

Food Sovereignty and Land Grabbing

Food Sovereignty and Land Grabbing

Edited by

Gabriele Proglia

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Food Sovereignty and Land Grabbing

Edited by Gabriele Proglia

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by Gabriele Proglia and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1251-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1251-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Introduction	
Gabriele Proglia	
Chapter 2	10
Urban Food Sovereignty: Reimagining a Western Perspective with Care	
Maddalena Castellani	
Chapter 3	36
Decolonizing Lands, Bodies, and Sexuality in Peasant Life: Who Dictates the Desires of a Peasant Body?	
Jeovana Santos Nascimento	
Chapter 4	59
The Case of the Amuru Sugar Works in Uganda: Land Grabbing, Gendering, and Western Knowledge Production	
Sara Adriano	
Chapter 5	74
<i>Resolver</i> and <i>Rebusque</i> : The State of Cuban Land and Food Sovereignty in 2022	
Mallory Cerkleski	
Chapter 6	102
The Particular Precarity of the Sicilian Peasant	
Vivian Whitney	
Chapter 7	122
A Political Framework for Reimagining the European Commons	
Hanne van Beuningen	

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

GABRIELE PROGLIO

(UNIVERSITY OF GASTRONOMIC SCIENCES)

La tierra no puede ser un calvario de pobreza, tiene que ser también un instrumento de liberación, para la compasión y la poesía, y no solo para los negocios. Hay que colocar el alma para plantar. La tierra plantada sin alma es un fracaso.

—Pepe Mujica, São Paulo, May 6, 2017.

All that exists, all that lives on land, and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement. Thus, the movement of history produces social relations: industrial movement gives us industrial products, etc. Just as by dint of abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition – purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the absolute method, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things.

—Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

On February 14, 1990, the space probe, Voyager 1, reached what up to that point had been the boundary of human exploration 3.7 billion miles away from the Earth. Until the time of its Saturn encounter, its mission had been to map the solar system through photographs and videos. After thirteen years of tireless work, this mission was expanded to an investigation of the boundaries of the solar system, including, for example, the Kuiper belt, the heliosphere, and interstellar space.

Since ancient times, one of our deepest desires has been to read the future in the glow of the stars, raising our eyes up toward a mysterious space. With the ending of the Cold War and the conquest of space by nation-states, there was a radical shift in perspective from a tendency toward

seeking infinity toward a dream of taking steps in the direction of a symbolic place in which desires, dreams, and fears were relegated.

Before Voyager left the solar system, NASA astronomer, Carl Sagan, positioned the camera to frame Earth and gave the order to take one last photograph of the planet before crossing interstellar borders. In 1994, four years after this photograph was taken, he published a volume titled *Pale Blue Dot*, in which he reflected on Earth's semblance to a distant blue dot. His reflections drew attention to the anthropocentric nature of human knowledge that is completely centered on the role of human beings on Earth. Inspired by that image, he wrote the following words:

From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here, that's home, that's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand. It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known. (Sagan 1994, 6–7).

These words seem perfect for articulating a critique of endless and boundless economic development projects. Many scholars have analyzed the ongoing

climate crisis from various perspectives. Some have castigated the criminal role of human beings, who have succeeded in blending ecological equilibrium for their own interests. This way of shaping the world in the image and likeness of human beings has been explored in studies on the Anthropocene. Out of irresponsibility, delirium, or a misguided sense of omnipotence, many subjects (nation-states, corporations, political leaders, and prime ministers, as well as citizens) have begun to think of themselves as gods on Earth; as entities capable of surviving any catastrophe. Other scholars have pointed out that the main problem is not human beings themselves; rather, the focus must be on capitalism. As Jason W. Moore has argued, “Capitalocene” is a specific “system of power, profit and reproduction in the web of life” (Moore 2016, 594). This second interpretation seems to me to be appropriate for understanding the intertwined economic, social, and cultural processes behind each disaster. Either way, regardless of which lens is adopted to interpret the daily unfolding of the apocalypse (Kosellek 2006 [1972]), the roles of human beings and the market need to be further problematized when imagining possible, collective futures. In light of this argument, food sovereignty has to do not only, or simply, with ways of organizing and allocating ownership of land within the territory of a nation-state but it is also about access of citizens, and of people in general, to food. Central to this topic are multiple political ecologies, conceived as ways of inventing collective futures from below and in the specific contexts in which apocalypses erupt. This willingness to invent more egalitarian, fair, and collective worlds calls into question every element of the present era.

This volume is one of the outputs of a research laboratory held at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo (Italy). Over the course of 2022, I led a group of students in a research project that analyzed food sovereignty and its impact on the world from multiple perspectives, applying different gazes to excavate unfair and unequal power relations in the past and in the present. The first part of the laboratory was dedicated to a collective reading and discussion of *La Via Campesina* (2000), an important text authored by Annette Aurelie Desmarias. Our aim was to understand some of the cultural and political processes connected to globalization and the rush for land as well as resistance from peasants, political groups, and organizations. During each meeting, a student presented a chapter of the volume, inviting the group to reflect on turning points, which seemed relevant for proposing an interpretation of unfair and unequal agricultural politics. Students then chose a specific argument, supported by an innovative approach, for their essays, which aimed to problematize the topic from an intersectional and global perspective.

We are living on the verge of a global war with ongoing echoes of the threat of a possible nuclear hecatomb. The COVID-19 pandemic has left behind a legacy, which includes militarized social and political relations. At the same time, the pandemic—which the general population seems to have decided is over, even as new SARS-CoV-2 variants and positive cases of infection continue to increase—is certainly a periodizing moment for all humanity. If geography can be approached by studying differing power relations in history (Massey 2005; Lefebvre 1991), then the pandemic, considered from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991), can be seen to have had differential impacts depending on people's positionalities (Alcoff 1988). From this interpretative stance, the pandemic was not the same for everybody; on the contrary, pandemic management exacerbated social, political, and economic tensions.

On the morning of February 24, 2022, beginning at 7 a.m., the sound of aircraft defense sirens filled the spaces—squares, streets, districts, and neighborhoods—of Kiev, a soon-to-become spectral city. Russia had begun its war, directing artillery fire at the Ukrainian capital. A new war had broken out in the heart of Europe. While many clues of conflict were evident in 2015, this conflict was immediately transformed into a global war. At the time of writing, the ongoing warfare remains contained within Ukraine, with Donbas, in particular, being the site of a battle between the two fronts. Nevertheless, since the beginning of this absurd war, the entire world seems to have been directly involved in the battle. The United States, Europe, and NATO as well as nation-states like China, India, Turkey, and other nation-states are some of the secondary actors participating in this tragic drama.

From a wider perspective, there are also other characters involved, even if they did not choose to fight a new war or to support one of the two sides in conflict. I am thinking, first, of people in many nation-states who live in fear because of the direct impact of the conflict on their lives. Following on the heels of the catastrophic and apocalyptic reality of a war against a virus evoked by several popular dystopian movies, such as *War World Z* and *I am Legend*, another war has taken hold of the lives of millions of people. Other victims of this conflict should not be forgotten: flora and fauna, that is, non-human life on this planet and, more broadly, ecosystems. Suffice it to recall the many bombings and blackouts at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and the pollution caused by harmful radioactive materials. The experience of the Balkans Wars, among others, should serve as a warning that warfare is not only a political, economic, and social problem; it is also an ecological one.

All historical events can be problematized in multiple ways, which include attending to archival sources emanating from nation-states involved in the battle; analyzing propaganda and its impact in public as well as private spheres; and focusing on single stories, for instance, those about soldiers, generals, or prime ministers. The different forms and scales of various historiographical approaches indicate a possible global dimension of history. From this standpoint, all events in every part of Earth seem to be connected, interrelated, overlapping, and intertwined. It is not necessary to turn to the theory of the butterfly effect to affirm that ways of making history are closely connected to historians' subjectivity. Many scholars have problematized this aspect, at least since the establishment of the *Annales* School.

Adopting this theoretical framing, our interest lies in pointing out and highlighting the unfair relationship between possible dimensions of history on the one hand and insufficient attention to and neglect of many ongoing events unfolding in the Global South on the other hand. Critical studies within various fields have problematized Eurocentric knowledge and its impacts by proposing and sharing racialized, sexist, and discriminatory imaginaries of peoples labeled as "others," namely non-white, male, bourgeoisie, and cisnet communities. Beginning with Edward Said's theories (Said 1979), this production of narratives has had a direct impact on practices and actions, for example, through colonization, border control regimes, and racial representations of "the other" in Europe. Critical studies are important for changing interpretative perspectives on historical facts, which are usually based on Eurocentric knowledge. The practice of deconstruction can foster an understanding of the role of hegemonic narratives. However, while useful for decentering the European gaze, it does not allow for the emergence of other voices, consigning non-European stories to a place of darkness and shadows. Those who are relegated to this space of "non-narrative historical discourse" become invisible or imperceptible to archival sources and the making of a historical process. Moreover, it would seem that a canonized representation of "the other," in which some characters are expelled and eliminated from the body of the narrative is more dangerous in historical terms. A misrepresentative narrative can be deconstructed or, more generally, a historian can work and rework this source. The widespread use of categories, such as "the peasant," to speak for collective actions, leads to the eviction of the voices of individual peasants from the historical ground. These voices are treated as atmospheric phenomenon, such as a storm, a drought, a high humidity rate, or as a pathogenic agent, such as a mosaic virus that can infect many vegetables.

This premise highlights a turning point in our research laboratory, namely our attempt to problematize food sovereignty from Global South perspectives (Boaventura de Sousa Santos 2014). If Europe and the West are interested in “only” managing some food stocks (e.g., wheat, soja, oil, etc.) in order to guarantee economic exchanges based on demand and supply, then the peasant can be understood as a secondary actor in this story. It is precisely within this framework—we believe—that it is important to expand and extend the view of the researcher working on food sovereignty to incorporate other lands and peoples outside of Europe. In doing so, the researcher must attend to interconnections between producers, distributors, and buyers, analyzing their impacts within particular environmental contexts in every part of the world. Accordingly, the meaning of “food sovereignty” must be reconceptualized and re-imagined from a much broader perspective. This is one of the reflections at the core of this research project.

The war in Ukraine has certainly upset global assets and called into question the supranational order. Since its onset, the conflict seems to have entailed the intertwining of multiple and varying fields (e.g., military, health, financial, economic, and energetic), exceeding the theater of war. Given the fear of a possible third world conflict involving the use of thermonuclear weapons wrought on the population, Turkey and China have themselves assumed primary geopolitical roles. As civilian deaths increase, the costs of this war are impacting Europe. Complaints of unjustified price increases of electricity and gas as well as those of basic commodities, notably wheat, oil, and soy, are rising. It is precisely through an analysis of the food market that it becomes possible to reflect on economic flows in relation to needs and on critical debates on food sovereignty.

According to the 2019 Observatory of Economic Complexity Report, Russia and Ukraine produce 60 percent of the global grain export (wheat, barley, corn, sunflower, etc.). This is a market in which both warring nation-states compete with the United States, Brazil, Argentina, and Canada. Well before the onset of the conflict, the situation became critical due to multiple overlapping issues. In 2021, during the pandemic, the prices of wheat and of all grains rose dramatically (by 48 percent) because of climate change-induced drought in many grain-producing countries, resulting in low production levels. Additionally, in the case of the United States, where 17 percent of wheat is exported at a net worth of 30.5 billion dollars, there has been a net drop in production—more than 10 percent—mainly concentrated in the states of Oregon, Texas, and Luisiana according to estimated data. Turkey and Iran are facing very similar situations, with imports doubling in

2022 because of low domestic production rates. The same situation applies to France and Argentina.

In 2019, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia, Sudan, and Azerbaijan were already importing US\$20.9 billion worth of grain. Specifically, Egypt and Turkey purchased 17 percent of the grain produced, which amounted to \$6.82 billion. In 2021, the situation in Africa was very similar, with imports of 42.2 billion dollars of grain. Gilberto García, at the OEC, warned that the conjuncture of several elements, such as climate change, rising gas prices, and the ongoing war “could lead to the limitation of exports, with devastating effects on the most vulnerable countries.” As noted by many scholars and journalists,¹ one of the most alarming concerns is the impact of this war is on Africa and the Middle East. If the fear of a war in Europe prompts consumers to buy large quantities of flour and oil, Africa and the Middle East will suffer the consequences of a lack of food sovereignty. These are two different effects—both directly connected to the war—with their specificities. More generally, it seems important to problematize the same historical event from different perspectives to develop a unique and expanded overview, which till now has generally been centered on Europe and the West.

As Philip McMichael has pointed out, historicizing food sovereignty is challenging for various reasons that relate to the contours of the food regime and the role of the economic—and I would like to add pandemic—crisis (McMichael 2014, 933). In 2013, Marc Edelman was invited by the Yale University Program in Agrarian Studies to give a talk titled “Food Sovereignty: Forgotten Genealogies and Future Regulatory Challenges.” Nine years after the first important meeting held to discuss this topic, namely the Second International Conference on Food Sovereignty organized by *Vía Campesina* in Tlaxcala, Mexico, food sovereignty was finally discussed at

¹ Some among many interesting articles include Margaret Dene, Hannah Labow, and Carol Siber, “Middle East Responses to the Ukraine Crisis,” the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 4, 2022:

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/middle-east-responses-ukraine-crisis>; Amr Hamzawy et al., “What the Russian War in Ukraine Means for the Middle East,” in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 24, 2022: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/24/what-russian-war-in-ukraine-means-for-middle-east-pub-86711>; Lizzy Davies, “How War in Ukraine is Affecting Food Supply in Africa and the Middle East,” *The Guardian*, April 2, 2022: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/02/war-ukraine-affecting-food-supply-africa-middle-east-lebanon-somalia-egypt-oil-wheat>;

Joe Macaron, “How Does Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine Impact on the Middle East?” *Al Jazeera*, March 17, 2022: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/17/how-does-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-impact-the-middle-east>

an Ivy League university. During this meeting, “food sovereignty” was defined as “the right [given] to each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity” (Vía Campesina 2000). This first version of this definition—which was also a watchword for the entire movement—was launched in 1996 at the World Food Conference in Rome. It was juxtaposed to “food security,” thereby affirming that the problem is not just about being able to secure a certain food stock for meeting national needs; decisions on what kind of food is produced, through what processes, and at what scale are also pertinent. In 2000, a significant exchange took place concerning the definition of food sovereignty following several international meetings (the Foro Mundial in Havana in 2001; the NGO/CSO Forum in Rome in 2002; and the Nyéléni Forum held in Sélingué, Mali in 2007 and in Mexico City in 2012). As João Pedro Stédile, one of the most important Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST) leaders, pointed out, “the concept brings us into a head-on collision with international capital, which wants free markets. We maintain that every people, no matter how small, has the right to produce their own food” (Stédile 2002, 100).

After some preliminary discussions aimed at establishing a common framework for adoption in the collective volume, our group finalized the index of this volume, with titles, abstracts, and bibliographies. Each contribution not only deals with a specific case study but it also sheds light on some central issues regarding extractivism and resistance by local/indigenous communities. As we hope will become clear, this volume is a unique project born “from below” during an intense dialogue and cultural exchange between individuals from many countries (e.g., the Netherlands, United States, Brazil, and Italy) and of different ages.

Thus, each chapter highlights reflections, possible strategies, or turning points which are impossible to ignore. Many topics are considered in the contributions. For instance, conditions relating to specific Global South contexts are problematized. Sara Adriano analyzes the impact of intensive palm oil production on the Ugandan Kalangala community and its major consequences on the natives, especially women, during and after land-grabbing practices. Mallory Cerkleski focuses on the Cuban way of reigniting the revolutionary energy with food sovereignty through interviews with Cuban individuals. Jeovana Santos Nascimento adopts a decolonial feminist perspective in a study of the connections among land, bodies, and sexualities in rural areas, analyzing colonial heritages in postcolonial contexts. Through its problematization of a Eurocentric geography, the aim of this volume is also to propose some reflections on Europe. For instance, Hanne van Beuningen’s essay focuses on the urgent

need to reinvent the commons in Europe so as to reshape an unequal politics of food. Vivian Whitney's piece suggests some possible replies to the question: "Who is the modern Sicilian peasant?" Lastly, Maddalena Castellani aims to apply La Via Campesina's principles to formulate some relevant questions connected to the massive outflow of people migrating from rural areas to cities.

Bibliography

- Alcoff, Linda. 1988. "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13 (3): 405–36.
- Boaventura de Sousa Santos. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against the Epistemicide*. New York: Palgrave.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–99.
- Desmarais, Annette Aurelie. 2000. *La Via Campesina. Globalization and the Power of Peasants*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Kosellek, Reinhart. 2006. "Crisis." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 67 (2): 58-75.
- McMichael, Philip. 2014. "Historicizing Food Sovereignty." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41 (6): 933–57.
- Moore, Jason (ed). 2016. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Said, Edward. 1979. *Orientalism*, New York: Penguin Books.
- Stedile, Pedro Joao. 2002. "Landless Battalions. The Sem Terra Movement of Brasil". In Tom Mertes (ed). *A Movement of Movements. Is Another World Really Possible?* New York: Verso.

CHAPTER 2

URBAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: REIMAGINING A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE WITH CARE

MADDALENA CASTELLANI

Abstract

This paper originates from a core question I asked myself during the research laboratory: how can we bring the principles of *La Via Campesina* into our daily Western lives and thoughts? Statistics worldwide draw attention to massive migrations of people from the countryside to cities, falling percentages of people employed in agriculture, and industrialization of agriculture, which have prompted a disconnection between production and consumption and between humans and their environments. Despite the fact that we are rapidly transforming ourselves into an “urban species,” there is a tendency to think of food sovereignty as a far-removed issue concerning the Global South. Can we really say that we are sovereigns of our food production? In truth, our food supply rests on fragile grounds, and we are facing a desperate crisis due to our culture of exploitation and lack of care, rooted in a Western neoliberal and capitalist system. My paper is aimed at problem making and framing, rather than problem solving. Nonetheless, I focus on imagination, care, and community engagement as the paths I choose to follow. I first contextualize the relevance of considering urban settings. Next, I sketch a multidisciplinary overview of the literature on urban food sovereignty, encompassing dichotomous thinking and class issues. I subsequently present *El Teatro Campesino* and the *Transition Towns Movement* as my main case studies, which demonstrate the entanglement between artistic, agroecological, and community practices. Finally, I suggest that we consider the crucial role that imagination and care play in shaping urban systems and fostering a new and more inclusive conception of civilization.

Introduction: Power Struggles

The food sovereignty movement, at large, it is no longer simply the massive movement of food around the world but the massive movement of money for a global enclosure that now commands attention—from protecting rights to lands and common property resources to contesting governing principles characterized as a checklist of how to destroy global peasantry responsibly. ... The G8's new initiative is attempting, yet again, to enforce the principle that money and markets decide what is best for the world.

—Philip McMichael, *Historicizing Food Sovereignty*.

Destroying its own conditions of possibility, capital's accumulation dynamic effectively eats its own tail.

—Nancy Fraser, *Contradictions of Capital and Care*.

There is a lot to unpack when tackling urbanism and cities. Tornaghi and Dehaene (2020, 598) poignantly observe that “urban is not just a geographical location ... but rather the reflection of specific social arrangements, collective inter-dependencies, value, and exchange systems.” In particular, the year 2007 marks a historical turning point, following which there were more people living in urban areas than in rural ones, which further testifies to how rapidly we have transformed ourselves into an urban species, or as Mike Davis (2006, 4) puts it, a “planet of slums.”

David Harvey, who is considered one of the most influential scholars in the field of critical geography, explored and deconstructed the intimate bond between capitalism and urbanization in several of his books.¹ He proposes that any struggle, urban or rural—whether over food consumption and land access, housing, public spaces, or transport, and so forth—is an elementary form of power struggle between social classes. Around the time of Harvey's research, anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz wrote his milestone paper titled “Time, Sugar, and Sweetness” (1979), in which he traced a compelling history of sugar. Although Mintz never directly mentioned food sovereignty in his paper, his argument aimed to

lay bare the relationship between demand and supply, between production and consumption, between *urban proletarians* in the metropolis and *African slaves in the colonies*. Precisely how demand ‘arises’; precisely how supply ‘stimulates’ demand even while filling it—and yielding a profit besides; precisely how ‘demand’ is transformed into the ritual of

¹ Examples include *Social Justice and the City* (1973), *The Urbanization of Capital* (1985) and *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (1985).

daily necessity and even into images of daily decency: These are questions, not answers. (Mintz 1979, 408, emphasis added).

Nowadays, despite being illegal, slavery is far from being a relic of the past; more likely it is a heritage *from* the past, having become institutionalized in the Global North as a precariat class or “simply” hidden slavery (Hodal, Kelly, and Lawrence 2014; Tondo and Kelly 2017; Hodal 2019; Haedicke 2021, 174, 235). Likewise, the inconvenient truth of the *dependence* of Western industrialization on food produced elsewhere at the cost of the local people and environments still holds true today. Especially in big cities like London, vast and increasing numbers of people are fueled by every kind of food, which is readily available at any time of the day and year in restaurants and supermarkets (Steel 2008, 140–152). The urgency of urban food sovereignty arises from that *dependence*, which hides great externalities and consequences both for the remote people and places producing the food and for the urban people consuming it.

Considering Harvey’s and Mintz’s arguments, I draw two parallels. The first is a historical parallel between the ways in which Western capitalism was fueled by the resources of the Global South and the modern intensification of this dependence phenomenon, and the second is a social one between the struggles of *La Via Campesina* and those of the urban working class. By linking these two sets of binaries, I aim to bring out the potential for collaboration between peasants in the Global South and the proletariat in the Global North as a vigorous response to a deeply inequitable society.

In bringing forth my reflections, I relied on qualitative and empirical research combining my personal experience (living in the Italian countryside and in Milan and London) and my academic education (a bachelor of arts degree and a master’s degree in gastronomic sciences). In selecting my theoretical sources, I engaged with a multidisciplinary literature on the topics of urban food sovereignty, arts, and creativity, and especially with feminist, materialist, political, and ethical philosophy discourses.

Theoretical Framework: Urban Land Grabbing

Collaboration is needed not only among different urban groups but also between rural and urban groups, to form ‘La Via Urbana’ that works together with La Via Campesina to reconstruct rural-urban connections and bring about structural changes necessary for achieving food sovereignty.

—Ana García-Sempere et al., *Urban Transition toward Food Sovereignty*.

The role of most of these [urban agriculture] schemes is not to feed our cities but to offer a range of (re)connections that we are gradually losing as a society, between the human and non-human, health and environment, and between food and land.

—Kathrin Böhm, *The Rural is not Remote*.

Contemporary academic scholarship contends that the urban has traditionally featured only marginally in the literature on food sovereignty, in which it is portrayed as a contextual element and a place where agrarian studies would be disempowered (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020). However, the formal claiming and definition of food sovereignty by the Latin American farmworker organization, *La Via Campesina*, three decades ago signaled the beginning of efforts to develop and adapt this concept to contexts that differ from the original rural context of its application. Food in the urban context lends itself well to a multidisciplinary analysis, which has attracted the attention of scholars from different fields and citizens alike. In particular, the establishment of a productive debate has been evident in the last decade, in which urban agriculture, viewed as a radical approach for countering globalization, has featured prominently. According to Tornaghi and Dehaene (2020), urban agriculture also opposes a traditional conception in which food sovereignty is conceived solely as a rural struggle, reflecting the dichotomous thinking typical of the modern West, which positions the urban and rural as two separate entities. Making a critical point, Bernstein (2014) remarked that academic analyses focusing on this topic have lagged behind, with food sovereignty having little to say (in 2014) about urban sovereignty. Consequently, he called for more serious reflection on how it actively shapes urban environments rather than mere witnessing of the “predatory nature of the urban on the rural” (Bernstein 2014, 22) and the assumption of a subaltern role.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has refocused attention on the dependence of urban areas on distant supply chains and on workers and products that were previously taken for granted, which has injected a renewed appreciation for and awareness of what we eat, how it gets to our table, and who was involved along the way. Scholars have interpreted greater public awareness as an opportunity to redefine the food system with a more holistic vision based on food sovereignty (Loker and Francis 2020). At the same time, the lines of urban food sovereignty are also blurred by race and class inequalities, and scholars have called for caution, pointing to the fact that “urban agriculture is also being mobilized at the forefront of green gentrification, green washing, new capitalist adventures and forms of self-exploitation which reinforce neoliberal dynamics” (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020, 597). Some have even pointed to a strategic general blindness

to the political, economic, and ecological dimensions of urban food sovereignty, which can turn potentially radical projects—as in the case of “community gardens”—into purely recreational activities for the wealthy (Loker and Francis 2020).

Loker and Francis (2020) have engaged in this discussion, analyzing how food sovereignty manifests in urban areas and its potential when it comes to local and urban production. They begin by citing the most commonly accepted definition of food sovereignty as:

[t]he right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and culturally appropriate methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.²

Loker and Francis stress the human rights focus on food sovereignty over the food security and food justice aspects, with a particular emphasis on the reclamation of land, which is at the root of citizens’ direct participation. Communities’ access to land in urban areas assumes several forms that shape food sovereignty, ranging from farmers’ markets to community-supported agriculture, through to home and community gardens. By empowering urban residents to grow their own food even on a small scale, these initiatives foster an attitude of care and appreciation of the environment on which they depend. Additionally, the sharing of skills and foods enables newly cultivated relationships between residents to flourish.

This aspiration, however, has to confront the tight connection between land control and power which is particularly salient in cities, where land is a scarce resource more than it is anywhere else. Therefore, advocating for agriculture against land grabbing also applies to urban contexts, effectively opposing the capitalist appropriation and dispossession of space and thus becoming a political act (see Chapter 5). Corporate food regimes are evident in cities, which respond to the dictates of neoliberal capitalist expansion, characterized by a “concentration of power and profit in the hands of an oligopoly of agri-food businesses” (García-Sempere et al. 2018, 4).³

² *Declaration of Nyeleni, 2007.*

³ García-Sempere et al. (2018) identify four main forms of appropriation: primitive accumulation of capital, production of absolute surplus, production of relative surplus, and dispossession.

Far from being separate entities, the urban and the rural have always been hybridized, and the struggles of farmers overlap with those of the urban proletariat (Jacobs 2018), potentially giving rise to an alternative response to the power system in place via urban agroecology.

This perspective is reinforced by García-Sempere et al. (2018), who explored urban transitions to food sovereignty through the lens of Marx's concepts of social metabolism and metabolic rift. Similar to biological metabolism, social metabolism refers to the human flow of energy and the consequent modification of the environment, while metabolic rift denotes the rupture of the interdependence between humans and their environment caused by dichotomous thinking, which has provided fertile ground for social discrimination and objectification of the environment throughout history. The concepts of social metabolism and metabolic rift are helpful for understanding "how the capitalist mode of production—with its logic of accumulation and its tendency for territorial expansion—creates spaces of accumulation and impoverishment, which we identify as North and South; Center and Periphery; and City and Countryside" (García-Sempere et al. 2018, 2).

Nancy Fraser highlighted the contradictions and fundamental incompatibility between the current financialized capitalism and social reproduction. She claimed that "every form of capitalist society harbors a deep-seated social-reproductive 'crisis tendency' or contradiction: ... capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very process of social reproduction on which it relies" (Fraser 2016, 100), together with two other background conditions. These conditions are governance functions (public power) and nature as a source and waste sink for capitalist production (Fraser 2016, 101). Fraser also associated the historical establishment of the capitalist system with Western/colonial/patriarchal domination.

In urban environments, capitalism assumes the shape of a concrete struggle for land access, which reflects a political and ethical conflict. A diverse set of scholars have called for a paradigm change (Fraser 2016; García-Sempere et al. 2018; Loker and Francis 2020), building a radical critique through the lens of food (encompassing production and externalities, consumption, and commercialization) in the urban context. Their main argument stems from the tight linkage of urban social reproduction⁴ with

⁴ Nancy Fraser defined social reproduction broadly as a "key set of social capacities: those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally" (2016, 101–102).

food systems and capitalism reinforcement; aspects that I explore in the following case studies.

Back to the Future: From “What is” to “What if”: We all are Artists and Farmers

The moral function of art ... is to remove prejudice. ... Works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own.

—John Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

Synergies and alliances are developing between artists and farmers, architects and activists, designers and scientists as they consider the transformative potential of farming to create new social and multi-species relations.

—Catherine Flood and May Sloan, *FOOD: Bigger than the Plate*.

What are the contributions of food sovereignty and imagination to a “post-Cartesian” paradigm? (Moore 2017, 1). A shift in our reality and political systems starts with a shift in awareness of our place within our communities and environments through the adoption of a relational and regional perspective. The journey of reimagining our perspectives and, with them, the places we inhabit, and our cities, does not originate in utopian architectural projects nor in sterile art galleries; it is initiated by rethinking what is already present in our daily lives. It is a journey that brings us “back to the future”; a future entailing an exploration of alternatives to the capitalist system that are neither communist nor a bucolic (and illusionary) rural past. This is a future driven by progressive and cooperative communities, farms, industries, schools, and universities, just as the Bengali (Indian) poet and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, had envisioned (Marsh 2015).⁵

The first steps toward this change of direction are also inspired by one of the most radical and influential modern artists, Joseph Beuys (1921–1986). Drawing on Harald Lemke’s (2017) analysis of the lesser-known activities of Beuys as a food ethicist, I focus on three of the artist’s important works, in conversation with each other, which are relevant to this discussion: *We are the Revolution (La Rivoluzione siamo Noi)* (1972), *Everybody is an Artist* (1979) and Beuy’s “potato” performance (1977).

⁵ Although “future” is a charged notion which, in the West, is mainly associated with the idea of progress and linearity, what I mean here by “back to the future” is a way of looking ahead, reimagining our culture, while at the same time considering where we are coming from.

La Rivoluzione siamo Noi (We are the Revolution) consists of a life-size image of Beuys pictured walking straight toward the viewer, thereby signifying a direct confrontation between the artist and the passive bystander and calling for social activism through art. Inscribed at the bottom right corner of the image is the phrase “La Rivoluzione siamo noi,” which conveys Beuys's idea of social reform as an art of living collectively and proactively. In the television documentary, *Everybody is an Artist*, Beuys applies his revolutionary charge in a provocative way: he is filmed in his kitchen engaged in the quiet and mundane preparation of vegetables to make a wholesome meal. As a well-known, *avant-garde*, Western, male artist, Beuys presents the careful preparation of the daily meal as a work of art and as an “evolutionary revolution” (Lemke 2017, 250–2). The artist’s conceptual intention was previously showcased in his “potato” performance organized in March 1977 in the garden in front of a gallery in Berlin’s city center, where he planted potatoes. In Lemke’s words: “with a backpack on his back, he became ‘a farmer’ who ecologically cultivates his land” (2017, 257). The following October, Beuys harvested the potatoes, “‘exhibiting’ a form of an ethical praxis that is now known as sustainable urban gardening or city farming” (257).

Beuys’ radical idea of extended and socially engaged art remains revolutionary (and controversial) to this day. In elevating the “humble” (according to mainstream Western culture) activities of food production and cooking to the dignified status of art, he aimed to awaken the public’s consciousness while raising the eyebrows of conservatives, broadly challenging a hierarchical and dualistic power paradigm, which has endured for centuries if not millennia. In the words of Blanc and Benish (2017), Beuys contributes to the idea that “art need not be thought of as a refuge from the impossibility to act in the real world” (35).

In this regard, Nicola Perullo (2018a), professor of philosophy, called for an inversion of perspective from “elevating cooking to the level of art as if this would sanction its value” to “leveling art to the level of cooking. What does it mean? Thinking art as cooking means thinking it as a material practice of sensible, perishable, and contingent processes” (191). I propose to adopt the same perspective with agriculture and urban farming as an art of living that demonstrates a political ethos by encountering life as if we were a little bit artist and a little bit farmer; one seed planted and one meal eaten at any one time.

We are Storytellers: Satire and Shock in *El Teatro Campesino*

The idea that really excites me ... is a theater of political change ... I'm talking politics, not art. I'm not talking about the individualized, introspective, personal philosophical view. I'm talking about really influencing people, and I sense a hunger in art for this.

—Luis Valdez, *El Teatro Campesino. Interviews with Luis Valdez.*

We meet the challenge posed by aesthetic shock ... by renewing, and expanding, our efforts to grasp the complexity of our surrounding world.

—Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art.*

The above example, focusing on the artist Joseph Beuys, projects the idea that there are several ways to engage with urban food sovereignty, one of which is to experience it through creative practices—filmmaking, photography, performance, theater, and so on. *El Teatro Campesino*, founded in 1965 as the cultural arm of the United Farm Workers and the Chicano Movement in California, and still active today, is illustrative of theatrical practice. It provides a powerful example of how art and culture can carry a political message: through satirical skits termed *actos*, the farmworkers illuminate the power dynamics at play, using humor to present themselves not as victims but as a united front reclaiming their rights. The *actos* are performed on trucks and during marches to create a sense of collective identity. Given their didactic nature, they are aimed at increasing the awareness of both farmworkers and the wider public regarding the “social construction of their exploitation” (Haedicke 2021, 190), making space for a dialogue between the two parties. Importantly, the *actos* do not represent an individual vision; they are a social vision crafted collectively through improvisation. Haedicke recognizes in the satiric tone a crucial aspect of successful communication, whereby the viewer is engaged in listening and laughing about difficult truths within a process of political mobilization.

In *The Two Facets of the Boss* (Valdez 1994), which is one of the most famous *actos* from 1965, a farmworker convinces the farm owner to embrace the “carefree” life of a farmworker, echoing a farm owner’s statement about farmworkers’ conditions, which was featured in the documentary *Harvest of Shame* (1960). The farm owner stated: “they just like it. ... That’s all they want to do; they love it. They love to go from place to place. They don’t have a worry in the world. They’re happier than we are. Today they eat, tomorrow they don’t worry about it. They’re the happiest race on earth.” The twisting of social positions in the *actos* aims to

communicate how situations can be deconstructed as a new reality, reinforcing the idea that social classes are the result of historical narratives imposed by the dominant class.

There are numerous examples of political theatricalization, such as Octavio Solis' 2015 play, *Alicia's Miracle*, which is based on an investigative report on the use of pesticides linked to cancer, developmental problems, and ozone depletion in California's \$2.6 billion strawberry industry (Haedicke 2021, 191). The character Alicia in this play is a young, pregnant woman who lives and works in one of the most heavily sprayed areas of California. She learns that her unborn child is deformed and dying because of the pesticides she breathes every day. Her intense physical and emotional anguish reflects the rejection of the substances that have entered her body and the corporate greed and indifference to the risk to those near the sprayed fields: "We don't matter! Not me, my baby, nobody! None of us matter!" (Solis 2015, 35). In the play, Alicia equates the pesticide with the father of her unborn child, which "plants its death inside me" (39). The aim of the story is to bring about social change and actions to counter exploitation through community awareness.

The violence of the capitalist system is also communicated at the corporeal level in Cherríe Moraga's *Heroes and Saints*, first performed in San Francisco in 1992 in reaction to the rise in childhood cancers linked to pesticide use in California. The poisoned, disabled human body becomes a metaphor of the poisoned land but also a powerful symbol of the place of protest, reclaiming the resurrection of both soil and body (see Chapter 3) within an embodied perspective:

[S]oil ... should not be confused with land. What was once land has become dirt, overworked dirt, over irrigated dirt, injected with deadly doses of chemicals and violated by every manner of ground and back-breaking machinery. The people that worked the dirt ... remember what the land used to be and await its second coming. (Moraga 1994, 91).

The strategy of shifting attention from things to experiences applied in the *actos* has also been deployed in initiatives to rethink museums, for instance, two mobile museums: *The Florida Modern Slavery Museum* (2010) and *Harvest Without Violence Mobile Exhibit* (2017). In the same way as for the *actos*, the mobile museums were curated by farmworkers with the aim of engaging participants viscerally (Haedicke 2021, 240). These instances of protest carried out by *El Teatro Campesino* in California, considered the agricultural heart of the United States, revolve around the same core formula of *La Via Campesina*: "consciousness + commitment = change" (Haedicke 2021, 212).

The contradictory context of these stories is applicable to other parts of the world, raising the question of how to make sense of Western/urban narratives of abundance juxtaposed with unfamiliar ones, exposing terrible social and environmental conditions. In the West, where the abundance of supermarkets seduces and blinds us to the exploitative systems that they hide, can we really say we are sovereigns of our food production? In truth, our food supply stands on fragile grounds, supported by the narrative of the market, agro-industrial lobbies, and governmental subsidies. Our exploitative industrial supply chain stands on the shoulders of workers and ecosystems—and on our own shoulders (see Chapter 6).

The act of highlighting the dissonance between the mainstream narrative of happy or invisible farmworkers and abundant harvests versus their reality aims to spark a shift in perception “from a geographical landscape viewed from a distance to a somatic experience of a political landscape provoking engagement” (Haedicke 2021, 185).

While writing this piece, I felt that what I was pointing to was all too obvious and thus somewhat useless. However, while discussing the topic with a few friends, I realized that I had been wrong. To my surprise, individuals in their late twenties enrolled in master’s and doctoral programs were not familiar with the concept of food sovereignty. On the contrary, my friends’ grandparents (who all have vegetable gardens in their backyards in Veneto, Italy) perfectly understood the importance of food sovereignty. This is not to say that there is an age hierarchy, and that old people always know better; on the contrary, the sharing of this realization is aimed at reinforcing the importance of intergenerational sharing of skills. It also aims to challenge our modern attitudes. After all, what does it mean to be young, modern, and international when we are not even aware of the meaning of independence and sovereignty?

Although the personal sample I have just referred to is minuscule, I believe it mirrors the greater portion of the population. The subordination of our understanding becomes more problematic when we realize that the hegemony of the capitalist narrative—which falsifies and hides abuse and degradation—applies to our reality made up of commodity fetishism in its entirety, from Indian farmers dying from pesticide exposure while growing the cotton used for making our clothes (BBC 2017) to the health problems caused by pesticides used in the production of European wines, such as Prosecco, produced in the region of Veneto, Italy, where I was born and raised (De Polo 2016). Human poisoning by pesticides has been recognized by the World Health Organization as a major global public health issue since the 1990s; however, communities are continuing to pay the price (Boedeker et al. 2020). Why should the land be devoted to wine production, while

people purchase cheaper tomatoes coming from the Netherlands? In the paradigm of commodity fetishism, the product acquires inherent value and the labor involved in its production completely disappears from the end consumer's consideration (Haedicke 2021).

All this is to say that food sovereignty touches us personally in countless ways. What a strange thing I claim: we have supermarkets and bins full of food and waste; nonetheless, we are not sovereigns over our food in the modern Western world. What an insult to our "progress"! Here, I will re-pose a question raised by Bruno Latour (1991, 12):

the final question, which is also the most difficult one: if we have stopped being modern, ... what are we going to become? ... My hypothesis ... is that we are going to have to slow down, reorient and regulate the proliferation of monsters by representing their existence officially. Will a different democracy become necessary? A democracy extended to things?

Latour (1991, 37) problematizes the idea of progress and modernity by exposing Westerners' false belief in their invincibility acquired through detachment from their environment.⁶ Using provocative (or astonished?) tones, he traces colonial empire after colonial empire back to ancient times, highlighting the differences between colonizers and indigenous/native populations: "the poor premodern collectives were accused of making a horrible mishmash of things and humans, of objects and signs," while the colonizers "felt absolutely free to give up following the ridiculous constraints of their past which required them to take into account the delicate web of relations between things and people" (39). Latour's analysis reveals that the mainstream ideas of progress and modernity are useful only to some people in society—colonizers, patriarchy, capitalism, nation-states, and so forth—and are passed down through cultural storytelling of the dominant class.

Although the contradictions are unfolding before our eyes, there is a tendency to regard them as distant problems. Another example provided earlier in this chapter is that of London, which became one of wealthiest cities in the world through the sugar/slave trade (Mintz 1979). Yet, many British scholars believe that no country is less prepared than the UK for an overheated, overpopulated, urbanized future (Lang et al. 2017). Britain currently imports one-third of the food consumed in the country from

⁶ João Afonso Baptista's paper "Eco(il)logical Knowledge: On Different Ways of Relating with the Known" (2018) also sheds light on the power dynamics behind the different ways in which Westerners and indigenous populations relate to the known and what they consider as knowledge and worthy of investigation.

Europe, and the last time the government had to take food seriously was during the Second World War, when the Ministry of Food constructed a self-sufficient internal production system on an urgent basis over a time span of six years (Collingham 2012).

Why, then, do we continue to adhere unthinkingly to the capitalist storyline? One explanation for the inaction of even the well-intentioned is suggested by the philosopher Lisa Heldke, while recalling Mary Midgley's comparison of everyday philosophy to plumbing:

philosophy, like plumbing, is vitally important, invisible, and likely to attract our attention only when something goes wrong with it. ... We'll try to keep fiddling with the old idea in the smallest ways possible, until something really disastrous happens and we're forced to tear out some walls. Rarely do we decide to replace old sets of ideas just because a new set shows great promise. (Heldke 2018, 250).

This idea also perfectly applies to the shift of perception from the promise of free, clean energy generated by nuclear power facilities to the realization brought about by Chernobyl in 1986 that such a vision was actually hiding economic interests at the cost of citizens' needs (*We the Power* 2020).

Shock, whether induced by real events or the storyline of a theatrical play, "causes a disruption in the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable" (Rancière 2004, 63). Shock disorientation stimulates a critical evaluation of what was taken for granted. Nuclear energy was considered safe until Chernobyl erupted. Does this example of shock share any similarities with the discussion on food sovereignty and food security, for instance the one about GMOs? How much longer are we going to tolerate the lie propagated by the chemical industry that sells us pesticides, destroying the fertility of the soil, humans, and non-humans? What happens when communities hand over their sovereignty, built on the specificity of that environment, to the standardization of big corporations and centralized governments? One answer to this question is given by a Londoner in the documentary, *We the Power* (2020): "Many people are stuck between the dilemma: 'I heat my home or I eat food. Which one do I pay for?'" Every person needs much more than just food and shelter to flourish, and the example of the *Teatro Campesino* makes clear how art can elevate the spirit, impart political education, and feed the soul.

Food and energy independence have always gone hand in hand. In fact, windmills or watermills historically provided both flour and energy to communities, which is how Europe was originally electrified (*We the Power* 2020). However, under the influence of capitalism, both systems were increasingly centralized and appropriated through the dynamics of oligopoly,

making communities more fragile and dependent upon foreign food and an energy supply (see Chapter 5). This is a phenomenon that we continue to experience in the present as a result of pandemics, wars, financial speculation, and the finitude of resources (see the Introduction to this volume). Once we notice these dynamics, it is impossible to unsee them. The capitalist mentality pervades our food, clothes, energy production, relationships, and emotions.

We the Power (2020) follows the refreshing stories of unyielding, community-led cooperatives from deep in Germany's Black Forest to the streets of ancient Girona in Spain and the urban rooftops of London, that "pave the way for a renewable-energy revolution and build healthier, more financially stable communities" (Patagonia 2022). All of these cooperatives embody ideas that threaten existing ways of doing things by reclaiming citizens' agency in the fight against big corporations pursuing profits at all costs, the cost of the well-being of humans and environments, made unsustainable over generations.

We the Power has a similar ring to Beuy's previously mentioned *We Are Revolution*, allowing us to see an alternative pattern of meaning. Similarly, the documentary *Tomorrow* (2015) rejects the narrative of powerlessness by showcasing vibrant communities creatively rethinking agriculture, economics, energy, and education. More than a quarter of the budget for the film (around €444,000) was crowdfunded from over 10,000 contributors (Kiss Rancièrian Bank Rancièrian 2022).

Such documentaries, which rarely enter the mainstream, aim to encourage alliances between academic researchers, creative practitioners, and citizens, with the aim of making room for discussion, education, and an alternative narrative.

Transition Towns: Communities Conquering Spaces of Political Participation through Creativity and Ordinary Action

[Permaculture] activities can go from starting to compost food waste, to plant and produce food locally, to promote ecological building. But even when actions are acknowledged as deeply intimate and individual—as can be a spiritual connection to a tree, or the building of one's self as a more ecological person—they are affirmed as collective. The "collective" here does not only include humans but the plants we cultivate, the animal we raise and eat (or rather not), and Earth's energetic resources: air, water.

—María Puig De La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*.

I have become a micro-farmer on my London roof, my entire relationship with time has changed. Instead of being measured against work commitments and holidays, it is about deciding what plants to grow, buying seeds and compost, planting and nurturing, watering and supporting, harvesting, picking, eating and sharing my beloved vegetables. For the first time in my life, my actions are directly bound to earthly rhythms, a bond that is as demanding as it is satisfying.

—Carolyn Steel, *Sitopia*.

In Europe, the Transition Towns (TT) movement, born in 2006, has introduced an effective counternarrative through practices to address the question: how could communities respond to the challenges of climate change? (Transition Network 2021). To tackle this question, the citizen movement initiated in the town of Totnes, UK, took action to empower local communities and reclaim their agency and resilience in the face of global economic agendas and climate change in the areas of food and energy production, and, importantly, community belonging. They have done so by consistently gathering and promoting projects that increase communities' self-sufficiency and familiar relationships among their members. Totnes is a town, located 300 km southwest of London with a population of around 10,000 people. Although in the common imagination “the city” is the most exciting place to be, I argue that it is precisely the peripheral position of towns like Totnes instead of the city center that characterize its potential.

The movement effectively spread to over 50 countries, with an estimated number of 2,000 to 3,000 communities currently involved (Transition Network 2021; Wells and Graymore 2014). It has also encouraged the founding of the Transition Network, a charity that works to support and train communities on how to run effective groups and “pull their creativity and commitment into exploring together the changes they wanted to see and getting things to happen” (Hopkins in Transition Networks 2021). Food is at the core of the TT agenda: their production and consumption are situated in their urban and peri-urban environments, connecting them to the cultural and ecological specificity of the territory. They embody a system of reterritorialization aligned with an agroecological model; one that does not consider cities as existing in a vacuum but rather as depending upon the limited resources of the surrounding regions. Accordingly, the city and the rural shift from being fixed nouns to “becomings” as live verbs; a praxis rather than a static concept and a continuous agricultural space that requires collaboration and a relational perspective, which considers “local space as the result of relationships that take place in the region” (García-Sempere et al. 2018, 6; Jongerden, Swagemakers, and Barthel 2014).