a single definition. The second reason is that the theory of food regimes allows us to highlight the crucial link between economics and politics in the commodification process.

More recently the most programmatic and extensive (re-)statements of food regime analysis have come from McMichael in his article *A food regime genealogy*.

According to his analysis, it is possible to identify three food regimes in the history of capitalism. A first food regime from 1870 to 1914, a second regime from 1945-1973, and a third corporate food regime from the 1980s proposed by McMichael within the period of neoliberal globalisation and described as the 'corporate-environmental' regime by Friedmann (2005).

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3 The concept of food regime was first articulated by Harriett Friedmann and Philip McMichael in 1989 in their essay *Agriculture and the State System. The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to the present*.
The existence of a third, neoliberal food regime is contested among some food regime theorists – see McMichael (2009), Friedmann (2009) and Burch and Lawrence (2009) for an overview of this debate

What – according to McMichael – constitutes the distinctive feature of the various food regimes is:

> the instrumental role of food in securing global hegemony – in the first, Britain's 'workshop of the world' project linked the fortunes of an emergent industrial capitalism to expanding cheap food supply chains across the world; in the second, the United States used food politically to create alliances and markets for its agribusiness. (McMichael 2013: 276)

The 'corporate food regime' is another moment. It defines a set of rules institutionalising corporate power in the world food system (McMichael 2009: 153). As the current food regime, it expresses a new moment in the era of capitalism and its distinguishing mark lies in the the politics of neo-liberalism.

This process began with the "European enlightenment and the transition to capitalism, accelerated under the British imperialism and the colonial project, and reached its zenith in the contemporary era with the financialisation of food itself" (Capra, Mattei 2015; Vivero-Pol 2017, as cited in Zerbe 2019: 157). The third corporate food regime, as Holt-Giménez points out:

> emerged from the global economic shocks of the 1970s and 1980s ushering in the current period of neo-liberal capitalist expansion.During the 1980s Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) broke down tariffs, dismantled national marketing boards, eliminated price guarantees and destroyed national agricultural research and extension systems in the Global South. These policies were embedded in international treaties through bilateral and international Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, and its Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), institutionalized the process of agricultural liberalization on a global scale by restricting the rights of sovereign states to regulate food and agriculture. (Holt- Giménez 2011: 111)

Framed in this context, the commodification of food as a theoretical and material process was accelerated by two recent developments: the expansion of intellectual property rights and the dramatic acceleration in the financialisation of food and agricultural markets (Zerbe 2019: 157).

As De Schutter observed:

> What we are seeing now is that these financial markets have developed massively with the arrival of these new financial investors, who are purely interested in the short-term monetary gain and are not really interested in the physical thing – they never actually buy the ton of wheat or maize; they only buy a promise to buy or to sell. The result of this financialisation of the commodities market is that the prices of the products respond increasingly to a purely speculative logic. This explains why in very short periods of time we see prices spiking or bubbles exploding, because prices are less and less determined by the real match between supply and demand. (De Schutter cited in Livingston 2012)

According to Bursch and Lawrence "the dominance of finance capital, which is symptomatic of the latest phase of capitalist development, has led to the emergence of a financialised food regime" (Bursch, Lawrence 2009: 275).

In the corporate food regime food has both an exchange value (as commodity) and a use value (to feed people). The prioritisation of exchange value to foster accumulation over the use value to feed people becomes the central goal of the commodification of food (Zerbe 2019: 156).

As it can be seen, the question of commodification is substantially traced back to the more general but at the same time fundamental phenomenon of abstraction in this case too. The use value, food as an essential element for human beings, is constantly overshadowed by the exchange value.

This brings out a fundamental consequence, acutely pointed out by Harvey:

> When you go to the supermarket you can see the exchange values [prices] but you can't see or measure the human labor embodied in the commodities directly. It is that embodiment of human labor that has a phantom-like presence on the supermarket shelves. Think about that the next time you are in a supermarket surrounded with these phantoms! (Harvey 2018: 59)

What makes food a commodity is the reduction of its multiple values and dimensions to that of market price, being profit maximisation the only driving ethos that justifies the market-driven allocation of such an essential element of human survival (Vivero-Pol 2017).

This means that food, instead of being considered as an essential element for the life of human beings, is a commodity that can only be purchased by those who have enough money.

In the globalised food regime, food as a commodity is connected to injustice, labour, lack, hunger, discrimination and violence.

The abstraction of agriculture through its incorporation and reproduction within global capital circuits imparts a 'food from nowhere' (Bové, Dufour 2000) character to the corporate food regime (McMichael 2013: 287). As I pointed out above, abstraction constitutes the fundamental trait of commodification. In this case, the abstraction of agriculture implies a constant disavowal of natural biodiversity. This means that any food can be grown anywhere in the world through the use of intensive agriculture, greenhouses, or genetically modified products, regardless of the effects such methods have on ecosystems and climate change.

This abstraction cannot be disentangled from the power of corporations[4] which have long played a central role in the international food system. With an ever greater amount of food crossing international borders, it is not surprising that global food corporations have become central actors in the system (Clapp 2011). The power of corporations led to what McMichael defined a 'world agriculture', namely not the entirety of agriculture across the earth

4 Grain giants ADM, Cargill, and Bunge took control of 80 percent of the world's grain (Vorley 2003). Chemical corporations Monsanto and DuPont together appropriated 65 percent of the global maize seed market (Action Aid International Ghana 2006): four companies – Tyson, Cargill, Swift, and National Beef Packing Company control 83.5 percent of the US beef supply (Hendrickson, Heffernan 2007)

but a transnational space of corporate agricultural and food relations integrated by commodity circuits. Corporate circuits, in fact, frame the global transformation of social, bio-political and ecological relations (McMichael 2013).

Value relations organise not only the agricultural sector, rather almost everything which turns into commodity form. As Moore argues " theory value identifies a 'deep structure' of historical capitalism that gives priority to labor productivity, and mobilises extra-human nature without regard for the socio-ecological conditions of its (uncapitalised) reproduction, we have more than a simple restatement of the problem" (Moore 2011: 19–20**).**

Food as a commodity is totally emancipated from any relation with space and time. But this emancipation from space and time generates a paradox of no small importance. On the one hand, and without any limitation, food is constantly available regardless of what season it is. On the other, it is totally isolated from the social and environmental context. In this way the food is not only removed from the local and temporal context in which it was produced but, at the same time, any relationship between the food and the consumer and between the consumer and the producer is lost, canceled. This means that "consumers are unable to look back on the food's production history, and consequently they are equally unable to see how their own food consumption influences nature and society. The relations are lost" (Coff 2006: 89). We eat information. Consumers' knowledge about food is in most cases reduced to what can be read on food declarations (Coff 2006: 92).

But the corporate food regime is a political construct rather than an inevitable condition.

As McMichael once again aptly showed:

> The corporate food regime is a political construct, and its beneficiaries constitute only about a quarter of the world's population, despite the widening effects of social exclusion, through the appropriation of resources (material, intellectual, and spiritual), and the privatization of public goods. At the same time, these effects generate the conditions for overcoming the social and ecological crisis of the corporate food regime, in resistance movements dedicated to the social re-embedding of markets. (McMichael 2013: 290)

As it can be seen, McMichael's approach tends to primarily enhance the political aspect in the formation and reproduction of food regimes. Thus, this approach identifies stable periods of capital accumulation associated with particular configurations of geopolitical power, conditioned by forms of agricultural production and consumption relations within and across national spaces (McMichael 2013).

2.2 New Perspective on Food Regimes Theory

In the extant debate, Mark Tilzey has recently proposed a different reading of the food regimes theory in his article "Food Regimes, Capital, State, and Class: Friedmann and McMichael Revisited" (2019). According to the author,

although the theory developed by McMichael and Friedmann has been pivotal to our thinking about the relation between capitalism, the state, and agriculture, it is possible to encounter some problems that would undermine the solidity of their theory.

Specifically, Tilzey states that there are some aspects that are not entirely explicit in the theory of food regimes but which are of particular importance for understanding the formation and reproduction of food regimes.

First, they provide no explicit definition of capitalism. Second, and conjoined to the above:

> their conceptualisation of the relation between capitalism and the modern state is seriously under-theorised. This concerns their neglect of the twin aspects of this relation that enable us to make sense of both entities in their dialectical co-constitution: the 'separation in unity' of the institutional spheres of the 'economy' and 'polity', and the complementary accumulation and legitimation functions of the state in relation to capital. (Tilzey 2019: 234)

Third, "Friedmann and McMichael either neglect, or deploy, a deficient class analysis, especially concerning inter-class 'struggle'" (Tilzey 2019: 234).

As Tilzey states, in the FRT there is an unresolved tension between structure (which defines positions to the social practices of those occupying these positions) and agency (conceived primarily in terms of the decisions and actions of individual land managers) that implies an abstract conception of capitalism. This means that in the FRT there is a dichotomy between terms rather than a dialectical relationship between the state-capital relations from which derives an understanding of the modern state as nothing but the contingent outcome outcome of a sectoral articulation between agriculture and industry. He suggest by contrast, "that the modern state is better conceptualised itself as a social relation" (Tilzey 2019: 234).

> This unresolved tension and their omission to present a theoretical basis for conceptualising the dialectic between 'structure' and 'agency', underlies, to a considerable degree, the great schism that emerged in the 1990s, within rural geography and sociology, between the 'structuralism' of 'abstract globalism' and the 'post-structural' frame of 'abstract localism'. Further, it was this 'abstract globalism' which mandated, and continues to mandate, its mirror image 'abstract localism'. Below, and through the development of 'Political Marxian' and related approaches, we will attempt to vitiate this dualism of the two 'abstractions' by means of revised conceptions of capitalism, class, agency and state. (Tilzey 2019: 232)

The core hypothesis supported by Tilzey is that class relations play a fundamental role in order to understand the FRT.

Tilzey's position aims to pinpoint a new causal basis for food regimes through the use of Political Marxism', in alliance with neo-Gramscian International Political Economy. This approach is aimed at supporting the idea that the modern state and capitalism must be conceived in terms of class relations,

making a different periodisation possible. This new and revised theorisation is conceivable through an eminently Marxian understanding of capitalism "which takes as its starting point Marx's desire, non-reductively, to understand capitalism in terms of the totality of social relations" (Tilzey 2019: 233).

This is the fundamental novelty brought by Tilzey to McMichael and Friedmann's theory. Not only the hypothesis of the existence of a fifth food regimes characteristic of contemporary society, but above all the idea that the formation and reproduction of food regimes steams from social-property relations in the hegemonic state (in the world system) and the international articulation of these relations with receptive and complementary class interests in other states.

A different periodisation of food regimes derives from this interpretation: 1) The First *National* Capitalist Food Regime 1750-1846; 2) The First *International*, or 'Liberal', Food Regime 1846-1870; 3) The Second International, or 'Imperial', Food Regime 1870-1930; 4) The Third International, or 'Political Productivist', Food Regime 1930–1980; 5) The Fourth International, or 'Neoliberal', Food Regime 1980-2010; 6) The Fifth International, or 'Post-Neoliberal', Food Regime.

The conceptual core of Tilzey's proposal is based on a different reading of the radical political economy that informed Friedmann and McMichael's theory, privileging the role of class relations in the relationship between state and capitalism and between states but also, favouring the economic moment over the political one. There is a need, writes Tilzey: "to specify modern capitalism in terms of class relations, composed of owners of the means of production counter-posed to an expropriated class 'free' to sell its labour power, in which, for the first time, power over production is exerted 'economically', not 'politically" (Tilzey 2019: 237).

The post-neoliberal food regime arises from the dialectical understanding of capital, state, and class, and the dynamics of combined and uneven development; and because of this existence of a 'post-neoliberal' food regime has not been seriously or systematically broached hitherto (Tilzey 2019). The key feature of the post-neoliberal food regime are identified by Tilzey as follows: (a) the appearance of 'land-grabbing' and neo-extractivism in the peripheries; (b) the emergence of China, particularly, as a sub-imperium; and (c) the rise of the Latin American pink tide states as a response to neoliberalism, and within the favourable international conjuncture defined by China's ascendance.

According to Tilzey's interpretation the post-neoliberal food regime is characterised by a fragmentation of neoliberal hegemony that involves a return to to heightened inter-state competition and antagonism reminiscent of the Imperial Food Regime.

As Claimed by Tilzey, precisely from this fragmentation would arise an epochal crisis of the neoliberalism, if not yet of capitalism in general: "Imperial monopoly finance capital has escalated its accumulation of land and natural resources in the peripheries. Money alone, however, is becoming no longer adequate to ensure continuing, and cheap, supply of food and energy to these consumption heartlands of neoliberalism" (Tilzey 2019: 244). To understand

this relation Tilzey proposes a different key relationship between capital and state in which the state-capital nexus deploys to secure economic growth and political stability, framing the form and function of food regimes.

The instability of the Post neo-liberal regime hinges, according to Tilzey's interpretation, on the deep ecological and political contradictions across the inter-related dynamics of imperium, sub-imperium, and periphery. This interpretation stems from Tilzey's particular approach to the FRT, which has its roots in a re-reading of a non-reductive Marxian theory in the form of 'Political Marxism' and a neo-Gramscian thinking used to comprehend the concept of capitalism, state and class dynamics. This interpretation is neglected, according to the author, in the traditional interpretation of the food regimes developed by McMichael and Friedmann.

According to Tilzey, it is precisely this reinterpretation that would allow to shed light on the current food regime which "may mark the endgame of capitalism in general, as it encounters an epochal crisis defined by spiralling political and ecological turmoil" (Tilzey 2019: 248).

Thus, according to Tilzey, this perspective allows:

> to present a revised and more comprehensive periodisation of capitalist food regimes, extending from the birth of the first capital-state nexus in England in the late eighteenth century through to the current re-emergence of overt state management of, and inter-state competition around, flows of food and resources in what we have chosen to call the 'Post-Neoliberal' regime. (Tilzey 2019: 249)

The fundamental conceptual core of Tilzey's proposal is that the FRT elaborated by McMichael and Friedmann fails to identify the internal relations between state and capital, and therefore the understanding of both as class relations. This perspective therefore eliminates the dichotomy between structure and agency cited above. The concept of class constitutes in fact the bridging concept that encapsulates both structure and agency, or class position and positionality (Potter and Tilzey 2005).

Hence the neo-gramscian concept of 'structured agency' adopted by Tilzey, which makes it possible to identify "the class fractional interests that comprise capitalist social relations and directs attention to strategies and understandings deployed by political agents in the defence or promotion of their interests" (Tilzey 2019: 234).

As we have seen, the analysis of food regimes allows to frame the commodification of food within an economic and political context.

Nevertheless, I believe that this analysis does not take into consideration a fundamental aspect of the question which, as we shall see, will instead be central to the movement of food sovereignty. This aspect is what allows the assumption of a perspective that is no longer only political or economical, but ethical, and which considers food commodification as dependant on not recognising food as a natural element essential to the life of human beings, and as a cultural element and fundamental right to each of these beings. In this regard,

food sovereignty can offer a fundamental contribution since it does not only constitute a challenge and an alternative to the current food regime, but also represents a different way of understanding the relationship between humans and nature as well as the relationship between human themselves.

3. Food Sovereignty: Rethinking the Relation between Humans and Nature

The concept of food sovereignty was formulated for the first time during the International Conference of Via Campesina in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in 1996, in opposition to the concept of food security as a universal ideal to prevent world hunger. "Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". (FAO 1996 cited in FAO 2003).

In contrast to this definition La Via Campesina claims:

> We, the Via Campesina, a growing movement of farm workers, peasant, farm and indigenous peoples' organizations from all the regions of the world, know that food security cannot be achieved without taking full account of those who produce food. Any discussion that ignores our contribution will fail to eradicate poverty and hunger. Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where Food Sovereignty is guaranteed. (Via Campesina 1996b)

Compared to the notion of food security, the concept of food sovereignty affirms that social control within the food system constitutes a fundamental aspect in order to guarantee food security. This certainly represents one of the most critical aspects of the concept of food security. In fact, as Patel rightly points out: "as far as the terms of food security go, it is entirely possible for people to be food secure in prison or under a dictatorship" (Patel 2009: 665).

According to Via Campesina:

> Long-term food security depends on those who produce food and care for the natural environment. As the stewards of food producing resources we hold the following principles as the necessary foundation for achieving food security [....] Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security. (Via Campesina 1996)

Thus, the concept of food sovereignty emphasises that the question of food is not at all a problem of insufficient trade, a simple problem of distribution or allocation, rather a matter of rights. This is a crucial question because the distinction between the two concepts rests on a diametrically opposite conceptions of food. Avoiding the issue of social control within the production and

consumption system, the concept of food security remains tied to a vision of food as a mere commodity. Recognising food as the fundamental right of every human being, food sovereignty, proposes a de-commodified vision of food and represents an alternative paradigm both to food security and to the current food system. Food sovereignty affirms the human right to food as extended by Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, but not simply through access to food but through the right of democratic control over food and food- producing resources (Holt-Giménez 2011: 128).

Although there is no single definition of food sovereignty, Windfuhr and Jonsén (2005) identified seven principles that underlie the subsequent elaborations of the concept of food sovereignty (Tab. 1)

Table 1: Summary of Via Campesina's 'Seven Principles to Achieve Food Sovereignty'

1.	**Food: A Basic Human Right** – Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right.
2.	**Agrarian Reform** – A genuine agrarian reform is necessary which gives landless and farming people – especially women – ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it.
3.	**Protecting Natural Resources** – Food Sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, and seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources and to conserve biodiversity free of restrictive intellectual property rights. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agro-chemicals.
4.	**Reorganizing Food Trade** – Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices.
5.	**Ending the Globalization of Hunger** – Food Sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organizations such as the WTO, World Bank and the IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for TNCs is therefore needed.
6.	**Social Peace** – Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalization in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanization, repression and increasing incidence of racism of smallholder farmers cannot be tolerated.

7.	**Democratic control** – Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. The United Nations and related organizations will have to undergo a process of democratization to enable this to become a reality. Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision making on food and rural issues.

Nowadays the Nyéléni Declaration for Food Sovereignty of 2007 (see Tab. 2) is the main platform for citizens groups supporting Food Sovereignty around the world, and an international reference point for discussions on Food Sovereignty (Tab. 2)

Table 2: SIX PILLARS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
(Nyéléni Declaration) (Nyéléni Forum, Mali 2007)

1.	**Focuses on Food for People**: Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.
2.	**Values Food Providers**: Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
3.	**Localises Food Systems**: Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
4.	**Puts Control Locally**: Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognises that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.

5.	**Builds Knowledge and Skills**: Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6.	**Works with Nature**: Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agro-ecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

Food sovereignty is a complex and multifaceted reality that combines a political and ethical perspective. "Food sovereignty is a historical wedge in a crisis conjuncture to recognise and promote alternative socio-ecological relations to feed citizens rather than long-distance consumers" (McMichael 2014: 938). It is not just a resistance movement "It is a process of accumulation of forces and realities coming together from the citizens of the entire planet. Food sovereignty is not just resistances, as there are thousands of resistances, but also proposals that come from social movements, and not just peasant movements" (Wittman 2009: 678–680).

> The strength of this global movement is precisely that it differs from place to place [...] The world is a complex place, and it would be a mistake to look for a single answer to complex and different phenomena. We have to provide answers at different levels – not just the international level, but local and national levels too. History shows that each phase of political development has a corresponding institutional form: France's response to the Industrial Revolution was the nation-state; the WTO is the expression of this phase of the liberalization of world trade. (Bové, Dufour 2001: 145)

The food sovereignty approach can be distinguished as an "epistemic shift" in which value relations, approaches to rights, and a shift from an economic to an ecological calculus concurrently challenge the rules and relations of a corporate or neoliberal food regime (Wittman 2011: 90).

By focusing on ecologically sustainable food production and reconnecting producers and consumers via the localisation of "food from somewhere", food sovereignty as part of an "agrarian regeneration movement" is increasingly presented as having theoretical potential to rework (Wittman 2009c), repair (Schneider, McMichael 2010), or heal (Clausen 2007) the metabolic rift (Wittman 2011: 93).

If 'food from nowhere' is the peculiar trait of the current global food regime, 'food from somewhere' (McMichael 2009b; Wittman 2009c) can be identified as the peculiar trait of the food sovereignty approach.

Food sovereignty then represents not only an alternative to the current food regime but also outlines a different approach to nature, a different relationship between humans and nature as well as a different ethical perspective.

The implementation of sustainable agricultural practices aimed at preserving the land, seeds, water and all other natural resources, provides for a vision of nature as a common heritage of humanity. Nature is not considered as a means from which to obtain the greatest possible profit, but is rather a fundamental element of human life and is essential for its survival.

This constitutes a central element of agro-ecology:

> the holistic study of agroe-cosystems, including all environmental and human elements. It focuses on the form, dynamics and functions of their inter-relationships and the processes in which they are involved . . . Implicit in agroe-cological research is the idea that by understanding these ecological relationships and processes, agro-ecosystems can be manipulated to improve production and produce more sustainably, with fewer negative environmental or social impacts and few external inputs. (Altieri 2002: 8)

Through this practice becomes possible to improve production through more sustainable practices, respecting the biodiversity of the environment and, more importantly, engaging in a relationship with nature that is based on knowledge and not on possession and which therefore takes into consideration the need for regeneration of the land, aimed at conservation for future generations.Furthermore: "Agro-ecology also brings in other principles: circular, social and solidarity economies building alternatives to linear and continuous economic growth, cooperation and care (for people and ecosystems), and the critical role of local, Indigenous, and co-produced knowledge" (Duncan 2020: 5)

Cooperation between man and nature is certainly the most characteristic and fundamental aspect of the food sovereignty approach. Food sovereignty conceives cooperation in two ways: rediscovering the relationship of immanence that binds man to nature, but also as an enhancement of human interdependence in order to guarantee sustainable development and build community. In this sense, cooperation does not only happen during the practice of agro-ecology as a sharing of techniques and knowledge, but is also intertwined with community gatherings, sharing food, and establishing solidarity through new friendships.

Nature and humans represent the same side of the same coin. This is why the movement of food sovereignty also has a strong ethical component. It is not only a matter of rediscovering the role of man within nature and the environment, but also a rediscovering of the value of the social relationships that establish the community we live in. All this is made possible thanks to a different consideration of food which ceases to be understood as a commodity, becoming instead an essential right of every human being. Food as what is donated by nature becomes the medium through which it becomes possible to establish a new relationship with the natural world subtracted from the mortgage of man's absolute dominion over nature. In fact, food relations "become

the medium, and product, of an alternative, political ontology. "Sovereignty" is the means by which this political ontology is to be secured" (Andrée, Ayres, Bosia, Massicotte 2014: 350)

This same attitude translates into social practices oriented towards well-being and sharing rather than competition. As Patel observes, "Food sovereignty offers a sophisticated attempt at developing a grounded, localised and yet international humanism around the food system" (Patel 2005: 81). It promotes a different concept of humanity which is based on the respect for human diversity, mutual well-being, traditions and cultural values.

Thus, what is at stake in the concept of food sovereignty is not only food as a natural resource, as an integral part of nature, rather how people choose to live, what and how they choose to produce and consume, and how to construct a more just, equitable, and democratic world. Against the reduction of the human being to the 'homo economicus', typical of the neoliberal model, food sovereignty fights for an alternative conception of human being. As Schanbacher points out, "it represents a drastically different understanding of human relationship [...] a clear alternative to purely economic understanding of human relations – both human-to-human relationships and our relationship to the natural environment" (Schanbacher 2010: 108).

Food sovereignty represents a unique social movement in which community, political, and cultural rights are intertwined with the issue of food.

Through its multidisciplinary approach and its strongly ethical component, food sovereignty constitutes an opportunity in order to contrast the progressive commodification of nature and of the environment.

In the current international political scenario, the issue of food sovereignty appears as a necessity that can no longer be sidestepped. Indeed, it is clear that current policies to reduce malnutrition and hunger are not having any effect.

Insisting that food sovereignty becomes the common global policy means trying to deconstruct a food regime that is no longer able to satisfy the needs of the world population, and at the same time, rethinking our relationship with nature.

Conclusion

As I tried to show above, the idea of food sovereignty represents a unique movement in which politics, economics and ethics are closely intertwined. The fundamental assumption that food, far from being a mere commodity, is an inalienable right of every human being, allows us to undermine the vision of 'food from nowhere' and replace it with that of food 'from somewhere'. The use value of food (to feed people) becomes the main mechanism for going beyond the vision of food as a pure commodity.

Proposing food as an essential right radically changes not only the way of understanding food but also the relationship between man and nature.

Food is a natural and cultural element, which cannot be dissociated from either the human work necessary for its production or from biodiversity,

necessary to maintain the balance of the ecosystem and to reduce the effects of climate change. The concept of food sovereignty was not developed by politicians or economists, but by those on whom world's food supply still depends: small scale food producers themselves. For these reasons it is not based on the theory of maximum profit typical of capitalist society, but on a relationship of harmony between man and nature.

The concept of cooperation as a fundamental element of food sovereignty does not only concern the relationship between producer and consumer, but also the relationship with the natural world. Through the practice of agro-ecology it is possible to preserve the health of the ecosystem by enhancing the biodiversity of the food produced and consumed.

For these reasons:

> Food Sovereignty is thus a more holistic system than Food Security. It recognizes that control over the food system needs to remain in the hands of farmers, for whom farming is both a way of life and a means of producing food. It ensures that food is produced in a culturally acceptable manner and in harmony with the ecosystem in which it is produced. This is how traditional food production systems have regenerated their soils, water, biodiversity and climactic conditions, for generations. (Fao 2014)

Thus, "Food sovereignty presents us all with an ethical choice, a choice that invariably challenges both how we see the world and what we think constitutes a just world" (Schanbacher 2010: 119).

The de-commodified perspective of food emphasised by food sovereignty depends in a non-secondary way on an ethical approach to food, which constitutes the fundamental trait of food sovereignty.

Through its right-based approach, food sovereignty could promote a global change in the current food regime as it: respects the rights of people; understands food to be more than a commodity, but a commons and a human right; promotes agro-ecological food systems; maintains solidarity with food producers and consumers around the world.

In my opinion, it is precisely the ethical approach that clearly distinguishes the concept of food sovereignty from that of food security, in which where and how food is produced is not a fundamental question.

As for me, I think that food sovereignty can really help to promote a new global food regime. In particular, I believe that the ethical approach constitutes its real core that could provide a new starting point for a new education on nature and human relations. Food sovereignty can constitute a new paradigm for a new idea of a society removed from the dynamics of capitalist economic power. If nature and food are understood as common goods to be preserved, as essential rights of every human being, it becomes possible to inaugurate a society, a politics and an economy based on solidarity and mutual well-being rather than on the maximisation of profit.

However, for this to become possible, a more concrete and precise definition of its political component is necessary.

If it is true that food sovereignty can represent a valid alternative to current food policies, I believe it is necessary to underline the most delicate aspect for a concrete application of food sovereignty on a global scale.

Furthermore, while it is undeniably clear that food sovereignty is an eminent political project, it is nevertheless complex to establish how such sovereignty, at the local, regional and national level, should be exercised.

In this sense, I think that, perhaps, the most problematic aspect of the concept of food sovereignty is precisely the status of sovereignty as such.

It is a core that has never fully been made explicit, which might explain why in more recent definitions of food sovereignty, increasing levels of inconsistency can be found. A striking example can be found, among others, in this sentence: 'those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations'(Via Campesina 2007). The phrase 'those who produce, distribute and consume food' refers, unfortunately, to everyone, including the transnational corporations rejected in the second half of the sentence. As Patel points out, there are, of course, many ways to get out of this impasse. One of these could be to interpret the phrase 'those who produce, distribute and consume food' as subjects in flesh and blood rather than legal subjects. However, even accepting this naive definition, what remains unexplained is precisely the question of sovereignty, as it must be admitted that even among human beings power and control are unevenly distributed (Patel 2009).

The matter does not seem to be easily clarified by referring to another equally significant aspect either, that is the right based approach. As it is well known, food sovereignty offers a totally different vision of food compared to the current global food regime. In fact, food is not a commodity among others but a right that must be ensured for every human being on earth. Accordingly, the matter of food turns into a political one. Nevertheless, assuming food as an inalienable right of each individual, does not directly allow us to clarify which institution or body has the guarantee of this right.

Affirming a right is indeed not a sufficient condition for that right to be guaranteed. For the language of rights to have any meaning, a guarantor of these rights must be identified.

Among the most relevant issues in this regard it is possible to identify the layering of different jurisdictions over which rights can be exercised, which constitutes a central aspect of food sovereignty. This call includes a whole series of figures ranging from nations to peoples, passing through regions and communities and reaching the state institution. But necessarily this call implies a concomitant call for the spaces of sovereignty which vary according to the different geographies of food sovereignty. But precisely on this point, "by pointing to the multivalent hierarchies of power and control that exist within the world food system, food sovereignty paradoxically displaces one sovereign, but remains silent about the others" (Patel 2009: 668).

The issue of sovereignty is therefore not only one of the constitutive aspects of food sovereignty but it is also the most problematic and delicate one.

It is the fundamental nucleus around which the entire system of food sovereignty revolves and, at the same time, the keystone for such a system to work.

A political and philosophical questioning about the status of food sovereignty is necessary. It is no coincidence that the name 'food sovereignty' necessarily refers to a political question. In fact, it suggests the idea that food is inextricably bound to the political realm.

Identifying the political nature of sovereignty with respect to basic control over whom has access to food or healthy food, is therefore indispensable in order to propose an alternative to the current global food regime.

Food as an essential right of every human being cannot be guaranteed without a clarification of the concept of sovereignty. Understanding who should exercise sovereignty, how it should be exercised, under what conditions, is perhaps the main knot for the project of food sovereignty to be realised globally.

To clearly define the concept of sovereignty, both in theoretical and practical terms, is the only way for food sovereignty to become a concrete and effective political practice. For these reasons, one of the future challenges for scholars should be to provide a theoretical framework for the concept of sovereignty.

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Federika Porčedu

Priroda i komodifikacija hrane. Prehrambeni suverenitet: promišljanje odnosa između čoveka i prirode

Apstrakt

Ovaj članak ima za cilj da istraži vezu između komodifikacije prirode i komodifikacije hrane. Komodifikacija hrane je u stvari jedan od najnegativnijih i najkontroverznijih aspekata komodifikacije prirode. Ispitivanje komodifikacije hrane predstavlja plodno tlo za istraživanje odnosa između čoveka i prirode. U ovom kontekstu, prehrambeni suverenitet predstavlja korisnu paradigmu koja ne samo da služi kao alternativa trenutnom režimu ishrane, već koja takođe omogućava da se iskusi drugačija vrsta odnosa između ljudi i prirode. Prehrambeni suverenitet predstavlja jedinstven društveni pokret u kojem su prava zajednice, kao i politička i kulturna prava isprepletena sa pitanjem hrane. Svojim multidisciplinarnim pristupom i snažnom etičkom komponentom, prehrambeni suverenitet predstavlja priliku da se suprotstavi narastućoj komodifikaciji prirode i okruženja.

Ključne reči: čovek, priroda, hrana, komodifikacija, prehrambeni suverenitet, etika