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FOCUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

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FOCUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The current ASEAS issue presents various approaches to food sovereignty – as a political struggle as well as daily practices. Throughout the last decades, agricultural transformations have turned South-east Asia from a food-insecure region into one characterized by high export sales in staple foods as well as investments in modern food systems. Despite the region's achievements in food security, it is increasingly confronted with new challenges regarding the quality and the social distribution of foods. This issue aims to explore different struggles for what we may broadly call food sovereignty, based on a methodological reflection on 'actors' and empirical studies into such diverse settings as a remote peasant community in Indonesia, soup-pot restaurants in Phnom Penh, and a network of activists in the Northeast of Thailand promoting alternative forms of agriculture.

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INHALT ~ CONTENTS

Sovereignties of Food: Political Struggle and Life-World Encounters in Southeast Asia

Christiane Voßemer, Judith Ehlert, Michelle Proyer, & Ralph Guth

▸ Voßemer, C., Ehlert, J., Proyer, M., & Guth, R. (2015). Editorial: Sovereignties of food: Political struggle and life-world encounters in Southeast Asia. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 8*(1), 1-6.

In Southeast Asian societies, food has always been at the center of diverse forms of contestation over access to land and other productive means, food self-sufficiency, and quality as well as food-based identities.

Political struggles and socio-economic differentiation in terms of food production, distribution, and consumption have dramatically intensified in the region. This has mainly been caused by enduring periods of agrarian reform, rapid global market integration, as well as processes of industrialization and urbanization in countries traditionally characterized as peasant societies.

Scott (1976) elaborates on the struggles and resistance of the peasantry in Southeast Asia in the context of emerging world capitalism and colonial hegemony – fighting against food shortages and the exploitation of their subsistence means. Following the region's independence from colonial exploitation, protests and other forms of contentious and 'everyday politics' of peasants and farmer organizations (Kerkvliet, 2009) have, of course, not withered but have redirected their claims against and adaptations to another 'food hegemon'. In this regard, Friedmann and McMichael (1989) critically analyze the establishment of state-led large-scale plantations for cash crop production in the Global South and the new socio-economic dependencies produced by the Green Revolution. Furthermore, the authors address the emergence of the current corporate food regime during the neoliberal phase of capitalism. In this regime, the hegemonic power emanates from transnational corporations and international finance institutions, controlling whole food commodity chains on a global scale and subordinating food and agriculture to the paradigm of profit-maximization.

The region's pathway of Green Revolution technology and concurrent regional and international trade liberalization have gradually and comprehensively led to growing social inequalities and agrarian differentiation. The interests and life-worlds of small-scale producers, landless people, fisher folk, and consumers seem to be threatened by the corporate food regime which favors large-scale and capital-and knowledge-intensive industrial food production (Manahan, 2011).

Critically addressing this structural violence emanating from the dominant food regime, a transnational social movement – *La Via Campesina* – emerged on the global stage in the 1990s. In sharp contrast to the food security discourse, originally promoted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and related international aid agencies stressing the need of agricultural modernization to combat world hunger, the social movement calls for *food sovereignty*. Food sovereignty stands for the attempt to radically transform global

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food-based inequalities by advocating an alternative path of small-scale agro-ecological and socially just modernity (McMichael, 2009). Aiming towards "the right of the peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni, 2007), it goes beyond global policy agendas aiming to 'feed the world' through technocratic fixes that have shaped the promotion of the Green Revolution in Southeast Asia since the 1960s/1970s (Ehlert & Voßemer, in this issue).

The alternative agenda of food sovereignty, which continues to be critically addressed as romantic rural nostalgia (Collier, 2008), is making its way into national and international policy arenas, gaining recognition in view of old and new inequalities: The latest global food crisis and high prices of rice constituting Southeast Asia's main staple food (Arandez-Tanchuling, 2011) continue to hit poor households in the region as competition over basic productive means like land, water, and seeds intensifies (LVC, 2008). Although strongly rooted in the Latin American context (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010), the discourse of food sovereignty and its political struggle increasingly gains ground in Southeast Asia (Reyes, 2011). In Indonesia, transnational food activists ally with the Indonesian environmental and agrarian justice movement, campaigning against biofuels and palm oil monoculture in the context of both the decline in biodiversity and climate change (Pichler, 2014; Pye, 2010). At the same time, access to safe and healthy foods has become a matter of complex global food governance that is largely beyond the regulatory capacities of states and untransparent to people making daily food choices. Vietnam, which is usually hailed for its agricultural and economic success since market liberalization in the mid-1980s, has recently been facing a number of food scares in relation to the abuse of pesticides and unsafe chemicals, hormones, and drugs in livestock production and aquaculture (Thi Thu Trang Tran, 2013), worrying local consumers. This obviously raises complex questions about food and health and has led several states in the region to adopt a discourse of food sovereignty, re-evoking the need for a strong developmental state as a guardian over food safety and accessibility as argued by Lassa and Shrestha (2014) for Indonesia. Furthermore, ASEAN's appropriation of the language of civil society and the discourse of food sovereignty is critically assessed as rhetoric cosmetics rather than stemming from a sincere commitment to fight hunger and social inequality in the region (Reyes, 2011, p. 224). Instead, in the aftermath of the food crisis governments would go back to normal by increasing productivity, Green Revolution mechanisms, and food aid (Manahan, 2011, p. 469).

The historical modes of peasants' resistance against colonial powers addressed by Scott (1976) are modified by the food sovereignty movement which, as a political actor, puts the contemporary concerns of a transnational peasantry to the fore. Scott has been taken up by current scholars on the contentious politics of peasant and farmer organizations (McMichael, 2009; Patel, 2009) and continues to inform actual political contestations over food production, distribution, and consumption in Southeast Asia. However, these new political discourses as well as the agenda of the food sovereignty movement itself leave many aspects unaddressed. This special issue relates to the political dimension of the food movement, but complements this perspective by drawing attention to how sovereignty over food is actually practiced as a matter of everyday food choice and identity and contextualized in local agricul-

tural life-worlds. Under the heading of "Food Sovereignty", this issue hosts studies on Southeast Asia that engage with questions of 'sovereignty' related to food as well as the nexus of food and health in a broad sense. The contributions enquire into very different struggles and sites of food sovereignty exploring the meanings of 'the right to define own food and agricultural systems', as well as the plural 'sovereignties' of food related to the multiple actors, topics, understandings and practices of food sovereignty

Three articles in this issue discuss different struggles for what we may broadly call food sovereignty based on empirical studies into settings as diverse as a remote peasant community in Indonesia, soup-pot restaurants in Phnom Pen, and a network of activists in the north of Thailand promoting alternative forms of agriculture. These empirical studies are framed by a methodological reflection on 'actors' in the discursive contexts of food security and food sovereignty, contributed by the guest editors of this issue.

In their article, Judith Ehlert and Christiane Voßemer apply the methodological approach of 'actor-oriented' development research by Norman Long to trace and criticize the limitations of the concepts of actors as passive aid-receivers in the food security regime, or as unified peasantry in the food sovereignty movement, and call for research to engage with the more complex *glocal* struggles for food sovereignty as rooted in the context of people's life-worlds in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The second article and first empirical contribution to this issue by Sophia Maria Mable Cuevas, Juan Emmanuel Capiral Fernandeza, and Imelda de Guzman Olvida delves into the role of swidden agriculture and its main produce – local rice varieties – for the food sovereignty of a community of peasants who identify as ethnic Tagbanua. As the ethnographic study reveals, local concepts of social identity, health, and deprivation are deeply intertwined with the year-round community practices of cultivating rice in the swidden. In the context of national policies that aim to extend the cultivation of rice as a commodity into this sphere of Tagbanua agriculture, the article offers an insightful and relevant contribution to understand peasants' everyday struggle for food sovereignty in the Philippines.

The third article by Hart Nadav Feuer centers on Phnom Penh's soup-pot restaurants as "urban brokers of rural cuisine" (Feuer 2015, p. 45), and as spaces where the travelling food concepts of customers and cooks are assembled into the idea and practice of a national cuisine. Analyzing the daily practices of choosing, cooking, eating, and discussing foods by restaurateurs and customers of soup-pot restaurants in Cambodia's capital, Feuer brings in a rare and inspiring perspective on what he views as every-day democratic forms of exercising food sovereignty among food distributors and consumers.

The *Alternative Agricultural Network Isan* in Northern Thailand is a member organization of La Vía Campesina and is at the focus of Alexandra Heis' article winding up this issue's section on Current Research. The article employs a political-economic perspective to delineate the global corporate food regime and its manifestations in the Thai context. Against this background, Heis analyzes the network's activities and discourses in the realms of organic farming, social relations of food production, and health as strategies of local resistance and empowerment. The article shows that these strategies of resistance are founded in vernacular concepts of identity and

build spaces where alternative meanings of and a more egalitarian access to good and healthy foods are enacted.

In our Research Workshop section, Amber Heckelman and Hannah Wittman present their ongoing work on agrarian responses of farmers in the Philippines to the challenges of climate change. This is part of a bigger and highly relevant project assessing "food sovereignty pathways in Ecuador, Brazil, Canada, and the Philippines" (Heckelman & Wittman, 2015, p. 87). The part discussed here draws attention to one of the countries which is already being hit hard by climate change and reports on how principles of food sovereignty are used to develop an assessment framework for climate resiliency and food security among smallholder farmers.

The Interview section comprises a conversation with Kin-Chi Lau from Lingnan University, Hong Kong. As a member of the Department of Cultural Studies, she initiated and currently coordinates an organic urban gardening project on campus. Among other interesting details on this, by now, well-established facility, she sheds light on the importance of local agricultural projects in the region. Rainer Einzenberger conducted this interview while Michaela Hochmuth edited the contribution.

Kilian Spandler offers insights into the 2nd Interregional EU-ASEAN Perspectives Dialogue (EUAP II) in our Network Southeast Asia section. Spandler highlights the importance of building interregional networks among young scholars and describes how such a process was facilitated by the EUAP II in different phases, including online communication to overcome financial barriers of travelling costs for young academics.

Two book reviews conclude this issue. A new publication by Melanie Pichler, *Umkämpfte Natur. Politische Ökologie der Palmöl- und Agrartreibstoffproduktion in Südostasien* (2014), was reviewed by Timo Duile. Stressing the importance of a critical-materialistic perspective in analyses of ecology and the state, Duile agrees with the author that such an approach is central in understanding why certain strategies of sustainability or transparency still fail in the contemporary political economy. The review is published in German.

Simon Benedikter and Ute Köster contribute a review of *Burma/Myanmar – Where Now?* (2014) edited by Mikael Gravers and Ytzen Flemming. The authors consider the extensive volume a solid source of information on Myanmar's current state, specifically with regard to conflicts in the southeast and northeast of the country.

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Food Sovereignty and Conceptualization of Agency: A Methodological Discussion

Judith Ehlert & Christiane Voßemer

▸ Ehlert, J., & Voßemer, C. (2015). Food sovereignty and conceptualization of agency: A methodological discussion. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *8*(1), 7-26.

The latest food crisis hit food producers and consumers – mainly in the Global South – hard and refocused attention to the question of global food security. The food sovereignty movement contributes to the growing re-politicization of the debate on 'how to feed the world'. From an actor-oriented perspective, the article presents a methodological reflection of the concept of food sovereignty in opposition to the concept of food security, both agendas highly relevant in terms of food policies in Southeast Asia. After framing the two concepts against the development politics and emergence of global agriculture following World War II, this paper elaborates on how actors and agency are conceptualized under the food security regime as well as by the food sovereignty movement itself. With reference to these two concepts, we discuss in which ways an actor-oriented methodological approach is useful to overcome the observed essentialization of the peasantry as well as the neglect of individual peasants and consumers as food-sovereign actors.

Keywords: Actor-oriented Research; Agency; Development Paradigms; Food Security; Food Sovereignty

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Die letzte Ernährungskrise traf landwirtschaftliche Produzent_innen und Konsument_innen im Globalen Süden besonders hart und zog eine erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit für Fragen globaler Ernährungssicherheit nach sich. Zur wachsenden Re-politisierung der Debatte darüber, wie die Welt zu ernähren ist, trägt die globale soziale Bewegung für Ernährungssouveränität bei. Der Artikel stellt aus akteursorientierter Perspektive eine methodologische Reflexion ihres Ernährungssouveränitätskonzepts, in Gegenüberstellung zum Konzept der Ernährungssicherheit, an, da beide Agenden von großer Relevanz im Kontext Südostasiens sind. Nachdem die beiden Konzepte im entwicklungspolitischen und historischen Kontext der globalen Landwirtschaft nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg verortet wurden, führen wir aus, wie Akteur_innen und ihre Handlungsmacht unter dem Ernährungssicherheitsregime und durch die Ernährungssouveränitätsbewegung selbst konzeptualisiert werden. Mit Bezug zu beiden diskutieren wir in welcher Weise ein akteursorientierter methodologischer Zugang hilfreich sein kann, um die konstatierte Essentialisierung der Kleinbauernschaft sowie das Ausblenden von Kleinbauern/bäuerinnen und Konsument_innen als ernährungssouveräne Akteur_innen zu überwinden.

Schlagworte: Akteursorientierung; Agency; Entwicklungsparadigmata; Ernährungssicherheit; Ernährungssouveränität

INTRODUCTION

The question of global food security has gained renewed attention with the latest food crises, which have severely affected food producers and consumers – mainly in the Global South. The ongoing debate on 'how to feed the world' is re-politicized in particular by the food sovereignty movement. This article methodologically reflects on the conceptualization of agency as implied in the framework of food security and food sovereignty. From our actor-oriented research perspective as development sociologists, we contribute to a deeper engagement with the role of different actors and their negotiations on food sovereignty and security, highlighting the importance of an actor-oriented understanding of food sovereignty to strengthen the relevance of the concept for development studies and politics.

Both concepts – food security and food sovereignty – are of high relevance to the context of Southeast Asia. The region has been presented as a 'success story' in terms of food security. This applies, for example, to the case of Vietnam which, following the country's market reforms and agricultural investments in the mid-1980s, moved from a severe and enduring state of food insecurity to one of the major global rice exporters nowadays (Tran Thi Thu Trang, 2011). In general, most governments adopted food security policies and the region became an experimental ground for the Green Revolution. Despite the region's achievements in food security, food crises still occur (e.g. the rice crisis in 2008). Struggles over the ownership and use of basic productive means such as water and land are ongoing, and pressing new challenges regarding the quality and social distribution of foods arise (Manahan, 2011; Thi Thu Trang Tran, 2013 for the case of Vietnam).

The broad transformations of agriculture and food in Southeast Asia cannot be understood without taking into account the modernist development paradigm and programs that have framed them for decades. Development agendas and food policies, as well as the debates in the social sciences, can be characterized by contradictory and often conflicting positions regarding the role of structure versus agency in shaping and changing societies. The food sovereignty movement draws on and shares Friedmann and McMichael's (1989) political-economic understanding of global food regimes. At the same time, it is a child of its time as it mirrors the actor-turn in the realm of development policies, embracing civil society participation and global social movements as actors of change since the 1990s. The movement has its origins in Latin America, but soon developed to become a global social movement from the Global South. As such, the agenda of food sovereignty also gained attention among peasant and civil society organizations in Asia, where a 2004 conference in Dhaka resulted in the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty publishing 'The People's Convention on Food Sovereignty' that focuses on the right of people and communities to food sovereignty (PCFS, 2004). In addition, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and several governments in Southeast Asia and beyond have started to adopt, at least rhetorically, the term food sovereignty (for Indonesia, see Lassa & Shrestha, 2014, for Venezuela see Schiavoni, 2014). In this context, the conceptual vagueness of the concept of 'sovereignty' becomes increasingly problematic. The questions of whose sovereignty is institutionalized in which spaces, and who is sovereign by what means

are essential to the quest of food sovereignty and gain momentum as a growing diversity of actors relates to it.

The term sovereignty, coined by legal and international relations scholarship, conventionally refers to the sovereignty of the state over its national territory and the legitimacy and right to impart policies without external interference. Regarding food policies, the nation state would be sovereign over food production and distribution without interference by, for example, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank (WB), and multinational corporations (Schiavoni, 2014, p. 3), which makes this reading attractive to national governments advocating for a stronger state regulation of food chains. The food sovereignty movement, though, focuses on food sovereignty as a 'right of the peoples' (Nyéléni, 2007), thereby adopting a pluralistic concept that attributes sovereignty to both state and non-state political actors (such as cultural and ethnic communities) who may co-exist but also challenge each other (Hospes, 2013, p. 122). Patel (2009) proposes the movement to reach beyond a plurality of juridical sovereignties and clearly raises a core issue of food sovereignty when asking how people can engage with food policies in a 'sovereign' way, given the existence of disempowering social structures. Yet, the history of development in Southeast Asia and beyond cautions against his proposal of a moral universalism and egalitarianism, as we will further discuss.

New conceptualizations of sovereignty seem to be needed that not only cut across different juridical understandings, but also engage more productively with food sovereignty as an embedded agency of people. For Southeast Asia, Kerkvliet (2009) and Scott (1985) have established the necessity to broaden the understanding of the political, recognizing the less pronounced daily forms of struggle and the 'weapons of the weak' in this regard.

To account for the meanings of food sovereignty in terms of agency also requires challenging the dualism of structure and agency in critical food research and politics, analyzing how a multitude of more *and* less 'powerful' actors negotiate and shape the meanings of food sovereignty in policies and daily practices. Such processes of negotiating social change among different actors are the focus of Norman Long's (2001) methodological approach to development research which he introduced to development sociology based on his own grounded theory studies of rural transformation and agricultural development. While the methodology was coined in view of the broader context of critical food research, the reason for this article is that actor-oriented approaches are largely absent from the current debates on food sovereignty (one exception is Long & Roberts, 2005).

The aim of this article is to discuss the problems associated with narrow conceptualizations of agency in the discourses on food security and sovereignty, and to highlight the opportunities of an actor-oriented perspective to deepen the understanding of people's struggles for food sovereignty as well as the meanings attached to it, thereby strengthening also the relevance of the food sovereignty debate for development studies. In this regard, we propose research that engages with agency beyond predefined arenas of political negotiations on food sovereignty and traces food-related agency in people's life-worlds. This opens the view to spaces of negotiation over different systems of knowledge on food, agriculture, and development, in which local food producers and consumers interact with state and international ac-

tors, transgressing the local micro- and global-structural level. After developing the context of development politics and the emergence of global agriculture which frame the emergence of the food security regime and the food sovereignty movement, we elaborate how actors and agency are conceptualized under the two frameworks and how this is commonly criticized. Following up on the observed ignorance of people's life-world agency as well as the problematic essentialization of collective agency, we discuss the added value of an actor-oriented methodology to address these shortcomings and strengthen an analytic approach to (embodied) and life-worldly food sovereign agency.

GLOBAL AGRICULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS: CONTEXTUALIZING FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The modernization of global agriculture and the development paradigms and politics following World War II frame the emergence and agenda of the concepts of food security and food sovereignty. Modernization theories in the 1950s/1960s, epitomizing the universality of the Western model of progress, were directly translated into development politics and interventions in newly independent nation states of the Global South. Large-scale agriculture – including land concentration, mechanization, irrigation, and intensification of production through Green Revolution technologies – promised higher productivity and was regarded as the main driver for further economic developments in the industrial sector. In this model, smallholder and labor-intensive subsistence agriculture in so-called developing countries were seen as inefficient traditional remnants that needed to be abandoned through transfers of technological innovations, agricultural know-how, and capital from North to South (Rostow, 1960). Modernist ideology proclaiming man's destiny to tame nature, made it a 'natural' imperative to re-organize the agricultural landscape to overcome environmental boundaries to productivity in the Global South. Furthermore, industrial development and urbanization required the re-organization of the social organization of work (Scott, 1999). Agricultural labor had to be 'freed' and absorbed as factory labor by the emerging industrial sector (Rostow, 1960). The era of 'catching up development' was driven by the developmental state in countries of the Global South and by development agencies in Europe and North-America as well as the Bretton-Woods institutions transferring capital, technology, and agricultural innovations to the developing world.

This context is referred to by Friedmann (1987) and Friedmann and McMichael (1989) as the second food regime (1950–1970s).[1] Deriving from world systems theory and regulation theory, their food regime analysis problematizes dominant development models perceiving national agricultural modernization as a linear process towards economic progress. By contrast, they focus on the unequal structural economic and ecological interdependencies in which nation states have ever since been inter-woven on a global scale. In their analysis, they reconstruct how intensive and extensive forms of capitalist accumulation reproduce structural inequalities between

1 The first food regime (1870–1930s) is characterized by extensive capitalist accumulation of industrializing Europe, importing foods from tropical colonies and settler-colonies that 'nurtured' European industrialization.

the Global North and South (see below). From the mid-1960s onwards, scholars of dependency theory critically assessed the devastating effects of the modernization paradigm and its respective development politics (Rist, 2008). According to the critics, the hoped for trickle-down effects of industrial growth had failed to translate into overall economic betterment of the rural masses. Instead, top-down re-organization of subsistence to state-led plantation monocultures for cash crop production increasingly left peasants in the Global South without access to land and traditional subsistence livelihood means (Akram-Lodhi, Borras, & Kay 2007; Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, p. 110). As a consequence, agricultural communities became more and more dependent on external food aid and foreign food imports of European and US-American agricultural surplus production. Dependency theorists see the reason for the failure of industrial growth in the structural economic dependencies between industrialized and under-developed nations but share the conviction with modernization theory that industrial and agricultural modernization are the most crucial to unleash national progress (Rist, 2008).[2]

The Food Security Regime

Deriving from this specific political economic context, the term 'food security' was first mentioned at the first United Nation's world food conference held in 1974 in Rome. Nation states pledged to combat hunger and food insecurity in the Global South by increasing global food production while guaranteeing price stability of staple foods. The technocratic faith in the productivity of industrial agriculture by followers of modernization and dependency theory alike led the debates around sufficient world food supplies (Patel, 2009, p. 664).

The global economic shocks of the 1970/1980s brought about the neoliberal turn of overall economic policies in the 1980s, which drastically downsized the developmental state. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) sharply cut down public investments, and dismantled price guarantees and tariffs. Former state subsidies of the agricultural sector were eliminated. The 1980s marked the beginning of the third 'corporate' food regime (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). Free trade agreements (FTA) as well as the foundation of the World Trade Organization in 1995 and its 'Agreement on Agriculture' further institutionalized the process of agricultural liberalization. State-centered agricultural development was gradually replaced by international financial and development institutions, and multinational corporations monopolized global agriculture by corporate-led technological innovations and proprietary regimes controlling entire food chains (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, p. 111).

Neoliberal policies have turned food into a tradable good from which many poor communities in the South remain excluded while domestic agriculture has been structurally downsized. Acknowledging that enough food to 'feed the world' was available on the global market, the United Nations World Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) refigured world hunger as a problem of *access* to food and reformu-

2 For a description of the respective economic development policy of 'Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI)', see Rist (2008).

lated the concept of food security accordingly.[3] Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011, p. 120–121) understand food security as an integral part of the current corporate food regime and as embedded in modernization theories of state-led development. The renewed role of the state within the corporate food regime is to provide food and agriculture-based safety nets cushioning the global food enterprise and its exclusive character. At the same time and in order to absorb the socio-economic externalities of the current neoliberal regime, FAO and international development agencies provide local food and agricultural aid. As the food security concept is deeply inherent to the food regime itself, functioning as an immanent development-political measure to deal with hunger in the Global South, we would like to call it the 'food security regime'.

The Food Sovereignty Movement

Whereas this food security regime was initiated by international agencies of the UN system, the transnational food sovereignty movement emerged "out of struggle and resistance" on the streets (Schiavoni, 2014, p. 2) where peasants in different regions of the world aired their complaints with the minimalist state and the global neoliberal food order. What started out as rather fragmented global peasant protests, culminated in the formation of the global social movement *La Via Campesina* (1993). During the Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007, leaders of the movement defined the guiding principle of 'food sovereignty' as "the right of the peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni, 2007). The movement's potent presence in the anti-globalization movement objecting neoliberal policies, free trade agreements, and agri-business monopolies generated a lot of media attention to its demand of an alternative agricultural model and visions of global socio-economic transformation.[4] The global food crisis, which peaked in 2007/08 and which was accompanied by popular protests and food riots mainly in the Global South (Bello, 2010), has certainly lent further legitimacy to the claims of the food sovereignty movement. The extraordinary boost of rice prices triggered national crises, for example, in the Philippines (Manahan, 2011). During this time Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam even banned rice exports to secure national food security (Bello, 2010; Tran Thi Thu Trang, 2011). Whereas ASEAN's responses to the global food crisis persist in increased food aid and Green Revolution (Manahan, 2011), peasant organizations, activists, and scholars have started discussions about alternatives to this productivist model. Control over natural and productive means by the "small and landless farmers, fisherfolk, rural women, indigenous peoples and other rural poor" (Manahan, 2011, p. 469) is increasingly being framed as a matter of food sovereignty in the region (Atienza, 2011; Caouette, 2011). In this way, food sovereignty goes beyond the food security concept as it re-politicizes global agriculture and the fundamental role and entitlement to food of the marginalized in this system.

3 In contrast to the conceptualization of food security as a matter of increasing production and a supply problem discussed at the first UN world food conference (see above).

4 For a detailed account on the genealogy of La Via Campesina and its strong roots in peasant resistance in Latin America, see Martinez-Torres & Rosset (2010).

Instead of searching for inbuilt solutions, it opts for a radical break with the corporate food regime.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF ACTORS AND AGENCY IN THE FOOD SECURITY AND THE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY FRAMEWORK

Having established the general context, we will now elaborate on how actors and agency are conceptualized in the food security and food sovereignty framework.

Under the food security regime in the Global South, authority to design and implement food policies is primarily granted to agricultural engineers and advisors because of their knowledge of Green Revolution technologies, as well as nutritionists and pharmacists because of their bio-medical expertise on micronutrients. Delivering the rational combination for the development of industrial agriculture and controlled nutrition supplies, these development experts are conceptualized as key actors of food security, and opposed to the hungry poor and ignorant masses in the Global South. In the course of the establishment of the food security paradigm, its agenda of modernization and its aid mechanisms, foreign food experts have fundamentally challenged the social organization of production and consumption in agricultural communities. Local agricultural and food knowledge have been constructed as a backward, residual obstacle to the universal leap from underdevelopment to industrial modernity. Modernization theories' positive belief in the regulating, determinant effects of structures and institutions of Western societies on 'the underdeveloped' is also mirrored in respective food security programs: Supposedly homogenous target communities of passive aid-receivers whose bodies wait to be fuelled are to be transferred from a state of under- and malnutrition to full-fledged productivity. In the food sector where neither food producers nor consumers are visible as actors with the knowledgeability and capacity to cope with everyday food-related challenges, this top-down paradigm of economic growth trickling down to the ones in need has been particularly obvious.

The dualistic conceptualization of actors, opposing global experts to passive aid-receivers, as well as its underlying paradigms of development and knowledge, have attracted numerous critiques. The logic of development as modernization, guiding the food security regime, has been problematized for its hegemonic claims of man over nature, specialist knowledge and universal science over situated forms of everyday life experiences, and modernity over tradition. For example, Hobart (1993) argues that the dichotomy constructed between the hegemonic 'progressive' global knowledge and traditional local ignorance carries a subtext of development as global top-down intervention rather than global-local interaction. The above binary constructions and their implications for the recognition of local agency in the Global South are also at the heart of the development critique voiced by prominent scholars like Escobar (1995). McMichael analyses them as mayor epistemological factors for the disregard of the global importance of smallholder farming culminating in the "narrative of peasant extinction in the modern world" (McMichael, 2009, pp. 152–153). He bemoans that, "in the name of free trade, development and food security, the current corporate food regime has imposed an 'agriculture without farmers' in a world equating industrial efficiency with human progress" (McMichael, 2013, p. 1). Neglecting

local forms of knowledge, subsistence and social reproduction, the conceptualization of actors in food security programs is also criticized for its gender-blindness. Agricultural development under the modernist food security agenda strongly favored cash crop production which is commonly dominated by male labor, whereas female peasants in many parts in the Global South tend to be responsible for reproductive subsistence agriculture (Boserup, 1970; Mies & Shiva, 1993; von Werlhof, 1991). As ecofeminist perspectives stress, a universalist and depoliticized agenda of agricultural development and food security completely overlooks the different and gendered positions in the global economy from where men and women struggle for their food needs. Furthermore, Pottier (1999, p. 16) criticizes the food security regime's technocratic focus on food preferences following the simplistic idea of 'people X enjoy food Y'. This reductionist approach decouples the individual from the complex cosmology of local food cultures.

These critics, coming from different perspectives, demand a stronger recognition of the knowledge and position of the gendered social group of peasants acting from a marginalized position of power. They meet and strengthen the claims for food sovereignty, which, as a political project, global social movement, and analytic framework, is concerned with bringing 'peasants' back in. It places food producers at the center in an otherwise technocratic project of 'feeding the world' in which peasants in the Global South in particular are seen as making up the most vulnerable group to the structural violence emanating from the global food regime (Schiavoni, 2014, p. 2).

Whereas the food security framework fully ignores local agency, the food sovereignty framework introduces the global peasantry as a collective actor, a counter movement challenging capitalist food relations in manifold ways and "to use exchange not for purposes of accumulation, but for reproduction of particular socio-ecological relations anchored in principles of self-determination/organization" (McMichael, 2013, p. 1).

This said, the food sovereignty framework has inspired and mobilized a diversity of publics, including, next to peasant movements, also workers, academic and public intellectuals, NGOs, and human rights activists in the Global South as well as the Global North. Bernstein (2014) problematizes the power differentials within the movement that portrays itself as the heart of a globally solidary peasantry but incorporates food sovereignty intellectuals' claims to develop discourse in concert with peasants, 'only' voicing their thought and experience in a more scientific language.[5] He is even more concerned with what is defended by sympathizers of the movement as a 'strategic essentialism' of the peasantry and the 'peasant way' of forming counter-agency in a capitalist global food regime. He opposes the movement's uniform construction of the peasantry, which he sees as a diverse group in terms of the social categories different peasants fall into – especially class and its intersections with gender, generation, and ethnicity. Yet his assumption of a total commoditization of socio-economic relations in a capitalist system leads him to disapprove of the potential of counter-agency exercised by this diverse group of peasants, and of the

5 This claim would also be dunned by postcolonial feminist scholars of development with regard to its ignorance of the complex problematic of representing as well as speaking from a subaltern position (Harcourt, 2009; Spivak, 1988).

existence and potential of non-commodified forms of agriculture and meaningful peasant resistance against capitalism.

Though holding on to the collective agency of the peasantry criticized as 'capital's other' (Bernstein 2014), the movement and scholarship on food sovereignty situate political collective agency in an analytic framework that strongly emphasizes structural constraints of agency. Approaching a food regime as a "rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale" (Friedmann, 1993, pp. 30–31), "the strategic role of agriculture and food in the construction of the world capitalist economy [...] across time and space" (McMichael, 2009, pp. 139–140) are at the heart of food regime analysis and its reception by food sovereignty advocates. The structural epistemic interest in understanding food as part of global capitalism translates into an academic approach to agency within predefined social categories and oppositions inherent to this capitalist system, as Friedmann reveals in her description of the interplay of actors within a food regime as "changing balances of power among states, organized national lobbies, classes – farmers, workers, peasants – and capital" (Friedmann, 1993, p. 31). Capitalism is understood by McMichael (2009) as developing cyclically, with periods of stabilization and transition, and his attention towards the potential of change inherent to the food sovereignty movement is associated with the latter.

This politically emancipative, yet structurally determined, conceptualization of peasant agency is reflected by the food sovereignty movement's radical claims to overthrow the capitalist system and the power relations attached to it, aiming towards a moral universalism and egalitarianism, which, as Patel argues, would be the only structural context in which food sovereignty could be enacted meaningfully by everyone:

> To make the right to shape food policy meaningful is to require that everyone be able substantively to engage with those policies. But the prerequisites for this are a society in which the equality-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism, and class power have been eradicated. (Patel, 2009, p. 670)

Yet, such claims are obviously problematic in view of the discussions above, both methodologically and politically. They implicitly fall back into modernization theory's paradigm that universal institutions and structural change are to free oppressed people's bodies and minds, denying that agency in a sense of food sovereignty could also be substantive in the context of a food regime which fosters global social inequalities.

The previous discussions have shown that the food security and food sovereignty framework clearly represent different approaches with a view to the distribution of 'agency' and 'knowledgeability' as well as the (in)visibility of food producers and consumers as sovereign 'actors'. In the food security debate, international organizations and their corporate allies are situated as the main actors in the driving seat. The food sovereignty movement breaks with the 'agriculture without farmers' and the peasant as passive and ignorant aid receiver and, by contrast, constructs the collective resistant actor of the global 'peasantry' as a politicized collective agent endowed with the entitlement to build an alternative food order. Yet, a common feature of the con-

ceptualization of actors in both approaches is a tendency to essentialize: The food security regime does so in its conceptualization of the ignorant local aid recipient, the food sovereignty movement in its strategic construction of a collective agency of the peasantry.

We propose an actor-oriented approach to engage explicitly with the empirical heterogeneity of actors shaping, reproducing, and challenging food regimes. As we will argue in the following section, an actor-oriented perspective is useful to deal substantively with relations of power and questions of sovereignty in the current food regime of the 'everyone' in Patel's citation – the peasant, the cook, the consumer, and so forth as actors, meaningfully struggling with and against food policies while exercising forms of food sovereignty in the context of their life-worlds.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF AN ACTOR-ORIENTED RESEARCH APPROACH TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The actor-oriented research approach that we draw upon in the following has been developed by Norman Long (2001) in his book *Development sociology: Actor perspectives*. In this work, Long takes up theories of social action, in particular Schütz and Luckmann's approach to life-worlds (1973 & 1984; see next section) as well as Giddens' (1984) concept of structuration.[6] Based on his study of rural transformations, Long promotes a paradigm shift from structural to actor-centered approaches in researching development processes. His critique of structural approaches to rural transformation and social change more generally – be they rooted in modernization theory, political economy or even postmodernism – is that they are driven by deterministic, externalist, and often even linear accounts of social change.

In the critical analysis of the global food order, perspectives of political economy and political ecology dominate. In particular the already introduced food regime analysis (see above) has become a prominent framework for understanding the way global food regimes develop, and for analyzing how the dynamics of global capitalism consolidate or destabilize food-related power balances between powerful and marginalized actors, and vice versa. Long's main concern is that such approaches are weak in understanding the dynamics of development surging from social heterogeneity and ambiguous local-global interactions. They risk overlooking the "empirical complexities and variabilities of contemporary life" (Long, 2001, p. 11), and present structural processes of social change as disembodied from the agency and the struggles of the multiple more *and* less 'powerful' actors that produced them (Long, 2001, pp. 11–12). Addressing such critique carries a special weight for research dealing with dynamics of rural development in the Global South in view of the modernist and colonial heritage of development, which has inscribed homogenizing views and interventionist paradigms to food security programs and development politics more generally (see above).

In order to avoid replicating these problematic assumptions on the level of research methodology and build theoretical approaches that capture social complex-

6 Giddens approaches situations of social (re)production as processes of *structuration*, based on the observation that "society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do" (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 77).

ity and human agency of more *and* less 'powerful' actors within it, Long encourages research to explore arenas of negotiation and structuration, spaces where different socially impeded individuals come to negotiate social change in a particular context of action (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

In this understanding, complex actors' networks generate gendered social spaces of negotiation[7] where different actors, their distinct forms of knowledge, resources, discourses, and symbols come to interact (Long, 2001, pp. 57, 113): Female and male peasants – collectively and individually – for example, negotiate issues of food production, distribution, and consumption with representatives of international agribusinesses and development agencies, state departments of agriculture, local authorities and family members, bringing forward ideas about rural development, or experiences of food production and perceptions of healthy foods that are shaped by technological, material, and symbolic food resources in their life-world.

Life-World Arenas of Negotiating Food Sovereignty

Whereas Patel bemoans the lack of opportunities for 'everybody' to engage with food policies (see above), Long detects and traces such engagements on the level of people's 'life-world': the social cosmos of individual actors, which they take for granted, experience, act upon, and thus constitute in situated daily practices (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973). Long's approach to life-world interaction clearly distinguishes actor-oriented research from food regime analysis, extending the question of political agency into the social realm of everyday life constituted by quotidian interactions between, for instance, members of a household or between farmers and extension workers.

Friedmann's (2005, p. 234) food regime approach analytically focuses on policy arenas, for example, when stating that "each of the past two food regimes was the combined outcome of social movements intersecting with state strategies and strategies of profit-seeking corporations". Yet, peasants do not necessarily organize in social movements to confront and exercise meaningful agency towards development policies that intrude their daily practices of food production and consumption. The Tagbanua community studied by Cuevas, Fernandez, and Olvida (in this issue) offers a classical example of a life-world arena of food sovereignty: Peasant households in the community are approached by state agencies promoting programs to commoditize former subsistence agricultural produce. And they deal with these offers by directly interrogating the meanings and potentials of such development interventions in the context of their interwoven daily life concerns over food and health, standard of living, cultural identity, and social reproduction. Food programs and agricultural development interventions are not simply adopted or rejected but negotiated by 'powerful' actors – in policy arenas and in immediate or indirect encounters with local rationalities in life-world arenas, such as the gendered social fields of the household and community. In focusing on these arenas of development, actor-oriented research engages with the more complex, ambiguous, and diverse processes by which particular

7 Dannecker and Lachenmann (2014) show that gender, next to translocality, is an axis that fundamentally structures such spaces of negotiation.

social "arrangements emerge and are consolidated or reworked in the everyday lives of people" (Long, 2001, p. 49). Actors are thus methodologically grounded as 'powerful' agents based on their ability to process and embed such diverse discontinuities intersecting in their life-worlds, making them capable of acting.

De-Essentializing Entities of Agency

What is constitutive of actors in Long's understanding is that they are in a position to formulate, reach, and carry out decisions (Long, 2001, p. 16), that is, to develop agency either individually or collectively. Generally, however, the actor-oriented approach is very sensitive towards the negotiated character of social positions and the fluctuant nature of systems of knowledge and identity. In consequence, social categories such as class or ethnic group are *not* conceived of as actors, as this would imply a reification of these categories in the sense of a methodological nationalism/essentialism (Lachenmann 2010, p. 9; with reference to Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). An actor-oriented critique of the essentialization of the peasantry thus reaches deeper than the critique of Bernstein (see above) and problematizes the empirical grounds of the latter.

It is from this stance that actor-oriented perspectives problematize the (re-)presentation of collective actors – such as the peasantry in the food sovereignty framework – as entities. Instead, it stresses, for example, that the reification of the 'household' a commonly used 'entity of decision-making' in development research neglects the complex interactions of unequally positioned actors (Lachenmann, 2009) and the different layers of belonging to a household. Especially, gender dimensions (Dannecker & Lachenmann, 2014), but also education and age shape decisions within households in intersecting ways, making the household a space of negotiation rather than a fixed entity of decision-making.[8]

Similarly, under an actor-oriented perspective, it is crucial to scrutinize the movement's claim of collective agency. On the one hand, its essentialization of the peasantry as 'capital's other' needs to be acknowledged as an important strategy to exercise 'coherent' agency in highly politicized arenas where civil society, states, and international organizations negotiate agricultural and food paradigms. On the other hand, however, the movement's quality as a collective actor and decision-maker needs to be challenged, by approaching it in itself as a space of negotiation where 'authoritative knowledge' about food sovereignty is generated, and where differently positioned gendered actors struggle to represent 'the global peasantry' or to be represented as part of it. One could critically remark that the movement's perceived mandate to represent the ones who are the most marginalized in the dominant regime (see above) draws on the same paternalistic and dichotomizing development discourse of empowering the 'weak' – a discourse which is framed by the very powerful actors of the food regime itself which the movement tries to resist.

This lens seems highly important to methodologically account for the empirical complexity of food struggles in people's life-worlds, for activists' diverse engagements

8 Herein we also see a major methodological pitfall of the household concept applied by the food security regime and food aid programs in which e.g. gendered food rules on distribution and consumption within the household are neglected.

with food-sovereignty, and last but not least the structures and dynamics of power within the space of actors promoting food sovereignty as members or sympathizers of the movement. This must not lead to a destruction of the political subjectivity of the movement, but may strengthen its capacity to openly negotiate and thereby act upon internal structures marginalizing certain groups, knowledges, rationalities, and meanings of food sovereignty. Research of Shiavoni (2014) as well as Lassa and Shrestha (2014) point to new issues of representation within the group of actors embracing food sovereignty as international bodies and nation states start to adopt a language of food sovereignty. An actor-oriented analysis of the movement, as a dynamic arena of negotiation itself, is helpful in this context to trace shifts in the movement's internal gendered processes of empowering or dominating certain actors and their perceptions and daily practices of food sovereignty. Such shifts may be generated (and analyzed) in the negotiations between individual peasants and activists of the movement and new actors (in particular national representatives and development agents) who join and shape the space of food sovereignty from a position of material and discursive power. Who empowers whom then becomes a contested terrain.

Global-Local Interfaces of Knowledge

Knowledge and its transformation, as well as 'knowledgeability' as a basis for social action, play a central role in actor-oriented research. Long (2001, p. 16) follows Giddens' notion of human agency, attributing individuals a 'knowledgeability' and knowledge-based capacity of coping with their life, given the manifold constraints of a social world, even under situations of extreme deprivation. Social action is shaped by internalized routines and explorative practices, as well as by social conventions and power relations (Long, 2001, p. 49–50).

As depicted earlier, development thinking and food policies have for decades granted epistemological authority to the expert knowledge of (Western) agrarian scientist and technical engineers. At the same time, agency-less peasants and their farming knowledge have diametrically been constructed as traditional, naïve, and lay. Nevertheless, this does not mean that farmers receiving food or seed aids have unambiguously taken on this assigned role. Hence, in this process of generating "authoritative knowledge" (Jordan, 1997), different systems of knowledge as well as systems of ignorance (Lachenmann, 1994, pp. 287) towards alternative knowledge still are contested, reproduced or restructured between different actors and their social actions.

Whereas the food security regime accounts for the superiority of scientific knowledge over local knowledge, for the food sovereignty movement global knowledge manifests in disruptive agro-productivist technology imperializing and destroying ecologically-sound, 'ethical' local knowledge. Both knowledge concepts entail a dichotomy, which the actor-oriented approach deliberately deconstructs. The actor-perspective methodologically centers on the interlocking of different bodies of knowledge, at so-called 'interfaces', moments in which actors' different cultural interpretations and social interests come to permeate each other, bringing to the front hidden rationalities of action (Long, 2001, p. 50). At such critical points of linkage and confrontation, peasants and development organizations substantiate claims or strategies and exercise power based on the integration of different forms of scientific, ex-

pert or everyday knowledge, global technical standards or longstanding experience. Following this, agency largely derives from the actors' 'knowledgeability' and 'capacity' to process diverse forms of knowledge as basis for social action and according to their life-world rationalities (Ehlert, 2012):

> Rather than seeing the 'local' as shaped by the 'global' or the 'global' as an aggregation of the 'local', an actor perspective aims to elucidate the precise sets of interlocking relationships, actor 'projects' and social practices that interpenetrate various social, symbolic and geographical spaces. (Long, 2001, p. 13)

It is exactly this empirical ambiguity of people's relation to both dominant and resistant conceptions of food and health that they interlink in their life-world struggle for and everyday coping practices of food sovereignty. Alexandra Heis' study of a local network for alternative agriculture in Northern Thailand (in this issue) is a good example to illustrate the ambiguity of the food sovereignty activists' approach to healthy food. On the one hand, representatives of the movement adopt globally dominant discourses of food security that measure healthy food in narrow terms of micronutrients. At the same time, on the other hand, they considerably stretch and challenge the narrowness of these discourses by empirically reconstructing them in their life-world context: Through the creation of green markets they establish direct food encounters between peasants and consumers that are not mediated by supermarkets or traders. In these encounters, nutrition tables, expiry dates, and sterile packaging – the symbolic markers of a global knowledge system that promotes hygienic, nutritious, and fresh food – become replaced by an assessment of 'freshness' in the direct conversations between producers, cooks, and consumers, concerning when the vegetable was picked, combined with sensual impressions like smell, consistence, size, and taste as indicators of overall quality. In a similar vein, Figuié and Bricas (2010) discuss the development of supermarkets in Vietnam. They empirically assess how the modalities of food supply in supermarkets enact new practices of assessing food quality. Sensory methods as described above and the trust between seller and customer are more and more replaced by product information supplied and consumer knowledge imparted. Nevertheless, instead of creating dichotomies between 'traditional' versus 'modern' forms of food qualification methods, the actor-oriented approach would focus its attention on the process of customers maneuvering in different markets and settings of food distribution by drawing on and combining diverse forms of knowledge. This process of maneuvering is directed by rational food 'information', but also by emic perceptions of food quality and concepts of freshness, taste, and delicacy.

Analyzing such interfaces, researchers may gain in-depth understanding about "how discrepancies of social interest, cultural interpretation, knowledge and power are mediated and perpetuated or transformed at critical points of linkage and confrontation" (Long, 2001, p. 50) – be they green markets or supermarkets. In order to theoretically grasp how the members of this movement, and the movement as a collective actor, construct and live their idea of food-health sovereignty, this ambiguity needs to be understood as part of the dynamic processes of negotiation in this translocal space of food-health and with a view to emerging rationalities of both food health and food sovereignty.

Embodiment of Agency?

An actor-oriented analysis of the sensual food-encounters in the examples above may also contribute to further developing the methodological approach of Long. Though the latter acknowledges Bryant Turner's (1992) work on the 'embodiment' of actors and action, the role of the perceiving, feeling, and experiencing body remains largely absent from his discussion. Also in the critical claims for food sovereignty, the body is largely constrained to an 'object' to be fed and treated well, as well as a victim waiting to be politically freed from the structural violence of neoliberalism and its food-related body politics. The calorific and scientific nurturing of bodies via food programs as in the food security framework on the other side strips the bodily agency off the actor. Turner (2001, p. 245), however, stresses the lived experience of eating – the smell, taste, touch, pain, and emotions associated with food – as expressions of agency over one's sensual and subjective body. Different settings than the studies cited above bear interesting hints towards the need to further explore the meaning of Turner's observation for the quest of food sovereignty. Furthermore, Feuer (in this issue) shows the entanglement of taste, embodied knowledge and sensual experience of food and eating in soup-pot restaurants as essential elements of the negotiations on good and healthy food on a daily basis. Cuevas et al. (in this issue) even find local meanings of food sovereignty in their research community to be grounded in the physical experience of swidden farming and the indulgence of the tongue in the tastes of swidden-grown rice specialties. As these examples illustrate, empirical accounts of the importance of bodily aspects of food sovereignty in production, distribution, and eating are readily available. It will be an important challenge for actor-oriented research to reconceptualize the food sovereign actor with a view to the embodiment of his or her action.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have pointed out the possible contributions of an actor-oriented research approach of development sociology to the study of food sovereignty and the quest of sovereign agency within it. To this end, we have discussed the conception of actors and their interactions in the food sovereignty framework as well as the food security regime it opposes.

A historical synopsis of the contexts of the food security and sovereignty frameworks served as a point of departure as it clarifies how the food security regime in the Global South is embedded into a wider context of a top-down modernist and interventionist development paradigm, shaping a technocratic and universalistic agenda of 'feeding the word'. The food sovereignty framework presents itself as a fundamental opposition to the food security agenda and the wider corporatist, capitalist global food regime it is integral to. Emerging from a global social movement, it revalorizes the role of the resistant peasant in a global food regime that postulates an industrial 'agriculture without farmers'.

While peasants and consumers in the Global South disappear under the aegis of the food security regime as knowledgeable actors, the food sovereignty movement reclaims them on the global agenda of food politics, introducing the global peasant-

ry as an unambiguous, anti-capitalist collective actor struggling for food rights. We argue that both conceptualizations of actors, though politically opposed, draw on similarly problematic essentializations of actors and their agency. They largely ignore the empirically visible manifold, complex, and heterogeneous struggles of peasants encountering, negotiating, and enacting development politics and programs in their everyday lives of farming routines and consumption practices, and thereby leave concrete and fundamental questions of power relations and sovereign agency 'on the ground' untouched.

Based on this critique, we see the contribution of an actor-oriented research approach in its methodological focus on how food policies are dynamically transformed and made sense of at *interfaces* of different actors and their food knowledges. It reveals how otherwise invisible food-related agency is unfolding in life-world arenas where actors at different levels, including the individual peasant and consumer, struggle over food policies and the authority of their respective (embodied) knowledges and experiences in defining them. This is where we see a crucial dimension of *sovereignty* that goes beyond its single-edged political notion, but assigns it to the actor as being capable of coping with everyday life and stimulating change not only through overtly political but, indeed, very mundane actions. Shifting the focus to the engagement with food politics in the daily lives of people and scrutinizing how specific forms of food sovereignty are developed in global-local interactions, the methodological focus on actors is thus a strong lens for addressing the increasingly pressing questions of sovereignty and representation within the food sovereignty framework.

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Where Peasants Are Kings: Food Sovereignty in the Tagbanua Traditional Subsistence System

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Food sovereignty is predicated upon the rights of communities to determine culturally meaningful methods of agricultural cultivation in order to ensure the security of their diets and their lifeworld. The article provides an ethnographic study of two Tagbanua indigenous communities in the province of Palawan, Philippines, and analyzes the relation between swidden agriculture and food sovereignty. Traditional swidden farming is an integrative system that defines social relationships, structures a spiritual belief system, and builds a fundament of the Tagbanua identity. As a cultural praxis, it is also central to the manifestation of food sovereignty within the market system, constantly being challenged by internal exigencies – as opportunities for cultural reproduction are limited by changing lifestyles – and external interventions from both private and public sectors. The article discusses how the Tagbanua subsistence cultivation system serves as the main mechanism through which indigenous cultural communities assert their independence from the market system, thus establishing local control over food and food production systems.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples; Philippines; Poverty; Seed Sovereignty; Subsistence Farming; Swidden Agriculture

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Ernährungssouveränität basiert auf den Rechten von Gemeinschaften, kulturell bedeutsame landwirtschaftliche Methoden zu bestimmen, um ihre Ernährungsgewohnheiten und Lebenswelten zu sichern. Der Artikel bietet eine ethnografische Studie von zwei indigenen Gemeinschaften der Tagbanua in der philippinischen Provinz Palawan und analysiert die Beziehung zwischen Brandrodungsackerbau und Ernährungssouveränität. Der traditionelle Brandrodungsackerbau ist ein integratives System, das soziale Beziehungen definiert, spirituelle Glaubenssysteme strukturiert und ein Fundament für die Identität als Tagbanua aufbaut. Als kulturelle Praxis ist er außerdem zentral für die Manifestation von Ernährungssouveränität im Rahmen des Marktsystems, der sowohl durch interne Notwendigkeiten – aufgrund der begrenzten Möglichkeiten für kulturelle Reproduktion durch sich verändernde Lebensstile – als auch durch externe Interventionen des privaten und öffentlichen Sektors herausgefordert wird. Der Artikel diskutiert, wie das Subsistenzsystem der Tagbanua als zentraler Mechanismus dient, durch den indigene kulturelle Gemeinschaften ihre Unabhängigkeit vom Marktsystem geltend machen und dadurch lokale Kontrolle über Nahrungsmittel und Nahrungsmittelproduktion ermöglicht.

Schlagworte: Armut; Brandrodungsackerbau; Indigene Gruppen; Philippinen; Saatgutsouveränität; Subsistenzlandwirtschaft

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, rice policy and public investment on agriculture had been mostly dedicated to lowland, irrigated areas, whereas upland rice ecosystems have largely been left untouched. Consequently, upland farmers relied solely on traditional cultivation methods and varieties to maintain rice production (Dayanghirang, 2011). As rice production pressures increase with population growth, rice exports, the loss of agrarian land to real estate development, and the invariable poverty of farmers, policymakers have been turning their attention to the uplands. This article is an outcome of a research and development project that took place in the frame of the *Upland Rice Development Program* (URDP), which was launched in 2011 and draws on the *Palayamanan Systems Approach*[1] and the integration of traditional agricultural systems. In particular, it aimed at sustaining the seed sources for traditional upland rice varieties through the establishment of community seed banks and the promotion of sustainable farming practices. The program has focused its efforts on the eradication of swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture (Philippine Rice Research Institute, 2011) because it is perceived as unsustainable given the rapidly growing population (Rambo, 2009; Suarez & Sajise, 2010). National policy promulgated by programs like the URDP envisions a future for upland farmers driven by growth in production, preferably through modernization and mechanization (Corong & Cororaton, 2005). The intention of the program is to increase the income of upland farmers in order to improve their conditions and cross the poverty threshold.

The intensification of rice production in the uplands was purportedly an effort to achieve rice self-sufficiency, but the consequent implementation of URDP is evidence of the "dissonance between governmental desires for rice self-sufficiency and pursuit of a more export-oriented agricultural economy" (Ehrhart, 2013, p. iv).

In early 2008, a food crisis hit the Philippines and put the issue of food shortage at the forefront of national debate. Until now, the Philippine government – while certainly not blind to the looming food crisis – finds itself unable to attain its goals of rice self-sufficiency (dela Cruz, 2014). Even though domestic rice production has failed to satisfy the demands of the domestic market, the Department of Agriculture recently reported the milestone of exporting 400,000 metric tons of premium rice to Hong Kong and Singapore ("For first time," 2014). The Philippine agricultural policy, including URDP, is based on the paradigm of food security which, however, was unable to serve the interests of the majority of food producers and has resulted in devastating effects on the livelihoods of peasants worldwide (McMichael, 2014). In contrast, the paradigm of food sovereignty, initiated by La Vìa Campesina, calls for "local production for local consumption" whereby food is valued based on its "nutritional and cultural benefits" in order to bring back control over food systems to nations and people rather than corporations who dominate the market (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010, pp. 8, 10).

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2013 to 2014, this article explores how a culturally shaped farming system that capitalizes on local knowledge

1 *Palayamanan* is a contraction of two *Tagalog* words: *Palay* means rice and *kayamanan* means wealth. The Palayamanan Systems Approach emphasizes crop diversity as a sustainable practice for upland agriculture, encouraging the simultaneous cultivation of various crops and seasonal crop rotation.

continues to provide for the needs of families and upholds a meaningful form of subsistence while generating income for household expenditures. The research documents agricultural production and the planting calendar of Tagbanua upland rice farmers in two communities in Palawan, Philippines. Open-ended ethnographic interviews and focus group discussions with Tagbanua farmers as well as migrant, non-Tagbanua residents were conducted in order to explore the role of swidden cultivation in ensuring food sovereignty in the Tagbanua villages.

The article discusses local swidden agriculture and its relation to Tagbanua livelihood and identity. As we will argue, the traditional farming system found in this study provides a preliminary framework for understanding how upland farmers in the Philippines assert food sovereignty by embedding labor cooperation, food distribution, and the means of production into social systems founded in Tagbanua culture and tradition.

In order to reach a more in-depth understanding of the current role of swidden agriculture among Tagbanua farmers, the research explores the complex meanings and functions related to the cultivation of the swidden. Following an introduction to the research sites, we present our research findings in two subsections. Firstly, we explain the system of swidden agriculture, illustrating how it is embedded within, and at the same time structures, the farmers' lifeworld and livelihood by weaving together elements of the spiritual belief system, environmental consciousness, social organization, kinship system, and subsistence. Secondly, while the swidden tradition continues to flourish, the system is being challenged by forces from within and without. On the one hand, the interests and aspirations of the younger generations are being diverted as their formative years are under the tutelage of the public education curriculum rather than learning on the field with their parents. On the other hand, farmers are lured by private companies into contract farming of cash crops like rubber and government agencies support upland rice production for export rather than local consumption. While these pressures hamper the continuation of swidden agriculture, the swidden is integral to Tagbanua agriculture, identity, and well-being. Thus, lastly, we conclude that the Tagbanua are likely to continue developing means to maintain their traditions while providing for the needs of their families, regardless of the intentions of both government and agribusiness efforts to replace the swidden.

THE RESEARCH SITES: SITIO DAAN AND SITIO STO. NIÑO IN BARANGAY APORAWAN

The ethnographic study took place in the villages of Sto. Niño and Daan in the province of Palawan. Palawan has been historically dubbed as "one of the least populated islands in the Philippine archipelago" (Lacuna-Richman, 2006, p. 37), it continues to be home to different indigenous cultural groups, including the Tagbanua who practice traditional swidden farming for subsistence in the uplands. Aborlan was one of the major Tagbanua *rancherias*[2] established under the American regime (Ocampo, 1996) and Aporawan remains part of this geographic subdivision (see Fig-

2 Rancheria refers to the reservation areas where ethnic communities were relocated during American colonialism.

ure 1). Today, the *barangay*[3] Aporawan comprises a total population of 3,008 persons in 509 households (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2012). A Tagbanua community of approximately 200 individuals continues to reside in Aporawan, living off their swidden fields and gathering non-wood forest products (NWFP) from their ancestral domain that they claim[4] located in Sitio Daan. This village of Tagbanua families is situated in the uplands of Aborlan that lack access to basic utilities like electricity and public transportation. The distance of 87 km to Puerto Princesa City, the provincial capital and public transport terminal, is best understood in terms of cost (Sitio Daan via Aporawan to Puerto Princesa: PHP 220)[5] compared to daily wages in Aporawan (about PHP 200). The houses are few and far apart, and residence in the area requires one to be Tagbanua or married to a Tagbanua.

In contrast, Sitio Sto. Niño is located approximately 12 kilometers from Sitio Daan, has become increasingly accessible through public transportation, and its population is more dense. Located beside the sea, it is a lowland agricultural community where wet rice paddy cultivation and commercial fishing are the main sources of livelihood. Some households also live from income generated from selling general merchandise in sundry stores. Tagbanua and *diwan*[6] live as neighbors in this more heterogenous community. Among the different villages in Aporawan, Sto. Niño is the closest to Sitio Daan and many Tagbanua families moved to this area in order to be relatively close to their farms but have access to public transportation, a larger market, and the local high school.

In the course of the ethnographic study, 40 interviews were conducted in Filipino with farmers from the villages of Sto. Niño and Daan. The majority of the interviewees were in the age group of 40 to 50 years,[7] comprising 15 women and 25 men who all acted as heads of their households. The average household in Aporawan had five members, but among the Tagbanua, the size of the household varied widely from two persons in a household (an elderly couple whose children were fully grown with their own families) to twelve (where grandparents take care of their younger children and their grandchildren whose parents work outside of Aporawan). All interviewees are refered to by their nicknames and agreed to have their names published.

In Aporawan, employment opportunities are few and the Tagbanua generally seek daily wages of around PHP 200 doing various jobs ranging from house cleaning, doing laundry, or providing farm labor for the entire day. At the time of the field research, the highest paid position was working on the road construction projects of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), which paid PHP 400.

3 In the Philippines, the *barangay* is the smallest political government unit, headed by the *barangay* captain and its council. A *barangay* usually comprises different *sitios* or villages depending on the total land area and the resident population.

4 As of writing, the Ancestral Domains Office under the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples is still validating this claim, therefore the Tagbanua in Aporawan have not been awarded their certificate of ancestral domain title. Such a title formally recognizes the rights of possession and ownership of indigenous peoples over their ancestral domains identified and delineated in accordance with the law RA No. 8371 Chapter II, Section 3 (http://www.gov.ph/1997/10/29/republic-act-no-8371/).

5 PHP 220 PHP currently equivalent to EUR 4.2.

6 *Diwan* is a Tagbanua term that refers to non-Tagbanua residents.

7 The youngest interviewee was 25 years old. The elder interviewees, many of them without birth certificates, did not know their age.

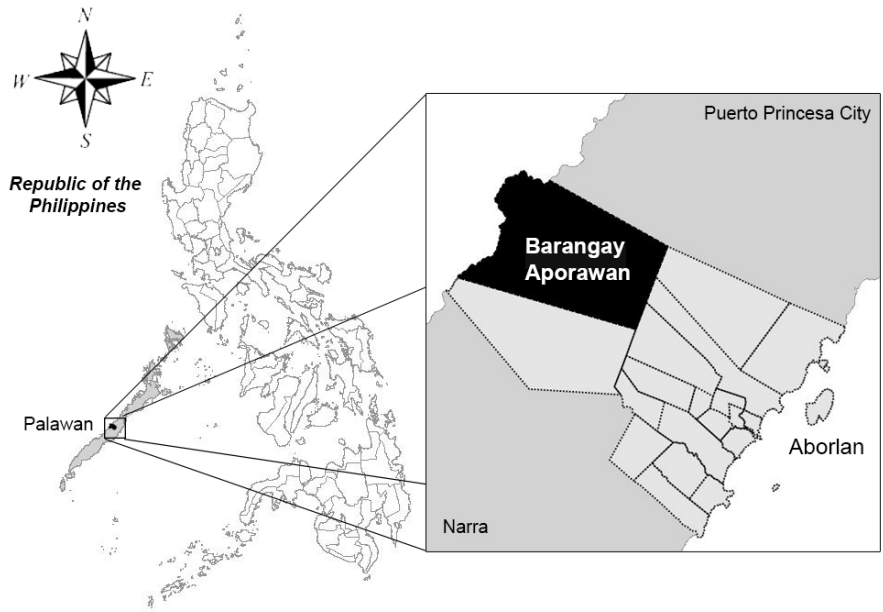

Figure 1: Location of research area Aporawan in Aborlan, Palawan province, Philippines (PhilGIS, 2013a; 2013b).

But the number of these positions is limited, and a contract of service is usually only issued for a short period of time – usually depending on whom one knows.[8] In a focus group discussion, farmers conceded that long-term employment (*pag empleyado*) that earns monthly salaries would be a comfortable life to aspire to – a life without risks and with little hardship involved. However, gaining such forms of employment would require having extensive education and few of the farmers interviewed (both Tagbanua and non-Tagbanua) graduated from elementary school.

For the interviewed heads of the household, managing family resources invariably revolves around managing their food resources – particularly rice. For the Tagbanua, their harvest is not quantified in cash, but measured by how long their food supplies last. In number of cavans of rice (approximately 50 kilogram), some of the farmers claim that their family can survive on 15 cavans while other families require 50, depending on the size of the household. A special portion of the harvest is set aside for the seeds while the surplus can be sold. Generally, the rice yield harvested by the Tagbanua is modest, as harvests from the uplands are lower than the harvests in irrigated fields (Pandey et al., 2006). One of the farmers boasted that his greatest harvest was in 2007 when he got 20 cavans, approximately 1.2 tons, from one sack of *Tipak* seeds. Usually, a family can secure their rice supply for the entire year in one harvest season.

8 One of the Tagbanua farmers interviewed said that he had been fortunate enough to have worked with DPWH for four months before he was forced to give up his contract to somebody else. He knew a local official who endorsed him towards the agency and facilitated the renewal of the contract.

SWIDDEN AGRICULTURE AS A MAINSTAY OF THE TAGBANUA LIFEWORLD

The annual agricultural cycle of rice cultivation monopolizes the time of the Tagbanua whose main occupation is rice farming. When a new agricultural year begins, the farmers clear an area for the year's swidden field by cutting the natural vegetation and burning the debris prior to planting crops. These swidden areas are usually claimed usufruct lands that have been left fallow for several years.[9]

Rice is the first crop to be sown on the newly opened lands in order to take advantage of the high levels of soil nutrients. Supplementary crops like tubers and corn may be planted between these rows of rice. Such alternative crops can augment the household food supply throughout the year, in case the rice is depleted. Moreover, as the rice plants are growing, root crops are also planted "under the rice" (*sa ilalim ng palay*).[10]

Tagkaingin[11] begins with the thorough clearing of trees and other vegetation (see Figure 2). This is usually accomplished by January so that the dry heat of February and March can prepare the field for burning. Folk wisdom maintains that the burning has to be perfectly timed before the first rains of the monsoon; upland research claims that these rains bring in higher levels of nitrogen, an important macronutrient for the rice plant (de Datta & Ross, 1975). When the soil is enriched by the ashes and softened by the first rains, this is the optimal time to start sowing the seeds before weeds take over the swidden.

In recent years, many respondents faced difficulties in anticipating the first rains of the year as the climate has been less predictable by the traditional calendar. It was unable to predict the El Niño[12] phenomenon and the delay it caused to the harvest. The families felt the strain of El Niño as rice stores were depleted and families had to eat sweet potatoes, cassava, or wild tubers as alternative staples. Despite these difficulties, the long dry spell was conducive to swidden farming, as it brought forest fires burning the fields so thoroughly that many were able to reap a large harvest from September to November that year.

As the year ends, the farmers move onto another field for clearing so that they can sow rice on another highly fertile swidden. This is the current practice and generally typical of tropical forest upland cultivation practices in the Philippines (Olofson, 1981), as also revealed by studies on other areas including the neighboring barangay Napsan (Conelly, 1992) and upland farms of the Bicol Region (Castoverde, 2000).

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9 Farmers avoid clearing primary or "virgin" forests since this is illegal and monitored by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

10 Farmers say that root crops are planted "under the rice", because the cuttings of sweet potato and cassava are literally planted under the canopy of the rice plant. One of the reasons why farmers prefer rice plants with thick canopies is because the shade reduces the growth of weeds, reducing the work needed for maintaining the fields, while also allowing enough space for the root crops.

11 *Tagkaingin* is a local term formed by the prefix tag and the root word kaingin used to denote the season or time for clearing the lands.

12 In 1998, El Niño prolonged the dry spell caused by a warming of the ocean and delayed the planting season by two months.

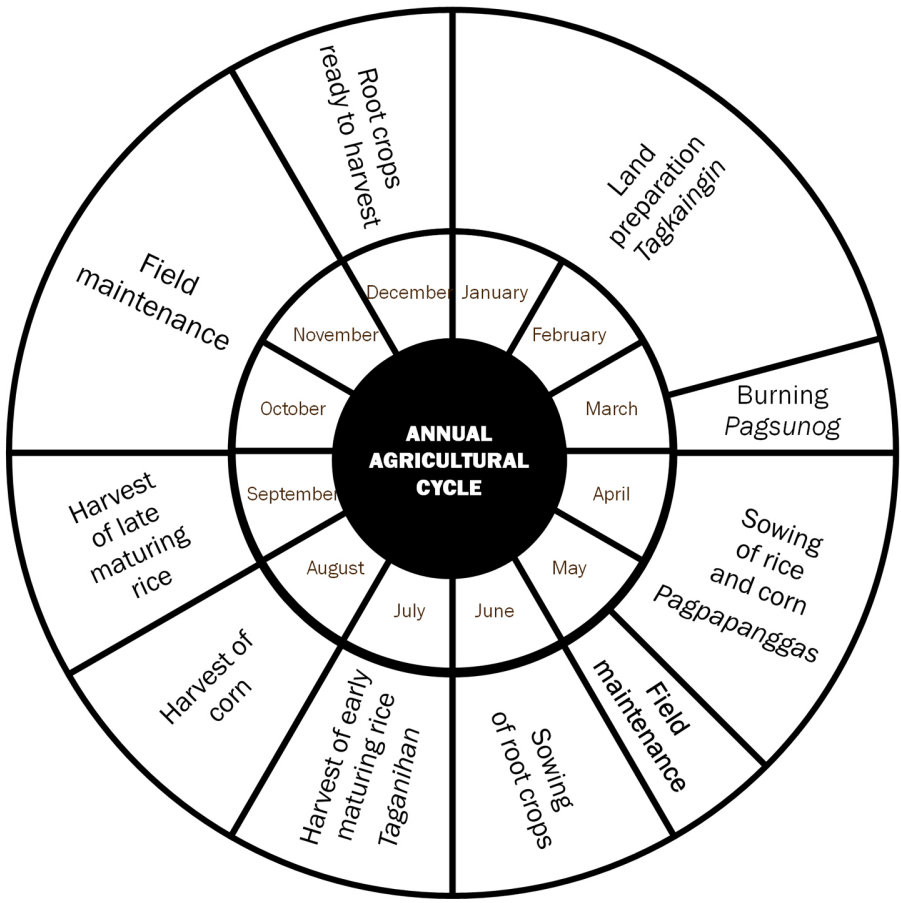

Figure 2: First year of the Tagbanua swidden calendar (own compilation from fieldwork).

SEEDS, KINSHIP, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

All agricultural endeavors begin with the seed (Harlan, 1995) and among the Tagbanua, rice seeds for the swidden can be obtained in several ways. One way is to receive rice seeds from parents when they hand over responsibility to their children (heirloom rice). According to custom, parents give their children rice seeds either when they start tilling their own lands or when they start their own family. Seeds can also be obtained when a farmer helps another through cooperative labor (*bayanihan*) during harvesting. Depending on the amount harvested, an individual can be entitled to one-fifth of the bulk that he or she helped bring in from the field. Departing from this tradition, farmers may ask for money nowadays (around PHP 200 as the going rate for a day's labor), depending on the situation. On some occasions, a Tagbanua farmer may be forced to purchase seeds from the nearby villages, but this does not occur frequently as farmers often find it difficult to exchange hard-earned seeds for

money: Carefully cultivated seeds that farmers set aside for the next season are given spiritual attributes and cannot be sold for profit. Also, considering the amount of labor, skill, and time required to grow the seeds, Tagbanua farmers believe that money would not be an adequate compensation. Therefore, the majority of the farmers get their seeds from their previous harvest, selecting them carefully from robust rice plants (*matinggas*).[13]

It is common among the Tagbanua farmers to cultivate several different rice varieties in one cropping season. Usually, this depends on how many seed types a farmer has available to sow for the season. However, the process of selecting which varieties to plant is not a random decision (Warner, 1981) and the farmer usually selects a favored (*malandi*) variety. One of the key informants to the research, Amay Bergin[14] from Sitio Daan, said that depending on the farmer's skill, his *malandi* variety can gain popularity. As the farmer's popularity grows, the number of people willing to provide cooperative labor in return for seeds will not be difficult to amass when the time comes. Other farmers shared that their *malandi* were the seeds they had obtained from their parents. Despite using other varieties, the farmers' experience proved that the old varieties still produced the more robust plants in the field.

Thus, among the Tagbanua, a farmer's skills build on his or her network of social relations that, in turn, will be helpful in cultivating and harvesting the swidden. In order to prevent exploitation and monopoly, distributing one-fifth of the harvested grains among community members is a form of reciprocity that is inherent to a system of swidden agriculture and dissimilar from the global market of agro-industrial corporations that control the supply of inputs in the corporate food regime (Fairbairn, 2010; Schanbacher, 2010).

RITUALS AND BAYANIHAN

Prior to land preparation, selecting which field to prepare requires a ritual where the farmer asks the *diwata Mangindusa*[15] for intervention to speak with the other spirits and request for permission to work the land. The farmer ends the ritual with the words "I know nothing. You can see." and is not allowed to revisit the swidden for three days in order to allow the spirits to 'talk' to each other. Rituals allow communication with the *diwata* letting the farmer know if the spirits will be benevolent, blessing the harvest, or malevolent. Misfortunes and tragedies borne of displeasing

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13 *Matinggas* is a local term that can be translated as 'robust'. According to the farmers, a plant's robustness is a combination of various characteristics including resistance to pests and diseases, endurance against drought or dry spells, a wide canopy, and an aromatic and delicious taste. Though the latter may be considered subjective characteristics, they are the traits that lead to traditional varieties being regarded as 'specialty rice' as opposed to modern rice varieties that have neutral aroma and different eating qualities compared to local varieties. Other characteristics reflect practical concerns: As farmers do not use pesticides or chemicals in their fields, wide canopies can help reduce the encroachment of weeds in the rice fields.

14 *Amay* is a honorific term referring to a male elder – *Amay* Bergin is a member of the council of elders of Aporawan who is considered to be the foremost expert in agricultural rituals and folk herbal remedies.

15 *Diwata* is a local term for unseen spirits that live in the natural environment. Rituals like these are reminiscent of the animistic religion of the pre-colonial Tagbanua. For agricultural rituals, Amay Bergin invokes the spirit of *Mangindusa*.

a malevolent *diwata* are not always limited to a disastrous cropping season, but may also go beyond the swidden, for example, by bringing illness to the family.

Another ritual conducted on the cleared swidden opens the rice planting activity (*pagpapanggas*) right before the sowing activity (*sungrod*) starts. Before dawn, the farmer heads onto his or her swidden in order to build an altar (*papag*)[16] and say some prayers asking for blessings (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: A papag for the diwata, an offering for the intercession of benevolent spirits (Photo by Sophia M. M. Cuevas & Imelda DG. Olvida).

The rituals come from the wider Tagbanua belief that a good harvest is not the result of a farmer's skills or seeds, but rather of the blessing of the *diwata* and God: "Only God can give life to people, right? Same goes for plants!"[17] Explaining plant growth in magico-religious terms, this supernatural belief system provides believers with peace of mind and helps cope with stressful events (Barber, 2012). In more practical terms, a subsistence economy can provide what is necessary for the family especially in a place like Aporawan where opportunities to earn income are low and the

16 *Papag* is an altar for the *diwata*. It is a bamboo platform ordinarily set in the middle of the swidden and is composed of several elements. The farmer assembles several local plants, water, and sand from the nearby river in order for the rice plant to emulate the characteristics of the different elements assembled in the *papag*. For example, a local river reed is included in the altar because the farmer wishes the rice to grow supple and resilient against the buffeting winds just like the river reed. The altar will only be cleared by the farmer after the harvest has been completed.

17 The Tagbanua believe that in between these rituals and the planting activities maintaining the field up until harvest, there is a miracle that allows the plants to emerge from the seeds, grow tall and fruitful after a few months. When that miracle takes place, humans can eat the rice that nourishes their bodies and gives them life.

prices of [consumer] goods – particularly rice – are high (Sobreviñas & Barrios, 2010). Swidden agriculture is a complex exercise requiring the successful orchestration of the climate, workforce, and timing to accomplish each activity. After the *Mangindusa* ritual has been conducted to obtain blessing for the selected swidden fields, the farmer taps into the cooperative labor exchange system within the community (*bayanihan*) to help clear the field of vegetation.

Since the planting is a crucial element that requires community cooperation, the Tagbanua have made pragmatic arrangements to schedule planting dates and announcing them to neighbors and relatives so they will know when to join the farmer in planting rice.

In order to finish sowing one hectare of land in a day, a minimum planting party of six women and one man, i.e. a total of seven people involved in the dibbling of rice, is required. Men handle the dibble stick and poke holes in the ground in a process called *pagtutugda*; women then follow to drop approximately seven to ten seeds per hole in a process called *pagbubudbud*. Compared to *pagtutugda*, *pagbubudbud* is more complicated and time-consuming and requires more workers, usually women. According to the farmers, older women perform these tasks best because they are used to evenly distributing seeds into holes made by the men across the swidden.

At the same time, however, *pagbubudbud* is a backbreaking task, as women have to crouch down to drop seeds accurately into the dibbled holes. Therefore, one of the respondents said that she preferred not to let her daughters help in the planting. Accordingly, she and her husband planted the rice alone, which took them several days to finish. While the respondent realized that practicing to sow would be the best way for her children to acquire the skill and avoid wasting rice seeds, it was more important for her to relieve the physical burden on her children than to pass on traditional swidden knowledge.

TAGBANUA IDENTITY IN THE SWIDDEN

"If you are a Tagbanua, you do swidden. Because that is the Tagbanua life. That is our life." *ate* Bebet[18] said in response to why they continue the traditional practice of swidden agriculture. Like other interviewees, she was unable to imagine a life away from the uplands, and in these areas, swidden is the way of life. *Ate* Bebet was raised by a mother who feared the *diwan* and their "foreign" ways. Living in the uplands, children like her learned the agricultural technology system for the swidden cultivation practices of Sitio Daan from their parents on the fields and in the forests. Rice cultivation shapes and affects every aspect of Tagbanua existence to the point that it is impossible for the respondents to imagine being without a swidden and still identify themselves as Tagbanua. This belief depicts that the indigenous (agri)culture continues to have strong roots among the interviewed farmers in Sitio Daan who were mostly 30 years or older.

When government policies constrain activities within the ancestral domain in the name of environmental conservation, this can entail displacement, especially when

18 *Ate* is a kinship term referring to an older female sibling within the same generation, but it can also be used to refer to older females without kinship relationship in order to express respect. It is used in this article in the diminutive form.

traditional means of extracting or producing resources are declared illegal (Dressler, 2005; Novellino, 1998). While cutting and burning primary forests is illegal, the Tagbanua have made adjustments by limiting their practice of swidden cultivation to usufruct lands. Yet, by continuing the traditional livelihood of swidden agriculture, indigenous identity and knowledge remain localized. This livelihood concurrently becomes their anchor to cultural heritage: By maintaining the swidden, they are still Tagbanua and have not lost their identity by adapting the ways of the *diwan*.

Rice production in the swidden does not simply satisfy the physiological need for food, it also fulfills a more complex role by ensuring the social and cultural well-being of the community. Beyond mere survival, the concepts of self and identity are shaped by maintaining a traditional lifeworld that continues to be relevant precisely because they continue to work.

The value of the swidden, it seems, cannot be divorced from people's struggle to survive. In an area like Aporawan, the market is mostly inaccessible and the prices for the small pockets of commerce that are made available are prohibitive.[19] Subsistence farming is therefore a vital tool for the survival of the Tagbanua household. Swidden farming does not only help meet subsistence needs, but also provides an identity.

TAGBANUA IDENTITY AND CHANGE

Food sovereignty seeks to provide a viable grassroots alternative to the predominant neoliberal economic stance of free trade (McMichael, 2010) that turns social relationships into mere functions of economic relationships (Polanyi, 1957). The Tagbanua have generated their own model of food sovereignty based on their indigenous knowledge systems and practices combined with their social institutions and the natural environment. They continue to practice traditional methods of swidden agriculture and refuse to utilize chemicals to augment their production. They continue to cultivate local rice landraces – some of which are heirloom varieties – following planting calendars according to seasons, and drawing on their social and family relations in order to participate in and benefit from cooperative labor exchanges on field activities. However, they do agree that there are certain trade-offs: The swidden does not generate any cash income, is time and labor intensive, has low yield output (in comparison with intensive wet-rice production), and requires long fallow periods during which the fields are unproductive. However, these trade-offs are only relevant within the context of an income-productive farming operation: Traditional and subsistence farming systems are a different story entirely.

The dimensions of wealth among the Tagbanua are tied to their geographic location – that is, their ancestral domain. Displacement strips their indigenous knowledge of relevance, nullifies valuable social capital, and renders them exclusively dependent on money as the sole currency with which to exchange goods necessary for survival (Asian Development Bank, 2002). Indigenous identity and knowledge remains localized: As comments on the role of the swidden for Tagbanua identity cited earlier indicate, interviewed farmers believed that they cannot be themselves

19 The typical sundry stores sell their merchandise with a higher mark-up price, due to the cost of transporting the goods, but also to take advantage of the captive market in Aporawan.

after being displaced from their homes – and if they are, it is necessary to return or to maintain a connection to the land. Among the Tagbanua, poverty and hardship are measured or assessed based on the kinds of food that are served: Lean periods are when they are served with root crops or when corn is mixed in with the rice as an extender. While policymakers try to measure poverty and the quality of life through the quantitative computation of income and profits, the Tagbanua simply assess the quality and variety of the food they eat. During a group interview with six farmers on the swidden, the farmers talked about the sensation of taste and how the pleasure of eating is based on what tastes are sought by the tongue. The inability to indulge in that pleasure, that is, when people can only eat enough in order to have the energy to do the work necessary to produce food and live another day, defines deprivation and poverty for the Tagbanua.

Another aspect overlooked by policymakers is the bodily conditioning that traditional farmers undergo throughout a lifetime of farming in the traditional manner. Physical well-being was reportedly affected by adapting the more sedentary lifestyle and the steady diet of artificial substances of the non-Tagbanua – requiring medical attention beyond the herbal remedies of the local healers. Thus, culture and identity are not simply embedded in the cognition of swidden farming tradition but in the physical practices that this tradition demands.

Clearly, the lifestyles of Tagbanua farmers are changing. They are expected to change more drastically in the coming generations with young children no longer spending their childhood gaining "performative knowledge" (Roncoli et al., 2009) under the tutelage of their parents in the field, but increasingly attending school and learning skills appropriate for employment. Evidence of such changes can take on various trajectories: The youth growing up in Sitio Daan whose homes are closer to the swidden fields are able to mimic their elders by proximity, but the youth who grow up in the heterogenous community in Sitio Daan lack the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for the swidden, and instead redirect their efforts to learning skills appropriate for employment. Bert,[20] a young Tagbanua, grew up working with his father to gather wild honey and helps in the field during the summer months when classes are not in session. He dreams of attending college and getting a job elsewhere to earn money for his parents. Meanwhile, a young girl from Sitio Daan dreams of finishing at the top of her class, learning about the history of her people, and teaching others to respect people from other cultures. Another marked difference in behavior among the Tagbanua who live outside of Sitio Daan and those who grow up in Sitio Daan concerns the children's games. In Sitio Daan, they mimic the planting activities of their parents while children in other villages preferred to run to their neighbors to watch television.

Changes in lifestyle of subsequent generations would also affect their survival strategies, belief systems, and, according to the interviewed Tagbanua, even their physical health, should swidden agriculture be replaced as a form of livelihood. One community elder talked about his daughter, a primary school teacher in the city, who felt uneasy and uncomfortable with urban life. He gave his daughter a few seeds and advised her to plant them, thinking that it would make her feel at ease. Surprisingly,

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20 The author has used a fictive name to refer to an 11-year-old boy who lives in Sitio Daan.

his daughter established a rooftop garden where she has her rice plants and felt much more content. As a Tagbanua elder who is attributed high social authority on agricultural issues, it was his opinion that planting rice is a spiritual activity that provides the soul with a connection to nature and peace within oneself. Otherwise, the elder said, a Tagbanua who does not plant rice would feel unhealthy and weak, prone to becoming ill, and generally miserable.

Assuming that identity is predicated in social existence – not in the nature of practices themselves, but in the way that these practices are valuable to a community – suggests that not only swidden agriculture qua itself matters, but swidden agriculture within its larger cultural frame of reference: the Tagbanua lifeworld.

CONCLUSION

One of the tenets of food sovereignty is "local production for local consumption" whereby food is valued based on its "nutritional and cultural benefits" (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010, pp. 8, 10). Locally developed cultivation systems like the Tagbanua swidden agriculture require environmental knowledge, cultural practices, and social relations in order to provide subsistence for themselves. Although their main preoccupation is the swidden, the Tagbanua (like other marginalized groups) utilize various strategies in order to sustain their livelihoods: gathering forest products in order to gain an income, seeking employment as day laborers (e.g. road construction, household help), replanting old swidden fields with fruit-bearing orchards for cash-crop production, and funding the education of their children. The swidden or subsistence food production of the Tagbanua is only one aspect of the entire web of economic activities that the farmers engage in, though clearly an important one with regard to the maintenance of the local food culture as part of the Tagbanua lifeworld and identity.

In terms of ensuring their community's food security, the Tagbanua's greatest hurdle is their lack of monetary resources, while their greatest asset is the persistence and conscious maintenance of their traditional food production systems. It is between these two poles that the Tagbanua assert food sovereignty. Despite the prevalence of the corporate food regime and the increasing impacts of the market economy, they are afforded relative freedom, control, and intimacy over their food and food-related lifeworld.

This system is, however, also challenged from without and within their communities. Clearly, the Tagbanua continue to practice traditional swidden cultivation in order to provide their families with rice and root crops (Dressler, 2009) that would otherwise be unattainable given the scarcity of employment opportunities within the area and the low level of education or skills that would make them eligible for employment elsewhere. However, interviewed farmers also see a need to improve their quality of living and aim to achieve this through participating in government programs like the URDP, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program,[21] or the Participa-

21 This program is also known as 4Ps and comprises a conditional cash transfer program implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in 2007.

tory Coconut Planting Program.[22] Despite their participation, however, these farmers felt that they have yet to experience the improvement and development such as mechanization and growth in production as promised by these projects. Admittedly, for the majority of the farmers interviewed, continued participation in the programs is predicated on the material or monetary incentives they will receive for it. Constructive development can only be realized when policymakers recognize marginalized groups as "active agents, working hard to transform their economic and social standing" (Gardner & Lewis, 1996, p. 59).

Would perhaps a paradigm shift from food security to food sovereignty be more attuned to the needs of the populace as it has been documented in the province of Bukidnon in Mindanao (Ehrhart, 2013)? In this case, a rice-growing collective composed of small-holding farmers founded on the principles of agricultural sustainability, collective marketing, reciprocal labor, and self-determination organized themselves against the prevailing trend of export crop strategy (particularly pineapple and banana) which had resulted in input-dependent agroecological systems, tenant farming, and debt bondage.

At first glance, there appears an insurmountable antagonism between traditional lifeworlds and the demands of 'modern' existence, but the Tagbanua themselves are not averse to participating in the market; however, they hold that such a participation endangers their sovereignty over the food production systems, and consequently, over themselves. Therefore, in order to ensure their right to food sovereignty, their strategies and choices in this regard must be respected, not only because they are rooted in traditions and experience, but more importantly because their practices continue to *work* and meet their needs. By remaining primarily, but not solely, swiddeners, the Tagbanua ensure their well-being and lead lives that for them are culturally significant and contextualized. By participating in the market, they recognize that isolation from the world is impossible. The power that they exercise by continuing traditional agricultural practices allows them space to negotiate indigenous identity within the encroaching modern world.

Integrating traditional cultivation systems with a diversified farming system like the *Palayamanan* would seem to hold much promise from the perspective of the Tagbanua farmers. Given their experience, they are willing to include additional varieties to their swidden and compare them with the varieties that they have been cultivating before. As a result of this study, for example, the farmers of Sitio Daan received seedlings of cocoa, coffee, and cashew. These were given to the communal nursery managed by the local cooperatives in order to begin the development of agroforestry in the area. Amay Bergin also petitioned the Philippine Coconut Authority for the release of coconut seedlings. As the leader of the Tagbanua community, he believes that they would have to find alternatives to gathering non-wood forest products in order to generate income and agroforestry plantations could provide a viable solution. Agroforestry plantations are also a strategy to maintain the swidden as the Tagbanua expect to be able to continue planting rice for their subsistence while selling the fruit of the trees for income in the coming years. Thus, regardless of external

22 This program is implemented by the Philippine Coconut Authority and manages the plantation of open-pollinated varieties of coconut trees in suitable areas.

interventions, the farmers aim to continue swidden cultivation as it provides them a livelihood independent of market forces. More importantly, the value of the swidden is an integral part of their identity as Tagbanua. While it may be true that not all Tagbanua will stay in Sitio Daan and work on the swidden, there are those who will remain to continue the tradition.

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Urban Brokers of Rural Cuisine: Assembling National Cuisine at Cambodian Soup-Pot Restaurants

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▸ Feuer, H. N. (2015). Urban brokers of rural cuisine: Assembling national cuisine at Cambodian soup-pot restaurants. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 8*(1), 45-66.

Pre-prepared food venues (or soup-pot restaurants) in Cambodia and other Asian countries make their decisions about what to cook in a complex food–society nexus, factoring in their culinary skill, seasonality of ingredients, and diners' expectations for variety. As such, soup-pot restaurants exist as tenuous brokers between rural food customs and the prevailing expectations of city dwellers. In urban areas, they are a transparent window into seasonality and market cycles, as well as an opportunity to encounter culinary diversity and participate in the consolidation of an everyday 'national cuisine'. Soup-pot restaurants, in contrast to other restaurant formats, craft an experience that balances the agricultural and social dynamics of rural eating customs with city comforts. Typically, soup-pot restaurants can accomplish this while also serving as a space of dietary learning, providing meals that are culturally understood to be balanced and nutritious, and garnering support for local cuisine from across the socio-economic spectrum. As a site of research, these restaurants can be seen as potential innovators for managing the consequences of industrialization on food and agriculture, facilitating democratic daily practices of food sovereignty.

Keywords: Cambodia; Food; National Cuisine; Nutrition; Urbanization

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Restaurants in Kambodscha und anderen asiatischen Ländern, wo vorgefertigtes Essen angeboten wird (sogenannte Soup-pot-Restaurants), gestalten ihren täglichen Speiseplan aus komplexen Gesichtspunkten der Ernährung, der jeweils eigenen Kochkenntnisse, der saisonalen Verfügbarkeit der Zutaten und den Ansprüchen der Gäste an einen abwechslungsreichen Speiseplan. Soup-pot-Restaurants spielen eine Vermittlungsrolle zwischen ländlichen Kochsitten und den Ansprüchen der städtischen Bevölkerung. In urbanen Gebieten spiegeln sie die saisonale Verfügbarkeit und Marktzyklen wieder und bieten gleichzeitig den Kunden die Möglichkeit, die kulinarische Vielfalt zu erschließen und sich so auch an dem Fortbestand der „nationalen Küche" zu beteiligen. Im Gegensatz zu anderen Restaurant-Formen, schaffen die Soup-pot-Restaurants eine Art von Ausgleich zwischen der landwirtschaftlich-sozialen Dynamik der ländlichen Essgewohnheiten und den städtischen Annehmlichkeiten. Zusätzlich dazu fungieren Soup-pot-Restaurants als Quelle für Nahrungswissen und regionale Küche für eine breite sozioökonomische Kundenschicht. Außerdem entsprechen die angebotenen Mahlzeiten den kulturellen Erwartungen für ausgewogene Ernährung. Als Forschungsfeld dienen diese Restaurants als Musterbeispiel für die Bewältigung der Folgen der Industrialisierung in der Ernährung und Landwirtschaft und für die tägliche Praxis der Ernährungssouveränität.

Schlagworte: Ernährung; Essen; Kambodscha; nationale Küche; Urbanisierung

INTRODUCTION: THE RURAL-URBAN FOOD NEXUS

It is a truism that cuisines worldwide originate in the diffuse rural sphere, typically in tandem with local agriculture. Rural areas provide a constant agriculturally-based influx of culinary habits to the cities through a combination of the dynamics of migration and the types of food delivered. In turn, these habits are gradually integrated into the prevailing – more cosmopolitan – contexts. While modern trade and logistics have made it possible for some of the produce of more distant rural areas (i.e. from other continents) to become accessible in urban markets, agricultural and also social inputs that are geographically closer (typically deriving from domestic agriculture) remain a powerful reference point for most culinary systems. Indeed, despite increasing disjuncture in the cultural economy of food and agriculture through globalization (Appadurai, 1990, p. 301), the material basis of many cuisines remains anchored, if sometimes only symbolically, to the food products and habits of the nearby rural sphere (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008, pp. 5–6). This is largely still the case in Cambodia, the focus of this paper. It should be noted that in highlighting this, I do not argue away the significance of the ongoing 'de-localization' of nutrition through trade, nor the increasing importance of ideological dimensions of cuisine, such as national identity (see Ferguson, 2010; Montanari, 2006) and commoditization (i.e. tourism and trade promotion) (see Chuang, 2009; Firat, 1995; Henderson, 2004). Indeed, these aspects are very much on parade in heavily urbanized and food-import dependent countries in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore and Brunei. In these countries, the competitive sensibilities of 'culinary nationalism' (i.e. Ferguson, 2010)[1] figure prominently (see Henderson, 2014; Ikhwan, 2014) and are even championed by the government (see Henderson, 2004; "Local Cuisine", 2012; Saunders, 2004).

With its grounding in Cambodia, a less globally dominant food player, this paper circumscribes many of the dominant trends in the research described above. It is oriented instead on understanding why the factual existence and/or imaginary of nearby agriculture and rural culinary habits exert such a considerable sway in spite of the increasing availability of imported food and culinary cultural models. In other contexts, this 'stubbornness' has been ascribed to the rise of food movements, the resistance to globalization (Friedland, 2010), or the efforts to protect biodiversity (Burlingame, 2012). In seeking explanations that more accurately characterize rural-dominated developing countries such as Cambodia, this paper takes a closer look into how the cumulative impact of the routinized transformation and consolidation of rural food habits in the rural-urban nexus contributes to a generalized popular knowledge and the awareness of 'national cuisine'. This paper stops short, however, of projecting the future of Khmer national cuisine.

In the sense that it is used in this paper, national cuisine is not represented by flagship dishes accessible to tourists (such as *Phat Thai*, Vietnamese *Phở*, Cambodian *Amok* curry, or Laotian *Larb*), what is inscribed in cookbooks (see Appadurai, 1988), nor by the foods named after a modern state such as Singaporean fish-head curry

1 Addressing the competitive cross-border identity building directly, Ferguson (2010, p. 105) writes: "The movement of goods and the blurring of borders notwithstanding, more and more countries propose culinary distinction as a marker of identity. From Austria to Singapore, from Norway to Brazil, aspiring culinary countries vaunt their edible traditions and indigenous foods to promote both tourism and exports."

(these anyway being regularly contested). For the purposes of this paper, I define national cuisine as the range of foods that are widely known, qualitatively understood, and regularly consumed by urban people of a collective ethnic background. Cambodia, and more specifically its capital Phnom Penh, is a model case in this respect as it is fairly homogeneous in terms of ethnicity (98 percent Khmer)[2] and is still in the early stages of urbanization following a period of forced ruralization in the 1970's (described more thoroughly in Fallavier, 2003; Simone, 2008). The country is still 73 percent rural/agriculturally-based, yet it is experiencing rapid rural-to-urban migration,[3] with the consequence that the nexus between agrarian change and urbanization presents a particularly active arena in which national cuisine is being negotiated and forged. The goal of this research is to examine the emergence of national cuisine at the rural-urban interface, preferably in a setting in which identity politics and globalization take a backseat to the daily routines of sourcing ingredients and making food. In this everyday setting, what can we observe about the negotiation over national cuisine and the role played by food makers, consumers, and food markets?

The search for a locale expressing this dynamic led me to what I refer to as a soup-pot restaurant, which is essentially a working class purveyor of various rural Khmer culinary traditions. For Cambodians, soup-pot restaurants fall under the linguistic rubric of *haan bai* (the generic term for 'rice stall'), which includes both stalls serving made-to-order food as well as those serving pre-prepared food[4] (usually from large aluminum pots; see Figure 1 for a typical soup-pot shop front). As described in greater detail in the sections below, soup-pot restaurants are typically inexpensive and family-run, making them suitable not only for recent immigrants with low wages and conservatives tastes, but also for anyone seeking a culinary experience comparable to home cooking. As a consequence, the owner-operators of soup-pot restaurants play the role of brokers between their individual (usually rural) culinary heritage and urban expectations of food, hygiene, and service. With this dynamic in mind, this research set out to study how the day-to-day operations of these ubiquitous restaurants work to consolidate the diversity of Khmer cuisine, both in their independent cooking decisions and in their response to customer demand. Because soup-pot restaurants capture such a wide range of customers in terms of demographics (a point I will address below), culinary trends that emerge in the routine of operating these restaurants are, in the evolutionary sense, continually selecting and distilling the diversity of regional Khmer cuisine into a national cuisine. In doing so, they are creating a basis for food sovereignty and setting the stage for managing globalization on more advantageous terms.

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2 Based on the Cambodian Social Economic Survey, 2013. For more details, see National Institute of Statistics (NIS): http://www.nis.gov.kh/index.php/en/find-statistic/social-statistics/cses/cses-tables.html

3 Nationwide, urban population growth from 2000 to 2010 has averaged around 4.3 percent (Cambodia Development Resource Institute, 2012). This statistic does not, however, account for dynamics introduced by temporary rural-urban mobility, commuting, and the predominance of only two major cities in absorbing urban migrants.

4 Curiously, there is no specific word or phrase or even a generally agreed-upon set of terms in Khmer for 'soup-pot restaurant'. In discussions about this subject, informants and I would generally agree to talk about 'places serving pre-prepared food' or 'food in pots'.

Figure 1: A soup-pot shop front in Phnom Penh (photo by Hart N. Feuer).

For this research, I studied a cross-section of the restaurant scene between January and November 2014, representing diners, restaurateurs, and local markets in Phnom Penh. Specifically, I surveyed 120 Phnom Penh residents cluster-sampled across the categories of age, socio-economic class, and gender.[5] I also conducted embedded participant observation in 15 soup-pot restaurants and 9 to-order restaurants in different economic zones of the city. In addition, I accompanied the chefs of 10 restaurants (both soup-pot and to-order) to fresh food markets over a period of 6 months to ascertain the logic behind food purchases and the dynamics of seasonality of vegetables, fish, and fruit. All interviews were conducted by the author in Khmer language and all quotes appearing in this text were also translated by the author.

SOUP-POT RESTAURANTS AND THE URBAN INTERFACE

In many Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia that are experiencing a transition from small-holder agriculture to corporate farming and urban life, the basis of nutrition (and hence, of culinary practices) is necessarily shifting. The nature of this change, by definition, is associated with the dynamics of urbanization – who, how many, and for what reason are people moving? Although Phnom Penh's migration is dominated by a young demographic – primarily young women seeking jobs in the textile industry and young men with insufficient land to farm – the phenomena of

5 Interviews were conducted randomly over a period of three months in June-August 2014 at the parking area of the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority – a place where nearly every family will come to pay the water bill on a 3-month cycle.

land sale, dispossession, and micro-entrepreneurship have continued to bring entire families into the city (Derks, 2008, p. 7; Scheidel et al., 2013). However, even as the nominal levels of urbanization have increased, observers of Phnom Penh have, in fact, characterized the enduring rural character of the city (see Saphan, 2011; Simone, 2008), describing it as having the atmosphere of a large village. In previous work (Feuer, 2011), I have also outlined how the farming background of most current city dwellers in Cambodia is associated with greater appreciation of food variety, the quality of produce, and the sanctity of balanced meals. This is necessarily associated with the way in which cuisine in the city is understood, negotiated, and evaluated. A first-generation city dweller in Phnom Penh highlighted these changes clearly in a conversation in a soup-pot restaurant:

> When I was growing up, we only ate foods that were in season. Every season was an exciting time to get something new and fresh. Sometimes the fruit trees were ready, sometimes the long beans were ripe. My parents did not even have to harvest themselves because we, children were so happy to go collect things from the fields. At that time, I thought we just got lucky and nature gave us things to eat when we needed them but now I know that my parents planted everything carefully so we would have tasty and good things all year long. [HF: How about now, in Phnom Penh?] In the city? It feels a bit like this but different. We can have anything, anytime we want but now we have to decide every day what we should eat; before, the fields helped decide this for us. And now, we only enjoy real fresh products if we get visitors from the countryside or if we visit home. (female accountant, lower-middle class, age 28, Phnom Penh, personal communication, 3. February 2014)

As this woman describes, not only has the basis of nutrition planning moved from long-term (i.e. using an agricultural time-frame) to short-term (i.e. daily decisions at the urban market) but the relationship between seasonal agriculture and food preparation has also deteriorated as a result of living in the city. In other words, culinary and nutritional habits that were rooted in a nexus of agricultural planning and agro-ecological constraints (see Halwart, 2006) are now more a matter of arbitrary, immediate food cravings and availability in the city markets (Drewnowski & Popkin, 1997). This narrative of becoming alienated from the rhythms of seasonality and nature re-appeared in various forms in most conversations I led with first and even second generation immigrants to Phnom Penh whom I met in soup-pot restaurants. A related, and similarly popular topic, however, was that eating at soup-pot restaurants was a step back into this rural food atmosphere, with respondents describing the restaurants variously as 'pure Khmer', 'real Khmer', 'like home', 'traditional', 'the usual [positive connotation]', and 'healthy'.

While the accuracy of these various descriptions will be taken up over the next few sections, it is important to stand back and ask if the borderline-romantic notions surrounding soup-pot restaurants are actually relevant: Do they translate into popularity? The short answer is: They are unquestionably the most popular dining format[6] in Phnom Penh among all socio-economic levels. According to my survey of

6 See Table 2 for a listing of competing restaurant formats.

120 residents (excluding foreigners) in 2014, all varieties of *haan bai*, which includes both to-order restaurants and soup-pot restaurants, host approximately 78 percent of all meals out in the city (see Table 1). Of all the meals in *haan bai*, 72 percent are taken in soup-pot restaurants (28 percent in to-order restaurants). Another way of seeing this is that 56 percent of all meals out (including to-order restaurants, branded restaurants, mall food courts, and foreign-food restaurants) are taken in soup-pot restaurants.

	Approximate socio-economic background				
	Poorest	Lower-middle	Middle	Upper	Average
% of all meals out in all *haan bai*	94,1	87,9	75,8	58,9	77,6
% of all meals out in soup-pot restaurants	88,2	65,5	51,6	32,1	56,2
% of haan bai meals at soup-pot restaurants	93,8	74,5	68,1	54,5	72,4

Table 1: Relative popularity of the different types of haan bai (n=120) (own data).[7]

While the relative popularity of this restaurant format is generally high, there are a few dynamics which arise when one looks at the weekly dining habits of various groups (see Table 2). First, the popularity of *haan bai* is inversely correlated with socio-economic status, with richer people proportionately favoring branded restaurants, food courts, and tourist restaurants relative to lower socio-economic strata. In spite of this relative difference, soup-pot restaurants remain the most popular form of dining even among the richest strata (1.8 times per week or 32 percent of all meals out). Among the poorest strata, families dine out almost exclusively in soup-pot restaurants (3.0 times per week or 94 percent of all meals out). Second, entertainment dining (such as going out for snacks, to a café, or a night-life locale) becomes increasingly prevalent at higher socio-economic levels, although it cannot be determined if this has an independent impact on where people take their full meals each day. Third, while the trend visible in Table 2 suggests that economic mobility allows people to diversify their dining choices, the absolute popularity of soup-pot restaurants among lower-middle and middle-class people remains robust. This suggests, on face value, that the broader set of restaurant options available at higher incomes, rather than class identity, determine routine dining choices (more on this below). Finally, unusual dining options that are not listed here (such as office canteens, buffet restaurants, and restaurant-cafés) are not included in this sample but were, at the time of surveying, a relatively small factor (mentioned only 5 times in 120 surveys).

Given the robust popularity of *haan bai*, and more specifically of soup-pot restaurants, I made a point of interviewing *haan bai* diners across the socio-economic

7 Socio-economic background was triangulated through a number of factors. If salary information was available, it was used as one basis, yet many other factors were also considered, such as the family income and non-salary income sources as well as the informant's mode of transportation, mobile phone model, and other outward characteristics used in a contextual manner (such as appearance and accent) for substantiation. Roughly speaking, the poorest earn adjusted monthly salaries of USD 150 or less; lower-middle income class up to USD 400; middle-class up to USD 1,000; and upper-classes above USD 1,000.

	Approximate socio-economic background				
Dining-out location	Poorest	Lower-middle	Middle	Upper	Average
Soup-pot	3,0	3,8	3,2	1,8	3,0
To-order	0,2	1,3	1,5	1,5	1,1
Branded restaurant	0,1	0,3	0,6	1,1	0,5
Mall or food court	0,1	0,4	0,7	0,9	0,5
Tourist restaurant	0,0	0,0	0,2	0,3	0,1
Snack	1,1	1,7	2,3	2,8	1,9
Night-life locale	1,0	1,3	2,3	2,6	1,8
Café	0,7	2,1	3,0	3,2	2,3
Total entertainment out/week	2,8	5,1	7,6	8,6	6,0
Total dining out/week	3,4	5,8	6,2	5,6	5,3

Table 2: Weekly dining-out locations of Phnom Penh residents (n=120) (own data).

spectrum in order to clarify the motivations or justifications explaining the egalitarian popularity of these venues. In the quotes below, the inertia behind the abstract of Khmer cuisine becomes apparent:

> I like to try many kinds of new food, but to fill my belly every day I still prefer Khmer food. *Haan bai* are the best place to get regular Khmer food. And they are cheap too. (male electronics salesperson, lower-middle class, age 24, personal communication, 5. May 2014)

> My family likes Khmer food every day. Even if I bring bread, I still have to bring soup and fried food or else they will complain. The *haan bai* around here always have something tasty. (female house-wife, upper class, age 31, personal communication 15. May 2014)

Furthermore, the utility and efficiency of the soup-pot restaurant model for both patron and restaurateur helps to explain why it remains such a popular institution in Phnom Penh, as demonstrated by the following statements from both owners and patrons:

> I used to have a to-order restaurant, but it was not so easy to run. I had to buy so many kinds of ingredients and cook them in a hurry when people came. I wasted a lot and I think the food was not so good. Now I just choose a few dishes for the day and take my time serving instead of being in the hot kitchen. (female restaurateur, age 40, personal communication, 8. October 2014)

> I like to look at and smell all the foods when I go to a [soup-pot] restaurant. It makes my decision easier. And if I'm with a group, we can decide together. (male patron, age 17, with a group of four fellow students, personal communication, 6. June 2014)

> If I'm in a hurry, I always go to the [soup-pot] restaurant because I can choose fast and they can wrap it up to go easily. (female hairdresser, age 21, personal communication, 6. June 2014)

While price is also a determining factor, particularly for lower socio-economic groups, patrons regularly praised the convenience, familiarity, and transparency of the soup-pot model. Because soup-pot restaurateurs typically display the options in the entryway (or roadside), patrons have the opportunity to smell, pose questions, discuss with their group, and even interact with the food (stir, flip, or touch) before settling on their choice. At the same time, they can evaluate the hygiene of the food and atmosphere of the location before entering the interior. If they are not immediately satisfied, it is not unusual (or impolite) for a patron to politely walk away.

In contrast, to-order restaurants require patrons to commit to a seat in the restaurant and trust that the food emerging from the kitchen will be tasty and hygienic. Nevertheless, to-order stalls also play an important set of roles for various diners; for example, while a soup-pot restaurant may run out of food or close early, to-order restaurants will be available for those who cannot eat during normal meal hours. Soup-pot restaurants are also typically less active during dinner, a meal many families (including restaurateurs themselves) prefer to eat at home. As a consequence, in the evening when soup-pot restaurants are either closed or are merely serving leftovers, to-order restaurants can prepare freshly-cooked food. Needless to say, for those in the mood for something specific, a to-order restaurant is a better choice.

In this section, I showed that soup-pot restaurants are a highly popular feature of Phnom Penh's urban landscape. Unlike restaurants that prepare food on-demand from a relatively fixed set of ingredients, chefs of soup-pot restaurants make their decisions about what to cook in a more complex food-society nexus, factoring in their culinary skill, seasonality of ingredients, whims in demand, and the compulsion to touch on the wide spectrum of regional Khmer cuisine. Consequently, as a site of research, these restaurants can be a window on food seasonality, food diversity, and the vagaries of urban dining demands.

CONNECTING RURAL SEASONALITY TO URBAN SPACES

The rural sphere, in all of its regional diversity, has historically acted as a cradle for food culture by both engendering dietary customs and sustaining the flow of agricultural inputs to cities. Food studies have long been concerned with what Appadurai (1986) calls "the social life of things", or the complex, sometimes transnational, forces that accompany a product and re-define its role along the path from producer to consumer. Food (i.e. fresh produce or meat) is an interesting example of this, as its eventual use is understood well by the producers, namely farmers who are cooks and eaters themselves. As agricultural produce moves away from the farm and into the city, its end-use in someone's recipe may either diverge widely from the conceptions of the farmer or fall in line with them. For example, while the fate of a high-quality pumpkin that is bought by the chef of a five-star hotel is hardly imaginable to the farmer, if that pumpkin is bought by a family cook or soup-pot chef, the end-use of cooking it is likely to be very similar to that which would have taken place on the

farm. Beyond a shared view of how to prepare food, the cook in a soup-pot restaurant shares an additional connection with producers, namely seasonality. While growing seasons are not as differentiated in the sub-tropics as in the temperate latitudes, the availability of water and the presence of competing cultivation (typically rice in the humid sub-tropics) engender a combined form of seasonality based on cultural, market, and natural factors. For the purpose of this paper, seasonality describes the cyclical (i.e. foreseeable) changes in both price and availability of certain agriculture and fish during the course of the year.

Typically, soup-pot restaurants face conditions similar to a designated cook in a family home, balancing what is available and cost-competitive (from the fields, rivers, and markets) with nutritional considerations, the family budget, and food preferences. In a predominantly agricultural society like Cambodia, there are many synergies inherent to this process. Seasonal vegetables, fruits, and fish are typically cheaper, fresher, and more in-demand by customers than imported or cold-stored products (AMO and WFP,[8] 2014, p. 2014; Buoy, Chhuon, & Thilsted, 2009; Chou, 2011, pp. 12–13, 28–29, 58–59; Hap et al., 2012, pp. 32–34). This is illustrated by a restaurant chef's description of her shopping strategy:

> I do all the shopping by myself so that I can be sure about quality. I don't trust my children yet, but they come with me so that they can learn. We usually go to the market for vegetables in the evenings, a few times per week. The other days we stay home and prepare pickles and sauces. [HF: And for fish, meat?] Every morning at dawn I wake my husband up, we go for fish and meat and sometimes vegetables if the farmers bring in something very fresh. Sometimes I see a vegetable that reminds me to cook a dish I haven't made in a while. Sometimes I see a fish that is perfect for one soup. I am always thinking about what I made before. I try not to repeat the same foods in a week, but sometimes I have difficulty in the dry season when there is not so much [produce]. I try to cook this way if the price is not too high. (female soup-pot restaurateur, age 42, personal communication, 12. September 2014)

The description above by a veteran (12-year) chef from a popular soup-pot restaurant is indicative of the logic of a typical home food planner. As opposed to the countryside, home cooks and restaurateurs in the city, are not necessarily constrained by the seasonality of produce to the same extent as rural dwellers. Nevertheless, as the vignette above illustrates, and embedded research with other restaurateurs confirms, most soup-pot chefs strive for seasonality, but must balance this against the risk of boring their customers with the same (seasonal) dishes. Interestingly, in a family-run restaurant, they also have to consider the demands within their actual family. A telling quote from the child of a soup-pot restaurant owner echoed this sentiment:

> If customers came in early enough, they would see our family eating the same food that we will serve for lunch. If the food is bad, we will complain to dad along with all of the customers! (male school child, age 15, personal communication, 14. June 2014)

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8 Agricultural Marketing Office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery of Cambodia & the World Food Programme of the United Nations

In order to fulfill the expectations of 'city people', soup-pot restaurants face a difficult challenge when attempting to source ingredients in unison with fresh markets, while also balancing food diversity, long-term customer preferences, and price fluctuations. A successful soup-pot restaurateur regularly manages these competing demands and, as a consequence, when urban dwellers dine out at soup-pot restaurants, the food they eat becomes a transparent window into the agricultural and market cycles that they would not otherwise encounter in the city. This comes to light when comparing the food diversity, cost, and use of non-standard vegetables[9] between soup-pot and to-order restaurants (see Table 3).

Soup-pot restaurant	To-order restaurant
2-pot restaurant	Top 5 dishes
11/28 dishes per week/month	Ordered 49 percent of the time
3-pot restaurant	Top 10 dishes
15/40 dishes per week/month	Ordered 63 percent of the time
Average price: USD 1.55	Average price: USD 1.85
With rice, sometimes dessert	With rice, no dessert
Non-standard vegetables	Non-standard vegetables
39 percent of dishes	23 percent of dishes

Table 3: Comparing the diversity, cost, and vegetable sourcing of restaurant formats (own data).

Although restaurants serving pre-prepared food and those serving made-to-order food cannot be compared on a one-to-one basis, I have found that this creative set of metrics adequately describes the different dynamics in these restaurants. A 2-pot restaurant (i.e. one preparing 2 large soup pots for each meal) will serve, on average, 28 unique soups and stews per month while a 3-pot restaurant will serve 40 per month. These values do not include the pre-prepared fried foods and braised dishes (*kaw*) that are also commonly served as the quantity of these dishes varies greatly across soup-pot restaurants of similar sizes. At the extreme, I have documented a 15-pot restaurant at the Central Market that serves up to 140 identifiably unique dishes per month. In contrast, to-order restaurants tend to receive most of their orders for a limited range of dishes and in only 37 percent of cases do people stray from the top-10 dishes ordered at that restaurant.[10] Furthermore, to-order restaurateurs reported that they are not routinely equipped to serve a large range of food types as this often leads to food waste. This becomes apparent when comparing the use of non-standard vegetables; on average, soup-pot restaurants, serve food containing these more unusual vegetables almost twice as often as to-order restaurants.

The tendency of soup-pot restaurants to use more seasonal ingredients can be

9 Non-standard vegetables excludes the most generic of ingredients found in Cambodia, such as tomatoes, onions, Chinese cabbage, morning glory, lettuce, potatoes, spring onions, string beans, sour mango, bok choi, shallots, and lime. It includes more recipe-specific ingredients such as lotus shoots, banana flower, young bamboo shoots, bitter gourd, *makak* fruit, palm fruit, *ma'om*, moringa, *kantrup*, *bas* leaf, *ptih*, Malabar spinach, *ngob* leaf, water mimosa, Asiatic Pennywort, and Crab Claw herb.

10 Although the top-5 or top-10 dishes are, strictly speaking, not consistent across restaurants, they are still generally comparable because the dishes overlap 70 to 80 percent.

substantiated further by comparing the amount of Cambodia-sourced and/or seasonal ingredients purchased by the two different restaurant formats (see Table 4). While with some products (such as fruit, eggs, beef, and pork) place of origin and seasonality is fairly consistent across the market, with other products (such as vegetables and fish), soup-pot restaurants tend to buy more domestic and seasonal produce than to-order restaurants.[11] To-order restaurant owners suggested that, in order to be ready to prepare a range of the highest-demanded dishes, they are compelled to buy a fairly fixed set of ingredients, regardless of whether these are in season or can be sourced locally that day. With the flexibility to select and adjust their offering of dishes on an ad-hoc basis, soup-pot restaurateurs are not faced with this dilemma.

Ingredient	Soup-pot	To-order
Vegetables	73	56
Fruit	85	80
Beef	100	100
Pork	34	31
Wild fish (Dry season)	43	27
Wild fish (Wet season)	78	58
Eggs	85	82

Table 4: Percentage of ingredients (by weight) that are Cambodia-sourced and/or seasonal (own data).

The overarching trend apparent from the data in Tables 3 and 4 is that in addition to serving a more diverse range of food types, soup-pot restaurants demand a more diverse range of ingredients than to-order restaurants. From the perspective of the soup-pot restaurant owner, this is a result of following seasonal trends and fluctuations in fresh food markets and avoiding repetition of the same food. From the perspective of to-order restaurants, the reason most commonly given for the low diversity of food selected is that customers tend to be less creative about what to order when they are given the choice (not to mention that most to-order restaurants lack a menu), requiring to-order restaurateurs to stock certain ingredients regardless of their seasonality or place of origin.

RURAL FAMILIARITY IN URBAN DINING

For city dwellers and the cohort of migrants who move through the cities seasonally, soup-pot restaurants provide low-cost access to familiar types of Khmer food and the comfortable atmosphere of 'home-cooking'. Particularly for low-income people, these familiar locales are an invaluable resource in overcoming the economic and social challenges of living in (or, in the case of migrants, transitioning to) the city.

11 Place of origin and seasonality was confirmed orally with each handler during market transactions. And while it is unrealistic to expect that food traders always honestly report the origin of the food, their long-term relationships with restaurateurs presents a disincentive to regular lying, so these numbers are reasonably accurate.

According to embedded research in 15 soup-pot restaurants and 9 to-order restaurants, this utility derives from three main attributes of soup-pot restaurants:

1. The atmosphere is familial and less anonymous;
2. Despite the low price point and modest settings, they are a less class-sensitive environment than on-demand restaurants;
3. The way the food is served mimics social eating customs in the countryside.

While the overall experience of eating in a soup-pot restaurant was routinely praised as comfortable and informal by a wide spectrum of patrons, this aspect is more pronouncedly appreciated by rural migrants, who are in the process of adjusting to the relative anonymity and service-orientation in the city. One patron, who had moved to Phnom Penh three months prior, related the following:

> After I sold my land and moved to Stung Meanchey [district], I went to a nearby *k'mong* [to-order] restaurant for lunch because we did not have a kitchen ready yet. We just ordered one soup and one fried food, but the waiter brought us a whole receipt! (male soup-pot restaurant patron, age 50, personal communication, 16. July 2014)

The business-like formality of this experience was clearly off-putting and in contrast to the more informal culture of soup-pot restaurants. In fact, this quote derives from an interview in a soup-pot restaurant that took place after the meal was paid for, a process in which the owner's 15-year-old daughter merely asked the patron what he had eaten, calculated in her head, and produced change from her own pocket. The fact that the restaurant owner's children, who were home from school for lunch, were the only 'servers' in the restaurant facilitates the atmosphere of familiarity (a typical family scene can be viewed in Figure 3). For this customer, the 'working class' character of the setting is considered a positive trait, even though he was a middle-class patron who could afford a fancier setting. In fact, sitting near this patron, who was a civil servant, were a range of people from varying socio-economic backgrounds. This included a group of four criminal defense lawyers, a local surgeon and his family, two *achan* (Buddhist laypeople) from the local pagoda, two groups of teenage students, and a group of construction workers in soiled clothing. In my sample of 15 soup-pot restaurants across Phnom Penh, this type of heterogeneity of clientele is consistent across the city (see Figure 2) and, in areas with more mixed middle and upper-class populations, the atmosphere in soup-pot restaurants is distinctively egalitarian.

One reason consistently cited for the inclusive popularity of soup-pot restaurants is the customary way in which the food is selected, presented, and served. The owner typically offers an arrangement of foods that allows even a lone diner to enjoy a complete menu that includes a watery soup, a fried entree, pickles, and cold tea (see a typical spread in Figure 4). In a to-order restaurant setting, arranging a meal balanced in this way would require planning by the customer rather than the chef and a higher cost to the customer. Allowing a food planner to curate the dishes available is a dietary custom that is typical of the countryside (Halwart, 2006; Ip & Betts, 1986; Ooraikul, Sirichote, & Siripongvutikorn, 2008) and has expanded into Cambodian urban cuisine in the soup-pot setting. In fact, customers that I interviewed in soup

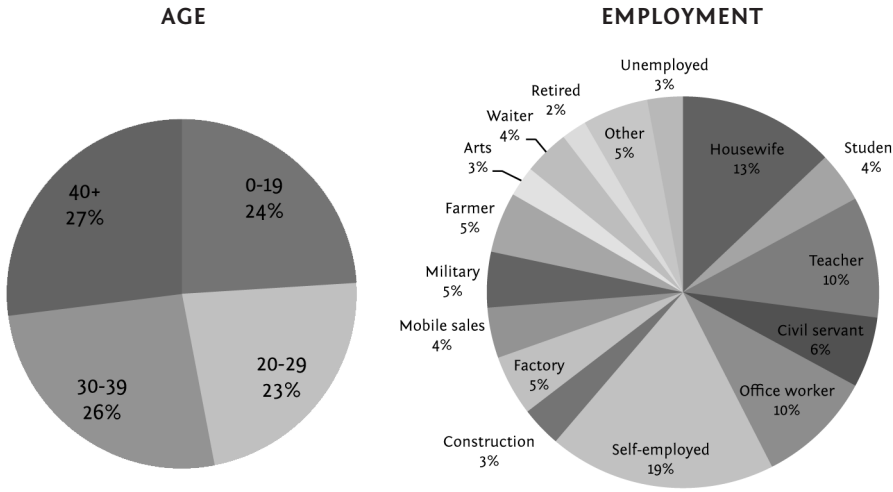

Figure 2: Diners in soup-pot restaurants: Employment and age distribution (own data).

Figure 3: A scene from a family-run soup-pot restaurant in Phnom Penh (photo by Hart N. Feuer).

pot restaurants consistently reported that they expect the chef to arrange the dishes to complement each other in a balanced way that follows dietary customs (and avoids food taboos, such as serving steamed rice without soup to wash it down).

Figure 4: A typical arrangement of Cambodian fare in a soup-pot restaurant (photo by Hart N. Feuer).

RURAL DIETARY LEARNING IN THE CITY

By providing a rotating menu of dishes containing diverse ingredients in a customary modality of dining, soup-pot restaurants can be a mutually-accepted coercive space of dietary learning, providing meals that are culturally understood to be balanced and nutritious, and that constantly (re)expose patrons to the diversity of national cuisine. Indeed, when prepared properly and arranged following various unwritten rules (i.e. old wives tales) for combining food types, Khmer cuisine can readily provide all of the necessary nutrients (Olney et al., 2009) as well as integrate various medicinal foods that support illness prevention (Medecine de la Natur, 2010). This aligns with the characteristics of the soup-pot restaurant outlined in the sections above – as a popular, affordable, and convenient place to eat, an access point to diverse home-cooking, and an egalitarian space for urban residents. Aligned this way, this positive dietary and socialization experience also creates an opportunity for informal learning about the range of Khmer cuisine, eating habits, and food flavors/textures. To illustrate with one vignette:

> Of course my child here [age 10] wants to eat burgers, but when we come here [to the soup-pot restaurant] to eat, he is very happy trying new kinds of soup and other foods that I don't make at home. Look at his plate today, he removed all the bones from this fish that he has never tried before. ... Here there is not only cola, but also coconut water and sugar cane juice. (housewife, age 36, personal communication, 11. August 2014)

In this example, the soup-pot restaurant provides a setting for informal food education by providing examples of Khmer cuisine not routinely prepared at home, and

by introducing local agricultural products (e.g. a new fish, alternative sweet drinks, unfamiliar vegetables and flavors) that are found in Khmer cuisine. The practice of providing a space with coercive social rules for dining that features a varied range of dishes is not dissimilar to programs that have been used for teaching nutrition education to Cambodian refugees in the USA (Ip & Betts, 1986), which suggests that the soup-pot restaurant is unwittingly serving as a passive educational resource. The child mentioned in the quote above is learning skills such as how to fillet an unfamiliar fish, how to taste and appreciate new flavors, and how to conduct himself in a customary eating environment. These skills will be useful when visiting relatives in the countryside or being invited to a meal at someone else's house. The mother, in turn, is refreshing her familiarity with certain foods, learning how to match the various soups and fried foods, and possibly learning about new dishes. Indeed, in many of the soup-pot restaurants I observed, it was common for the owner to discuss ingredients, cooking techniques, and food taboos with patrons.

In fact, a striking feature of many discussions that I have overheard or participated in at soup-pot restaurants is the high degree of food-related expertise exhibited by most patrons. In conversation at the table, it is not unusual for a patron to correctly diagnose a cooking error, off-flavor, poor quality ingredient, or the questionable arrangement of dishes. It is also not unusual for patrons to praise the freshness of ingredients, skillful preparation, and suitable arrangement. In general, this capacity to critique food and agriculture is widespread in Cambodia, owing largely to the rural background of most city dwellers. As depicted in Saphan (2011) and Feuer (2011), the re-population of Cambodian cities after the forced ruralization of people during the Democratic Kampuchea period (ending primarily in 1979) has meant that most urban dwellers, and almost all recent urban migrants, have an agricultural background. This tends to equip diners to assess raw ingredients and the food they receive with considerable nuance (see Feuer, 2013, pp. 24–26). However, eating in soup-pot restaurants also presents new challenges and opportunities for patrons to maintain and revise their knowledge and awareness of food quality, nutrition, and food safety.

Dining in a soup-pot restaurant is usually as predictable as eating at home: The food is familiar and the arrangement of the dishes is customary. However, given the diversity of food encountered over time in soup-pot restaurants (see Table 4 for reference) and the variability among venues, one often discovers new foods, or is confronted with modern food ingredients and additives (such as monosodium glutamate, bouillon, synthetic vinegar, artificial colorings, etc.). Because the food at soup-pot restaurants is similar to food that might be served at home, patrons have a baseline from which to comment on the divergences in quality of raw ingredients, skill in preparation, and presence of new ingredients – in both positive and negative ways.

> Actually, this is my first time here even though I live just nearby. I used to eat there [pointing across the street] every day, but the daughter took over cooking and the food is no longer tasty. She uses a lot of flavoring [monosodium glutamate] and prepares the *kreung* [pounded ingredient paste] the night before so it is not good smelling by the next day. (female garment factory worker, age 19, personal communication, 17. August 2014)

> Taste this rice. I guess this is IR [a high-yielding variety]. This is for pigs to eat. We should be proud of our rice in Cambodia. … I'm not coming here again. (male security guard and former rice farmer, age 25, personal communication, 21. March 2014)

> [To me:] If you look behind this house, you'll see banana trees, herbs, and *b'ah* trees. You're not supposed to put *b'ah* leaves in this soup, but that's why it's so tasty even if it's not really *somlaw korko* [vegetable herbal stew]. [To the hostess:] Hey sister, show this foreigner how fresh your ingredients are – bring him some fresh *sluk m'reah* from the back! (male construction worker, age 34, personal communication, 14. September 2014)

In aggregate, these routine types of critique are performative of food knowledge: They represent both the continual confirmation and maintenance of existing knowledge and the potential for new learning about food, agriculture, and contemporary issues such as food additives. At the bare minimum, soup-pot restaurants provide a continual reminder of the variation of regional food and, particularly for children, provide opportunity to discover flavors, textures, and social eating patterns not found at home. In other words, soup-pot restaurants help set the popular and accessible benchmark for national cuisine and contribute to maintaining existing knowledge. In addition, new learning and participation in the evolution of the national cuisine takes places spontaneously when one encounters and learns from new dishes, novel variations on familiar foods, and modern ingredients.

ENTREPRENEURS ADAPTING CULINARY TRADITION TO THE CITY

From one perspective, the cohort of small business owners who open and maintain soup-pot restaurants can be viewed as conservative, un-original, and practicing only rudimentary hygiene. Indeed, their food is not usually innovative in the sense of creativity and experimentation, their premises are typically unkempt and poorly furnished, and they often follow poorly-substantiated folk models of hygiene (see Pelto & Pelto, 1997) rather than scientific rationale. In this paper, however, I have argued that soup-pot restaurateurs operate in a rural-urban nexus, in which their role as brokers for rural dietary customs and curators of national cuisine is valued more than their capacity for innovation and fancy interiors. In fact, many business owners have related that they fear that certain types of advancement will only alienate customers or increase costs without justification.

> Two years ago, I updated my restaurant with a new display case and silverware. My wife and I thought it was a good change, but customers complained. They said they could not look inside the soups or touch the fish easily to help them choose. And they said the new spoons were too thick so they could not cut meat with them. So I put the soups back where the flies were and gave them the small aluminum spoons back. You see, that is what I have now.[12] (male soup-pot restaurateur, age 39, personal communication, 27. March 2014)

12 It is common in Cambodian *haan bai* not to provide knives, so diners have adapted to using the edge of a spoon to cut through large pieces of meat. Cheaper spoons are often thinner, which makes them more effective.

> I always buy my rice from neighbors in my home village in Kompong Cham. This is usually one or two traditional rice varieties. Last year, a salesman convinced me to try a high-quality jasmine rice so I bought two sacks to try. Some people complained that the rice was too soft for everyday food, or they said they feel like they are eating wedding food. After using that rice for one month, I switched back to the old one. (female soup-pot restaurateur, age 45, personal communication, 15. March 2014)

> The only reason that I can accept for the lunch price to go up is if the owner gives more food or makes better quality food. I don't want to pay more for fancy tables, chairs, and bowls. (male soup-pot patron, age 55, personal communication, 14. February 2014)

The examples above suggest that the constraints faced by soup-pot restaurateurs in deciding how to manage expectations about their establishment compel a more functional form of creativity, one which does not tamper overtly with the perceived authenticity of the customary dining experience. This follows with analyses of the role of chef-as-entrepreneur, which suggest that the responsibilities of a chef are not necessarily to innovate and upgrade but to match the food to the intended dining experience (Duruz, 2009; Leschziner, 2009). Indeed, the restaurateurs of many of the more popular soup-pot restaurants that I met had learned the art of creating what Moreiras's (1999) called a "double consciousness". This phenomenon explains how restaurants keep the interactional framework of dining familiar and desirable to patrons even as they are otherwise compelled to adjust the underlying structure to respond to urban constraints (e.g. hygiene, entertainment, availability of seasonal or local ingredients, presence of non-Khmer food). "Double consciousness" describes how, for example, hygiene measures are surreptitiously included in the restaurant protocol without tampering with the shabby, working-class atmosphere. This also explains how, given the growing prevalence of aquaculture fish and the vegetable imports to Cambodia (Chan, 2014; Chhean, Diep, & Moustier, 2004; Hortle, 2007, p. 59), a restaurateur can create a dining experience that expresses 'authentic' flavors while camouflaging the presence of cultured catfish and out-of-season vegetables.

For example, most establishments I researched now provide fans for comfort, condiment kits and rubbish bins for each table, and an area with a television or newspapers. All of them will package the food to take-away with no extra fee. More than half of the venues (18 of 24) use food warmers to maintain optimal temperature (see the pots in Figure 1). Additionally, most restaurants have switched to hygienic ice and have improved techniques for sterilizing dishes and utensils. Even then, some establishments still crush the hygienic cubes to make the ice appear like 'traditional' shaved block ice, and present the already-sterilized utensils in a jar of hot water (an accepted folk method of hygiene). A few venues (3 out of 24) use cleaning agents to wipe down tables instead of the more predominant practice of wiping with a used rag (a folk model more effective in maintaining orderliness rather than sterility).

While hygiene and comfort can be easily adjusted without changing the overall rural dining experience, the mark of a good broker is the capacity of the owner to transform the seasonal products in the market into food that captures a broad swath of the national cuisine. One soup-pot restaurant near the Central Market in Phnom Penh has remained a beloved institution due to this characteristic, often be-

ing referred to in the newspapers as "a museum of lowland Cambodian food" ("The Unique Lunch", 2012). Ultimately, the proprietor who can derive a large number of dishes from the highest quality ingredients will not only be a successful entrepreneur, but also provide a gateway for city people to routinely encounter diverse rural food, thereby (re-)producing the national cuisine and maintaining demand for domestic agriculture.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I argue that the rural-urban interface is the crucible in which the diversity of rural agriculture and culinary culture is transformed into a more abstract and less geographically-embedded concept of 'national cuisine'. While many observers of culinary change are quick to jump to globalization as both the major cause for and the conclusion of national cuisine, the case of Cambodia in this paper suggests that such an approach would be premature. In Cambodia, and potentially other rural-dominated countries, the more fundamental processes of agrarian change and urbanization are the primary battlegrounds in the formative stages of 'developing' national cuisine. During this period, national cuisine is still predominantly about defining the range of foods that will become generally known, qualitatively understood, and regularly consumed by urban people of a discrete culinary-ethnic group. Undoubtedly, for the purposes of encouraging culinary tourism, the urgency builds to establish cuisine as a representation of an imagined community of the nation (Ferguson, 2010; Phillips, 2006). However, this does not necessarily crowd out the concurrent, and more everyday, processes of consolidating culinary diversity at the rural-urban nexus. This 'glare of the global', I suggest, is what brought Appadurai (1988) to hastily suggest that national cuisine would tend to be formed out of disparate regional and local elements that scarcely would have been found together. In fact, cuisines from nearby rural areas or even those gradually integrated through immigration and agricultural exchange 'from outside' (as would be the case for certain Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese touches in Cambodia), are often found together with little contradiction as long as basic ingredients and cooking practices do not depart too radically from one another. This is illustrated in this paper through the decentralized manner by which soup-pot restaurants, as brokers of cuisine and agricultural produce, routinely curate the diversity of regional culinary habits and fresh produce – regardless of whether or not they come from Cambodia.

While there are cuisines that, in a simplified and reified form, aspire to go abroad as ambassadors of culture (see the cases of Singaporean "Takeout" and "Malaysian Kitchen" found in, respectively, Epicure, 2011 and Yoshino, 2009), this paper is about the early formative steps, in which culinary diversity, agricultural heritage, and everyday eating habits are more fundamental than "culinary soft power" (Farrer, 2009) in the world. As translators of rural dietary traditions for urban citizens and urban migrants, Cambodian soup-pot restaurants contribute to maintaining awareness and appreciation for Khmer cuisine and supporting seasonal domestic agriculture. As the most popular destination for meals out across the socio-economic spectrum, soup-pot restaurants can contribute to food sovereignty by providing affordable, accessible, and nutritionally balanced food for a broad range of urban diners. In the long

term, this domestic consolidation of national cuisine reinforces the stature of Khmer food and puts it in an advantageous position for exposure to global cuisines. This has become more apparent in 2014 with the naming of Cambodia's Luu Meng as "Asia's Top Chef" by Top 10 of Asia magazine (Murray, 2014) and in Cambodia's third consecutive win of the title for the world's "Best Rice" at the 2014 World Rice Conference.

Everyday institutions, such as soup-pot restaurants, facilitate food sovereignty locally by brokering diversity and consolidating national cuisine in an inclusive, decentralized way. This then contributes to laying the groundwork for international legitimation of Khmer cuisine. These forms of food sovereignty are rooted in daily practices and are essentially democratic as opposed to the sometimes authoritarian policies implemented under a food sovereignty heading.

This inclusivity and democratic nature of assembling national cuisine is achieved, in part, due to three emergent characteristics of soup-pot restaurants that were outlined above. First, by leveraging synergies between fresh and low-cost ingredients from domestic agriculture, soup-pot restaurants render seasonality transparent to patrons who otherwise do not experience the agricultural cycles in the city, thereby empowering everyday citizens to participate in demand creation. Second, the social atmosphere of soup-pot restaurants is a more familial and egalitarian environment than other types of venues, thereby drawing customers from the entire socio-economic continuum who are seeking familiar culinary customs. Third, soup-pot restaurants can be a space of dietary learning, providing meals that are not only balanced and nutritious, but allow city dwellers, especially children, to experience and learn about the diversity of national cuisine while participating in its continual redefinition.

For food researchers looking for countervailing forces to the rapid changes in agriculture, cuisine, and diets in developing countries, the soup-pot restaurant can be understood as an institution that transforms culinary diversity into a relevant and popular experience. As a phenomenon on the rural-urban interface, soup-pot restaurants are neither entirely rural nor entirely urban. Rather they erect a "double consciousness" that allows urbanites to experience a window onto rural cuisine and agricultural cycles while adjusting for comfort and the vagaries of food availability in urban markets. Successfully navigating the expectations of urban Cambodian customers requires the soup-pot restaurateurs to carefully gauge the competing demands for modern convenience, a customary experience, as well as tasty and varied food. In this way, the relative survival of soup-pot establishments can be an indicator of the scope and nature of industrialization and their role in brokering will provide insights and guidance for managing future disjuncture of globalization and agrarian change on food.

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The Alternative Agriculture Network Isan and Its Struggle for Food Sovereignty – a Food Regime Perspective of Agricultural Relations of Production in Northeast Thailand

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▸ Heis, A. (2015). The alternative agriculture network Isan and its struggle for food sovereignty – a food regime perspective of agricultural relations of production in Northeast Thailand. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *8*(1), 67-86.

This paper uses the food regime analysis to visualize relations of domination and exploitation within the realm of food production and supply. Starting with an outlook on how the food regime plays out in the Thai context, the author goes on to elaborate its critical aspects fundamental for a food sovereignty critique: growing concentration of power on the side of transnational corporations, exploitative relations of production in agro-industry, and devastating effects for nature, small-scale producers, and increasingly also for consumers. In Northeast Thailand, the *Alternative Agriculture Network Isan* (AAN Isan) is struggling to secure income and subsistence agriculture for its members. This is achieved through a number of activities, some of which are introduced here in detail. Producer cooperatives, organic farming, green markets, or a local herb medicine center all aim at empowerment within the present market situation by using aspects of the health discourse to support their arguments and at the same time reinforcing a specific local politics of identity, rooted in notions of culture and religion.

Keywords: Alternative Agriculture; Food Regime; Food Sovereignty; Peasant Identity Politics; Northeast Thailand

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Mittels einer entlang des *food regime*-Ansatzes inspirierten Analyse zeigt die Untersuchung vorherrschende Macht- und Ausbeutungsverhältnisse landwirtschaftlicher Produktion. Mit einem Einblick in die Manifestation des globalen *food regimes* in Thailand konzentriert sich der Artikel auf jene Elemente, die zentral für die Kritik der *Food Sovereignty*-Bewegung sind: Monopolisierung der Produktion und Verteilung bei transnationalen Unternehmen und negative Folgen der agroindustriellen Produktion für kleinbäuerliche Produzent_innen, die Umwelt sowie Konsument_innen. Das *Alternative Agriculture Network Isan* (AAN Isan) in Nordostthailand setzt sich in diesem Kontext für seine Mitglieder ein. Eine Reihe diesbezüglicher Aktivitäten werden hier detailliert beschrieben: Produktionskooperativen, ökologische Landwirtschaft, Bauernmärkte sowie das örtliche Kräuterzentrum. Diese alle zielen darauf ab, die Kleinbäuer_innen innerhalb der vorherrschenden Marktverhältnisse zu stärken und greifen dabei sowohl auf Aspekte von Gesundheitsdiskursen als auch die Frage der kulturell und religiös determinierten Identität zurück.

Schlagworte: Food Regime; Food Sovereignty; kleinbäuerliche Identität; Nordostthailand; ökosoziale Landwirtschaft

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INTRODUCTION

Using the example of the *Alternative Agriculture Network Isan*[1] (AAN Isan), this paper explores food sovereignty activities of a group of farmers in Yasothon province, Northeast Thailand. The network is part of the international peasant organization *La Vía Campesina*, and its individual members and member groups have a long tradition as grass-roots activists and campaigners on ecological issues and issues of social and economic inequality. As a nation-wide organization, AAN Isan oversees government agricultural policies and provides a networking platform for its member groups. As a food sovereignty movement, it emphasizes peasant subsistence and empowerment. Although it presents itself as a nation-wide network, its center certainly is the north-eastern region of Thailand. Similar to other alternative development concepts of the Global South, food sovereignty draws on local categories and non-Western ontology. The concept of agrarian citizenship, for example, accentuates the cultural meaning of land and the understanding of agriculture not as a business, but as a way of being and is reflected in the politics of peasant identity. Thereby, the peasants understand themselves as stewards of the earth and the land (Wittman, 2010, p. 169; Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010, p. 2). Apart from the struggle for socio-economic equality, this is the beating heart of the AAN Isan.

In the following, the paper shows how the AAN Isan embraces strategies of resistance in order to maintain and, when possible, enlarge their income and means of subsistence. The field of action of AAN Isan member groups is predetermined by the global food regime manifesting in the Thai context – a set of food production and supply relations. Hereby three major spheres were detected: organic agriculture, alternative marketing, and healthy diets. The paper shows how these are related to the food regime and where the scope of action for AAN Isan lies, and illustrates examples of all relevant strategies. One major theme figuring in the data is the specific notion of peasant identity as reflected in the agrarian citizenship concept mentioned above. The struggle over definition of healthy foods and diets has been noticed as crucial for legitimating a given food regime. It is shown how AAN Isan agents actively engage in such struggles by successfully addressing drawbacks of the corporate food regime and pointing to the beneficial effects of close consumer and producer relations, triggering solidarity and a locally rooted identity.

The article is based on data collected during fieldwork in October 2011 through open, semi-structured interviews as well as informal talks. The sample of interviewees included representatives of the AAN Isan as well as the *Sustainable Agriculture Foundation*,[2] and leading figures of the AAN Isan interest groups. According to their specific interest, members of the AAN Isan are involved in such initiatives as the herbal group, the alternative marketing group, and the green market group. All of

1 On the English version of the AAN Isan website, Isan has been transcribed into English as *Esan*. This does not correspond to the general rules of transcription of Thai language and is therefore not adopted in this paper.

2 Sustainable Agriculture Foundation was established as a fund-managing organization in 1997 when larger amounts of funds were made available to alternative development social movements in the aftermath of the 99-day protest of the *Assembly of the Poor* (Expert A & B, personal communication, October 2011).

them are full-time farmers and only secondarily involved with the AAN Isan. Furthermore, two scientists from the Faculty of Agriculture at the Ubon Ratchathani University were interviewed.

The geographical focus of the study was the province of Yasothon, which is some 500 km northeast of Bangkok. It is one of the poorest of the 76 Thai provinces, with a very low level of road infrastructure. However, the scope of AAN Isan covers several provinces of the Northeast. This is the region with the highest share of agricultural holdings in numbers as well as in terms of area coverage in Thailand (National Statistical Office & Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2003). The most important cash crop of the region is jasmine rice – a high-yield breed – and the most important industrial activity in Yasothon is rice milling (Kaufmann, 2012, p. 161).

Overall, eight semi-structured interviews and several informal talks were conducted mainly in English and local Lao dialect. The interviews were conducted with the support of a native interpreter and transcribed with the support of a native translator fluent in German and English. Analysis of data was based on Grounded Theory. This implies a hermeneutical, empirically grounded induction of theory, whereby collection of data and its analysis are at least partly interconnected processes making it a well-structured methodology (Hildebrand, 2007, p. 33; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 58).

The paper starts with an explanation of the food regime framework and how it plays out in Thailand. The second section places AAN Isan within a conceptual and historic context and points out its main food sovereignty aspects – its members' peasant identity politics as well as its local strategies of resistance. The last section demonstrates the empirical findings and concludes with a discussion on the relevance of the network's attempts to re-establish local farmers' and consumers' social and economic position and capacity to challenge the dominant food regime relations in Thailand.

THE GLOBAL FOOD REGIME FRAMEWORK WITHIN THE THAI CONTEXT

The concept of food regime defines global food production and consumption patterns as related to a specific accumulation regime, global value chains, and resulting power relations. The analytical concept developed by Friedmann and McMichael (as cited in McMichael, 2009) is a combination of regulation and world-systems theory, which allows for a nuanced examination of how unequal global relations of production in agriculture are spatially and socially localized. Transformation and consolidation processes of food regimes are integrated within general, political, and economic transformations of power relations and require new cultural legitimation. Herein a food regime is understood as a dynamic concept with uneven phases of transformation and consolidation and the focus is on its historical and procedural aspects. According to Friedmann, a food regime in general is a "rule governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale" (as cited in McMichael, 2009, p. 142). The more implicit such rules are the more binding they are, appearing as something natural. Nevertheless, a food regime is not simply a top-down exercise of power or expression of interest, but an outcome of "political struggles among con-

tending social groups" over power within dominant discourses and of "what works" (McMichael, 2009, p. 143). Ethical and moral perceptions provide cultural legitimation to a food regime, securing its stability. According to Friedmann, it is especially the conflicts that indicate "newly delegitimized – i.e. previously naturalized – aspects of the old food regime and offer competing *frames* for resolving them" (Friedmann, 2005, p. 335). In our case, it is mainly issues of health impact, the ecological effect, and the social relations of food production that carry conflictual potential or where renegotiation is most visible. Such transformations are opened up by, and at the same time open up spaces for, social movements, which "act as engines of food regime crisis and transformation" (Friedmann, 2005, p. 229) with the "power to legitimate or challenge regime cultures" (McMichael, 2009, p. 160).

One of such socio-ecological social movements that try to counter the tendencies of the current food regime is the food sovereignty movement. Its critique of social relations of production and ecological effects as well as its programmatic orientation rests on food regime analysis (Bernstein, 2014; Wittman, 2011, pp. 89–90). On a global scale, food sovereignty aims at establishing a global moral economy (McMichael, 2005, 2009, p. 148), reworking the metabolic connection between society and nature (Wittman, 2011, p. 820) and thus establishing agro-ecology as a new agricultural paradigm. As will be shown in this paper, AAN Isan (and the food sovereignty concept itself) is far from being a counter-hegemonic project in Thailand; it is yet able to exert resistance and to hold its ground against very powerful – corporate – players. It has detected major contested features of the current food regime, which it uses in order to challenge these power relations.

According to McMichael (2009, 2012) the current food regime is structured in compliance with rules of neoliberal political economy that favor the private as opposed to the public. This is equally valid for agricultural development and goes hand in hand with an increasing monopolization of power in the sphere of food supply and production. It also implies a bias regarding agricultural research and development activities where funding has shifted from public to private, too (Pistorius & van Wyk as cited in McMichael, 2009, p. 150). In addition, a major geo-political shift towards the Global South appeared in as much as 'newly agricultural countries' (Friedmann, 1993) open up access to cheap means of production – land, water, and workforce – and help satisfying changing consumption patterns in favor of fresh, non-seasonal fruits and vegetables in the Global North. The formation of these new economic structures has resulted in a new accumulation pattern oriented towards southern transnational corporations (McMichael, 2009, pp. 150–151; McMichael, 2013, p. 684). In consequence, there is a growing vertical integration of food production and supply chains shown in the growing dominance of subcontracting of southern peasants for the cultivation of specialty crops, animal husbandry or broiler, and shrimp production, as opposed to formerly independent cash cropping (Goss, Burch, & Rickson, 2000; Heft-Neal et al., 2008) on the one hand and, on the other hand, in the increasing crowding-out of fresh markets by super- and hypermarkets on the side of food distribution and rising control of supply of means of production (seeds, mills, technology, etc.) on the side of agricultural contractors. All of these are often one and the same company (Goss et al., 2000). This process is also driven by deep changes of consumption patterns, whereby it is not really clear if it is demand that determines the supply or vice versa

(Campbell, 2009, p. 311). Clearly, the increasing monopoly of corporate food supply with individual supermarket chains controlling up to 80 percent of national retail markets (Burch, Dixon, & Lawrence, 2013, p. 215) does have a good deal of regulatory power as to the products on offer and the shaping of consumer choices.

Regarding the manifestation of the corporate food regime in Thailand, three central aspects of legitimation appear: the benefits of supermarkets versus fresh markets (Banwell et al., 2013), the issue of contaminated and unsafe foods versus healthy, organic products (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012), and the question of just social relations of production and especially the situation of farmers and small-scale producers. All issues are interrelated as they are based on discourses about environmental production and the question of health and healthy, socially and locally embedded foods (Campbell, 2009; Dixon, 2009). These are also crucial to the struggle over cultural legitimation and thus the power to set up rules, and as such are contested by all social groups.

A Thai multinational enterprise, the Charoen Pokphang Group (CP Group), can serve as an example here (Goss et al., 2000, p. 514). In their survey, Goss et al. (2000, pp. 516–517) show how the originally Thai agro-industrial company has grown into a transnational corporation in only two decades, mainly through inter-sectorial diversification and a high degree of vertical integration of elements of production within the production chains (Goss et al., 2000, pp. 516–517). It now controls the entire production and supply chain for products of animal husbandry as well as shrimp farming on a global scale. It produces feeds, owns feed mills, contracts out broiler production, and even provides loans for contracting farmers, who otherwise could not enter into the contract (Heft-Neal et al., 2010, p. 47). According to the Heft-Neal et al. (2010) study of poultry production in Khon Kaen, Northeast Thailand, credits provided by brokers cover more than 45 percent of the farmers' financial means (p. 47). Contract farming basically involves a subcontracting large-scale supplier, the retail sector, the intermediary broker, and the producing farmer (Shankar, Posri, & Srivong, 2010). The expensive agricultural input is provided to the farmers by the large-scale supplier via a broker and it is often acquired on credit, with no contract, or even specified rates of interest (Delforge, 2007, p. 5; Shankar et al., 2010, p. 144). Not only does contract farming draw producers into extensive dependency relations that very much resemble former client-patron relations and informal credit markets where vulnerability of debtors is increased through lack of transparency and a missing legal status. The rigid coordination which is needed to keep up a constant quality and quantity level renders farmers de facto tenants and wage laborers on farms who, nevertheless, bear the entire risk of their enterprise (Goss et al., 2000, p. 521; Shankar et al., 2010, p. 144). This rigorous control over the processes of food production goes hand in hand with retail corporations increasing their monopoly power over the retail sector within national markets (Burch et al., 2013, p. 215). In Thailand, major multinational supermarket chains have increased their market shares constantly since the 1960s. The CP Group is strongly involved in this trend. Although it started with four major retail chains, after the financial crisis of 1997 it now holds the national franchise of the Seven-Eleven's convenient stores (Boonying & Shannon, 2015, p. 10; Shankar et al., 2010, p. 140; Shannon, 2009). In Thailand, fresh markets still provide the major share of fresh fruit and vegetable supply. But the increasing monopolization of the retail market

leads to a gradually declining number of independent fresh-market retailers, mainly due to customer distrust over safety of foods and hygiene in some market areas (Banwell et al., 2013, p. 610; Konsulwat, 2002). Consumers feel attracted by the bright, clean, and well-stocked locations, which is equally true for small convenient shops as for huge hypermarkets (Shannon, 2009, pp. 81, 83; Banwell et al., 2013, p. 609). The corporate food regime, which brought about the so-called supermarket revolution, is based upon marketing strategies of clean and hygienic packing fostering especially healthy, safe, and affluent fresh foods. This changing retail situation in Thailand and the expensive pricing of those products may negatively influence consumer food choices and subsequently their options for healthy diets. As the low-income population might lose access to fresh foods, which are now generally available at fresh markets for relatively low prices, it might force them to become dependent on cheap convenient foods with high energy density and low nutrient value (Banwell et al., 2013, p. 609). This development already implies certain inequality in food supply according to customers' purchasing power in Thailand and will further lead to a growing number of people suffering from malnutrition, especially among the low-income populace (Dixon, 2014, p. 202).

According to Dixon (2009), the question of healthy and adequate nutrition has always been part of the legitimation process of a given food regime. In her analysis of health and dietary aspects of a given food regime, she describes in detail the emergence of the *nutricentric citizen* whose dietary choices are steered by questions of technical functionality rather than cultural and social aspects (Dixon, 2009, p. 329). This is supported by the so-called "diet making complex", in which the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations (UN), and other health and nutrition related institutions supported by scientific research and financed by corporations with stakes in agriculture–food business make recommendations as to which nutrients are especially health-enhancing (Dixon, 2014, p. 202). Within the current food regime, the recommendations favor fresh but also processed and functional health foods or wellness foodstuffs, designed for self-optimization and self-improvement. Such dietary recommendations, substantiated with health and medical discourses, not only dictate what is on offer in supermarkets, and at what price, but, to a great extent, they also shape consumer perception about what healthy food is and where to get it.

Last but not least, the issue of environmental protection is also very much used to legitimate the current food regime. Although this is certainly more relevant in the Global North, this topic is on the upswing in the Global South, too. The environmental aspects of food marketing came to the fore after broad critique of the former food regimes, demanding environmentally friendly production as well as clean foods. The calls of social movements of consumers and producers for locally, ecologically, and socially produced foods (Campbell, 2009, p. 313) have at least partly been picked up and co-opted by the retail and food producing sectors, however, according to their needs and in a way which would not hinder profits (Friedmann, 2005, p. 254). The complex and costly certification procedures do bring about a certain degree of security for the conscious consumer; however, they particularly serve the needs of the retail companies, such as foregoing public control or to justify higher prices for organic foods. Within this struggle, social movements such as food sovereignty movements are caught up in a dialectic relation with the corporate regime, which is constantly co-

opting and appropriating their health, social justice, and environment related claims (Campbell, 2009; Dixon, 2009, p. 323). The following chapter will introduce the food sovereignty movement AAN Isan and the practices of its members. It will especially look at how the group reacts to and deals with such drawbacks of the current food regime. Concerning the small-scale farmers in Yasothon, these include the increasing monopolization within agricultural production and supply chains, the ecological and social effects of intensive agricultural–industrial production, as well as the question of who can best feed the world. In all these cases – health, environmental protection, and the retail situation – they are trying to establish their own definition and rules, thus aiming at destabilizing or at least gaining power within the corporate food regime.

AAN ISAN – LOCAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INITIATIVES IN NORTHEAST THAILAND

AAN Isan is a loosely structured network of organic small-scale producers with its early beginnings in the 1970s, starting out from informal initiatives of Yasothon and Surin province peasants (Expert A, personal communication, October 2011). At the end of the 1990s, AAN Isan became a nationwide organization and the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation was founded to organize and administer its funds. With the massive protests of the *Assembly of the Poor*[3] and the new constitution in 1997, there was some upswing of alternative development concepts in Thailand and sustainable agriculture became part of the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1997. Later, in 2006, the *Sufficiency Economy Philosophy*[4] became constitutional and funds were made available for relevant projects. At the time the study was carried out, the network was financed also by the government organizations CODI (Community Organisation Development Initiative), the Agricultural Land Reform Office, and the National Thai Health Foundation (Alternative Agriculture Network Esan, n.d.). This is especially interesting with regard to the intersection of the food regime and the health discourse legitimating it. Some projects, especially in the realms of seed variety breeding and alternative economy, are at least partly conceptualized and sustained as research projects (Alternative Agriculture Network Esan, n.d.; Expert D, personal communication, October 2011). The AAN Isan is active in the Northeast of Thailand, but its main focus is within the provinces of Roi Et, Ubon Ratchathani, Yasothon, Mahasarakam, Khon Kaen, Kalasin, Petchabun, and Surin. The network structure is very dynamic; groups are mobile and inter-connected across provincial borders; meetings are held in different sites. Interviews were conducted mainly with

3 Assembly of the Poor (AOP) was the first nationwide closing of ranks of rural and ethnic minority NGOs and social movements mounting a 99-day protest in front of the government offices in Bangkok. The founding of the AOP was also fueled by political activists who already were involved in opposition to the Pak Mun dam in Ubon Ratchathani province, among others the later spokeswomen of AOP Wanida Tantawitthayapitak (Glassman, 2001, p. 520). The AOP protests were especially remarkable for their strategic and dramaturgical performance. Nevertheless, the achievement was very limited and agreements were not renewed by the subsequent government (Baker, 2000; Missingham, 2003).

4 Sufficiency economy philosophy was introduced by the King in his birthday speech after the outbreak of the crisis in 1997. It is an alternative approach opposing negative effects of capitalism with moderation and sufficiency. It is consists of Buddhist moral and ethical concepts, such as the middle path (Piboolsravut, 2004).

representatives of the AAN Isan, the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation as well as key members of the AAN Isan interest groups. While AAN Isan and the Sustainable Agriculture Foundations are NGOs and thus have a formal representational body, the interest groups do not. Such groups have spokesmen and spokeswomen and indeed committees which take some organizational responsibility, but they are not autonomous or independent organizations. For example, the green market committee takes decisions about certain group activities, or just takes care of tasks which need to be done, such as ordering a car to pick up the right vendors on time (Expert G, personal communication, October 2011). Among the interviewees there were a person engaged in the establishment of Community Supported Agriculture and the seed selection activities in Kut Chum district, the representative of the Thai medical center at the temple *Wat Tha Lad*, and one initiating member of the green markets in Yasothon.

After a short historical outline of AAN Isan farmers' engagement in the struggle for food sovereignty and alternatives to development in general, special attention is given to its cultural and identity politics which are crucial for the legitimation of the peasants' claims within the food sovereignty approach. The section concludes by pointing out some of the central food sovereignty strategies by which the AAN Isan offers an alternative to the current food regime. Especially the focus of AAN Isan on environmental and health issues forms the legitimating backbone of the movement's agricultural activities and self-representation attracting diverse local consumers.

Since the 1980s, after the successful repression of communist and socialist uprisings during the 1970s, Thai alternative development has been dominated by a localism discourse articulated through the *Community Culture School*[5] (Parnwell, 2006). Within this concept, disseminated above all by a group of socially motivated academics, often physicians, and rebellious monks, the pre-capitalist village and community culture perceived as a genuine Thai lifestyle can lead the way out of the crisis-prone capitalist system. Localism is often characterized as a somehow backward looking imagination of the past based on local religion, beliefs, moral, and ethics and avoiding involvement with general political and economic problems and ideologies (Parnwell, 2006, p. 185). The Thai King's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a variety of the Community Culture School in that it seeks endogeneous solutions for socio-economic problems, caused mainly through exogenous factors, i.e. the deprivation of world-market prices for staples and primary goods, or the increasing out-migration of rural population into better-paid industrial occupation. It also largely draws on Buddhist principles of moderation and the middle path. Because it was formulated by the King, it has become leading in national policy making and even made it into the national constitution in 2006. It is central to a number of national and rural development policies and is recognized by the UN Development Report on Thailand in 2007 (Kasem & Thapa, 2012, p. 100). In parallel, there has also been a perceivable trend towards more radical tactics of resistance against capitalist development since the late 1980s (Somchai, 2002, pp. 23–24). Massive action of resistance in the Northeast grew

5 Community Culture School has emerged at the end of the 1970s and grew in importance throughout the 1980s and 1990s as opposition to the negative effects of capitalist development. Buddhism and the village culture are seen as its starting points for the achievement of a moral and ethical socio-economic system. The ideas have re-emerged as a neo-localism discourse in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy of the King (Parnwell, 2006, p. 185).

against projects of public–private partnership, which represented early forms of land-grabbing[6] and threatened the livelihoods of thousands of villagers. Amongst the issues of public concern were the large-scale 'reforestation' endeavors with heavily emaciating eucalyptus (Lohmann, 1991; Pye, 2008) or the construction of the prestigious Pak Mun dam in Ubon Ratchathani (Tegbaru, 1998) which would have destroyed the livelihoods of villagers dependent on fishing in the Mekong river. This protest finally spurred a nationwide protest movement, which cumulated in the foundation of the Assembly of the Poor (Missingham, 2003). The forerunner organization of AAN Isan, the *Small-Scale Farmers' Association of Northeast Thailand*, was one of the founding members of the Assembly of the Poor that successfully pushed for the integration of sustainable agriculture into national policies and assured funding and political support for alternative development projects, among others the AAN Isan (Somchai, 2002, p. 24; Supa, 2005; Expert D, personal communication, October 2011).

Being a member of the food sovereignty movement La Vía Campesina, AAN Isan also embraces the concept of agrarian citizenship, reflected in its identity politics as well as strategies of resistance. The notion of agrarian citizenship is a response to the bias of social and political rights towards property and class relations inscribed in the concept of national citizenship (Wittman, 2009, p. 807). Agrarian citizenship emphasizes the cultural and ecological aspects as parts of political economy. At its center are the culturally and socially established relations of small-scale and subsistence farmers to land and food production. While in mainstream economy land is regarded as an asset or means of production, the agrarian citizenship concept stresses the importance of land for social reproduction of its people and their identity. To identify oneself as peasant implies a reciprocal relation of caring and protection between the land and its people (Desmarais, 2008; Wittman, 2009). This is especially relevant regarding the ecological crisis and global warming, where peasants and food sovereignty movements claim to be able to avert or sooth the ecological crisis. This established relation to land and nature provides a fundamental challenge to capitalist agricultural production.

The following section shows in detail the specific politics of identity of the AAN Isan members and how they relate to the agrarian citizenship concept articulated through the food sovereignty movement. Their economic strategies of resistance are based on their self-understanding as peasants and people of the land and will be elaborated hereafter. The described activities with regard to alternative – moral – forms of production and marketing of rice, herbs, and traditional medicine as well as local agricultural products illustrate the linkages between identity, political and economic struggle and their cultural legitimation.

Identity Politics

Identity and cultural politics within the AAN Isan are a result of a conjunction of Buddhist and vernacular concepts and identification as peasants (or people of the

6 Regarding its manifestation within the current food regime, McMichael (2012) defines land grabbing as a symptom "of a crisis of accumulation in the neoliberal globalization project" (p. 681). Reflecting "changing conditions of accumulation" (McMichael, 2012, p. 681) the land grab as an analytical category is far more than a simple acquisition of land under capitalism.

land; Wiebe as cited in Desmarais, 2008, pp. 139–140) and the emphasis on community. These are based on mutual legitimation. The concepts of community and solidarity economy are understood as deeply rooted within the cultural and religious traditions of the Isan people (Parnwell, 2006; Experts F & D, personal communication, October 2011). Equally, rituals around seed selection and preservation are embedded within Buddhist festivities and are often celebrated on temple or temple premises. The specific peasant relationship to the land and agricultural production is also supported by Buddhist concepts, especially its holistic perception of nature and humanity. Society and human deeds are thus seen as part of nature, not as separated from it (Kaufman, 2012, p. 157; Expert A & B, personal communication, October 2011). In addition, Buddhist philosophy basically defines all phenomena as interwoven and interdependent, reflected in the principle of dependent origination – of cause and effect (Ratankul, 2004). This worldview is widespread in Thailand and forms part of the politics of identity of Northeastern peasants. The aspect of this specific relationship to nature and natural resources is the major characteristic of a peasant and a distinction towards, say, a farmer or an agrarian entrepreneur (Desmarais, 2008, p. 140). The politics of identity therefore play a major role within the food sovereignty discourse and the self-designation as peasant is in itself regarded as a specific act of resistance (Desmarais, 2008, p. 139). In Thailand, the terms *chao na* or *chao ban*[7] are commonly used when referring to farmers or peasants respectively (Walker, 2012, p. 9). These terms are also explicitly used by AAN Isan members in order to underline the social and cultural implications of being a peasant, for example in connection to the *hed yu hed gin* concept (as explicated below). Also, when speaking English the term peasant is used (Expert A, personal communication, October 2011). The agent's re-identification as peasant is closely related to the concept of agrarian citizenship as defined above and carries strong political implications.

Local Strategies of Resistance

The local strategies of resistance employed by members of AAN Isan mainly address the three contested realms within the present food regime: organic farming, social relations of food production, and health. In all of these, AAN Isan members have found strategies to oppose and at times even challenge the dominant power relations. Subdivided into numerous specialized groups, with personal cross-linkages and multiple memberships, AAN Isan members above all continue to consolidate their socio-economic position as independent peasants and food producers. They explicitly evade any deeper integration into the corporate sector using the instruments of producer cooperatives and alternative marketing strategies. Both are legitimized, at least partly, through the agent's capacity to define what is healthy for human and nature, especially within the realm of organic agriculture, seed breeding and vari-

7 *Chao na* means farmer in Thai, while *chao ban* literally means villager. During the interviews both were used as self-designation, especially in the context of differentiation. However, there is no equivalent discussion regarding the meaning of the term *peasant* and its historical context as in English-language literature (cf. Bernstein, 2006). There is however some political implication to the term *chao na/chao ban* (Walker, 2012). From my own experience, these terms strongly emphasize the self-identification of the people with the locality and their profession, specifically stressing the actors' agency and expertise.

eties, rice milling and production of organic fertilizers, or the producer–consumer relations for increased transparency and trust (Expert A, B, & E, personal communication, October 2011).

Their aspiration to earn a living as small-holders figures most prominently in the data – expressed as a vernacular concept of peasant livelihoods. What they call *hed yu hed gin*[8] (literally "produce to live, produce to eat") implies more than subsistence farming; it also includes empowerment and participation in the market, mainly through fair trade and alternative or direct marketing of their products (Expert B, personal communication, October 2011; for the notion of *hed yu hed gin*, see also Parnwell, 2006). This vernacular concept is substantially, i.e. in the way it is perceived by the agents, tied to perceptions of peasant identity and agrarian citizenship and mirrors food sovereignty's central critique of capitalist agricultural production. Especially in its current regime, agriculture is increasingly unable to provide for livelihood even to the farmers themselves (Desmarais, 2008; Jarosz, 2014; McMichael, 2009). The *hed yu hed gin* concept is the most potent concept of the Isan peasants' resistance as it specifically points towards the ability of the peasants to fend for themselves. As small-scale and independent farmers cannot compete on the market dominated by large corporate companies and based on social and economic inequality (Shankar et al., 2010, p. 141), their only chance lies in the establishment of alternative marketing circuits where they regain power over the definition of agricultural and food practices (Desmarais, 2008, p. 140). The specific strategies pointed out below are all included within the *hed yu hed gin* concept.

ORGANIC FARMING AND PRODUCER COOPERATIVES

The main strategy of the AAN Isan is the promotion of alternative agriculture, i.e. agricultural practices independent of the mainstream corporate food regime – as far as possible. The issues of safe and clean food were already articulated by Isan peasants in the late 1980s, mainly in consequence of serious health effects caused by untrained and heavy application of chemicals in agriculture (Kaufmann, 2012, p. 175; Panuvet et al., 2012). As a result, organic agriculture opened up as an option for concerned farmers and became a focal point of interest, especially for the early activists. For them, production without chemical input is not only a matter of marketing and sales increase; it is much more an act of resistance, as heavy use of chemicals and high-yield seeds was responsible for growing indebtedness and ecological destruction (Robinson, 2010, p. 8; Somchai, 2008, p. 109). Although organic production has been picked up and heavily co-opted by the corporate sector, mainly for exports to the Global North, only 0.02 percent of total agricultural land in Thailand was farmed organically in 2012 (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012, p. 88). Members of AAN Isan are mainly active in further developing organic farming practices and marketing of their products, however outside the corporate sector. One major instrument of independent production is the establishment of producer cooperatives, such as organic and inorganic rice mills. The Nature Care Club[9] cooperative rice mill in Na So village, located

8 This is a vernacular expression in the Isan Lao-dialect and does not exist as such in Thai language.

9 The Nature Care Club is one of the autonomous members of the AAN Isan. Some of these groups are

in the Kut Chum district in Yasothon, was one of the first of the AAN Isan and was founded in the late 1980s as a joint initiative of consumers and producers. This early form of collective community supported agriculture is still a very successful model of direct producer and consumer relations and the mill even participates in international trade (Expert A & B, personal communication, October 2011). Certifications and labeling of organic, safe, and healthy food clearly is a corporate strategy (Friedmann, 2005, pp. 230–231) and it is not possible to bypass these (costly) certification procedures on conventional markets. In Thailand, the main organic certification body is the Organic Agricultural Certification Thailand (ACT) which is a private organization accredited by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). ACT is also supported by the Earth Net Foundation, the major promoter of organic production in Thailand (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012, p. 88). The rice mill and its members must apply for a membership with the ACT, however, in order to emphasize the community aspect, the mill has obtained a group guarantee. This social control system is based on the members' mutual controls as to compliance with ACT standards (Od-ompanich, Kittisiri, & Thongnoi, 2007, p. 32). Regarding the club's exports to Europe, representatives of European certification bodies have visited and consulted the mill's board on the subject of their requirements (Od-ompanich et al., 2007, p. 32; Expert H, personal communication, October 2011) The rice mill sets its prices based on principles of fair trade and thus helps its members to avoid the unfavorable dependency relation with rice brokers and keep a bigger share of the rice price for themselves (Expert A & B, personal communication, October 2011), thus addressing one of the main food sovereignty claims. The remnants of the milling process are sold to farmers for the production of organic fertilizers and offer assistance to farmers who want to switch from conventional to organic agriculture (Expert A & C, personal communication, October 2011).

In Thailand, farmers are strongly encouraged by the authorities to use seed varieties developed and distributed by state institutions (Expert B, personal communication, October 2011). This has not only had an adverse effect upon the biodiversity, but also narrows local knowledge about seed selection, farmers' self-determination, and local dietary preferences. In order to elude the necessity to purchase organic seeds from government or other suppliers, the club's members are encouraged to select and preserve their own seed, and organic seeds are also supplied by the club. AAN Isan seed sovereignty groups organize seed fairs, socio-cultural seed exchange events as part of religious rituals, and cooperate with the agricultural department of the University of Ubon Ratchathani (Kaufmann, 2012, p. 169; Robinson, 2010; Expert A & B, personal communication, October 2011). For example, black and red sticky rice, which were supplanted by high-yield and long-grain rice varieties are now being pushed by some AAN Isan members. Peasants are involved in ongoing research about cultivation methods and processing of these rice varieties, which are then successfully marketed in green markets and through the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme. Seed cultivation is partly facilitated as a research project by the Ubon Ratchathani agricultural institute (Expert A & D, personal communication, Octo-

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more formal than others. As founder of the cooperative rice mill in NaSo, the Nature Care Club is one of the more formal groups of the AAN Isan. The group existed before the AAN Isan was founded.

ber 2011). By using and breeding their own seeds and elaborating local knowledge through educational workshops, peasants are actively re-establishing agency over their means of production, thus diminishing dependency from state agencies and the agro-industrial sector.

Related to the question of organic production is the more general concern over health. Indeed, strategies of empowerment in food production and supply employed by AAN Isan are closely related to and embedded in the health discourse. Supported by a dedicated medical doctor and the abbot of Kud Chum village, they got involved in activities aimed at the revival of traditional herb and healing practices. Foregoing the establishment of the Nature Care Club, the "healing neighbor" group was founded in 1983. At the same time, traditional herb medicine and healing practices were established at the Kud Chum hospital, which still functions as a center for traditional medicine. The herbal medicine group is still active, and a small village health center has been established at the local temple, where villagers can sell or exchange herbs for ready-made medicines and where planting of herbs, or collection of herbs in the forests, is promoted (Od-ompanich et al., 2007, p. 27; Expert C & F, personal communication, October 2011). Currently, members of the "healing neighbor" group are also engaged in establishing and maintaining relationships with urban consumers and patients. These can call the center and order medicines or herbs, which will then be delivered to the green market in Yasothon province, thus fostering producer–consumer relations and empowering both herb growers and patients. Although this initiative started rather as a self-help activity within the nascent localism discourse, it now exerts impact upon provincial law and distribution of means from health care funds (Expert A, personal communication, October 2011). According to the informants, there is a fixed budget on traditional medicine and therapy in the provincial health care budget and Yasothon province is among the forerunners in combining alternative and mainstream treatment.

ALTERNATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

As mentioned above, individual AAN Isan members have recently picked up the community supported agriculture scheme, which is still in an experimental phase. Milling, packaging, and transport are all carried out by the same person, who delivers his rice to a group of friendly consumers in Bangkok (Expert B & D, personal communication, October 2011). Still another form of collective and alternative marketing is the weekly green markets. Selling fresh, local products directly to consumers is one of the most basic strategies of food sovereignty with positive effects for both parties. These markets assure the producers the entire freedom of action as to their choice of offer, the pricing, and marketing. There are no discriminating or unequal relations in the process of distribution and according to the farmers' experiences, their profit exceeds by far their expectations (Expert B, C, & G, personal communication, October 2011). This is opposed to the widespread income situation of other farmers who are required to advance investments only to later depend on heteronomous market prices, which almost never cover the costs of production (Heft-Neal at al., 2008, p. 47; Shankar et al., 2010). For consumers, it assures a direct and reciprocal relation with the producers and knowledge about the origin and production of their foods.

By selling their own products directly to the consumer, peasants at weekly markets are indirectly but importantly contributing to the education on local biodiversity, especially for urban consumers and city dwellers, which, due to the all-year supply of fresh products, have lost knowledge about the seasonality of foods (Campbell, 2009; Expert C, personal communication, October 2011). Old varieties are promoted and re-introduced at the green markets, such as the already mentioned red and black sticky rice varieties. Some vendors manufacture prepared dishes, especially sweets and desserts, and sell them at the market, thus increasing the promotion of these varieties. Also frogs, insects, and other specifically local foods are fostered. In line with the food sovereignty program, AAN Isan tries to oppose this trend of losing the knowledge about locality and seasonality of foods by emphasizing the relevance and advantages of local and seasonal foods for the consumers and producers alike. Foods produced within the local cultural and ethical embedment is thus ascribed special value and quality (Campbell, 2009).

As was pointed out above, the AAN Isan is actively involved in legitimating its actions through health related discourses and with the help of health relevant actors, e.g. through funding. In Yasothon province many activities have been supported by the district health office – among others the establishment of the green markets. It is here in particular that AAN Isan members can capitalize on health issues because the "diet-related health inequities and environmental externalities generated by the current food system have been contributing to a crisis of legitimacy for the major proponents of such as system" (Dixon, 2009, p. 322). By presenting their products as healthy and cheap (or at least cheaper than average), class-based divergence and the increased inequality in access to high quality foods is challenged (Dixon, 2014, p. 202). Each food regime was based on the social legitimation of specific diets (Dixon, 2009, pp. 324–327), and discourses regarding healthy foods and diets have been part of transformation and consolidation processes of food regimes ever since. One major player here is the Codex Alimentarius, an international organization leading the definition of food and dietary standards. However, according to consumer critique, representatives of agro-food industries and other food-related businesses are often included in the delegacies. The increasing blending of private and public interest in research and development casts further shadows on the decision making within the commission (Bühte & Harris, 2011, pp. 219, 224). Until now, the debate over health effects of food was based in life sciences and dominated by discussions about nutrients, vitamins, and the advantages of animal proteins. But recently food related social movements, increasingly supported by ecologically oriented public health and life science research (Dixon, 2014) were successful in forwarding claims that healthy food should also be socially, ecologically, and culturally sound (Campbell, 2009, p. 313; Dixon, 2014, p. 201; Friedmann & McNair, 2008). As was mentioned earlier, quality certifications and labels are one major characteristic of, and are driven by the corporate food regime, and there is, also in Thailand, a large number of labels for environmentally friendly, healthy, and safe foods (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012, p. 88; Scott, Vandergest, & Young 2009, p. 71). Nevertheless, as Sangkumchaliang & Huang (2012) point out, all those certifications do not really show consumers' increased trust in organic and socially just relations of production. Apart from ecological effects, most buyers of organic products also attach importance to the support of

and contact with local farmers – needs which are only insufficiently addressed by corporate or national certification bodies (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012, p. 95). From the producers' perspective, organizing peasant markets and building relationships with consumers thus offers a valuable strategy to tackle this crucial discrepancy. Knowing the producer increases consumers' trust in production processes and makes food provenience and quality transparent and communicable.

At this point, the AAN Isan peasants' pricing policy also needs to receive attention, not only as means of marketing but also, and especially, as means of accessibility and affordability of healthy foods. The prices are chosen to be competitive to those at the other fresh market. Selling peasants would go to the fresh market and find out what prices were demanded for specific products only to offer their products at a cheaper price. Own input – mainly the labor necessary to mend the garden and collect the fruits and vegetables, or the time spent at the market – was not calculated (Expert G, personal communication, October 2011).

CONCLUSION

This paper has introduced food sovereignty activities in Yasothon province, Northeast Thailand, using the example of the Alternative Agriculture Network Isan as set against the analysis of the Thai context of the global food regime. Food regime is not understood here as a static concept but rather as fluent, dynamic, and relational. As its participants are not static objects without agency, so the regime too is in a constant process of transformation and consolidation. The paper's objective was to identify characteristics of the current food regime along which the AAN Isan activities could be analyzed with respect to their food sovereignty relevance. The global food regime as a set of exclusive and dominant relationships around food production and supply has very diverse local manifestations with at times severe effects especially for small-scale and independent farmers but also for consumers. The article has shown how small-scale producers in Northeast Thailand attain and maintain independence through a set of specific local strategies of resistance. Aiming primarily at evading the corporate sector and hence its manifold dependence relations, these strategies have mainly local effects; they are however also globally embedded. Such embedment is given in part through the global structure of its opponents and partly through its linkages to the transnational or global struggle of the food sovereignty movement.

The paper has examined AAN Isan strategies of producer cooperatives, organic farming and seed sovereignty, and alternative marketing. Each of these provides the peasants with possibilities to refrain from the corporate sector and its often exploitative relations, but at the same time to take part in the market, thus being able to earn a living. There is a clear linkage between the practices, the peasants' self-identification, and their cultural and religious embedment. The center of social activities, such as seed exchange fairs or moral economy is often the local religious center – the temple and local activities are often supported by involved monks. All AAN Isan strategies are interdependent as the members' focus on food and seed sovereignty covers the entire production and supply chain – from organization of means of production, over production processes, up to marketing strategies. Although organic certifica-

tions and labeling cannot be bypassed when offering their products at conventional markets (Scott et al., 2009, p. 71), it is the framework of agrarian citizenship which provides ethical and moral standards of production rather than official certification bodies. The specific politics of identity – the self-designation as people of the land and people of the village – and therewith associated social and ecological responsibility stressed by the food sovereignty movement are central to the AAN Isan members' self-understanding. Apart from the moral and ethical implications of the agrarian citizenship concept which call for a holistic understanding of nature and natural resources (Desmarais, 2008, p. 140), health discourse has shown to function prominently as a means of social legitimation of the peasants' struggle. Here, the actors especially pick up the mismatch between the certification and labeling constraints on the part of producers and the lacking trust and transparency of production processes perceived by consumers (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012). Producers therefore stress their cultural relation to land, as generalized in the agrarian citizenship concept, but which is deeply ingrained in their Buddhist beliefs and the principle of interdependence of all phenomena (Ratanakul, 2004). By pointing out their very own specific competence herein, the peasants are building relationships with consumers and by directly marketing their products they are able to bypass the certifications and meet the demands for more transparency. Their claim that the peasants' social relations of production are best suited to produce healthy and socially and ecologically responsible food is increasingly supported by ecologically oriented public health research.

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Food Sovereignty: A Framework for Assessing Agrarian Responses to Climate Change in the Philippines

Amber Heckelman & Hannah Wittman

▸ Heckelman, A., & Wittman, H. (2015). Food Sovereignty: A framework for assessing agrarian responses to climate change in the Philippines. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 8*(1), 87-94.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is one of the foremost countries affected by climate change, with increasing incidence of super typhoons, droughts, floods, and changing rain patterns — all of which exacerbate existing food insecurity, poverty, and ecological degradation (United Nations University & Alliance Development Works, 2014; Yumal et al., 2011). In response to these challenges, the development and diffusion of adaptation and mitigation strategies are necessary to enhance agrarian resiliency. Our ongoing research involves the assessment of food sovereignty pathways in Ecuador, Brazil, Canada, and the Philippines. Here, we report on our progress in using food sovereignty principles to develop an assessment framework for climate resiliency and food security among a network of smallholder agrarian systems in the Philippines. The objective of this research project is to analyze how and to what extent these smallholder farmers are enhancing their livelihoods; responding to loss and damage incurred due to climate change; and serving as catalysts for climate change adaptation, mitigation, and overall resiliency through farmer-led agricultural development initiatives.

The *Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-Unlad ng Agrikultura* (Farmer-Scientist Partnership for Agricultural Development, MASIPAG) is a national Filipino farmer-led network engaging in agroecological strategies to promote the sustainable use and management of biodiversity through farmers' control of genetic and biological resources, agricultural production, and associated knowledge (Medina, 2009). Since MASIPAG's establishment in the 1980s, the network has grown from 50 farmers to an estimated 35,000 farmers today. Our team is working with MASIPAG to assess the degree and scope of their effectiveness in facilitating livelihood resilience, especially in the context of climate change.

The challenge with this research lies in capturing the range of complex and interrelated dimensions encompassed in agrarian systems. Another challenge is developing new methodological approaches to empirically measure the outcomes of dynamic agroecological strategies and their overall impact on climate resiliency and food security. In response, we propose a systems-based approach built on the principles of 'food sovereignty' as a framework for investigating these dynamics and assessing their impact on both food security and climate resiliency.

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In the Philippines, an estimated 17 percent (16.4 million) of Filipinos do not meet their nutritional requirements and basic needs (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2012). A quarter of the population (24.2 million) lives in poverty (World Bank Group, 2012) and poverty is most severe and widespread among indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2009). Contributors to poverty and food insecurity include land reform policies dating back to 1988 that have been ineffective at breaking up and redistributing privately owned lands acquired during Spanish colonialism (Bello, 2001); multinational agricultural companies that are expanding industrial palm oil, banana, and pineapple plantations (Franco & Borras, 2007); and large-scale gold and copper mining operations that are destroying landscapes and watersheds (CEC-Philippines, 2012). These factors perpetuate a cycle of landlessness and poverty among farmers and contribute to the ongoing concentration of wealth and power in the Philippines (Ballesteros & de la Cruz, 2006; Borras, 2007).

Major reports (De Schutter, 2010; McIntyre et al., 2009; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2013), high profile case studies (Altieri & Koohafkan, 2008; Bachmann, Cruzada, & Wright, 2009; Holt-Giménez, 2002), and reviews (Altieri, Funes-Monzote, & Petersen, 2012; Lin et al., 2011) suggest that in order to address worsening inequalities, limited resources, and degrading ecological conditions while improving climate resiliency, agrarian systems should facilitate effective social processes for community empowerment as well as exhibit high levels of diversity, synergy, recycling, and integration. These studies credit the smallholder farmer sector for enhancing resiliency by effectively adapting to and mitigating climate change through increased use of local varieties, water harvesting, diversified and intercropping agroforestry, soil conservation practices, farmer-breeding practices, and a series of other traditional techniques. However, little empirical assessment has been made of the potential of diversified and small-scale agrarian systems to achieve food security and sustainable livelihoods through climate change adaptation and mitigation (CCAM) strategies, and there is a lack of consensus on how to assess and measure the effectiveness of such strategies.

SYSTEMS-BASED ASSESSMENT BUILT ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Assessments that only measure crop yield fail to account for important social, political, economic, environmental, and health outputs of an agrarian system. The development of comprehensive assessments that also consider inequality, poverty, hunger/malnutrition, market instability, and ecological degradation that characterize much of the agrarian experience are urgently needed. All of these dimensions and realities necessitate a move toward a more 'systems-based approach' derived from systems dynamics, a methodology for studying and managing complex systems that change over time (Ford, 2010; Meadows, 1972).

The principles of food sovereignty provide a framework for developing a systems-based approach that can assess food security and climate resiliency among agrarian communities. Since its articulation by La Via Campesina in 1996 as the right of local people to control their own regional and national food systems, food sovereignty has emerged as a significant topic in the discourse surrounding climate change. Advo-

cates suggest that food sovereignty initiatives have the potential to create alternative agricultural and food policy models that are better equipped with addressing food insecurity in the face of climate change (Altieri, 2009; Altieri, Nicholls, & Funes, 2012; Chappell et al., 2013; Wittman, 2011). This is because the principles of food sovereignty promote practices that are consistent with resilient agrarian systems like the preservation of genetic and biological diversity to enhance ecosystem service functions, reduced reliance on costly energy intensive inputs, and the linkage of farmer knowledge with political mobilization (Vandermeer & Perfecto, 2012).

The basic principles of food sovereignty provide a starting point in the effort to transcribe this concept into a methodological tool for assessing agrarian systems. The principles in brief are (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007):

1. the perception of food as a human right versus a commodity;
2. the value placed on equity and empowerment for all food providers;
3. the emphasis on the social and ecological benefits of localizing food systems;
4. the call for local control over resources and knowledge;
5. the support for local knowledge and protection of community intellectual property rights; and
6. the significance placed on agroecological practices.

A review of these principles reveals the different scales (household to global), factors (policies to local organizations), and dimensions (equity to sustainability) that food sovereignty engages with. Another feature of the framework is that it facilitates an investigation of phenomena affecting management decisions within agrarian communities, such as citizenship, social justice, and nutritional health (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Chappell et al., 2013; Vandermeer & Perfecto, 2012; Weiler et al., 2014; Wittman, 2009). As such, a systems-based assessment built around these principles has the capacity to capture the various dimensions and phenomena that affect the ability of agrarian communities to effectively respond to climate change. As such, our systems-based approach (see Figure 1) aims to address the growing critiques and concerns with assessments that focus primarily on crop production and the biophysical aspects of an agrarian system (Gregory, Ingram, & Brklacich, 2005; Schmidhuber & Tubiello, 2007).

ASSESSING CONVENTIONAL AND AGROECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO CLIMATE RESILIENT FOOD SECURITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

CCAM strategies are developed and deployed from a range of agricultural models (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Kaur, Kohli, & Jaswal, 2013; Loos et al., 2014). For example, the 'conventional' model led by the *International Rice Research Institute* (IRRI) and its national version, the *Philippine Rice Research Institute* (PhilRice), challenges scientists to develop technologies including high yielding and/or genetically engineered varieties (HYV) capable of withstanding climate induced ecological disturbances such as floods, droughts, and salinization (Fedoroff et al., 2010; Ismail et al., 2013). The process of developing and locally testing HYV varieties, and making them available to farmers via commercialization, can take several years. This process is

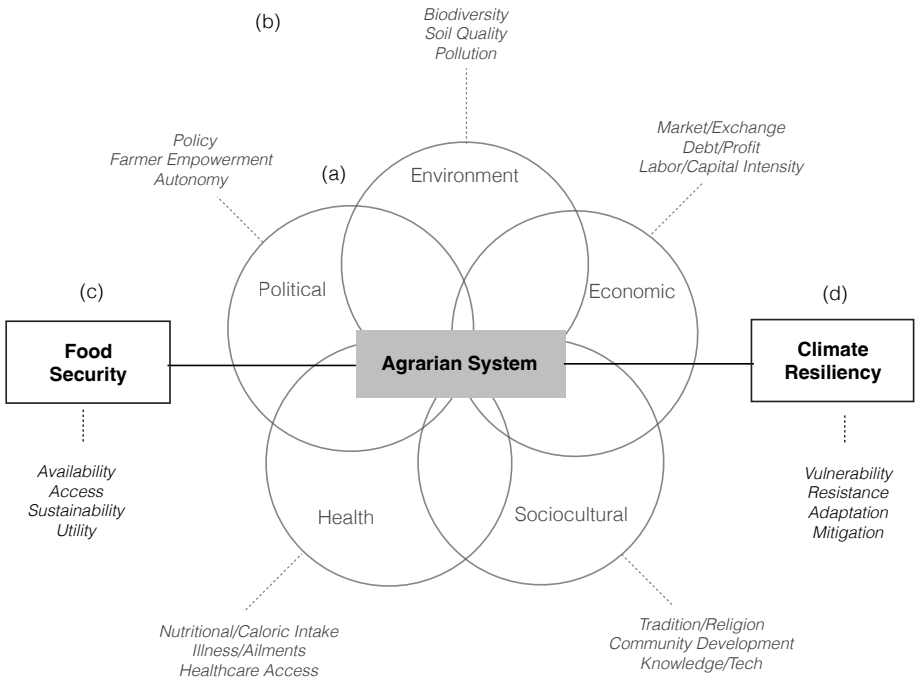

Figure 1: a 'food sovereignty' approach to assessing agrarian systems (own compilation).

costly, both in terms of the investment required for developing and producing new crop varieties and in terms of their subsequent affordability and accessibility to resource-poor farmers (Perfecto, Vandermeer, & Wright, 2009). There are also significant environmental and health costs associated with applying the chemical inputs required to grow these HYV (Frossard, 2002; Kaur, Kohli, & Jaswal, 2013; Perfecto et al., 2009).

MASIPAG advocates an alternative 'agroecological' model for agricultural development (Bachmann, Cruzada, & Wright, 2009). To enhance climate resiliency, this network of farmers, scientists, and NGOs works in concert to collect indigenous (or heirloom) seed varieties and engages in farmer-breeding initiatives to develop crops that are locally adapted to climate-induced conditions such as floods, droughts, and salinization (see Figure 1). These seed varieties are then shared among other farmers in the network via seed exchanges or planned distribution efforts. The network also provides mechanisms for farmers to share agricultural practices and community initiatives, such as intercropping strategies and livestock exchanges to promote genetic diversity (see Figure 2). Diversified livestock and intercropping systems improve soil quality and carbon sequestration as well as provide farmers, along with their families and community, with access to diverse and nutrient-rich diets. However, the productive capacity of agroecological and smallholder systems has been questioned in terms of their ability to feed growing urban populations, in particular because of reduced access to agricultural inputs, limited labor availability for low-input systems, and other resource constraints. Other challenges include the limited access of smallholder

Figure 2: Over 375 rice varieties bred by a single MASIPAG farmer (Photo by Amber Heckelman).

Figure 3: MASIPAG farmer preparing an organic pesticide and fertilizer (Photo by Amber Heckelman).

systems to agricultural infrastructure and consolidated distribution networks (Connor, 2008; International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2013; Seufert, Ramankutty, & Foley, 2012).

Both IRRI and MASIPAG initiatives demonstrate the different ways in which the Philippine agrarian sector aims to improve its capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change while simultaneously ensuring food security. This illustrates, again, the need to move beyond yield-centered assessments so as to comprehensively account for the range of activities and adequately assess their effect on food security and climate resiliency.

MOVING FORWARD

At present, we are in the first of two phases in the effort to develop our systems-based food sovereignty assessment tool. The first phase involves designing and drafting the assessment tool (survey questionnaire), which involves soliciting feedback from participating agrarian communities and pilot testing the assessment tool in collaboration with MASIPAG. The second phase will utilize the questionnaire to collect data in three agrarian communities comprised of both conventional and MASIPAG farmers, and located in regions susceptible to climate change induced disturbances.

As part of an ongoing multi- and transdisciplinary and multi-country collaborative research project, this paper highlights the challenges of adequately assessing climate resiliency and food security in the Philippines, and proposes a systems-based approach built on food sovereignty principles as a framework for carrying out such assessments. Ultimately, our intention is to increase our understanding of the connection between food security and climate change in the Philippines and to lay the groundwork for identifying pathways to resilient agrarian systems.

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"Plant Some Plants, Plant Some Hope, Plant Some Future". Urban Gardening at Lingnan University of Hong Kong: An Interview with Prof. Kin-Chi Lau

Rainer Einzenberger & Michaela Hochmuth

▸ Einzenberger, R., & Hochmuth, M. (2015). "Plant some plants, plant some hope, plant some future". Urban gardening at Lingnan University of Hong Kong: An interview with Prof. Kin-Chi Lau. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 8*(1), 95-102.

Prof. Kin-Chi Lau is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong.[1] Her areas of interest cover cultural studies, contemporary China studies, and comparative literature as well as critical pedagogy and gender studies. She promotes the idea of a *transition campus* at Lingnan University and is one of the initiators of the organic Urban Gardening Project[2] there. She is also a founding member of the Global University for Sustainability.[3] Rainer Einzenberger conducted this interview with Prof. Kin-Chi-Lau on the topic of urban gardening in Hong Kong via Skype in March 2015. Michaela Hochmuth was in charge of the editing. The interview portrays the Urban Gardening Project, its history, structures, and organizational characteristics. It engages with the participants of the project and their challenges and difficulties in realizing it. The broader and complex concepts of food sovereignty, food security, and 'commons' build the contextual background of this dialogue.

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Prof. Kin-Chi Lau ist derzeit außerordentliche Professorin am Institut für Kulturwissenschaften an der Universität von Lingnan, Hong Kong. Ihre Interessensgebiete umfassen Kulturwissenschaften, zeitgenössische China-Studien, vergleichende Literaturwissenschaften sowie kritische Erziehungswissenschaften und Gender Studies. Sie treibt die Ideen des *transition campus* an der Universität von Lingnan voran und ist diesbezüglich eine der Projektinitiatorinnen des Stadtgartens für biologischen Anbau. Darüber hinaus ist sie Gründungsmitglied der Global University for Sustainability. Rainer Einzenberger führte dieses Interview mit Prof. Kin-Chi Lau zur Thematik des städtischen Gartenbaus in Hong Kong via Skype im März 2015. Michaela Hochmuth war für die Editierung verantwortlich. Urbane Landwirtschaft erfreut sich in Südostasien angesichts wachsender Besorgnis über Klimawandel und fortschreitende Urbanisierung sowie im Kontext einer Wiederaufwertung bio-ökologischer Anbauformen als „gutes" Essen einer wachsenden Popularität. Das Interview zeichnet das Stadtgarten-Projekt, dessen Geschichte, Strukturen und organisatorische Merkmale nach. Es beschäftigt sich mit den Akteuren und Akteurinnen sowie deren Herausforderungen und Schwierigkeiten im Zuge der Umsetzung des Projekts. Die umfassenden und vielschichtigen Konzepte von Ernährungssouveränität, Ernährungssicherheit und *commons* stellen den kontextuellen Rahmen des Dialogs dar.

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1 For Prof. Kin-Chi Lau university profile, see: www.ln.edu.hk/cultural/staff/lau-kin-chi.

2 The title of this interview "Plant Some Plants, Plant Some Hope, Plant Some Future" (Lingnan Gardeners, 2014, p.1) originates from the first newsletter of the Urban Gardening Project at Lingnan University.

3 For more information, see the Global University for Sustainability's website: our-global-u.org.

Rainer Einzenberger: You initiated an organic Urban Gardening Project at Lingnan University in Hong Kong in 2014. What was the intention of the project and how did the idea for this project come into being?

Kin-Chi Lau: We started this project in September 2014 but prior, we had been very much concerned with questions of food security, food safety, and food sovereignty. These issues have been our main concern ever since we convened two forums on questions of sustainability. In December 2011, we held one main conference called the South-South Forum on Sustainability[4] at Lingnan University in Hong Kong and in December 2012, we had the second forum in Chongqing at the Southwest University. To these two forums we invited over 200 scholars and activists from over 30 countries across different continents, including Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia from South America; South Africa, Mozambique, Mali, Senegal, Egypt from Africa; Thailand, India, Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Korea, and Japan from Asia; as well as countries from Europe and North America. So the concern about food sovereignty and sustainability has already been there for many years.

As for the project at the university, the main idea is that it would be a pedagogic project by which students could gain more understanding not only about plants and gardening, but also about issues of global warming and climate change. Lingnan is a small liberal arts university. We have about 2,700 undergraduates, 3,000 associate degree students, and maybe 2,000 postgraduate students. Previously, I sent students to do their internships at different farms in Hong Kong or even in Beijing. But this only benefited a few students. So, we thought, putting the garden in the campus itself would arouse more curiosity and interest, and with that we can promote certain issues.

In September 2014, we made an application to the president of Lingnan University to give us some sites on campus and he was quite interested in the idea. He himself liked planting and came from a rural background in mainland China. He endorsed our plan. The main locations for the garden plots are between several main academic buildings, which means most people pass through the sites every day. At these central sites, we started to make planting boxes, find soil, get seeds, and then find people who wished to get involved.

Today, the people involved come from two different groups: One group are students who are taking some of my courses, which have to do with questions of sustainability, farming, or understanding global issues. So as part of their assignment, the students are doing some farming at the garden during the semester. Another group is called 'the Lingnan Gardeners' which includes staff, students, alumni, friends, or family members. This group is open for anyone who is interested – even people from the neighborhood can come and be part of the project – and we encourage everybody to participate according to their time and energy available. Sometimes, we also have specific groups to whom we give the produce, for example the cleaning staff, or the security guards. The idea is that although we organize this project and take care of the seedlings and plants, the produce belongs to anyone who cares to come to the campus on the harvest days to have their shares.

4 For the South-South Forum on Sustainability, see: www.southsouthforum.org.

Apart from the farming and harvesting in the garden, we also organize seminars to talk about food safety and other issues. One question we try to tackle is the question of 'commons'. For instance, we tailor-made some 20 planting boxes with wooden frames for the gardens in the campus. When people joined the Lingnan Gardeners group, some people came and asked, "Which box is mine?" They had the idea that if they took care of a box, it would be theirs and so they would be entitled to the produce. We encountered this question many times when we were asked what we would do with the harvest. We have been trying a lot to emphasize that we would want the people to see the campus as a common space, for which we are only caretakers. Concerning the garden, we only need to manage the water and the soil, since the plants grow by themselves. We announce the harvest day at the beginning of the month in our newsletter. On harvest day, whoever comes by will be able to enjoy a part of the harvest. But the idea of commons is already very alien to many people who are so used to private property, privatization, and the monetized economy.

We also tell students that the campus is a common space – not only for students and staff, but also for the cats living at Lingnan University campus. When we started the planting, one main discussion we had was how we could coexist with these cats, since they would mess up the gardens a little bit. We eventually designed some 'playground' for the cats with soil in certain boxes, and the cats got the message and did not mess with our plants in the garden plots.

Another issue we had was that the campus management team used to spray pesticides to kill mosquitos and other insects. When we started this project, we wanted to bring back butterflies and bees because we saw so few of them on the campus, yet they are so important to nature. But we were told by the management team that if there were any report of bees they would have to kill them since people were used to some 'urban' idea of what was an appropriate environment for humans, and they would see bees with their stings as dangerous. So bees needed to be eliminated. After we started the organic farming, we negotiated with the management team to refrain from spraying pesticides in the garden areas and now we have bees and butterflies in our areas, but not in others. This may appear to be trivial issues, but we bring up these issues to our students, some of whom may never have thought about them before. We explain for example why certain chemical pesticides are killing all microorganisms in the soil and that normally there are millions of microorganisms in a handful of healthy soil. In particular, we raise the issue of organic farming and the problems of modern farming.

Einzenberger: How come the cultural studies program initiated such a project, and not e.g. agricultural sciences or life sciences?

Lau: Cultural studies at Lingnan University is quite a unique program because we are an interdisciplinary program and we have faculty members who are quite actively involved in social movements and local and global initiatives. That is also why it seemed quite natural that it would be the cultural studies program running this gardening project.

In our undergraduate studies, for example, we cover the question of ecological justice in the curriculum. We discuss the linkages between ecological and socio-economic

justice. As students normally learn only with their heads but not their hands and their hearts, we ask our students to sweat and labor in the garden. Through growing local organic products, we also encourage students to see how over 90 percent of the food we consume in Hong Kong is imported – some of it travelling very long distances from the USA or Europe to come to our dining table. In our master's program we have been running new courses which are concerned with the food crisis, the future of farming, food sovereignty, and food movements. Further, we have courses on global issues and global cultures where we also take up questions of sustainability. We draw on experiences from the people's science movement in India or the Aymaran indigenous movement in Peru, where we see the different initiatives on water, soil, and food. Such issues have been taken up in our courses.
That is why, I think, this subject is not only a matter of life sciences. At the cultural studies program, we try to understand the kind of crisis we are facing in today's world and we also try to look for alternatives. But if we discuss alternatives that are too grand or too remote from daily life, then the impact on the students is going to be limited. That is why we also have this kind of farming project on the campus itself – so that it offers some kind of experiential learning, watching the plants grow and linking that to different issues. For example, we saw how the *heat island effect*[5] on our campus caused the plants to grow very well in the winter because of all the glass and concrete walls surrounding the gardening plots. We asked our students to do some research and they found that the heat island effect in Hong Kong was serious and that the temperature rose by 3 degrees Celsius for every kilometer from the edge of the city moving towards the city center, and that the average rise of temperature in Hong Kong in the last century was three times the rise of the average world temperature.
These are some examples of how we try to link local experience with broader perspectives and global concerns.

Einzenberger: You refer to your campus also as transition campus*, how is this linked to the* transition movement[6] *which tries to find small-scale local responses to the global challenges of climate change and ecological limitations?*

Lau: In the summer of 2014, we went to the UK to see some of the *transition towns*, for example Totnes[7] and Bristol[8]. Introducing the idea of the transition town and transition campus is a first step to have people critically reflect upon the whole question of urbanization. The idea of the mainstream is that being modernized means you are urbanized. Whether it is Hong Kong, or mainland China, or other countries, people take pride when the proportion of peasants is altogether very small, and if the urban population is high, it is taken as something positive. In 2011, China already had over 50 percent of the population being urban. But we know that cities are basically parasitical, since they do not produce food and there are a whole series of problems

5 The *(urban) heat island effect* is the phenomenon of the average urban air temperature being higher than that of the nearby rural environment. This effect varies in time and place as a result of geographical, meteorological, and urban characteristics. See also Kleerekoper, van Esch, & Baldiri Salcedo, 2011.

6 For the transition movement, see: www.transitionnetwork.org.

7 For Transition Town Totnes, see: www.transitiontowntotnes.org.

8 For Transition Town Bristol, see: transitionbristol.org.

related to urbanization. Therefore, on the one hand, the idea of the transition campus is to look for alternatives to global warming and the unsustainable ways of life in the urban environment. On the other hand, it is to try to reverse and change some of the values that favor and also privilege urbanization. One agenda for us is to try to see how people can value farming and the peasants because they produce food and because they have been the most exploited sector of the population for a whole century. It is in this context that we try to promote the idea of the transition campus. The transition campus is one way in which we also try to pose the questions addressed by the rural reconstruction movement in China. For about 15 years I have been working with some professors, students, and social movements in mainland China to encourage young people to go back to the countryside, stay there for six months or one year, so that they can learn about the problems of the countryside and through their experience there, reflect on their ideas about urbanization and modernization.

Einzenberger: Where did the knowledge for the gardening project come from, did you have some advisors or experts?

Lau: Yes, we have one graduate from our master's program who is the director of the Little Donkey Farm[9] in Beijing. He is an agricultural expert and has done organic farming in China for 12 years now. As our key expert he teaches students, helps to plan the farming, and takes care of some of the problems. We are all learning together with him. I myself started to learn organic farming back in 1994, when I started some poverty alleviation projects in the rural mountain areas of mainland China. At that time I thought that I needed to know more about farming and agriculture before I could start interacting with the local villagers. I have been trying to learn from this and it has been a great pleasure for me to do farming.

Einzenberger: How are the participants actively involved in the gardening experience working physically with the plants and soil?

Lau: Students had to do some hard labor during the clearing and the construction of the garden and some students told us that they had never sweated so much within two hours. Others made their first experiences in constructing a path. One main impact is that they realized the amount of labor, care, and time involved in growing a plant. Certain perceptions, usually taken for granted, for example that rice is just easily available at the supermarket or that there is abundant supply at the wet market, might change. We will also be growing some paddy rice on the campus so that students not only know how rice grows, but that they also learn that food is precious. Many students told me that one reflection they have since their involvement in the project, is the kind of importance they now attach to food, and how they now feel that the prices for food which takes so long to grow are inappropriately low.

9 The Little Donkey Farm is the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm in Beijing. For more information see: www.littledonkeyfarm.com.

Einzenberger: You also have special harvest days for women in your urban garden projects. What gender aspects do you see in this context?

Lau: That particular harvest day was the international women's day on March 8th but in fact among the Lingnan Gardeners, three quarters are women. We have some men but they are a minority. Of course there are certain gender aspects to the questions of farming and food but this is not a main focus of our work, maybe because most of the initiators and participants are women, and most of us are feminists. So we put in a lot of value to reciprocity and to contributions which cannot be calculated by monetized exchange. These are some of the feminist values and approaches which we have taken up.

Einzenberger: How important is healthy (organic) food for Hong Kong people, and is it affordable?

Lau: This question is related to a much more complex context about value change, cultural change, and social change. Organic food from abroad is available in certain supermarkets in Hong Kong for the upper and middle classes, and organic vegetables are even imported from mainland China to Hong Kong. Now in Hong Kong you have big corporations in the organic food market. But since the price for organic food is 50 to 100 percent higher than for conventional food, for the general population – the lower and lower middle classes – it is hard to afford. But if you would stop going to restaurants and cook at home, you probably can afford all the organic food for your meal. But then there is also the question of time and energy that you have to spend on going to the market and on cooking. That is also some constraint in Hong Kong because so many people work overtime. I think the 'cook your own meal' movement that has been going on in different parts of the world needs to be promoted in Hong Kong. But that will also require changes in work time patterns and in the intensity of work.

Einzenberger: China experienced several food scandals in the last years (with baby formula, rotten meat, etc.). How was this taken up in the Hong Kong media and has this influenced the idea for the project?

Lau: The Hong Kong media of course has been reporting a lot about food scandals because this is a question that people are concerned with. The food scandals come not only from mainland China but also from Taiwan, which previously was supposed to be very safe, and then it was found that contaminated and recycled oil was used or that they were using color and flavoring ingredients. So there have been food scandals from mainland China, from Taiwan, and occasionally from Hong Kong itself. I think the awareness for safe food is quite high in Hong Kong. There are quite a lot of mechanisms introduced by the government for quality control. For instance, if there is bird flu somewhere in mainland China, no live poultry, chicken, or duck would be imported to Hong Kong. Sometimes I feel that the phobia about food safety is excessive. There is need for more education about food that seems to be hygienically produced and safe, such as junk food from big food chains, but of course some of us

know that it is not healthy. There is still a lot that we need to do in terms of people's understanding about what kind of food is healthy.
Another aspect on which we would like to focus is the idea of local production for local consumption. It is both a question of food sovereignty, and the need to reduce the distance that food travels from around the world to the dinner tables in Hong Kong. That of course has direct consequences for the CO_2 emissions, climate change, and global warming. Hong Kong is very vulnerable in terms of its dependence on food imports from the USA, Brazil, and mainland China.[10] This question is relevant not only in terms of food safety and food sovereignty, but also in terms of the ecological footprint.

Einzenberger: What resonance does your project have in Hong Kong and maybe beyond?

Lau: Many people have been interested in our project and we got reported on in some mass media. After we started this project, some universities in Shanghai and Chongqing also got interested in promoting the idea of the transition campus. They contacted us and wanted to see how they could grow organic food on the campus as an educational project for all students. Many universities in Southeast Asia, South Asia, or China have sites where they do organic agriculture, but mostly by the agricultural departments. For us, we want to stress not only growing organic food but also a whole series of issues. So we have been discussing this with other colleagues from Shanghai and Beijing, and there is some interest in building certain networks so we can interact with and learn from each other.

Einzenberger: Do you also have networks with Southeast Asia?

Lau: Yes, for example in Thailand, we visited Chiang Mai University two months ago and also know many colleagues at Chulalongkorn University. They have been sending students for internships to the countryside and to villages. Apart from academia, we also have contacts with several rural reconstruction movements in Southeast Asia and South Asia – in the Philippines, Thailand, India, and Nepal. With them, we have been working on networks to see how we can share our resources to run short term courses or particular programs for young people.

Einzenberger: In Vienna, since recently, there are many urban agriculture and gardening initiatives. Would you say that urban gardening in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia is becoming popular or is it rather a marginal issue within a small group of academics or activists?

Lau: Of course, in a way it is still marginal but I also find that urban gardening has gone beyond a small group of activists or academics. In some neighborhoods, for instance in some primary and secondary schools, we can also see the promotion of urban gardening. These initiatives also come up as a kind of response to the problems

10 According to the statistics of the Office of the United States Trade Representative, in 2013, Hong Kong was the 6th largest export market for agricultural goods. Mainland China was the largest (United States Trade Representative, 2014, p. 1).

of food insecurity, global warming, etc. Somehow we can try to promote this more as an alternative to the crises and problems that we face today.

Einzenberger: Do you see any evolving research topics in this context?

Lau: I think one question is about food movements. How there can be autonomous food movements of people who grow their own food, in their local neighborhoods, and take up urban farming or subsidize and support rural regeneration movements, and also how these would be related to lifestyle changes. I think Michael Pollan[11] said in his promotion of the food movement, that as long as people cook their own meals they won't have all the problems of obesity and heart disease which come along with the consumption of junk food.
But these issues need to be taken up by the general public and not only by activist groups, advocacy groups, or academics who discuss them in the classrooms. People need to make efforts to make some changes, however trivial they may appear to be.

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Building Interregional Networks Among Young Researchers: IFAIR's 2nd EU-ASEAN Perspectives Dialogue

Kilian Spandler

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Comparative regionalism is a budding research field which generates a demand for interregional forms of knowledge production as a way to overcome regional intellectual parochialism. However, this demand is yet to be matched by appropriate academic networks. Valuable regional research networks exist in the form of punctual interaction at international conferences, but dialogue *between* regions that goes beyond these is still rare. There may be a number of reasons for this. Apart from potentially differing research cultures, the simple fact that institutionalizing intellectual exchange across geographical distances is usually cost-intensive is certainly one of the most important barriers. This is especially true for countries and regions where the financial equipment of research institutions is poor and funding for travel is sparse. Those who suffer the most under such conditions are students and young researchers with generally fewer personal resources and limited access to funding for academic purposes.

Against this background, the 2nd Interregional EU-ASEAN Perspectives Dialogue (EUAP II), which was held from March to June 2015, shows how a mix of on- and offline formats can help in building bridges for young academia despite unfavorable conditions.

The EUAP II was organized by the *Young Initiative on Foreign Affairs and International Relations e.V.* (IFAIR), a student-led, Germany-based initiative that promotes youth exchange and projects related to international affairs.[1] Following the inaugural project in late 2013 and early 2014, the second edition of the Dialogue ran under the heading 'Building Global Partnerships – Which Role for the EU and ASEAN?'. In keeping with this question, 20 graduate and post-graduate students, as well as young professionals from Europe and Southeast Asia, discussed the potential for the two regional organizations to cooperate on current challenges in global governance.

Concluded in late March 2015, the first phase of EUAP II was an online conference which included a two-week working phase of break-out groups focusing on specific issue areas. Using video conference technology, the participants jointly developed research questions and prepared presentations that were then discussed in a plenary session. With high selection standards, the project connected a low financial threshold and a 50:50 quota for participants from each region, thus ensuring excellence in academic performance without sacrificing equal representation of voices from both regions.

1 More information on the organization can be found on http://www.ifair.eu.

Expert advisors from academia, think tanks, and civil society organizations assisted the break-out groups in their research during the working phase. The findings of the online conference form the basis for a policy paper, which identifies the potential for an EU-ASEAN partnership. In addition, the paper makes recommendations to decision-makers on how to improve interregional cooperation in the issue areas of development, trade, finance, and climate change. It was drafted by a group of Dialogue participants under the guidance of IFAIR's editorial team. In the recently concluded second phase, a project delegation discussed the policy recommendations with political stakeholders in Brussels. The visit was concluded by a 'citizens café' informing the public about the findings of EUAP II. There was also a panel discussion with experts and project representatives at the *European Institute for Asian Studies* on 18 June 2015.[2]

The support by established research institutions, such as the *EU Center in Singapore* or the Brussels-based *European Institute for Asian Studies*, indicates that the potential of hybrid on- and offline research formats for exchange among young academia is gaining increasing acknowledgement by the regionalism community. The discussions of the online conference attest the undeniable viability of web tools as a means to create sustainable interregional formats of knowledge production as well as the productivity of such formats in producing policy-relevant analyses (see also the paper resulting from the first EU-ASEAN Perspectives workshop, Meissner et al., 2014).

The EUAP II discussions showed that, while the potential for joint action by the EU and ASEAN on global issues differs across policy fields, there are generally clear limits for a partnership. In addition to differences between the two regions, divergences within the regions in terms of political and economic structures obstruct the development of common policies. Any strategy for developing the global dimension of EU-ASEAN interregionalism will therefore have to work towards relations on more equal terms between but also within the two regions. A recurrent point raised at the conference was that greater involvement of civil society and private sector actors can help to level the playing field.

This being said, the obstacles towards a more fully developed interregionalism somewhat reflected back on the EU-ASEAN Perspectives Dialogue itself: Even though the participants came from geographically diverse backgrounds, including nationals from five European and six Southeast Asian countries, the inclusion of representatives from each region's peripheries has proven hard to achieve. Increasing inclusiveness will therefore form one of the key challenges of future editions of the project. In this respect, the main hurdles are weakly developed academic networks which make it hard to advertise calls for applications, limited internet bandwidth capacity which impedes participation in the online meetings, and a lack of language skills. An improvement of the academic and digital infrastructure together with an enhancement of English language training in higher education systems would go a long way in maximizing the potential of interregional knowledge production.

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2 The paper and a report on the discussion can be accessed on http://ifair.eu/en/eu-asean-perspectives-dialogues/.

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Book Review: Pichler, M. (2014). Umkämpfte Natur. Politische Ökologie der Palmöl- und Agrartreibstoffproduktion in Südostasien.

Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot. ISBN 978-3-89691-978-6. 248 Seiten.

▸ Duile, T. (2015). Book review: Pichler, M. (2014). Umkämpfte Natur. Politische Ökologie der Palmöl- und Agrartreibstoffproduktion in Südostasien. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 8*(1), 107-110.

Palmöl wurde in Europa in den letzten Jahren zum Politikum und damit auch zum Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Untersuchungen und Auseinandersetzungen. War Palmöl davor oft als ein Lösungsansatz im Kampf gegen den Klimawandel und als Möglichkeit zur Einkommensgenerierung in den Ländern des globalen Südens (in erste Linie Indonesien und Malaysia, woher etwa 90 Prozent des weltweit produzierten Palmöls stammen) gesehen, mehren sich nun auch im akademischen Diskurs kritische Stimmen, die ökologische und soziale Folgen des Palmölbooms in den Erzeugerländern untersuchen.

Melanie Pichler, Universitätsassistentin am Institut für Politikwissenschaft an der Universität Wien, hat in diesem Kontext eine weitere Studie vorgelegt, die sich mit der Palmölproduktion in Südostasien beschäftigt. In ihrem Werk widmet sie sich einem bisher wenig beachteten Untersuchungsgegenstand, nämlich der Rolle des Staates bei der Schaffung eines für die Palmölindustrie vorteilhaften Produktionsumfeldes. Den Staat charakterisiert Pichler hierbei im Anschluss an kritisch-materialistische Staatstheorien als umkämpftes Terrain, in dem verschiedene Gruppen versuchen, ihre Interessen durchzusetzen und als Allgemeininteressen zu universalisieren. „Natur" wird in diesem konflikthaften Prozess sowohl materiell-stofflich als auch diskursiv-symbolisch (re-)produziert, von bestimmten AkteurInnen angeeignet und innerhalb postfordistischer Naturverhältnisse als nachhaltig zu managendes Ressourcenreservoir entworfen, ohne dass Besitz- und Machtverhältnisse in Frage gestellt werden.

Im ersten Teil der Studie erläutert Pichler diesen kritisch-materialistischen Zugang und diskutiert überzeugend dessen Vorzüge gegenüber konventionellen Theorien von Staat und Staatlichkeit. Dabei beschreibt sie den Staat als ein Gefüge sozialer Verhältnisse, in welchem Hegemonie durch Konsens und Zwang, also sowohl diskursiv als auch durch staatliche Gewalt, durchgesetzt wird. Innerhalb kapitalistischer Widersprüchlichkeiten gelingt es so, die sozialen Verhältnisse trotz latenter Konflikthaftigkeit immer wieder zu stabilisieren.

Anschließend wird das methodische Vorgehen der Untersuchung dargelegt, wobei die Autorin ihre Arbeit als qualitative Forschung ausweist, in der Interviews, Gesetzestexte und Publikationen der untersuchten AkteurInnen ausgewertet werden. Daran anschließend wird die Entwicklung und Förderung des Agrartreibstoffsektors in Indonesien und Malaysia diskutiert. Hier wird deutlich, wie bestimmte AkteurInnen ihre partikularen Interessen in staatliche

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Praktiken einschreiben. Besonders wird dann aber die materielle Basis des „Palmölprojekts" analysiert: Diese macht Melanie Pichler in Anlehnung an regulationstheoretische Überlegungen in einem regionalen Akkumulationsregime aus, das vor allem aus nationalen und regionalen Konglomeraten besteht. Diese sind, wie Pichler in der Analyse der historischen Entwicklung der AkteurInnen, Strukturen und Kräfteverhältnisse ausführt, in transnationale Wirtschaftszusammenhänge eingebunden, ermöglichen aber einer regionalen Elite ebenfalls eine effektive Akkumulation von Kapital.

Darauffolgend wird die Bedeutung Indonesiens, Malaysias und Singapurs für dieses Akkumulationsregime analysiert. Während Indonesien – zumindest theoretisch – auf eine Diversifizierung von Rohstoffen für die Biotreibstoffproduktion abzielt und mehrere Institutionen und Interessensgruppen in die Ausarbeitung der Strategien involviert sind, konzentrierte sich Malaysia seit den 1960er Jahren auf die Produktion von Palmöl und lediglich dem Plantagenministerium fallen hier politische Entscheidungskompetenzen zu. In beiden Ländern profitieren besonders Konglomerate, die sowohl über eigene Plantagen als auch über eine weiterverarbeitende Industrie verfügen. Singapur nimmt innerhalb des regionalen Akkumulationsregimes die Position des Handels-, Technologie- und Finanzzentrum ein.

Ein zentraler Aspekt des Buches ist dann die Untersuchung zu den Konflikten um die Kontrolle und Aneignung von Land. Dabei wird zunächst die historische Genese der Eigentumsverhältnisse nachgezeichnet. Hier wird deutlich, dass die heutigen Eigentumsverhältnisse, die eine Akkumulation von Land als Produktionsmittel in den Händen des Staates und privatwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen ermöglichen, eine Vorgeschichte haben, die in Indonesien auf die niederländische Kolonialzeit zurückgeht. Deutlich wird hier allerdings auch, dass „Natur" im Rahmen dieser Analyse einer politischen Ökologie als Ressource, z.B. als Land in Erscheinung tritt, was letztlich vielleicht auf einen anthropozentrischen Naturbegriff des späten Marx verweist. Auch wenn so ökonomisch nicht fassbare Dimensionen von Natur nur schwer in eine Analyse eingebunden werden können, beispielsweise Bedeutungszuschreibungen durch Indigene an natürliche Entitäten, so ist eine solche Herangehensweise doch adäquat und wichtig, um vermeintlich unideologischen Analysen des Managements und der Inwertsetzung natürlicher Ressourcen, die lediglich marktbasierte Lösungsmechanismen propagieren, Argumente entgegenzusetzen.

Des Weiteren führt Melanie Pichler aus, dass Indonesiens Dezentralisierungsprozesse seit 1999 dazu geführt haben, dass Unternehmen ihre Interessen nun auf unterschiedlichen politischen Ebenen – beispielsweise in Jakarta und auf Provinz- oder Landkreisebene – und damit effektiver durchsetzen können. Sie zeigt außerdem, dass die „Neue Ordnung" unter Suharto maßgeblich auf der Inwertsetzung von Natur basierte, da so einerseits die Anbindung an das kapitalistische Wirtschaftssystem vorangetrieben, andererseits auch die ökonomischen Interessen nationaler und lokaler Eliten bedient werden konnten. Im demokratischen Indonesien haben nun jedoch auch NGOs sowie soziale und indigene Bewegungen die Möglichkeit, den Staat als Arena zu nutzen. So hat es beispielsweise die indonesienweit agierende Indigenen-NGO AMAN zum Teil geschafft, die Anerkennung von solchen Besitzverhältnissen durchzusetzen, die sich aus dem traditionellen Gewohnheitsrecht Indigener Gruppen ableiten. Auch innerhalb des Staatsapparates selbst werden dabei Konflikte aus-

gemacht. Schließlich kann so gezeigt werden, dass der Staat selbst ein umkämpftes Terrain ist, auf dem jedoch AkteurInnen, die mit Kapital ausgestattet sind, strukturell im Vorteil sind.

Neben den Konflikten um Land macht die Autorin als weitere zentrale Konfliktlinie die Auseinandersetzungen um die Beimischung und Zertifizierung von Agrartreibstoffen aus. Beimischungsquoten von Agrartreibstoffen waren dabei zunächst als Strategie im Kampf gegen den Klimawandel und als Maßnahme gedacht, um die Abhängigkeit von fossilen Energieträgern zu reduzieren. Pichler zeigt jedoch, dass hier der Staat in erster Linie als Regime in Erscheinung tritt, das ein exportorientiertes Landwirtschaftsmodell fördert, welches letztlich hauptsächlich Agrarkonzernen und Biodieselunternehmen zugutekommt. Auch der *Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil* (RSPO), der eine Zertifizierung von Palmöl auf freiwilliger Basis anstrebt, wird analysiert. Dabei wird herausgearbeitet, wie im RSPO bestimmte Gruppen systematisch marginalisiert werden – allen voran unabhängige KleinbäuerInnen und PlantagenarbeiterInnen. Auch zeigt die Autorin, dass indigene Landrechte im Rahmen des RSPO kaum beachtet werden. Sie argumentiert überzeugend, dass der RSPO ein Beispiel für ein Steuerungsinstrument ist, das Government durch Governance ersetzt und letztlich auf Freiwilligkeit und Markt baut anstatt auf demokratisch-politische Kontrolle. Dennoch ist der Staat weiterhin präsent, da er diese Formen der Regulierung anerkennt und auf eigene Instrumente verzichtet.

Resümierend hält Pichler fest, dass innerhalb des aus den Palmölkonglomeraten bestehenden, staatlich abgesicherten regionalen Akkumulationsregimes auch gesellschaftliche Naturverhältnisse transformiert werden, Natur also noch stärker den Interessen der Konglomerate untergeordnet wird. Schließlich regt sie im Ausblick auch an, die *Renewable Energy Directive* der EU insgesamt in Frage zu stellen, denn die Untersuchung legt nahe, dass die Beimischung von zertifizierten Treibstoffen, die innerhalb der ökonomischen und sozialen Rahmenbedingungen des Akkumulationsregimes produziert werden, bestehende systemimmanente Probleme wohl eher reproduzieren als lösen.

Melanie Pichler hat eine Studie vorgelegt, die nicht nur für WissenschaftlerInnen interessant ist, sondern auch wichtige Anregungen für die politische Arbeit von Umwelt-, Entwicklungs- und Menschenrechtsorganisationen geben kann, indem der systemische Charakter der Probleme, die das Akkumulationsregime verursacht, aufgedeckt wird. Gerade die Idee, den Staat als umkämpftes Terrain zu fassen, indem sich Machtasymmetrien reproduzieren, ist hier sehr überzeugend: Mit diesem theoretischen Rahmen kann erklärt werden, warum viele Konflikte und Missstände in der Palmölindustrie einen derart persistenten Charakter aufweisen und mit dem Ruf nach mehr Nachhaltigkeit oder Transparenz im Rahmen der bestehenden Verhältnisse bisher nicht gelöst werden konnten – und wohl auch nicht zu lösen sind. Es bleibt zu hoffen, dass diese informative, argumentativ starke und theoretisch gut fundierte Studie auch über akademische Kreise hinaus eine entsprechende Wirkung entfalten kann.

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Book Review: Gravers, M., & Flemming, Y. (Eds.). (2014). Burma/Myanmar—Where now?

Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. ISBN: 978-87-7694-112-3 -XIV. 447 pages.

▸ Benedikter, S., & Köster, U. (2015). Book Review: Gravers, Mikael, & Flemming, Ytzen (Eds.). (2014). Burma/Myanmar—Where now? *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 8*(1), 111-118.

Myanmar has been ruled by an authoritarian military regime for more than half a century. The Southeast Asian country gained sad notoriety through political repression, massive human rights abuses, armed conflicts, socioeconomic decline, and extreme poverty. This began to change only in 2011 when the junta replaced itself with a quasi-civilian government in order to seek ways out of its political and economic isolation. Thereafter, the country embarked on a new political course of opening up and political liberalization. While the international community has euphorically celebrated Myanmar's self-initiated "roadmap to democratization," new and old problems endanger the transitional process. In response to this, Mikael Gravers, an anthropologist and Myanmar scholar, and Flemming Ytzen, a journalist with a long-lasting Burma engagement, put together this ambitious volume taking stock of the current political situation with a thematic focus on conflict resolution, peace building, and democratization. Bringing together the perspectives of 21 academics, journalists, and practitioners, the purpose of this book is to address the attainments and prospects of the transitional process so far, as well as the future challenges and threats lying ahead of the conflict-torn country.

The book features three parts and a brief conclusive chapter. Part I, entitled "Order and Change" (pp. 23–139), guides the reader through the most salient events, developments, and changes of the country's ongoing transition from a military dictatorship to a civil government with all its institutional consequences. Ytzen and Gravers draw a lively picture of the controversial elections of 2012 as well as the upcoming polls of 2015. This is followed by an overview of the altering role of the media and newly emerging space for political engagement. This section also looks at the main actors and key political figures, their interests and strategies, most notably Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD), President Thein Sein, the military-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), and the various ethnic minority parties, but also societal forces such as the Tatmadaw (military of the union government), the bureaucracy, the Buddhist Sangha, business interests, and (armed) ethnic groups. Michael Lidauer provides detailed insights into the new constitution and the political administrative system enshrined in it. He highlights the need for more decentralization, constitutional amendments, and corresponding changes in the election system on the way towards a new and more democratic state in Myanmar. Charles Petrie and Ashley South briefly sketch the country's civil society

landscape and elucidate the potential role NGOs may play for peace building and democratization. More critically, referring to Myanmar's geostrategic position in the region, Bertil Lintner argues that reforms are embedded in and driven by geopolitical power games and interests that do not necessarily serve the democratic transition in the first place. Subsequently, Josine Legêne and Flemming Ytzen describe how global and regional players aligned their foreign policy towards Myanmar throughout its turbulent history. Beyond politics, major social issues are addressed by Marie Ditlevsen, who sheds light on current developments in health and education, while Jessica Harriden elaborates on the situation of women who suffered greatly because of decades of armed conflict and violence. Anna Roberts shows that despite recent legal improvements, the human rights situation remains precarious and has even aggravated in the face of flaring anti-Muslim violence.

With almost two hundred pages, Part II, entitled "Challenges to Unity" (pp. 142–338), represents the analytical heart of this volume. While the preceding part describes changes due to political reforms, this section analyzes the challenges inherent in the current transformation and legacies of the past. Mikael Gravers depicts how many of these obstacles stem from the British colonial era. The British divide-and-rule colonial policy, which systematically segregated ethnic and religious groups within Burma's "plural society" (Furnivall, 1948) fuelled distrust and fear, which escalated into multiple, ever-complicating conflicts after the country gained independence in 1948: "Politicization of ethnicity, internal conflicts and general mistrust has created a complex scenario that is difficult to handle in the ongoing reform and peace process" (p. 154). In this context, Gravers traces the Karen's struggle for autonomy as a process of ethno-nationalism, factionalism, and multifaceted conflicts. Far from describing homogeneity, Gravers insightfully illustrates how the Karen have become increasingly fragmented since 1948 due to inner conflicts between the Christian and Buddhist camps and their changing relationship with the (military) government. Gravers vividly demonstrates how different layers of conflict emerged over time and space.

Remaining with Southeast Myanmar, Tim Schroeder and Alan Saw U, both engaged in the peace process in Karen State, look into more contemporary developments under the ceasefire agreement signed by the government and the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2012. In the face of massive land grabbing, the illegal extraction of resources, and large-scale top-down development projects, the authors hint at the far-reaching social and ecological impacts that will potentially bring an abrupt end to the flimsy peace process. Both authors underline the urgent need for more coordination between international actors engaged in humanitarian aid and more participation of local populations and civil society in all affairs related to peace building and regional development in order to avoid further conflicts. Fair access to and even distribution of natural resources must be duly ensured in the peace process. How different groups/local elites cooperated with military government and private investors in the field of natural resources extraction under so-called "ceasefire capitalisms" (Wood, 2011) and how abruptly such ceasefire agreements can end is shown by Wei Moe's chronology of the Kachin conflict in Myanmar's Northeast. In 2011, after a 17-year bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) was broken, fighting started over the development of hydropower and other large-scale projects (e.g. Myitsone dam), as well as plans to in-

corporate the KIA into the government-controlled Border Guard Forces. Moe draws a portrait of a highly complex and almost unresolvable conflict that has long extended its scope across Kachin State into Northern Shan State and even China. From a more emotional perspective, Lian H. Sakhong describes what it means to return to Myanmar and to visit his homeland, the Chin Sate, after having lived more than twenty years in political exile. Throughout this chapter, it is repeatedly emphasized that peace building and reconciliation are the key factors for the country's democratic transition and socioeconomic development, but this is difficult to achieve as long as limited trust among conflict parties and divergent expectations about peace exist. Charles Petrie and Ashley South recap the history of peace building endeavors between the government and non-state-armed groups (NSAGs) over the past decades. Concerning state building in post-conflict zones, one of the key questions is how "non-state local governance structures will relate to formal state structures. This is a particularly pressing question in areas of recent armed conflict, where communities are subject to multiple authorities" (p. 227). As ethnic minorities have little trust in the Tatmadaw and fear growing central government influence (Bamarization), for them peace, essentially, is about more regional autonomy and ownership over policies and the development process. For the military and the union government, however, peace is traditionally tantamount to controlling the margins to ensure political stability and national unity. Given such contradictory perceptions, the authors conclude that more needs to be done in order to enhance the dialogue between government, NSAGs, and urban populations to generate mutual understanding and create a common basis for peace. As the reform process continues to gather momentum, donors are increasingly engaged in peace building initiatives but often lack sufficient background knowledge of the complexity of the situation. At present, as illustrated by South, donors predominately support and operate through governmentally controlled structures while neglecting direct cooperation with conflict parties and their organizations – indeed, a one-sided and therefore risky approach.

The second section of Part II deals with religion and ethnicity, which are tightly entangled in Myanmar. Buddhists comprise the majority (eighty-nine percent of the population), but there is a diversity of other beliefs such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism. Gravers and Ditlevsen provide insights into religion and its politicization. Following this, Mandy Sadan describes how among the Kachin (which is basically an umbrella term for several ethnic subgroups settling in Northeast Myanmar) Christianity has become the common identity and major ideology supporting their long-term struggle for regional autonomy. With respect to democratization, Gravers depicts Buddhist worldviews on democracy, human rights, and political culture and what we can learn from this for the current democratization process. Following up on this, Gravers traces the politically inherent role of Buddhism throughout different epochs of the country's modern history, focusing on the political engagement of the Sangha as a historical continuum, in both positive and negative terms. On the one hand, Buddhism constantly has acted as a vehicle of social, political, and moral criticism and resistance to repression and authoritarianism. The struggle for freedom from British colonial rule and the Saffron Revolution of 2007 are explicitly discussed in this context. On the other hand, Buddhism constitutes an unpredictable source of xenophobic nationalism and political polarization. The recent anti-Muslim

riots, in which politically radicalized monks played a major role, are the most recent manifestation of a whole array of similar incidences carrying on from past to present. Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung discusses the outbreak of communal ethnic-religious violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Northern Rakhine State in 2012. She examines the historical roots of this conflict and the controversial term Rohingya for the ethnic Muslim group in Rakhine State. Officially considered Bengali (illegal immigrants from Bangladesh without formal citizenship status), this group of people has become the target of severe discrimination, displacement, and other human rights abuses in the wake of rising xenophobic nationalism coupled with fear about the spread of radical Islam.

Part III considers "Economy, Development and Environment." Sean Turnell examines economic reforms and their effects, among other issues, including the new foreign direct investment law, trade liberalization, the new exchange rate regime, and land reforms. Rather skeptically, Turnell argues that macroeconomic and fiscal reforms are lagging far behind the political developments. The reforms, yet unfinished and fuzzy, have created a regulatory environment in which the country's elite and foreign investors are taking advantage in a socially and ecologically unsustainable way. While growth has increased, it remains non-inclusive and largely dependent on natural resources extraction for export, mainly oil, gas, gemstones, and teak. Also, other sectors remain embedded in a political economy featuring crony capitalism: "One of the most remarked-upon developments in the latter years of the Burma's then-ruling SPDC regime was the increasing dominance of the economy by the military, and by a handful of elite business figures attached to them—universally known throughout Burma as the 'cronies' … there can be little doubt that they will remain a force in Burma's political economy" (p. 382). In contrast, rural areas, where the bulk of Myanmar's population lives, face constrained livelihood opportunities and poverty due to little public investment in infrastructure, unsecure land tenure, and no clear rural development policy to change things for the better. After reading Part I and II, Part III, fraught with repetition, falls a bit short of expectations. It has little new to offer that has not already been said elsewhere in the book. Less description and more analyses of the changing political economy would be of great value for the reader to complement the picture provided in Part I and II.

All in all, covering a wide range of issues essential to grasp the present situation, this is a useful book in many respects. Approaching a wide readership ranging from scholars to practitioners, it has much to offer in terms of overview knowledge as well as in-depth analysis and thought-provoking considerations about the nexus of peace building, democratization, and development. Endowed with an index and multiple glossaries on issues such as ethnicity, main political organizations, and armed groups, as well as a range of useful chronological tables and cartographic materials, the book also serves as a valuable reference book. In this regard, however, one wishes that the editors had paid more regard to structural issues. For instance, it remains unclear why the book distinguishes between normal and so-called 'in focus' articles and how these two types of articles align with each other.

Thematically, the book largely focuses on the Southeast and Northeast as well as explicitly violent and armed conflicts. Other aspects would have been worth paying more attention to. When it comes to ethnic minorities, the Kachin and Karen are

in the spotlight, whereas other regions and more 'silent' conflicts (e.g. Shan State and Chin State) receive far less attention. As so often occurs in the highly politicized context of Myanmar, some views and political analyses are debatable, but the editors managed to balance divergent views and draw a differentiated picture of the current situation. Although no article solely deals with the history of the country itself, in most articles history is taken into consideration and used to explain current processes and dynamics. Hence, the book undoubtedly provides a solid foundation for all those meaning to engage with contemporary Myanmar and its transitional process to an uncertain future.

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Call for Papers

ASEAS

FOCUS

Socio-Ecological Conflicts in Southeast Asia

The upcoming issue of the Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies (ASEAS) 9(1) features a focus on socio-ecological conflicts in Southeast Asia from a political ecology perspective.

Along with selective industrialization processes in Southeast Asian countries, the extraction and control of natural resources and environmental assets play a pivotal role for economic growth and export-oriented development in the region. At the same time, Southeast Asian countries increasingly face the environmental and social costs of resource-based development (e.g. deforestation, water pollution, flooding, biodiversity loss, eviction of indigenous people or ethnic minorities, growing percentage of urban poor, etc.) that give rise to increasing resistance against these forms of economic development.

The special issue welcomes contributions that deal with these emerging socio-ecological conflicts from a political ecology perspective. Rather than conceiving of environmental problems as external costs that can be dealt with using technical measures, the interdisciplinary research area of political ecology highlights the political, economic, and socio-cultural configurations that shape society-nature relations. In doing so, political ecology research focuses on the unequal distribution of environmental and social costs as well as on asymmetrical power relations that give rise to resistance, culminating in socio-ecological conflicts. Apart from more 'traditional' conflicts arising around the extraction and control of key natural resources (e.g. land, mining, water), we welcome contributions that discuss 'new' conflicts that emerge from the very policies and measures to deal with the environmental costs of industrialization and economic growth (e.g. conflicts over conservation areas, payment for ecosystem schemes like REDD+, biofuel development).

Submissions therefore may focus on the following aspects:

- socio-ecological conflicts arising around the extraction and control of key natural resources (e.g. land, mining, water)
- socio-ecological conflicts emerging from 'green' politics (e.g. conflicts over conservation areas, REDD+ projects, biofuel development)
- historical trajectories of current socio-ecological conflicts (e.g. colonial legacy, green revolution, large-scale developmentalist projects)
- unequal power relations and social inequalities in socio-ecological conflicts as well as visions for empowerment of subaltern actors
- scalar dimensions of socio-ecological conflicts and the interaction of these scales (e.g. localized conflicts in specific Southeast Asian countries, transnational campaigns, contestations at the ASEAN level, nationwide protests)
- alternative and plural visions of managing natural resources and protecting the environment (e.g. indigenous control of resources, nationalization, commons, environmental justice)

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