
Major Research Paper

Women and Food Sovereignty: An Ecofeminist Polanyian Perspective

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December 1st, 2010.

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Introduction

Food security has become, in the last few years, a very fashionable policy avenue for international financial institutions and national aid agencies. Women are often pinpointed as the most important stakeholders in these aid initiatives as there is growing recognition that they bear the brunt of food crises around the world (World Bank, 1994; FAO, 2008) since they comprise a great percentage of food producers in the South (up to 90% according to the Food and Agriculture Organization) (FAO, 2008).

Food security initiatives and policies offer some solutions to temporarily alleviate the problems associated with food crises, but a growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements are charging that these measures do not get to the root of the problem. Indeed, these civil society critics argue that the problem lies in the way in which the food regime is organized. Its structure, according to them, is “undermining conditions of human survival” (McMichael, 2009a, p. 153). It is doing so by destroying biodiversity through its dependence on high inputs (petro-fertilizers) and new seed breeding technologies (McMichael, 2008, 2009; Patel, 2008, 2009; Desmarais, 2004). On a social level, the corporate food regime, promoted by key players such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), reorganizes agriculture as it diverts local crops towards export in the South, pushing countless peasants off the land and destroying rural communities in the process (McMichael, 2009a, p. 150). These peasants find themselves either as part of a pool of cheap labour working on large agri-business estates, or engaged in ‘tedious’ contract farming with agri-businesses, or simply as part of the increasing slum population encircling the metropolises of the ‘Third World’ (McMichael, 2009a, p. 153).

The most vocal of these civil society critics is La Via Campesina, a transnational peasants' network which views the structure of the food system as the source of the food crisis (Desmarais, 2006, 2008). La Via Campesina (LVC) proposes 'food sovereignty'¹, a system in which production is oriented primarily toward local consumption instead of export and in which food is viewed as a human right (Desmarais, 2006, 2008).

As women are disproportionately affected by the policies that frame the current food regime, proposals to construct different social organizations around the production, consumption and distribution of food should also pay particular attention to their role. Thus, this research project seeks to identify what is wrong with the current food model from a gendered perspective and explore how proposals for 'food sovereignty' seek to address those problems. The following research questions will therefore orient and frame the analysis: 1) What is wrong with the actual food regime? 2) How does the food regime affect women? 3) How can we conceptualize the rise of movements proposing alternatives to the current food regime, and do those alternatives include a gender perspective? How do women contribute directly to the development/consolidation/framing of alternative agricultural discourses and practices? 4) Would these alternatives be beneficial to women? In what ways?

Objectives

In the context of growing concern for food security and the rise of transnational peasant movements opposing the current food regime and proposing food sovereignty as the alternative, the objectives of this research are twofold. First, I wish to contribute to the existing literature

¹ A more thorough definition of 'food sovereignty' will appear in chapter 3.

and policy debates on women and food security by offering a *gendered* analysis of food sovereignty. Indeed, while international institutions (e.g. WB, FAO, UN) and numerous NGOs agree that women bear the brunt of the food crisis (FAO, 2008; WB, 2007; Spieldoch, 2007), and that women are extremely important to maintain house and community level food security, there are very few academic studies that link women's experiences under the current food regime and the potential viability of *food sovereignty* as an alternative.

The bulk of the research on women from the global South and agriculture has focused on how women are adversely affected by the modernization of agriculture. The literature includes ways to 'integrate' women into the modern food system in order for them to benefit from 'development' or 'globalization' (Ferguson, 1994; Koopman, 2009). Furthermore, it is important to highlight the agency of women in the design, implementation, and promotion of alternative food models. Women are already agents of change, and as such, it is important to provide a gendered analysis of food sovereignty in order to move away from the 'integration' perspective, that is, from the belief that what rural women need is assistance in becoming full economic actors into the current food regime. This perspective is espoused by the Women in Development (WID) school, as well as by international institutions such as the World Bank. Critical development scholars such as Anne Ferguson and Jeanne K. Koopman have demonstrated that past development projects that sought to improve rural women's conditions have in fact deepened gender inequality as they have failed to transform the structure of corporate agriculture (Ferguson, 1994; Koopman, 2009). A gendered perspective of food sovereignty recognizes the importance of women in food production and acknowledges women's heightened vulnerability to food insecurity. Additionally, this gendered perspective critically

analyzes the role of the current food regime in worsening social, ecological, and economic conditions for the majority of people in the global South.

Second, I wish to develop an appropriate theoretical and conceptual framework, which is capable of delving deeper into my research questions by politicizing the issues, and by keeping gender at the forefront of my analysis. Keeping this in mind, I develop an Ecofeminist Polanyian theoretical framework which will enable me to proceed with my research in a comprehensive manner.

At this stage in the research, it is possible to offer a tentative hypothesis. I posit that an Ecofeminist Polanyian theoretical framework enables a particularly thorough reading of food sovereignty because it establishes that 1) capital's² expansion into the food regime renders relations of social reproduction (SR) more insecure, and women, who shoulder the majority of SR responsibilities, will bear the brunt of this regime; 2) because women are particularly affected, I argue that they lead, in many parts of the world, the movement for food sovereignty, which can be conceptualized as a contemporary example of Polanyi's countermovement of social protection; 3) women lead the movement towards food sovereignty by trying to reclaim a 'subsistence perspective' via a struggle for access or ownership of (re) productive resources, such as land and seeds; 4) by engaging in these struggles, the women involved become empowered, and "offer an alternative to corporate agriculture founded on principles of ecology, democracy, education and cooperation" and which "politically redefines the issues of social reproduction in a progressive way" (McMichael, cited in Bakker & Gill, 2003, p. 166).

² I use capital to mean the collusion of corporate/industrial interests; essentially individuals, families, groups, or institutions which control the means of production.

Methodology

This research will draw on existing case studies and literature to provide a gendered analysis of food sovereignty, and of its potential for revitalizing relations of social productions. By doing so, it will examine and highlight the gender roles of rural actors in sustaining, promoting or seeking to implement an alternative model of agriculture or food regime, and explore if and how it allows women's greater emancipation. The method adopted here will serve to illustrate and develop the theoretical framework that is at the core of this research project.

Case studies

Using a variety of case studies will highlight instances where women are engaged in the struggle for food sovereignty. The information gathered from the case studies comes from academic and grey literature. I have decided to focus on two lines of analysis, women's access to land and women's access to seeds, both highly critical factors/components in strengthening the role of food producers. As La Via Campesina argues, women's access to productive resources such as land, water, and seeds is a central tenant of food sovereignty (La Via Campesina, 2010). Furthermore, women, while being key food producers own an infinitely small percentage of the world's land. In Africa, for example, women grow up to 75% of crops for local consumption but own less than 1% of the land (Martinez, 2009, p. 83). Given the lack of case studies featuring women's legal land ownership, either as individuals or as a collective, I have chosen to broaden my use of 'women's access to land' to include women's secure access to communal lands. By 'secure', I mean women's socially and culturally accepted right to use communal land, as opposed to possessing a legally binding right to land titles. Due to the paucity of in-depth case studies on women and land and women and seeds, I will draw examples from different regions in very different socio-economic political contexts, which provide an overview of the richness and variety of cases where women play a key role in alternative models of food production.

It is important to note that I do not envision 'women' as a homogenous group who all face the same issues. Indeed, Chandra Mohanty (2003) warns against conceptualizing 'women' as a homogenous group of people, arguing that viewing women as a unified group, united by a common oppression will inevitably lead to the creation of the "average Third World woman" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 221). The 'Third World woman' is often constructed in western academia in opposition to the 'Western woman', that is, the former is viewed as poor, ignorant, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, and family-oriented, while the latter is perceived as educated, modern, in control, and free (Mohanty, 2003, p. 22). To avoid falling into this Eurocentric dichotomy, it is important to view "the production of women as socioeconomic political groups within particular local contexts" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 31). Another potential pitfall of research on women in the South concerns the lack of social agency usually attributed to the women studied. Indeed, 'Third World women' are viewed as objects, passive victims of international capital, as opposed to subjects, agents of change "who make choices, have a critical perspective of their own situations, and think and organize collectively against their oppressors" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 72).

The case studies analyzed in this study of women's access to (or fight for) land take Mohanty's call for highlighting women's agency seriously. Women are at the forefront of the battle to keep capital from further encroaching upon the commons in the resurgent Mau Mau movement in Kenya (Turner & Brownhill 2001, p. 200). The main galvanizers of the 'new' Mau Mau are peasant and landless women who "demand communal land titles, universal, free education, and producer control of trade" (Turner & Brownhill, 2001, p. 200).

Closely entwined with the Mau Mau resurgence in Kenya is the Green Belt movement, also in Kenya, in which women plant trees in order to reverse desertification and to (re)gain

control of the land. “Led by [Wangari] Mathai, this [is] a grassroots movement among women to reclaim their environment, restore “green spaces” in which they could produce food and revive women’s agrarian strategies which had been of benefit to them and their communities” (McCann & Kim, 2003, p. 109).

My next case study is one in which grassroots groups of poor women gain access to land through market mechanisms. In Medak district, an area of Andhra Pradesh (AP) in India which is prone to draught, the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a rural development non-governmental organization, facilitates women’s groups’ (sangams) fight for access to land (Agarwal, 2003, p. 207). The DDS assists poor, low-caste women in either leasing or purchasing land in order for the women to farm it collectively, thereby ensuring “ food security in an environmentally friendly fashion, through organic farming, multiple cropping and wasteland development” (Agarwal, 2003, p.207).

Regarding women’s access to seeds, I chose two case studies from South Asia as this is the region where Green Revolution was most successful in transforming agricultural production techniques, including the introduction of new seed technologies. In the Nayakrishi movement in Bangladesh, peasant women take part to reclaim their role as guardians of the seeds following the destructive consequences of the modernization of agriculture brought on by the Green Revolution (Begum, 2003). Another case study related to women’s access to seed is Carine Pionetti’s research on seed politics and gender in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. Pionetti explores how women in two districts of Andhra Pradesh, Medak and Adilabad, are countering the gradual commodification of seeds by establishing a local seed economy, enabling them to maintain crop diversity, maintain a livelihood (selling seeds in the local market), maintain

independence from the market, and maintain or improve their social status (Pionetti, 2005, p. 140).

Outline

I will begin by elaborating my Ecofeminist- Polanyian theoretical framework in chapter one. Following this, chapter two will explore the role of the expansion of capital into the food regime in different eras and its effects on women in the South. I will argue that this expansion of capitalism can be construed as an example of Karl Polanyi's first part of his double-movement. In chapter three, I demonstrate how groups of women in the global South are leading Polanyi's countermovement by establishing pockets of food sovereignty in their communities. They are doing this by engaging in struggles to access the means of re(production), land and seeds. Finally, I conclude by summarizing my arguments and by offering tentative policy options to support the work of these women in establishing a system of food production and consumption which values their role and which is socially, culturally, and ecology sustainable.

Chapter 1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

An Ecofeminist Polanyian Perspective

In order to provide a gendered analysis of food sovereignty, I have elaborated a particular theoretical framework which I believe brings to light the essential elements necessary for such a study, an Ecofeminist Polanyian framework. An Ecofeminist Polanyian perspective highlights the social and environmental consequences of the expansion of capital in the realm of agriculture, particularly the impact of these processes on women in the global South, who are the primary producers. It also highlights the rise of alternatives to the contemporary food regime, particularly how women participate in the development and consolidation of these alternatives, and finally, in what ways women benefit from their participation in these oppositional social movements.

The Polanyian part of the theoretical framework enables an understanding of the deep changes experienced in the food regime throughout the past century following the expansion of capital. It also *politicizes* the role of capital: Polanyi believed that the expansion of the 'free' market is not natural (2001). It responds to specific needs and interests and therefore, it is possible for other forces to oppose it. The subsistence perspective elaborated by ecofeminists such as Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen can complement this approach by helping us understand women's centrality and agency in the movements opposing capital's growth and expansion. Many women around the world, particularly in the global South, have indeed created lives outside of, or in parallel with, the global capitalist market, argue Mies and Bennoldt-Thomsen. These lives elaborated on a subsistence perspective focus on the reproduction of life, the well-being of families and healthy communities, and not on the accumulation of profit. The

reproduction of life is endangered by the accumulation of profit necessary to a capitalist system, hence the usefulness of the concept of social reproduction which permits a more thorough reading of the gendered consequences of the expansion of the free market in the food regime

Polanyi's double-movement

The 'globalization project', defined by rural sociologist Philip McMichael as "an emerging vision of the world and its resources as a globally organized and managed free trade/free enterprise economy pursued by largely unaccountable political and economic elite" (1996, p. 300), has resuscitated and given new impetus to Karl Polanyi's theory of the double movement. Just as McMichael describes globalization as a *project*, one of Polanyi's greatest contributions was to show that the free market ideology was also a political project, that is, a *product* of industrial interests (2001). By denaturalizing what many view as an inevitable process, Polanyi invites a critical reading of the institution of the 'free' market and of how its expansion affects members of society. Writing during the Second World War, Polanyi, an economic historian, posited that in every market society there is a twofold tension: on the one hand, as capitalist markets are expanded in power and scope, on the other hand, society reacts and opposes this assault on public life (Munck, 2009, p. x). This 'double-movement' is present throughout history.

Karl Polanyi articulated his concept of the double-movement in his seminal book *The Great Transformation*, written in 1944. As Patel argues, Polanyi looked back on the British industrial revolution as the beginning of the market society, and observed that "the birth of the free market required a great deal of violence, but he also observed something else: People fought back" (Patel, 2009b, p. 22). During the period Polanyi deems the most 'active' of the industrial revolution, 1795 to 1834, the market economy's expansion was severely curtailed by the

Speenhamland Law, also known as the 'poor laws' (Polanyi, 2001, p. 81). Indeed, rural people's vehement protests to stop the rapacious enclosure of communal lands for market use resulted in the government's introduction of this law, effectively preventing the establishment of a labour market, an essential component of a completely free market economy. The Speenhamland Law, although a "powerful reinforcement of the paternalistic system of labour organization" allowed for wage subsidies for labourers (Polanyi, 2001, p. 82). This law introduced the notion of the "right to live", and it is not until its abolition in 1834, following the rise in political power of the middle class, that a fully capitalist society, complete with a free labour market, was ushered in (Polanyi, 2001, p. 82). The Speenhamland Law can be viewed as the double movement, in which the poor fought the ills brought on by market forces. Indeed, "poor laws are not an example of how self-regulating market turn new things into stuff that might be bought and sold- they are a response to society's demands in the age of self-regulating markets" (Patel, 2009b, p. 23).

To understand *why* a market economy would create such opposition from society, one must turn to Polanyi's discussion of 'fictitious commodities'. A self-regulating market economy is one in which all "natural and human substance of society" is turned into commodities (Polanyi, 2001, p. 44). Specifically, a market economy must commodify land, labour and money if it hopes to expand. The problem, according to Polanyi, is that:

Labor, land and money are obviously not commodities... Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself... land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man; actually money, finally is merely a token of purchasing power (cited in Munck, 2007, p.15).

Polanyi predicted that the commodification of these elements would inevitably lead to the destruction of both social relationships and the natural environment (Polanyi, 2001, p. 44).

The notion of embeddedness (or dis-embeddedness) is also central to Polanyi's understanding of a market economy. He argued that in a capitalist system, the economy becomes "dis-embedded" from society (Polanyi, 2001, p. 70). In a market society, the economy functions as an autonomous entity, unhindered by the oversight of any social or political sets of relationships.

According to Polanyi:

[T]hat is why the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system (2001, p. 60).

This disembeddedness inherent in a market system means that the economy is no longer subjugated to other types of regulations emanating from society, religion, or culture (Munck, 2007, p. 17). Before the market society emerged, the economy was one among a number of elements shaping a society. It was fully integrated into other types of relations, and fully controlled by societal will (Munck, 2007, p. 17). In contemporary times, the economy has been elevated to the top, and all other aspects of society are merely accessories to it. Pre-market societies, on the other hand, subjugated the economy to other social relations. They were guided, believed Polanyi, by a certain 'moral order' (Munck, 2007, p. 17).

It is this dis-embeddedness of the economy brought on by the market system, via its commodification of life, which will inevitably lead to the rise of 'protective counter-movements'. Polanyi believed that the expansion of the free market, the first movement, would create a challenge to the whole society, but that the response, the countermovement, would come through specific groups, sections, and classes of society (2001, p. 160). In contemporary times, the question becomes: "Which groups or sections of society are likely to respond to the encroaching marketization and commodification of life?" (Munck, 2007, p. xiii). Many different

groups could certainly organize from various sectors of society and for a variety of reasons.

However, in order to answer this question, I turn to ecofeminism and the concept of social reproduction as both of these theoretical tools can contribute to a better assessment of the role of women in the countermovement.

Ecofeminism: The Subsistence Perspective

In studying the role of capital's expansion into the food regime, ecofeminism essentially adds onto the insights gleaned from a Polanyian perspective. It answers the question Polanyian scholar Ronaldo Munck ponders in asking which segment of society will be most likely to form a countermovement to oppose the expansion of capital into their lives: the answer being women.

More than focusing on *who* is involved, ecofeminists also seek to understand *how*. In

conjunction with the concept of social reproduction, which answers the *why*, an ecofeminist perspective fleshes out the insights of Polanyi applied to the study of food production and consumption by aptly centering the discussion on women who often feel first the negative consequences of the growth of capital into their lives, and who, as a result, will oppose it in a myriad of ways. I choose to use the 'subsistence perspective', theorized by German ecofeminists Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, as what I describe as 'ecofeminism'. Here below is a discussion on the subsistence perspective.

Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen posit that a 'subsistence perspective' would reclaim society and economy from the power of capital (1999). They broadly define the concept of subsistence as an 'alternative social orientation' which can be defined by self-determination, freedom, persistence, preservation of economic and cultural base, autonomy, and cultural and biological diversity (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, pp. 19-20). It also includes ideas such

as regionalization, local economy, and self-sufficiency. Indeed, the subsistence perspective refers to a food-centered political economy in which the economy is firmly 're-embedded' into, and at the service of, society. It is about creating a viable alternative to rampant capitalism and establishing a life outside of market relations. A 'subsistence perspective' can provide an alternative to a market society, as it would center all its activities on the (re)production of life itself (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 12).

Mies and Bennhold-Thomsen define subsistence production as follows:

Subsistence production or production of life includes all work that is expended in the creation, re-creation and maintenance of immediate life and which has no other purpose. Subsistence production therefore stands in contrast to commodity and surplus value production. For subsistence production the aim is 'life', for commodity production, it is 'money' which 'produces' even more money, or the accumulation of capital (1999, p. 20).

Like Polanyi, these ecofeminists reject the commodification of every aspect of life in a capitalist model. Both these theoretical orientations see how such a model, in which everything becomes private property at the service of capital, will inevitably lead us down a path of annihilation of both the natural world and social relationships (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 3).

According to ecofeminists, a capitalist industrial system simply cannot be realized for all people as it is an "ecological impossibility" (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 13). The need to find a perspective which would include the liberation of women from the global South without leading to the destruction of the natural thus became the impetus for the elaboration of the concept of the 'subsistence perspective'. For Mies and Bennhold-Thomsen, 'subsistence' was originally a theoretical tool to explain how women were exploited in a capitalist society, but later 'subsistence' also became a way to acknowledge that an industrial society cannot continue to

exploit natural resources infinitely (1999, p. 21). 'Subsistence' is thus a means to reconcile gender (social) and ecological concerns.

Ecofeminists Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen specifically lay out the basis of such a 'subsistence model', and how it would relate to a variety of themes, like³:

- Work life: men would take on as much unpaid work as women. Wage work would be replaced by an occupation which would be defined as useful for both society and material needs. Subsistence production would become central to the economy and the market economy would subsidize the "production of life" (1999, p. 62).
- Technology: technology in a subsistence model should be used to 'enhance' life. It would not seek to dominate nature but rather cooperate with it (1999, p. 62).
- Moral feature of a subsistence economy: the economy is only one part of society. In an economy oriented towards subsistence, it does not seek to override all other types of regulations, such as social, cultural, or religious oversights that are crucial to many indigenous communities. A subsistence economy also "respects the limits of nature" (1999, p. 63). It is not part of an international market system; it is decentralized and regional (1999, p. 63).
- Trade/Markets: local needs are met locally, through local and regional markets. Local markets should be geared towards subsistence needs. Long-distance trade is not forbidden, but is not to be relied upon for local subsistence needs. Furthermore, trade should respect biodiversity and local cultures (1999, p. 63).
- Changes in the concept of need and sufficiency: there needs to be a change in values and a change in how we conceptualize needs. In a subsistence model, all human needs should be satisfied, as opposed to the fulfillment of needs in capital and material surplus of a minority of people. Reciprocity must be emphasized "between rural and urban areas, between producers and consumers, between cultures, countries, and regions" (1999, p. 63). A fundamental tenet of a subsistence orientation is self-reliance in food needs (1999, p. 63).

A 'subsistence perspective' essentially advocates the ability to have sovereignty over one's life.

Furthermore, women under such a social organization are autonomous on macro and micro

³ Though I define food sovereignty later on, I wish to highlight how this vision of a 'subsistence perspective' and the defining principles of food sovereignty share the same underlying elements. Some of the most notable elements of both concepts are the focus on producing to fulfill local needs first, the centrality of women as actors in this process, and a respect for the limits of nature.

levels. That is, women “have their own authority to produce their lives” (Mies, 2005) and this authority gives them power within their household/communities (micro level), and independence from the capitalist economy (macro level).

When addressing the question of what a ‘subsistence’ model means for women, Maria Mies and Veronika Bennhold-Thomsen assert that such an approach adopts the perspective from below, that is, of women, and particularly poor, rural women from the global South (1999, p. 8). A subsistence orientation thus empowers women as their work of producing and reproducing life, undervalued and/or invisible under a capitalist economy, would be highly valued and central to this type of social model. Furthermore, women are conceptualized as agents under such a model; they reject market relations and the reach of capital into their lives and formulate alternatives (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 184). The empowerment generated by a subsistence perspective for women, and for men, derives from ownership of land and/or control of productive resources (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 3). “The realization of the subsistence perspective depends primarily not on money, education, status and prestige but on control over means of subsistence: a cow, some chicken, land, also some independent money income” (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 4). Based upon their research in both India and Mexico, Mies and Bennhold-Thomson demonstrate that access to land, seed, water, and livestock give communities, especially the women within them, the ability to subsist in an independent fashion (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 2). Indeed, in the subsistence model, communities have the capacity to (re)produce themselves without being dependent on outside forces and agents. Access to productive resources enables women to forcefully counter both patriarchy and capitalism.

Arguing that the 'subsistence perspective' is more than a theoretical concept, Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen provide some compelling examples of empowered women engaged in a variety of subsistence models. Women who organize to assert (or maintain) a 'subsistence perspective' demonstrate their agency by challenging the mainstream view of women in development as 'victims' of underdevelopment and in 'need' of 'help' to fully benefit from capitalism (cf. Mohanty). For instance, women in the Mexican town of Juchitan are the market traders, and through this activity they hold an important social position. The women of Juchitan engage in market trading not to accumulate money. Their primary goal is to provide the necessities of life for their families and through this activity they also garner respect from the wider community (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p. 109). The control of the market of the women traders of Juchitan has kept away the encroachment of the global capitalist economy despite the "well-connected location and geography" of the city (Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1996, p. 70). Furthermore, women's stronghold of local trading has ensured the continuation of subsistence agricultural production, despite massive attempts at industrializing agriculture in the region (Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1996, p. 165). Economic relations in Juchitan are not based on the dictates of growth; they are instead based on intricate mechanisms of social cohesion, expressed through reciprocity. The local economy thus bears a subsistence orientation, and women derive agency from their social status as traders.

Just as Karl Polanyi lamented the loss of the social control over the economy in a free-market society, he argued that the second part of his double-movement would seek to re-embed the economy at the service of society by valuing those same mechanisms of reciprocity, mutual aid, and communality, all of which are present in Juchitan. Importantly, women derive much social power from participation in a subsistence economy. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen note

that “whatever the reason why women keep control of the market, a kind of syndrome takes shape in which this female control of the market is associated with the strong social position of women and the subsistence orientation” (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 118).

A key characteristic of the subsistence perspective is a use of the commons. The commons can be described as “all those parts of the Earth that remain unprivatized, unenclosed, a noncommodity, a support for the manifold human values of mutuality” (Linebaugh & Rediker, 2000, p. 26). The use of these shared and commonly used spaces underlies the basis of non-capitalist social relations (Brownhill, 2009, p. 21). As sociologist Leigh Brownhill notes, the “subsistence political economies of the 21st century are virtually all besieged by global capitalism” (2005, p. 21). As such, the act of defending or extending a subsistence perspective becomes a political act which is very much in line with Polanyi’s countermovement of societal protection. Two phrases succinctly describe this: “To subsist is to resist” (Brownhill, 2005, p. 21), and “no subsistence without dissidence” (Mies & Bennhold-Thomsen, 1999, p. 209).

Thus, the subsistence perspective clarifies certain elements of Polanyi’s double-movement. For instance, it highlights women’s role in the second part of the double-movement. Importantly, it focuses on the *how*: how is it that women have reacted and are currently reacting to the rise of global capitalism.

The following feminist concept of social reproduction also clarifies Polanyi’s double-movement by establishing the consequences of free-market growth for women.

Social Reproduction

Social reproduction is a concept central to the understanding of both subsistence and Polanyi’s double-movement. It is described in a number of ways, as “the work of maintaining

existing life and reproducing the next generation” (Laslett & Brenner, cited in Bakker & Silvey, 2008, p. 4), and as “the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (Katz, 2001, p. 711). Social reproduction is a multi-layered concept; it encompasses both what is necessary for the reproduction of the species (here we talk of the biological aspect), and what is essential to produce and reproduce labour power (Bakker & Silvey, 2008, p. 2). More specifically, when one refers to social reproduction, one talks of securing the “means of existence”, which may include food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, etc. (Katz, 2001, p. 711).

Feminist geographer Cindi Katz notes that social reproduction can be consolidated from a variety of sources such as the state, the household, civil society, and capital (2001, p. 711). Of course, these sources of social reproduction vary across time and space, and across gender, race, and class (Katz, 2001, p. 711). In the mid-twentieth century United States, for example, powerful unions managed to transfer a bulk of the work of social reproduction onto capitalists, through an increase in social benefits to the workers (Katz, 2001, p. 712). Feminist political economists are quick to point out that under a neoliberal capitalist regime, social reproduction has become privatized (Bakker & Silvey, 2008, p. 4). States have transferred a significant proportion of social reproduction responsibilities onto individuals, non-governmental organizations, and corporations (Bakker & Silvey, 2008, p. 5).

This privatization bears more significance for women as social reproduction is “disproportionately reliant on the unpaid work of women and girls in the family and community and the paid work of women employed by state agencies” (Elson, cited in Rich, 2008, p. 545). But this added burden on women is further complicated by identity markers such as nationality, class, and race (Katz, 2001, p. 710). For example, the child-care provisions for families with financial wealth is often displaced onto women from the global South, who leave their own

children in the care of extended family in order to raise another family's children (Katz, 2001, p. 713).

Social reproduction helps to understand how the (uneven) spread of global capitalism affects women, and thus gives a better understanding of the gendered implication of Polanyi's protective counter-movement. Indeed, the rise and spread of capitalism has very clear repercussions for social reproduction. Since global capitalist production has been spatially reorganized through the processes of off-shoring and subcontracting, it becomes increasingly mobile and can thus "shuck many of its particular commitments to place, most centrally those associated with social reproduction" (Katz, 2001, p. 709). Furthermore, social reproduction as a conceptual tool enables an understanding of the importance of a 'subsistence perspective', a model of society which revolves *around the reproduction of life*, as opposed to a market society, which focuses on the reproduction and the accumulation of wealth for a minority of people.

Chapter 2: Polanyi's First Movement: The Threat to Social Reproduction

To provide a gendered analysis of food sovereignty, one can first turn to Karl Polanyi's concept of the double-movement. To briefly recap, in *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi (2001) made the argument that as the so-called self-regulating market expands, society will inevitably respond by forming protective countermovements. A number of points underlie Polanyi's concept of the double-movement. First, to ensure its expansion, capital must find new ways to commodify what Polanyi describes as those 'fictitious commodities': nature and human labour (Polanyi, 2001, p. 44). The transformation of humans and nature into 'fictitious commodities' resulting from the expansion of the free market give rise to a number of negative consequences for societies: "When state policies move in the direction of disembedding through placing greater reliance on market self-regulation, ordinary people are forced to bear the higher costs, workers and their families are made more vulnerable to unemployment, farmers are exposed to greater competition from imports, and both groups are required to get by with reduced entitlements to assistance" (Polanyi, 2001, p. xxvii). This process can also be understood through the Marxist concept of 'primitive accumulation' (PA), which refers to the broad "extension of global capital into new social and environmental spaces and relations..." (Roberts, 2008, p. 536).

Feminists have added important insights to the understanding of PA by including social reproduction in its process. As Silvia Federici argues, "primitive accumulation also [involves] the separation of processes of production from those of social reproduction (with the privatization, subordination, and theoretical occlusion of the latter)..." (cited in Roberts, 2008, p. 542). Here, the separation of production from social reproduction enables both capital and states

to offload their responsibilities of social reproduction onto individuals (mainly women)⁴. Capital can further its expansion by manipulating the means of social reproduction to mobilize women as a reserve army of labour. This manipulation has taken the form of an attack on subsistence food production throughout the world. As Isabella Bakker and Rachel Silvey argue, “the insecurity of access to the means of reproduction is a fundamental source of ‘command’ over the work process” (2008, p. 2). Indeed, once household and communities can no longer ensure the fulfillment of their basic needs (such as food and shelter), they will necessarily be forced to enter the pool of cheap wage labour and it is with this pool that capital can reproduce itself and maintain its expansion.

Capital uses different means to endanger the process of social reproduction in different temporal eras. I use the concept of the food regime⁵ to delineate two eras, the post-WWII food regime and the current/corporate food regime, illustrating the varied ways in which capital has spread into the relations of food production in countries of the global South, and how this has affected women.

Evolution of post-WWII food regime

The evolution of the post-WWII food regime is intrinsically linked with the rise of the ‘development’ project, which was, according to rural sociologist Philip McMichael, a “politically-orchestrated initiative following the Second World War, incorporating postcolonial

⁴ The separation of production processes from social reproduction processes was initiated during the transition to capitalism, during which time men entered wage labour, and the responsibilities of social reproduction were pushed into the private sphere of the household. These responsibilities were fulfilled by women’s unpaid and unrecognized labour. Capital benefits from this arrangement as the reproduction of the labour force is subsidized by women’s unpaid labour (Roberts, 2008, p. 555).

⁵ I refer to food regimes to mean: “a rule-governed structure of production and consumption on a world scale” (Friedmann, 1993, pp. 30-1). I use other terms to refer to the ‘current food regime’, namely the ‘neoliberal food regime’, and the ‘corporate food regime’, all three terms referring to the same model.

states into an imperial field of power to legitimize and expand capitalist markets as the vehicle of 'national economic growth and modernity'" (1996, p. 14), lasting from the 1940s to the late 1970s. The food regime of this period was characterized by the extension of US food aid to Third World states, which enabled the US government to secure political allegiance against the spread of communism. Furthermore, the distribution of food to developing states permitted the US to subsidize their own national producers and to develop capitalist markets in the South for US agricultural products (McMichael, 2009a, p. 141). Many Third World states accepted US food aid because it was cheaper and far more convenient to import American wheat "than to bankroll long-term improvements in the production, transportation, and distribution of local foods" (McMichael, 2008, p. 71). Food aid thus fostered food dependency within developing states. Third World states were also encouraged to follow the same model of agro-industrialization in the name of national economic development, also providing new markets for western chemical and agro-industries. In the process Third World states promoted Green Revolution technologies to increase yields and instituted land reforms to prevent peasant revolts (McMichael, 2008, p. 71). Despite the national character of the development era, the US state promoted, via various projects such as the Marshall Plan and the Green Revolution, the establishment of a transnational commodity chain in which different countries and regions began to specialize in the production of certain agricultural products (McMichael, 2009a, p. 146). Hence it is in this time period that capital, under the guise of 'development', integrated relations of production and consumption of food in the global South, where these relations were previously guided by a subsistence perspective.

Women under the Post-WWII Food Regime (1950s-1970s)

This expansion of capitalist relations into food production and consumption in the global South had major repercussions for women. The most significant agricultural endeavour of the 'development' era, the Green Revolution, was enacted through new high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilizers, modern farm technology, and improved irrigation schemes, all of which crystallized the importance of capital in the food system (FAO, n.d.). It succeeded in achieving its stated goal of increasing yields, and in introducing into the Third World the "US model of chemical agriculture" (McMichael, 2008, p. 77; Escobar, 1995, p. 127), with enormous social and ecological repercussions (Arends-Kuenning & Makundi, 2000, p. 318). In areas such as Bangladesh, "the indiscriminate use of high-yielding seeds (HYV), fertilizers and pesticides has damaged fertility of the soil and the entire ecology" (Begum, 2003, p. 135). This high-input agricultural system led to women's *marginalization* from agriculture: "Women, particularly poor women, tended to be excluded—not only because of the difficulty of obtaining financing but also because of institutional traditions in extension traditions of transferring technologies to male heads of households" (McMichael, 2008, p. 81).

As one such example of marginalization, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that the introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice in Asia resulted in the displacement of women's role in agriculture. The FAO argues that the introduction of technology brought on by the Green Revolution that resulted in the mechanization of many processes in harvesting led to a tremendous loss of work for 1.2 million Javanese women who had previously hand-pounded the rice (FAO, n.d.). Sociologist Solvey Gerke, in her review of social changes in rural Java in the 1970s, remarked that the entirety of hand-pounding work disappeared with the rise of rice mills (1992, p. 94). This task was an exclusively female one, and the introduction of rice mills

forced the women to look for other types of agricultural jobs. Further compounding women's marginalization from agriculture in Java is the fact that "[i]n various parts of Java... quite a large amount of traditional forms of female employment have been taken on by men" (Gerke, 1992, p. 99). Gerke shows that it is the poorest, landless women who suffered the most from the changes brought on by the Green Revolution on the Javanese rice economy. Indeed, "it became more and more difficult for the landless and near landless women to contribute to the subsistence of the household" (Gerke, 1992, p. 95).

Another case of women's marginalization from agriculture following the introduction of capitalist relations of production can be gleaned from Bangladesh. Farhana Begum notes how the introduction of 'modern agriculture' severely affected poor rural women:

Before the arrival of modern agriculture, women were primarily responsible for seed conservation, germination, and testing. For example, in relation to rice, the main crop in Bangladesh, women's knowledge and labour was essential to assess how well seed was likely to germinate, how much rice could be realized by processing paddy, how much seed and rice would survive storage, how much value was added to paddy, whether for home consumption or marketing, and how the by-products would be used (2003, p. 136).

After the arrival of the new HYV rice seed, farmers turned to corporations instead of using the seeds that village women had saved from previous crops, like they had done for generations.

Women, in this process, lost their important role as guardians of seeds and became marginalized from agriculture (Begum, 2003).

Adding to women's marginalization within agriculture, the industrialization of agriculture also deepened gender inequalities in many instances. In her long-term study on the effects of the modernization of agriculture in the Senegal River Valley, sociologist Jeanne E. Koopman notes that the large-scale irrigation project enacted by the national government and international

donors in the 1970s exacerbated 'male bias' as irrigated plots were given to heads of households of which 90% were men (2000, p. 256). The irrigation project was a way to connect agricultural producers of the area to global capitalist markets by encouraging greater production for export. In other words, such 'development' project enabled the expansion of capital into the agricultural sector of countries of the global South. Furthermore, the gendered inequality in terms of labour time deepened, as hoards of younger men migrated to the cities, which resulted in male household heads "pushing more women into labour-intensive agricultural tasks" (Koopman, 2009, p. 256).

Mary Arends-Kuenning and Flora Makundi also note a similar shift in gender relations in Mali (2000). The arrival of new variety of seeds in Africa, in this case, hybrid cotton in Mali, added significantly to women's labour burden. As the new varieties necessitated more labour than the traditional seeds because of the need for more inputs, men, in charge of commercial crops, forced women to spend more time on these than on traditional subsistence crops, thus lessening women's bargaining power in the household (Arends-Kuenning & Makundi, 2000, p. 326).

Evolution of the Corporate Food Regime (1980s to 2010)

The evolution of the corporate food regime is paralleled with the rise of the neoliberal 'globalization' project. The latter is defined by McMichael as "an emerging vision of the world and its resources as a globally organized and managed free trade/free enterprise economy pursued by largely unaccountable political and economic elite" (McMichael, 1996, p. 300). In short, it is the latest incarnation of 'development', now with greater control in the hands of transnational capital as opposed to national governments. It is in this era that the expansion of

the 'free' market deepens. In the 'globalization' project, the commodification of (re)productive assets previously belonging to the commons has been accelerated. Hence it is here where one can clearly see what Karl Polanyi meant when he argued that the first part of his double-movement, the growth in power and space of 'free' markets, would prove to be a danger to both humans and nature. As Ronaldo Munck observes, Polanyi's salience for these current times is to emphasize that the "self-regulating market [is] neither socially nor environmentally sustainable" (Munck, 2007, p. 16).

It is also important to note that the 'globalization' project, within which the current food regime evolves, is intrinsically linked with the development of neoliberal ideology (1980s to early 1990s), which emphasized the privatization of state apparatus in an effort to stimulate economic growth. The shift from public to private control of the food regime happened via a:

[p]olitically instituted process of economic liberalization privileging corporate entities and rights in the food system, with respect to crop development and the management of 'food security'—as a service performed not by nation-states but by transnational corporations through the world market (McMichael, 2009a, pp.150-151).

Political economist Stephen Gill argues that neoliberal ideology is now globally omnipresent, and this omnipresence is embedded through the 'new constitutionalism', which refers to:

[h]ow international legal and national constitutional measures have increasingly institutionalized neoliberal reforms and discipline as fundamental economic policy over the last 20-30 years. These disciplinary measures constrain the types of government intervention, limit capacities of social redistribution and welfare, and tend to promote more privatized systems. Thus, they govern not only the political economy but also social reproduction (2008, p. 19).

Two types of new constitutionalist measures, trade agreements and structural adjustment programs (SAPs), were of particular salience in consolidating the power of capital into the agricultural sectors of countries in the global South, as explained below.

Trade Agreements and SAPs: Consolidating the Power of Corporations in the Neoliberal Food Regime

Corporations have become key actors in the neoliberal food regime as a result of trade liberalization and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) adopted and promoted by powerful state representatives. Indeed, much is often made of how states have withered away under globalization and the rising power of multi-national corporations. Countering this view, Otero and Pechlaner argue that the state is central to the implementation of neoliberal policies, including the ratification of free trade agreements like NAFTA and the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 180). Just as what Karl Polanyi had argued for a previous era, neoliberal globalization is a political project, driven by specific interests, which relies on the state to “impose the market as a self-regulating mechanism” (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 180). However, it must be noted that power imbalance and inequalities amongst states affects the way in which each state will fit into this project of neoliberal globalization. “Nation-states with the greatest international clout will be most influential in setting up the global regulatory regime around which less powerful nation-states will need to strategize and adapt” (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 180).

The implementation of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) in Mexico provides a useful case study to illustrate the impact of neoliberal trade agreements on developing countries. NAFTA was implemented by the U.S, Mexico and Canada to fulfill trade liberalization on a regional basis. The three basic goals of this agreement were to reduce trade barriers, expand markets, and facilitate economic stability (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 185). It is important to note that these neoliberal prescriptions were not fully ‘imposed’ on Mexico, but were well-received by certain sectors of the ruling class, including the technocrats in the political sphere (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 185). To ‘prepare’ the country for the implementation of

NAFTA, the Mexican ruling class passed agrarian reform legislation which privatized communally-owned land used by peasants and indigenous groups. The 'unspoken' purpose of the agrarian reform was to create a large pool of cheap labour-by pushing peasants off the land-to entice foreign investments (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 195). "This process was initiated through the radical elimination of most government supports for peasant production, including the virtual elimination of subsidized loans, the dismantling of a number of government-run agricultural marketing agencies, and the elimination of the government-run seed companies" (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 195). Furthermore, trade liberalization in Mexico has resulted in a significant increase in the production of high-value fruits and vegetable for exports, with a corresponding decreasing emphasis placed on the production of lower-food grains for domestic markets, like corn, as Mexican producers cannot compete with the cheap imports of highly subsidized US maize (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 198). Mexico now imports a significant share of one of its staple foods, maize (23% in 2007). This situation renders the country highly vulnerable to price fluctuations originating from other countries (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 198). For example, in 2006 when U.S president Bush announced a subsidy for U.S corn producers to foster the growth of corn-based ethanol, tortilla prices in Mexico rose 60% in early 2007 (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 199). Pechlaner and Otero argue that NAFTA has rendered Mexico 'food vulnerable' (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 199). While some neoliberal analysts suggest Mexican producers have gained massively from the rise in the export of high-value vegetables and fruits, the data suggests otherwise. "While there are 32,000 firms in the food industry, only 1,692 engage in exports, and only 300 firms account for 80% of all exports" (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010, p. 201). In short, the rise in exports has only benefited large scale 'capitalized agricultural entrepreneurs' and U.S. firms and customers (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010,

p. 201). NAFTA's role in Mexican agriculture has thus resulted in pushing thousands of peasants off the land, increasing the country's food vulnerability, and consolidating the role of corporate players in the food production system. Whereas Mexico used to be self-sufficient in food production, it is now importing large amount of food and is getting further away from food sovereignty.

A further element which consolidated the hold of corporations in the neoliberal food regime is the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs). SAPs were imposed upon developing countries in the 1980s and early 1990s as conditions for receiving loans from international financial institutions to pay down the private debt they had accumulated in the 1970s. Indebted countries were required by SAPs to earn foreign exchange to service their burgeoning debt loads. International institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund pressured developing countries into expanding their production of commodity exports (Fridell, 2006, p. 16). SAPs were also:

... achieved through mandated restrictions in social expenditures, especially on health, education and infrastructure, elimination of many public-sector jobs; removal of price subsidies on essential commodities and services; reduction of wages; the privatization of state assets (for example, forests, water and land, publicly owned companies,) and public service provision; and overall, the removal of protection from national economic activities along with the freeing of financial transactions (Brownhill, 2009, p. 231).

The example of Kenya can be used to illustrate how neoliberal prescriptions such as SAPs altered developing countries' agricultural sector. In Kenya, as in many other African states, the World Bank and IMF promoted non-traditional exports as part of the strategy to

generate the foreign exchange needed to service their debt payment (Dolan, 2005, p.413). The traditional agricultural commodities were viewed as “old statist policies of developmentalism”, while non-traditional export (NTX) were viewed as ‘progressive’ and ‘entrepreneurial’, “replacing archaic parastatal-controlled agriculture with market-savvy actors” (Dolan, 2005, p. 413). Political economist Gavin Fridell traces the nurturing of Southern countries’ agricultural sector, specifically the traditional export commodities (i.e. coffee, tea), back to various international commodity control agreements established in the interwar period and after the Second World War until the 1970s, under the Bretton Woods era (Fridell, 2010, p. 458). These agreements, in general, sought to regulate production and the amount of commodities allowed in the markets to ensure high enough prices for the producers (Fridell, 2010, p. 458). The reason behind those agreements was “economic nationalism driven by the desire of Southern elites to protect the viability of large-scale agro-export industries...” (Fridell, 2010, p. 458). The various mechanisms put in place to ensure market regulations favouring Southern producers were eventually dismantled, many eliminated under the auspices of SAPs. It is in this context that non-traditional exports became heavily promoted by international financial institutions. In Kenya, NTX were first established through contract farming schemes. Small or large growers were connected ‘vertically’ to Northern markets via exports firms (Dolan, 2005, p. 413). Eventually, these contract farming schemes were replaced with giant corporate farms and processing facilities as the smaller growers became unable to achieve the increasingly rigorous production criteria required by Northern supermarkets (Dolan, 2005, p. 421). SAPs, as with neoliberal trade agreements such as NAFTA, led to the consolidation of the dominance of corporations in the neoliberal food regime, with clear repercussions for women and social reproduction, as explained in the following section.

Women under the Neoliberal Food Regime (1980s-2010)

The marginalization of women from agriculture and the exacerbation of gender inequalities observed in the post-WWII food regime have deepened in the last thirty years. As the new division of world agricultural labour -in which countries of the global South produce and export high-value agricultural commodities (vegetables, fruit) to wealthy Northern consumers and with Northern agricultural producers dumping cheap basic grain staples in Southern markets- is consolidated, peasants and smallholders are either squeezed out of their land or pushed into production contracts for agro-exporting firms (McMichael, 2008, p. 107). This process is especially harmful for women in the global South, who, due to their lower socio-economic status, face increasing pressures on their livelihoods.

Women's lack of security and rights in land means that commercialization easily erodes women's role in and control of food production. As small farming is destabilized, women must work in the agribusiness sector on plantations and in processing plants, as planters, pickers, and packers, feminizing the global agricultural labor force, and adding to women's workday, despite income benefits and associated 'empowerment' (McMichael, 2008, pp. 107-108).

A Project of Capital...

The current dismantling of subsistence production in the global South is a political project of capital, not an unintended consequence of corporate growth. As Leigh Brownhill argues, the expansion of capitalist relations (Polanyi's first movement) must necessarily entail the destruction of those relations of production and social reproduction which exist outside of the global market (2009: 19). She states that "capital is dependent on the commons and on the gendered commoners" (Brownhill, 2009, p. 17). The 'commons' and 'gendered commoners' refer to the spaces and gendered relationships which survive independently of capital's reach, like subsistence agricultural production. While capital depends on subsistence for the

reproduction of cheap labour, subsistence has been (and can be) autonomous from capital (Brownhill, 2009, p. 18). It is thus only by threatening the commons and subsistence relations that capital can further its expansion. As Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen argue, “the war against subsistence is the real war of capital, not the struggle against unions and their wage demands. Only after people’s capacity to subsist is destroyed are they totally and unconditionally in the power of capital” (1999, p.19).

Dismantling small-scale agricultural production through new constitutionalist measures, such as trade agreements that enforce liberalization and promote the production of crops for export rather than local markets, has immense benefits for capital. For it is when women are no longer in control of the means to ensure their own family’s subsistence/survival that they are forced into joining the global labour force to secure the basic necessities of reproduction. An attack on subsistence is a means for capital to reproduce *itself* by ensuring a constant renewal of cheap and flexible labour.

The Feminization of Labour: Women as ‘Ideal’ Employees

The feminization of agricultural wage-labour, which began in the ‘development’ era, has intensified in the current ‘globalization’ era. In the following examples, gleaned from both eras, we can observe two themes. First, that capital favours women as labourers. Due to women’s traditional lower socio-economic status, capital can pay women lower wages than men. Arizpe and Aranda note that in the context of Mexico, strawberry exporters manipulate the cultural values which confine women to a subordinate role in society, to keep underpaying female labour. “[C]ompanies take advantage of the traditional idea that any income earned by a daughter, wife, or mother is an “extra” over and above the main income of the father, husband, or son” (1981, p. 470). Second, that despite grand claims by capital’s agents like national governments,

development agencies, and international financial institutions, a great majority of women are not 'empowered' by their participation in the labour market.

The two trends mentioned above- women as capital's favoured labour segment and the lack of promised 'empowerment' once they enter the labour market- can be observed in the 'development' era, where the introduction of high yielding varieties of rice in Asia resulted in the increasing "need for cash incomes in rural households to cover the costs of technological inputs which has forced women to work as agricultural labourers" (FAO, n.d.). It is often asserted in neoliberal literature that the Green Revolution 'empowered' women as it led to the creation of agricultural wage work 'opportunities' for them. Hence it is important to note the enabling role of 'development' industry in facilitating the first part of Polanyi's double movement, by promoting the benefits of the expansion of the market into the global South. Indeed, the Women in Development (WID) paradigm promoted women's integration into the capitalist system as the way for them to benefit from 'development'. The Western liberal feminists who developed the WID framework argued that modernization had not benefited women in the developing world (Razavi & Miller, 1995a, p. 2). Previous development projects, WID proponents argued, had not taken women into consideration. What was needed was to help "integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort" (cited in Razavi & Miller, 1995a, p. 3). WID advocates framed women's subordinate status within an economic framework: women were not equal to men because they did not contribute to the household equally in terms of income (Razavi & Miller, 1995a, p. 4). Women's inequality was thus linked to their exclusion from the 'market place' (Razavi & Miller, 1995a, p.4). "It was therefore argued that if women were brought into the productive sphere more fully, not only would they make a positive contribution to development, but they would

also be able to improve their status vis-à-vis men” (Razavi & Miller, 1995a, p. 5). Once international financial institutions (such as the World Bank) and national development agencies adopted WID prescriptions, the design of development projects focused on “human capital” and on “equipping women immediately...to improve productivity and earning capacity” (Razavi & Miller, 1995b, p.41) by integrating them within the market economy.

Da Corta and Venkateshwaly’s longitudinal study (from 1970 to 1995) of villages in the state of Andhra Pradesh offers compelling evidence to shatter some of the myths perpetuated by the WID school relating to the benefits for women accrued from the Green Revolution. They forcefully counter the notion that women, though not the intended beneficiaries of the Green Revolution, ‘benefited’ and were ‘empowered’ by it. They note that the main effect of the Green Revolution was the proletarianization and pauperization of women: “the greater demand for women’s work in agriculture, though not planned by the designers of the green revolution, was an extremely fortuitous result of the adoption of the HYV because much demand enhances women’s employment and thereby reduces the sex bias which is so marked in the Indian subcontinent” (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 74).

The authors dispel two myths about the impact of capitalist development on women agricultural producers by identifying two corresponding paradoxes: the ‘standard of living’ paradox and the ‘women’s empowerment’ paradox (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, pp. 75-76). The first paradox refers to the fact that despite an *apparent* improvement in agricultural labour conditions, seen in a doubling of real wages and an increase in land ownership as a result of the introduction of Green Revolution technologies, the real standard of living has not seen corresponding betterment. The researchers report on the dismal living conditions of agricultural

labourers, noting that, “workers [are] living in poor, crowded housing, wearing tattered saris, and some [are] still relying heavily on children’s paid labour rather than sending them to school” (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 75). The authors note that despite the rising wages of labourers, a number of factors decreased the take home income, such as reliance on loans from exploitative employers and relying on merchants to provide food for their families (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p.75).

This fact had repercussions on female employment, autonomy, and gender-relations, leading to the ‘women’s empowerment’ paradox. In Andhra Pradesh, women’s employment as agricultural wage labourers rose after the implementation of the Green Revolution (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 97). Many explanations are put forth to explain this feminization of agriculture, but Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu found that men’s general shift into off-farm employment opportunities, mostly in petty commodity production, explains this rise in female employment. “Consequently, the gender divide corresponds, to some extent, to a class division between non-propertied/waged workforce composed of women (and largely unfree), and self-employed men (though largely tied to commission agents)” (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 104). This has resulted in significant negative impacts on women: as more women move into low paid agricultural work, men tend to shift more responsibility for household reproduction on to them. Men often refuse what they consider to be demeaning agricultural work knowing that their wives will acquiesce to it, and bring in some money with their wages (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 105). Thus, ironically, women must assume much greater financial responsibility for the social reproduction of their family (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 106). Through such withdrawal of male responsibility towards family provisioning (social reproduction), women feel obliged to accept any offers of work, despite the fact that it may pay

extremely low wages or involve dangerous work or performing humiliating tasks. The outcome of this situation for the peasant women of Andhra Pradesh is that it “increases their unfreedom, reduces their actual wages received, increases real male female wage differentials, and increases hours worked per day” (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 108). Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu are clear in their conclusion that the increase in women’s agricultural wage work opportunities engendered by the Green Revolution did not result in women’s empowerment, but the women’s proletarianization resulting in disempowerment (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999, p. 114)

As similar story is currently taking place in the contemporary ‘globalization’ context, in which women’s work ‘opportunities’ rest on their comparative advantage as low-wage workers. For example, in her study of farm and pack house labour in Kenya, sociologist Catherine Dolan reports that the work ‘opportunities’ occasioned by the commercialization of agriculture in the current food regime rest on a gendered division of labour and insecure jobs for women (2004, p. 99). After analyzing employees’ skills level, wages and benefits, work hours, and work conditions of both men and women in various large scale farms and pack houses in the non-traditional export (NTX) sector of Kenyan horticulture, Dolan concludes that the benefits gained through the creation of employment opportunities under the current food regime are achieved through the “comparative advantage of women’s disadvantage” (Dolan, 2004, p. 124). That is, agribusinesses use women’s subordinate socio-economic and cultural status to extract cheap labour from them (Arizpe & Aranda, 1981, p. 471). The conditions of labour in horticulture for women workers have many parallels to other types of ‘feminized’ industries around the world, such as light manufacturing (see Elson & Pearson, 1981). The female workforce must contend with “employment insecurity, excessive hours, occupational segregation, environmental health

concerns, low wages, and limited opportunities for training and skill development” (Dolan, 2005, p. 422).

Sociologist Stephanie Barrientos, in her study of female labour in Chile’s fruit export industry, also reports that this female segment of the agricultural workforce is marginalized and unrecognized officially in government circle (1997, pp. 75-76). Women comprise the vast majority of seasonal fruit industry labourers and do so at much lesser pay and poorer working conditions than men also working in the agricultural sector (Barrientos, 1997, p. 76). Barrientos points out the contradiction between the fact that women are the most insecure workers in the agricultural sector in Chile while being the motor behind the immense growth of the Chilean export horticulture industry (1997, p. 78).

The picture is the same in Brazil. As Ben Selwyn notes, if agribusinesses wish to remain competitive in the global market, they must rely on readily available cheap seasonal labour (2010, p. 1). Women are thus the ‘ideal’ employment segment because their labour power is undervalued compared to that of men, based on “their assumed and real familial responsibilities” (Selwyn, 2010, p. 1). Managers, assuming that female employees will need to miss work days to care for their children, will value these female workers less, and consequently, offer the better full-time jobs to males. Women are assumed to be ‘good’ candidates for NTX employment for other reasons, such as their assumed feminine traits: patience, submissiveness, and dexterity (Deere, 2005). Other employers believe that ‘women’s skills’, apparently gained through domesticity and motherhood, are undervalued or simply not viewed as skills at all, thus justifying lower pay (Deere, 2005, p. 53). For example, in the grape export production region of Sao Francisco, Brazil, agribusiness managers will redefine certain skills, such as grafting grapes of vines as requiring manual dexterity, which they view as a ‘natural’ attribute of women.

Redefining skills as 'natural' enables agribusinesses to justify the gendered segregation of the labour force, and the lower pay of job sectors in which women dominate (Selwyn, 2010, p. 7). Indeed, as Laura Reynolds finds in her study of agribusinesses' employment practices in the Dominican Republic, "employers manipulate gender ideologies and institutions to depress wages, to increase labour discipline and to maximize labour extraction from both women and men" (2001, p. 25).

Feminist economist Carmen Diana Deere succinctly summarizes the role of capital in this feminization of agricultural labour by claiming that:

[O]ne of the consequences of neoliberal policies has been to transfer the costs of reproduction of the labour force from the state to the households and often to the women within them, both because of their primary responsibility for domestic labour and because the crisis has required their growing participation in the labour force (2005, p. 8).

But this situation, in which the social reproduction work of women becomes more and more onerous, has a number of consequences for both the women and the communities involved. First, we are now in a situation in which the difficult conditions under which social reproduction needs are met has meant growing human insecurity for a vast majority of the world (Bakker & Gill, 2008, p. 19). Famines and food crises have reached epidemic proportions and food insecurity in many areas of the world is growing at an alarming rate (Magdoff & Tokar, 2009, p. 1). Second, the destruction of subsistence and small-scale food production and the consequent marginalization of women from agriculture have longer term repercussions on social reproduction, including, for example, the loss of indigenous localized knowledge about crops, the loss of rural culture, and the loss of biodiversity, all of which hinders the ability of future generations to survive and reproduce themselves (Bakker and Gill, 2003, p. 166).

Sociologist Deborah Barndt, in her research on the tomato trail, has observed these issues in Mexico, where small maize farmers (mostly women), displaced by the growing imports of cheap subsidized US maize, now work on large corporate farms:

[T]he only Mexican inputs are the land, the sun, and the workers... the South has been the source of seeds, while the North has the biotechnology to alter them. [T]he workers who produce the tomatoes do not benefit. Their role in agro-export production also denies them participation in subsistence agriculture, especially since the peso crisis in 1995, which has forced migrant workers to move to even more scattered work sites. They now travel most of the year, with little time to grow food on their own plots in their own communities... [W]ith this loss of control comes a spiritual loss, and a loss of knowledge of seeds, or organic fertilizers and pesticides, of sustainable practices such as crop rotation or leaving the land fallow for a year—practices that had maintained the land for millennia (1997, pp. 59-62).

And, finally, for women, the attack on subsistence production has often meant an increase in their unpaid labour, an increase in gender inequities in the home, a decrease of their social status, an increase in their time constraints, and general dis-empowerment (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999).

Polanyi's Countermovement

Capital's reach into the food production and consumption system has taken on different guises in different eras. In both the 'development' era and the current 'globalization' era, the aim of capital was/is to connect the agricultural sectors of states from the global South to global capitalist markets. The consequences of this expansion has been growing food insecurity for many countries in the developing world (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010), and the deepening marginalization and general dis-empowerment of women (Da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999), among many other negative outcomes.

Needless to say, resistance to the expansion of capital into the food regime has grown in recent decades due in large part to its assault on social reproduction resulting in growing human insecurity (Desmarais, 2006, 2008; McMichael, 2005, 2006). By returning to Ronaldo Munck's earlier question about which group is most likely to form a countermovement to protest capital's expansion into their lives, we can turn to ecofeminism, and specifically the 'subsistence perspective' to delineate an answer. Countless women from the global South, far from taking the hit to their livelihoods and the obvious threat to social reproduction engendered by the expansion of the 'free' market, are key agents in the consolidation of food sovereignty around the world. They are, in essence, leading Polanyi's countermovement in many parts of the world through their efforts in reclaiming a subsistence perspective. These women are leading the countermovement via a fight to reclaim or maintain their control over (re)productive resources such as land and seeds. The following chapter will thus offer a few case studies in which women engage in such counter-hegemonic processes. From these dispatches of communities striving for food sovereignty, we can already tease out some of the ramifications for women. Indeed, food sovereignty might just carry the hope of restoring and revitalizing "forms of social reproduction" (McMichael, 2003, p. 185) that may prove to be essential for the future of the planet and to restore and fully recognize the central role of women in relations to food production.

Chapter Three: Women at the Forefront of Polanyi's Countermovement: Food Sovereignty

The threat to social reproduction caused by capital's penetration into the food regime—explored in two time periods in Chapter 2—embodies a contemporary example of Karl Polanyi's first part of his concept of the double-movement. As Cindi Katz observed, social reproduction is secured through a variety of actors and institutions, namely the state, capital, the household, civil society, etc. (Katz, 2001, p. 711). The disengagement or retreat of any of these actors will put relations of social reproduction in a much more precarious position and will inevitably put a larger share of those responsibilities on the institutions which are not as mobile as capital, like the family. Philip McMichael shows how the shift from the 'development' era to the 'globalization' era has intensified the retrenchment of the state in matters of social reproduction and has lessened the state's ability to put pressure on capital to fulfill some of those responsibilities (2003, p. 173). In the context of agriculture, this has had particularly dire consequences for small producers and peasant farmers of the South, as state retreat has meant an undermining of the "coherence of [national] farm sectors, rural cultures, and civic rights to food security" (McMichael, 2003, p. 173). Indeed, as the:

Local producers and markets are scuttled by the removal of public protections, marginalized by the privileging of export cropping, and swamped by artificially cheapened food imports, the conditions of social reproduction in the countryside are reconstituted within new circuits of capital enabled by the corporate globalization project (McMichael, 2003, p. 176).

Further compounding the threat posed to social reproduction (SR) by the retrenchment of capital and states' social reproduction responsibilities, capital has waged an assault on subsistence production via 'new constitutionalist' measures, such as the commodification of productive

assets (land, water, seeds) and trade liberalization (resulting in the dumping of cheap food from the North into the local markets of the global South) to ensure its renewal by forcing the creation of a global pool of cheap flexible labour. Isabella Bakker and Rachel Silvey note how this is done in the global South, where “assets such as land, water or agricultural seeds are increasingly appropriated by the state or private interests, reflecting new forms of “primitive” accumulation that challenges the previous fluid boundaries between expanded household relations of social reproduction and care, food, provisioning and sustainability” (2008, p. 7). It is also important to note a new form of primitive accumulation that has developed in the past few years, widely referred to as land grabbing. Rich countries dependent on food and/or energy imports have begun leasing and buying land in various parts of Africa to grow food for export in order to ensure their own food security, or to produce energy with the recent turn to agrofuel production (Borras & Franco, 2010; MacDonald, 2010). Countries such as Ethiopia, where so many citizens are facing famine and deep food insecurity, are finding themselves in the incongruous position of feeding the wealthy (MacDonald, 2010). Critics contend that these land grabs are pushing small farmers off the land, and only benefiting governments and private investors which negotiate these deals (MacDonald, 2010).

The inevitable consequences of this assault on society, according to Karl Polanyi, would lead to a number of social counter-movements which would seek to reclaim the power from the market. The transnational peasant movement, La Via Campesina (LVC), developed the concept of ‘food sovereignty’ as a potentially counter-hegemonic vision to fight the expansion of capital in relations of food production and consumption. Annette A. Desmarais, a Canadian academic, former farmer, and technical advisor to LVC, situates the rise of this peasant-based and peasant-led social movement within the context of the “implementation of structural adjustment

programmes, regional trade agreements and the World Trade Organization Agreement on agriculture”, in other words, on the expansion of capital into relations of food production (Desmarais, 2002, p. 91). LVC has over 150 member organizations which represent millions of people around the world (Wiebe, 2006, p.167). The movement claims to be independent, pluralist, and autonomous (Desmarais, 2002, p. 94) and its popularity is due in great part to its proposal of an alternative to the current food system based on the concept of food sovereignty. La Via Campesina first presented this vision for an alternative to the globalized food system at the 1996 World Food Summit. Food sovereignty is a broad concept, defined by LVC as follows:

Food sovereignty is the people’s, countries’ or state unions’ RIGHT to define their agricultural and food policy, without dumping vis-à-vis third countries. Food sovereignty includes:

- Prioritizing local agricultural production in order to feed the people, access of peasants and landless people to land, water, seeds, and credit.
- The right of farmers and peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume and how and by whom it is produced.
- The right of countries to protect themselves from too low priced agricultural and food imports.
- Agricultural prices linked to production costs.
- The populations taking part in the agricultural policy choices.
The recognition of women farmers’ rights, who play a major role in agricultural production and food (cited in Spielloch, 2007, p. 11).

Through this definition, it is possible to understand how LVC’s movement on food sovereignty can be construed as the second element of Polanyi’s double movement. These acts of societal self-protection seek to re-embed the economy within society. Food and all its necessary productive assets, like land, water, and seeds are viewed by LVC as human rights to sustain life itself, not as ‘commodities’ as they are perceived in a capitalist production system (Munck, 2007, p. 99). It is thus necessary to de-commodify those ‘fictitious commodities’ in order to re-embed the economy within society. ‘De-commodifying’ can have different meaning depending on the

specific context, but one way this can be done is by maintaining productive assets (labour, water, land, seeds, etc.) in the legal, social, cultural, and political control of communities who are primarily affected by such productive and reproductive activities.

Ecofeminism helps to flesh out Polanyi's double-movement theory by highlighting the agency and leading role of women in the countermovement. Faced by threats to social reproduction, women around the world are establishing pockets of food sovereignty by reclaiming a subsistence lifestyle away from, or in parallel to, the capitalist market. As Leigh Brownhill argues, "the political project of defending and elaborating subsistence society is critical to the building of alternatives to socially and ecologically destructive global corporate capitalism" (2009, p. 18). Women struggling to regain or reclaim control of (re)productive assets are reasserting "the capacity of communities to produce their life without being dependent on outside forces and agents" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p. 4).

Struggle for Land

As Silvia Federici (2004) asserts, "land is the material basis for women's subsistence work, which has been the main source of 'food security' for billions of people across the planet" (48). She also notes another very important point about women's access to land, that it enables the rise of *other* countermovements. That is, subsistence agriculture secures the basic necessities of life so that people can wage a number of battles to tame the extension of capital into their lives without worrying too much about essentials such as food (Federici, 2004, p. 52). Indeed, ownership or access to land is crucial for women as they can use it to expand or maintain a subsistence perspective, which in turn gives them "an essential control over their health and the health and lives of their families" (Federici, 2004, p. 57). The following examples from Kenya, India and Bangladesh showcase women's agency in a contemporary example of Polanyi's

countermovement, food sovereignty, struggling against capital for access to land in order to secure a subsistence lifestyle.

Kenya

Sociologist Leigh Brownhill (2009), in her doctoral thesis on women and land struggles in Kenya, highlights the immense importance of women's direct actions to preserve common land used for community-oriented food production throughout the centuries. In the decades following independence (1960s-1970s), Brownhill notes that Kenyan women organized themselves into a wide array of groups to re-assert their rights to farm on indigenous common lands and to return to a subsistence lifestyle (2009, pp. 224-225). This led to the "resurgence of commoning" during the 'development' era, from the 1980s onwards (Brownhill, 2009, p. 230).

In the 1980s, facing rapidly escalating debts and a diminishing source of foreign currency revenues, the Kenyan state implemented structural adjustment programs (SAPs) at the behest of international institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For food production, this translated into a requirement to expand cash crop production as a way to make up for the declining world market prices of coffee and to gain foreign currency to repay the debt (Brownhill, 2009, p. 234). Peasant women, comprising 80-90% of food crop producers in Kenya, in the face of the resulting food insecurity and other threats to social reproduction, were firmly opposed to this expansion of the market into the food system. Brownhill traces back a few examples of women actively rejecting the commodification of agricultural production in favour of growing subsistence crops. In one such instance, coffee producer wives in Maragua in the mid-1980s resisted demands from their husbands to spend more time and space in the fields on cash crop farming. Facing hunger as a result of rapidly decreasing food prices, Maragua

peasant women started planting vegetables in between their husbands' coffee plants, despite contravening national agricultural regulations, and their husband's ire and contempt (Brownhill, 2009, p. 235). Later on, hunger still being a looming threat, the women in Maragua, as well as elsewhere in Kenya, chose to go even further by destroying the coffee trees in order to make space for food crops.

One woman stated that it was on the way home from a church service that she and her friends made a pact to destroy all the coffee trees on their farm that day. They did so, and helped each other plant food gardens in their place (Brownhill, 2009, p. 235).

This form of women-led direct action to revitalize and reinstate subsistence production in specific localities spread to other parts of the country and soon became unstoppable. Brownhill notes that this coffee strike empowered the women involved in three key ways. Firstly, they withdrew their labour from capital by refusing to work in the coffee fields; secondly, as a result of this labour shortage, they contributed to the decline of Kenyan governmental revenues; and thirdly, the women re-directed their land and labour towards subsistence food production (2009, p. 235).

Another women-led movement which developed in Kenya to foster food sovereignty and to fight the commodification of land and nature was the Green Belt Movement (GBM). The GBM's founder, Dr. Wangarai Maathai was committed to "enhancing food security by conserving forests, water sources and indigenous seeds" (Brownhill, 2009, p. 207). The movement was first initiated by the establishment of women's groups. Through a variety of seminars, these groups learned how to plant, propagate, and maintain healthy trees. The women involved planted the trees on public land to reinforce their claims to the commons, which enabled them to use it for local food production (Brownhill, 2009, p. 238). By participating in the GBM, women also re-gained indigenous knowledge about seeds and ecologically responsible

farming techniques. Brownhill reports that women became empowered as their role in healing the badly damaged ecology was socially recognized and highly valued (2009, p. 238).

Ultimately, women in the GBM impeded the free market's reach into the production sphere as:

[t]he land on which women planted and defended their trees was clearly land not available for mechanized plantation-style cash crop production. Women were becoming more and more adamant about the need to limit plantation agriculture and return the land to indigenous uses. The subsistence use of the land that peasant farm women pursued were, however, direct challenges to private interest who wished to buy forest land, clear it, and either develop or subdivide and sell it (Brownhill, 2009, p. 239).

India

Consolidating land rights for women to reassert a subsistence lifestyle is also a self-protective countermovement strategy of the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a grassroots post-development organization based in Andhra Pradesh in India. Established in 1983, the DDS works with poor, lower cast women in Medak district. After receiving pressure from these female members, the Society decided to focus their efforts on enabling land access and land ownership for women (Agarwal, 2003, p. 207). As explained in Chapter 2, the Green Revolution ushered in capitalist relations of production in India, posing a serious threat to society, particularly to its most vulnerable citizens, poor, rural women. It is in the context of this danger to relations of social reproduction that development scholar Ashok Kumbamu notes the development of a number of societal countermovements of self-protection (2009, p. 337). Of particular importance to the food system are the actions of the DDS, which seeks to establish food sovereignty in several villages in Andhra Pradesh via a concerted effort to assist land access and/or rights for poor women who wish to establish a subsistence lifestyle (Kumbamu, 2009).

Unlike other development organizations which focus on securing access to wage labour

opportunities to improve women's welfare, the DDS focuses on productive assets, particularly land, as a means of securing social (re)production, reinforcing food sovereignty, and enhancing women's social power (Agarwal, 2003, p. 216). It does so by facilitating both the leasing and/or buying of land for poor rural women who band collectively. Groups of five to fifteen women, in *sangams* (groups), with financial assistance of the DDS, lease land from local landowners and cultivate it as a collective (Agarwal, 2003, p. 207). Without the backing of the DDS, it would be nearly impossible for these groups of lower caste women to lease the land since landowners would not trust their ability to repay the rent dues. With access to land (either through leasing or buying), the women involved share both the labour and the produce. As Raj Patel writes: "the possibilities of this sort of commons are liberating" (Patel, 2009b, p. 170). The peasant women, who are assisted by workshops from the DDS, practice agro ecological and organic methods of farming. Alongside the subsistence farming of the leased or purchased land, women's *sangams* have begun saving local breeds of seeds, many of which were commodified and patented during the Green Revolution (Kumbamu, 2009, p. 345). Through their efforts with seed conservation, the women have succeeded in recovering fifty types of traditional crops.

Through these initiatives, the DDS and the women's *sangams* have addressed the "issues of biodiversity, livelihood, indigenous knowledge systems, local food grains, and food security" (Kumbamu, 2009, p. 344). This self-protective countermovement has wrestled away the market economy by de-commodifying food, land, knowledge, and seeds. The risks posed by the advance of capitalism into the food regime, such as the food insecurity, the loss of biodiversity, the commodification of productive assets, the indebtedness of small farmers, disappearance of the commons, and the disappearance of indigenous knowledge, have been greatly diminished in the villages where the DDS has accompanied poor women in their quest to consolidate a

subsistence perspective. The resulting benefits are abundantly clear: much greater food security, a balanced diet, control over natural resources, autonomy from the market, sustaining agriculture and livelihood, and the reclaiming of indigenous knowledges (Kumbamu, 2009, p. 343).

Ownership of productive assets is highly beneficial for women as the resulting autonomy, from both the men and the market, fosters empowerment. The DDS's women's *sangams* reinforce this point of view. Indeed, the benefits of land ownership for these lower caste women are immense. The participants report a "decline in social ills, such as male drunkenness, domestic violence, bonded labor and caste indignities, and an increase in their self-confidence, and the respect they now receive within the village" (Agarwal, 2003, p. 213). Other notable improvements include women's greater command over higher wages in times when they work off-farms, and greater control of intra-household income.

Struggle for Seeds: from market expansion to resistance

Raj Patel succinctly summarizes how the first part of Polanyi's double-movement, capital's expansion, spread to seeds:

Throughout the 1980s, the World Bank was bringing the market to the Global South... They [the proponents of neoliberalism] brought with them their tactics of enclosure not only the old-school seizure of land, but also new forms of commodification involving culture and knowledge, as demonstrated by the "biopiracy" of the intellectual property in seeds. At the stroke of a pen, the genetic information in seeds that had been bred by generations of peasants became a new El Dorado for transnational seed companies, intellectual property ripe for the taking (2009, p. 120).

As such, ownership of transgenic seeds by a few multinational corporations, such as AstroZeneca, Du Pont, and Monsanto, threatened the social reproduction of small farmers and peasants around the world for a number of reasons. First, peasants often cannot afford the

transgenic seeds and the necessary fertilizers which accompany them (McMichael, 2003, p. 183). Second, transgenic seeds weaken global biodiversity and thus endanger another material aspect of social reproduction, the environment (Katz, 2001, p. 714) on which peasants most directly, but also urban consumers, continue to rely on for livelihood needs. Just as with land, seeds represent an asset necessary for the reproduction of life in the household and the community. Women in the global South have historically been the stewards of seeds, and thus biodiversity, before the extension of capital into the food regime. As a result of this stewardship, women have become the forefront of a new countermovement resisting the agro-industrial control over biodiversity.

Deccan Plateau, India

As with land, the importance of seeds to women has been noted by a small but growing number of academics (see Pionetti, 2005; Sahai, 2004). The market's assault on the food regime has been well documented, and specifically the assault on seeds has represented another direct threat for women and for all relations of social reproduction. The protection of agrobiodiversity, which is necessary to attain food sovereignty, must thus be understood in gendered terms (Momsen, 2007, p. 153). Feminist geographer Janet Henshal Momsen (2007) notes that through their responsibilities for social reproduction, women keep seeds to ensure their subsistence lifestyle (156). Seed keeping enables food sovereignty, continuation of biodiversity, and independence from the market. The liberalization of agricultural markets is eroding these traditions of women-led seed keeping, as this subsistence practice hinders the spread of the commodification of seeds, necessary for the expansion of the seed industry.

In her research on the seed economy of the Deccan Plateau in Andhra Pradesh (India), Carine Pionetti (2005) examines the role of women as seed savers and their fight to maintain this status as the ever encroaching seed industry begins to change the local seed economy. Women

farmers assume the great majority of seed saving and dissemination responsibilities in the region because of their various roles associated with the social reproduction of their families. There are five reasons, according to Pionetti, that these women seek seed independence. First, they seek to diversify crops and food to ensure a healthy and nutritious diet for their households (2005, pp. 140-141). Second, being the guardians of seeds enables women to keep control of the selection practices, which means that they get to select the most pest resistant seeds for their crops (2005, p. 141). Third, this is the only way women can be assured of being able to sow their seeds at the optimal time, without having to rely on market availability or financial resources at the time of planting. Dependence on seed loans from other farmers or commercial seed providers often means a tardy beginning to the growing season (2005, p. 142). Fourth, keeping control of seeds enables women to build capital, in that they become seed lenders and in return receive grains which they can subsequently use for obtaining more seed: “the act of lending seeds becomes an additional source of livelihood” for women (2005, p. 142). And finally, women save their own seeds to secure autonomy. Through ownership of seeds, women are able to establish a subsistence lifestyle, thus creating another pocket of food sovereignty by reducing or eliminating their reliance on the market for food (2005, p. 142). As a result of their leading role in the domain of seeds, women invariably gain higher status in both their household and in their community. Furthermore, this control of seeds empowers women to demand access to land, and to consolidate more power within intra-household relations (2005, pp. 144-145). Even landless women participate in the keeping and lending of seeds to secure their livelihoods (2005, p. 150). Importantly, “women farmers can use seeds to implement cropping strategies to help fulfill their own vision of agriculture”, which, for women on the Deccan Plateau, means focusing on dryland food crops to enhance the food security of their families (Pionetti, 2005, p. 145). Another key

benefit of productive asset ownership by women is that it enables them to create and recreate relationships of solidarity and reciprocity with one another. This forms the basis of what Pionetti calls the 'localised seed economy', which "provides farmers with a local and non-monetarised source of seeds", enabling the community to exist outside the reach of the market economy (2005, p. 145).

[S]eed self-reliance at the community level may well be the only way for small women farmers to practice farming that provides sustenance and gives them some autonomy in economic, cultural, and by extension, political spheres (Pionetti, 2005: 157).

However, in this era of 'free' market growth expansion, the localized seed economy in Deccan Plateau that has been nurtured and under the control of village women is under threat. The embeddedness of the local seed economy within village social relations is challenged by the efforts of the seed industry to expand their market. Indeed, Ronaldo Munck, summarizing Karl Polanyi, argued that "there are long-term tendencies under capitalism towards marketization, commodification, and what we would call 'economization'. They entail a 'disembedding' of the economy and economic relations from social, community, cultural or religious forms of regulation" (Munck, 2007, p. 17). Political ecologist Carine Pionetti shows that in the case of India, the seed industry is aggressively pursuing an expansion of its market on a global level. It is growing and expanding by three means. First, biological controls exist by creating seeds that cannot be reproduced, such as the 'terminator' seeds. Second, legal controls are created through intellectual property right regimes such as Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

(TRIPS), monitored by the World Trade Organization.⁶ Third, policy controls are introduced where the state assists the industry in establishing certain market regulations (2005, p. xv).

Pionetti demonstrates how expansion of the capitalist market into the Indian countryside threatens simultaneously the subsistence lifestyle of the villages of the Deccan Plateau, the role of women as guardians of the seeds (and thus their social status within household and community), the food security of those farm communities, and their livelihoods. In short, the seed industry threatens *all* relations of social reproduction which create and recreate life in the Deccan Plateau. Women, far from accepting this market expansion into their lives, are standing up and using a variety of means and methods to keep seeds within their control. In their task, they must confront not only the agents of capitalism, such as seed companies, government officials, loan masters, but also their husbands, whom, lured by the appeal of more money if they grow cash crops, pose another obstacle to their autonomy and self-sufficiency: “Men farmers are relatively easily convinced by the extension workers or private dealers to adopt commercial crops as they are supposed to generate monetary returns and they are strongly associated with modernity” (Pionetti, 2005, p. 112). Perhaps women are more sceptical of the market and its promises because the responsibilities of social reproduction fall on their shoulders, and keeping control of productive resources is their only way to ensure the necessities of life for their families.

Despite the many constraints faced by these women, they “try to circumvent these obstacles and create spaces to pursue their own agenda” (Pionetti, 2005, p. 113). Some women farmers simply refuse to give up and continue to grow a variety of food crops in their small

⁶ TRIPS enable the privatization of genetic material and biological resources by allowing corporations to patent these assets (Sahai, 2004: 59).

portions of the family land. Many others use more discreet techniques, such as mixing seeds of their food crops with the seeds of the major cash crops. One of the women interviewed by Pionetti explains: “If my husband and I go together for sowing, I prepare the seeds of all varieties I want to grow and bundle them up in my saree while he is busy preparing the plough” (2005, p. 113). Other women wait a few weeks after their husbands sow their commercial crops to find spaces between the cotton or other commercial seeds to plant their own food crops.

It is because of their traditional control over seeds and their unwillingness to transfer this knowledge and control to the seed industries that these female farmers can counter the pressures of market actors in the commodification of crops and food. Ownership of seeds enables women to secure a lifestyle of subsistence, thus establishing food sovereignty in their communities. Indeed, “surrendering this realm to market forces is a form of alienation from which women farmers try to protect themselves” (Pionetti, 2005, p. 115).

Bangladesh

Another case study where women were and are the catalysts for the creation of a countermovement, described by Polanyi, is the Nayakrishi Andaloan movement in rural Bangladesh. This grassroots movement of small farmers aims to establish a form of agroecological⁷ farming in their communities. The “Nayakrishi Andaloan (NA) [movement] developed as a response against the overwhelming promotion and practice of chemical agriculture in Bangladesh and the erosion of community power in the face of encroaching and centralizing forces beyond the control of the peasantry” (Mazhar, 1997, para. 2). Rural women became the ‘natural’ leaders and catalysts of the Nayakrishi Andaloan movement as they faced

⁷ Agroecology refers to the “application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agricultural ecosystems” (Altieri, 2009: 103).

the threats to social reproduction engendered by the industrialization of agriculture. Women saw how pesticides affected their own health and the health of their family. Moreover, small women farmers in Bangladesh experienced a deep loss of social status as their role as seed keepers was displaced by the commodification and commercialization during the Green Revolution (Akhter, 2001, p. 55). Indeed, Polanyi's first movement, where the market expands into non-market relationships, wrought a number of ills in the Bangladeshi countryside, namely the economic, social, and political dispossession and disempowerment of the peasantry. The "privatization of natural resources, and the consequent erosion of common property rights and privileges, loss of seeds and genetic resources, and above all, the increasing perception of insecurity of food and productive resources" (Mazhar, 1997, para. 2). Not only did the 'perception' of food insecurity increase, but real food insecurity increased during this time.

Rural women most affected by these consequences were the first to respond to UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternative), a grassroots NGO that aims to revalue and re-establish a subsistence perspective in rural Bangladesh by supporting a peasant-led movement. The Nayakrishi Andaloan is thus a movement of rural women farmers who are reinstating a model of subsistence agriculture by banning all pesticides and chemical fertilizers which contaminate ground water, and who are establishing a holistic farming system of multi-cropping, intercropping, mixed cropping and agro-forestry (Mazhar, 1997, para. 3). A key goal of the movement is to preserve and save local seeds in order to re-establish self-sufficiency in seeds (Begum, 2001, p. 137). Women in the movement, who make up the majority of the membership (62%), are re-asserting their role in the collection, conservation, preservation, and regeneration of seeds (Begum, 2001, p. 137). They are rebuilding their own seed wealth by keeping seeds at home for common subsistence crops (Begum, 2001, p. 138). They have also set up nurseries in

most households in order to produce seedlings. Furthermore, the NA women have initiated community seed wealth centers to enable seed trading and exchanges with other communities. These seed centers are not to be mistaken for seed banks which operate within the capitalist market and which centralize ownership (Begum, 2001, p. 138). Establishing relations of reciprocity and redistribution is essential to the establishment of a subsistence lifestyle. The expansion of such alternative practices beyond the local community is a way to re-embed the economy within society. It is based on solidarity rather than on market economy principles. For Karl Polanyi, these characteristics of reciprocity and redistribution, present in non-market societies, tend to disappear once the economy is disembedded from other forms of social regulation in a free market system (Munck, 2007, p. 36). Through this process, women in the Nayakrishi Andaloan movement are re-establishing their independence away from global capitalist market circuits, by weaving the ties necessary to build a subsistence perspective, and by consolidating their household and community food sovereignty. They are, in essence, “resocializing economic relations” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 79). These rural women in Bangladesh, through their participation in food sovereignty, demonstrate how economies are social and political, not abstract concepts. Indeed, a central tenant of Polanyi’s work is to demonstrate that market economies are not ‘natural’ or ‘inherent’ or ‘innate’, but that they are political entities responding to certain needs and interests. Counter-movements can and do take action to re-embed the economy in its role of steward of societies and the ecology.

Conclusion

La Via Campesina developed the concept of food sovereignty as a strategic political tool for mobilization, to strengthen a countermovement of self-protection and autonomy against the

expansion of capitalism into global food production and consumption. All of the above mentioned examples can be described as instances of food sovereignty as elaborated by LVC. As Raj Patel argues, the concept does not set out the specific *how* of achieving food sovereignty (2009b, p. 122). The way in which food sovereignty is accomplished is for each community to decide, based on the local context and culture. What food sovereignty does require are rights: “they [members of LVC] want to exercise these rights over the stuff they need to survive: land, water, seed and culture” (Patel, 2009b, p. 122). Women, by maintaining or seeking ways to return to a subsistence lifestyle, are at the forefront of food sovereignty movements and food sovereignty is an example of Polanyi’s second part of the double movement. Women’s willingness to engage in these battles to control the very elements essential to food sovereignty, such as land, water, peasant knowledge, and seeds, results from the particular socio-economic and historical burden they face when relations of social reproduction are threatened by capital. Women engaged in these struggles over land, water and seed decommodification are repossessing what Polanyi called the ‘fictitious commodities’ of land, labour and money from market forces. Indeed, “any move from within society to remove any element from the market (‘decommodification’) thus challenges the market economy in its fundamentals” (Munck, 2007, p. 15). Ecofeminists Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen believe that movements to reclaim a subsistence perspective, often led by women in the global South, offer not only independence and empowerment for those participants, but they also lead the way for how we should organize societies and economies. Women engaged in subsistence battles to establish food sovereignty in their households and communities “provide a model for the kind of system we will need in a world of climate change” (Patel, 2009b, p. 170).

Conclusion

In light of the current context of growing food insecurity in the global South, I have developed a theoretical framework that I believe is useful to fully analyze the issue, referred to as an Ecofeminist Polanyian perspective. This theoretical orientation permits a thorough reading of food (in)security in the global South. I have demonstrated throughout this research that an Ecofeminist Polanyian theoretical framework illustrates that:

1) Capital has expanded into the food regime, first under the guise of ‘development’, which led to the introduction of food aid for the global South, as well as the introduction of western –style agro-industrialization, and second, under the guise of ‘globalization’, with the help of new constitutionalist measures, rendering the subsistence and small-holder agricultural sectors of the global South even more vulnerable to market fluctuations. Polanyi would probably describe these processes as contemporary examples of the first part of his double-movement: the expansion of capital deeper into social relations. The demise of subsistence agriculture is not, as the modernist narrative would have it, a natural evolution, but rather the consequence of political decisions.

2) Capital, in its expansion into relations of food production, distribution, and consumption in the global South, has commodified and marketized assets necessary to (re)production, such as land, seeds, water, and indigenous knowledge, thus putting in danger relations of social reproduction and the sustainability of ecosystems.

3) Rendering the provisioning of the means of existence in danger is not an unintended consequence of ‘modernisation’. It is rather a calculated project of capital. Blocking access to

the assets necessary to (re)production forces people, and predominantly women who bear the greatest responsibilities for social reproduction, to find work as waged labour in order to provide their households with the basic necessities. Women, it turns out, are capital's favourite pool of workers, as patriarchal traditions are used by capital to keep wages low, and jobs insecure. Forcing women into the global labour pool is thus a way for capital to reproduce itself.

4) Because women are so often the main people responsible for the subsistence and well-being of households' members, I argue that they lead, in many parts of the world, the movement for food sovereignty thus resisting capital's multiple and historical attempts to put an end to subsistence agriculture. This is a contemporary example of Polanyi's countermovement of societal protection. Women exert this social protection by reclaiming what ecofeminists call the 'subsistence perspective'. Through this ecofeminist prism, women are not victims of capital, but rather agents in the elaboration and construction of socially and ecologically viable alternatives to capitalist agriculture. As Leigh Brownhill notes, "women have been at the forefront of resisting commercial policies and promoting a return to a food-centered political economy" (2007, p. 2).

5) Women's fight for food sovereignty happens via a struggle to re-assert their rights to use and have access to productive resources such as land, seeds, water, and indigenous knowledge.

6) By engaging in these battles to de-commodify and de-marketize their lives, the women involved gain or reclaim an important social status in both their household and community. Establishing their autonomy at both the macro and micro levels results in women's empowerment, which subsequently leads to positive consequences for local gender relations and communities as a whole.

7) Finally, the type of agriculture practiced by these women offers “an articulated realization of a post-climate destroying agriculture” (Brownhill, 2007, p. 7). That is, these instances of women-led return to subsistence perspective show us what agriculture should look like in a world besieged by the combined threats of climate change, peak oil, and peak soil. They put in practice what Philip McMichael refers to as climate cooling agriculture (2009b, p. 244). By returning to such a food-centered political economy, women demonstrate that to ensure the creation and maintenance of communities around the world, it is necessary to become stewards of the environment. Human security for the majority of the world’s population is dependent on the elements present in women’s subsistence perspective. Farming techniques that respect the limits of nature, biodiversity, and the maintenance of indigenous knowledge are central to general human security.

So what is the significance of an Ecofeminist Polanyian theoretical framework applied to the question of food security and food sovereignty? I believe that the insights gleaned from this theoretical orientation enable a new reading of the rise in food crises and of the potential solutions. By this I mean that we can move away from the neoliberal policy prescriptions that prevail throughout international financial institutions, national development agencies, and NGOs. The general trend amongst these institutions is to view peasant agriculture as archaic and backwards and to favour switching to larger, ‘more efficient’ agriculture by realizing ‘economies of scale’ (Bryceson, 2009, p. 56). The belief that biotechnology can become the panacea for the multiple food crises in the global South is also prevalent in the discourse on food security (Bryceson, 2009, p. 56). As of late, organizations such as the FAO and the World Bank have begun to review their stance on smallholder agriculture. The FAO is now encouraging donor agencies to invest heavily in smallholder agriculture, highlighting the importance of the necessity

of producing staple crops in peasant communities (Bryceson, 2009, p. 59). Organizations such as the Gates Foundation's Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) have responded to this call and have mobilized investment in extension and inputs for African small-producers (Bryceson, 2009, p. 59). Despite these apparently encouraging trends and newfound recognition of the importance of peasant agricultural production, we must be very careful in evaluating these prospects. As Deborah Bryceson notes: "various environmental and social activists suspect that AGRA investments are intended to create new markets for western chemical and agro-industries, encouraging African farmers' dependence on non-sustainable agricultural inputs and favouring larger more entrepreneurial farmers at the expense of others" (2009, p. 59). It is in this context where I believe an Ecofeminist Polanyian theoretical framework is useful in helping to maintain a critical awareness of the potential 'solutions' to recurring food crises.

It is with this in mind that I will attempt to tease out some policy implications which could provide some 'real' solutions to food insecurity. In so doing, I will try to steer clear of the above mentioned 'solutions' which only replicate the same situation of capital's growth in scope and power. Indeed, some of these 'solutions' are ways for capital to mitigate its own consequences of growing human insecurity (Bakker & Silvey, 2008, p. 27). To ensure and protect neoliberal globalization, capital needs to prevent resistance by offering some "compensatory measures" which only serve to "co-opt political opposition" (Bakker & Silvey, 2009, p. 28). Furthermore, I do not wish to diminish people's, particularly women's, agency in resisting the extension of capital into their lives. I am merely suggesting a few courses of action which could, I hope, facilitate and assist these civil society demands.

Taking a cue from the ecofeminist concept of the 'subsistence perspective', it is necessary to focus on women's access to (re)productive resources as the fundamental step to

ensuring food sovereignty. First, securing women's access to land is of utmost importance. This can be done in various ways. For example, from the top down, governments can legislate gender equality in property ownership, as is the case on Rwanda where the government, faced with an unprecedented post-genocide female demographic, has implemented laws to ensure women's land rights (Daley, Dore-Weeks, & Umuhoza, 2010). It seems that this practice, though still in its early stages, is having positive effects for young women. Ownership of land "presents Rwandan women with the opportunity for an unprecedented degree of independence and autonomy from patriarchal control over property, and creates a potential avenue to significantly increase women's power, authority and decision-making capacity within domestic relationships as in the public realm" (Daley et al., 2010, p. 145). Autonomy from the global capitalist market is also important and having control of a plot of land is a source of independence for women's livelihoods.

From the bottom up, grassroots women's groups are coming together to buy or lease land as groups (Agarwal, 2003). Development agencies and civil society organizations can provide financial assistance for these endeavours or technical assistance. This could, for example, mean help in navigating complicated land tenure systems and laws (Kumbamu, 2009). Furthermore, the same financial assistance could be used by peasant women to organize community seed banks, where they could store traditional seeds and share with women from other communities, instead of having to buy seeds from agro-industries (Kumbamu, 2009). Another key policy choice which would go very far in ensuring communities' food sovereignty is to protect and enhance the commons, by way of laws, regulations, or treaties. For instance, ensuring that water and genetic resources stay in the public realm would enable communities to be autonomous from capital and would put a stop to new forms of enclosure.

Though I offer these options as potential ways to foster food sovereignty and consequently greater security for the majority of people, it seems very unlikely that states and international institutions would do an about face and suddenly square off against capital. As we cannot hope for much change from a top down perspective, we must look for changes from below. As Raj Patel argues, for things to change, we must “confront inequalities in power” (2009, p. 192). This means that we must engage in “direct action to make the world fairer” (Patel, 2009b, p. 192). It is of some comfort that the women involved in the subsistence struggles discussed in this paper have done just so. As Silvia Federici argues:

[T]hese efforts are extremely important not only because, thanks to them, billions of people are able to survive, but also because they point in the direction of the changes that we have to make if we are to regain control over the means of production and construct a society where reproducing ourselves neither comes at the expense of other people nor presents a threat to the continuation of life on the planet (2004, p. 48).

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