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Food Sovereignty and the Agrarian Question in South Africa: Class Dynamics and Collective Agency from Below

Andrew Bennie

0510293F



Supervisor: Professor Michelle Williams

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration

I, Andrew Bennie, declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology) at the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or for examination in this or any other university.



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Andrew Bennie
27 August 2023

Abstract

In South Africa – one of the most unequal countries in the world – patterns of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition exist in conjunction with a dominant agro-food system that is highly modernised, commercialised and globally integrated, and includes a deeply unequal agrarian structure. Globally, there has been an upsurge in movement organising around the ecological and social impacts of the corporate food system. One of the most prominent political responses has been the food sovereignty movement. The politics of food sovereignty, however, is ultimately grounded and constituted in situated national and local contexts. The research for this thesis therefore sought to understand the nature of civil society organising from below in South Africa in response to the various inequalities of the agro-food system (the 'food movement'), with which the global discourse and practice of food sovereignty articulates. I therefore argue that there is an emergent 'food movement' in South Africa whose character (and limits) reflects its construction through historical and ongoing conjunctural, contingent and contextual relationships between the agrarian and national questions, political struggles under national oppression, and the social, economic and ecological contradictions of national liberation in the post-apartheid order.

The thesis is grounded in the conceptual frame of the agrarian question, a critical agrarian political economy approach that has principally been concerned with the relationship between agriculture and capitalism, the class relations within agriculture, and the associated politics arising out of the agrarian question. It is situated in the agrarian debate on food sovereignty, broadly construed as that between 'agrarian populism' and 'agrarian Marxism'. It adopts a materialist analysis that is combined with historical and political specificity, open to the ways in which political agency is an important factor shaping the course of agrarian change. The research adopted a qualitative approach framed by Michael Burawoy's extended case study method combined with elements of Gillian Hart's method of relational comparison. Data was gathered primarily through an analysis of secondary and primary literature, extensive interviews, participant observation, and two case studies.

To understand the terrain of food organising from below, the thesis examines the historically conjunctural, contingent and contextual processes that both underpinned the formation of the dominant agro-food system and to which that system contributed. It does this by weaving the history of food and hunger to the history of class formation, political resistance and organising,

and larger historical developments. This sets the scene for understanding the origins and nature of the contemporary 'food movement' in South Africa. A typology shows that the array of organising around food and the agro-food system today falls along a continuum between justice-centred and food-centred conceptions of change in the food system, and that they cohere around *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *transformative* politics. Importantly, these types should be understood through a longer history of varying political responses to national oppression and the evolving agrarian question, and to the continuities, limits and opportunities of national liberation. The thesis also analyses how these relational categories play out in specific local agrarian contexts of working class communities, showing that the form they take in a given context is shaped by the articulation of a number of conditions and factors. This is done through an examination of the political intersections between agriculture and the struggle against proposed mining in Amadiba in the Eastern Cape Province, and efforts by a smallholder farmer association in Limpopo Province to advance a food sovereignty politics through agroecology. I show that material socio-ecological conditions in situated contexts play an important role in shaping the form, potential and limits of agro-food politics, including patterns of differentiation, hegemonic state-society relationships, and fragmentation of subaltern classes. However, I show that the possibilities for transformative agro-food politics are also contingent on articulations between political histories and practices, the role of the state, and the nature of alliances. I conclude with the need to view food sovereignty not only through a structural lens of an endpoint and blueprint for food production and distribution, but also in terms of how its impulses might (or might not) contextually and conjuncturally connect with efforts to build transformative politics that seek non-alienated production and living, distributional justice, and the secure socio-ecological reproduction of life and living labour.

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List of Acronyms

AAC	All Africa Convention
ACC	Amadiba Crisis Committee
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ACC	Amadiba Crisis Committee
ANC	African National Congress
AFN	Alternative Food Network
AMWU	African Mineworkers' Union
ANSCA	African National Soil Conservation Association
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CAN	Community Action Network
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPA	Communal Property Association
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CSAAWU	Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
DAFA	Dzumeri Area Farmers Association
DBSA	Development Bank of Southern Africa
DMR	Department of Mineral Resources
EDA	Environmental Development Agency
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EJNF	Environmental Justice Networking Forum
FGF	Food Gardens Foundation
FRIDGE	Fund for Research into Industrial Development, Growth and Equity
FSAW	Federation of South African Women
FSC	Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign
GM	Genetic Modification
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements
LED	Local Economic Development
LPM	Landless People's Movement
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
LVC	La Via Campesina
MEC	Minerals Energy Complex
MFA	Mopani Farmers Association
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
MPRDA	Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act
MRC	Mineral Commodities
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NAFU	National African Farmers Union
NCAR	National Committee Against Removals
NCW	National Council of Women

NLC	National Land Committee
NP	National Party
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
OAASA	Organic Agricultural Association of South Africa
PACSA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action
PMBEJD	Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity
PGS	Participatory Guarantee System
PLAAS	Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RWA	Rural Women's Assembly
SAAU	South African Agricultural Union
SAFSC	South African Food Sovereignty Campaign
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisation
SANRAL	South African National Roads Agency Limited
SANFC	South African Native Farmers Congress
SANNC	South African Native National Congress
SDC	Siyavuna Abalimi Development Centre
SPP	Surplus Peoples Project
SWC	Sustaining the Wild Coast
TB	Tuberculosis
TEM	Transworld Energy Mineral Resources
TOB	Transkei Organised Bodies
TCOE	Trust for Community Outreach and Education
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMMAWASA	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
UP	United Party
WFP	Women on Farms Project
WoMin	Women in Mining
ZCA	Zoutpansberg Cultural Association

Note on South African Racial Classifications and Other Terminology

'The burden of race placed on scholars of South Africa is such that no racial label can be considered innocent or purely descriptive. Whatever term is used is politically loaded and scarred by history,' writes Jacob Dlamini (2012: 6). 'Still, needs must.' Under apartheid the Population Registration Act classified South Africans into four 'race' groups: African, Indian, White and Coloured (referring to people of mixed descent). These categories remain in use today, in everyday life and academically, although since the end of apartheid Black is often used to refer to Africans, Coloureds and Indians (Jacobs, 2018). This thesis works with these conventions.

Similarly, the use of terms like 'native' and 'tribal' in the text are used when referring to subjects and entities that were generally labelled as such at the historical time under discussion and in the sources used.

Rather than 'Khoi' or 'Khoikhoi' to describe one of the main indigenous groups to occupy an extensive region of what became South Africa upon settler arrival, I use 'Khoe' and 'Khoekhoe' because this reflects updated, current ideas and orthography (Ross, 2014).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Before the South African government imposed lockdowns in March 2020, which drastically limited human movement and economic activity in an effort to stem the spread of the Covid-19 virus, 20% of South Africans had inadequate or severely inadequate access to food. A further indicator of this inadequacy is reflected in the fact that levels of child stunting have remained stubbornly constant for the last twenty years, with 27% of children under five years old reported as stunted in 2016 (StatsSA, 2019a; FAO *et al*, 2022). The Covid-19 lockdowns worsened this situation, and brought the chronic food insecurity crisis in a relatively wealthy country to the centre of public attention: one survey found that in the first month of the lockdown, 47% of surveyed households reported running out of money to buy food (Wills *et al*, 2020); by March 2021, 35% of households still reported not being able to purchase adequate food and 17% were experiencing consistent hunger (van der Berg *et al*, 2021). These patterns exist together with a dominant agro-food system that is highly modernised, commercialised and globally integrated, including a deeply unequal agrarian structure given the slow pace of land reform since 1994. In this context, the research for this thesis sought to understand the nature of civil society organising from below in response to the various inequalities of the agro-food system – the South African 'food movement'. By 'from below', I refer to actors from poor, vulnerable and marginalised communities – 'grassroots', 'working class', 'popular classes', 'classes of labour'. How I approach 'from below' denotes agency at community level through civil society (rather than capital- or state-centric agency), discussed in Chapter 2 on politics, articulation and movements).

In this thesis, I argue that there is an emergent 'food movement' in South Africa whose character (and limits) reflects its construction through historical and ongoing conjunctural, contingent and contextual relationships between the agrarian and national questions, political struggles under national oppression, and the social, economic and ecological contradictions of national liberation in the post-apartheid order. This is illustrated through a history of the relationship between the agrarian question, rural and labour struggles and the agro-food system, and an exploration of the current forms of organising popular classes around food questions that form the basis with which the food sovereignty discourse and politics articulates.

The research was motivated by my work and interest in food sovereignty, as a popular frame of mobilisation, discourse and idea related to challenging corporate power in the agro-food system, building power and alternatives from below, and democratising the agro-food system and associated political relationships. A primary source of the idea of food sovereignty is in the struggles of peasant movements in the global south, but a key level of its elaboration has been the interaction between southern peasants and northern small and medium food producers on the global stage. This has occurred through the rise of transnational agrarian movements (TAMs) in the context of neoliberalism, with food sovereignty most closely associated with La Via Campesina (LVC). This has also provoked a surge of interest and research in agrarian studies on these transnational movements. In addition, the global land rush after the 2007-2009 financial and food crises, and the contributions of the global food system to the climate and biodiversity crises, has provoked a greater intertwining of food, agrarian and climate justice struggles and analysis (Borras, 2016). However, as the coverage of transnational movements by Borras *et al* (2008) and Voss and Williams (2012) point to, ongoing attention to the localised dynamics and contents of movement building, where movements are ultimately rooted and constituted, remains relevant. Through these transnational networks, food sovereignty has travelled to South Africa and has come to frame the activities and objectives of a number of movements, NGOs and formations.

The content and principles of food sovereignty as a mobilising frame and concept may seem highly relevant for thinking about ways of challenging and transforming South Africa's agro-food system. It is an industrialised country, but because of its racialised process of capitalist development, this was achieved through the simultaneous creation of underdevelopment and poverty for the black majority. As a result, South Africa is considered the most unequal country in the world (World Bank, 2022). This is starkly illustrated in respect of food and hunger: the dominant agro-food system is highly modernised and commercialised, it exhibits high levels of corporate control and concentration (and profitability for large and powerful actors), the country's agricultural system produces a wide diversity of foods, and the country is food secure in that it produces enough quantities of food to feed the country (and a wide diversity of food), reflected in the fact that it exports more than it imports (FAO *et al*, 2022). But this co-exists with a generalised social reproduction crisis for workers and the poor, evidenced by enduring hunger and deprivation.

These stark contradictions related to the food system, hunger and inequality have provoked the question for some researchers of the movement response; or more specifically, the apparent lack of a movement response. Given sharply climbing food prices and hence hunger after the economic effects of 2007/8 financial crisis on South Africa, Joynt (2010) inquired as to why there was an apparent absence of evident collective action by affected working class communities in response. Before the 2007/8 financial crisis, Greenberg (2006) also noted the general failure to politicise food access in South Africa, despite the country's Constitution guaranteeing the right to food, and which he suggests therefore allowed the state to take minimal action in achieving this right. More recently, Ledger (2016: 118-119) claims that 'in sharp contrast to the thousands of charitable efforts all around the country – there is hardly any food activism around changing the food system.'

Hunger and contradictions of the agro-food system also have a relationship to South Africa's agrarian question (Jara, 2014). With the slow pace of land reform and its poor alignment with agricultural policy, the country's land and agrarian questions remain unresolved. While the land and agrarian questions are not synonymous, they point to the fact that issues of racialised economic inequality, historical redress, food insecurity, structural unemployment, and the prevalence of chiefly power remain unaddressed (Cousins, 2007; Jara, 2019). In the context of the unresolved land and agrarian questions, including their relationship to the agro-food system, scholars like Jara (2019: 20) have consistently noted 'the poor state of self-organisation and limited capacity for sustained social struggles by the mass of the agrarian motive forces for systemic change' (as well as Cousins, 2007; Hall and Jara, 2009).

This thesis does not seek to simply explore an apparent lacuna in agro-food movement organising in South Africa. Rather, it seeks to examine what does exist. It does this by providing a picture of the nature and extent of present organising related to the contradictions of the agro-food system in the context of the country's agrarian question, and with which the global food sovereignty discourse and framing has articulated. The task of analysing popular agency in relation to food and contradictions of the agro-food system has been undertaken by a number of researchers, in different locations and at different scales. For example, at the level of the household, scholars like Mosoetsa (2011) and Lakhani (2014) have examined the multiple strategies that poor women in working class households undertake to secure food and social reproduction for their families in the context of economic precarity. Also at the level of the household, Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam (2016) applied a food sovereignty and gender lens

to analyse the actions and politics of a self-sufficient farmer in KwaZulu-Natal. Others have examined specific initiatives organised by NGOs that enrol actors from poor communities into food production as part of alternative food networks, and their social impacts (Olivier and Heinecken, 2017; Siebert, 2020). Scholars like Kesselman (2017) and Hope-Bailey (2017) have analysed urban agricultural projects initiated by working class actors across the City of Johannesburg to understand their potential as social alternatives in the food system. However, a key gap in the analysis of these forms of agency from below related to the food system, which this thesis responds to, is a broader picture and more integrated analysis of different forms of food organising, and to situate them in a wider historical and systemic context.

Secondly, those like Cherry (2016) and Andrews (2018) have analysed some of the ways in which certain platforms have been framing their attempts to build a food sovereignty politics in South Africa. However, an important gap here is how the organisational proclamations they analyse actually play out amidst local realities, in ways not necessarily captured by the formally stated visions and framing of the platforms and initiatives in question. Filling these two gaps, I suggest, are key to better understanding the nature, political relevance and limits of these forms of organising in terms of egalitarian and emancipatory ideals.

A third related gap that this thesis seeks to respond to relates to the orientation of much land and agrarian research in South Africa today. This is a very vibrant field, which tends to focus on the livelihood patterns and experiences of rural people, and on tracking the dynamics, progress and challenges experienced in land reform. Furthermore, from the 1970s to the early 1990s there was a great wealth of research and literature that focused on rural politics and the agrarian question in South Africa, yet after 1994 – understandably, given the expectations on the national liberation movement in power and the opportunities it apparently presented for the pursuit of equality – much research turned towards a policy orientation. As a result, apart from the flurry of research on the Landless Peoples Movement in the early 2000s, there has been less research on rural politics of the agrarian question from below. In this thesis I focus on one aspect of agrarian politics – food and food sovereignty.

A wide array of collective action, such as within and between households in response to hunger, might be identified in South Africa outside of ‘formal’ movement organising. However, this thesis is specifically focused on initiatives and formations that explicitly seek to organise popular class agents in response to particular contradictions of the dominant agro-food system

and so identify as or with a broader movement. A notable aspect of this is the role and agency of NGOs and their relations with communities and movements. This is one outcome of the historical articulations between South Africa's agrarian question and liberatory politics, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5. It is therefore a component part of the contemporary dynamics of agrarian and food movement terrain in South Africa, as observed by Jara and Hall (2009).

Research Questions and Contributions of the Thesis

The main research question informing this thesis was: What is the nature of the food movement in South Africa and how does it articulate with food sovereignty, class and the agrarian question?

To unpack this main question, the research was guided by the following sub-questions:

1. What has been the historical relationship between food, resistance and the agrarian question in South Africa?
2. What is the nature of the food movement in South Africa with which the global food sovereignty discourse articulates, and what is its political relationship to the agrarian question?
3. How do ideas and practices of food sovereignty intersect with local agrarian histories and conditions?
4. What do existing forms of agrarian organising tell us about food sovereignty and its relationship to the agrarian question in South Africa?

In answering these questions, this thesis seeks to make four key contributions. Firstly, it provides an analytical depiction of the nature of collective organising of popular classes around food system questions, and with which the global food sovereignty discourse and politics has interacted at the national level and into local spaces. This includes locating the nature and contours of this food organising terrain as an outcome of South African histories of agrarian change, resistance, class formation, and political responses 'from below'.

However, a tendency of many food sovereignty proponents pointed to by Scoones (2021) is to focus on particular practices and techniques as indicators of food sovereignty. While they may be critical components of food sovereignty, he suggests that this risks focusing debate at the

level of technology (such as promoting agroecology in productive terms in response to Green Revolution proponents), at the expense of the context of these interventions that shapes their character and outcomes, and the 'the socio-technical and political challenges of wider change' (Scoones, 2016: no page on html). A second contribution of this thesis is therefore to focus less on the technics of food sovereignty, and surface the historical and social relations that have shaped them, and continue to shape how, by whom and in what ways they are elaborated today. Central to this is to move beyond analyses of stated visions and practices (like agroecology and seed saving) that are seen to constitute food sovereignty, to the class relations that forms of agency are embedded in, how they relate to the changing of class relations, and to state power.

Connected to this, the third key contribution of the thesis is to provide further insight into food- and agriculture-related organising of popular classes within contemporary processes of agrarian change. It does this by zooming in on two case studies, the Amadiba struggle against proposed mining, given the role of mining in South Africa's contemporary agrarian question; and a smallholder farmer organisation, the Mopani Farmers Association (MFA), given the political centrality of small farmers and agroecology in the global food sovereignty movement and discourse. Through this, it aims to contribute to extending understanding of one facet of politics and the agrarian question in South Africa today, through the lens of organising in the agro-food system. This seeks to deepen how we understand the prospects and limits of food sovereignty as an idea and political frame in South Africa today.

Finally, the fourth aimed-for contribution of the thesis is to theoretically contribute to thinking about emancipatory collective action related to food and agrarian questions, in the frame of food sovereignty. Specifically, despite de-agrarianisation in South Africa, it seeks to keep the agrarian question on the agenda, its importance heightened in the context of the intersecting social and ecological crises, and the role of hegemonic agrarian relations in contributing to that crisis. It does this by promoting the importance therefore of conjunctural, contingent and articulatory approaches to understanding the political import of the agrarian question in situated, politically specific and not always predictable ways. This underlines my approach to food sovereignty in the thesis.

The Food Sovereignty Debate

The concept of food sovereignty was formally launched into the global sphere at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996. It emerged as a discourse and politics from the effects of neoliberal trade liberalisation that extended global corporate power into the agrarian economies especially of the south, engendering dispossession of land, seed, water, markets and other resources, and has come to frame the resistance to the advance of corporate industrialised food systems and their damaging social, ecological, health and economic consequences. Within this context, it was also initially counterposed to the concept of food security, which took globalised food markets and corporate power for granted, and failed to question or address the power, actors and processes causing food insecurity. Whereas food security originated from within the global hegemonic institutional context, food sovereignty developed through a counter-movement to the deleterious effects of the intensified role of powerful market actors in re-shaping agrarian economies to the detriment of the peasantry, small-scale and family farmers worldwide, and especially in the south (Wittman 2010; Patel, 2009). It became the key rallying call of the global social movement La Via Campesina ('Way of the Peasant'), one of the world's largest global social movements that, through its 182 local and national member organisations spread across 81 countries, claims to represent about 200 million food producers, mostly peasants and landless as well as small and medium farmers across the global south and north (LVC, 2021; Borras, 2016). At a food sovereignty world assembly in Mali in 2007, the resulting Declaration of Nyéléni, named after a legendary Malian peasant woman, articulated what has become one of the most widely used definitions of food sovereignty:

> Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. 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 ('Declaration of Nyeleni', 2007: 1)

This is only an excerpt from the full explanation of food sovereignty given by the Declaration, and the synthesis report from the assembly at Nyéléni elaborated on six principles of food sovereignty that have become widely seen as the key coordinates of advancing food sovereignty, offering instruments to resist the spread of capitalist agriculture and the corporate food regime, and to advance alternative food systems defined by food sovereignty. These are: focuses on food for people; values food providers; localisation of food systems; localising control over the food system; building of knowledge and skills through plural systems of knowledge and practice; and working with nature (principally through employing agroecological methods of production) ('Declaration of Nyeleni', 2007; Kesselman, 2017). Key

therefore in this conceptualisation of food sovereignty is the democratisation of, and strengthening social control over, the food system.

Food sovereignty has evolved over time, across contexts and through multiple sites of interaction to centre not only the social and political agency of the peasant or small food producer and to include consumers, rural-urban connections, urban agriculture and agricultural workers in its formulations and practices. Reflecting this, it has been embraced by a wide array of social actors and forces, across different contexts and activities, to frame their struggles, interventions and objectives, including in South Africa. In this sense, its exact content in any given place and time is also therefore subject to the actors and contexts that shape its elaboration.

However, applying food sovereignty to the many dimensions and actors of the food system has not come without its analytical, political and concrete tensions. As an idea, mobilising frame, political project and discourse that has garnered extensive global attention is likely to do, food sovereignty has become a 'fundamentally contested concept' (Alonso-Fradejas *et al*; 2015: 433). It has thus inspired academic conferences, journal articles and special journal issues devoted to deepening and interrogating its dimensions (such as Edelman *et al*, 2014; Shattuck *et al*, 2015; Alonso-Fredjas *et al*, 2015). Some of the critical questions raised about food sovereignty relate to its essentialisation of its key political protagonist, the peasant producer, within an unrealistic traditional and ecologically harmonious frame (Jansen, 2015; Soper, 2020); the risk of marginalising millions of small scale farmers whose livelihoods depend on international food trade by rejecting, or not engaging seriously with, international trade (Burnett and Murphy, 2014); what exactly sovereignty refers to in terms of definition, but also at what levels and scale sovereignty applies (Edelman, 2014; Iles and De Wit, 2015); the unaddressed gender questions in food sovereignty discourse and politics (Park *et al*, 2015); the complexities of integrating or excluding varying class forces of agrarian labour and social divisions between them (Agarwal, 2014); and questions of political representation and class differentiation in farmer movements organising under the banner of food sovereignty (Henderson, 2018).

Food sovereignty ultimately has agrarian roots, initially developing from national agrarian movements in Latin America, such as the *Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Rural Workers Movement) (MST) in Brazil, concrete expressions of rural class struggles to democratise land, labour and political power (Wittman, 2009; Carter, 2015). Its

foremost global organisation, Via Campesina, largely emerged out of these agrarian class politics and principally promoted a radical agrarian politics on the global stage (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). Food sovereignty has thus also reignited debates on agrarian change and the agrarian question (with which this thesis is primarily concerned). Broadly construed, these reflect enduring debates in agrarian political economy between so-called agrarian populists, associated with the intellectual tradition emanating from the Russian scholar Alexander Chayanov (1966) and his foundational text, *The Theory of the Peasant Economy*; and agrarian Marxists, historically informed by Vladimir Lenin's (1964) class differentiated analysis of the Russian peasantry in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. The former are seen to idealise the peasantry as a homogenous economic and political actor immune and indeed resistant to capitalist logics, while the latter emphasise their insertion in capitalist commodity relations, consequent class differentiation amongst the peasantry, and the resultant divergent economic relevance and political interests of differentiated rural classes.

A foundational element of contention in these debates is therefore the question of agency and social transformation (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). A key figure who agrarian Marxists like Henry Bernstein (2014) deem as indicative of agrarian populism[1] is Philip McMichael, who has extensively documented and theorised on the emergence and elaboration of the global food sovereignty movement and discourse (McMichael, 2009; 2013; 2014). Much of McMichael's framing and thinking on food sovereignty is informed by his and Harriet Friedman's pioneering work on theorising global food regimes (Friedmann, 1987; Friedman and McMichael, 1989), defined as a 'rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale' (Friedmann, 1993: 30-31). The concept illuminated the central role of global food relations in structuring and reproducing global capitalism. They argued that the first world food regime from the 1870s to the 1930s was organised by European colonial power, principally that of Britain, as it imported tropical products and grains from settler colonies to fuel its industrialisation and feed its working classes, while the second global food regime from the 1950s to the 1970s coincided with the rise of United States' imperial dominance and sought to channel surplus US grain production predominantly to the south, with implications for those societies and their food economies. McMichael (2009; 2016) went on to argue that a third world food regime, the corporate food regime, built on the US-centred food regime and consolidated corporate power in organising the global food system, brought new regions of the world into

[1] And 'its foundational trope of agrarian populism: the social and moral superiority of "peasant" (or "small-scale") farming' (Bernstein, 2014: 1032).

global animal protein chains, consolidated global supply chains (especially through supermarketisation), and unleashed new rounds of dispossession of small producers, principally by exposing southern agrarian peasantries to corporate power through WTO-driven trade liberalisation.

McMichael (2009: 142) argues that each food regime, and the transitions between them, has 'reframed the politics of development' and so the food regime framing offers an important historical lens through which to understand the ecological and political relations of contemporary capitalism. It is therefore in response to the depredations of the corporate food regime that he, and those like Fairburn (2010: 15), locate the rise of food sovereignty as a 'counter-frame'. Given the world-historical significance of the global corporate food regime in terms of its assault on small farmers, ecological destruction and inequality, McMichael (2013) argues that it fundamentally posits a new agrarian question related to the need for far-reaching socio-ecological transformation of the global food system – the agrarian question of food – which can only be resolved from below. As he continues:

> …a reformulated (and historicized) agrarian question, is, simply, who shall farm the land and to what socio-ecological end? … The reformulation enables recognition of how a classical formulation can be recast in such a way as to underscore the significance of farmer/peasant mobilization today around questions of land rights and ecological farming. While these questions may have been marginalized during the twentieth century, they are now condensing in the crisis of the corporate food regime (McMichael, 2013: 65).

In this view, agency from below is the centre-piece of addressing today's agrarian question. In his wide-ranging critique, Bernstein (2009a; 2014; 2016) challenges a number of the foundations of food sovereignty discourse, including the voracity of its opposition to industrial agriculture; its posing of the peasant, small-scale or family farmer as its central political actor and 'capital's other' (Bernstein, 2014: 1032) without specification of their alternative systems of production, grounded in political economy, on which the future social order would be based; and the viability of its world-historical political programme for addressing the interconnected capitalist crises. He argues that food sovereignty sets up unrealistic binaries (between peasant and capital, food security and food sovereignty, agroecology and industrial agriculture) that elides analytical rigour through proper dialectical thinking. Underpinning these aspects of Bernstein's critique is an agrarian political economy perspective on the nature of the contemporary agrarian question and the agents at the centre of it. He argues that food sovereignty advocates have not adequately appreciated the agrarian dynamics of change under

capitalism that long pre-date the rise of the corporate food regime but have integral implications for food sovereignty's potential. In short, given the commodification of subsistence under capitalism, differentiation amongst the peasantry (better understood as petty commodity producers) is inherent. Under conditions of neoliberal globalisation that have heightened the fragmentation of 'classes of labour', only a very small proportion of petty commodity producers are able to reproduce themselves from their own production, let alone provide surplus for non-farming populations. An important element of Bernstein's critique is thus the limits that the dynamics of agrarian change under capitalism pose especially for the agency that is supposed to realise food sovereignty's aims and scope.

In this sense the debate also encompasses varying positions long existent in the literature on the agrarian question on the nature of agrarian change and its relation to capitalism and so, in particular, the relationships between agents of change and structural class determinants, class formation and its relationships to ecological crisis and political organisation, and the implications of fragmentation of classes of labour for politics and agrarian change. On the one hand, those like Watts (2009) argue that classical Marxist analysis (like Bernstein's) and more 'agrarian populist' analyses (like McMichael's) both exhibit a class reductionism albeit in different ways: for those like Bernstein agency is explained by structural dynamics, while more populist positions lump small farmers as one class and fail to adequately appreciate the differentiation between them.

On the other hand, as with so many apparently binary paradigmatic debates, there seems little reason why one should see 'populist' and more 'classical Marxist' approaches only in diametrically opposed terms. Rather, one can combine both a political appreciation of food sovereignty and class analysis, and situate food sovereignty as a struggle of particular classes in relation to capital and the state (Gürcan, 2018). As proposed by Gürcan (2018), I therefore adopt a class-analytical position on food sovereignty, which emphasises its roots in popular class struggles to defend and expand the ecological and social bases of reproduction and production, to assert popular control over resources and the means of production, and to challenge the state, capital and dominant classes in ways that seek to deepen democracy.

For the purposes of this thesis, this points to the necessity of situated and politically specific analysis in understanding agency and structural transformation, while grounded in agrarian political economy. To do this, this thesis therefore does not seek to adjudicate on this debate

between ‘populists’ and more structurally-inclined Marxists or strengthen the arguments of one side over the other, but rather to situate it in this conceptual context, pointing to the centrality in the thesis of approaching food sovereignty from a critical agrarian political economy perspective. Thus while drawing on elements from scholars like McMichael and Bernstein, I also work with thinkers like Archie Mafeje, Sam Moyo and colleagues, Gerard Otero, Stuart Hall, Gillian Hart, Christina Figueroa, and Samir Amin to assist the task of approaching food sovereignty organising and the agrarian question in South Africa in politically specific and contextual ways.

Whither the agrarian question in South Africa: Why the agrarian question?

The food sovereignty idea and movement developed principally through agrarian movements like the MST in Brazil. Although it has come to cover a multiplicity of contexts and issues in the food system beyond the conditions of agrarian production and reproduction, its emergence is therefore rooted in the class-based movement contestation of agrarian inequalities. ‘Agrarian’ refers to agricultural activities associated with farming, the provision of goods and services linked to farming, the associated modes of land use, and to the social relations and societies based on farming (Hebink and van Averbeke, 2013; Bernstein, 2010). However, a prominent element of agrarian analysis in South Africa is that it has experienced far-reaching de-agrarianisation, referring to a long-term process of occupational adjustment and income earning away from agricultural livelihoods, together with shifts in social identification and residential location (Bryceson, 1997). Because of the country’s colonial and apartheid history, in which black populations were both dispossessed as well as banished to rural land as locations to store ‘surplus’ labour, even most rural populations are seen to be de-agrarianised, such that there is a ‘weakening link between rural and agrarian in South Africa’ (Hebinck and van Averbeke, 2013: 189); meaning, therefore, that the country’s enduring land question is not synonymous with its agrarian question (Ferguson, 2013). Why, then, did I choose to locate food sovereignty in relation to South Africa’s agrarian question?

Firstly, while the de-agrarianisation thesis may be apt in pointing to a longer historical arc of change, a linear conception of it has been questioned in that it is insufficient to understanding the more localised specificities that constitute the extant agrarian relations in the country, the dynamics of de- and re-agrarianisation, and associated forms of local agency. This means not only viewing existing agrarian activities simply as a historical artefact, but looking at how they

have been actively reproduced through particular configurations of individual and collective agency, ongoing material shifts, political arrangements, and economic circumstances, as illustrated by the work of those like Mtero (2012) and Ncapayi (2013). There is thus a more complex picture at localised levels than a linear conception of de-agrarianisation can capture.

Secondly, although over 60% of the South African population reside in urban areas, the amount of people residing in rural areas remains significant, and on-going urban-rural linkages imply a continued significance of rural spaces beyond just the numerical rural and urban demographics (Scully, 2012). While access to rural land does not in itself imply agricultural production, there are still at least 2.3 million households engaged in subsistence farming and about 230 000 smallholder households selling to markets, who together may account for as much as a quarter of the value of food consumed in South Africa (Aliber and Mdoda, 2015). The possible opportunities that addressing South Africa's agrarian question potentially poses for ecologically and socially transforming aspects of the agro-food system also remains a legitimate topic of engagement (Jara, 2019).

Lastly, as also seen in this thesis, an ongoing response by some sections of marginalised working people in both rural and urban areas is own food production – an agrarian response. Nor is urbanisation therefore a sign on its own simply of de-agrarianisation – given the historical construction of rural-urban connections through semi-proletarianisation and continued working class precarity, the agrarian can also pervade the urban, as shown by Jacobs (2018). Furthermore, historically and into the present, both more liberal-informed and left-informed initiatives aiming to organise popular classes around food questions have predominantly focused on food production. Most active conceptions of food sovereignty in South Africa, while speaking to issues like that of corporate power and urban hunger beyond farming, have tended to remain rooted in agrarian visions of an alternative and in conceptions of popular agrarian agency. Indeed, the enduring social and ecological crises show little sign of abating in the near-term, which might imply the simultaneous endurance of agrarian responses to conditions of precarity. It is therefore the dynamic and multiple determinations of the reproduction of the agrarian that might call for ongoing examination. For these reasons, the agrarian question remains a centrepiece of analysis in this thesis, but is approached in situated and conjunctural ways that pay prominent attention to political agency.

Chapters Overview

To demonstrate the argument about the historical and ongoing conjunctural, contingent and contextual intersections between the agrarian question, resistance, and food-related organising, the thesis is structured as follows. A literature review and conceptual framework is presented in **Chapter 2**, aiming to highlight some of the key ideas and debates on the agrarian question, grounded in a Marxist agrarian political economy, and from which much debate on food sovereignty draws. A core theme running through the chapter is an emphasis on a materialist analysis that is combined with political specificity, open to the ways in which political agency is critical in shaping the course of agrarian change. Such specific and conjunctural analysis also needs to centre the ecological question, and so a political ecology lens. I suggest that the Gramscian conception of articulation as developed by Stuart Hall, and elaborated further in the South African context by Gillian Hart,[2] offers a useful analytical and methodological tool to strengthen such politically specific and contextual analysis of the agrarian question.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach that informed the research. The research was framed by Michael Burawoy's extended case study method combined with elements of Gillian Hart's method of relational comparison. Burawoy's method was important in situating my study within wider structural processes and theory. Although this is not a fully comparative study, it drew from the *relational* part of Hart's method, which includes its form of dialectical method, viewing subjects and sites of study as nodal points of wider processes that are also productive of those processes; and an emphasis on historical determinations. In addition to describing the qualitative data collection methods, the chapter describes my research journey and the associated reflexive process. It also gives an initial introduction to the case study sites.

In **Chapter 4** I argue that understanding the manifestations of food politics from below today – or the translation of social facts of agro-food system inequalities into political facts (Mamdani, 2017: 217) – can be understood in relation to the historically conjunctural, contingent and contextual processes that both underpinned the formation of the dominant agro-food system and to which that system contributed. Historically, resistance from below related to agriculture

[2] Both of whom reference Harold Wolpe (1972) whose work was seminal in developing the concept of articulation to understand South Africa's social formation and accumulation model, but also significantly move beyond him in deploying the concept, given the limitations of the functionalist way in which he initially developed and applied it.

and food was closely intertwined with struggles over labour, land, and political liberation, and were further shaped by intersecting forms of race, class and gender differentiation and domination. I demonstrate this argument by weaving the history of food and hunger to the history of class formation, political resistance and organising, and larger historical developments. Ultimately, I show a divergence between the politics of national liberation and the structural dynamics of the agrarian question and dominant agro-food system. This had implications for the kinds of organising we see in Chapter 5.

In **Chapter 5** I present a typology of contemporary forms of organising and collective action around the contradictions of the food system in South Africa. Based on an analysis of how initiatives and organisations have positioned themselves through their organisational documents, public vocabularies and declarations, actions, and in interviews and observations, the chapter shows that organising around food and the agro-food system falls along a continuum between justice-centred and food-centred conceptions of change in the food system. Together with their relationships to questions of production and consumption, they cohere around what I identify as *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *transformative* approaches. Consistent with viewing the types identified as 'articulatory practices' that are political expressions of articulations between historical processes and conditions, social relations and political subjectivities, the chapter then turns to understanding them as political responses to the historical processes and conditions described in Chapter 4. It suggests that these positions emerged largely out of two historical responses to the national question: on the one hand, that grounded in the tradition of South African liberalism which sought to address immediate problems of hunger and ecological degradation within the prevailing social and political system and, on the other, from national liberation traditions that sought to overturn the power relations of an oppressive social system. Both, however, have continued to evolve dynamically and relationally on this continuum in the post-apartheid period as they confront similar social and political realities from different historical and political perspectives. These are the determinations with which food sovereignty articulates.

The categories developed in Chapter 5 are relational in two senses. Firstly, there is not a Chinese wall separating them, but they are also shaped by the interactions with each other. Secondly, the categories reflect general orientations in terms of social and political objectives, key protagonists and forms of operating. Their meaning and impact is ultimately produced by how actors in local contexts engage with and actually constitute the formations in these categories.

Therefore, Chapters 6 and 7 focus on cases associated with the transformative category, which seeks to challenge and transform existing relations of power, property and accumulation that reproduce the marginalisation and disempowerment that lie at the root of hunger and inequality. The two chapters are aimed at analysing how the relational categories developed in Chapter 5 play out in specific local agrarian contexts of working class communities, 'ground zero' of food sovereignty politics.

Chapter 6 examines the Amadiba anti-mining struggle on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape Province. There has not been a deliberate political attempt to organise under the banner of food sovereignty or to advance agricultural practices framed politically through food sovereignty, but the content and nature of the struggle are of interest from a food sovereignty perspective. I show that local food production and provisioning has taken on a transformative, counter-hegemonic politics through their articulation with a struggle that seeks to deepen democracy and defend popular sovereignty over production and productive resources – closely reminiscent of the global food sovereignty discourse and politics. The particular features of the Amadiba context that have shaped this politics, and its intersections with agriculture and food, are the focus of this chapter. The chapter highlights in particular the role of politics in shaping the course of localised agrarian change in contingent and conjunctural ways, in particular through the re-articulation of existing practices and common sense into a political project, as well as wider alliances that have further shaped the course of agrarian activity and politics.

Chapter 7 explores a somewhat contrasting case to that of Amadiba, in rural Limpopo Province, where attempts to advance a transformative agrarian politics of food through the Mopani Farmers' Association have largely remained limited to productivist, organic livelihood interventions. Through the MFA, the chapter examines some of the tensions between the aspiration of transformative food sovereignty politics and the local given context within which MFA operates. I show some of the material circumstances and political relationships that MFA is embedded in, which pose important constraints to building a transformative agro-food politics, and so help to explain the hegemonic politics through which MFA works to advance agroecology. This shows how attempts to embed agroecology as a means of building food sovereignty takes place in conjunctural and contingent ways as it articulates with multiple contextual factors. **Chapter 8** draws key conclusions from the thesis and reflects on its wider implications for thinking about agro-food politics, food sovereignty and agrarian theory.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework: Dynamic Agrarian Questions

Introduction

One of Bernstein's key critiques of scholars like McMichael and other food sovereignty proponents is that they understand collective class agency of the peasantry or food sovereignty actors in simplistic terms as capital's unitary 'other' (or globalised industrial agriculture's 'other'). Indeed, implicit in McMichael's notion of the agrarian question of food is his reading of agency from the structural, social and ecological contradictions of the corporate food regime. This poses the question of concretely understanding the nature of agency and resistance in situated and contextual ways. As Gillian Hart explained in relation to her research in two townships of rural KwaZulu-Natal:

> ...larger political-economic forces and discourses did not simply descend upon passive places. Rather they were actively reworked and reconfigured in ways that would have been difficult – if not impossible – to predict or read off structural conditions (Hart, 2002: 297).

This chapter is therefore aimed at providing some of the conceptual tools to move beyond interpreting agency from structural conditions. This helps to explore the wider social and historical factors through which to understand the shaping of collective agency from below over food and the agro-food system, beyond only mirroring the contradictions of the dominant agro-food system. This means exploring the translation of structural, social facts into political facts, with a focus on the manifestations of differentiation, class, politics and the outcomes of wider structural processes through organising among social forces on the ground through civil society – from below.

This thesis is situated in the conceptual frame of the agrarian question, a critical Marxist agrarian political economy approach that has principally been concerned with the relationship between agriculture and capitalism, the class relations within agriculture, and the associated politics arising out of the agrarian question. The agrarian question emanates from late-19th century theorising, but it continues to ignite much research and debate as the continually evolving field engages with contemporary issues, especially in the context of the intersecting systemic crises of our time – related to ecology, climate justice, gender, the enduring subsistence crisis of the world's working people engendered by a rampant global capitalism, food regimes and food sovereignty, and imperialism and development (see Levien *et al*, 2018;

Borras *et al,* 2022). The overarching contemporary urgency of the ecological crisis, as well as agro-food systems implications in it, mean also that agrarian questions can hardly be theorised separately from ecological questions. As such, this thesis also integrates a political ecology approach, by integrating socio-ecological relationships into its agrarian analyses, and is alive to the ways in which socio-ecological patterns are shaped through relations of power, material interests and struggle (Paulson *et al*, 2003).

This conceptual framing and literature review principally engages with the debates on food sovereignty that are grounded in approaches to understanding the agrarian question under contemporary realities, and especially that of class and politics. While the political sociology of the agrarian question has been a consistent component of critical agrarian political economy, this chapter seeks to emphasise the political and historical specificity of the agrarian question – its conjunctural and contingent nature. Consistent with a Marxist approach, this means that my starting point on class is materialist, in that it is rooted in the structures and processes of capitalism. However, its ultimate form and trajectory in a given context is an outcome of further multiple determinations, of which intersecting political agency is an important determination.

The chapter provides an overview of the history of thinking on the agrarian question and a brief framing of the agrarian debate on food sovereignty. It subsequently turns to key ways in which the agrarian question has been framed in the contemporary global conjuncture, most prominently by Henry Bernstein. It then engages with key debates on this topic, especially through the arguments of Sam Moyo and colleagues. I suggest a key point of divergence between scholars like Bernstein and Moyo and colleagues is on how to understand the politics of the agrarian question today, a factor that the latter give much prominence to, and which is necessary for opening up analysis within the agrarian question of deeper ecological and gender questions. I then bring this discussion on the political aspects of the agrarian question together into a conceptual framework drawing largely from the work of Gerard Otero and his notion of political class formation. Otero's framework provides important analytical tools to analyse the articulation between class, other elements of social difference and agrarian change. I develop this further by incorporating the concept of articulation, a methodological and conceptual tool through which to undertake conjunctural and dialectical analysis. This draws largely from the conceptual developments on articulation by Stuart Hall (1980; 1996), and from Gillian Hart (2002; 2007) who draws significantly from his work for the South African context. I pose articulation as a useful analytical tool to approach the question of collective action, food and

agrarian change. I then outline some of the key features and political ecology of South Africa's agrarian question and food system as the context with which this thesis engages.

Capitalism and the Agrarian Question: A Conceptual Overview

This thesis is situated within a theoretical approach of Marxist agrarian political economy[3] that seeks to understand dynamics of agrarian change under capitalism. The agrarian question as a Marxist approach to analysing agrarian change arose in the writings of Karl Marx when he theorised the development of capitalism in Europe, and specifically the development of capital and class formation in the English countryside with the shift from feudalism to private property relations and industrialisation. This formed the basis for the elaboration of the classical agrarian question in the late 1800s and early 1900s by thinkers and political actors like Vladimir Lenin and Karl Kautsky (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010; Bernstein, 2009a). Lenin's (1964) key contribution to Marxist agrarian political economy was the question of class differentiation amongst the peasantry as a result of a developing capitalism, based on his research of the Russian peasantry in the late 1800s and presented in his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia.* Within Marxist approaches to understanding complex and multiple histories of agrarian change, class has therefore been central. Indeed, for those like Henry Bernstein, 'class is the indispensable starting point for a robust political economy of agriculture' (Watts, 2012: 203).

Much historical thinking on the agrarian question has principally been concerned with issues around the development of agriculture in capitalist societies. One of its principal early theorists, Karl Kautsky, thus defined the agrarian question as, 'is capital, and in what ways is capital, taking hold of agriculture, revolutionising it, smashing the old forms of production and of poverty and establishing the new forms which must succeed?' (quoted in Akram-Lodhi, 1998:135). The agrarian question thus had strong roots in linear Marxist thinking that saw pre-capitalist agricultural relations in the countryside as backward and doomed to disappear due to the economic laws of capitalism that would introduce capitalist relations in and forms of agriculture, contribute to industrialisation, and lay the grounds for progress towards socialist revolution. Kautsky theorised the agrarian question within the politics of the German Social Democratic Party (Coulson, 2014), and the question was thus primarily a political question in

[3] Diverse as perspectives and debates within it are (see Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010).

terms of alliances and building the social force for revolution. This in turn became a question of whether and how to win over the peasantry – and which parts of the peasantry given the growing differentiation in the countryside created by capitalist transition – in the transitional pursuit of electoral victory (Hendricks, 1995).

The development of (predominantly European) thinking on the agrarian question over the century thus principally came to be concerned with the development of capitalism in agriculture to unleash the productive forces, especially for industrialisation, such that Terence Byres would come to define the classical agrarian question as 'the continued existence in the countryside, in a substantive sense, of obstacles to an unleashing of accumulation in both the countryside itself and more generally – in particular, the accumulation associated with capitalist industrialisation' (Byres, 1996: 26). Construed in this way, drawing from the work of Byres, Bernstein (1996) identifies three problematics that have characterised the classical agrarian question. The first is the problematic of 'accummulation.' This is largely associated with the work of the Soviet theorist Preobrazhensky (1965), concerning the role of agriculture in generating surplus resources for industrialisation and structural transformation. The second problematic can be termed one of 'production'. The production problematic is drawn from the work of Lenin and Kautsky and was concerned with the extent to which capitalist relations have developed in the countryside, the forms that it takes and the barriers that may be impeding its development. The third problematic, 'politics', drew from Frederich Engels' initial theorisation and was concerned with the political forces and processes that the accumulation and production problematics gave rise to in rural areas (Akram-Lodhi, 1998). Such broader change was principally thought of by those like Engels in relation to a peasant-worker alliance in pursuit of the worker-led revolution, but it also came to embody in the second half the twentieth century a focus on the political role of the peasantry in revolutionary and anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century, with works such as Eric Wolf's (1969) *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* and James C. Scott's (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*.

In the terms of these problematics, given the centrality of agriculture to the expansion of capital, Bernstein (2006) argues that the classical agrarian question can be characterised as the agrarian question of capital. The resolution of the agrarian question was illustrated by the development of capitalist agriculture in the countryside and industrialisation in the cities – 'structural transformation'. The tradition that this classical agrarian question stimulated gave rise to wide ranging research and political debate on various aspects of the agrarian question, its iterations

in particular national spaces, and its various resolutions (see Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010; 2010b; Bernstein and Byres, 2001). A significant aspect to this elaboration was that theory gleaned from the analysis of capitalist development in Europe and North America was then applied to a developmentalist analysis of countries of the south, and concerned itself with identifying the features of agriculture in those countries that were holding back 'structural transformation' towards industrialisation and fuller capitalist development – 'transition' (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010). Transition thus came to be a key preoccupation for much scholarship on the agrarian question, defined as 'those changes in the countryside of a poor country necessary to the overall development of capitalism and its ultimate dominance in a particular national social formation' (Byres, 1996: 27). For Byres, however, if industrialisation occurred without the development of capitalism in agriculture, then the agrarian question ceased to exist. That is, the agrarian question was extant only in relation to the overall necessity of capitalist industrialisation.[4]

One of the core critiques of the food sovereignty discourse and the 'peasant way' from an agrarian political perspective is that, while it provides an important political mobilising framework, in academic and practical terms it conceives of the peasantry, or people of the land, or farmers who bear the brunt of the neoliberal food regime, as an internally homogenous group. This accordingly papers over potential diverging interests, implications for politics and the exclusionary implications. From an agrarian political economy perspective, rural class relations, rooted in processes of differentiation as a result of the context of capitalism, is therefore critical to analysis of agrarian change and politics. Agrarian political economy therefore analyses the social relations of production and reproduction. An important starting point offered by Bernstein (2010) is to make the distinction between the technical conditions and the social conditions of farming. The technical conditions are key in terms of productivity and refer to the tools and technology that are used in farming; the quality of human labour in using the technology (determined by things like nutrition and education); and the raw materials of farming, which is presented by the natural environment – fertility of soils, types and qualities of seeds, the supply and management of water, and so on. The social conditions of production refer to the social relationships that people enter into to get these things. It therefore includes the technical conditions, in that the social conditions shape patterns of ownership, access and

[4] A perspective that Levien *et al* (2018: 856) suggest described those 'whose orthodox, "stagist" assumptions had turned many Marxists into the B-team for modernization theory.'

control over land, labour, tools, water and seeds. The social relations of production and reproduction are therefore key in agrarian analysis (Otero, 1999).

To summarise this discussion so far in relation to food sovereignty, it can be said that food sovereignty is largely about seeking to bring together two things. Firstly, it intervenes in the technical conditions of production through promotion of practices like agroecological production, farmer management of seed systems, indigenous crop preservation, and so on. However, this is intertwined with, secondly, the aspiration to and struggle for a particular set of socio-ecological relations for these techniques of production to be elaborated through, broadly that of equality (class, gender, racial), democracy and ecological harmony. That is, food sovereignty is realised through just socio-ecological relations. The achievement of just relations is an object of political struggle. Hence, food sovereignty is not only the existence of items like seed banks and the practicing of agroecology, but is inseparable from the social relations through which these practices are undertaken (Figueoroa, 2015).

From an agrarian political economy perspective, core to the analysis of social relations of production and reproduction is the apparently inexorable tendency under capitalism of rural class differentiation, identification of which is crucial to placing social actors in the social relations in which they are constituted (Levin and Neocosmos, 1989). Class differentiation is a relatively complex and non-linear process, that is also not necessarily reducible to quantitative measurement, but it broadly refers to the emergence and existence of sharp differences within the rural population and changing relations between them, reflected in differential control over productive resources (often, but not always, including inequalities in access to land) and therefore also the patterns of access to the products of own or others' labour (White, 1989; O'Laughlin, 1996).

Class differentiation 'proceeds by multiple routes that are historically and socially specific' (Mamdani, 1987: 211). However, schematically, differentiation is seen to result from the fact that capitalism leads to the 'commodification of subsistence' (Bernstein, 2010: 34) amongst rural dwellers, meaning that they increasingly rely on commodity relations (and therefore capitalist class relations) to reproduce themselves, whether through sale of their labour power, selling of their production, the purchase of consumer goods, or a combination. Class differentiation is thus seen to arise from within production relations, as peasants become petty commodity producers who embody the contradictory class places of both capital and labour.

For Bernstein (2010), this contradictory combination is the source of agrarian class differentiation, and when it ruptures is when class differentiation proceeds, eventually leading to the formation of agrarian classes of capital and of labour. However, this *class* differentiation, which is a process of capitalist relations, also articulates with other forms of social difference such as gender, race, ethnicity, region and religion to produce the patterns of *social* differentiation, and the broader social relations, evident in any particular context.

As a result of wider capitalist relations, Ossome and Naidu (2021) suggest that the three key realms of production involving popular classes that emerge in agrarian economies are peasant subsistence production, petty commodity production and wage labour (the latter the other side of the development of some petty commodity producers into capitalist producers, or Lenin's 'rich peasantry'), which articulate with each other in various ways. For many in the literature,[5] peasant refers to those households that produce mainly for subsistence to ensure 'simple reproduction'. Some peasant producers might also produce a small surplus, but only enough to support simple reproduction at a slightly higher level of consumption (Otero, 1999). With petty commodity production, the unit of production remains the household, but production is to varying degrees integrated into wider commodity relations and so those households' reproduction is dependent on those relations (Friedmann, 1980). For Mamdani (1987), petty commodity production does not itself imply capitalist production relations (seen in commodification of land, labour, inputs and equipment), even if such production is connected to 'capitalist' markets. It is when petty commodity producers generate a sufficient surplus to enable capital accumulation that expanded reproduction occurs, and through which differentiation proceeds towards the development of capitalist property relations and agrarian classes of capital and labour.

[5] There is a sometimes confusing variety of usage of terms like peasant and petty commodity producer in the literature. For example, for Bernstein (2009b), peasant refers to a pre-capitalist social category, a producer who mainly ensures subsistence, or simple reproduction. However, Levin and Neocosmos (1989: 250) use the term peasant as 'a short-hand equivalent' of 'agricultural petty commodity producer.' Furthermore, Mamdani (1987) suggests that petty commodity production can still happen through non-capitalist production relations. However, according to Friedmann's (1980) definition, this would be classified as peasant production, due to the non-commodification of the factors of production, secured through personal rather than market relations. Mafeje (1985: 36) pointed out, regarding the southern African context, that the multiple interpenetrations of systems of land tenure and various social properties of rural societies belied any 'clean class categorisations'. This section therefore aims at providing a basic clarification of some key concepts used for the purposes of this thesis that will be used on the terms described here, rather than adjudicating on deeper conceptual debates about such social agents.

Contextual specificity is also called for in such renderings. A prominent element of understandings of rural class differentiation as above is the dispossessory dynamic in developing capitalist property relations, as richer peasants gain greater control over land at the expense of poorer and landless peasants (Li, 2010; White, 1989). However, Mafeje (2003) argued that the 'lineage mode of production' still predominated in much of sub-Saharan Africa, rendering understanding control over land through the frame of capitalist property relations inaccurate. In the lineage system, communal access to land is guaranteed to all (male-headed) households, while allowing for private appropriation through that land. Because of this dynamic, he argued that this system in fact provided the potential for more equitable forms of agricultural development through 'accumulation from below' (together with interventions to address questions like gender domination in this system). Thus in South Africa, he argued that class agents of semi-proletarians could not be understood on the basis of property relations, given that they accessed land through usufruct rights in the form of quitrent title in the homelands (Mafeje, 1985).[6]

The above, broad schema of class formation and differentiation therefore largely speaks to what has been called 'accumulation from below', analytically distinct from 'accumulation from above'. These concepts were initially developed by Lenin with the United States a key example of the former and Prussia a key example of the latter. Accumulation from below emerges as a relatively spontaneous process, internal to the conditions of petty commodity production, where capital accumulation begins through production relations from below, through differentiation (Mamdani, 1987). Accumulation from below has been deemed more economically and politically progressive because of its broad-based character, its ability to develop the forces of production more dynamically, and its implications for democracy (Akram-Lodhi, 1998; Cousins, 2013). Accumulation from above, on the other hand, refers to a process where powerful precapitalist classes transform themselves into agrarian capitalists (Akram-Lodhi, 1998) and, Mamdani (1987) adds, involves extra-economic coercion usually by powerful actors, like the state, and so is implicitly also less democratic. That is, the agrarian question of capital can be resolved from above or from below (or contextually specific combinations), with varying political and economic implications.

[6] And of course, because of the overall context of national oppression under the apartheid accumulation model, wider democratic questions would have to be dealt with before being able to consider such equitable forms of development based on prevailing landholding systems.

Two additional points need to be made about differentiation that are relevant to thinking about the South African context, where the nature of racial dispossession created a host of complexities regarding class formation (Cousins, 2013). Firstly, as O'Laughlin (1996; 2016) points out, the above sorts of explanations of differentiation within agriculture through accumulation from below assume it as a process internal to petty commodity production under capitalism. However, critical in differentiation and class formation in South Africa were 'external' factors brought about by proletarianisation through labour migration, and so the role that rural land played in subsidising wages and capital, as argued by Wolpe (1972) in his seminal article.[7] Given continued access to land as part of the particular process of dispossession and capitalist development in South Africa, wages also provided a means of investment into the rural homestead and agricultural production, and hence O'Laughlin (1996) argues that diversified livelihoods (the variable combination of wages and forms of own production) was the key driver of differentiation. Differentiation is therefore also shaped through the relationship between rural households and the wider social formation beyond only local production linkages (May, 1987). This relates to the second issue and a point made by Archie Mafeje (1985), which is that to understand African rural class relations in the southern African context, one needed to start not from the household's situation in localised, 'internal' production relations, but from how the household socially reproduces itself in a wider totality of social relations – how, in the context of the migrant labour system, households socially reproduced themselves across the continuum of both rural agrarian relations and urban wage work (and hence the semi-proletariat or 'peasant-workers') (Mafeje, 1985: 37). Although some of the terms of the continuum may have shifted since then, as Zhan and Scully (2018) and Scully and Webster (2019) have shown, examining how especially semi-proletarian households socially reproduce themselves in the context of unemployment and precarity through combining the rural and the urban is still a relevant lens in South Africa today. This points to the question of how to understand the agrarian question in our contemporary conjuncture, to which I now turn.

Contested Agrarian Questions and the South

Much of Bernstein's critique of food sovereignty is informed by his analysis of the contemporary agrarian question. His classification of the classic agrarian question as one of

[7] Which, of course, was also the subject of important critique; see Mafeje (1981), Friedman (2015) and O'Laughlin (2021).

capital is in part a preface to his central argument – that the agrarian question of capital has on a world scale been resolved and that under today's conditions of capitalist globalisation, the principal agrarian question in the south is the agrarian question of labour (Bernstein, 2006). This is because in most places capitalism has developed, and in the context of capitalist globalisation, continued industrialisation and capitalist development are no longer dependent on capitalism in agriculture nor the surplus generated there. Rather, as a result of the contemporary nature of global capitalism there is a global fragmented class of labour – the precariat, the informal working class, petty commodity producers – that is rendered surplus to the accumulation needs of capital. Borrowing from Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, Bernstein defines classes of labour as 'the growing numbers…who now depend – directly *and indirectly* – on the sale of their labour power for their own daily reproduction (Bernstein, 2006: 455; original emphasis). Fragmented refers to how many classes of labour in the global south are forced to pursue their reproduction through combining often insecure and oppressive wage employment, small-scale production and livelihood activities in the informal economy, 'across different sites of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, wage employment and marginal self-employment' (Bernstein, 2010: 111).

It is thus the intensified reproductive crisis of labour and, consequently, how to secure social reproduction for classes of labour, that for Bernstein constitutes the agrarian question today. Based on this, he argues that there is no longer such a thing as a peasantry in the world today. This is because what are often classified as peasants are rather classes of labour for whom land is only one source of survival in multiple livelihood activities (which often includes petty commodity production). As such, the struggle for land, for example, is not a sign of the resurgence of peasant struggles, but of fragmented classes of labour seeking one source of livelihood amongst others (Bernstein, 2006). Including petty commodity producers as part of classes of labour further informs his critique of food sovereignty, suggesting that a significant challenge for the agrarian vision of food sovereignty as an alternative to corporate agriculture is that very few petty commodity producers in the south today are able to reproduce themselves primarily from their own farming, hence posing questions about their ability to mount an alternative to the global corporate food system (Bernstein, 2014).

Bernstein's argument on the agrarian question of labour has become widely employed as an analytical concept and, as such, has also generated significant debate and critique. Hendricks (2014) has pointed out that his rendition of the classical agrarian question singles out only one

of the agrarian question's many dimensions, that he has contradictory views on the relevance of the agrarian question of capital to countries of the south, and that countries of the south in fact face much more complex questions on the relationship between agriculture and capitalist development rather than not facing such a question. Dasgupta (2021: 226) suggests that, notwithstanding its conceptual usefulness, it remains a 'capital-centric depiction of the agrarian space' that does little to help elucidate the forces, factors and forms of agency shaping the nature of rural (and urban) livelihoods and economies in the context of such a question. Murisa and Helliker (2011) describe it as a 'woolly' concept that isolates labour from its symbiotic relationship with capital.

A notable over-arching response to the framing of the agrarian question by those like Bernstein, through the prism of nation and class, comes from Moyo *et al* (2013; 2015). They argue that the notion that the agrarian question of capital is resolved and the reduction of the question to industrialisation is based on a particular European experience. However, they argue that this perspective was nonetheless transposed onto the study of agrarian formations and societies in the south, with the accompanying Eurocentric frame of identifying barriers to transitioning from 'backwardness' to industrialisation. For Moyo *et al* and Issa Shivji (2019), this perspective has a number of gaps for accurately thinking about the agrarian question in the south. According to such scholars, unlike in the north, the agrarian question in the south is not simply the question of how capital accumulation and industrialisation get going. Rather, the examples from Europe that those like Byres and Bernstein draw from to develop their theories on the agrarian question of capital cannot be thought outside of the world system of imperialism and accumulation that was crucial to enabling European industrialisation. This enables recognition that slavery was a key process that provided the surplus for industrialisation rather than simply European agriculture; that a large part of the food and industrial needs of Europe were served through the reorganisation of agrarian economies of the south (so creating agrarian questions there); as well as by the export of the contradictions of European capitalist development, such as the creation of a population surplus to the labour requirements of capital, to the settler colonies (Shivji, 2019; see also Frederici, 2021). Shivji and Moyo *et al* (2013) therefore argue that that it is inaccurate to suggest that the agrarian question in Europe was 'resolved' in terms of capital, when its unresolved contradictions were simply exported. Colonialism and imperialism therefore created new contradictions in the south, which in turn confronts different arrangements of problems to be resolved beyond simply industrialisation, encapsulated as the agrarian question of national liberation (Moyo *et al*, 2015).

Part of building their argument is that whereas one of the outcomes of the agrarian question of capital in the North was industrialisation and the predominant shift to proletarianisation and urbanisation, being on the receiving end of imperial expansion meant that process could not simply be emulated in most societies of the south/periphery. Instead, the predominant features of many African countries is an incomplete transition reflected in the 'disarticulation' between agriculture and industry (Moyo, 2011) and the predominance of a semi-proletariat – 'peasant-workers' (Mafeje, 1985: 36) – who depend on combining land-based sustenance and the wage (especially through migrant labour) for survival, as opposed to any 'pure' conception of the peasantry, and who provide the key social base for the political contestation of the agrarian question under peripheral capitalism (Moyo and Yeros, 2005). This also reflects how formal decolonisation in the main failed to resolve the agrarian question of national liberation. According to Moyo *et al* (2013; 2015), because most African countries' experiences of colonialism and their current position in an imperial world order, the agrarian question of capital is unresolved. In the context of African economies' integration in the world economy through to neoliberalism, the extraction of surplus from peasantries in the postcolonial era (through marketing arrangements as well as exploitation of semi-proletarian labour power), the re-emphasis on export agriculture, and successive waves of land alienation have meant agriculture has generally remained disarticulated from wider national development, and so the majority of smallholder peasants, or semi-proletarians, experience a consistent social reproduction crisis (Moyo, 2015; Moyo and Yeros 2005). To fundamentally address this requires addressing the land question through extensive land reform to give land to the majority poor peasantry, and enabling a process of accumulation from below in order to address their social reproduction crisis. Hence an agrarian question of capital remains, with land reform needing to address historical dispossession, economic empowerment and democratisation (Murisa, 2021).[8]

Framed in these terms, the agrarian question of national liberation also appears to hold relevance regarding the key political coordinates of South Africa's agrarian question, and so

[8] One of the critiques of Moyo *et al*'s (2013; 2015) argument on the agrarian question of national liberation, such as by Hendricks (2014), is that they advance a romantic conception of the peasantry in resolving the agrarian question that avoids questions of class differentiation and divergent political interests. However, this critique ignores Sam Moyo's wider body of highly detailed empirical and theoretical work that consistently included class analysis, including on the semi-proletarian nature of African peasantries rather than any romantic peasant notions (see Scoones, 2021b). His work does not gloss over differentiation; rather he argues for a more democratised articulation of accumulation from below and popular class organisation to forge a more democratised path of national development.

the necessary structural shifts through which to think about the material terrain of contestation for food sovereignty, especially given South Africa's 'unresolved national question' (Jara, 2013: 267), in part reflected in the reproduction of its unequal agrarian structure. Although accumulation, productivity and production of wage foods and integration with industrialisation was achieved through colonialism and apartheid, this was through accumulation from above, which rendered a consistent social reproduction crisis of the peasantry under conditions of proletarianisation (Moyo, 2015). Whereas Bernstein might position the contemporary widespread precarity of South Africa's rural and urban working classes in the context of the current phase of capitalist globalisation in the south, Archie Mafeje's (1985) analysis points to the fact that an agrarian question of labour was always embedded in the agrarian question of capital in colonial contexts like South Africa. The existence of the semi-proletarian reflected how settler capitalism fragmented the social reproduction of native populations: 'Out of economic necessity, they migrate to the urban areas and out of the need for the social reproduction of their labour, they revert to the countryside' (Mafeje, 1985: 36). Capitalist development in places like South Africa therefore created the national question in the form of racially repressive relations defining the national accumulation pathway (Moyo, 2015). The fundamentals of this national accumulation pathway that produced semi-proletarianisation and precarity remains in place and so, even though some modalities have shifted like high rates of urbanisation, the wider question of a more democratised and inclusive development path, including accumulation from below, is seen by some to remain (Jacobs, 2018; Cousins, 2007).

To sum up, the divergence between Bernstein and Moyo and his colleagues is largely at two levels. Firstly, at the materialist and structural level. Whereas Bernstein has been developing his arguments since the 1990s that the agrarian question of capital is resolved (see Bernstein, 1996a), Moyo and colleagues argue that because of the historical and structural context of the south, this is not the case. Indeed, a similar point was already pointed out by Akram-Lodhi in the late 1990s in his critique of Bernstein's initial arguments that the agrarian question had been resolved, worth quoting in length for its similarities to the arguments of Moyo and colleagues:

> [T]he late 1990s has witnessed a quite remarkable revival in peasant movements and a restatement of the case for agrarian reform… Many in these movements seek to refashion development by constructing a new social structure of accumulation in which the state is able to unleash forces capable of generating economic development for the betterment of the majority. It will be the capacity of the state to respond to the interventions of these actors and navigate rather than abdicate the prevailing trajectory of the world-system which will in all likelihood be the critical issue of agrarian transition in the medium term. In such a process, and

> in the era of deepening globalisation, politics, production and accumulation will become if anything even more dynamically interrelated in the countryside of developing and transitional economies. In this light, it can be suggested that, contrary to the critique of Bernstein, the agrarian question, in all three problematics, remains (Akram-Lodhi, 1998: 148).

This points to a second point of divergence, which is on the question of political agency. As Akram-Lodhi alludes to, organised political agency has played a role in keeping the agrarian question in the south on the agenda. Similarly, for Moyo *et al* (2015), the agrarian question of national liberation is contingent not only on the structural contradictions of southern agrarian questions, but on the agency of organised rural class forces who have kept it on the agenda. It is this popular agency in relation to the agrarian question of national liberation that also opens the space for the elaboration of other agrarian questions, principally of gender and ecology. Those like Bernstein and Byres are certainly not blind to the contingent and political nature of the agrarian question, the 'political sociology of class forces and interests' (Bernstein, 2009a: 57). Indeed, Byres argued that the outcomes of the agrarian question are ultimately 'determined in the arena of class struggle', that production and accumulation patterns shape politics, and politics in turn shapes production and accumulation (quoted in Akram-Lodhi, 1998: 143). At issue is that this question is still framed in subordination to industrialisation through transition, and the political sociology of the nature and role of class struggles under the contemporary agrarian question.

On the latter question of the class nature of rural populations and their political agency, on the one hand, Bernstein's understanding of peasantries as one component of classes of labour and Moyo's understanding of peasantries as a semi-proletariat largely refer to the same thing.[9] Furthermore, Bernstein's (2006) repudiation of the notion of a pure peasantry and its implications for political agency in relation to his critique of food sovereignty (Bernstein, 2014) in fact appears not that far apart from Moyo and colleagues. Bernstein's argument that what those like Phillip McMichael today understand to be the peasantry are in fact classes of labour pursuing multiple livelihoods under conditions that deeply constrain the potential for such 'peasantries' to mount a challenge and alternative to corporate agriculture in feeding the world,

[9] For Bernstein (2009a: 73), the peasantry in the south as a component of classes of labour is 'neither dispossessed of all means of reproducing itself nor in possession of sufficient means to reproduce itself', which is the same as semi-proletariant, a term he prefers not to use in favour of classes of labour, because of the former's functionalist connotations (see Zhan and Scully, 2018). However, Moyo *et al*'s deployment of the term is not functionalist and draws much of its inspiration from Archie Mafeje's analysis, who was also a strong critic of functionalist analysis (see Mafeje, 1981). It is therefore in this non-functionalist spirit that I continue to use the term 'semi-proletariat' in this thesis.

amounts to a similar critique Moyo and Yeros (2005) made of food sovereignty nine years before Bernstein's (2014) critique. Based on their prior analysis of southern semi-proletariats and their central role in rural social movements, they suggested that the internationalism of La Via Campesina had failed to properly recognise, and base its political visions and arguments on, the 'semi-proletarianised specificity of peripheral capitalism' (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 51). As such, it centred a vision of a farmer and of food that was supposedly universal, but eschewed the more urgent 'horizontal' political tasks of uniting peasant-workers across the rural-urban divide and in pursuit of more democratised and autonomous national development priorities (*ala* the national question).

On the other hand, this also points towards a key difference between Moyo and colleagues, and Bernstein: Bernstein treats the conditions creating fragmented classes of labour as an accomplished fact, but for Moyo and Yeros (2005b) and Moyo *et al* (2013; 2015) , it is precisely those constraining conditions that are the object of political agency, and on which transforming those conditions is contingent. Moyo and colleagues therefore advance an effort to more deeply engage with the political agency necessary to confront the conditions that define the agrarian question of national liberation. In contrast, whereas Bernstein's concept of the agrarian question of labour is a significant conceptual contribution to Marxist analysis of the agrarian question in the south, as O'Laughlin (2016) points out, '[t]he political meaning of this proposition [remains] puzzling in any context', nor does it assist in working out the specific political terms of actual struggles (JAC, 2019, video). One can therefore see the contributions of Moyo and colleagues as in part an attempt, grounded in Marxist materialist analysis, to lend a certain political and economic specificity to the agrarian question in southern Africa, by identifying global and national structural forces locking in inequality in a national context, and the terms and role for political agency, and so the economic and political preconditions for any achievement of food sovereignty.

Such efforts to understand the agrarian question in a wider appreciation of contemporary social and political exigencies must also be shaped by gender and ecological questions. Moyo *et al* suggest that addressing the agrarian question of national liberation opens the grounds for addressing gender inequalities and the ecological crisis, because of their connections also to national economies' and societies' relationship to an imperialist world economy. In this regard, Ossome and Naidu (2021) argue for the de-centring of the capital-labour relation and that the core of the agrarian question of labour is that of reproduction in the context of a global surplus

population. This brings into view gendered contradictions within the household unit determining how such reproductive labour is undertaken. Where for most rural households subsistence production, petty commodity production and wage labour are usually on their own insufficient to securing household reproduction, those realms are usually sustained by gendered labour. Their concept of the gendered agrarian question of labour therefore points to 'the labour that is expended in producing and reproducing life whether it is relevant for capital accumulation or not', and instead relates to the 'survival and flourishing of the working people' (*ibid*: 65). In much of the south where neither colonial nor post-colonial states, nor capital, took adequate responsibility for social reproduction, land and ecological security remain key resources that gendered labour depended on to reproduce households. Resolving the national question is important for addressing these gender questions, but also has to grapple with their material basis.

Ecological conditions are therefore also important in shaping the conditions of gendered labour for reproduction. Akram-Lodhi (2021) shows that the development of the productive forces under capitalism has happened through raising labour productivity, while undermining the conditions for a sustainable socio-ecological future. The ecological crisis instead calls for raising productivity in terms of ecological integrity, energy use and knowledge, and the reshaping of social property relations. He therefore proposes the ecological agrarian question, which pays attention 'to the ways in which the capital-labour relation shapes and is shaped by the prevailing ecology and as such is about how rural labour processes and ecological processes are intertwined' (Akram-Lodhi, 2021: 701). This accepts but also goes beyond the frame of the agrarian question of labour, by emphasising the importance of situating classes of labour within the combined prevailing social property and socio-ecological relations within which they reproduce themselves (shot through with gender relations, of course), thus integrating a stronger political ecology lens. For Akram-Lodhi (2021) the ecological question and the labour question can therefore be addressed by re-embedding the labour-nature metabolism and transcending the limits of capitalist relations, suggesting that agroecology is an important means to do so.

The agrarian question in southern Africa is therefore shaped by a number of connected issues, including the continued subordination of the region's economies, ecologies and working people's livelihoods to the inequalities of the global economy, enduring fragmentation of livelihoods, exposure to the brunt of the climate and ecological crisis, and the role of gendered labour in securing continued social reproduction amidst these conditions. This context might

suggest the political challenge of bringing agrarian questions of labour, gendered labour, ecology and of national liberation into resolution with each other. However, the agrarian question of liberation (or the ability to pursue sovereign national development, *ala* Samir Amin, defined also in relation to the climate crisis and the social question) and its proposed openings to these inter-connected agrarian questions is dependent not only on successful anti-imperialism, but points to a deeper social question of national democratic relations and the class interests that the ruling political class serve. The ways in which these questions are addressed and brought (or not brought) into relation with each other are therefore political questions of agency.

I would therefore suggest that these responses to predominant Marxist articulations of the agrarian question reflect an attempt to deepen a relational analysis that situates the agrarian question in a conjuncture of specific political and socio-ecological structures and processes. If in this sense the 'resolution' of an agrarian question is not entirely a 'story foretold' (Alonso-Fradejas, 2015 :493), then this renders the need for continued contextual and politically specific analysis of agrarian change, prevailing power relations and political agency. In the next section, I turn to conceptually deepening the discussion of collective agency and the political nature of agrarian questions.

Class, Politics and the Agrarian Question

As Akram-Lodhi (2021) has noted, the debates on food sovereignty between 'populists' and some agrarian Marxists continues to display a seemingly mutually exclusive emphasis on agency and structure respectively. This would appear to reflect the 'often forgotten lesson', as Alonso-Fradejas (2015: 489, 493) puts it, 'that trajectories of agrarian change are not a story foretold, but the product of multiple and dynamic politics'. This means that while differentiation and class formation can be seen as an inevitable tendencies in rural relations under capitalism, their actual form and course is an outcome not just of economic laws, but of the specificities of material contexts, and the ways in which individual and collective agency interact with structural forces and agency 'from above' to shape actual patterns of differentiation and agrarian change. This means also taking seriously the forms of agency and consciousness that underpin class formation and agrarian change.

That is, to understand the agency of particular classes, it is insufficient to only impute their objective class position; nor would this help in understanding how classes might combine in common action, which in turn can have implications for material processes of change. To understand the potential of agency we must study actual resistance itself and its class dynamics, namely who is participating in particular struggles, how and under what conditions (Murisa, 2011). We should analyse how those involved in the struggles perceive these struggles; how forms of class consciousness evolve in relation to material conditions and struggles. In this regard, based on research in a rural community of Peru, Smith argues:

> [T]he determination of class relations should not begin with an analysis of property relations and their objective conditions, to which forms of consciousness, the experience of struggle, and political relations are added on; rather, the interplay of experience and consciousness, which so often in postmodernist discourse constitutes a vaguely defined subjective agency, is shown to be integral to the formation and transformation of productive and property relations; that is, it is a constituent, and thus determinant, element of class formation, as critical are the objective conditions of this transformation. (quoted in Veltmeyer, 1997: 150)

This shows also how various classes, defined by their objective positions, can act in concert around specific issues and struggles, even though their objective interests may not always converge; rather, contingency comes into play. However, class formation can also be a sustained process contingent on consistent social and political organisation. This can occur at the level at which local tendencies to class differentiation are actively negotiated among actors. For example, Sikor (2001) has shown how villagers in a particular part of Vietnam undertook periodic redistribution of rice paddies to counter consolidation so as to ensure subsistence security for all before accumulation; and so, while accumulation and differentiation proceeded, a rising standard of living was secured for even the poorest households. In a peri-urban land occupation for livestock farming in Cape Town called Zabalaza, Jacobs (2018: 886) seeks to understand ‘an urban proletariat with peasant characteristics’ not simply from their objective position in the class structure, but also from the angle of their practices, histories and the ongoing negotiation and reproduction of particular class forms through their daily collective political practices and internal struggles. He finds that differentiation from within agricultural practices is deliberately limited by a principle of equal plot size per farmer, such that the ‘rules and practices limiting differentiation are themselves the outcome of class struggle, which is a constant feature of the internal social relations at Zabalaza’ (Jacobs, 2018: 896).

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil illustrates how a key component of class formation is sustained political mobilisation and organisation that help define and enact the lines of class struggle (Gürcan, 2018). The movement organises popular class struggle to challenge agrarian capital and the state in its efforts to democratise land, labour and national politics. However, this class project is not simply an outcome of objective class structures, but is produced by how the MST organises subalterns in relation to those structural factors. It organises overlapping class actors, including rural peasants, semi-proletarians and agricultural proletarians, to urban proletarians seeking to expand their base of social reproduction through land access and agrarian production. It unites these various social actors on a material basis, but the cultural process of identity formation and consciousness-building around the identity of 'landless worker' is crucial to constituting the landless as a collective political subject that has contributed to shaping the course of Brazilian agrarian change (Carter, 2010; Fernandes, 2015). The ebb and flow of MST's 'convening power' and its geographical unevenness, however, also indicates the extent to which class formation is a contingent and conjunctural outcome of interaction between political organisation, particular regional histories, subjective meaning making, and structural factors (Sauer and Mészáros, 2017; Wolford, 2015).

These dimensions to the combined material and political nature of agrarian change are well captured in Gerard Otero's (1999) notion of 'political class formation'. Otero examines diverging trajectories of class formation in different regions of Mexico and seeks to overcome class reductionist accounts of both some populists that idealise the peasantry and some Marxists who read off class from structural determinants and the associated material interests of those actors. Political class formation starts from the material position of class agents within production relations, but it also pays attention to the ways in which the kinds of state intervention, prevailing regional cultures, types of leadership and the nature of wider alliances shapes the actual course and content of class formation. He broadly identifies the struggles that underpin class formation as either bourgeois-hegemonic, oppositional or popular-democratic. The nature of state intervention is key to shaping these forms: if state intervention is experienced positively by direct producers but the initiative remains with the state, struggles are likely to be coopted into bourgeois-hegemonic discourse and politics. However, if state intervention threatens the reproduction of direct producers, then this is likely to provoke an oppositional struggle (Otero, 1999).

An oppositional struggle can evolve into bourgeois-hegemonic or develop a popular democratic nature. The latter advances self-management in the labour process and asserts democratic control over the means of production and the product of labour, so representing a strengthening of civil society in relation to the state. Which direction an oppositional struggle goes in is largely a function of the nature of leadership within those organisations or movements, which shapes the kinds of wider alliances that are built and whether they retain their autonomy in relation to the state and from other political organisations. In Otero's (1999) analysis of Mexico, charismatic-authoritarian and opportunistic-corrupt kinds of leadership led to bourgeois-hegemonic cooption of struggles, while class organisations with democratic leadership had the best chance of constructing popular-democratic alliances with other organisations and retaining their independence. As such, there was a deepening of popular-democratic production forms and relations that he suggests illustrated a 'post-capitalist' character that was able to make demands on the state and shape policy, and deepened the power of civil society in relation to the state in a counter-hegemonic project. As such, while the direct producers in his cases all occupied the same position in the objective class structure (semi-proletarians), whether the process of political class formation in each case went in the proletarian or peasant direction showed marked divergences. This was determined – within prevailing relations of production and social reproduction – by the contents of demands and struggles, the character of class organisations including the nature of their leadership, and the degree of autonomy and independence of organisations in relation to state intervention and other political organisations, which articulate in not entirely predictable ways (Otero, 1999).

The import of Otero's analysis is the conceptual tools it provides to approach food sovereignty with a class analytic lens, by examining the relationships between collective agency, class and agrarian change. Such processes of change can therefore be seen as determined not only by abstract class categories created by capitalism, but proceeds through particular interactions between objective and subjective elements (including agents' consciousness) within a 'dialectical unity' and so is the product of multiple determinations that require empirical analysis to unpack in a given context (Mafeje, 1981: 130). An important aspect of these determinations illustrated by Otero is that the use of classes here does not assume internal homogeneity, but rather that class is also a conjunctural process. In moving beyond his initial conception of the articulation of modes of production in South Africa (Wolpe, 1972), Harold Wolpe offered a sophisticated framing of this:

> Classes…are constituted not as unified social forces, but as patchworks or segments which are differentiated and divided on a variety of bases and by varied processes. It is true that a more or less extensive unity may be brought about politically through articulation, but within a common discourse, of specific interests which are linked to the common property which defines classes. But, and this is the fundamental point, that unity is not given by concepts of labour-power and capital, it is constituted concretely through practices, discourses and organisations. One might say that class unity, when it occurs, is a conjunctural phenomenon (quoted in Hart, 2007: 88).

In analysing food-related organising from a class perspective, organisations or initiative are therefore also important units of analysis, as nodal points of multiple determinations. A Gramscian approach to the concept of articulation can provide a way to undertake such conjunctural analysis of the multiple determinations that produce observed outcomes.

Conjunctural Analysis, Articulation and Political Subjectivity

Consistent with a Gramscian Marxism, this thesis adopts an analytical starting point of the powerful role that the economic foundations of capitalism play in structuring social relations, including class. But to understand the actual form of collective agency requires a deeper political sociology examining the translation of social facts into their experience as political facts at the level of political subjectivity and organisational apprehension. It therefore extends a materialist approach to appreciating other determinations in structuring existing social forms, including agency. Consistent with Marx's own arguments, Antonio Gramsci's analysis was grounded in the need for historical specificity in analyses of capitalism, which meant treating objects of analysis as 'historical articulations' (Hall, 1980). This approach was informed by Gramsci's broader concern with the tasks for social transformation posed by hegemony – the dominant position and social authority that a dominant social class wins through consent (backed up by coercion, rather than coercion the principle mechanism), enacted by the state, and which needs to be continually worked on and maintained as a conjunctural process (Hall, 1996). Hegemony is therefore an active process that articulates class, subjects, identities and projects (Hall, 1991). Similarly, contesting hegemony, such as through counter-politics and movement building, also requires active processes of articulation.

Consistent with Marx, Gramsci emphasised historically specific analysis to inform a political project. A key contribution of his in this regard was the method of conjunctural analysis – concrete analysis of the political dynamics of a particular social formation (built upon economic foundations) to inform political action (Hall, 1996). As explained by Stuart Hall (1996), a Gramscian analysis therefore means moving beyond a reductionist approach that reads off

political developments from their economic determinations, to incorporating analysis of the 'mediations' structuring the relationships between the economic foundations and the actual phenomena and processes shaping social reality in a particular instance.

A conjuncture is when social relations and underlying historical processes come together in particular contexts or moments, and produce outcomes that are determined by multiple factors (Featherstone, 2017). Conjunctural moments reflect a 'condensation of forces' (Hall; in Clarke, 2014a: 116) when existing relations of power, ideas, material practices and contestation intersect, and produce a particular political terrain (Hart, 2002). Conjunctural moments also imply room for agency in the form of varying political actors working to shape the outcomes (Grayson and Little, 2017). However, I do not take an idealistic view of agency as able to enact any outcome wished for, but rather, in contrast to *abstract determinism*, understand agency through the notion of *historical determination*, where the conditions in which agency is enacted are defined by material conditions and economic power relations, but which do not automatically determine the forms of struggles or associated political subjectivities (Hart, 2002).

That is, political interests and subjectivities shaping class formation must be actively constructed, to produce 'a "unity" out of difference' (Hall, 1991: 136). The concept of articulation is a way to undertake historically specific analysis, and to understand this 'unity' as constructed by dialectical forces and as a product of multiple determinations. Harold Wolpe (1972) had initially used the concept to understand how two modes of production, capitalism and kin-based pre-capitalist modes, connected in ways that supported the growth of the former and undermined the conditions of the latter. But Wolpe's approach was criticised for its limited structural and functionalist reading of the South African social formation and use of articulation (see Mafeje, 1981; Friedman, 2015). In Stuart Hall's (1980) notable intervention on the question of how to approach the relationship between capitalism and elements like race (and racism) in structuring a social formation, he significantly moved beyond Wolpe in his elaboration and deepening of the concept of articulation, as a method of conjunctural analysis. His approach to articulation emerged from what he argued were broadly the inadequacies of 'economic' approaches that read the social structures of society as simply reflections of their underlying economic relations and structures on the one hand (in which Wolpe would be situated); and, on the other, 'sociological' approaches that viewed social phenomena like race or ethnicity as

having their own structuring effects autonomously from deeper economic relations.[10] Grounded in a Gramscian framework and method, his use of articulation was a way to conceptualise the dynamic connections between race and accumulation in places like colonial and apartheid South Africa: 'race is an articulating principle of the social, political and ideological structures' through which the capitalist mode was sustained, such that race could be seen as 'the modality in which class is "lived", the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which is it appropriated and "fought through"' (Hall, 1980: 309; 341). As such, the question was not whether race or class were primary in structuring the South African social formation, nor how as two autonomous, self-contained factors they simply intersected to produce the social formation. Rather, the social formation reflected the co-constitution, through historical articulations, of accumulation, class and race (and which he does not specifically mention, gender), within a dialectical unity.

Hall's (1980: 329) elaboration of the concept of articulation thus partly reflects notions of 'joining up' and 'giving expression to', beyond simply juxtaposition. Articulation can be used in the sense of the combination of relations and structures into a 'complex unity' that is dynamic and overdetermined, in the sense that the unity is not simply the sum of its components. In this sense, articulation is generative of social structure and realities. In the context of struggles over hegemony, ideology plays a prominent role because it provides the systems of meaning and concepts through which people make sense of the world; the 'common sense' through which people understand themselves and the world around them (Hall, 1996). Hall's elaboration of articulation is therefore informed by a Gramscian framework of conjunctural analysis that elides an automatic correspondence between economic foundations, ideology, and politics. It instead acknowledges that capitalism and its law of value functions through particular cultural, gendered and racial characteristics. Capitalism and class exploitation is therefore organised economically, ideologically and politically in a specific social formation, South Africa historically reflecting a particular arrangement of this (Hall, 1980; 1996). In the sense developed by Stuart Hall, articulation becomes a useful analytical tool to approach the composition and construction of collective politics that challenge hegemonic relations; and to understand the intersections of various elements like history, class, gender, race and subjectivity in the construction of collective political action and mobilisation from below.

[10] Which Hall (1980) qualifies was also a simplification of the complexity and range of approaches that fell within each, and so stood as a broad categorisation for the purposes of working through some of the key lines of debate.

Hall's work on articulation was prominently elaborated in the South African context by Gillian Hart, who uses articulation in the sense of simultaneously 'the joining together of diverse elements' and 'giving expression to' through the production of meaning (Hart, 2007: 91). Grounded in Hart's concerns with the intersections of political action and patterns of accumulation in shaping trajectories of social change, it points to the way that forces intersect and the forms, subjectivities and terrain they give rise to. In pointing us to the material relations and forces structuring a particular context or moment, articulation allows us to situate agency and subjectivity within a nexus of diverse forces and relations that both constrain and enable it (Levenson, 2022). As Hart (2002: 27) describes:

> …economic practices and struggles over material resources and labor are always and inseparably bound up with culturally constructed meanings, definitions, and identities, and with the exercise of power, all as part of historical processes.

In this sense, articulation is grounded in the inseparability of situated practices and their accompanying discourses and power relations (Hart, 2002). It provides a way to analyse not only hegemonic practices and discourses from above, but also the constitution of movements and collective action from below, 'on the terrain of "common sense" using material and symbolic resources given from the past' (Hart, 2022: 29). It is therefore important to consider the 'common sense' – the meanings – through which actors make sense of their concrete situation, and which shapes their individual and collective behaviour in producing responses to that situation. This means examining the particular local articulations of material context and wider relations, class, race, ethnicity and gender through which political subjects are made and which contribute further to movement, political and accumulation trajectories. In this sense, political practice, informed by subjects and their ideology/identity, can be seen as also productive of prevailing social realities (Mafeje, 1981). For analysing forms of organising and struggles, this means understanding the structural and class circumstances and the constraints they pose, people's common sense and meaning making in this context, and their political subjectivation through the 're-articulation' of these 'existing fragments of meaning' into new meanings through a political project, which in turn shapes politics in practice (Levenson, 2022).

Using the concept of articulation, Figueroa (2015) develops a relational approach to food-related research that de-centres food and instead adopts a people-centred approach that takes social life as its starting point. Where 'food is a modality by which capitalism is lived' (Figueroa, 2015: 503), this means understanding social practices in a particular historical context related to food (and questions of food sovereignty) as dynamically constructed through

the articulation between class, race and situated subjectivities. This also helps us think beyond simply questions of the technical viability of food sovereignty visions in particular contexts of agrarian change, for example, but to understand what food sovereignty actually does in terms of politics in practice – how practices related to food might articulate with and express particular struggles, histories and practices of survival under precarious capitalist life. This points to conceptualising the initiatives examined in this thesis in the historical and social relations through which relationships to elements like food, agroecology and land are structured. Figueroa's people-centred approach converges with the approach of this research, which is to analyse food-related initiatives within a critical agrarian political economy perspective that situates them in articulation with a wider set of social and class relations structured through the agrarian question.

The Agrarian Question in South Africa

South Africa's agrarian question has broadly been argued that South Africa's agrarian question of capital, in the sense of the development of capitalist agriculture and industrialisation, was resolved from above, in two important senses. Firstly, through a system of racial capitalism where pre-capitalist land property in the form of British and Boer settlers gained control of land through various processes of dispossession and war and through the twentieth century became capitalist farmers alongside the forced creation of an agricultural proletariat (Cousins, 2013; Marcus, 1989). Secondly, rather than the development of capitalism in agriculture providing the surplus for industrial development, it was largely the expansion of the mining industry since the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand (the 'Rand') in 1886 that underpinned industrial development, and which developed into the 'minerals-energy complex' (MEC) (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996). As such, there were still debates in the latter quarter of the twentieth century over whether by the 1950s commercial agriculture in South Africa was yet capitalist (see Morris, 1976; Keegan, 1986, Bradford, 1990; Freund, 1987). The history of the agrarian question is discussed in detail in chapter 4.

As a result, South Africa exhibits a dualistic agrarian structure, which still persists today. On the one hand, there are about 40 000 recorded commercial farm units in the country that are registered for VAT,[11] but most food is produced by around 15 000 commercial farm units

[11] Value added tax.

(Hodge *et al*, 2021). This food is mostly distributed by a concentrated, corporate-controlled distribution, processing, manufacturing and retailing network. On the other hand, about 2.3 million black smallholder farmers still produce food for their own households and supplementary local sales, and 230 000 or so black smallholders, while not formally registered for VAT, produce commercially for a main or secondary source of income (Greenberg, 2015; StatsSA, 2020a). But they generally do so with little support and restricted access to productive resources. For example, only 5% of water used by the agricultural sector is used by black farmers (DWS, 2018). Aliber and Mdoda (2015) have estimated that the food produced by these farmers account for between 20-25% of the value of food consumed in the country.

The dominant agro-food system is highly 'modern' and characterised by advanced technology and logistics systems, is consistently profitable for dominant actors, and agro-food capital has considerably expanded into southern Africa and further north (das Nair *et al*, 2018; Moyo 2015). This sits alongside persistently high levels of hunger: before the COVID-19 pandemic, 20% of people had inadequate or severely inadequate access to food (StatsSA, 2019) and today 65% of the population (38.7 million people) cannot afford a healthy diet (FAO *et al*, 2022). Furthermore, those at the coalface of South Africa's food supply, farmworkers, experience some of the highest levels of precarity in the country. Until recently, farmworkers received a lower minimum wage than other sectors and even with the new minimum wage (R21.69 per hour), workers struggle to make ends meet, thus also displaying high levels of food insecurity (Devereux et al, 2019; Makgetla *et al*, 2019). Furthermore, almost 27% of children under 5 were reported as stunted in 2016, with severe implications for later cognitive development. These statistics reflect South Africa's enduring inequality, with food insecurity and the risk of stunting, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) disproportionately carried by poor, black populations (HSRC and MRC, 2013; FAO, 2022).

In this context, Cousins (2007: 227) has argued that South Africa manifests an 'agrarian question of the dispossessed', defined by '[s]tructural unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, land hunger and continued rule by chiefs' and the struggle is therefore for democracy and against exploitation and oppression. For Cousins (2007: 227), then, the agenda for resolving the incomplete agrarian question in South Africa is 'to contest the monopolistic privileges of white/corporate farming, and of chiefly/bureaucratic elites in former homelands, and create the conditions for "more diverse forms of commodity production", i.e. "accumulation from below"', while recognising also that this will be replete with processes of class differentiation.

In this sense, Cousins' conceptualisation of the agrarian question does not appear very different from Moyo and colleague's notion of the agrarian question of national liberation, in that both are concerned with the role of agrarian reform in challenging race-class inequality and the power of capital, for creating more integrated forms of rural development that support smallholders in accumulation from below, while also acknowledging the tendency towards differentiation (see Moyo, 2015), and that an essential ingredient of resolving the agrarian question in these terms is political mobilisation by rural social movements (Cousins, 2007). However, Cousin's argument for *diverse* forms of petty commodity production is based on the fact that due to dispossession, de-agrarianisation, the context of the agrarian question of labour in South Africa, and other material constraints, most rural households pursue multiple livelihood strategies, and so land reform cannot only be about agricultural production, but supporting diverse forms of economic activity.

Without getting further into the details of Cousins' (2007) argument, it implies that the agrarian question should be situated as part of the bigger land question. However, within this, a wider range of statistics, situated agrarian studies, and the researcher's own experience, continue to suggest an enduring latent demand for land for agriculture. For example, according to Hall and Dubb (2013), a survey carried out in 2005/6 found that a third of black South Africans wanted land for food production, and nearly half of those wanted only one hectare or less. This points to the importance of Cousin's (2009) argument that to benefit a wide range of differentiated actors, land redistribution should be based on a class analytic approach to smallholder farmers and associated farming needs and potential. It is therefore important to note that the land question (concerned with rights to land and racial restoration) is a component of but not reducible to the agrarian question in South Africa. This implies locating how agrarian questions articulate with wider rural development and livelihood issues.

However, a lackluster agrarian reform programme has failed to transform the country's dualist agrarian structure. Together with the World Bank, in 1994 the government set a target of transferring 30% of agricultural land by 1999, through a market-based 'willing buyer-willing seller' policy laid out in the *White Paper on South African Land Policy* (DLA, 1997). However, by 2021, according to The Presidency (2021), about 7.7 million hectares of land had been transferred through both the redistribution and restitution legs of the land reform programme, which is only 8% of total agricultural land. The programme has been plagued by bureaucratic inefficiency, insufficient budgetary allocations, lack of post-settlement support, a poor

alignment between land and agricultural policy, and a bias towards potential capitalist farmers at the expense of the needs of ordinary residents (Hall, 2015; Cousins, 2013b).

The failure to transform the agrarian structure is reflected in the fact that the former homeland areas – which were initially established as reservoirs for the reproduction of labour power and then, when the economy turned to a labour surplus economy, simply as a place for black labour to perish (as Mafeje [1981] put it) – continue as zones of marginalisation, with generally the highest rates of poverty and marginalisation in the country (Noble *et al*, 2014). In many respects, the lack of strong bases of production and reproduction in the former homelands illustrate what Eastwood *et al* (2006) call rural dependency, where households are heavily dependent on transfers from outside rural areas (in the form of remittances and state transfers) as a result of low local sources of income and high unemployment. They describe the process of racialised dispossession that produced rural dependency 'premature de-agriculturalisation' (Eastwood, 2006:1325), where working class black households were displaced from being able to secure their reproduction through agriculture alone and also without a concomitant long-term shift to gainful employment in non-farm sectors – the production of semi-proletarianisation. Such patterns reflect the contemporary endurance of what Jacobs (2018: 885) suggests is 'the long-term tendency of capital accumulation in South Africa to produce proletarianization (and urbanization) without producing the conditions for the emergence of a working class that can survive primarily through reliance on wage labour.'

In this context, newer dynamics to the agrarian question are being introduced by a push for mining in these zones linked to an attempted national class project. The rapid increase in mining activities over the last decade has added implications for the country's agrarian question and to the material basis of struggles and alternatives in the agro-food system, on two fronts. Firstly, expanding mining operations are increasingly encroaching on high fertility agricultural land and competing for resources needed for agriculture, principally water (BFAP and Maize Trust, 2015; *Mail and Guardian*, 2015; Cock, 2021). Secondly, rural residents are facing new rounds of dispossession as the state and mining capital have been turning their eyes to the rich mineral deposits located in the former homelands – 'the new frontiers of mineral extraction' (Mtero, 2017: 192). The passing of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) in 2002 played an important role in stimulating two converging processes of particular consequence for black rural residents in the former homelands. The first is a transformation agenda aimed at overcoming historical white ownership in the mining sector. The key approach

is that of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) so as to de-racialise ownership in mining and produce a 'patriotic bourgeoisie' whose accumulation interests advance national development (Bowman, 2019). Secondly, the MPRDA transitioned the sector from private ownership to state custodianship of minerals, giving the state the power to pursue its transformation agenda through its power to allocate mineral rights. Where the state has been frustrated in the full realisation of its intentions in the established mining sector, the allocation of new mining rights in the former homelands, where 90% of new mining rights applications are located (Claassens, 2018), has provided an avenue for pursuit of its de-racialised class project (Capps, 2012). This is also connected to bolstering forms of 'traditional' rule that facilitate this mining project and so raised democratic questions of citizenship rights (Hay, 2018; Jara, 2013)

This push for mining has posed threats to agrarian sources of reproduction for many rural communities. For example, apart from direct dispossession, Mtero (2017) finds in the case of communities living next to mining operations in parts of Limpopo Province that land handed over to mining removes surrounding rural communities from land-based resources and leads to reduced cultivation and diversity of crop production and consumption, thus diminishing local agrarian economies without providing a concomitant offset of secure employment. Such patterns have therefore also ignited agrarian resistance, with women often at the forefront, in cases like Makhasaneni, Fuleni and Somkhele in KwaZulu-Natal, and Amadiba in the Eastern Cape, covered in Chapter 6 (Yeni, 2018; Leonard, 2021; WoMin Collective, 2017). Expanded mining attempts in these zones of marginalisation is therefore also inflecting South Africa's agrarian question with a dynamic of reproduction, resistance and struggles over democracy.

This points to a deeper socio-ecological question in the link between South Africa's national and land and agrarian questions, and resistance. Those like Jara (2013) and Satgar (2019a) have argued that the ruling national liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), is moribund in terms of providing political capacity to resolve the national question in any emancipatory way, having articulated the discourse and aspirations of national liberation to a project of neoliberal market rationality and containing the poor (Hart, 2013). This is reflected in its approach to the land question, which, as Andrews (2017) usefully points us to, simultaneously crafts socio-ecological relationships that reproduce dispossession. She suggests that '…prior to and after 1994, a common identity was forged to claim and struggle for land based upon racial dispossession. [But] this racial dispossession was entrenched through processes of commodification and commercialization of land [after 1994], which maintain

separation of people and nature'. Indeed, Satgar (2019) argues that the ecological crisis and the need for systemic transformation that it poses renders conceptions of the national question through a narrow conception of racial redress (without a concomitant class, gender and ecological perspective) shallow and myopic. For Andrews (2017), the ruling liberation movement's articulation of the land question, and imaginaries from below, to its limited understanding of racial redress therefore reproduces exclusionary logics of private property, capital accumulation, commodification, technological fetishism and the industrial model of agriculture. This essentially amounts to the de-racialisation of private property, thus failing to engage with how the social and ecological questions call for re-thinking the roles of and relationships to land. Andrews however explores struggles like those of small-scale fishers, women resisting extractivism and Inyanda National Land Movement, which she suggests are articulating alternative socio-ecological conceptions and practices from below that take us beyond the national liberation movement's subordination of land and people to capitalist techno-fetishism and socio-ecological crisis, reflecting Akram-Lodhi's concept of the ecological agrarian question and 'how rural labour processes and ecological processes are intertwined.'

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of literature and conceptual overview of the perspectives informing this research. It is broadly situated within theorising of the agrarian question, a Marxist agrarian political economy approach to examining agrarian change under capitalism. There are a great diversity of perspectives and debate within this approach, and this chapter unpacked some of the key concepts within agrarian analysis that are used in these debates. At issue in agrarian debates on food sovereignty, like that between Henry Bernstein and Philip McMichael, is the question of the nature of agency and its confrontation with contemporary capitalism. Through the arguments presented by those like Sam Moyo and colleagues, I zoomed in on the question of political agency and its role in responding to and shaping agrarian questions, and called for a more situated, contingent and conjunctural analysis. I suggested that the concept of articulation helps facilitate a dialectical analysis of agency and structural constraints through the agrarian question. The perspectives presented in this chapter inform my relational research approach that starts from socio-ecological life, and how popular class action related to the agro-food system is formed through articulations with wider relations of class,

race, citizenship, democracy and struggles of ‘living labour’ (O’Laughlin, 2021) to socially reproduce themselves in a time of social and ecological crisis.

Indeed, given factors like de-agrarianisation and urbanisation in South Africa (such that it is difficult to speak of a significant peasant class in terms of an overriding role for the agrarian in the reproduction of working classes), the context of proletarianisation and semi-proletarianisation, the ongoing social reproduction crisis of popular classes, and ongoing land and food questions, it is necessary to undertake situated, historical and relational analysis that seeks to understand the particular articulations between them, collective agency and the agrarian question. This is what the thesis attempts to do through a historical lens in Chapter 4, a historically situated analysis of the contemporary context of food sovereignty-related organising in Chapter 5, and situated analyses of how this translates into localised contexts through the case studies in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology employed to conduct the research. It describes how the research is framed by drawing on elements of both Burawoy's extended case method and Hart's method of relational comparison. It then describes how the mapping and case study phases of research were undertaken, as well as how the initiatives and cases for study were selected and accessed. The case study sites are subsequently introduced, depicting some of the background, geography, and socio-economic relations in which they are embedded. It then gives an overview of the data collection techniques employed, which included primary and secondary document analysis, in-depth interviews and participant observation. This is followed by a brief description of my research with the MST in Brazil, which was undertaken to help sharpen my thinking on the South African context through reflecting on an example of strong agrarian organising. I then undertake some reflections on my role as a scholar-activist, which includes the ethics of such research and conduct in the field. The chapter closes with further reflections on the research and opportunities for further research.

Research Approach

The research for this thesis adopted a primarily qualitative approach, in which the primary sources of data were interviews, observation, and document analysis, and therefore extensively drew from the narratives, thoughts and experiences of the research participants and organisations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The overall logic of the research was structured by drawing from elements of Burawoy's (1998) extended case method and the *relational* part of Hart's (2018) method of relational comparison. The extended case method seeks to respond to apparent questions of representivity and subjectivity, problematised largely by positivist science. It responds through a reflexive model of research, which, instead of aspiring to detachment, embraces the role of the researcher as an active participant in the subject of study, and therefore reflects on the research process as part of wider social relations. There are four key dimensions to this dialogic approach. Firstly, it proceeds as a dialogue between the researcher and the subjects of study, where the 'mutual reaction' (Burawoy, 1998: 14) through observation over space and time helps to further unravel the social reality under study. The

second key element is to locate the social situations observed into the social processes that they are part of. The third dimension is to embed this dialogue in another level of dialogue, between local processes and extralocal social forces. Fourth, this is then embedded in a further dialogue, with theory. Burawoy suggests that by engaging through these levels, the method is able to contribute to theoretical and generalisable explanations, and be subject to wider theoretical refutation and advancement, beyond the local site of dialogue/data collection.

To broaden Burawoy's extended case method, I also attempt to draw on elements of Hart's method of relational comparison, which better helps one situate studied phenomena in more 'horizontal' relations that constitute them. It therefore focuses 'on *how* key processes are constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life' (Hart, 2018: 375; original emphasis). I do not undertake a comparative approach, however, but rather draw from the *relational* part of the approach, in four respects. A first part is that a relational approach embodies a form of dialectical method that pays attention to the mediations and interconnections that shape social reality. This is part of a conjunctural analysis, of bringing key forces at play in a particular context and beyond the local site into a single frame of analysis (Hart, 2018). I therefore view the places, events and activities in the study as the coming together of different processes, and the result of multiple relations and determinations. A second way I attempt to draw from the relational method is to see subjects of study, and sites, not only as specific variations of wider general processes, but to also be alive to the generative/productive aspects at play, the ways in which dynamics in these sites are constitutive of a wider reality and trajectories. In this regard, the approach followed in this research project is consonant with what Figueroa calls a people-centred approach to the investigation of food questions (which is inspired by her work in urban communities but can be generally applicable as a research approach), which she describes in the following way:

> In shifting the theoretical lens from 'food' to the social formations and historical trajectories that produce particular experiences of food, a relational, historically and culturally grounded, 'people-centered' approach can highlight the social elements that create and/or strengthen resonant, locally inflected political strategies for food sovereignty in urban communities. Seeing food as an essential means of reproduction also entails questions of the production and reproduction of human beings as labor, and labor-power (Figueroa, 2015: 500).

Consequently, taking food and collective action around it as an 'ensemble of relations', a methodological approach should be one that takes 'into account how space, power, and meaning

are implicated within the system, engages with the particular struggles and histories of a community, and identifies the ways in which social transformations affect, and are affected by, the lived experience of food' (Figueroa, 2015: 502). This means, therefore, 'de-centring' food in analysis of collective agency related to food questions. Although Figueroa does not explicitly mention it, I include people's ecological relationships in this approach.

A third component of a relational method I attempt to employ is to emphasise historical determinations. As Edelman and León (2013) have emphasised, situating changing social relations around land and agricultural production in a historical perspective is a necessary condition to understanding their character, and their possible future trajectories. When undertaking this research it was clear to me how important history was in shaping the context, relations and terrain of action, and that it was difficult to explain the formations I was examining without pointing to the historical processes that they developed through. I thus attempted to reflect part of Hart's (2018) relational method that is based on Lefebvre's 'regressive-progressive method', which entails understanding current reality 'by starting in the present, working our way back to the past, and then retracing our steps…' (Lefebvre in Hart, 2016: 7). This was used to understand the organised forms of collective agency connected to food sovereignty and the sites examined. As such, this thesis contains relatively hefty doses of history. Chapter 4 aims to build historical understanding of the intersections of food with popular resistance amidst changing agrarian relations under evolving national oppression. Chapter 5 gives an overview of the contemporary food movement, and the second half of the chapter returns to history to explain these contemporary forms and to situate them back in the historical relations described in Chapter 4. The case study chapters, 6 and 7, also include an examination of the sites' histories to link these relations to how they have shaped the present subjects of examination. A fourth element drawn from the relational method is in the approach to case studies.

Mapping and Case Study Approach

Three broad overlapping phases of research inform this thesis. The first is primarily secondary research on the history of food, the agrarian question and resistance that informs Chapter 4. The second was a mapping of agro-food system-related initiatives and forms of organising, which informs Chapter 5, through my own experience, participant observation, interviews, and primary and secondary document analysis. The third phase, constituting Chapters 6 and 7, was

case study research into the Amadiba anti-mining struggle and the organisation of smallholder farmers through the Mopani Farmers Association (MFA).

A case study is a research method that investigates a phenomenon in a situated context (Yin, 2018). Indeed, the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are blurry (*ibid*) and, I would suggest, are co-constitutive. The phenomenon under study in both was collective organisation involving food and agriculture. In the case of the Amadiba on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape Province, this was examined specifically in relation to the anti-mining struggle, within the physical context of the Amadiba coastal area. The second case was of the Mopani Farmers' Association (MFA) located in the Mopani District Municipality of Limpopo Province, a particular context of historically proletarianised rural communities of a former homeland existing in close relation with a context of large-scale agrarian capitalism. A multi-sited case study approach allowed me to study the different forms that the phenomenon under study could take, and would also assist in making broader claims based on more than one scenario (Dor, 2019). The data points within the case studies were guided by prior theoretical lenses and involved multiple techniques of data collection (Yin, 2018).

This is where the fourth way I draw from the relational method comes in. Undertaking localised case studies are necessary because it is important to understand the forces that phenomena are constructed through not only at a national or international level, but to understand how they are constituted in local spaces. This incorporates articulation and conjunctural analysis so as to examine the co-constitutive relations between different scales. I therefore move through the wider history, the multiple determinations of the forms of agro-food system-related organising as relational in nature, and to arrive at how these intersect as part of the constitution of particular politics in the cases. The cases are therefore seen not as bounded units, 'but as dense bundles of social relations and power-infused interactions that are always formed out of entanglements and connections with dynamics at work in other places' (Hart, 2002: 297). Furthermore, as Hart (in Chari *et al*, 2022) points to, it is through analysing the production and changing of these wider relations at a particular nodal point (in this instance, the research case) that broader claims can also be made.

Site Selection, Sampling and Access

The fieldwork for this project took place in two phases that overlapped in time and in terms of focus and research subjects: a mapping process of the 'food movement' in South Africa (the results of which are principally reflected in Chapter 5) and fieldwork on two case studies. The aim of the case studies is to understand how the relational categories of the food movement developed in Chapter 5 work in localised contexts. The first case is the community struggle against proposed mining in the Amadiba area of the Wild Coast, located in the former homeland of Transkei, in north-eastern Mpondoland, in Eastern Cape Province. The second case is the Mopani Farmers Association, which organises smallholder farmers in the Mopani District Municipality in Limpopo Province, in areas that used to be part of the former Gazankulu and Lebowa homelands. I also undertook fieldwork research for a third case study, on the Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC), supported by the Surplus Peoples Project and organised across the Western and Northern Cape – an initial scoping of the FSC over roughly 8 days in 2016, a one week trip in the same year, and a 3 week trip in 2017. However, due to the fact that the Amadiba and MFA cases captured the key information relevant to this thesis, I decided to present only those two. I plan to make use of the nonetheless important FSC data post the thesis, such as in a journal article. Furthermore, the FSC is also an important formation analysed in the mapping of the 'food movement' in South Africa, and so some data from this fieldwork nonetheless informs Chapter 5.

The interviews and observation informing the mapping took place across a roughly 3-year period, between 2015 and 2018. The information gathering for both the Amadiba and MFA case studies occurred at a number of levels over an extended time as well, roughly between 2016 and 2019. Principal sources of information were site visits. With Amadiba this involved three visits of about one week each between 2016 and 2017, and with MFA two visits of approximately two weeks each over 2016 and 2017. However, data collection extended well beyond these targeted visits to include, in the case of Amadiba, analysis of legal papers, news articles, visits for other reasons but which provided chances for further observation, conversations and insights; and, in the case of both Amadiba and MFA, ongoing personal conversations that kept me abreast of developments, access to new organisational documents, and interactions at activist events that I attended.

My initial knowledge of initiatives to target was based on my prior involvement in activist food networks, through which I came to know of many of the initiatives. I aimed to examine and engage with a cross section of initiatives that organised in different parts of the country, different social actors, and around different issues related to food and the agro-food system. This covered initiatives operating in rural areas as well as in urban areas, based on the understanding that due to South Africa's model of uneven capitalist development and semi-proletarianisation, the agrarian question is not purely a rural question, but its agents and activities take place through linkages that define the rural-urban relationship in South Africa (Hart and Sitas, 2004). In addition to my initial knowledge of different initiatives, further initiatives, movements or organisations were identified by word of mouth, through the research as it unfolded such as through reading organisational documents and internet searches, and snowball sampling, where I met further people involved in other initiatives, movements or organisations during processes of participant observation. The sample for the mapping thus entailed examining around 36 different initiatives across six of South Africa's nine provinces (Gauteng, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape). Key informants in both the mapping and the case studies were identified through non-probability sampling, as they were chosen for their relevance to the study rather than attempted representativeness (Maxwell, 1998; Neuman, 2000). Participants in the initiatives and participant interviewees in the case studies were randomly selected, as well as through snowball sampling.

However, there was also nuance in sampling regarding the two case studies. In the Amadiba case, sampling of respondents was random, as I sought to interview a cross-section of community members, as it is a community-wide struggle against the proposed mining. The sampling for the case study on the Mopani Farmers' Association (MFA) was more purposive, in that I specifically targeted farmers, both those who were members of the MFA and those who may not have been. Including those who were not members of MFA was part of seeking to broadly interview farmers in order to understand the agricultural context of the research site. It also further gave insight into the workings and scope of MFA. A further way in which the sampling in the case of MFA was purposive was that once I had identified that there were broadly four social forms of crop-farming in the research site, I deliberately sought to interview samples of farmers across the four (many of whom operated across more than one of them).

Broadly, both cases were selected for their initial perceived alignment with a politics of food sovereignty (albeit in different ways) that reflected that promoted by those like La Via Campesina, which is one based largely on land and agrarian reproduction, a politics that organises subaltern classes and challenges power relations, and advances economic and social alternatives in the agro-food system. In particular, I selected the Amadiba struggle because of an initial understanding of a politics involving the intersections of state power, traditional authorities, communities (and often women-led) resistance and, in many cases, agrarian reproduction, that seemed to be growing in the South African countryside as a result of the push for mining in the former homelands. The strong agrarian basis of livelihoods in Amadiba also provided an interesting case to examine an aspect of the politics of the agrarian question in this context. The choice of Amadiba was also a result of a somewhat coincidental realisation of how closely resistance to extractivism was intersecting with agrarian relations of production and reproduction, both seeming to be shaping each other. I was asked in 2016 by Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC) (see more on SWC below) to undertake a training workshop on cooperatives with Amadiba farmers, who were experiencing a challenge of producing more than their households could consume and so wanted to explore marketing options and enterprises.[12] It was timed with the beginning of a fieldwork trip visiting different initiatives throughout the country as part of the mapping, and so I decided to spend an extra three days interviewing farmers as part of including anti-extractivist struggles in the mapping. However, through the interviews it became clear that community responses in their struggle against the proposed mining were converging with and in some ways re-shaping agrarian practices in interesting ways. This is largely what motivated me to explore this further through repeated field visits, resulting in Chapter 6.

The MFA was selected as a case study because of its apparent alignment with the global politics of food sovereignty, as an association organising smallholder farmers outside of the political mainstream associated with those like National African Farmers Union (NAFU) or African Farmers Association of South Africa (AFASA), and was instead aligned to left-oriented formations promoting class-based mobilisation of the rural poor around the land and agrarian questions, the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE) and Inyanda National Land Movement; which also have links with Via Campesina and global food sovereignty networks. It was also a farmer organisation that officially aligned with a key component of food

[12] I had worked at the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) from 2011-2015, doing popular education and support work on cooperative and solidarity economy development.

sovereignty, agroecology. The context in which it operates also provides a number of contrasts to Amadiba: it is much more de-agrarianised (in terms of proportion of households engaging in agriculture as an important livelihood activity), exists in close relation to the agrarian capitalism of the large-scale commercial fruit farms of the former 'white' South Africa, and is situated in a quite contrasting ecological context (see below).

The MFA is constituted by nine different area associations that accord with the nine traditional administrative areas falling under the Mopani District Municipality. The research on MFA was conducted primarily through the Dzumeri Area Farmers Association (DAFA), in the Dzumeri Traditional Administrative Area. DAFA and the Dzumeri Area were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, the entire Mopani district is large and so to try and focus across it would have made sampling and logistics challenging. Secondly, focusing on one association allowed me to delineate the study area and research participants more clearly. Thirdly, of the nine area associations that form the Mopani Farmers Association, at the time of fieldwork DAFA was the most active and well organised of the Area Associations (Nkwashu, interview, 31 October 2016).

Access to both sites was secured relatively straightforwardly, through pre-existing relations of trust and comradeship. I initially connected with the Amadiba struggle in 2009 during my research stays in one of the villages for my MA research, in which I examined the social dynamics and power relations around what was then a little-explored struggle against the proposed mining for titanium-related minerals by a South African subsidiary of an Australian mining company and its Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) partner (see Bennie, 2010). I since stayed connected to the struggle and individuals in it through political solidarity and my role on the board of Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC) since 2012. SWC is an NGO that has acted in solidarity and support of the Amadiba struggle since its very early days. As I was already known to structures in the community, I did not have to formally go through the traditional authority for permission to pursue the research as I had for my MA project, but was able to simply commence the research through my existing contacts.

Access to MFA was secured directly through its leadership, who I already knew through our connections in food sovereignty-related activist networks. I therefore commenced the research with MFA's consent. However, during the first fieldwork visit in 2016 I contacted government officials in the provincial agriculture department with the aim of securing interviews with them,

but was told that I needed to present my research proposal in order for them to give me permission to even conduct research in the region in the first place. While very friendly and helpful, they told me this was necessary because they had had previous experiences of researchers coming in and producing research that they did not find palatable and which they felt unnecessarily disrupted relations between their department and farmers. Given South Africa's open Constitutional democracy, I would ordinarily not have felt compelled to comply with such an injunction, but on ethical grounds felt I did not want to unnecessarily influence MFA's relations with the department, and so after consulting with MFA, I agreed. While I waited for a meeting with the department, I anyway continued with the research, with MFA's consent. In the end the department was not able to organise the relevant officials at the same time to meet me, and so they received and 'approved' my proposal by email. This experience in itself was notable in expressing some of the social reality I was studying.

Introducing the Case Study Sites

Umgungundlovu/Amadiba Coastal Area



Figure 1: Location of Mgungundlovu, in the north-eastern corner of the Eastern Cape Province (Source: Wikipedia Commons)

Umgungundlovu is the coastal section of the Amadiba Administrative Area in north-east Mpondoland, on the northern-most section of the Wild Coast. It extends for 22km and about 2900 hectares along the coast and falls under the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province (see Figure 1).[13] Approximately 7000 people live

[13]Formerly Mbizana Local Municipality.

within Umgungundlovu (SA CSIR, 2018), spread across 6 villages: Sigidi (and the north-eastern limit of the proposed mining tenement area), Mdatya, Xolobeni/Kwanyana, Mtolana, Mpindweni, and Mtentu (and the south-western limit of the proposed tenement area) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Map of the give proposed mining tenement areas along the Umgungundlovu coastline (left) and the planned route of the N2 toll road (right). Sources: Field (2021) and Steyn (2021).

The Amadiba struggle was instigated by the application by a small Australian mining company, Mineral Commodities (MRC), and its local subsidiary, Transworld Energy and Minerals Resources (TEM), to mine for titanium-related products in the sand dunes of the Umgungundlovu in 2007. The Amadiba coastal communities, under the banner of the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) and in alliance with progressive NGOs, movements and activist lawyers, have fiercely and successfully resisted the proposed mining. At the same time, the communities have been up against a planned highway cutting through their lands. The existing N2 winds its way inland through the rolling hills of Mpondoland, but the proposed Wild Coast N2 toll road would follow a more direct route connecting the KwaZulu-Natal town of Port Shepstone to the city of East London in the Eastern Cape (Zukulu, 2012). The 80m-wide, fenced-off road reserve would cut through cultivated fields and split some of the Umgungundlovu villages in half. Through a number of court cases, the legal challenge was eventually unsuccessful, and now the ACC has been negotiating with the South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL) to at least move the part that would go through Umgungundlovu further inland.

The affected communities have consistently opposed both projects because of the threats they would pose to their livelihoods, which is heavily entwined with land- and sea-based sources. It is therefore somewhat of an anomaly compared to the wider context of the Eastern Cape. In a province that exhibits generous natural endowments of arable land, the Eastern Cape only has a few pockets of niche commercial production areas, and as such only about 98 000 people were listed as employed in the agricultural sector between July and September 2020 (StatsSA, 2020b), out of a total provincial population of about 6.7 million people (StatsSA, 2019b). However, it has the second highest percentage of households involved in agricultural activities, at around 30%, which is mostly subsistence-oriented, based on family labour (Cawe, 2021: 48). However, for most households, other sources of income outstrip agriculture in terms of survival. Together with Limpopo Province, income from social grants outstrip wages as a source of household income. Where household income does come from wages, those wages are much lower than in other provinces: the average household income from wages is R68 057 in the Free State and R157 542 in the Western Cape, but in Eastern Cape it is only R57 377 (Cawe, 2021: 47). Eastern Cape work-seekers are thus much less likely to find employment than in other provinces, and even where they do, their wages tend to be lower. Remittances, at about a quarter of household income, signal 'the enduring income links between urban employment and survival in the rural countryside' (Cawe, 2021: 47). These high levels of unemployment, low incomes and depressed agricultural activity are reflected in food insecurity levels – of households surveyed in the *Community Survey 2016*, 26% reported running out of money to buy food in the previous 12 months (StatsSA, 2016).

In contrast, in Amadiba, remittances, wages and social grants contribute much lower proportions to household livelihoods relative to land- and sea-based sources, and no households report hunger or food insecurity (Koen, 2016; Zamchiya, 2019). As we will see in Chapter 6, ecological bases of social reproduction (including agriculture) have provided an important basis to the political struggle. This is made possible by the fact that households of Mgungundlovu were never dispossessed of their land, due in large part to organised resistance such as through the Pondo Revolt. It is also further enabled by ecological attributes like fertile soil and high levels of annual rainfall, a contrast with the semi-arid ecological context that the MFA operates in (see Figure 3).

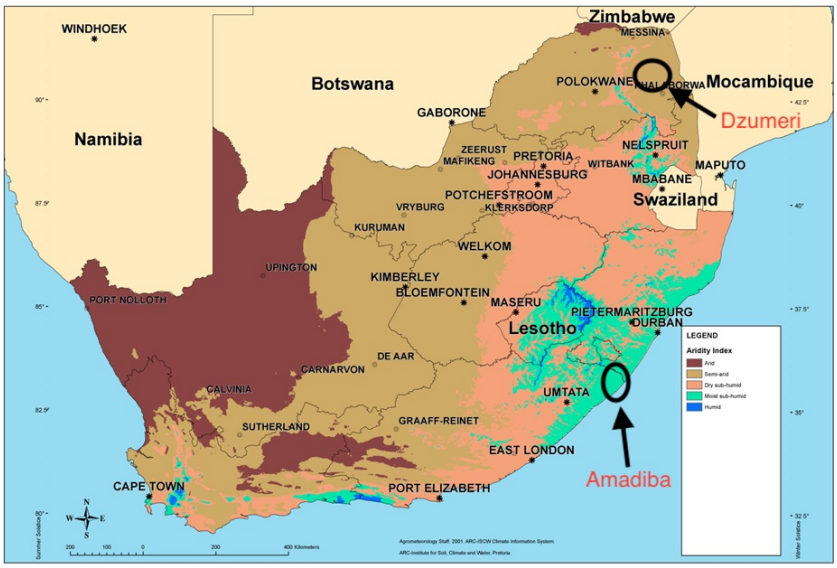


Figure 3: Aridity map of South Africa, showing the approximate positions of Amadiba and the MFA research site, Dzumeri. Source: StepSA, 2018.[14]

Mopani Farmers Association – Dzumeri Traditional Administrative Area

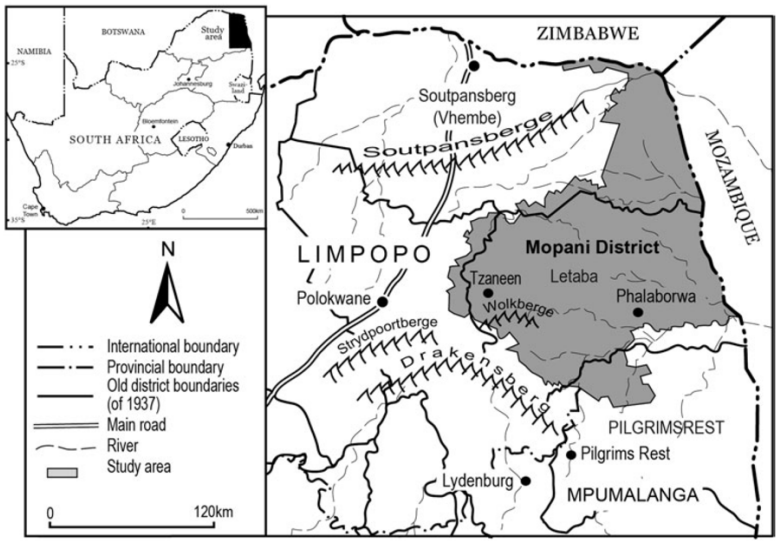


Figure 4: Map of Mopani District. Source: Hay (2014).

Mopani Farmers Association (MFA) operates in the Mopani District Municipality of Limpopo Province across 51 villages and has a membership of 1260 farmers (SGS Consulting, 2017). Most of them are located in the Greater Giyani and Letaba Local Municipalities (Manderson *et al*, 2016), much of which used to fall under the Gazankulu Bantustan. While the region can have good Summer rainfalls, it is classified as semi-arid and is subject to frequent droughts (see

[14] http://stepsa.org/climate_aridity.html

Figure 3). The MFA is constituted by nine Area Associations, which organise farmers within the nine traditional administrative areas of Mopani District, which used to be part of the Letaba District under the colonial and apartheid periods. This research was conducted mostly in villages of the Dzumeri Area (see Figure 5), with the Dzumeri Area Farmers Association (DAFA).

The site is located in Limpopo Province, which has a total population of close to 6 million people (StatsSA, 2019b). Commercial agriculture makes a significant contribution to the Province's economy, with 142 000 people listing themselves as employed in agriculture between July and September 2020 (Cawe, 2021: 48). In the reference period of the 2019 *General Household Survey*, 38.2% of Limpopo households reported some sort of involvement in agricultural activities, a figure that has been declining over time, but is still the highest in the country (StatsSA, 2020b; StatsSA, 2016a). Of those households, 92% of such activity could be classified as subsistence, as it was aimed at securing an extra source of food for the household. Only for around 5.5% of households does it constitute the main or an extra source of income (*ibid*).

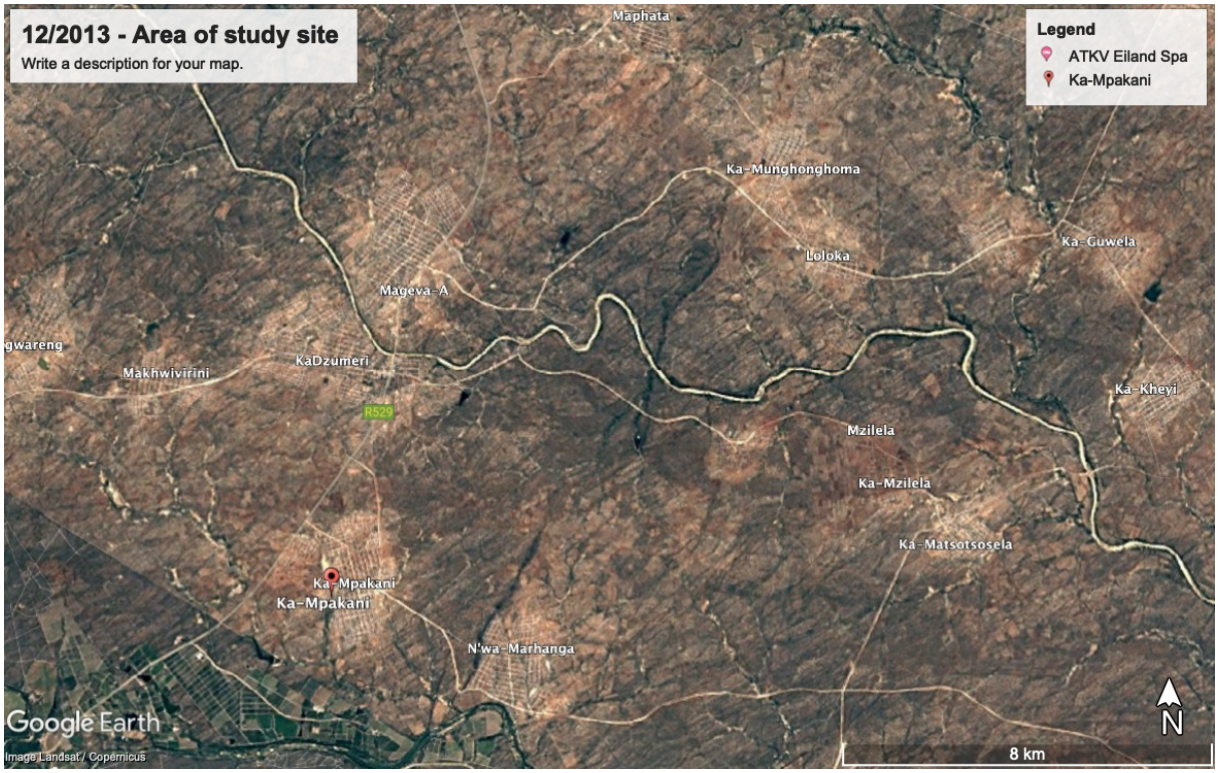


Figure 5: Google Earth image of the Dzumeri Area, including its village names. Note also the south-western boundary of the area, formed by the commercial farms of the former 'white' South Africa.

By all accounts, the region reflects the 'jobless de-agrarianisation' (Du Toit, 2018: 1087) that is so characteristic of South Africa's recent history and current economic situation. In the case of the former Gazankulu homeland, this is reflected in a history of land dispossession and associated loss of agrarian livelihoods, and the failure to reinvigorate those agrarian livelihoods through the Bantustan development apparatus. Thus Cooper (1987: 493) reported that despite land being no less fertile than those of white agriculture, although the Bantustans in Transvaal occupied 20% of the Province's land area they produced only 5% of its food. Furthermore, only 6% of Gazankulu's residents could scrape together a monetary living from agriculture (Harries, 1989: 107).[15] Gazankulu was thus largely 'reduced to the status of a proletarian dormitory for the industrial areas of South Africa' (*ibid*: 108), with households coming to depend for household income mostly on employment on the surrounding commercial farms and the Johannesburg mines (van der Waal, 2017).

The resulting rural dependency and marginal conditions of production in Dzumeri are seen in the conditions of agricultural production today. Like Eastern Cape, sources of household income signal how the region was historically engineered to rely on wage income, and now the effects of unemployment on household wage incomes. According to the *General Household Survey 2019* (StatsSA, 2020b), grants are a source of income for 59% of households. Only 50% of households have access to a wage income, and 25% depend on remittances. In StatsSA's *Community Survey* 2016, 18.1% of respondents in Limpopo Province reported running out of money to buy food in the year prior to participating in the survey, but the highest rates of 28.7% were reported in two local municipalities, one of which the case study area is situated in, Greater Giyani (StatsSA, 2016b).

From *Census 2011* statistics, about 31% of households in Greater Giyani are involved in agricultural activity. Of these households, about 60% have livestock, about 17% undertake mixed farming (both livestock and crop farming), and about 20% farm crops (either vegetables and other crops like grains, or both).[16] However, apart from the 5.5% of households in Limpopo who farm for a main or extra source of income (StatsSA, 2020b; StatsSA, 2016a), there is a high correlation between those who practice agriculture and income poverty: 84% of

[15] The level also varied by region within Gazankulu. For example, according to Harries (1984: 4) only 2% could make a living from agriculture in the southern region of Mhala, while in central Gazankulu the figure was about 10%.
[16] http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=greater-giyani-municipality

households with no income engage in agriculture, as compared to only 28% of those who earn between R4 801 to R38 400 per month (Hay, 2015: 279). This latter agricultural practice, mostly for subsistence, has also historically been impacted by the chronic unemployment since the 1970s, which has reduced the resources available for the poorest households to invest in agricultural production (Vibert, 2016). The low percentage of households who farm for income, and the otherwise association of farming practice with the lowest incomes, reflect the marginal conditions of agricultural production. These are some of the social conditions in which the subject of this research, the Mopani Farmers Association, operates.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary and Secondary Document Analysis

Research on the historical intersections between the agrarian question, food and resistance under the national question, presented in Chapter 4, relied primarily on secondary sources, drawing on a wide range of scholars who have been influential in shaping our understanding on the agrarian question in South Africa. The analysis of primary documents included newspaper articles cited throughout the thesis; data drawn from Statistics South Africa publications to inform the description of larger patterns, as well as the socio-economic contexts of the case study sites; and organisational documents like information booklets, strategy and planning documents, reports, and press statements, which were particularly central to the analysis and classification of the 'food movement' in South Africa, presented in Chapter 5. I also undertook a small amount of archival research in the William Cullen Library at Wits University, principally of the Communist Party of South Africa's (CPSA) *Guardian* newspaper to gather information on the urban, working class food organising that took place mostly in the first half of the 1940s. I also visited the archive at the Mariannhill Monastery, situated on the outskirts of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, to access old newspaper articles, books and documents that shed light on the origins in South Africa of what is now known as organic agriculture, as Father Bernard Huss of the Mariannhill Monastery was an important progenitor since the 1920s.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were a key instrument of data collection in this research, as they aimed at deep exploration of issues with participants, and were suitable for both gathering facts and

putting pieces of various stories together, as well as understanding the perceptions and experiences of interviewees (Weiss, 1995). In-depth interviews with a group of informants deliberately selected for the information they could provide on the topic were conducted with 26 key informants, mostly related to the mapping of the 'food movement'. These included researchers and scholar-activists knowledgeable on agrarian, food and movement issues in South Africa, state officials, and those situated at important vantage points such as in NGOs active on land, food or agrarian issues.

In South Africa, a total of 144 in-depth interviews that were aimed at uncovering personal oral histories, consciousness and apprehension of their individual activities and involvement in collective forms of action were conducted. This was made up of, firstly, 52 research participants for the mapping of the 'food movement' in South Africa. Secondly, twenty-seven participant interviews were conducted for the Amadiba case study (including two group interviews), with ordinary residents and Amadiba Crisis Committee activists. Thirdly, in the MFA case study, 29 participant interviews were conducted (including 4 group interviews), with mostly farmers that were members of MFA and some who were not members. Lastly, in the case of the FSC, 36 participant interviews were conducted, which, while not informing a discrete case study, helped inform FSC's contribution to my thinking in the mapping of the 'food movement' in South Africa. Both key informant and participant interviews were based on semi-structured interview schedules (Appendix 2), but the interviews were conducted in a flexible manner that followed leads and made prompts in order to explore particular points of interest and importance as the interview unfolded.

Participant Observation

To triangulate and extend the sources of data beyond the relatively narrow window in which one conducts an interview, I also undertook participant observation in both the mapping and case study phases of research. Beyond only asking people about their thoughts and experiences, it provided me with the chance to also observe what they do and say (Robson and McCarton, 2016). While interviews provided key sources of information on the topic, observation allowed me to build a more complete and dynamic picture of the initiatives I studied through more sustained engagement. During the mapping research, this involved more 'passive' forms of observations in the field, as well as participant observation through my participation in events like organisational AGMs, becoming a member of the Bryanston Organic Market Participatory

Guarantee System (PGS) and so attending organic farm assessment visits, and participating in direct action such as marches organised by the movements or campaigns I was studying. Through daily fieldwork notes, as well as writing notes after attending particular events or engaging in particular conversations, I was able to record and reflect on observations, important discussions that took place, informal conversations I had, and inputs by individuals, which served as an important source of written data.

This participant observation also overlapped with my continued role as an activist during the research period, and so included activities like facilitating a workshop with Mopani Farmers Association (MFA) members on the politics of food systems during my fieldwork (on the organisation's request); my solidarity work with the Amadiba anti-mining struggle (such as coordinating the media campaign for the legal application to assert the communities' right to consent before mining could take place); and my role (in 2015) as the national coordinator of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC). An important component of the extended case method is to make observations and gather data across time and space (Burawoy, 1998). My research and active participation across the initiatives and case study sites intermittently across an extended number of years allowed for this to happen, and enabled keeping track of evolving developments.

Fieldwork Visit to the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil

Some of the background research for this thesis included a visit to Brazil in 2016 to spend two weeks with the *Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Rural Workers Movement) (MST) in the state of São Paulo. Given the focus of my research on the agrarian question, food sovereignty and politics from below in South Africa, in addition to extensive engagement with literature on the MST, the aim of this visit was to help sharpen my thinking through a case of a strong agrarian and food sovereignty movement to reflect the South African situation off. In particular, I was interested in understanding how food sovereignty is being conceptualised and practiced, and how the movement builds and maintains itself in the context of a corporate agro-food regime. I conducted six key informant interviews with members of the MST secretariat in Sao Paulo and militants (organisers), which allowed me to explore the political subjects it works to cultivate around the agrarian question, the challenges and successes the movement has experienced, and the practicalities of building social and agro-food alternatives. A visit to the movement's Florestan Fernandes national school allowed me a

further glimpse into the central role of education and liberatory pedagogy in building the capacity for MST's social transformation project. I also stayed in one established settlement and two encampments, where I observed some of their workings and interviewed 14 MST members.

Ethics and Reflecting on My Role as a Scholar-Activist

Both the extended case method and relational comparison incorporate the fact that as researchers we also shape the world we seek to examine. Rather than something to be avoided, it is something to be actively examined in the research process. This requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher, in two important senses. Firstly, to be self-aware and alive to the researchers' impact on the research situation, and considering how those impacts further explicate the social reality under study. The second is to be aware of the power effects between researcher and researched in terms of how it affects the data as well as a matter of respect towards the wellbeing of research participants.

I consider myself a scholar-activist in the terms described by Borras (2016), as my research is informed by a deeper commitment to social change in the interests of the hungry, poor and working people, and I have been and remain connected to food sovereignty campaigning and social justice struggles. Before beginning this PhD, I worked at the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) in grassroots popular education and organising work related to cooperatives, the solidarity economy and food sovereignty, and continued my activism and solidarity work on different fronts during the PhD. The topic of this thesis was therefore motivated by wanting to better understand the dynamics and inner workings of the initiatives and forms of organising in South Africa around a key political ideal of my work (food sovereignty), and to better understand the broader terrain of the 'movement' and the forces shaping it.

My close political associations with many of the organisations and movements I study in this thesis may raise questions about the rigour of the analysis I present. However, this provokes two reflections on my part. Firstly, what I present in this thesis is the product of an evolution of my thinking and practice as a result of the many facets of this research process. Broadly speaking, I feel that when I started this research I somewhat struggled to shift away from assessing the realities and initiatives from the strongly normative positions I held of how I

wished the world to be, rooted in my years of activist work. Having such normative frames is not in itself anathema to rigorous scholar-activist research, but it was important to shift to a less blinkered assessment of these subjects, more as they were rather than what I hoped they would be. This has been an element of growth for me during this research – retaining my political commitments while marrying them with more sober assessment and acknowledgements of reality as it is. Secondly, therefore, rather than open bias towards any of them, how I present issues here reflects not simply attempted impartiality, but a learning process of deeper understanding. For example, I am on the board of Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC), an organisation that is discussed in Chapter 6. My assessment of their role in the Amadiba struggle has very little to do with how I wish SWC to be seen given my association, but reflects my own shift in how I understood their work and its impacts since being invited to join the organisation in 2012 and, somewhat skeptically at the time, agreeing. The analysis presented is a result of learning more about its role through my involvement in it and the research and thinking for this thesis.

All ethics protocols of Wits University were observed during the process of this research (Appendix 1) – the purpose of the study was made clear to participants and that their participation was informed and voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from participants, including the organisers of processes, meetings and events that I observed and participated in. Interviews were recorded only with the explicit permission of interviewees. All participant interviewees have been kept anonymous in the thesis, while key informants are identified, all with their consent. Furthermore, having activist and friendly relations to many (but not all) of the initiatives and movements I was studying would not make me immune to the need to remain reflexive in my personal relations and conduct in the field. Despite my political allegiances, in a country of deep (and still extensively racialised) inequality, and where more than half of households still cannot afford a nutritious diet, given my social position I do not directly experience these conditions daily. It was therefore important to remain sensitive to power effects in the field. This meant realising when I felt I had made mistakes in my conduct and making an effort to correct for them as research continued, but also making efforts to personally connect with research participants in basic ways, such that they would feel as comfortable as possible in raising issues and questions they felt important to do so. The research therefore did include being challenged by some participants such as about where I was coming from on the topic, but was worked through by respectful and honest conversation, which in these instances in fact seemed to build deeper trust between us. Or, there were occasional times when an

interviewee did not seem comfortable and answered questions in a brief and unengaging ways, and so I chose to wrap up the interview in the interests of their comfort. But still, I do not pretend that all power effects were perfectly dealt with; I am sure I ignorantly breezed through a number of situations in less-than-ideal ways. Learning is never complete.

Reflections on Opportunities for Further Research

I close this chapter with some final reflections related mainly to opportunities for further research around the topic of this thesis. It may seem odd that this thesis engages little with the Covid moment and its aftermath, given the centrality of food, hunger and the agro-food system to its dynamics and impacts. The main reason is that by 2020 I had already completed the research and was writing up this thesis. I was also busy completing a second draft of Chapter 5, which broadly categorises the civil society 'food movement' in South Africa. Being involved in and observing the coming together of the broad food movement was interesting in how I found that much of my analysis was confirmed in terms of the orientations of the actors, the relations between them as well as their divergences, and the prominence of NGO-movement/community relations in this 'movement'. This therefore helped to some extent confirm my findings as well as refine them in the third draft of the chapter and so, regarding my original research questions, did not give rise to urgent new findings. However, this is not to say that the Covid moment did not give rise to evolving dynamics that call for ongoing understanding and analysis, as illustrated by some of the work done by those like Wegerif (2021), Kroll and Adelle (2022) and the Institute for Poverty Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape.[17] Dialectical analysis implies constant change, and the 'food movement' is elaborating in interesting ways, justifying ongoing deep engagement.

In covering the food movement, I focused specifically on initiatives organising popular class actors. This was deliberate, but in some senses it also does not capture the full range of food activism, that includes researchers and academics working on food governance issues, for example. This would benefit from future study, to examine more the ways in which popular class organisation intersects with these other levels of activity. In addition, the typology I provide in Chapter 5 is a broad categorisation of the key streams of the 'food movement'. I also

[17] See https://www.plaas.org.za/african-food-systems-and-covid-19/.

suggest that ongoing research is needed to further understand how popular class actors individually and collectively engage with these. This is why I present two case studies rooted in particular localised contexts, but I chose those connected to what I call the 'transformative' stream of the 'food movement' because of its closer alignment to the dominant southern thrust of food sovereignty movements as rooted in challenging and transforming dominant power and material relations. However, many working class organisers and forms of collective action have been connecting with other streams like what I call the 'organic' and 'organic livelihoods', which signals deeper cross-class engagement and movement-building. How actors in working class and poor communities connect with this wider stream and 'localise' them in ways shaped by 'multiple determinations' in those local contexts, would be an important area to keep studying.

I had originally planned to write up three case studies, the third being of the Agrarian Reform for Food Soveriegnty Campaign (FSC). Not including the FSC is a significant gap, as they were one of the earlier popular formations to arise from progressive NGOs' turn to supporting localised self-organisation after the collapse of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) (see Chapter 5) in the early 2000s. They were also one of the first formations in South Africa to enact food sovereignty as a mobilising frame, having connected with it through transnational activist networks. Furthermore, the Western and Northern Cape have quite a particular agrarian history, having been at the forefront of colonial expansion, indigenous dispossession and proletarianisation, and shot through with subaltern struggles for land- and sea-based autonomy (see Penn, 2005; Marincowitz, 1985). This makes for understanding the basis for agrarian mobilisation in the region a task with its own fascinating specificities. However, I plan to develop this research further through, for example, journal publication. I also hope to discuss with the FSC possibilities of joint planning for the elaboration of the research in politically useful ways.

This leads to a final reflection I wish to consider here. Scholar-activism is not reducible to it, but participatory forms of research agenda setting and conduct of research with particular movements is an important element. Calling into question how we do research was further thrust into relief by the contemporary push for decolonising knowledge and research, which was given a boost by the rise of the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015. The decolonisation agenda of #FeesMustFall may have gone in different directions, but progressive approaches to decolonisation open up important questions and methods for research that seeks greater

alignment with the realities and aspirations of deeply unequal and unjust societies of the south, like South Africa's. This is not to question the continued relevance and importance of independent academic inquiry; it rather points to the fact as I develop this research further, such as through postdoctoral study, I seek to include some joint planning and agenda setting with some of the movements I am in solidarity with, such as those of the Amadiba coastal communities.

Chapter 4: A History of Food, Politics and Class Struggle in South Africa's Agrarian Question

Introduction

The rise of the international food sovereignty movement is generally situated in relation to the rise of neoliberalism, which reconfigured the relations between the state, market and society across national settings and increased the global mobility and power of transnational food corporations in agro-food systems and their ability to shape national agrarian questions (see McMichael, 2014; Bonnano and Wolf, 2018). The struggles that have shaped the international food sovereignty movement (epitomised in La Via Campesina) emerge from longer historical peasant struggle trajectories over national agrarian questions and associated class dynamics that formed the foundations of the contemporary global movement response to what has been called the corporate food regime. This points to the fact that while broad parameters of agrarian change can be identified, a relevant understanding requires examining the historical specificities in a particular place (Bernstein, 2004; cited in Gray and Dowd-Uribe, 2013). This chapter is therefore aimed at providing a historically specific account of the agrarian question in South Africa and its relationship to the food question, resistance and the class relations from which the dominant agro-food system arose. This also serves to historically and contextually locate the origins and the typology of food organising from below in Chapter 5.

By 'using the work of historians to illuminate the present' (Mamdani, 2017: xix), I situate the confluence of food and politics historically within the interconnections between the agrarian question and the national question. I show that to explain the present terrain of collective action related to food and the contradictions of the food system, it is important to understand the historical social conditions of their development, which came about through conjunctural, contingent and contextual processes under national oppression. In the context of settler capitalism, the relationship between organised resistance and agriculture and food was shaped by struggles over labour, land, and national liberation, as well as intersecting forms of race, class, ethnic and gender stratification and domination. I demonstrate this argument through connecting the history of food and hunger to the history of class formation, political resistance and organising (including the shifting proletarian-agrarian forms of consciousness that underpinned them), and larger historical developments. This serves to show how the forms of collective action examined in the following chapter emerge from these historical and structural

factors, which are re-made as they travel to local spaces and interact with global discourses like food sovereignty. I conclude the chapter by showing how the convergences of political struggle, land and agriculture gave way to a pattern of divergence by the 1970s. The forms of collective action examined in the following chapter can partly be seen as variously positioned in relation to converging struggle and food politics once again, under new structural and political conditions.

The chapter is organised into two historical periods, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In terms of labour, differentiation and resistance I primarily discuss them in relation to the colonial period, drawing linkages to the twentieth century as well. This is not to imply that these features were only applicable in the nineteenth century, but to highlight that this is where they began and that they were forces continuing under changing conditions over the twentieth century. The last section of the chapter deals with the historical period up to 1994, as the post-1994 context is dealt with in the following chapter.

Hunger and Malnutrition in South Africa: The Historical Context

By the early twentieth century hunger had become a consistent feature of black life in South Africa, continuing to the present. Before colonisation, hunger was instead cyclical and due largely to ecological factors, experienced during winter and drought periods (Wylie, 2001). Fully describing the range of food provisioning and diets of pre-colonial southern African populations is hampered by reliance on accounts by European missionaries, travellers and shipwreck survivors and on patterns of oral history disrupted by dispossession and disintegrating social structures (Webster, 1986). Furthermore, generalisations of multiple societies spread across different geographical and climatic contexts should be tentative. But from the sources that do exist, a picture emerges of most pre-colonial societies that were able to secure their nutrition needs sufficiently through a combination of cultivation, hunting, and gathering of berries, insects and wild herbs (Webster, 1986). Yet in 1938 the South African government, concerned that Africans were growing too weak to provide their labour on a sustained basis, tasked a commission to investigate the state of nutrition of Africans in rural areas. One male rural resident reported to the committee that '[t]he Native is starving on a full stomach.' As Wylie (2001: 4) observes of this statement:

> His formerly diverse diet had become monotonous. Too often he was eating his cornmeal porridge ungarnished by wild greens or meat or milk. Having lost his ancestral standards for a good life, he was living in a state of longing for new commodities and old staples. He was 'starving on a full stomach.'

The shift marks the turn from hunger and malnutrition as a function of season, climate and labour power to hunger as an endemic feature of black life with economic and political causes, rooted in land dispossession and disruption of agricultural systems, the severing of social structures, and the nature of proletarianisation (Cousins, 2015b). Understanding hunger and malnutrition in South Africa therefore requires an understanding of colonial conquest and imperial incorporation, processes of accumulation and class formation, state formation and dispossession, and how these intersecting factors produced a process of underdevelopment that lay at the root of chronic afflictions of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and health problems (Webster, 1986; O'Laughlin, 2013).

The dynamics of the agrarian question and industrialisation in contexts like Western Europe were initially brutal (Federici, 2021). However, over historical time the region generally saw a rise in wages and increased dietary diversity of those moving from peasantry to proletariat (Wylie, 2001), partly also due to the export of their agrarian question's contradictions to the south, as discussed in Chapter 2. In South Africa, the process of capital accumulation and industrialisation restricted non-white agriculture and produced proletarianisation without the conditions for a working class that could survive primarily on wage labour – semi-proletarianisation (Jacobs, 2018). The dominant historical trend was therefore one where dependence on the market for food through low wages resulted in changed and simplified diets and, together with high levels of physical labour exploitation, declining health for much of the black workforce and their families. In rural areas, a declining productive base due to overcrowding on often poor quality soils saw hunger and malnutrition becoming a consistent feature of rural life. The uneven development created by segregationist capitalist development meant that through the process of industrialisation the portions of income spent on food by whites declined – as they on the whole experienced upward mobility in favourable labour markets (Seekings and Nattras, 2005) – while the black majority suffered increasing food expenditure pressure, reflecting agricultural decline, low wages and high food costs (Wylie, 2001). To understand this process, I outline the historical evolution of South Africa's agrarian question and the overall development of its economy, the role of agriculture and food systems in this, and resistance by the dispossessed.

Hunger therefore had political and economic causes arising out of colonial ordering of land and labour and, as will be discussed further below, its creation was at times politically deliberate as a tool of conquest. By the first half of the twentieth century, the systemic hunger caused by the progression of the agrarian question in favour of (white) capital – through the destruction of the black peasantry and entrenchment of the low wage migrant labour system – became a cause of alarm for the state, concerned by its implications for reproducing a reliable labour supply. Consistent with the ways in which colonial authorities tended to construe affliction for racially discriminated subjects and citizens as they mediated the contradictions of labour reserve economies (O'Laughlin, 2013), this gave rise to what Wylie (2001) calls the 'malnutrition syndrome', which involved reducing the political and economic causes of African hunger to cultural ones subject to technical solutions: the Native Affairs Department (NAD), which managed the Native Reserves, was at the frontline of the state's evolving attitude towards declining health and nutrition in the reserves. In the early twentieth century, guided by a racial paternalism that 'both facilitated exploitation and set its limitations' (O'Laughlin, 2013: 180), it sought to 'protect' Africans in the reserves from potential famines by seeking to balance the rapacious demands for labour from the mining and developing agricultural sectors with rural Africans' welfare. However, as the structural marginalisation of the reserves continued and ecological and social conditions (reflected in hunger and malnutrition) eroded, the NAD shifted to targeting Africans' behaviours, and their purported cultural determinants, as the problem to address in order to rectify the problem of poor health and nutrition. The state, scientists and nutrition experts attributed poor African nutritional and agricultural practices (such as overstocking) to their cultural ineptitude in adapting to modernity, rather than to their subjugation and dispossession. Wylie (2001) suggests that this gave rise to an evolving ideological framework of the malnutrition syndrome that further informed state interventions in the lives of rural Africans (such as cattle culling and betterment programmes) in the twentieth century aimed, in part, at narrowly addressing the pervasive malnutrition and hunger of the rural African population (Cousins, 2015a).

Endemic hunger that was underpinned by the architecture of accumulation and labour demand therefore prompted further colonial state incursion into the lives of rural Africans in the twentieth century, which (as will be discussed further below) often instigated fierce agrarian resistance. This ideological framing added further dynamics to the country's evolving agrarian question under national oppression over hunger, food and agriculture. To give a further sense

of the relations between food, hunger and agrarian resistance to national oppression, I now turn to outlining some of the features of this relationship during the colonial period.

Colonialism, the Agrarian Question and Resistance

A process of imperial expansion in which class dynamics were key factors in shaping racial domination and dispossession forged the roots of the relation between hunger and the national and agrarian questions. The incorporation of African societies and polities through colonial merchant penetration and industrial expansion was characterised by a diversity of experience (Beinart, 1982). This section nonetheless seeks to point to important overarching issues that historically emerged around dynamics of social change, resistance, food and the agrarian question.

South Africa's agrarian question by the nineteenth century reflected Bernstein's (2006; 2009) classic agrarian question, the agrarian question of capital: creating the conditions for capitalism in the countryside, and transferring labour and surplus from the countryside into industrialisation and economic development outside of agriculture. The context of settler capitalism rendered it a strongly racialised question and forged the beginnings of the creation of new, politically and economically ordered patterns of hunger and malnutrition. Fostering conditions of 'accumulation from above' (Cousins, 2013) took place through racialised dispossession in order to free up land for settler agriculture and labour power for this agriculture as well as the infrastructure needs of the colonial economy. As a result of settler capitalism, therefore, 'traditional' societies were, to paraphrase Archie Mafeje (1978a), externally reconstructed as a result of resistance and war, dispossession, production and trade linkages between settlers and colonised societies and the colonial re-ordering of rural political power (Beinart and Bundy, 1980; Bundy, 1972; Mamdani, 2017). But this also instigated evolving trends of social differentiation within colonised societies. The patterns and experiences of hunger and social deprivation amongst colonised societies were thus also shaped by internal dynamics and ruptures resulting from, and interacting with, this overall position of subjugation. Such differentiation in turn played a role in shaping resistance and struggle over the agrarian question, and so, these intersecting forces shaped forms of struggle and resistance that involved food.

To illustrate this, I use the 'great Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement' of 1856-57, a formative event in the making of colonised South Africa, as emblematic of the intersecting forces structuring resistance that involved food, proletarianisaton, social differentiation and endemic mass hunger and food insecurity under the evolving agrarian question, and so refer back to it in the discussions that follow. This movement occurred through the process of colonial expansion by which South Africa was created. The process began with the production of food to serve the global mercantilist economy, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) sent Jan van Riebeek to establish a refreshment station on the land of the Camissa Khoe and what the Dutch named the Cape of Good Hope (Mellet, 2020), to re-stock the company's ships with fresh water, fruits, vegetables and wheat on their journeys between Europe and Asia. As an agrarian settler economy, the food system that emanated from the Cape gave rise to particular social subjects, political relations, and social and economic relations of domination. For much of the seventeenth century the settlement remained isolated and small, with fruit and vegetable production occurring within the settlement's boundary hedges, and economic interaction with the indigenous Khoe groups largely based on bartering for livestock to supply passing ships with meat (van der Merwe, 1995). But the release of VOC employees from Company service in the late seventeenth century to farm independently and supply the Company with meat and wheat – free burghers – released new logics of subsistence, accumulation and colonial conquest and expansion into the interior. From the free burghers arose the trekboers (migrant/colonist farmers), who opened the frontiers to the east and to the north of the Cape, which were zones of varying relations between trekboers and indigenous groups of conflict, cooperation and subjugation in an overall process of primitive accumulation (Penn, 2005; van der Merwe, 1995). By the 1700s, physically decimated by measles, economically destroyed by cattle loss and their political structure collapsed under colonial pressure, the Khoekhoe in the Western and towards the Eastern Cape were annihilated as independent social groups (Ross, 2014). Some survivors fled into the interior to escape the measles as well as cattle disease; those who remained could only survive as servants to the trekboers or Xhosa, and others, responding to the often-brutal conditions of servitude under the Boer farmers, joined the ranks of the San to attack and raid trekboer cattle, constituting the major resistance to easterly colonial expansion until the nineteenth century (Ross, 2014).

The process of frontier expansion in the nineteenth century, under the helm of British rule,[18] would lead to the 'great Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement' of 1856-57, a mass movement response to the experience of conquest that played out in a colonised peasant society through the material conditions of agriculture, livestock and hunger.[19] Eastward colonial expansion continued gradually across the nineteenth century as it took the British nine wars of dispossession – the 'Frontier Wars'[20] – to finally subdue the Xhosa (Mostert, 1992). The series of wars might be seen as expressions of racialised class struggle, as the Xhosa resisted forced proletarianisation through the intentional destruction of their social structures in order to release labour power and land for the needs of the colonial economy. By the early 1850s, the British government of the Cape Colony had conquered much of the Xhosa territory, which they called British Kaffraria. The War of Mlanjeni of 1850-53, 'this most merciless of frontier wars' (Peires, 2015: 65), in which the British adopted a scorched earth policy to create hunger by destroying Xhosa fields and gardens, left them in a greatly depleted state and induced nascent social changes. Chiefs' authority was subordinated to colonial power, land shortage was intensified and Xhosa men owned less and less cattle (Mphande, 1991).

However, notwithstanding these emerging social changes, fundamental social and political structures of Xhosa society still remained in place and so it was only British military power that kept it a part of the colony (Peires, 2015). In the eyes of the Governer of the Cape by 1854, Sir George Grey, the task was thus to create out of the Xhosa, through land expropriation and 'civilisation', a wage-earning labour force for the colony as well as a class of cultivators employing 'progressive' methods of production and supplying colonial markets (Bundy, 1972; Bradford, 2000). The Xhosa's malaise after the War of Mlanjeni provided him with an

[18] The British had taken over rule of the Cape from the Dutch for the second time in 1806.

[19] Jeff Peires' *The Dead Will Arise* was first published in 1989 and provided the first comprehensive account of the 'Cattle-Killing' movement. However, as a 'landmark' (Guy, 1991) study is bound to do, it sparked a number of often acerbic debates (Offenberger, 2008), controversies and new research over issues such as the precise causes of the movement, who exactly Nongqawuse's uncle Mhlakaza was and his role in instigating the movement, and the gender blindness of Peires' and other historians' analyses (Guy, 1991; Bradford, 1996; 2000) (the latter to which Peires [2015: 673-690] has responded and defended his position). I have here tried to provide a general account that is relevant to this chapter but that is also valid in relation to these debates and controversies. I also put 'Cattle-Killing' in parentheses because as Guy (1991) points out, although the slaughter of up to 400 000 cattle was a dramatic aspect of the movement, the ceasing of cultivation and destruction of grain stores was the second pillar of the movement. 40 000 Xhosa would not have starved to death if they had no cattle, but they did because they had no grain to eat.

[20] 'Frontier' of course reflects a colonial imagination of an untamed space requiring civilisational control to transform the land and people there into 'productive' objects. I deliberately maintain its usage, however, as it is accurate insofar as the frontier was an intrinsic feature of settler colonialism (Penn, 2005: 9-14; Legassick, 1980) and the wars were fought to advance the frontier of an advancing imperial capitalism. As Moore (2015: 4) argues, 'not only does capitalism *have* frontiers; it *is* a frontier civilisation.'

opportunity to move towards implementing this vision. Xhosa cattle numbers had been depleted by the war; lung-sickness then arrived in South Africa in 1853 and by 1855 was killing 5 000 Xhosa cattle a month (Peires, 2015). This impacted the material and emotional wellbeing of many Xhosa, contributed to the disruption of gender and sexual relations and played into the general malaise and aspirations for societal restoration (discussed further below). To add to this, the invasion of a grub species rendered maize crops inedible and excessive rains rotted remaining crops. A defeated people, having lost a great bulk of their land, now faced significant hunger through the loss of crops and what remained of their cattle.

In this context, a millenarian movement was sparked by the prophecies of a young girl, Nongqawuse, who claimed to have received a vision instructing that all cattle, which had become polluted from witchcraft practices, be killed, all cultivation suspended and grain stores destroyed in order to cleanse Xhosa society (Bradford, 1996). Thereupon reincarnated Xhosa warriors would return by sea to rescue them from the misery in which they found themselves. Thus what came to be called the 'Great Cattle-Killing Movement' was born. Although its label is a misnomer as it was the destruction of crops and grain stocks and suspension of cultivation that turned 'deprivation into catastrophe' (Guy, 1991: 229), it was a movement response to generalised social deprivation induced by colonial rule and, as the Xhosa were an agrarian society, the movement centred around cattle and crops, items that had played a central role in both their material and cultural reproduction. While the material focus of the movement centred on suspension of agricultural activities, its overall millenarian character aimed to restore the pre-colonial Xhosa social order. As Peires (2015: 350) argues:

> It is thus no exaggeration to describe the Cattle-Killing as a mass popular movement of a truly national character, uniting both chiefs and commoners, the main classes of the precolonial social order, in a communal defence of their way of life.

Food and agriculture were thus conjunctural to larger political and economic processes of colonial conquest and indigenous resistance to their subordinate terms of incorporation into the emerging capitalist order. As mentioned, a principal colonial motivation was to break up the Xhosa social and agrarian structure in order to release labour power to service the needs of the colonial economy. From the beginnings of the unfolding of settler capitalism, therefore, the peasant and labour questions were coterminously central to the development of the agrarian question and therefore to understanding the nature of resistance.

Labour and Resistance in the Agrarian Question

Bernstein (2006; 2009) argues that the classic agrarian question of capital has been resolved and that the agrarian question of labour, in which access to land in the context of growing precarity is one basis for the livelihood struggles of fragmented classes of labour across the global South, is extant in our contemporary context of neoliberalism. However, for those like the indigenous people of what came to be South Africa, the agrarian question of capital was also always an agrarian question of labour: the precarity of maintaining social reproduction in conditions where settler capital had taken hold of their labour power through dispossession and tax impositions (Mafeje, 1985). A key consequent feature of the agrarian question instigated by colonial incorporation in southern Africa was semi-proletarianisation (Moyo and Yeros, 2005a) and so, as for much of the classes of labour in the global South, work has consistently been precarious and low-wage (Scully and Webster, 2019). Semi-proletarianisaton (and its gendered content) has been central to the agrarian question in South Africa, with a dialectic of racialised land dispossession together with retention of (restricted) rural land, which remained an important basis of the reproduction of black classes of labour in line with the needs of capital accumulation, as seminally theorised by Harold Wolpe (1972). Into the early twentieth century, circumscribed access to land by African households entrenched gendered patterns of reproductive and wage work (Bozzoli, 1983), but also allowed them some scope of choice between household agrarian production and men's participation in the labour market (or balancing the two) and so struggles over land, food and agriculture were often related to the terms on which labour was exploited.

Food often connected with class struggles over proletarianisation at conjunctural moments, which is again illustrated in the 'Cattle-Killing' movement. By the end of the movement in late 1857, 40 000 Xhosa had perished and 400 000 cattle had been slaughtered (Peires, 2015), the final nail in the coffin of Xhosa resistance to colonial rule. In 1855 175 000 Xhosa lived in 'Xhosaland', but after the 'Cattle-Killing' only 26 000 remained, the rest driven out of the region by the resulting famine and British military force (Bradford, 2000; Peires, 2015). The crisis could have been ameliorated through aid from the colonial authorities. Instead, spearheaded by George Grey, the crisis was left to run its course so that hunger and desperation would drive the Xhosa from the land – opening up the land for white settlement – and into colonial labour service to feed the great need for labour by the emerging agrarian capitalism in

the Cape. Thus arose what Peires (2015: 497) termed a 'relief/rations/labour contract circuit' that operated in King Williams Town, where many of the starving and destitute arrived seeking relief; and where many others tried to get to, but did not make it. Food became the weapon by which proletarianisation was enforced: starving Xhosa were only given food rations once they had registered with local magistrates for employed work,[21] and those who arrived physically destitute were made to register as soon as their health returned. Although the system aimed to send them to the Western Cape where their labour was needed, at first farmers in the surrounding magisterial districts rushed in to take delivery of Xhosa labourers before they could be sent further afield (Peires, 2015). Food and agriculture thus assumed a political significance in relation to racially defined class struggles over labour power, in which hunger became a political tool for proletarianisation to feed the economic needs of white farmers and, later, the mining industry. It also illustrates, therefore, how from the beginnings of the unfolding of settler capitalism, peasant, food and labour questions were coterminously central to the development of the agrarian question, and therefore also to understanding the nature of resistance.

In the first half of the twentieth century, agrarian resistance took different forms according to the regions of the country and the social relationships that prevailed (Beinart, 1987), but generally continued to be shaped in relation to the terms on which mostly African men's labour power was extracted. The proletarian and the peasant, and the particular structural, conjunctural and contingent development of settler capitalism produced a range of mediations of the peasant-proletarian relationship. Proletarianisation and the rise of a peasantry were thus 'dynamically linked' processes (Mafeje, 2003: 15). While proletarianisation was a significant feature amongst rural Africans in the early twentieth century, for the most part agriculture was still a significant-enough source of reproduction for many to defend a foothold on the land, and access to wages often provided resources for investment in peasant production (May, 1987). In the Eastern Cape and parts of Natal an 'independent' market-oriented peasantry emerged largely linked to European traders and mission stations, while in the Transvaal, Orange Free State, and parts of Natal, a peasantry emerged through labour tenant and sharecropping arrangements (Mafeje, 1978a; Bundy, 1988; Keegan, 1986; 1988; van Onselen, 2005; Trapido, 1978). The particular experience of colonialism and the relationships between land, markets and labour that it constructed thus also produced social subjects that are important in understanding the

[21] Peires (p. 486-488) notes that the framework for work was more akin to slavery, with only a five-year limit on employment contracts distinguishing them from slavery. The Xhosa had a 'choice' between starvation and working in the Cape Colony, the latter under highly restrictive and forceful conditions.

course of social change, politics and resistance over the twentieth century, and through which the shifting political significance of food and agriculture can be understood.

In the relationship between proletarian and peasant, the demand for labour by the mining and farming sectors could be a key factor in agrarian resistance. In the case of white farmers in much of the country, the relative viability of land-based production for Africans posed a particularly acute impediment to accessing their labour power and they frequently complained of a labour shortage into the twentieth century (Bundy, 1972; Hay, 2014). This was also evident in the Western Cape. Proletarianisation of subaltern populations was for a long period the most advanced in this region and so rural politics was often centred on wage and working conditions (Bernstein, 1996b), but there was also a more nuanced picture. After the end of bonded labour in 1828 and slavery in 1838, a significant number of Khoe labourers and ex-slaves exited the full-time waged relationship with agrarian capital and established relatively autonomous agrarian, land- and sea-based livelihoods, only participating in casual wage work on farms as per their need. Consequently, access to labour was still a consistent problem for agrarian capital and other classes of white commercial farmers over the second half of the nineteenth century (Marincowitz, 1985). The actual course of proletarianisation in the Western Cape was therefore in part defined through autonomous peasant- and sea-based existence, with a consequent political struggle proceeding out of the fact that '[f]armers were...as incapable of achieving complete control over workers' lives as rural labourers were of terminating dependence upon farm wages' (Marincowitz, 1985: 270).

In such processes autonomous access to sources of food and livelihoods acted as a break on proletarianisation. This sometimes led to confrontations in which food and hunger were the immediate object of struggle but that reflected the wider class struggle over accessing labour power. For example, hunger once again provided a prospective lever for increasing the labour supply in Pondoland in 1912, which was threatened with a looming famine due to drought. In addition, cattle had been hit by East Coast fever, which hampered ploughing and made transport of grain by draught oxen into the territory to meet the need for purchase difficult (Beinart, 1982). The Native Affairs Department, and its magistrates, undertook a number of actions to avoid a famine, but which were shaped largely by the concern of the NAD, government and the Chamber of Mines to ensure that the labour supply was not threatened, and even to use the famine as a way to increase supply to the mines. Hence a key solution developed jointly by the Union Government and the Chamber, on the requests of the magistrates of the various districts,

was to pay an advance on the wages of new mine recruits, so that the consequent ability to purchase food for their families to avoid starvation would encourage them to make available their labour power. Hence when traditional leaders of Pondoland attempted to take their own measures to provide food to their populations they were vetoed by the NAD, which felt that such measures would reduce the need for young Mpondo men to find work (Wylie, 2001).

In the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal, struggles tended to centre over access to land and resistance to proletariansiation by labour tenants and sharecroppers (Trapido, 1978; Keegan, 1986). A further case illustrating the intersection of food and class struggles over labour power within a particular political context was in the Lebombo Flats of the Eastern Transvaal, which was threatened with famine as a result of a drought in 1927. Labour shortage on white farms was a chronic feature in the Orange Free State and Transvaal until the mechanisation of white agriculture from the late 1940s. In addition to a small number of waged workers, white farmers accessed black labour through labour tenancy arrangements, but which only provided them with labour for a few months a year. Due to the low wages and poor working conditions, and the exploitative practices of charging high prices when selling grain to Africans when their harvests were poor, young men preferred to leave the region and work on the mines in Johannesburg (Hay, 2014; Wylie, 2001). Farmers saw the drought as a potential stimulus to push Africans into waged work on their farms and through their farmers' associations vociferously confronted the NAD to convince it not to deliver food aid, which they saw as starving them of much-needed labour. So desperate were they that they formed a vigilance committee to attempt to block a trainload of grain from being delivered as aid, and black residents of the area mobilised to prevent them from doing so. In the end, reduced levels of food aid were delivered (Wylie, 2001). Food, in the context of pending famine, had become an object of political struggle between local magistrates of a racial state working to exercise their paternalistic imperatives, African populations resisting being forced to sell their labour power under oppressive conditions, and white farmers who sought African labour for accumulation in the context of developing agrarian capitalism.

In the Native Reserves, conditions were influenced by increasing participation in labour migration and state intervention in the lives of reserve residents. The question of labour was thus a central factor of agrarian resistance, which in practice related to the immediate material bases of social reproduction, principally land and agriculture, and was provoked by interventions seen to undermine rural capacities for social reproduction, like raising taxes and

interfering in processes of communal land allocation (Beinart, 1987). However, at the same time, access to wage work shaped the conditions of agrarian production as well. Proletarianisation was largely resisted when it was predicated on land dispossession and the removal of an agrarian base that provided respite from the conditions of labour market exploitation. Access to wage work also shaped agrarian production: as pure agrarian existence became squeezed, so proletarianisation could also bolster agrarian livelihoods by providing the resources for investment in agriculture (Bundy, 1988). Access to wage work was thus one of the spurs to the growth of a peasantry, and was a source of stratification and differentiation in the countryside, an issue to which the following section now turns.

Social Differentiation and Resistance

Colonial conquest instigated a shift in the causes of hunger from principally climatic and geographical, including periodic famines, to political and economic ones. Three key forces arising from colonial domination that were to shape the agrarian and nutritional fortunes of the African population of South Africa were land dispossession and consequent crowding into native reserves, the associated disruption of African social structures, and the terms under which a labour force was created to service colonial economic needs. However, the actual patterns and experiences of hunger and social deprivation amongst colonised societies also reflected the combination of pre-colonial forms of differentiation and new forms arising from economic and political changes instigated by colonial contact and subjugation. Colonial and apartheid power 'fragmented the circumstances and experiences of the oppressed population' (Mamdani, 2017: 272). As such, resistance to colonial state power were not just direct reactions to state interventions. Rather, forms of resistance in the evolving agrarian question, the dynamics that underpinned them, and who participated, were mediated by particular constellations of differentiation at particular moments within rural societies, related to class, chiefly power and gender.

One source of class formation and differentiation in African societies was contact with colonial markets. Merchant traders were often ahead of the colonial state's advance and, along with missionaries, were the first to establish links with local populations in Xhosa territory (Peires, 1993). This accelerated economic change as pre-capitalist African producers by the 1830s were starting to export an increasing amount of their produce to colonial markets through these local traders. Those traders in turn imported increasing amounts of manufactured foods, especially

blankets and agricultural implements, which contributed to increasing production levels and creating a class of peasant producers. In this way, pre-capitalist production relations of indigenous societies linked with demand on colonial markets, and merchant capital therefore also profited from those relations (Beinart and Bundy, 1980; Mafeje, 1981; 1985). However, these emerging patterns of market responses and accumulation also served to undermine chiefly power by destabilising the social sanctions that they exercised on accumulation (Bundy, 1972).

To turn to the Xhosa 'Cattle-Killing' again, such a rupture was a key material contradiction underpinning the movement's rise. As with the patterns of hunger, deprivation and resistance, the movement arose from an articulation of colonial power with the conditions of social suffering and internal differentiation in the social and economic structures of Xhosa society that arose in concert with colonial domination and market integration. The movement brought to the fore a new, almost violent, division in Xhosa society, which Peires (2015) argues reflected a deeper class divide in-formation and its relationship with chiefly power. The colonial system changed the relationship between chiefs and wealthy councillors[22] in the form of the money economy. Councillors' greater ownership of productive capacity allowed them to take the initial lead in participating in colonial markets, and their economic behaviour extended to internal Xhosa social relations through selling corn and meat portions of slaughtered cattle in exchange for money rather than the customary practice of sharing. This gave them sources of wealth that the chiefs could neither provide nor sell, and so it allowed the councillors to become more independent of them. Chiefly power had also been circumscribed by colonial authorities, who enhanced the role of councillors as key functionaries of indirect rule over the Xhosa people.

According to Peires (2015), this new economic behaviour and chiefs' declining social control reflected a new arrangement of social forces that was emerging on the eve of the 'Cattle-Killing'. On the one side were the wealthier who had more to gain from stronger ties with British authority and thus largely shunned the prophecy's injunctions and came to be known as the *amagogotya*, the unbelievers. On the other side, those who believed in and carried out the injunctions of the prophecy, the *amathamba*, were led by the chiefs, who now stood as brave defenders of the communal system, who, despite their often-exploitative profligacy, nonetheless guaranteed land and cattle to the Xhosa people. For this group, the communal system that relied on reciprocity and mutual aid for its reproduction was under threat from the

[22] Each chief had a set of councillors whose role was to guide him in his rule and to look after the wellbeing of the people.

new market-oriented behaviour that sold meat and corn rather than sharing it communally. Cattle and corn were thus the battlefield on which the conflict between the old order and the new played out.[23] Those who sought to restore the old social order were mainly those on whom colonial conquest had imposed suffering rather than opportunity, 'whose material subsistence was largely eroded by conquest, drought and lung sickness, and for whom Nongqawuse's prophecies were probably the last chance to avoid migrant labour and the final disintegration of the old way of life' (Peires, 2015: 358). In this way, the Cattle-Killing movement reflected resistance to dispossession and proletarianisation that arose out of the articulation of colonial conquest with incipient forms of social differentiation in Xhosa society.

Even after the final defeat of the Xhosa, the growth of a peasant class and consequent differentiation continued. After the 1860s, the Mfengu, on crown land granted to them by colonial authorities for their loyalty, and Thembu, Gcaleka and Ngcika Xhosa who had been placed in the Transkei region which later became a reserve, were able to adapt to their new circumstances and many flourished as peasant producers. As Bundy notes:

> Throughout the Ciskei, North-Eastern Cape and western Transkei, peasants gained a foothold as landholders and cultivators, selling grains, forage, stock, and animal products. They won prizes at agricultural shows in competition with white farmers, and a statistician noted in 1870 that 'taking everything into consideration, the native district of Peddie surpasses the European district of Albany in its productive powers' (Bundy, 1972: 374).

Combined with increased migrant labour, integration into the cash economy, reduced land availability, and exploitative practices by traders, differentiation also manifested in changes in dietary patterns. For the better-off in Pondoland, for example, diets were diversifying by the 1930s as those who earned cash through the sale of wool or from salaries could purchase consumer foods. The diets of the poor diminished, as crops like maize and butternut were still cultivated but the expansion of fields and pastures reduced much of the wild areas where things like wild spinaches were once gathered. Also, although redistributive norms and practices remained, they were eroding and commercial transactions between households increased (Wylie, 1989; Bundy, 1988).

[23] That there was an economic basis to the divide between the believers of the prophecy and the unbelievers is also supported by Bundy's (1988: 51) finding that 'most of those already substantially involved in production for the market held aloof from the destruction [by the movement].'

The growth of an African peasantry often also intersected with the state's 'civilising' objectives and missionary education, which produced further differentiation between better off and poorer peasants, as well as between so-called traditional 'reds' and a relative elite who were seen as more aligned to missionary education and 'civilisational' aspirations. This went together with state attempts to reduce and re-craft African political power (see Mamdani, 2017), which, in fragmenting the oppressed populations, in turn often produced differentiated responses along the lines mentioned above. For example, resistance to the Glen Grey Act, which sought to create councils in the Transkei as a form of 'self-rule' and to shift African political participation out of the colonial system, revealed divisions in the early 1900s between headmen, in whom the Act sought to concentrate greater political control over land and tax collection; and Christians, educated elite and commoners who organised to resist its provisions through public meetings, withholding of taxes, and drafting of petitions and protests (Bundy, 1987a). However, at the same time, Pondoland inhabitants were under pressure from taxation, cattle disease and adverse terms of trade and labour migration (Bundy, 1987b). Resistance to the system was therefore driven by ordinary people and poorer peasants, stimulated by the fact that they had little control over the authorities that enforced the restrictions, amidst rising mistrust towards the colonial administration and its increasing incursions into homestead life (Beinart, 1982). Further division between 'traditional' elites and ordinary people was revealed with the onset of cattle culling in the 1930s and subsequent resistance. As Govan Mbeki pointed out in 1938, overstocking resulted from the impoverishment and proletarianisation of Mpondo peasants, and the culling opened new opportunities for accumulation of cattle by chiefs, headmen and councillors (Bundy, 2012).

The interaction of colonialism and capitalist economic forces with the pre-colonial forms of women's subordination produced a variety of systems of female subordination through a 'patchwork quilt of patriarchies' (Bozzoli, 1983: 155). In turn, these gender dimensions also articulated with forms of differentiation to shape resistance to racial oppression. Women's gender roles could also lead to participation in resistance and influence the kinds of resistance. Sometimes this resistance was driven by challenging of their gender roles, and sometimes in defence of them. For example, in the early 1920s the Cape government attempted to implement certain provisions of the Glen Grey Act in the Herschel District of the Transkei, such as increasing the power of magistrates over land allocation. A division arose between the 'progressive' educated elite who were in favour of 'modernising' the land tenure system and both poorer and better-off farmers who depended both on climate and purchase of commodities

from local traders to survive, the relative balance depending on monetary income levels. As in the 1912 drought, when the next cyclical drought hit in 1919, the price of grain sold by traders increased while they remained stable in urban areas. Traders were already perceived as exploitative of local people, and so this sparked a boycott movement that also spread to Qumbu District in East-Griqualand, where women picketed trading stations and, armed with sticks, blocked customers from entering (Beinart, 1987). The movement was led mainly by better-off women, whose households spent more on commodities and sold more produce to the traders (and for which they had been receiving a low price), and so were the most affected by price increases in consumables. The organisational core of the protest movement emerged from the women's church groups, *manyano*. These worship groups also organised mutual aid amongst women and were part of the increasing political independence of women who resisted patriarchy in traditional systems as well as colonial racial oppression and exploitation (Beinart, 1987).

The example of the Xhosa 'Cattle-Killing' movement also illustrates the historical articulation of gender and resistance to racial oppression. Bradford (2000) and Guy (1991) suggest that changing gender and sexual relations laid important conditions for the 'Cattle-Killing' movement, which was also driven by gendered dynamics between Xhosa men, boys, women and girls and masculine imagery and desires, which interacted with specifically white, *male* colonial militarism that aimed to break up the Xhosa polity and push them north of the Kei River (Bradford, 2000). This perceived threat of war articulated with a crisis of Xhosa masculinity engendered by the loss of cattle, land and traditional authority, and led to the cessation of cultivation in anticipation that the British would destroy the crops as they had in previous wars. She argues that the revival of Xhosa masculinity through preparation for war, visions of specifically male warriors returning to restore the old social order, and the construction of a black nationalism that appealed to a wider black diaspora through warrior imagery, drove the activities of the movement – suspension of cultivation, destruction of grain stores and killing of cattle – that appeared to conflict with the direct material interests of a Xhosa peasantry (Bradford, 2000).

As the century turned, gender continued to play a role in shaping agrarian change and resistance. In the white farmlands of the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal labour tenancy and sharecropping were key forms through which a peasantry persisted in the first half of the nineteenth century. While black male peasants were the face of struggles to survive as

independent producers under constant pressure, as is illustrated in van Onselen's (2005) meticulous account of the life of a black Highveld sharecropper and his family, women's labour was crucial in the reproduction of peasant households and was similarly subject to intense patriarchal control (Yeni, 2021). Women sometimes resisted this control, through passive resistance in their labouring duties, and through forging small-scale economic activities that they could control, such as small livestock keeping (van Onselen, 2005). Furthermore, critical to the racialised class struggles on the farms from the 1930s, which fed into the rise of apartheid (discussed below) was that these struggles were not only between white farmers and peasant households. They were also between peasant household heads and sons, many of whom avoided having to work on deeply oppressive terms by leaving to find work in the cities, so also challenging the patriarchal control in the household that served those demands (Morris, 1976; Hay, 2014).

Traditional gender relations also positioned women to experience particular state interventions and economic changes in specific ways. As increasing numbers of men left the reserves as migrant labourers, the welfare burden on women increased, having to shoulder increased demands of production and household reproduction (Mafeje, 1988; 2003; Nyoka, 2020). This was made all the more difficult under conditions of land shortage and degradation, low incomes through wage remittances, and lack of resources for agricultural investment. The results in deteriorating child nutrition and health and their domestic responsibilities for feeding their families made them a target of the 'malnutrition syndrome' by NAD officials, nutritional scientists and development practitioners (Wylie, 2001).

Black rural life and resistance over the nineteenth and into the twentieth century was therefore structured by the dynamic relationship between colonial forms of power, the labour and peasant questions, social differentiation, and the demands of an evolving settler capitalism. It is within these shifting relationships that intersections among resistance, agriculture and food occurred. To understand the nature of such resistance one therefore needs to understand how it emerges from shifting material and political conditions, as well as the conscious forms of political organising that emerge out of them, their apprehensions of those conditions, and their differentiated social bases. In the twentieth century, structuring the agrarian question was the fluctuating unity between proletarian and agrarian, rural and urban, with consequent political struggles and imperatives.

The Agrarian Question and Struggle into the Twentieth Century

Although under conditions of increasing land restriction and subordinate labour terms, the relationship between wage labour and agrarian subjects was one that initially supported the growth of a peasantry in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The agrarian question of capital came into play as African farmers in the reserves and on white-owned land responded to an economic stimulus outside of agriculture, although for the latter such accumulation from below was deeply circumscribed by restrictions from 'above.' With the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly in 1867 and then of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, the mining sector, with its demand for food and cheap labour came to be a key driver of the dynamics of the agrarian question, and specifically in how it intensified a process of uneven development (Morris, 1972). Initially some black agriculturalists were able to benefit from the immense market for food that the opening of the gold fields created, but white farmers also sought more land and labour as they too responded to increasing demand. The mining industry also had a massive demand for labour and so the link between the agrarian question and national oppression tightened as the state stepped in to limit the role of independent African farmers, and dispossession and expropriation of African societies' natural resources intensified (Bundy, 1988; Keegan, 1986).

The 1913 Natives Land Act furthered the institutional and legal consolidation of the migrant labour system by seeking to change the terms on which Africans could participate in labour tenancy relationships on white-owned land and to create a more consistent labour supply for the mining industry (Beinart and Delius, 2015). Just as the rise of the market-oriented peasantry was a product of settler capitalism, so was its demise. Consequently, the rural African population would become integrated into the wider capitalist economy principally through labour migration rather than through petty commodity production, as the former came to be at the heart of South Africa's capital accumulation (May, 1987; Sitas, 1996). In turn, the immediate causes of hunger in the subsequent decades of the twentieth century arose from two key features of semi-proletarianisation through the migrant labour system – low wages and land shortage (Wylie, 1989). This encapsulated the nature of the country's agrarian question for the African majority: the confluence of racialised dispossession, capital accumulation in white hands, racialised class exploitation, and the social reproductive fallout on the shoulders of rural African women.

The mining sector's demand for cheap labour was thus key in consolidating a particular social and political subject that had significant political implications for the course of struggle against national oppression well near to the end of the twentieth century – the migrant worker, who, straddling the urban and the rural, embodied both (Mamdani, 2017). In this sense, migrant workers could be seen as a class subject that were 'the bearers of the dual character of labour' (Jacobs, 2018: 888) – peasant and proletarian, 'peasant-workers' (Mafeje, 1985; Mamdani, 2017). This meant that agrarian struggles often were not simply peasant in nature, but informed by proletarian experience; and rural agrarian relations often informed proletarian struggles. However, at the same time, these struggles were informed by a host of other 'mediations' (Mafeje, 1981: 138). This reflected that the migrant worker was not a singular political subject, but informed by historical, political and economic context; nor was it the only important political subject amongst the oppressed to consider in the apartheid context. The construction of a migrant subject also reflected how, as has been mentioned, colonial and apartheid power fragmented the experiences of oppressed populations.

Many of the rural revolts that occurred in the South African countryside between the 1920s and early 1960s were instigated by state interventions to shore up the migrant labour system by attempting to stem the ecological and social decline of the reserves arising out of overcrowding and overstocking relative to the restricted land available to Africans. However, the motivations for resistance and its forms were also often informed by the experiences of migrant workers. Firstly, land continued to play an important function in the material and cultural survival of migrant workers' rural households, and access to wage work provided a means to invest in livestock and production. Beinart and Bundy (1980) hence suggest that it was 'peasant migrants' who had the most to lose from betterment interventions, which threatened their access to land and resources that allowed them to engage in migrant labour somewhat on their own terms. Hence, interventions like those associated with rehabilitation and betterment schemes, which further undermined the rural social structure through reordering living and agricultural patterns, often provoked fierce organised resistance from the 1930s through to the early 1960s. The limited retention of land that underpinned the migrant labour system (Nyoka, 2020; Jacobs, 2018) thus meant that between the 1930s and early 1960s migrant labour was key in linking the politics of the agrarian question and peasant resistance with working class politics: migrant workers 'functioned as conveyor belts between urban activism and rural discontent' (Mamdani, 2017: 221)

Urban, working class experiences thus at times influenced rural protest. A factor in many of the rural revolts that took place in the 1940s and 1950s appears to be migrant workers experiences of the racially oppressive labour regime, where reserve land represented a final refuge from domination of their lives by white officials, employers and the market (Delius, 1990). Betterment and its associated cattle culling and land demarcation were thus 'seen as attempts to strip rural communities of their remaining economic props and it was believed that the agricultural officers and co-opted chiefs would usher the white state into every nook and cranny of rural life' (Delius, 1990: 8). In these cases urban organisational and political experience also helped fuel rural organisation. For example, the Zoutpansberg Cultural Association (ZCA) was formed by the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) member Alpheus Malivha and by the early 1940s was actively involved in organising open defiance to betterment in the Zoutpansberg in the Northern Transvaal. Malivha used the CPSA's newspaper, *Nkululeko*, as a platform to communicate with and politically organise rural dwellers through the use of a particular style of writing in Tshivenda language that was grounded in the cultural sensibilities of his audience (Nemutanzhela, 1993). Thus although the party structure to some extent presented an institutional node for ideological and political training and experience for migrant workers, which as a consequence fed into rural peasant organising (see Delius, 1993; Hirson, 1977), such organising did not feature prominently in its overall political concerns during this period (Lodge, 1985).

Urban working class politics was also often constituted in its connection with the relations and conditions around the rural homestead. In the instance of the great black mineworkers strike of 1946, Dunbar Moodie (1986) argues that mineworkers on the Highveld predominantly approached their work and arrangements of labour on the mines through a moral economy[24] informed by the cultural outlooks, expectations and networks of a rural peasantry. The workers thus still had perspectives centred on their rural homes and their presence on the mines was motivated by a need for the wages that strongly determined the conditions of their families and agriculture in the reserves. A drought hit much of the countryside from 1945-46, causing increased rural distress (including a famine in Pondoland) and placed greater pressure on wages to secure rural needs. The 1940s also saw periodic food shortages in South Africa (that also

[24] By 'moral economy', Moodie (1986: 1-2) refers to the 'implicit contract' that, in addition to the explicit written contract binding black miners, was defined by more moral parameters, of '"mutually acceptable elements within a system of political domination and economic appropriation' accepted by both workers and local mine management, and implied certain obligations on the part of mine officials.

precipitated other working class struggles, discussed below), and so mine workers would often not receive their expected rations of food. This decrease in food, however, was not compensated for by increased wages, feeding into outrage at the disruption of the moral economy, which Moodie (1986) argues drove the strike. The rural networks that connected workers within and across mine shafts were the key organising basis of the strikes, and so Moodie (1986) shows how the workers' rural, agrarian circumstances and associated networks significantly shaped the migrant workers' responses to their conditions of industrial exploitation.

Expectations embedded in the rural social order also influenced other urban struggles, like the women's attacks on municipal beer halls in Cato Manor in Natal in 1959. Yawitch (1979) examines the women's often forceful actions in response to state attempts to end women's beer brewing activities and replace them with those of the Municipal Corporation. She argues that, on top of socio-economic hardship and poverty, the women's actions were also a reaction to the effects of stanching part of their social roles that were embedded in the rural social order from which they came – of brewing beer for men – which, in a context of urban poverty, provided them with an economic reprieve. However, Yawitch (1979) also argues that due to continued strong links with rural homes and the hardships that betterment was imposing on the agrarian economy, the example set by Cato Manor women prompted rural women to act as well. The first actions near the town of Harding, where women disrupted infrastructure associated with conservation schemes, set off a chain of women-led actions against compulsory cattle dipping, passes, and attempts to force them to undertake unpaid labour of afforestation work and filling of dipping tanks, that spread through rural Natal and into some areas of the Eastern Cape. These examples convey the sense that class struggles around the agrarian question were shaped by the varying dimensions of national oppression and challenged its effects. This raises the question of the extent to which rural struggles (with their connections with urban working class struggles) were actively linked to a national political confrontation with the economic and political structures of racial oppression that were engendering land dispossession, poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

The Agrarian Question and National Liberation Movements

As Mamdani (2017) has pointed out, colonial and apartheid power fragmented the circumstances and experiences of the oppressed. Indeed, the evolution of the South African

agrarian question under conditions of national oppression, and the associated rural-urban connections crafted through the migrant labour system, gave rise to multiple racially oppressed social subjects: permanent rural residents/peasants, mostly male migrant workers and their peasant wives, fully urbanised workers, an indigenous petty bourgeoisie, those integrated into the structures of power organised around Native Authorities, and so on. As shown earlier, these social subjects articulated with each other in varying ways across struggles. But as Mamdani further points out, such fragmentation is also not simply an accomplished fact, but to overcome such fragmentation in order to confront the source of oppression is a question of political agency and organisation. So, in the context of national oppression, how did the movements organised around the national question fair in this regard?

On their own, the rural uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s failed to shift wider economic and political structures. They often remained 'parochial, disjointed, sporadic, and isolated' (Bundy, 1984: 20), succumbing to state repression, the dictates of agricultural cycles, and the backwardness of communication and other technology compared to the state (Beinart and Bundy, 1980). However, Drew (1996) suggests that because of the convergence of economic and political oppression, where local chiefs and elites benefitted through accumulation opportunities, differentiating them from those who fought against state interventions, these rural struggles were in fact the base of the national democratic struggle in the 1950s. Indeed, at the time there were those such as Govan Mbeki (1964), a member of both the CPSA and ANC, who felt that rural protests were capable of being more sustained than urban protest and so linking the urban and the rural was a critical basis for national political struggle (Drew, 2011; Mbeki, in Bundy, 2012). However, Mbeki was to be disappointed. While recognising the importance of the land question, the agrarian question did not feature centrally in the broad liberation movement's conceptualisation of the national question and, following from this, it failed to develop a programme of rural resistance based on land and production (Levin and Weiner, 1991; Levin and Solomon, 1997). This included a consistent failure to grasp and support sustained organisation and political power that the migrant – the peasant-worker – potentially represented through their embodiment of the rural-urban connection.

The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) undertook extensive rural organising in the 1920s around the labour question and built a mass base amongst labour tenants especially in Natal and the Eastern Transvaal. Its ideology, however, was 'agrarian nationalist' (rather than class-centred) and it did not extend its activities to the land question faced by peasants in

the reserves (Bundy, 1984: 28; Beinart and Bundy, 1987). It collapsed in 1929 before it could make political and practical shifts on the basis of class struggles over land (Lodge, 1983). Between 1945 and 1958, the All Africa Convention (AAC), which was affiliated to the urban-based and numerically small Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), was guided by the importance of the peasant struggles in the reserves to the national revolutionary struggle. Largely spearheaded by IB Tabata (1945), it linked with struggles against rehabilitation in the Transkei but by the 1950s its presence had declined (Bundy, 1984).

The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) had a growing black membership in the 1920s and its congress in 1928 adopted the Native Republic Thesis, which posited that the majority of the South African population was the black peasantry who faced struggles under white control of land and that they therefore constituted 'the basic moving force of the revolution in alliance with and under the leadership of the working class' (cited in Drew, 1996). This conclusion implied the party supporting the organisation of the peasantry as well as farm workers. However, while a few individual CPSA activists undertook work in the reserves between the 1930s and 1950s, where they realised the potential of social protest to challenge state power (Drew, 1996), the party's overall organisational involvement in the rural areas[25] on the basis of the Native Republic Thesis was stunted by a number of internal factors that reinforced an urban bias in their perspective on the class struggle. These included the bias of the party's founders towards the proletariat as the only revolutionary class, and misgivings amongst many members of the emphasis on race over class in the Thesis (Bundy, 1984). The party's membership plummeted in the 1930s but drastically increased again in the 1940s due to its extensive urban organising around bread-and-butter issues (which we will return to below in relation to the agrarian question), but was banned in 1950.

Govan Mbeki had undertaken extensive organising work in the Transkei in the 1940s and played a significant role in the region's shift from being 'politically in mid-night slumber' (Mbeki, quoted in Bundy, 2012: 62) to a high level of organisation in the form of the Transkei Organised Bodies (TOB). Women participated on an equal footing to men in the TOB and it included farmers' organisations, cooperative societies, Vigilance Associations, two women's organisations, welfare societies, and a trade union. However, twice during the 1940s when it

[25] I use the broader term 'rural areas' here rather than reserves because although as mentioned a few CPSA activists worked in the reserves, the South African peasantry was not only concentrated there but, as discussed earlier in the chapter, also on the commercial farms as labour tenants and sharecroppers.

had built up critical mass over campaigns to boycott political institutions aimed at limiting the political enfranchisement of Africans and the associated tightening hold over land by native authorities, at the point when it then needed to link to national campaigns it was left stranded by the ANC and its reticence (keeping in mind that in the 1940s the ANC was stilled wedded to an elite-driven legalist approach to agitation and was somewhat wary of mass popular organisation) (Mamdani, 2017; Gumede, 2005). As a result, in 1948 the TOB disassociated from the ANC and affiliated with the AAC, under IB Tabata (Bundy, 2012).

The Congress movement instead laid the beginnings of its mass base from the 1940s on a newly forged political constituency that linked the working class and petit bourgeoisie, by focusing on immediate issues affecting them in their urban settings (Scanlon, 2007; Bundy, 1984). The ANC lacked a mass base and it was largely dormant in terms of any sort of popular organisation. However, based on the Native Republic Thesis and the need to confront the national question, the CPSA had shifted closer to the ANC. Whereas it focused mainly on building trade unions in the 1930s, by the 1940s it had shifted to also focusing on wider political issues such as universal suffrage and community-focused activism (Lodge, 2019). The CPSA's extensive organising in relation to urban problems of housing, transport, poor living conditions and food access laid an important basis for the ANC to continue building the national liberation movement through more popular methods in the 1950s, after the CPSA had been banned in 1950 (Delius, 1993; Sapire, 1993). One of the key areas in which the CPSA made an impact was in urban food struggles.

Food as a focus of organised class struggle arose from a particular historical conjuncture, and was politically connected by those like the CPSA to urban class struggles rather than the agrarian question. The 1940s to early 1950s saw an upsurge in both urban and rural class struggle as growing immiseration in the reserves drove increasing numbers of people, especially women, into urban centres (Walker, 1982; Lodge, 1985). An even greater number of people were flowing into the cities from the white-owned farmlands (Morris, 1976). From the 1930s class struggles were intensifying between labour tenants and mostly less wealthy white farmers, who faced a chronic labour shortage due to higher wages paid by the mining and manufacturing industries, and so sought to unlock greater labour power from labour tenants. This intensified the migration towards the urban centres as members of labour tenant families, especially young men, sought to escape the oppressive labour relationships that farmers were attempting to forge

(and also intensified the crisis being experienced in white agriculture) (Morris, 1976).[26] In these urban areas, black workers had to contend with low wages,[27] poor living conditions and housing, high transport costs and rising retail prices (Walker, 2012). Food prices were rising the sharpest, aggravated by food shortages and chaotic food distribution (Sapire, 2003), which contrasted with the control over pricing and distribution that commercial farmers had won with the Marketing Act of 1937 (Wylie, 2001).

Given prevailing gendered divisions of labour, women were at the coalface of these conditions, especially around food, and so they were at the forefront of organising bodies to confront the state and food retailers. In response to initial demands over food prices, the government organised food vans to drive into suburbs and sell basic foodstuffs at lower prices. Out of the long queues that mostly women had to wait in to access food from these vans, they formed bodies like the Consumer Vigilance Council and, later, the Women's Food Committee in Cape Town and Food Policy Councils in Johannesburg and Durban, to push for deeper reforms in the food system (*Guardian*, 1943a; 1944). They also organised marches and direct confrontations with food distributors who they suspected were hoarding food in order to benefit from higher prices (Guardian, 1943c; d; Walker, 1982). The CPSA was involved in these structures and campaigning around the food question, which was linked to working class distributional demands such as calling for state intervention to lower food prices, confronting the power of the control boards and their producer interests, drastic action against food monopolies withholding food supplies, and a Ministry of Food to coordinate food production and distribution (*Guardian*, 1943b; e; f).

The politicisation of food and the structures of the food system was thus an axis for urban working class mobilisation in the 1940s that, as mentioned, laid an important basis for the national liberation movement, and especially for many previously non-political women to begin to craft a substantial place in the formal liberation struggle (Walker, 1982). However, together with the poor focus on rural class struggles by those such as the CPSA, it could be suggested that politically connecting the question of food to working class distributional demands, but not

[26] Various aspects of Morris's (1976) account of the rise of capitalism in South African agriculture, especially its timing, have been critiqued by Mafeje (1981), Keegan (1986), Bradford (1990) and others, but as Freund (1987) notes, they did not challenge the existence of class struggles on the farms and their relation to the rise of apartheid, which is what concerns me here.

[27] Even though the wage share of total national output increased for black unskilled and semi-skilled labour during the Second World War, but from a very low base (Nattrass, 1993).



Figure 6: A CPSA campaigning poster reflecting the demands of the various food committees. Source: Bickford-Smith and Van Heyningen (1999: 106).

to the agrarian question, was part of consolidating the national liberation struggle around the urban black working and petit bourgeois classes. Yet at the time, food and hunger remained deeply implicated in the politics of the agrarian question: peasant farmers in the form of labour tenants were fighting intense class struggles with white farmers; hunger and malnutrition persisted in the reserves, which further informed the cultural racism of the state's malnutrition syndrome that fed into interventions like betterment, as well as, according to Wylie (2001), the ideological framework of apartheid; and hunger and malnutrition were part of the fragile conditions of survival in the reserves that instigated such fierce resistance to these state interventions seen to further hardship. In this sense, it appears that both the ANC and the CPSA politically de-linked food and hunger from the agrarian question, reflecting its urban proletarian and petit-bourgeois bias. The political relevance of connecting agrarian class struggle to a wider national political movement was reflected in the rise of apartheid and the simultaneous consolidation of the migrant labour and capitalist agro-food systems.

A number of factors thus fed into the rise of apartheid as a conjunctural outcome, key of which included the agrarian question in the form of struggles by white farmers to secure their right to exploit black labour as a basis of accumulation; the role of hardship in the Reserves that both instigated resistance and created a flow of Africans into the cities; the consequent increasing

urban black political assertiveness in the urban areas (Stanwix, 2012); and the confluence with Afrikaner nationalism that offered apartheid as a political solution (Mafeje, 1981).

Agrarian struggles nonetheless continued after the rise of apartheid in 1948. Betterment policies had sparked resistance and rebellion since the 1930s and their continuation as 'rehabiliation' schemes in the 1950s continued to spark many rebellions in the reserves (Khan, 1997). They were further intensified by the implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act after 1955,[28] which placed greater control over life and land in the hands of chiefs. This included the revolt in Sekhukuneland in the North-western Transvaal in 1958 (Delius, 1990) and the largest and most sustained rural uprising, the Pondo Revolt of 1960-61 (see Mbeki, 1964; Turok, 1960; Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2011). The consolidation of the migrant labour system after 1948 kept migrants' links with the reserves alive and so, with their rural conditions of social reproduction and respite from apartheid labour control being further restricted, they played a key role in carrying urban militancy into rural revolt (Mamdani, 2017). However, although the ANC began giving improved attention to rural struggles by the later 1950s, by this time the national liberation bodies were politically ill-equipped to incorporate the lessons of rural resistance into their organisations and their programmes remained poorly articulated with the demands of various sections of the rural population, including migrant workers (Bundy, 1984).

Two further connected factors undermined the prospects of the liberation movement politically connecting the national question with the agrarian question. Firstly, the ability of the ANC to openly organise in the 1960s was stanched by its and the Pan African Congress' (PAC) banning after the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960s. As a result of the banning, secondly, the ANC adopted a new strategy. Rather than finding new ways of supporting popular organising, it chose to adopt an approach based on external and military coordination by its exiled leadership (Friedman, 2012; Lodge, 2019). This included the formation of the party's armed wing in 1961 aimed at initiating a guerrilla war in the country, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Govan Mbeki pressured MK's High Command, based on his analysis of the Pondo Revolt, on the importance of peasant struggles and linking them with those of workers, and he and Joe Slovo were tasked with developing a discussion document to inform its first strategy, *Operation Mayibuye.* Drawing on the lessons of the Pondo Revolt and the successful Cuban and Algerian guerrilla wars, a key proposal was that of rural guerrilla struggle (Drew, 2011). It was heavily criticised

[28] The Act was passed in 1951, but only implemented after 1955 (Bundy, 2012).

in movement structures for not taking sufficient stock of the obstacles to such an approach, but in any case the strategy was never implemented after key leaders of the ANC underground were arrested in 1963 (Simpson, 2019).

National Politics and the Consolidation of the Agro-food System

As a result of state repression and the weakening of the national liberation movement, the 1960s were years of relative political calm, as well as of economic boom. By the early part of the decade, rural class struggles associated with land, patterns of social reproduction and the ordering of rural power had been all but defeated. For agri-food and industrial capital, the agrarian question had largely been resolved in its favour, on the basis of racial oppression. The entrenchment of the migrant labour system through state power and elaborate legislation secured the black labour supply for capitalist industries like mining, manufacturing and farming. A (white) capitalist farming sector was consolidated, achieved through the modernisation of agriculture and the elaboration of powerful food producer and commodity-based marketing institutions that transferred the surplus from agriculture to consuming classes, industry and export markets (Bernstein, 2013). The relationship of much of the black urban *and* rural[29] classes of labour to this agri-food regime came to be through food consumption. This would be mediated by wages and food prices, the latter largely regulated by a complex range of state interventions in production and distribution (Stanwix, 2012).

This modernised agri-food system was thus achieved by a process that combined labour and racial oppression. In a process that Marcus (1989) terms the 'modernisation of super-exploitation',[30] the technical modernisation of commercial agriculture through mechanisation and the forced conversion of the labour tenant form to the wage labour form expelled millions of Africans into the reserves (and later, homelands/Bantustans): of the 3.5 million people forcibly removed between 1960 and 1982, documented by the Surplus Peoples Project, about 1.1 million were from white-owned farmlands (Platzky and Walker, 1985: 10). The reserves thus addressed the labour question as places to dump its excess supply after the economy shifted to a labour surplus one in the 1960s. Moving to consolidate the reserves as semi-independent

[29] Forced de-agrarianisation and the increased dumping of populations in the Reserves meant that by 1967, the average production of food in the reserves as a proportion of food requirements was only 26% (compared to around 50% until 1953) (Simkins, 1981: 264). Rural dwellers were thus overall also increasingly dependent on the dominant agri-food system for consumption.
[30] No page number cited as this is the title of Marcus' book.

homelands also addressed the racial question by re-directing African citizenship and political rights claims out of 'white' South Africa and into separate, homeland state structures organised according to ossified ethnic identities (Mafeje, 1981; Ferguson, 2006).

Where do we locate the role of political organisation related to the national and agrarian questions in this shifted context? While this was happening, the locus of political resistance from below was shifting elsewhere, which was grounded in a number of trends that signalled an apparent divergence between land, the agri-food system, and political resistance. Firstly, de-agrarianisation continued, although not in a simple linear fashion and so subsistence agriculture endured in varying levels in the different homelands. Overall, there was an increasing shift towards fully proletarianised workers, with growing numbers of workers seeing themselves as proletarians, rather than farmers, working to fund rural homesteads (Moodie, 1991). Secondly, at the same time, while forced de-agrarianisation was historically a tool of proletarianisation, structural shifts in the economy from the 1960s created a surplus labour question. Dealing with this question involved attempted industrial development as well as agricultural and rural development schemes in the Bantustans (Tapscott, 1995). A politically-crafted agrarian question arose in the Bantustans: to ensure capitalism takes hold of agrarian and social relations, agrarian accumulation for a few, and industrial growth, in order to solve the racially-circumscribed labour question. This resolution was to be addressed by the development project, through industrial and agricultural development schemes (Tapscott, 1995). Most investment in the Bantustans was therefore large-scale and relatively capital-intensive. These projects also benefitted more prosperous, commercially-oriented farmers and so was a lever for some level of differentiation in agriculture (Levin and Weiner, 1991; Schirmer, 2015). Land and agriculture thus became less an object of resistance within the Bantustans and more one of the state-directed development project.

Thirdly, by the 1970s it seemed that the rural and the agrarian question were no longer subjects of struggle in relation to the national democratic struggle. However, land struggles outside of the Bantustans continued into the 1980s, against black spot removals, incorporation into Bantustans, and by labour tenants on white-owned farms. For example, by 1983 475 000 people had been removed from such 'black spots' (Claassens, 1991: 8). Yet by the time of the 1980s land rights NGOs were the only current in the broad democratic movement that focused on land questions, by supporting communities in their resistance to forced removals (Mngxitama, 2005). The locus of the national democratic struggle was thus elsewhere. After the relative calm

of the 1960s, organised national resistance was revived by the 1973 Durban strikes, in which a key segment was migrant workers, and spread to the Reef and the Cape into 1974. This was followed by the 1976 Soweto Uprising, which reignited the anti-apartheid struggle in the townships. Thus through the 1970s and 1980s, the locus of anti-apartheid resistance was grounded in citizenship and worker rights, through township civics, trade unions and the United Democratic Front (UDF). Even in the Bantustans, often connected to the UDF as well, struggles were now mostly organised by students and the main issues that were elevated to the level of political demands were nationalist and modernist, centred on education (Beinart, 2012; Levin, 1996).

However, despite these patterns, agrarian conditions under particular circumstances still had a notable bearing on national politics. This was illustrated in the continued rural-urban connections embodied in the migrant worker: ethnic rule in the rural Bantustans and the varied agrarian bases of migrant worker reproduction continued to have bearing on the politics of the national question (Mamdani, 2017). However, the political lacuna that the urban bias of labour, youth and township struggles for national liberation reflected would have devastating consequences, ultimately leading to the civil war in KwaZulu in the late 1980s and on the East Rand in the early 1990s. A complex host of factors combined to produce the violence, but for the sake of this chapter we here focus on the aspects that particularly illuminate the continued relevance of the agrarian question to the national question at the time and, in this case, the explosive political consequences of not comprehending and acting on it politically.[31]

As Mamdani (2017) points out, being the link between despotic ethnic rule in the rural Bantustans and urban conditions, the political role of the migrant worker was contradictory – how the differences between ethnicities and between rural and urban were translated into political life was a matter of political organisation. The anti-apartheid struggle was brought back to life by the strike waves that started in Durban in 1973 and spread to the reef and the Cape into 1974. Migrant workers were at the forefront of the strikes. Unions resisted attempts by the state, based on the recommendations of the subsequent Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions, to continue to drive a wedge between urban-based workers and migrant workers

[31] For the purpose of illustrating the arguments of this section, I approach migrant worker politics and the national question through the lens of the Transvaal and KwaZulu experiences. It should be noted that the role of Xhosa migrant workers from the Eastern Cape in the trade union movement of the Western Cape is also worthy of its own treatment in relation to the national question – see Friedman (1987).

(Forrest, 2011). However, this division nonetheless happened in the 1980s, largely as a result of two important factors. Firstly, the economic boom from the 1960s had transformed the economy and consequently the nature of work. As the industry sought to up-skill and downsize the workforce, it was the unskilled, mostly migrant workers who lost out. The 1980s were therefore one of economic devastation for many of them (Sitas, 1996).

The second factor was largely a matter of political agency in response to these economic conditions. The new leadership coming to the fore of COSATU in the 1980s was mainly urban-based, many having come from the black consciousness, student and township movements. What Mamdani (2017: 247) calls a 'political differentiation' was thus taking place in the labour force, between permanently urbanised, better educated workers, and the less skilled migrant workers: unions no longer organised in hostels as they once had and migrant workers – the working class political link between the national and agrarian questions – were being politically marginalised in the anti-apartheid struggle. Even when trade unions forged closer links between workplace and community struggles in the 1980s (Webster, 1988), the notion of community tended to be limited to the township. Growing alignment between the labour movement and township student mobilising increasingly marginalised migrant workers (Mafeje, 1978b). Those such as Forrest (2011) suggest that the unions failed to consider migrant worker members from the angle of the life worlds they occupied, the totality of how they were socially reproduced as human beings that spanned the workplace, the hostel and the rural home and, in the context of increasing economic insecurity, their consequent political priorities. Rapidly declining conditions in the homelands as more people were being dumped in them, the relaxation of influx control in 1986 and the consequent exodus of people into the cities, and historical tensions between township and migrant hostel dwellers, fed into conditions in the hostels that provided grounds for an upswing in militancy of migrant workers in Natal in the late 1980s and then the East Rand in the early 1990s (Bonner and Ndima, 1999; Sitas, 1996).

Whereas union organisations had previously managed to organise migrant workers' priorities around a progressive agenda based on working class and black unity, their networks that organised life in the hostels and linked them with their rural homes came to assume a greater importance in channelling their discontent. According to Bonner and Ndima (1999), this had particular bearing for Zulu migrants: in contrast to migrant workers from many other Bantustans where due to their economic and ecological collapse more families were moving to the cities, those from KwaZulu had been able to maintain comparably better agriculture and homestead

bases, so keeping their families there. At the same time, however, pressures on the social reproduction of the homestead were increasing due to dumping of over two million people in the homeland under black spot removals, consequent overcrowding and social dislocation, violence, intensified betterment planning, and increased theft of livestock. This placed Zulu migrant men under particular strain and crystallised the importance of a foothold in the city for reproducing the homestead, captured in the phrase 'A Zulu works for home' (Bonner and Ndima, 1999: 2).[32] Calls by the ANC to convert hostels into family units and accommodation for returning ANC exiles threatened their hostel base, and bolstered their defensive footing (Mamdani, 2017).

The appropriation and construction of meaning by migrant workers during a time of socio-economic devastation, political change and resistance fervour was provided by rural, ethnic forms of solidarity and organisation in the hostels. The 'rural in the urban' (Mamdani, 2017: 219) found expression in ways that Inkatha used to appropriate migrant workers into a counter-revolutionary, regressive expression of working class organisation. In the resulting violence, union leaders and members, township dwellers and civics came under attack from Inkatha-aligned migrant hostel dwellers, which, together with the years of spiralling violence, led to the deaths of over 20 000 people (Kaufman, 2017: 501).

As Mamdani (2017) argues, this bloody period in the dying days of apartheid had a material basis, as described here, but was not inevitable. Rather, it was contingent on how political movements at the time comprehended and responded to the situation that emerged from these forces. The failure in this regard had devastating consequences in terms of violence and lives lost; but this political aspect to the agrarian question and its relation to the national question also had its bearing on the course of national liberation. Firstly, the labour movement had made significant strides in overcoming ethnic identity and forging black and worker unity in the 1980s (Forrest, 2011). But the Achilles heel in maintaining this unity, it seems, was the failure to connect with the bearers of the proletarian-agrarian character of labour – migrant workers – in ways that both attended to their marginalisation and understood them and their priorities as

[32] We should also not lose sight of the gender dimension to this contestation. Those like Mosoetsa (2011) and Lakhani (2014) have shown the gendered contestation over social reproduction in the household (both urban and rural) under conditions of economic marginalisation in more recent contexts, while those such as Ngwane (2003) and Ferguson (1994) showed the gendered contestation in the rural household in the context of labour migrancy, such as in regard to the investment of wages in cattle, locking money up that could otherwise be used for more immediate household social reproduction needs borne largely by women. Declining conditions in Zululand could thus also be seen to further increase 'women's' claims on migrant 'men's' wages.

constructed between the social reproduction in the rural sphere and their urban locations of employment. As such, as Sitas (1996: 247) contends, 'Black solidarity began to be dislodged when urban struggles became the priority on South Africa's agenda, and migrants' homestead preoccupations were frequently ignored.'

Secondly, those such as Forrest (2011) argue that the violence played a key role in limiting the transformative extent of the democratic transition by weakening the social forces capable of advancing such an agenda. Unions and their members were key targets of attack in the violence and so those such as National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), one of the largest and most deeply organised of the trade unions, had to put a huge amount of energy into defending their members and the national democratic struggle, which detracted from its ability to push a deeper socialist agenda. This is not to suggest that the 1994 transition would have otherwise realised socialism, but that given the key role that the labour movement played in national liberation, having a strongly organised socialist force could have deepened the agenda around what Mkandawire (2009) calls the social question in the struggle over the national question. Similarly, the depth of political consciousness and organising amongst township civics and youth movements was limited by the descent of many of them into the cycles of violence. Forrest (2011: 415) therefore contends that, in the aftermath of the violence,

> the state failed, in the narrow political sense, in its attempts to defeat the ANC, yet it succeeded in demobilising the unions and other organs of civil society organisationally and ideologically. This was its fundamental, long-term, counter revolutionary success. The power to effect a more fundamental transition was denied the working class.

Thirdly, this was coupled with the curbing of popular power in the transition 'from above', from within the national liberation movement. As ANC exiles returned after unbanning in 1990 and the party was positioned at the head of the internal anti-apartheid forces, Friedman (2012: 24) suggests that it sought to channel popular mobilisation and organisation 'into paths which ensured its subordination to the movement and its elite'. Friedman further suggests that the resulting gap between the leadership and those they represented affected the nature of the transition to democracy and the trajectory of government since 1994, in which millions of citizens tend to be excluded from a say in decision making.

A further backdrop to these political dynamics was that during the 1980s the commercial agriculture sector entered a structural crisis. By this time the dominant agro-food system was

highly concentrated, constituted by the complex system of control boards and farmers' cooperatives that economically favoured commercial farmers as a political constituency through stable prices, subsidies and cheap credit (Marcus, 1989). The racially-delineated support, over-capitalisation and intensification of production alongside the induced deprivation of a large majority of the population produced a system riddled with contradictions, like the over-production of food relative to profit-making requirements and destruction of surpluses or, most commonly, the export of surpluses at a loss while hunger was endemic to much of the population (Marcus, 1989). South Africa's economic crisis of the 1980s reflected in the crisis of accumulation in the agricultural sector, with low interest rates having led to over-capitalisation and unproductive investments, declining terms of trade between agriculture and other sectors, and the worst drought since the 1930s (De Klerk, 1991).

Responding to the crisis, historic forms of power and control in the agro-food system built up through a racial capitalism were preserved and consolidated in the processes of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. A re-articulation of race and class power in the agro-food system was set in motion through a new wave of restructuring of the agricultural production and marketing system from above (De Klerk, 1991). Most of the large agricultural cooperatives repositioned themselves through and after the transition period to maintain white Afrikaner dominance in agriculture through their corporatisation, ideological redefinition, and the crafting of new political relationships with the state, which allowed them to convert the accumulated value of decades of state support into privatised market power (Bernstein, 1996c).

In relation to the agri-food system, then, by the early 1990s the political balance of power was in favour of capital: the ANC government in waiting did not have a robust policy approach to the land and agrarian questions (nor was there a broad constituency specifically mobilised around this issue), in contrast to capital, which organised itself to impact the broader rural development path and positioned itself for economic reforms (Marcus, 1999; Bernstein, 2013). Thus within a wider on-going process of neoliberal reform of the economy since the 1980s (Gelb, 1991), and the national political locus of struggle elsewhere, the agro-food sector was also able to respond to its structural crisis with relatively little political constraint. Privatisation of state agricultural bodies and cooperatives, deregulation and liberalisation allowed them to preserve and expand their racially delineated economic interests. As a result concentration increased throughout the agro-food system in the post-apartheid period, with the balance of power shifting towards corporate retailers and brand owners and away from consumers and

producers (Greenberg, 2010), consolidating the 'unjust, unsustainable, unsafe, unkind' (Cock, 2016: 4) food system, aspects of which the formations examined in the next chapter variously respond to, but out of the political backdrop described in this chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the historical intersections between food, resistance, the agrarian question and the national question in South Africa. It showed how agrarian resistance in this regard was shaped by struggles over labour, land and social reproduction in a wider context of racialised consolidation of class interests. It also showed how forms of differentiation within oppressed groups played a role in shaping the actual direction of struggles and their outcomes, and so a contingent and conjunctural history in which their outcomes were also shaped by political agency and decisions. The resulting overall class defeats of struggles over labour and land under national oppression laid the basis for the emergence and consolidation of agro-food capital. Peasant resistance in the reserves in the 1950s and early 1960s, however, had little bearing on production in the emerging dominant agro-food system, and the populations that were being increasingly pooled in the developing Bantustans and urban townships became ever more dependent on that agro-food system through consumption. More direct agrarian class oppression in the productive structure of the agro-food system came to be primarily experienced by farm workers outside of the reserves on white farmlands (Du Toit, 1994).

However, the chapter also showed that, reflecting South Africa's history of partial proletarianisation and the maintenance of the rural as an element of working class life, the political problematic of the agrarian question may not have been rooted in rural peasant uprisings, but aspects of the agrarian question were still articulated to the politics of the national question largely through the migrant worker. However, the 1980s also reflected the consistent historical lacuna in the main national liberation movements in both understanding the specific connections between the agrarian and national questions and acting politically upon them.

The initiatives examined in the next chapter can thus be understood against the backdrop of the history, limits and contradictions of the politics of national liberation. What came to be the dominant political thrust in the country, largely embodied by the leadership of the ANC, attracted and organised people's energies and imaginations in the fight against racial domination. However, such a politics largely left the agrarian question unattended to and,

notwithstanding ongoing localised land and agrarian struggles, national agrarian political organisation was a missing feature of the democratisation struggle and breakthrough. At the same time, the dominant thrust of politics aimed at resolving the national question and that had attracted the minds and energies of so many, was largely centred on state power and democratisation, and arguably lacked a deeper vision of popular freedom and liberation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012; Jara, 2013); what might also be explained as a limited approach to the social question. Indeed, that force is also now also caught up in the contradictions of state power and maintaining hegemony in neoliberal conditions (Marais, 2011; Hart, 2013). Thus in contrast to movements like the MST in Brazil, which emerged from agrarian mobilisation in the struggle for national democracy (Fernandes, 2015), the alternatives examined in the following chapter emerge less from a tradition of agrarian political struggle in national politics, and reflect the contradictions of national liberation. However, while the dominant agro-food system today is highly developed and concentrated in favour of capital, we will see in the next chapter that agrarian conceptions have still predominantly shaped food sovereignty-related organising in South Africa, reflecting historical persistence in other thrusts of agrarian organisation outside but also at times marginally connected to the dominant thrust of national liberation politics. These responses and alternatives can be understood through the shifting dynamics between politics, land, labour, production and social reproduction in the post-apartheid period.

Chapter 5: *Food Movements Unite!*? Collective Organising from Below in the Food System[33]

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how food historically intersected with the politics of popular resistance under national oppression, against the backdrop of the dominant agro-food system emerging out of the evolving agrarian question. The purpose of that chapter was to point to the interplay of structural forces and the agency of social actors that produced the conditions in which initiatives from below developed. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an account of the contemporary 'food movement', the formations through which food politics from below are currently organised in South Africa and with which food sovereignty as a global idea, practice and political project articulates.

The range of practices and forms of organising, however, also complicate the notion of a 'food movement', and thus my initial use of it in inverted commas. The 'movement' is nascent, inchoate and politically varied. The organisations and initiatives examined in this chapter include those whose *raison de'etre* is food, where food is the direct object around which collective organisation occurs, but also organisations who attempt to advance approaches based on the foundational concern of the transformation of social power relations, where food politics is an interconnected element of their programme. I thus use the term 'food movement' to refer to the variegated forms of organising and collective action from below that consciously respond to the social and ecological contradictions of the South African agro-food system, in which food and agriculture is an object of political action, and which seek to transform the food system in varying ways, from farm worker organisation struggling for better wages and living conditions to developing alternative food networks (AFNs). Many forms of organising exist at different levels, from organising in communities to initiatives working on food system governance. However, given that I am coming from a movement and a class perspective, my concern is primarily with forms of organising and initiatives that more directly involve the organisation of members of popular classes.

[33] The words in italics are the title of Holt-Giménez (2011), *Food Movements Unite! Strategies to Transform our Food Systems.*

I do this by analysing the relationship between existing organising in civil society related to the contradictions of the dominant agro-food system and social transformation. Based on an analysis of how initiatives and organisations have positioned themselves through their organisational documents, public vocabularies and declarations, actions, and in interviews and observations, the chapter shows that the array of organising around food and the agro-food system falls along a continuum between justice-centred and food-centred conceptions of change in the food system. Together with their relationships to questions of production and consumption, they cohere around what I identify as *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *transformative* approaches. These approaches are constituted by concrete practices, forms of organising and inter-connections that are shaped by the contradictions of the food system and the corresponding agro-food and political imaginaries of their organisers. However, I argue in this chapter that they also need to be understood through a longer history of interactions with the material effects of national oppression, that were framed through particular social and political perspectives and practices, and their contemporary engagement with the conditions and contradictions of national liberation. A key feature of this history was a weak alignment between political resistance and production alternatives to the industrial agro-food system model. This is seen today in the challenge of manifesting political linkages between food sovereignty production alternatives and broader class-based mobilisation.

To demonstrate this argument, I begin by presenting a typology of the food movement in South Africa. The positions that they occupy on the continuum, between ameliorative and systemic, are based not just on how they envision the problems and solutions in the food system, but how they are situated in relation to social, economic, consumption and production questions. I then show how these various approaches, and their relations with each other, reflect a longer history of their evolution in a context of racial oppression combined with socioeconomic exploitation. I show the shifting material relationships between the elaboration of alternatives to the industrial agro-food system and national oppression, uneven development, and the contradictions of the post-apartheid social order, and how an apparent gap between food sovereignty politics and mass mobilisation from below is rooted in two historical trends of food-related organising under conditions of national oppression. On the one hand, an ameliorative approach that focused on production as a response to ecological and health challenges, and forms the basis to today's *organic* stream. It was disconnected from political organisation to challenge racial oppression, and grounded in a liberal tradition and its attendant relationships with settler capitalism and white supremacy. The second is the national liberation tradition that

largely exhibited a lacuna in political organising around the agrarian question under national oppression, and its antecedents who integrated food politics in their political project as they responded to the limits of national liberation post-1994. These patterns are reflected in how, while food sovereignty elements are being elaborated widely in South Africa – existing perhaps as a 'hidden alternative' in households, communities and between classes – the challenge remains to integrate them into a wider momentum aimed at directly transforming structural, systemic and policy frameworks.

Food-centred and Justice-centred Approaches to Food System Change

Two coordinates to begin unpacking a typology of the food movement in South Africa is to point to food-centred and justice-centred approaches to food system change, as it is these two conceptions, broadly speaking, with which the notion of food sovereignty is linked. In short, in food-centred approaches, the starting point is the outcomes of the industrial food system in terms of food's quality, health aspects and the environmental impacts of its production. These concerns are elaborated across different class and social contexts to produce particular configurations. Justice-centred also shares these concerns, but they are refracted through a central emphasis on rights of popular classes, and so their framing agenda tends to be on social and distributional inequalities, the race, class and gender implications of food system injustices, and the rights and struggles of farm workers and dwellers. Making the distinction between food-centred and justice-centred approaches to food system change is grounded in the recognition that while food system contradictions may be commonly recognised, approaches to addressing them are refracted through varying concrete interests, worldviews, politics and social referent points. As Figueroa (2015: 502) explains:

> In the interplay of ideas, debates, and movements struggling to define the 'big tent' (Patel, 2009) of food sovereignty, critique of the prevailing food system remains a dominant mode through which aspirations for a better food system – and by extension, a better world – is expressed… [But] a proactive route to building and advocating for alternatives is far more difficult to imagine. What we are often left with is a host of utopian visions, constructed around the quality and value of food as a commodity; abstract models of 'sustainability' that often, in practice, end up reinforcing the social divisions and structures of alienated capitalist life.

The implication is that centring food and the food system as an isolated object of organisation disconnected from challenging wider social relations, even when advancing alternative visions of the industrial food system, runs the risk of reproducing social inequalities within initiatives and movements, and in broader society. This thus suggests an inseparable link between food

system transformation and social transformation. The wider methodological implication is to understand particular initiatives and movements through broader social parameters than simply their visions of food system change, but to situate them in relation to their particular histories, social protagonists, and prevailing social inequalities and power relations. This reflects Figueroa's (2015) call to de-centre food in the analysis of food-related organising, which means placing social life, rather than food, as the point of departure for critical analysis of struggles and alternatives in the food system. This is in line with the origins and elaboration of food sovereignty, whose concern is social injustice and inequalities perpetuated by corporate-controlled, transnationalised food systems through dispossession, hunger and malnutrition (Giménez and Shattuck, 2011).

This approach is similarly reflected in Du Toit's (2013) assertion that an inseparable connection between the social reproduction crisis and organisation targeted at the agro-food system is a precondition for any 'progressive agro-food politics' in South Africa. Indeed, attempts examined in this chapter to organise members of popular classes around elements of agro-food system alternatives are less responses to production challenges but arise from addressing immediate social reproduction challenges experienced by the landless, unemployed and workers that are marginalised by the dominant production structure. The potential political links between social reproduction and political organising are illustrated by Benya (2015) in the case of the role of women in the Marikana mining strikes. She shows how women's experiences in the social reproduction sphere fed into shaping contestation in the capital-labour relation, becoming politically visible at conjunctural moments, thus making social reproduction dynamics and associated gendered agency a constituent element of class struggles. Given that food sovereignty is about a politics of challenging existing relations of power, social difference and property, this raises the question of how these attempts to build food sovereignty alternatives from spaces of social reproduction in working class communities connect politically with challenging the dominant agro-food production structure and distributional regime that it is a part of.

A transformative politics of food sovereignty thus implies conceptualising the specific articulations between social transformation, power and food system transformation in empirical and socially specific ways (Figueroa, 2015). This also means recognising the specific class and property relations with which initiatives and forms of organising related to the food system articulate. This perspective is illustrated in practice by one of the most prominent agrarian

movements and food sovereignty advocates worldwide, the Rural Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil. The MST struggles for land and agrarian reform, its key tactic being that of organised land occupations (Carter, 2015). Through its practices, it comes up against the power of agribusiness and its associated social and ecological impacts. The MST analyses this, however, as a manifestation of a wider onslaught by capital. It also promotes the slogan of food sovereignty through which it frames food as a right. But, according to a member of the movement's National Coordination, 'This conception of agriculture is much more advanced than capitalism can offer to humanity and society' (Rosetti, interview, 15 June 2016). Thus for the MST, food sovereignty cannot be fully realised within capitalism and so it is one demand within a broader political class struggle of constant mobilisation for 'people's agrarian reform' to transform Brazil's agrarian and social structure (MST, 2014). Through analyses such as these, we can place organising related to food in a wider class and structural context. This is particularly relevant for South Africa given its vastly unequal agrarian and social structure and its highly developed commercial agro-food system alongside mass poverty and hunger.

Figure 7 below presents a typology depicting a framework for understanding the food movement in South Africa. The key axis is between food-centred and justice-centred, but with emphases on either consumption or production, I suggest, produces particular configurations identifiable in the South African context. Indeed, consumption and production are in practice linked in multiple ways; the label of each thus refers to the sphere where the locus of action has tended to focus. How they conceptualise consumption and production respectively and their implications, in interaction with a food- or a justice-centred conception of food system change, produces broad configurations that I have categorised as *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice*, and *transformative.* I now turn to unpacking the parameters of the typology and the configurations in more detail.

To begin with the food-centred axis, under which *lifestyle* and *organic* fall, the key starting point for organising efforts here is the problems of the industrial food system, especially its ecological impacts. One aspect to the food-centred axis is focused largely on individual consumption as the key mechanism of change to send signals to producers and support those producing ecologically, mostly under the *lifestyle* stream. Food-centred *organic* efforts of collective action organise people around alternative practices to that system. This is focused on both better-off and poorer communities, although not necessarily from a central standpoint of justice. Questions of social justice can be present, but tend to be understood largely in

ameliorative terms and often, as Figueroa (2015: 502) describes, as an 'additive property to a sustainable food system rather than the very foundation from which such a food system must be built.'

	Food-centred (Ameliorative)	**Justice-centred (Systemic)**
Consumption	Lifestyle • 'Clean' food • Authenticity • Local • 'Foodies' • Bring supermarkets on board • Politics: individual consumption – vote with forks • Examples: niche food stores and restaurants, sections of Slow Food	Food Justice • Ensure capacity of poor to access nutritious food baskets • Linkages made: social justice organisations • Politics: regulation for social and environmental justice; explore critical social questions through food • Examples: ACB and Biowatch anti-GMO campaigns; PACSA – increase social grants to help poor cope with food price increases; coalition to confront bread price fixing (Black Sash, COSATU, Children's Resource Centre *et al*)
Production	Organic • Soil and nutritional health • Entrepreneurialism and livelihoods (food security through sustainable agriculture) • Greening of food system • Individual innovations aggregated into change – 'pioneers' • Organise actors around market change • Politics: regulation to grow market sector • Linkages made: other food-related organisations • Examples: South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO); PGS; Siyavuna; sections of Slow Food	Transformative • Food sovereignty linked to distributional demands, rights, entitlements: agrarian reform, land, housing • Movement power to contest power relations • Politics: Change social relations, hence class-based organising • Linkages made: socio-economic issues • Examples: Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC); Inyanda National Land Movement; SA Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC); Rural Women's Assembly; Tshintsha Amakhaya; anti-extractivist struggles intersecting with agriculture

Figure 7: Typology of the food movement in South Africa

In line with the historical origins and elaboration of food sovereignty, the starting point for those towards the justice-centred axis is the needs and rights of the poor and marginalised and challenging the social relations that induce deprivation, including corporate power, and through which attempts to advance resistance to the industrial food system is refracted. Some of the concrete *practices* promoted by those on this spectrum, such as agroecological production, may be similar to those on the food-centred side of the spectrum, but they are linked to different *political* approaches and activities that seek justice and social transformation. An important structuring dynamic of conceptions of justice in forms of organising related to the

contradictions of the agro-food system have been histories of various national liberation traditions that have connected to struggles on the ground that are shaped by the social and economic contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa, what Jara (2013: 267) calls the 'unresolved national question'. The meanings of justice in relation to food are thus closely tied to contesting the patterns of class, racial and gender inequality forged under national oppression, and intensified in various ways by economic forces after liberation. This is reflected by the chairperson of a national small fishers' movement, Coastal Links, who, in response to a question about how the struggles of small-scale fishers relates to the politics of food, explained:

> In the first instance, not a lot of us see it as a food struggle and especially in the South African context…In the South African context it's a struggle for access [fishing rights], firstly. Because [then] you will have food no matter how or in what way... In the South African context we came from the apartheid system into a system with new laws in 1998 which still disenfranchised and dispossessed fishers of the fishing rights to put food on the table (Abrahams, Interview, 2016).

Thus for Abrahams, the struggle of small fishers, although situated within the agri-food system, is not a struggle about food *per se*, but rather about confronting the historical continuities in structures of power, economics and exclusion that shape the material conditions within which actors in the food system, like poor communities of small fishers, have to reproduce themselves. Similarly, the Ujamaa Collective in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha, whose organisers are informed by Black Consciousness and radical theology perspectives, critique the dominant food system and organise poor residents around communal food gardening, but as a conduit to more fundamental questions of the reproduction of racial inequality. They envision entirely transformed social relations, as described by one of its organisers:

> Basically this system has created a nation of beggars, um, out of black people. You know the Afrikaans word, the *bergies*?[34] Ja, black people are currently *bergies*, we are constantly on our knees begging for bread. Like even how we relate with the job market. We always talk about something to put on the table, which basically means we are in that desperate position, constantly, and until we move from that position we will never be free. So part of our belief is that food is captured as a form to capture the people, so until you liberate the food of the people, the people themselves will never be liberated, because it is in their desperation that the exploitation continues (Gola, group interview, 2017).

[34] The Afrikaans word for mountain is *berg. Bergies* is often used to refer to homeless people in Cape Town, because many of them historically took shelter on the slopes of Table Mountain. Hence the English equivalent might be 'mountain people'.

Given the inordinate impact of hunger and malnutrition on poor, black households (MRC and HSRC, 2013), Ujamaa's concern is thus how commodification of food perpetuates racial inequality, how it links to the incorporation of particular segments of the population into the economy through their labour power, and undermines collective action for liberation. The 'unresolved national question', in which racial patterns of economic inequality have not been fundamentally overturned after apartheid, thus remain a historical referent point structuring the relation of such forms of organising to prevailing social questions.

In conjunction with primary focuses on production or consumption, the justice- or food-centred approaches then give rise to *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *transformative* categories. Given that the typology represents a continuum, these categories are meant to denote not only *distinctions* between them but also their *inter-relations*. Nor are they static. Current formations are not strictly in one category but often straddle the categories, incorporating elements from each. The categories should therefore be seen less as sharp distinctions, and more as historically specific configurations that exist, and shift along, the continuum. As such, particular initiatives, organisations or movements tend to exist within a network, often as nodal points that bring together various historically patterned tendencies. As the next section will show, their histories are also interconnected. For example, the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO) brings together actors from the lifestyle sphere as well as those operating more in the *organic* sphere; Tshintsha Amakhaya, whose politics I situate in the *transformative* category, brings together organisations that emerged from a rights-based activist politics, but also those that were historically oriented towards providing technical services, often around sustainable agriculture, to project participants in the vein of food security (Tshintsha Amakhaya, 2015a; Ntsebeza, 2013a). There are therefore also convergences between the types – each contains elements and practices similar to those in other types. An example is what constitutes sustainable production practices, in the vein of technical agroecology and organic practices.

The concept of articulation helps to capture the notion that the forms examined in this chapter are manifestations of material conditions structured by class and race, economic forces, state power, social attributes, and the cultural and political apprehension of these conditions by social agents. However, consistent with the argument of this thesis, as historically determined 'articulatory practices' (Hart, 2002: 32) they are also subject to further evolution and change as conditions evolve and shifting political connections are formed. Their situation on the continuum is determined by historical parameters, but also by their engagement on specific

issues, the contingent alliances that might form between actors from the different types around those issues, and the convergence of specific historical and personal tendencies within specific formations. Thus concrete formations to which we can relate food-centred and justice-centred framings emerge from particular historical streams, and constitute the nodes around which the conceptions converge.

The *lifestyle* sphere exhibits an emphasis on food itself, with the key activity being that of consumption as the means to desired outcomes. It is largely a lifestyle approach that pays little attention to concerted collective effort for social change. The prime motivation for actors is eating, transforming and enjoying (mainly organic) food. 'Local' is a prominent buzzword but tends to carry little critical social content. The main sphere of action is circuits of consumption composed of restaurants serving organic produce and grass-fed meat, niche food shops, artisanal bakeries, and initiatives that build a closer relation between producers and consumers than the industrial food system, like farmers markets and organic box schemes.[35] Their main social agents are the health-conscious middle class, chefs, 'hipsters', 'foodies' and food critics. This modality exhibits what are in themselves important elements of a sustainable food system, but they are embedded in elite circuits of consumption with participation largely dependent on financial means. As Ledger (2016: 185) describes:

> [M]any of the people who shop at the new organic food stores and farmers' markets in South Africa are looking for 'alternative' food; that is, certified organic, free from chemical additives and produced in an environmentally friendly and/or humane way… But there may be nothing 'solidarity' about these alternative networks at all. In fact, there is not, particularly in South Africa. My research suggested that the majority of people who shop at organic stores have little or no interest in social justice or the welfare of farmworkers, or the fairness of the food system or how their purchases might contribute to any of these goals.

These *lifestyle* approaches therefore contribute to developing food system patterns and relationships that are alternative to the industrial food system, but through existing class relations. They thus may also link with an aspect in the *organic* sphere, to small farmers from poor communities as producers in livelihood programmes that are linked into niche consumption driven by desires for wholesome, nutritious and 'clean' food, such as Harvest of Hope, which operates in townships on the Cape Flats.[36]

[35] For example, www.munchingmongoose.co.za; www.wensleydale.co.za.
[36] https://abalimiharvestofhope.org.za

The historical origin of the *organic* sphere emerges from a production perspective, with an overriding concern with the health of the soil as a result of industrial agriculture, which evolved into an ecological critique of the industrial food system and so efforts to elaborate sustainable methods of food production. As such, it emerges from various efforts of practicing what has broadly been termed sustainable agriculture. The term organic has tended to be associated with efforts by the middle class to forge alternative environmental and spiritual lifestyles, with an emphasis on 'pioneers' connoting an approach to change that rests on the aggregation of individual innovations and entrepreneurial action. However, organic practices in production in South Africa have also developed in concert with longer historical efforts to ameliorate soil degradation, hunger and malnutrition in poor rural and urban communities through ecologically centred community and household food production. In poorer communities in the global North, such organic community agriculture has tended to be linked with wider efforts to confront systemic economic and racial inequalities (and coalesced around notions of food justice). Here, however, it has historically been organised as a more instrumental response to key outcomes of the historically engineered social reproduction crisis in poor black communities (as framed in the previous chapter) – hunger and malnutrition (Battersby, 2013). This has largely taken the form of livelihoods development approaches, in which organic food production is posed to address consumption challenges of malnutrition and hunger.

These organic livelihood approaches have historical origins as welfare interventions in sites of poverty, but have also evolved into what Williams would describe as the social economy, where 'the negative effects of the market are addressed by a range of social programmes administered by various organisations, but does not seek to fundamentally transform social relations', and which 'presents entrepreneurship as a vehicle for addressing social problems rather than a simple vehicle for private gain' (Williams, 2014: 149). A key common thread of this *organic* sphere that ties together middle and working class actors is thus that of advancing a combination of ameliorative and entrepreneurial actions that are also posed as alternatives to the industrial food system's ecological and nutritional contradictions. The key approach is thus to expand the private sector around organic, through (social) entrepreneurship; to organise actors around market change, with technical frameworks, standards and policies as foremost mechanisms to advance change in the food system. A key organisation in this regard is the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO), which emerges out of the historical efforts of 'pioneers' in the organic sector, but now also includes elements from the *lifestyle* category, so playing a

role of consolidating economic and social linkages between organic production and consumption.

The term *food justice* emanates from the United States context, largely as a response to institutionally racist development patterns and the resulting inordinate prevalence of food insecurity in poorer communities of colour linked to limited consumption options (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011). Community food security initiatives in the form of urban farming, farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) schemes are therefore advanced in large part as conscious responses to racial inequity and socio-economic deprivation and have also extended to campaigns to improve farmworkers' wages and working conditions (Alkon, 2013; Field and Bell, 2013). Until recently, the term was scantily used in the South African context (perhaps partly due to the history of household and community food production having being advanced as more instrumental welfare responses to food insecurity), but there have been initiatives and struggles that appear to reflect a food justice approach by focusing on the food system and consumption through factors of distributional justice, class and race.

Three variations to the *food justice* approach in South Africa can be identified. Firstly, campaigning has occurred around the impacts of the dominant food system on the consumption capabilities and patterns of poor and working class households in the context of low wages, social grants, and high unemployment levels. This included organisations like Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA), which undertook community organising but also monitored prices and associated dynamics in the food system. They called for shifts in the distributional regime (the necessity to increase wages and social grants) so as to better enable poor households to access nutritious food baskets (see, for example, PACSA, 2017).[37] It also includes work to confront corporate power in the food system and its effects on health and nutrition. While there are organisations that continually lobby around issues, such as the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) on GMOs and biotechnology and the Healthy Living Alliance (HEALA) on the constitutional right to healthy food, water and environment (and its implications for confronting corporate power), alliances and campaigns have tended to be temporary, instigated by egregious instances of injustice and exploitation by powerful corporate actors. An example is the alliance between the Black Sash, the Consumer Forum, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and Children's Resource Centre to ensure punishment

[37] PACSA closed doors and Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity (PMBEJD) was established, which conducts similar work to which PACSA did.

and redress after the four major bread producers colluded in 2006 to fix the price of bread, a staple food of the poor.[38] A wide alliance of a cross-sector of organisations also coordinated resistance to the introduction of GMOs in South Africa.[39] In recent years there was also advocacy by civil society and progressive researchers calling for a sugar tax in order to shift the costs of sugar consumption onto the corporate interests producing sugary drinks, whose effects are disproportionately evident in lower income groups.[40]

Secondly, there have also been efforts that start with food consumption (its nutritional quality, aesthetics, and enjoyment) but lean towards justice as they use food to forge connections across class, racial and spatial contexts and to explore questions of poverty, nutrition, art, human relations, and (de)colonisation (Rousell, interview, 2017). In many ways, they engage with food in similar tangible ways as the *lifestyle* sphere, but they shied away from its perceived class and racial exclusivity. For example, young Slow Food activists, frustrated at the time by what they saw as Slow Food South Africa's class and racially narrow purview, in 2016 established the Slow Food Youth Network, taking a different approach to organising activities around food. Such activists have thus organised events in townships focused on food but that are as socially and economically inclusive as possible, such as free 'Eat-Ins', open events centred on sharing, art and reviving food traditions in inner-city Johannesburg, and organising collective work groups to support township food gardens (SFYN 3, interview, 2017; SFYN 2, interview, 2017). This also includes the likes of the Ujamaa Collective, who aim to build self-reliance by attempting to break the link between food consumption and the structure of South African capitalism, in a context of sharply racialised spatial inequality in Cape Town (Group interview, 2017).

A third aspect to *food justice* organising around consumption has also related to farm and food worker justice, in two respects. The first is organising over wages and working conditions, with it frequently being pointed out that many farm workers cannot afford to feed their families sufficiently on their wages, and so improved wages is essential for their food security (Louw, interview, 2016; Ledger, 2016). Particularly in the Western Cape, where the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) operates, such conditions of farmworkers are prominently framed through race, in terms of racially oppressive labour

[38] See *Mail and Guardian* (2011).
[39] See Scoones (2008).
[40] See www.heala.org; Myers *et al* (2017).

relations and lack of respect,[41] as farm work is still primarily experienced and understood through paternalistic and often oppressive relationships with white farmers (Wilderman, 2015). This aspect has also included some organising amongst workers in other parts of the food chain, such as in processing and retail. Reflecting the fragmentation of the workforce, such workers have usually not been organised by unions, and they struggle against precarious work, outsourcing and low wages. They are instead supported by organisations such as the Casual Workers' Advice Office (CWAO) and other bodies that support informalised and precarious workers in legal representation and self-organisation (for example, see Dor, 2017; VoC News, 2019).

A second way that consumption has been focused on in relation to organising for worker justice is through appealing to consumers, such as the campaign by CSAAWU and supporting organisations to boycott wines of Robertson Winery, which extended to Norway and Sweden through transnational trade union cooperation.[42] Such justice-oriented approaches to farm and food worker organising still exist somewhat on the margins. For example, farm worker organising by the labour movement has historically been weak. A key reason is that the nature of commercial farms makes linking with workers notoriously difficult (reflected in the fact that only about 10% of farm workers are unionised) and in intensified casualisation of farm labour (TCOE, 2016). Much of this organising that links with critiques of the food system and rural social relations is being advanced outside of the traditional labour movement, linked to organisations from the transformative sphere like TCOE, Surplus Peoples Project (SPP), Women on Farms Project (WFP) and the Eastern Cape Agricultural Research Project (ECARP). Farm worker organising has thus also related to the *transformative* sphere, as their living and working conditions are grounded in a critique of the production structure and distributional regime.

In the *transformative* configuration, I refer to organisations that ground their perspectives and actions in justice, by centring land, food, access to natural resources, housing and gender justice as rights and entitlements of the poor and marginalised, and relate the undermining of these rights to the overarching agrarian and food production structure. The *transformative* sphere incorporates similar elements to *lifestyle* (clean and healthy food), *organic* (sustainable

[41] Lack of respect shown by farm owners towards workers is a common refrain by workers in the Western Cape, which is indicative of the racialised patterns of domination on commercial farms.
[42] See CSAAWU (2017); *Amandla!* (2017).

agricultural practices and livelihoods), and *food justice* (the Right to Food and social justice). But they also make a more explicit political linkage to the transformation of market and property structures as a basis for these outcomes. They thus organise members of marginalised communities around alternative food and agrarian production practices that are similar at a technical level to those in the organic livelihoods stream, for example, but they attempt to link it to confronting the wider justice-related issues facing communities through class-based forms of organising. As with the livelihoods development approach in the *organic* stream, they also aim for sustainable livelihoods, but see restoration of land and access to natural resources lost under colonialism and apartheid, and confronting the neoliberal structure of the economy and the role of traditional leadership, as necessary conditions for building those sustainable livelihoods. Thus in this justice-centred approach, the notion of food sovereignty is not only related to the contradictions of the industrial food system itself, but is grounded in the problems of landlessness, land rights and agrarian reform, inequality, rural democracy and gender justice that need to be fixed through pushing for structural change. This is closely aligned to how La Via Campesina has framed food sovereignty (see Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Patel, 2009). In this *transformative* sphere, food sovereignty therefore tends to be embedded in and linked with wider class-based distributive demands, where the achievement of entitlements is linked with structural shifts in class, property and power relations, and in the distributional regime. The prominent form in this sphere is the NGO-movement/community relation. As will be discussed below, the NGOs predominantly emerge from anti-apartheid currents and position themselves as supporting movement and community agency.

Lifestyle, *organic*, *food justice* and *transformative* are therefore broadly the movement terrain with which food sovereignty as a global idea and practice has articulated in the South African context – although actors in the *transformative* current were the first to connect with the global food sovereignty movement and bring the discourse to the country, the other spheres have connected and utilise the term as well. In other words, approaches to and meanings of food sovereignty are in fact now also shaped by varied historical trajectories, protagonists, class relationships and political ideas that constituted the formations and organisations of the typology. Reflecting this, food sovereignty has not been elaborated in a uniform way through civil society in South Africa. For example, given the history of those in the organic stream, organisations like SAOSO largely associate food sovereignty with a food system based on ecological production practices, as in its strategy statement: ‘Taking responsibility for food sovereignty and Sustainable Development through Organic Production and Agroecology

Practices whilst reversing the adverse effects of climate change.'[43] This is to be achieved within the existing economic, political and distributional framework. The key means for changing the food system is advancing ecological production practices coupled with marketing arrangements. Similarly, organisations supporting livelihoods in the organic stream, such as Siyavuna Development Centre, which support smallholder farmers in southern KwaZulu-Natal Province, locate food sovereignty as organic food production at household and community level (Peters, interview, 2016). They say little, however, about corporate power and social structures of inequality, or confronting them. Such organisations are of course grounded in social concern, but those in the transformative stream tend to express a more expansive notion of food sovereignty, in which social transformation is the more central issue to which food sovereignty is hinged. For example, the Inyanda National Land Movement (2015: 40) argues that food sovereignty 'cannot be separated from pro-poor agrarian transformation' and envisions

> an alternative people's agrarian system that is based on the equitable ownership of land and natural resources, ecological sustainability, agro-ecological production, and the democratic ownership and control of production, the input system, processing, distribution and marketing (2015: 35).

Thus, in addition to advancing organic or agroecological livelihood practices, such organisations tend to emphasise political claim-making through mass, class-based mobilisation and organisation, to achieve shifts in material and social relations to realise the conditions for food sovereignty. In the opening of its Declaration statement from its founding assembly in 2015, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC), an initiative spearheaded by an NGO that sought to impart a food sovereignty politics to various layers of other organisations, movements, and initiatives, placed corporate power in the food system as a key target. It further claimed to locate itself in the popular interests of 'the hungry, the landless and the exploited of our country' (SAFSC, 2015: 1). It thus emphasised the mobilisation of this social base in relation to corporate power and rights:

> We…are calling for the deep transformation of our food system by breaking the control of food corporations, repositioning the state to realise the Constitutional right to food and as part of creating the conditions and space for the emergence of food sovereignty alternatives from below. In this context mass popular power is essential… (SAFSC, 2015: 1-2).

The differences here point partly to the question of scale in conceptualisations of food sovereignty (Iles and de Wit, 2014), but these are shaped also by the political perspectives and

[43] www.saoso.org

experiences through which food sovereignty is approached. Indeed, organisations on both ends of the food-centred and the justice-centred continuum evolved in the post-apartheid period as they have responded to the contradictions and opportunities of national liberation, from different historical and political perspectives: the former as they respond to both freedom and the material realities of inequality in the post-apartheid era, and the latter as they seek to challenge the limits of national liberation from the standpoint of popular classes. From the production angle, the *organic* and transformative organisations do in fact advance similar practices related to alternative forms of (food sovereignty) agriculture, such as creating production and consumption networks outside of corporate circuits, seeds, local markets, the importance of small farmers, biodiversity, and so on. Such commonalities create grounds for further overlap in practices between a number of organisations, confirming the different categories in the typologies as relational. Thus in relation to working class communities, the livelihoods development organisations have experienced expansion in practices of organic agriculture in the communities in which they work (Small, pers. comm, 2016; Peters, interview, 2016) as the social reproduction crisis has deepened in post-apartheid South Africa (Mosoetsa, 2011), yet not as connected to a wider political approach to social transformation.

Organisations in the *transformative* and *food justice* stream have attempted to link such alternatives with mass organisation and pressuring the state on agro-food system transformation and redistribution. They have achieved often localised successes in challenging rural injustices through mobilisation, such as challenging the state on rights-based issues like housing and access to water, accessing commonage land, tenure security, some agricultural support from the local state, challenging traditional leadership structures, services in rural townships and improving access to natural resources in particular locales (Tshintsha Amakhaya, 2015a; SGS Consulting, 2017). However, wider structural gains have been limited – movement power in relation to state and market power remains weak, reflected in the lack of land reform and progressive policy change at the national level (Tshintsha Amakhaya, 2015b; SGS Consulting, 2017; Hall, 2015).

This reflects a historical challenge of articulating the politics of alternative food and agriculture with mass politics from below, pondered by the likes of Cock (2009), Joynt (2010), Greenberg (2006) and Ledger (2016). To understand the shape and content of the contemporary forms of organising related to the food system presented in the typology, and their current political import in terms of organisation and social transformation (the essence of food sovereignty), we

must examine their history. In the next section we therefore go into more detail to show the historical relations of ecology, class, race and ideology that these current attempts to organise popular classes around various aspects of agro-food system transformation have been shaped through. While keeping in mind the *lifestyle* and *food justice* spheres, I focus principally on the history of the *organic* and *transformative* spheres, because their focus on organising popular classes from a point of agrarian production and livelihoods also means they have had the most consistent (and often contrasting) relations to the evolving agrarian question.

A History of Organising around Alternative Agro-food Practices

As Hart (2002) contends, articulation in the sense of the joining together of different elements is also a way of thinking about how movements and forms of collective action are constituted on a historically constructed terrain using material and symbolic resources given from the past. In Chapter 4 I provided an overview of some of the historical dynamics of class formation, resistance, class struggle, and political organising, and the place of food and agriculture running through these. In this section, I situate attempts to organise people from subordinate groups around food and agricultural alternatives within these broader dynamics.

Because hunger and malnutrition are class problems, and food sovereignty is a politics of emancipation aligned with popular classes, in this section I examine the currents that have most connected with the problems of malnutrition, hunger and poverty amongst popular and working classes – *organic* and *transformative*, and to some extent, *food justice*. The global food sovereignty discourse has been presented as emerging from productive struggles of peasants due to the effects of trade liberalisation, structural adjustment, and the raiding of national markets as countries were opened up to the circuits of the global food regime (McMichael 2014).[44] However, in much of the South African context a more appropriate way to view the organising of members of subordinate classes around practical elements of what has become food sovereignty is to see them as in the main agrarian-centred responses to social reproduction challenges emanating from the specific conditions of semi-proletarianisation under racial capitalism: adverse relationships to land and ecology, wage labour and the agro-food system (Moyo, 2015; Jacobs, 2018).

[44] Of course, other public policies have subsequently been called for that relate to social provisioning as well – health, education, and policies and interventions that support the rights of rural women; but are still related to a peasant production structure.

A key point illustrated by this section is the historical disjuncture between these agrarian-centred responses, popular mass politics and agro-food transformation. I suggest that this is linked to the particular historical articulations between global processes and discourses, local ideas of nutrition and alternative agro-food practices, class, the material operations of racial domination and the consequent politics of resistance and national liberation. I trace this through four historical periods: the 1910s-1940, in which historical precedents to sustainable agriculture were grounded in an African elite-missionary nexus centred on a civilising project; 1940-1960, where, in the context of increasing social differentiation, better-off farmers engaged in more commercially oriented production schemes supported by the state, and sustainable agriculture evolved into specifically organic practices that were aimed at the 'losers' of Bantustan consolidation as nutritional interventions in response to the impacts of land shortage and low wage labour migration; 1960s-1994, where these practices became more aligned with 'rural development' and welfare responses organised by NGOs of the liberal middle class, in a period of homeland consolidation; and post-1994, which offered both opportunities and limits for the relationship between agro-food alternatives and the transformation of power relations from below.

One of the features standing out in this section is the focus on production. Firstly, this reflects the historical nature of the development of these practices. The longest history of practices in South Africa today that are linking with food sovereignty (the *organic* stream) has mostly emerged from production responses to ecological and social challenges. Despite the over-arching trend of proletarianisation and de-agrarianisation (though not linear), the historical origin of these practices has therefore been grounded in attempts to reproduce agrarian relations under shifting political circumstances, in both rural and urban contexts. The primary response when it comes to popular classes, therefore, has been to organise them around production alternatives. Secondly, this production focus also partly reflects the purview of this thesis – the relationship between the agrarian question and food sovereignty politics – a core feature of which is the transformation of the agro-food production structure.

1910s-1940: Soil and Civilisation

In the typology, it is the *organic* field that displays the longer history of organising around alternative agro-food practices in response to social and ecological challenges that emerged

from the settler colonial process. This *organic* stream culminated out of several historical threads. The crystallisation of the conservationist ideology in the 1940s, centred on combating soil erosion and restoring soil health, formed a foundational milieu for the antecedents of organic agriculture work. Official concerns over soil erosion had first arisen in the early 1900s, with the state worried that settler agriculture was undermining the soil conditions necessary for continued agrarian accumulation (Beinart, 1984). These concerns turned to the reserves from the late 1930s in the form of rehabilitation schemes that aimed to save the soil from 'African ignorance' and to stem their economic decline so as to sustain their ability to reproduce a permanent class of migrant labour (Drew, 1996).

However, before 1920 an organisation of black farmers, the Native Farmers Association (NFA), had been formed to counteract ecological degradation through the 'modernisation' of African agricultural practices. The foundation of the NFA was what might be termed the liberal nexus of missionaries and the emergent African elite. Cape liberalism had emerged through the joint economic interests of white traders and the emergent market-oriented black peasants and found 'ideological expression in the opinions of liberals and missionaries' (Peires, 1993: 320). Liberal missionary paternalism was concerned with the welfare of the 'native' through a frame that saw Africans as culturally inferior but capable of advancement under white tutelage (Rich, 1993; Rich, 1987). They thus provided education to the progeny of the market-oriented black peasantry whose rise (discussed in Chapter 4) was partly facilitated by access to mission station lands together with agricultural support and training (Bundy, 1988). This led to the growth of an African liberal political class, whose basic mode of reproduction often combined salaries from professional jobs with a mixed model of subsistence and commercial farming (Mabandla, 2015).

'Progressive' agriculture, based on scientific and 'modern' methods of farming, was seen by missionaries like Father Bernard Huss of Marianhill Mission[45] as part of attacking African tribal conservatism (and its purported resulting social and ecological maladies) and making the African modern. Progressive agricultural methods were thus intertwined with dominant racial ideology, seen as part of the solution to the 'native question': to bring Africans into modern civilisation by restoring their agrarian society on the basis of a 'progressive' relationship with the land (Huss, no date; Rich, 1987). Efforts towards sustainable agriculture in this mould thus

[45] Huss worked in the Eastern Cape and then at Marianhill Mission in Natal, and later became a key practitioner and trainer of organic agriculture.

grew out of models of industrial and agricultural training promoted by some missionaries and inspired by the Tuskegee Institute in the American South. This perspective saw Africans as more suited to such manual pursuits in local contexts under missionary control for a foreseeable future (Rich, 1987; Khan, 1994).

This civilising missionary focus on agricultural training converged with the liberalism of the African elite that envisioned progress through socio-economic and educational achievement, land ownership and entrepreneurship (Khan, 1994), and who missionaries saw as an important conduit through whom modernised agricultural practices could be conveyed to the wider peasantry (Rich, 1993). Thus out of this liberal nexus arose (elite) African agency in formally seeking to address the health of the soil. They were driven by a concern for the wellbeing of people and the environment but, based more on a civilising project as its approach to liberation, eschewed class-based organising to challenge the structural sources of social and ecological deterioration. In 1918, the mission-educated Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu and others formed the Native Farmers Association in Keiskammahoek in the Ciskei reserve. Its members were mostly educated African elite, such as teachers and clerks, and they saw one of their key roles as working with the poor peasantry, who constituted most rural inhabitants, in order to overcome 'ignorance, poverty and racial discrimination' through promoting sound agricultural methods, thrift and education (Khan, 1994: 516). However, although the NFA was active from 1918 to the mid-1940s and spawned over 20 farmers associations in Ciskei, Transkei, Eastern Transvaal and then-Basutoland (Khan, 1994), organisations like it struggled to embed their proposed agricultural methods in a wider base of the peasantry. This appears to reflect a political weakness in being able to confront the forces that continually undermined the conditions required for what they were trying to achieve. Part of this was a failure to forge a political connection over time between the needs of the ordinary peasantry and the expansion of the agricultural practices that were being promoted. This was underpinned by a number of factors, including alignment with the state, rural differentiation and a declining productive base, and state repression.

In terms of relationships with the state, the African elite such as Jabavu attempted to maintain a close relationship to what many rural inhabitants experienced as a repressive state. This often created suspicion amongst the ordinary peasantry who were fiercely resisting state attempts to encroach on their agrarian livelihoods through stock culling, compulsory dipping, and conservation programmes like betterment (Khan, 1994). This trend continued into the 1950s

with the NFA's successor, the African National Soil Conservation Association (ANSCA). ANSCA was established after the rise of apartheid in 1953 with the support of the whites-only National Veld Trust (NVT). It also came to be further supported by the Native Affairs Department (NAD), which saw the potential for a black organisation to secure rural cooperation in conservation programmes like betterment and in its fight against forms of African organisation like the ANC[46] that were opposed to the rehabilitation schemes (Khan, 1997). Their close associations with the state thus meant that initiatives to foster sustainable agriculture were poorly aligned with rural struggles and potential forces of liberation.

Differing class and political aspirations between African elites promoting agriculture methods that preserved the soil were also reflected in diverging practices of resisting the impacts of intensifying segregation policies, in which agency to advance sustainable agriculture was out of step with the tempo of rural resistance. Although those like Jabavu opposed increasing racially discriminatory land legislation and territorial segregation, like much of the African political elite of the time (Ngcukaitobi, 2018) his preferred political methods were restricted to deputations, meetings, letters, persuasion and participation in state bodies. In the 1920s he was still reticent towards radical political organisation against the effects of tightening territorial segregation (Rich, 1987). Missionaries like Father Huss, in seeing African self-help under missionary supervision as the route to addressing problems experienced by Africans, was actively opposed to attempts at African political self-organisation like the ICU and the Wellington Movement. He thus saw his work on agriculture and cooperatives as an alternative to such politics, even forming the Catholic African Union for advancing cooperatives and sustainable agricultural practices amongst the peasantry in an attempt to pre-empt radicalising political influences (Rich, 1993). An important origin of organic agriculture in South Africa was thus attempts to elaborate sustainable agricultural practices amongst the rural peasantry, but it was actively positioned in ways aiming to contain potentially deeper emancipatory political action by that peasantry.

1940-1960: Shifting Parameters of Soil Conservation and Organic Agriculture

We explored in Chapter 4 how the 1940s and 1950s saw an upswing in rural resistance, instigated by the state's moves to bolster the power of traditional authorities and to implement

[46] The ANC took a position against betterment, but as discussed in Chapter 4 and comprehensively by Bundy (1984) and Rich (1993), it displayed a notable lethargy in organisationally translating this into political action with rural residents against the schemes.

betterment and rehabilitation schemes in the reserves on the grounds of soil conservation and social modernisation. A resulting anti-conservation from above sentiment amongst the peasantry drove a further wedge between it and those attempting to formally advance soil conservationist concerns. This was not helped by the fact that while white farmers were provided with support to shift their agricultural practices to counter soil degradation, the approach to African peasants was one of compulsion – legal punishment for transgressions, stock culling and betterment planning, thus bolstering peasant resistance (Khan, 1994). Initiatives like ANSCA saw soil erosion as the problem to be addressed (rather than the economic and social marginalisation that it was an outcome of) and so promoted sustainable agriculture as a soil conservation measure. It therefore condemned rural resistance that sought to push back against government conservation measures and the hardship they were causing. They instead preached acquiescence to these schemes as a solution to what they saw as Africans' deficient agricultural practices (Huss, 1945; Khan, 1997). This deepened the political distance between innovative agricultural practices and rural resistance, as well as liberation organisations like the All African Convention (AAC), which from the 1940s supported resistance to the 'new fraud' of rehabilitation (Tabata, 1945).

These cleavages also reflected a material underpinning of growing economic differentiation during this period between most of the rural population and the relative elite, amidst accelerating proletarianisation and a deteriorating peasant production base. This further drove a wedge between the peasantry and those practicing or advocating for what were seen as sustainable agricultural practices. At this time the productivity of white agriculture was increasing. For example, between 1947/48 and 1967/68 maize production increased from 30 to 105 million bags, while in the reserves total agricultural production was stagnant. The increasing population numbers and stagnant production meant that output per head steadily declined over the decades such that by the 1950s agricultural production provided for less than half of food requirements in the reserves (Simkins, 1981: 264; Cochet, 2015). Yet this decline was not uniform. Some of the African elite and better-off rural residents, who had access to administrative and educational posts, were in better positions to continue investing in land and livestock. As the state sought to create a small class of commercial farmers in the reserves and then Bantustans, they were also better positioned to participate in and benefit from the conservation interventions that many ordinary residents were resisting (Drew, 1996; Mabandla, 2015; Schirmer, 2015). As such, the ordinary peasantry was further alienated from linking agriculture and conservation measures.

A further important feature that undermined African organisation around soil health and the progenitors to alternative agro-food practices during this period was state repression. The rise of apartheid in 1948 reflected the victory of a bloc of class power in favour of intensified segregation and racialised class exploitation. Organisations exhibit political shifts over time and so Khan (1997) suggests that it may well have been that had an organisation like ANSCA continued, and had the space to respond to shifting conditions, it may have widened its political approach and appeal. Indeed, when ANSCA showed signs of doing so, it succumbed to the pressures of a racist state. An example illustrates this. Through a collaborative relationship with the NAD, ANSCA was asked to investigate the reasons for the most intense resistance to betterment and recommend how to ensure African cooperation. However, its resulting investigations in the Glen Grey district facilitated its reckoning with the material roots of African poverty and environmental degradation. Its final report to the NAD therefore recommended that the issue of landlessness needed to be addressed to stem the social and ecological decline of the reserves. In a time of heightened state hostility to African self-organisation, ANSCA therefore failed the NAD's political test, and the NAD subsequently withdrew support and funding from the organisation. ANSCA eventually disbanded in the late 1950s after it was instructed by the government to re-organise with an ANSCA for each defined 'tribe' in line with apartheid policy of racial and ethnic separation – a virtually impossible requirement (Khan, 1997). The potential growth of ecological agriculture based on soil preservation through self-organisation of the racially oppressed was thus limited by state repression. As Khan (1994) points out, in conjunction with the wider political weakness of black political organisation at the time, organisations like the NFA and ANSCA could do little to stem the on-going legislative assault on blacks' freedoms and land rights. The productive base and farmer composition upon which a social force advancing sustainable agriculture could potentially have been built was thus steadily eroded.

Still, the technical solution of sustainable agricultural practices to deep problems arising from political and economic change continued. By the 1950s it was not possible to produce enough within the reserves to feed the populations living there due to land shortage, a fact pointed out by the 1956 Tomlinson Commission report looking into the conditions of the reserves. At the same time, the state was working towards consolidating the reserves as 'self-sustaining' homelands and as managed labour pools for white industry, agriculture and mining (Schirmer, 2015; Cochet, 2015). By the 1940s, the promotion of agricultural practices that were seen to

preserve the health of the soil had evolved into promoting specifically *organic* practices of sustainable agriculture (Auerbach, interview, 2018; Mazibuko, 1996). The Valley Trust was established by Dr Haley Stott in the Valley of a Thousand Hills in 1953 (about 30km outside of Durban), which became a key locus for the elaboration of small-scale organic production as a solution to soil erosion and malnutrition. The notion of organic agriculture originated in the global North as a response to the ecological and nutritional effects of industrial agriculture. Key to its emergence, however, was the colonial context – a foundational intellectual inspiration came from imperial scientists' interactions with the virtues of indigenous agricultures' natural methods,[47] which contrasted with the havoc that settler agriculture was wreaking on soils across the colonised world (see Holleman, 2017). While all forms of agriculture in the peripheries were technically organic, it was so labelled in the imperial core to mark it out from the industrial model of agriculture that had become predominant there. Ideas of organic agriculture then travelled from the imperial core (see Reed, 2010) during the height of the conservationist ideology sweeping the country during the 1940s. In South Africa it intersected with the existing forms of environmentalism that have been described here and the social conditions defined by combined and uneven development. As the destruction of African agriculture, proletarianisation, and immiseration of the reserves proceeded, so did malnutrition and poor health. What came to be called organic agriculture was increasingly targeted at household and community level as health and nutritional interventions.

Such initiatives responded to the immediate reproductive challenges of poor African households, but they were largely delivered through the prevailing ideological architecture of the time. They targeted personal behaviour as the problem, but not the dispossession of entitlements and citizenship rights that underpinned their hunger. For example, the Valley Trust's work was informed by a social medicine approach to the problem of malnutrition in the area, which aimed to address the environmental factors causing ill health (Digby and Sweet, 2011). Overcrowding in the Valley was driven by workers unable to settle in Durban due to the Group Areas Act as well as an influx of ex-labour tenants ejected from the modernising commercial agriculture sector. This led to exhausted soils and erosion, a decline in household subsistence agriculture relative to wage labour, and prevalent malnutrition (Wylie, 2001). However, for Stott, the environmental factors in his social medicine approach boiled down to nutrition. In turn, he believed these nutritional problems reflected the inability of Africans to

[47] See Howard (1943; 2006[1947]).

adapt to their new social conditions 'due to poverty and ignorance with a background of deeply rooted restrictive customs, beliefs and habits', which also translated into the endurance of 'primitive' agricultural practices (Stott, 1968: 1115). Although the Trust explicitly saw its work as non-political (Digby and Sweet, 2011), Wylie (2001) argues that the fixation on the health of the soil played into the political solutions of programmes like betterment that also targeted soil degradation as the cause of malnutrition. She thus records how apartheid administrators were quite happy with the Valley Trust's work, which dovetailed with policies of developing the 'self-reliance' of the homelands as a solution to the 'racial question.' An important locus for the initial elaboration of organic agriculture was therefore done through paternalist relations that sincerely sought to address social and ecological problems of the oppressed, but in ways that aligned with prevailing ideological and power relations.

The approach to organic agriculture in marginalised communities of course illustrated both continuities and evolutions over time. A line of thought and practice of 'pioneers' connects the history of organic agriculture as it was conceived as a solution to purported African problems in the twentieth century. A further key figure in the organic stream in South Africa was Robert 'Tree Man' Mazibuko. He gained prominence for innovating on organic practices seen as suitable to the problems of rural African communities and developed some associated renown as a conservationist (see Cock, 1992). He credits his grounding in organic agriculture to Father Huss's training at Mariannhill Mission in Natal (Mazibuko, 1996). He also once worked closely with Haley Stott at the Valley Trust, where Mazibuko conducted much of his community training. What also connected them was that they responded to the declining productive and social conditions in the reserves through the imaginary of the restoration of African agrarian society. Many of the practices themselves that they worked to organise rural residents around are consonant with those that are today associated with radical alternatives like food sovereignty and the solidarity economy. However, by targeting African behaviour as the problem, they were unable to confront the wider forces steadily undermining the attainment of that vision (Wylie, 2001; Rich, 1987). These initiatives were therefore trying to promote sustainable agriculture on a constantly although unevenly[48] declining productive base, as household survival was becoming increasingly reliant on proletarianisation (Rich, 1993). These strands of organic agriculture as livelihood interventions for marginalised communities would evolve further

[48] In addition to social differentiation, decline or maintenance of production levels also depended on factors like regional ecological endowments (Schirmer, 2015).

through new institutional channels as the project of apartheid consolidated through the homeland system.

1960s-1994: Organic Agriculture, Rural Development, and Self-Help

By the early 1960s, the white commercial agricultural sector had modernised in terms of technology and labour relationships, which, together with extensive state support structures, laid the basis for the consolidation of the dominant agro-food system. The resulting shift to a labour surplus economy from the 1960s gave impetus to the solution of 'separate development' to contain surplus labour in rural homelands and to shift political claims out of the realm of 'white' South Africa (Marcus, 1989; Bernstein, 1996c). The development apparatus that this gave rise to sought to engineer 'self-sustaining', semi-independent Bantustans (see Tapscott, 1992). Homeland agriculture was also subject to this apparatus, which aimed to build up a market-oriented production structure for a small number of commercially oriented farmers. This included irrigation schemes based on conventional production methods as part of generating rural employment (Ntsebeza, 2018). The revival of nationalist political struggles from the 1940s largely centred in urban areas. The elaboration of sustainable agricultural practices in African communities was therefore left to welfare and development responses to the structural dynamics of racial capitalism, through NGO-community relationships as well as the formal development apparatus.

During this period many of these responses were spearheaded by liberal members of the middle class who, in contrast to the previous period, were less explicitly concerned with addressing the perceived cultural ineptitude of Africans. The problem now was less African behaviour, and more poverty and the environmental problems experienced in the homelands (rather than their causes). These responses were organised through varying political perspectives. One thrust was constituted by politicised university students and graduates and anti-apartheid activists who sought to support and empower oppressed rural communities in addressing their immediate problems, through agricultural nutrition and health interventions (Nash, email comm., 2021). This was reflected in initiatives like the Environmental Development Agency (EDA), which produced *The People's Workbook*, a practical toolkit aimed at supporting people's collective agency, and included agriculture.

A predominant thrust was also liberal-oriented initiatives that sought to support agency for people to 'help themselves'. A key feature of this period was therefore a convergence between

members of the middle class who were working to re-craft production and lifestyle arrangements in their own lives, and the terrain presented by poverty and environmental degradation in the homelands and townships. This resulted in the further elaboration of organic agriculture amongst oppressed classes, often on the philosophical/political basis of self-help and local agency. The common linkage was the health of the soil, and associated nutritional benefits, and it was the nodes at which these linkages between existing historical practice, international ideas, liberal ideas of welfare and self-help, as well as radicalised students seeking to respond to degraded rural conditions, and environmentalism came together that provided the basis of agency for advancing sustainable and organic agricultural practices in South Africa.

By this period therefore, an important nexus for the elaboration of organic agriculture in the country was the convergence between members of the middle class and black poverty through an organic livelihoods approach. By the 1960s, organic agriculture was also congealing around a small middle class, somewhat 'countercultural' base. Even when the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) was formed in 1972, organic agriculture in the global North was still considered 'anti-establishment, if not absolutely revolutionary' and its promoters were viewed as 'marginal and eccentric' (Geier, 2007; quoted in Paull, 2010: 96, 98). Similarly, what might be considered 'alternative' sections of the white middle class in South Africa also came to be key drivers of the organic movement, combining spirituality, health and environmental concerns. The establishment of the Soil Association of South Africa was spearheaded by Catherine Parnell after she travelled to England and met Lady Eve Balfour, a main founder of the UK Soil Association (Reed, 2010). The Association focused on information sharing and training amongst its mainly suburban, gardening members and in 1972 it was represented by Pauline Raphaely at the founding of IFAOM in France (Auerbach, interview, 2018; Paull, 2010).[49] Over the ensuing decades the association would fizzle out and re-launch in different iterations and names, attributed by some of those involved to in-fighting and 'egos' (Rosenberg, interview, 2018; Auerbach, interview, 2018). This in turn partly reflected that organic was largely advanced through individual and entrepreneurial endeavours, which could lead to contestation as some pursued individual economic interests through these organisations in what was an economically marginal sector (Rosenberg, interview, 2018).

[49] IFOAM was initiated by the French organization *Nature et Progrès*, and founded together with Rodale Press of the US, the UK Soil Association, the Soil Association of South Africa, and the Swedish Biodynamic Organisation (Paull, 2010).

From interviews with a number of the 'pioneers' of the organic movement in South Africa, they tended to be drawn to the organic space by a varying combination of environmental, health, cultural anti-establishment and spiritual persuasions, similar to the 'counter-cultural' nature of the organic movement in the global North as it became 'mainstreamed' on the back of the environmental movement that exploded in the late 1960s (Reed, 2010). This also meant that important institutional sites for the elaboration of organic-related agricultural practices amongst the middle class, where many of the organic pioneers gained their initial knowledge and experience of organic and biodynamic practices, were those underpinned by European spiritual philosophers and thinkers, such as Rudolph Steiner and Karl Koenig. These included Camphill Villages, aimed at building integrated lives for mentally challenged people through involvement in productive work (Jackson, 2013), and Waldorf Schools, a network of private schools whose educational approach is informed by Steiner's Anthroposophy (Uhrmacher, 1995; Hauptfleish, interview, 2017; Rosenberg, interview, 2018; Auerbach, interview, 2018). In a context of extreme and racialised uneven development, these trends within the middle class existed together with the social reproduction problems experienced in rural and urban black communities. Many of these actors were thus also inspired by the organic livelihood work of Robert Mazibuko in poor rural communities (Mazibuko was also part of forming the Soil Association of South Africa). A number of them were therefore motivated by humanitarian concerns to assist poor black communities to address hunger and malnutrition through organic or sustainable agriculture. As Raymond Auerbach, a key organic pioneer, rural development practitioner and university researcher, explained of his environmental awakening:

> There and then I took an oath to myself to learn to produce food in a way which did not damage the environment, so that the soil and web of life would not be destroyed. And also to devote my life to helping people deal with rural poverty (Auerbach, interview, 2018).

Through work in rural areas, those like Auerbach would go on to implement and innovate on participatory rural development methods to solve local problems, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (see Auerbach, 2020). Through this stream, organic agriculture was diffused in these communities largely as welfare interventions to supplement household survival activities, as what can be called an organic livelihoods approach. However, today these methods are used across rural development approaches as well as by those who seek to embed them more explicitly in efforts to support the rural poor in collective action to transform power relations, as in the *transformative* sphere (for example, see Andrews *et al*, 2009; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Some university students emerging from the politicised milieu of the 1970s thus

also formed important connections between environmental and health concerns of some of the middle class and the problems of poverty and hunger of oppressed communities.

Many young people who came to advance organic agriculture were shaped by both their engagements with the realities of black poverty as well as their connections with liberal self-help organisations, like Operation GROW. The urban poverty in townships had also motivated the establishment of organisations such as Operation GROW in the 1960s and the Food Gardens Unlimited in 1976[50] (Warshawsky, 2013) to respond to hunger and malnutrition through organic agriculture, based on self-help and behaviour change to help the poor cope with their adverse social circumstances. For example, in the 1960s, Marie Roux, a member of the then Organic Soil Association of South Africa, partly inspired by Robert Mazibuko's deep trenching technique, established Operation GROW. It identified rising food and living costs as a further threat to health and so, in response, aimed to teach township dwellers in Soweto to grow their own organic food in their backyard. As Roux explained:

> The 'survival agriculture' and self-help themes are highly relevant in a country with alarming unemployment and malnutrition figures. Side by side with great progress and prosperity, many are suffering gross privation and poverty. Famine relief offers no permanent solution. They need a hand UP, not a hand OUT. Hand-outs only encourage indigence and loss of self-respect. These matters need to be tackled right at the bottom, NOW. For it is the ever-increasing, unskilled, suffering masses who constitute a grave social and political problem to this land and whoever rules it (Roux, no date: no page number).

In this vein, problems like unemployment and malnutrition were seemingly viewed in isolation from their structural causes. A key prism that the development of an organic livelihoods approach elaborated through was thus local agency, self-help and individual responsibility. One way to understand the diffusion of food sovereignty-related practices in this stream is therefore that the rural and urban circumstances created by an agrarian transition shaped by national oppression, in which the majority of the black population was adversely incorporated into the economy (Du Toit, 2009), facilitated these practices as part of helping them adapt to these conditions. There is thus little evidence that these efforts were connected to political efforts to challenge national oppression and the sources of poverty and hunger, but through their efforts also elaborated the practical capacities that, if articulated to a wider politics, could be important components of an emancipatory project.

[50] Later to become the Food Gardens Foundation.

The rural development apparatus in the ethnically defined Bantustans also provided a setting for linking sustainable agriculture and food practices with attempts to address the effects of rural poverty. Although the homeland and apartheid governments largely focused on conventional agricultural development, some of the homeland structures also provided opportunity for food and development practitioners to advance elements of what one might describe as 'alternative production' (De Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito, 2007). For example, the Transkei was the apartheid government's poster child of the 'independent' homeland states and was thus the most advanced in the process towards becoming a self-governing state (Southall, 1992). The quasi-government Transkei Appropriate Technology Unit (TATU) was a central institution for the homeland's rural development programme, providing advice and assistance to government departments, rural communities, NGOs, and small industries. Its community work focused on self-help projects funded through the South African government and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA).[51] Through this it worked on chemical-free agriculture, building self-sustaining agricultural models, training villagers in Robert Mazibuko's deep trench gardening method, the growing of new foodstuffs, recipe experimentation, producing organic vegetable growing manuals for learners and teachers, and the training of rural women on alternative energy (Thompson, 1986; Small, 2011).

The Farmer Support Group in Zululand and Operation Hunger, which was established in 1980 to provide humanitarian relief to apparent mass hunger in the KwaNdebele homeland in Northern Transvaal, undertook similar rural development focused on developing capacities for sustainable agricultural and food methods (Auerbach, interview, 2018; Breslin, Delius and Madrid, 1997). A number of practitioners that have advanced organic agriculture in civil society also worked in these rural development institutions in the homelands, illustrating the link between welfare NGOs and development as an important nexus for the reproduction and diffusion of organic agriculture as a response to household social reproduction problems.[52] These all helped to elaborate agroecological and nutritional capacities important for a food sovereignty project. However, these what are now considered food and agriculture alternatives were developed in more ameliorative terms, at an apparent distance from political organisation from below for liberation.

[51] The South African government established the DBSA to finance industrial, agricultural and infrastructural development in the homelands (Tapscott, 1992).
[52] The case of Rob Small is illustrative.

1994-present: Opportunities and Contradictions of National Liberation

The democratic transition of 1994 marked a critical breakthrough for the political liberation of the oppressed majority. I show in this section, however, that in the post-1994 period the further development of food system alternatives has occurred as a result of both the opportunities and the limits of national liberation. Specifically, they have been shaped by the relevant agents' engagement, from different political histories and perspectives, with the new institutional, legal and political space created by the democratic era, alongside failed land reform, limited wealth redistribution, and an ongoing and deepening household social reproduction crisis. However, given these conditions, there has been a continued disjuncture between, as well as renewed attempts to connect the elaboration of, food sovereignty-related practices and mass politics for the transformation of the production structure.

For initiatives in the *organic* stream that organise households around small-scale sustainable agriculture in rural and urban areas through an organic livelihoods approach, the contradictory conditions of the new era facilitated their further evolution. On the one hand, political liberalisation related to the state's reconfigured discursive, policy and resourcing support towards development through a 'collegiate logic of state-civil society relations' (Ballard *et al*, 2006: 2). Many of these initiatives historically relied on private sector funding.[53] As the moral, constitutional and political mandate for redistribution and poverty-alleviation took shape in the new national building project, the emphasis on corporate social investment (CSI)[54] by capital grew (Fig, 2005), which bolstered the support for the non-profit sector. This allowed for organisations supporting organic agriculture for livelihoods to expand their purview to include livelihood development through entrepreneurial support, linked with creating often niche markets for some of those small producers. An example is one of the most well-known urban farming initiatives, Abalimi Bezekhaya, which operates in some of the townships of the Cape Flats. Until 2008 Abalimi farmers produced mainly for household consumption, and selling of

[53] Operation Hunger, for example, elicited much of its support from business leaders, and its board of trustees included the CEO of Tiger Oats, which was renamed Tiger Brands in 1999 and is currently the largest general foods manufacturer in South Africa (Greenberg, 2017); Wendy Ackerman of the supermarket giant Pick n Pay; and was chaired by Mervyn King, a judge and later the author of the King codes of business ethics (*Sunday Times*, 2012); the Food Gardens Foundation relied mostly on private sector funding (Warshawsky, 2013); while prominent food security organisations like Abalimi Bezekhaya and Siyavuna rely heavily on private sector funding (Peters, interview, 2016; Small, no date).

[54] Rather than corporate social responsibility, South African business has preferred the term corporate social investment, which, Fig (2005: 601) contends, asks 'no questions about legacy, memory, history, justice, or moral and ethical responsibilities.'

surplus to neighbours on their own initiative (see Karaan and Mohamed, 1998). In 2008 Harvest of Hope was established, which purchases produce from the township producers, cleans, sorts and packages it, and delivers it through a box scheme to consumers in the prosperous southern suburbs of Cape Town. As the director of Harvest of Hope, Rob Small (pers. comm., 2016) explains:

> All those years until 1994, first elections, was just to help people survive apartheid. Okay. That's all. We could not develop people. Black people were not people. Okay, so, only after 1994 did we have citizens, who we could work with. Then we, from 1994 until 2008, we worked *very hard* to develop citizens. Citizen farmers. Ja? Okay. And at a certain point we realised we had some, really something going, and now these citizen farmers needed a market, because it's not good enough just to have food. They need money, too. So we set up the market, Harvest of Hope.

This progression was therefore shaped by the context of democratic South Africa and the opportunities it opened up, including the prospects of addressing immediate needs in expanded ways. On the other hand, the continued levels of unemployment, poverty and hunger, reflecting structural economic and social continuities, have imparted a continued relevance to small-scale food production as a supplementary household survival activity. For example, in the case of Abalimi, the post-apartheid migration to urban townships due to rural stagnation necessitated ongoing support for food production as a poverty relief strategy (Small, pers. comm., 2016). Over time some[55] producers linked to an alternative food network.

Small-scale, alternative agriculture initiatives have proliferated partly as a result of limited structural change and consequent household social reproduction crises. As pointed out by Auerbach (2017), small-scale organic agriculture has expanded in the context of a stunted land reform process, as a production response to what land poor households have available in this context of stunted transformation. For example, Siyavuna Development Centre, which supports small farmers, now organised through local associations and the Kumnandi fresh produce brand, was started by an organisation that ran a foster care programme and feeding scheme, when it decided it needed to develop a deeper response to the dire situation of many of the foster households. Through the Community Investment Programme (CIP) method, problems of poverty and food insecurity were identified by community members, and participants opted for

[55] Abalimi works with about 2500 farmers at any one time, of whom only about 100 are involved in supplying Harvest of Hope. The majority are therefore supported to reach what Abalimi terms 'subsistence' level, in which they are able to produce food for supplementary home consumption, while those who produce small surpluses for Harvest of Hope are seen as having progressed to 'livelihood' level, the next level being that of 'commercial' (Small, pers. comm, 2016).

solutions that could be built from their existing resource base: varying amounts of land, labour (due to unemployment) and agricultural knowledge. Hence micro- and small-scale agriculture was specified as the solution (Peters, interview, 2016; Geerts, 2014). In this sense then, the advancement of food sovereignty related alternatives in this organic stream have developed in articulation with conditions that reflect the lack of structural, policy and agrarian change in favour of popular classes.

As shown in the history above, the *organic* stream developed through activity across class and social locations. In the contemporary period, evolving connections continue to be formed between historically *lifestyle* and middle class realms of *organic* food and agriculture activity, and those from working class communities, as organisations respond to the contradictory realities and opportunities of the post-apartheid era, such as Slow Food and the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO). A key organisation in the *organic* sphere, SAOSO is emblematic in this regard. The organisation is the latest iteration of the historical line of national organic associations. Much of the current leadership has acknowledged that earlier versions of organic organisations, and the early days of SAOSO, were dominated by those who, because of historical privilege in access to land and resources, were in better positions to pursue their organic-related economic interests through the organisation. They have therefore recognised that part of SAOSO's success will be in the need to broaden its social and racial base (Purkis, personal observation, 2017). This started from realising the problem of racial homogeneity when engaging government for its support, but it shifted – attributed by some to interaction between the more progressive actors and younger blood in the organisation who had come of age in a post-apartheid era (Barrow, interview, 2018; Rosenberg, interview, 2018) – to a more concerted effort to better position SAOSO in relation to the country's socio-economic and racial demographics. This led to a stronger link between traditionally middle class and entrepreneurial actors, aspiring organic entrepreneurs from working class communities, and small-scale farmers emerging from the livelihoods development realms of activity. The basis for this connection is a food-centred one: the ecological conditions and effects of food production, the consumption of clean food, and the establishment of relations between food producers and consumers, entrepreneurialism and market access and expansion. The starting point is thus food, and in trying to bring a broad array of social actors around organic and healthy food, seeks to eschew a more politicised stance. As one of SAOSO's key organisers explains:

> I think the message we have been putting out there is pretty, it's not contentious, it's not political. It's a clean message, it's a message of care and a concern about our food system, and people are beginning to buy into that (Anderson, interview, 2017).

This food-centred and ostensibly 'non-political' approach to problems of the food system partly reflects SAOSO's class composition, of trying to organise those from working class communities as well as large organic businesses and export-oriented actors around a non-contentious vision of clean food and healthy soil. The approach tends to be that of growing the private sector around organic practice, with the market as an important framework. This can involve, on the one hand, alternative market logics, such as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), which are based on a peer-to-peer, human relationship-based approach to organic assurance, and are thus seen by some as an alternative to third party, export-oriented certification schemes that are often punitive and require a high level of resources to participate in (Wainwright, interview, 2016). On the other hand, for some PGS is a stepping-stone towards third party certification for export and a means of assurance for entering existing, corporate-dominated retail chains (Pers. Obs., SAOSO AGM, 2018 and Bryanston Market PGS AGM, 2018).

Indeed, as an organic sector organisation, SAOSO resulted from a state-sponsored FRIDGE study that mandated its formation. In 2006 two organic sector pioneers together with the CEO at the time of the National African Farmers Union (NAFU), an organisation of commercial black farmers aligned to the state and the ruling ANC, submitted an appeal to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to conduct a FRIDGE study for the organic sector (Rosenberg, interview, 2018). FRIDGE refers to the Fund for Research into Industrial Development, Growth and Equity, and the purpose of such studies is to guide the DTI and NEDLAC in deciding whether and how to support the growth of a globally competitive sector in the national economy.[56] The DTI then commissioned, through NEDLAC, the study for the organic sector. The basic outlook of the resulting report, *Study to Develop a Value Chain Strategy for Sustainable Development and Growth of Organic Agriculture* (Institute for Natural Resources [INR], 2008), is about developing a market sector, providing opportunities to support and develop 'agribusiness entrepreneurs' (INR, 2008: 169) from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, building up the capacity of the sector to access high value export markets as an important lever of its development, and align with existing government frameworks and

[56] http://www.dti.gov.za/industrial_development/research.jsp

obligations related to AgriBEE, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the prescripts of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). SAOSO has also subsequently developed national organic production standards as a framework for the expansion of the organic sector to adhere to.

The organisation thus might be described as a form of collective action that seeks to influence market conditions and strengthen the market position (Bernstein, 1996c) of organic producers, processors and retailers. However, at the same time, there are those in SAOSO who also wish to align this with a wider social question, raising the question of the relationship, or possible tensions, between an approach of market expansion and social justice. As described by Anderson (interview, 2017):

> Are we targeting people who shop at Woolies[57] who just like to see the organic logo on the bag, or are we catering to the majority of our people who are being poisoned with GMOs? It has to be the latter. Our people are being poisoned. It's a crime against humanity, what's happening. So there is the elite organic market, but then there's the clean food market at the bottom that has to grow. We have got to get all the people selling on the road, all of the people selling in the townships, all of the people selling to their communities, they've got to be selling clean food. So for me organic is, everything has to be based on those organic standards. Even PGS is based on those organic standards. Without those standards there is no structure for the farmer to work with (Anderson, interview, 2017).

These two intersecting logics of commercialisation (which has historically underpinned the worldwide growth of the organic sector; Reed, 2010), and social justice reflects the tension that Raynolds (2004: 726) points to with regard to the global trade in organic products: 'between mainstream market conventions – rooted in efficiency, standardization, and price competition––and alternative movement conventions – linked to personal relationships of trust, ecological diversity, and social justice.' This raises questions about the extent of social change required to address hunger and the distribution of entitlements that trying to advance alternatives in the industrialised food system can achieve, within the prevailing distributional regime and class and property relations of the post-liberation era. This issue will be returned to in the final section of the chapter.

The post-1994 period also saw attempts to link more radical demands for redistribution, rights and entitlements of the poor with alternatives to the industrial food system, by those organisations who largely constitute the *transformative* sphere of the typology. These actions

[57] Common abbreviation for Woolworths, a top-end food retailer in South Africa.

were taken up through the frame of food sovereignty, but they came together in the context of the failure of the national liberation project to shift the material foundations of South African inequality. The organisations and platforms in the *transformative* sphere emerged largely from traditions of organising to challenge the injustices of apartheid and especially organisations in the land sector, which evolved and took new forms under the changing political and economic conditions after 1994. Attempts to mobilise the landless around food politics emerged from a combination of civil society organisations' engagements in transnational activist spaces and the social reproduction crises of communities that they worked in, in the context of failed land reform and a lack of a coherent national land or agrarian movement.[58] The junctures in which food politics was adopted in this current appears to further reflect the limitations of national liberation politics and the ruptures in political terrain in South Africa, especially as it relates to land.

An important process in this regard was the formation of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) amidst much excitement, especially internationally, that it would resemble the MST of Brazil; like the MST, it openly posited land occupations as a potential tactic (Baletti *et al*, 2008). However, relating the two also reveals important differences between the movements themselves and their contexts. I want to highlight one here, which is important for understanding the place of transformative food politics emerging in this realm of struggle rooted in land rights. The MST's transformative class politics is based on a social base, and political identity, of historical peasant struggles (Fernandes, 2013). It has a long peasant history to draw from and, despite its struggles, the peasantry remains a significant part of Brazil's agrarian class structure.[59] Following from this, the second key foundation of its organised class politics is a politicised linkage between land, citizenship and agriculture. In contrast, the LPM did not have histories and infrastructures of peasant organisation to draw from. The politicised linkage in the

[58] This is not to imply a lack of land and agrarian struggles, as Jacobs (2018: 899) reminds us, which he refers to as 'land reform from below.'

[59] The peasantry, as a sector of the national population, as a political constituency and as a subject of economic and political forces, constitutes a large portion of Brazil's population (Wright and Wolford, 2003), with family farming production still accounting for around 70 per cent of domestic food consumption (Graeub *et al*, 2016: 10). As such, it has historically been the core of the MST's social base, and constitutes its core political subject. Thus when I spoke to and interviewed members of the MST's National Secretariat and its members in the camps, their common label for MST members was 'the peasants'. Indeed, in the two encampments and one settlement on the outskirts of the city of Ribeiro Preto in Sau Paulo state in which I spent time and interviewed residents, many of them came from the urban working class, and many still had family members with jobs in the city and would come to the settlement or camp on weekends, yet were still referred to, and referred to themselves as, 'peasants'. Their identification with an agrarian and peasant existence was largely informed by their personal connections to peasant history and their repudiation of the tribulations of urban working class life, and the process of political subject formation that the MST actively engenders (Interviews and fieldwork notes; also see Baletti *et al* [2008]).

LPM was primarily that between land and liberation from racial oppression, in the form of claims for citizenship and concrete implementation of equal rights. I suggest that this underlying political linkage is important in interpreting the scope and limitations of food politics in the *transformative* current.

Together with internal dynamics and paths chosen, the close association between the politics of the land question and the national liberation struggle among the oppressed majority had important implications for the direction that organising around the land and agrarian questions would take after 1994. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the main liberation organisation, the ANC, failed to politically connect with peasant struggles or undertake mass organising over rural land, production and reproduction, being centred rather on mass urban and worker struggles. After the 1960s outright rural resistance over land had largely died down, mostly under state repression. By the last days of apartheid, about 60% of the country's population still lived in rural areas (Presidency, 2014: 20) but in the rural Bantustans the upsurge of organising under the mass democratic movement (MDM) in the 1980s occurred mainly around education and state repression rather than the land question (Levin and Solomon, 1997). By the 1980s formal organising in the broad democratic movement around the land question and the 'rural voice from below' (Mngxitama, 2005: 49) was grounded mainly in land rights NGOs, out of which the National Land Committee (NLC) emerged. The NLC, as a component of the broader liberation movement, was constituted by NGOs through which this part of the national liberation movement took up political organising on the land question, through providing assistance to communities facing forced removals, publication of their ordeals and organising legal assistance. By the early 1990s the NLC was closely aligned with the formal liberation movement, and was staffed mainly by United Democratic Front (UDF) activists, many of who were also active in the ANC Youth League and SACP (Mnxgitama, 2005: 52; Ntsebeza, 2007; Nauta, 2001).

After 1994 the state adopted a market-based land reform programme largely informed by the advice of the World Bank (Murray and Williams, 1994), which reflected a wider context of the restructuring of the accumulation model to new political conditions that reasserted the hegemony of dominant fractions of capital post-1994 (Greenberg, 2004). During the 1990s, while the NLC focused on land reform policy, decades of public support and investment in the wider agro-food sector was transformed into corporate wealth as key institutions privatised and transnationalised their operations under the benefits of liberalisation and deregulation, leading

to further corporate concentration in the food value chain (Greenberg, 2010; Bernstein, 2013; Ledger, 2016). This significantly restricted the prospects for developing black farmers and, therefore, for sustaining a link between land reform and agriculture (Du Toit, 2018).

At the same time, the achievement of formal democracy in a context of market liberalisation was followed by a general demobilisation of civil society, both as the ANC actively demobilised civic structures and as many civil society organisations changed their relationships to the state as the envisaged task shifted from resistance to development (Ballard *et al*, 2006). This trend was similarly reflected in organising around the land question – there were a few spontaneous land occupations in the early 1990s where communities pre-empted the land reform process by occupying their dispossessed land (Mogale, interview, 2015; Mngxitama, 2005), but as the political opportunity structure opened, so energies and expectations for redress were channeled into an institutional, bureaucratic process as the state developed a policy framework with three legs for land reform: restitution, redistribution and tenure security (Ntsebeza, 2007).

Given the transformative expectations on the new ANC state and the NLC's linkage to it through the national liberation movement, the most organised section of rural civil society adopted a position of close collaboration with the state and focused on policy formulation for land reform. Many of the staff from the NLC affiliates moved to occupy positions in the Department of Land Affairs and other land reform institutions such as the Land Claims Commission. As such, in the 1990s the NLC moved away from rural mobilisation (Ntsebeza, 2007). Where it did focus on mobilisation, it was state-centred, assisting communities to organise in relation to the bureaucratic processes around the three land reform policy programmes (Conway, interview, 2015). However, as the former director of an NLC affiliate, the Southern Cape Land Committee (SCLC), reflected, aligning with the state led to a contradictory relation of engaging with the objectives of redress, rights and justice, while simultaneously contributing to constructing the architecture for a market-based land reform programme that undermined those objectives (*ibid*).

Much organising of the landless was thus hinged to the ANC state grounded in a perception of it as a primary political agent to resolve the national question and a critical associated component, the land question. However, an important moment leading to a break in this association was when at the end of the decade the state shifted the emphasis of land reform from that of rights and economic improvement for the poor to a more explicitly class-biased

objective of developing a class of black commercial farmers; that is, from equity to productivity (Sihlongonyane, 2005; Hall, 2013). This ushered in a new phase of land activism as the shift, on the back of the failure of the state to reach its land reform targets, led to the birth of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) – as well as the demise of the NLC. The LPM was launched at the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban in 2001, during a period from the late 1990s that saw an upswing of social movement struggle ignited by neoliberal macroeconomic restructuring after the relative hiatus of popular activity during the 1990s (Greenberg, 2006; Ballard *et al*, 2006). However, the process also heightened divisions within the NLC. One point of division was how it should relate to the ANC state, whether a more overtly challenging role or continue to pursue collaboration with the national liberation movement in the state. Connected to this was how the NLC should relate to social movements, and in particular the LPM. The launching of the LPM was a controversial move in the NLC. With the LPM's adoption of an overtly oppositional politics towards the state, division further deepened and in 2002 the NLC disbanded (Mogale, interview, 2015; Mngxitama, 2005).

The LPM claimed a membership of 100 000, 90 per cent of whom were rural inhabitants (Alexander; in Baletti *et al*, 2008). The movement also connected with urban struggles, mainly around evictions in inner-city buildings and informal settlements on the outskirts of Johannesburg (Greenberg, 2006). Its core base were thus the 'landless', a socially heterogenous category united by disaffection with the state's land policies: those in rural areas, like labour tenants who suffered under racial agrarian power relations, to those in urban areas who sought land for housing and were resisting government-led removals (Alexander, 2006).

The LPM continued only for a few years after the collapse of the NLC, and despite subsequent attempts to revive it, it remains a shell of what it was once expected to be. Although it affiliated to the global peasant movement, La Via Campesina (LVC), and had close ties with the MST, it only managed to build a tenuous connection with food politics. For example, it attempted to build a transformative politics over food access in peri-urban settlements around Johannesburg. One of the household level responses to the deepening of social reproduction crises in post-apartheid South Africa has been the initiation of food production in attempts to generate income and supplement food consumption (Mosoetsa, 2011). It therefore started from an agrarian premise by organising people engaged in such survivalist food cultivation in informal settlements and adjacent lands into an agricultural network, through which it was hoped that a 'politically articulate and mobilised national network of food gardeners' could be developed

(Greenberg, 2006: 27). However, although the network apparently flourished at first on the back of an initially active political movement, it was also momentary. The reasons for this reflected the wider factors underpinning the LPM's demise. One was internal weakness, as those like Greenberg (2006) suggest that it lacked visionary leadership able to guide it through a broader political plan of action and take advantage of political opportunities. Another was a lack of technical and organisational capability and experience (Greenberg, email comm., 13 July 2020).

However, the LPM's decline, and that of its food network, also reflected wider factors related to the history of national oppression and the contradictions of national liberation that weakened the prospects of a national land movement and of articulating the politics of the country's land and agrarian questions with the politics of food. I will mention three that are most relevant to this chaper. The first was the NLC's and LPM's emergence from the fold of the broad national liberation movement and thus its relationship with the ANC state. The nature of the LPM's birth was one of contentious politics towards the state, after the state's poor performance on land reform and its deepening class bias. However, in the context of contestation within the ruling alliance (between the ANC, SACP and COSATU) over the neoliberal macroeconomic framework adopted under GEAR in 1996, the SACP's 2004 Red October Campaign, 'Mawubuye Umhlaba: Land! Food! Jobs!' demanded land for the landless, sought to target the commercial agriculture lobby, and called for the speeding up of land reform together with agrarian reform to ensure food security, sustainable rural communities and support for small-scale farming (SACP, 2004). After much internal debate (Alexander, 2006), the LPM decided to cooperate with the SACP on the campaign, which led to a National Land Summit in 2005 (Hall and Jara, 2009).

In the communities in which it organised, however, the LPM was contending with deepening political cleavages as it articulated a more radical politics of confronting the ANC state over land. Alexander (2006) argues that the notion of 'the landless' was an important uniting political innovation that emphasised the failure to realise citizenship, political freedom and rights; but the movement's contentious mode of politics also alienated potential support bases at community level, as it was frequently interpreted as anti-ANC (Greenberg, 2004). This dynamic, again, played out in the food network, as some of its key agriculture groups fragmented over the extent of criticism of the ruling ANC (Greenberg, 2006). There was also increased estrangement between the LPM and the ANC's political partners, including the

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and civics like the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), a movement that was once a militant force in confronting apartheid at community level and remained closely aligned to ANC politics post-1994 (Zuern, 2006). According to Greenberg (2006: 4), in this context of post-liberation political fragmentation, the LPM did not build 'a strong organic leadership' that could withstand and negotiate these dynamics at community level, in addition to other internal dynamics, and the movement thus weakened.

Secondly, the broader role of the state also limited the logic and politics of food production that the LPM was able to build in relation to land. For example, the case of building and sustaining individual food gardens as a practical precondition for a wider political food network was also hampered by the political dynamics of local government. In the post-apartheid era local initiative often combined with state support fostered a mushrooming of urban and rural food gardens amidst the on-going social reproduction crisis, but as Greenberg discusses in relation to the gardens in the LPM network, in resource-starved contexts their political potential has tended to be diminished by being locked into achieving technical and bureaucratic benchmarks in order to receive state support, thus conforming with state-led prescriptions. This links back to the role of the state in structuring civil society after 1994, as described by Greenberg (2006: 24) in the case of the LPM's food gardens:

> The state uses its concentrated political power to shape the discursive frameworks in which delivery, welfare, support and economic and social life as a whole are negotiated. The state follows this up with selective inclusion in public activities based on conformity to state led prescriptions of what to ask for, when to ask and how civil society should organise. Anything outside of the state's framework is either ignored, marginalised, co-opted or repressed, depending on circumstances and the potential threat to the dominant political project.

A third important factor that played into the prospects of building a movement that contests the politics of the agrarian question and of food in the post-apartheid era is how the class structure constructed under national oppression (discussed in Chapter 4) affected attempts to organise a movement. While 'landless' provided a frame that connected 'labour tenants and farm workers to chiefs and other elites', some argue that it papered over differences in class background and other social circumstances of its constituency and thus did not negotiate a political programme that rested on a coherent class project (Greenberg, 2004: 35; James, 2002a). As Ben Cousins, a prominent South African agrarian scholar, contended:

> I think it was a big problem in the LPM, you had very different interest groups all brought together under the rubric of 'the landless'. But, you know, former labour tenants in Mpumalanga and KZN, farmworkers, people in informal settlements in Gauteng, and restitution beneficiaries have very different class interests, but none of that could be discussed at all, um, it was a no-no, we were all just 'the landless'. And it was no surprise really when the whole thing fell apart within two years (Cousins, interview, 2015).

This question of social heterogeneity further expresses itself in differing reasons for desiring land and the variety of roles it plays in social reproduction strategies: arising from racialised and gendered patterns of labour migrancy; land dispossession and the resulting array of rural-urban linkages; the heterogeneity of the types of demands linked to land access; and the expected use of land and the range of livelihoods. These pose questions for the practical base upon which land and the agrarian questions might be politicised in relation to food. The collapse of the LPM, partly reflecting its failure to form a collective political subject out of a socially fragmented constituency, and the failure of the national liberation project to address the land question through state power, were important processes shaping today's *transformative* stream of agro-food politics from below. In addition, a number of further factors came together to shape this stream, including the ignition of food politics by the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in South Africa, the turn to supporting self-organising of the landless autonomously from the national liberation project, and the role of the global justice and food sovereignty movements in shaping the food politics of this stream through transnational activist linkages.

Other currents of activism and organisation also coalesced after 1994 to constitute the justice-centred approach to food sovereignty that links the rights of the poor to the need for agrarian reform include the Trust for Communtiy Outreach and Education (TCOE), a network of agrarian and small fisher support organisations. Steve Biko and others established TCOE in the 1970s to provide education and health services to marginalised rural communities. However, leading up to the political transition, the organisation shifted its work away from what it felt was the state's responsibility and towards building pressure for interventions that would more thoroughly address the skewed distribution of resources, of which, given the organisation's rural focus, 'the unfinished business' of agrarian reform was seen as pivotal (Andrews, interview, 2016). As will be discussed below, given intransigence on progress with land and agrarian reform post-liberation, it increasingly moved to supporting the building of poor people's movements to challenge the state.

A third historical node that had important links with the land rights sector and *transformative* stream has been organisations working on questions related to *food justice*. They emerged from environmental justice-centred anti-GM activism that arose from the passing of the South Africa GMO Act in 1997. Biowatch South Africa, an organisation established after the legislation's passing, initiated a loose alliance that Scoones (2008: 339) describes as a 'hybrid coalition of interests and ideas', which included organisations approaching the issue variously from traditional environmentalism, environmental justice, sustainable or organic agriculture, a rights-based orientation, and consumer food safety. Leading organisations like Biowatch crafted an overall emphasis of the network on the rights of marginalised communities and a sensitivity to histories of dispossession, exhibited in what Schurman and Munro (2010: 166) call a 'decommodification bias' in their analytical and normative frameworks. However, its leadership remained largely middle class, 'well-educated, urban-based and well off' (Scoones, 2008: 337). Given the lack of a comprehensive land movement, it did not connect to a mass agrarian base at the time, as was the case, for example, with the anti-GM movement and the MST in Brazil. While it formed connections with COSATU and organisations working in townships, like the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), it was also not grounded in a mass base of poor black communities who were the bulk consumers of genetically modified maize, and so its leadership largely remained middle class and urban.

However, the justice-oriented perspectives of organisations like Biowatch and the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the networks they had formed in the global food justice and sovereignty movements translated into important links between the *transformative* and *food justice* approaches to food system change. They participated with agrarian organisations in building the food sovereignty discourse and practice in South Africa, especially as it related to the intersection of food sovereignty issues like GM and agroecology and rural people's struggles (see, for example, SPP, ACB and FSC, 2011). Also, as the high point of the anti-GM network petered, some organisations turned to new foci. For example, the NGO Biowatch turned to supporting small-scale farmers in northern KwaZulu-Natal Province in agroecological production in household and community gardens, seed saving and marketing. While this practical approach is similar to livelihoods development in the *organic* sphere, its historical environmental justice perspective endeared it to food sovereignty. Working with such communities was an environmental justice response to the introduction of GMOs, to support communities in their right to have control over their seed systems and culturally appropriate and diverse food. However, Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) would also situate them in a

'radical' stream as in their lobbying activities as an NGO they confront certain efforts to advance the corporate food regime, and they have a historically strong relationship with organisations such as SPP, who support grassroots mobilisation for agrarian reform and food sovereignty, for example. The African Centre for Biosafety (ACB, later renamed African Centre for Biodiversity, which it will be referred to from hereon) built links with organisations on the African continent resisting the advance of biotechnology and supporting small farmers, and fostered firm relationships in transnational agro-food activist networks. Through pre-existing activist networks, both organisations also maintained and built relationships with South African agrarian organisations, such as the Surplus People's Project, Women on Farms Project, Southern Cape Land Committee and the Trust for Community Outreach and Education, making them a significant feature of the *transformative* stream as well.

Most of the organisations and struggles analysed here thus involve NGOs, mostly led by leftist activists, that turned to supporting local agency and self-organisation to challenge the state on land and agrarian reform. Food politics, through food sovereignty, entered their work in the context of three factors. Firstly, from the early 2000s many of these NGOs formed enhanced connections with related movements in other parts of the world through spaces such as the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (Hart, 2008). They also increasingly engaged in radical transnational activist networks and spaces like the World Social Forum (WSF), La Via Campesina and some, like SPP and TCOE, had built relationships with the MST. The discourse of food sovereignty from these transnational spaces was thus weaved into their work in the concrete conditions of South African rural communities, where they started to introduce questions of the corporate-controlled industrial food system into their work supporting the agency of the rural poor. However, this occurred, secondly, in the context of structural weakness given the failure to shift the state on agrarian reform and thus the overall maintenance of unequal material and social relations in the agrarian structure.

The third important feature of the context in which food sovereignty discourse entered was that of movement weakness. After the failure of the national liberation project to resolve the land question, and the subsequent failure of the NLC and LPM, most NGOs turned towards supporting more autonomous movement-building starting with immediate problems at community-level, in order to lay a material basis for a more meaningful expansion of the movement beyond the contradictions of the national liberation project. Food sovereignty thus

informed the support to local agrarian and food activities that take place within the existing agrarian and economic structure, such as seed saving and sharing and small-scale agroecology. This approach is also aimed at laying a basis for longer-term alternatives and to articulate with struggle to address the land and agrarian question. These interventions are thus also seen as part of a longer-term movement building agenda through an alternative vision of agrarian reform aligned with food sovereignty, democratic rights of rural people and gender justice. In this sense food sovereignty is seen by some of the organisations as a way to further conceptualise and politicise agrarian reform (May, interview, 2015; Wesso, interview, 2015; Andrews, interview, 2016).

In aiming to build a stronger base for a wider movement, most of these organisations have supported the formation of associations, forums and movements. For example, the Surplus People Project (SPP) supported the growth of the Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign, shortened to Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC), in the Northern and Western Cape, which was launched in 2008. The TCOE supported the formation of the militant farm workers union, CSAAWU, and the Western Cape-organised Mayibuye Land Rights Movement. TCOE also supported the local movements like these and associations in forming a national movement, the Inyanda National Land Movement, launched at the end of 2014. They are united by their professions to push for far-reaching land and agrarian reform in the interests of the poor, and to link demands like those over housing and electricity together with food sovereignty in order to operationalise the perceived necessity of connecting the struggles of the urban and rural poor and working classes in the creation of a wider, radical challenge to material and societal power relations (Inyanda, 2015; FSC, 2011; Gola, group interview, 2017).

A further aspect of organising related to food and the agrarian question that has become prominent in the post-apartheid era is related to resistance to extractivism and large-scale development projects. Rural residents in the former Bantustans face renewed rounds of dispossession as the state and mining capital have turned their eyes to the rich mineral deposits located in the former homelands, where ninety percent of new mining applications are located (Claassens, 2018). A key impact of this mining push has been to remove affected rural communities from land-based resources, reducing cultivation and diversity of crop production and consumption, and so diminishing the agrarian element of local economies without a concomitant offset of secure employment (Mtero, 2017). Such struggles also include those like the Philippi Horticultural Area (PHA) Food and Farming Campaign, which has fought to

protect peri-urban farmland in Cape Town, and the water table underneath it, from silica mining and private housing developments. In doing so, it has evolved into a campaign to transform the area through land reform and agroecological production (Sonday and Coleman, interview, 2 October 2017; Genis, 2016). Struggles connecting land, food and agriculture are thus also occurring in relation to large-scale development and extractivism. I situate them in the *transformative* sphere because they challenge material and policy interests flowing from the Minerals Energy Complex (MEC) (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996), class interests connected to the existing or proposed 'development' projects, and confront the state through the assertion of democratic citizenship rights and environmental justice.

This section has examined the history of the *organic* and *transformative* (and to some extent *food justice*) currents identified in the typology in order to trace the historical limits and contemporary challenges of connecting contestation of the dominant agro-food system and agro-food alternatives with popular mass politics. It showed how the longest history over the twentieth century related to the elaboration of agro-food practices alternative to those of the industrial system occurred in the *organic* stream. The material basis for these practices was the eroding soil conditions in the reserves as settler capitalism intensified land shortage. These efforts later connected with middle class efforts towards organic food consumption and production, and so involved elements of co-creation through class and racial divisions. Thus while organic is often associated with elite consumption, in South Africa a key part of the development of the organic movement was its relationship to conditions of racially delineated underdevelopment. However, these practices were promoted first through a paternalistic, civilising project, and then later as a means of self-help. This meant it was consistently disconnected from political organisation to contest the agrarian and national questions. The *transformative* sphere largely emerges from folds of the national liberation movement and only started integrating food politics into its work amidst the contradictions of national liberation. In contrast to the *organic* stream it seeks to build social movement power to contest broader social and power relations. However, it has also faced limits in this regard. The two streams, however, should be seen as relational. The *organic* stream has in fact probably done the most to advance the actual practices that constitute a food sovereignty system, while less grounded in politics for the wider systemic transformation that food sovereignty requires. However, at the same time, as working class actors and formations continue to connect with the *organic* stream, new articulations with varying political implications may emerge. Given the respective limits of *organic*, *transformative* and *food justice*, the question might therefore be how stronger linkages

might be formed to advance both practical alternatives and movement power for wider systemic transformation, and on what political basis.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the terrain of organising as it relates to some of the contradictions of the dominant agro-food system in South Africa, in order to understand the organising terrain with which the global discourse, politics and practice of food sovereignty meets. Many forms of organising exist at different levels, from organising in communities to initiatives working on food system governance. However, given that I am coming from a movement and a class perspective, the focus of the chapter was on forms of organising and initiatives that seek to organise the agency of members of popular classes. In this regard I suggested that understanding the different approaches to organising related to the agro-food system requires one to look beyond how they envision a good food system. Against the backdrop of the dynamics of national oppression, dispossession and uneven development, it requires also looking to how they are related to the question of social transformation and the means for change; that is, their ideological outlooks and their class agency. This produces a suggested typology of *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *transformative.* At the same time, the chapter also showed that these are not pure distinctions: firstly, there are historical and contemporary connections between them that encourages one to instead see them as *relational* and therefore also shaping each other through both their convergences and divergences. Secondly, the types themselves do not strictly adhere to the descriptions I have given, but also reflect elements of the other types and have inconsistences and contradictions within them.

However, the key argument of the chapter was that although this 'movement' terrain exists, in the context of the contradictions of national liberation, challenges remain as to its links to mass politics and structural transformation, and to which a significant social force for food sovereignty can be clearly identified. I showed that to understand this relative disjuncture partly requires a historical perspective on the history of agro-food initiatives that have linked with popular classes. In the context of national oppression, these initiatives were elaborated in ways that poorly articulated with political resistance. This was of course linked to the scale of dispossession and de-agrarianisation, which especially by the second half of the twentieth century reduced the material base for agrarian politics. However, it was also due to the ideological persuasions of those who for the longest time over twentieth century history

promoted these practices, as welfare responses that were poorly integrated into the prevailing politics of the agrarian and national questions. Furthermore, it can also be connected to the lacuna in national liberation organisations that may otherwise have played a greater role in coordinating rural struggles in the context of the national question, and through which more politicised links between agro-food system alternatives, land and national resistance might have emerged. Attempts in the contemporary period to build political linkages between food sovereignty, mass popular politics and the agrarian question therefore do so in the context of this history as well as the contradictions of national liberation.

However, this apparent disjuncture is not an irredeemable structural fact, and political agency related to the agrarian question persists. Deeper understanding of the ongoing building of local capacities and alternatives and their potential role as a base for a wider transformative politics require ongoing attention. As some have argued (Cousins, 2007; Hall and Jara, 2009; Jara, 2014; 2019), the building of rural social movements and alliances with other sectors to contest the contours of the contemporary agrarian question remain pertinent, and efforts continue in this regard. There may currently be an absence of a coherent, national land or agrarian movement but, firstly, often localised struggles related to the land and agrarian questions continue across the country. Secondly, there are initiatives working to connect these struggles into wide-scale movements and build alliances to contest aspects of the agrarian question. Thirdly, as shown above, key actors in constituting these efforts and the *transformative* current have been NGOs, which raises the question of how their attempts to support the building of transformative agrarian and food politics play out in practice amongst popular social actors, and their implications for class-based organisation. In this context, having now examined the national terrain of conscious agro-food organising, the subsequent chapters turn to examining these dynamics of organisation, land, and alternative agro-food practices in more localised contexts through the cases of an agrarian community resisting proposed mining on their land, the Amadiba, and a smallholder farmer organisation seeking to advance food sovereignty through agroecology, the Mopani Farmers Association (MFA).

Chapter 6: Food politics, the agrarian question and class struggle in Amadiba

Introduction

This thesis has sought to explore the nature of food sovereignty politics from below in South Africa and its intersections with the agrarian question. I therefore explored the place of food and the rise of the dominant agro-food system in historical resistance to colonial and apartheid oppression, within the parameters of the agrarian and national question. This helped to create the context for understanding the contemporary food movement in South Africa through a typology, with which the global food sovereignty discourse, politics and practice has interacted and that it has also further shaped. The next question to tackle is how these forms of organising translate at the local level, where they are ultimately rooted and where concrete conditions shape their political import and character (Borras *et al*, 2008). That is, what happens in efforts to translate food sovereignty into local organising in the context of the country's agrarian question? To highlight the conjunctural and contingent factors shaping the actual forms and outcomes, in this and the next chapter, I focus on two initiatives aligned in varying ways with the transformative approach identified in the typology, which I argued seeks to challenge and transform existing relations of power, property and accumulation that reproduce the marginalisation and disempowerment that lie at the root of hunger and inequality.

I choose cases associated with transformative food politics because they reflect the historical roots and articulations of food sovereignty as a political response by class-based struggles to the contradictions of national and global capitalisms. However, I use the categories of the typology to show that they help to make sense of dynamic and contradictory realities expressed at the local level, such as how, in the case of the Amadiba anti-mining struggle, organic livelihood interventions can be an important part of a transformative struggle; or, on the contrary, how attempts at building transformative organising around food and the agrarian question are translated by local conditions and politics into attempts to advance productivist practices resembling organic livelihood approaches, as in the case of the Mopani Farmers' Association (examined in the next chapter). In this chapter and the next, I explore the intermediating factors shaping such outcomes through two contrasting cases of food sovereignty politics.

Agriculture has existed as a widespread practice of reproduction for a long time in Amadiba, but this chapter shows that it has assumed a particular transformative political significance through its articulation with the anti-mining struggle. It is not only the threat of mining that has stimulated the politicisation of agriculture in transformative ways, but the mode of grassroots organising as well. A transformative politics has grown endogenously and independently of a food sovereignty ideational framing. The technical conditions of production therefore do not necessarily accord with food sovereignty principles, seen in apparent declining agrobiodiversity, changing agricultural practices in response to commercialisation such as greater external input use and less diversified crop production, and links with the corporate industrial food system through both consumption and production. However, local food production and provisioning has taken on a transformative politics through its articulations with a wider struggle that challenges aspects of prevailing economic and political power, demands democratic rights to participation, and defends popular sovereignty over production and productive resources – strongly reminiscent of the global food sovereignty discourse and politics expressed by La Via Campesina. Where organic livelihood interventions following techniques of food sovereignty have been made with the support of an outside NGO, their political significance has been deepened by the connection to the political struggle. Agricultural practices are thus implicated in this transformative politics addressing the social conditions of production, and that makes the pursuit of food sovereignty possible. The particular features of the Amadiba context that have shaped this politics, and their intersections with agriculture and food, are therefore the focus of this chapter.

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section suggests viewing the struggle as a response to a threat posed by a class project from above, and so it has taken on an oppositional character. At the same time it has also illustrated popular-democratic elements seen in democratic demands linked to control over production. The second section examines the agrarian relations of production and reproduction in Amadiba from which these emerge, and which remain central to household survival. The section includes a consideration of the historical and incipient processes of class formation and their historical and cultural mediations; processes that are threatened by this state-supported class project from above. The direct threat that such a class project poses to communal access to the means of production and reproduction is an important factor in instigating a transformative struggle. However, as Otero (1999) has shown, the actual nature of the struggle and its relationship to class are shaped by subjective and contingent factors as well. The third section therefore examines the means through which these social

relations of agriculture have been subjectively re-articulated into the political sphere of resistance, which includes political negotiations of patterns of differentiation. The fourth section explains how the relationship to the state, the nature of leadership and wider alliances have further shaped the political process that has allowed a transformative politics of food to emerge. The chapter concludes by restating the material basis of the transformative nature of the struggle, but also the contingent and conjunctural elements of its construction, highlighting the political processes key to its transformative direction.

Class Power, Mining and Amadiba Resistance

The attempt to mine titanium-related products from the sand dunes of the Amadiba coastal area by Transworld Energy and Minerals Resources (TEM), the South African subsidiary of the Australian-based Mineral Commodities Ltd (MRC), can be seen as an attempt at accumulation from above, in that its origin and impetus is external to the concerned community, rather than emerging relatively 'spontaneously' as an 'internal' process from the conditions of petty commodity production within the community (Mamdani, 1987; Cousins, 2013a). The proposed mining is connected to a national class project, but through its establishment of the Xolobeni Empowerment Company (Xolco) it also incorporated some members of the Amadiba communities, as well as the chief of Amadiba. The interests surrounding the proposed mining in Amadiba have constituted a class bloc composed of mining capital and domestic capitalists allied with quarters of traditional leadership and the state, against the majority of the community who would need to make way for such accumulation to occur.

State functionaries and promoters of the mine have consistently argued that this project would remedy the poverty of the region by bringing jobs and development, and the proposed N2 highway is promoted as a remedy for its state of neglect, by opening the area to development. However, it could be argued that the proposed toll road also reflects an attempted class project of accumulation from above, that seeks public sector support to operationalise an opportunity initiated by private sector actors. As local environmental activist Sinegugu Zukulu explains in his founding affidavit in a court case challenging the granting of environmental authorisation for the construction of the road:

> Its [the toll road project's] genesis was an unsolicited proposal from a consortium of major road building companies (i.e. the WCC [Wild Coast Consortium]) seeking to benefit from the enormous civil engineering contracts involved in constructing the greenfields sections (including

> a number of very large and expensive bridges to span the gorges). Furthermore the WCC would be in a prime position to win the contract to become a toll concessionaire and collect tolls on the entire length of the route from within Durban to within East London (most of which has already been constructed using public funds) (Zukulu, 2012: 26-27).

Yet the residents of Umgungundlovu have opposed the road project because they believe it would enable the mining project, both of which pose fundamental threats to prevailing land-based strategies of household reproduction. The mining company proposes a mining tenement area covering about 900 hectares of Umgungundlovu, which would require the 72 households and its approximately 600 residents to be relocated, while the socio-ecological relationships of remaining households would be irrevocably disrupted by the mining operations (GCS, 2007; Bennie, 2010). The Umgungundlovu communities have opposed the road not only because they believe it would enable the mining, but also because it would directly affect about 40 homesteads. The 80-metre wide, fenced-off road reserve would split the communities in two, affect access to grazing land, and disrupt existing cultivation patterns and natural resource access (Zukulu, 2012; Lorenzen, 2020).[60]

Over time the vast majority of the Umgungundlovu communities have come to understand both projects, especially the mining, as directly opposed to their wellbeing and so since 2007 have organised sustained resistance, under the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC). A core facet of the political nature of this resistance has been its efforts to deepen democracy against a class project from above, which the mining represents. The ACC was formed at a community meeting in 2007. The traditional council of Mgungundlovu, *komkhulu*, gave ACC the mandate to gather and transmit information about the proposed mining to the communities so that they could make an open and informed decision on it, and to eventually organise the community's opposition. The *komkhulu* of Mgungundlovu has retained high levels of legitimacy as a democratic community instrument of customary rule, and has acted in opposition to the Chief of the overall Amadiba area since he aligned with the mining agenda. The Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) thus emerged from local processes of customary rule and is commonly referred to as 'the child of *komkhulu*' (ACC leadership, interview, 16 March 2016).

[60] The Umgungundlovu communities have organised against both the proposed mining and N2 toll road, but the proposed mining has provided the most direct and sustained object of struggle. While I continue to mention the planned highway, my object of focus in this chapter is therefore dynamics around the proposed mining, as well as for the sake of simplicity and clarity in writing.

Through the ACC, the affected communities have enacted a contentious, oppositional politics to challenge the undemocratic practices of the state and local elites in attempting to impose the mining project against the will of the majority of households. It also challenges the post-apartheid state on its failures to address the social needs of the region, and simultaneously makes rights claims to development, service provision and infrastructure that serve local needs without destroying the ecology on which people depend. This has taken place through multiple layers of struggle, from high level engagements in various national processes and with national politicians to political engagements and actions within the province to challenge and engage politicians and the provincial and local state. Such mobilisation has also fed into legal strategies to block processes aimed at commencing mining and other interventions at odds with community aspirations. The legal awarding of a right to mine to TEM has twice been challenged, while the highest profile legal case ended with the High Court victory that granted the communities' right to give consent before being deprived of their land in 2018 (Basson, 2018).

These levels of struggle have been rooted in community-wide local organising, including community meetings at *komkhulu* to ensure a constant flow of information to community members on latest developments in order to inform organising strategies and demands; local demonstrations and marches; holding local meetings for state officials to engage with community members on their terms (as well as mobilising to put forward clear demands at meetings organised in the community by the state); and blockades against mining and toll road-related activities, sometimes organised by the ACC and sometimes organised spontaneously by community members.

A key strategy has also been to organise participatory community processes to derive demands for support to alternative, democratic development plans, which have centred on agriculture and community tourism and the provision of infrastructure including health, education, road improvements, electricity and other services; which were handed over to authorities at community mass meetings (see ACC, 2013; Komkhulu, 2016). Beyond only oppositional politics, a key feature of this organising is therefore the assertion of popular democracy to push back against unwanted projects imposed from above that would deprive the affected communities of their land rights. This strategy is grounded in both customary processes of participatory democracy and national and Constitutional law (see Zukulu, 2012; Baleni, 2016). A key framing of the struggle has centred on relationships to land and the agrarian character of

Umgungundlovu communities, and the threat posed to this 'social metabolism' (Foster and Suwandi, 2020: 16) by mining. The struggle has therefore made demands that link agrarian production and reproduction to the claiming and deepening of democratic rights, including the Amadibas' right to determine their local economic development path. This is made possible by a material reality in which access to land remains a critical basis of livelihoods in Umgungundlovu.

Social Relations of Production and Reproduction in Umgungundlovu

The Umgungundlovu communities are generally semi-proletarian, in that households have historically relied for reproduction on a combination of wage labour and access to land. Today households variously depend on diversified livelihood strategies that include wages, remittances and social grants, but land-based sources provide the most significant component of livelihoods for most households. Two surveys reported on by Koen (2016) and Zamchiya (2019)[61] respectively provide indicators of the extent and balance of these strategies, and are confirmed in my qualitative research. While most households have children eligible for the child support grant, only 32% of women and 41% of men are of eligible age for the old age grant. Although regions of Mpondoland like Amadiba have historically been integrated into wider circuits of capital through wage labour, currently only about 13% of adults residing in Umgungundlovu have access to employment, while close to half of households do not even have a household member with access to a job (Koen, 2016: 5,6; Zamchiya, 2019: 7). While households frequently refer to the importance of community relations in explaining low levels of deprivation, only about half of households have access to cash remittances (Koen, 2016). Households thus generally have low cash incomes, and are dependent on jobs, remittances and social welfare 'to only a limited extent' (Koen, 2016: 15).

Combined with the virtually non-existent state infrastructure, the above data might initially confirm wider statistics describing the Umgungundlovu region as one of the poorest and most deprived in South Africa. Instead, households of Umgungundlovu exhibit extremely high levels of food security: in both Koen (2016) and Zamchiya (2019) not a single household reported

[61] Koen's (2016) data was generated by a survey of 68 of the 75 households that fall directly within the proposed mining tenement area to generate socioeconomic data for the Amadiba's legal application to the High Court in the 'Right to Say "No"' case. Zamchiya's (2019) data was generated by a survey conducted by researchers from the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) and the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) across four of the Mgungundlovu villages.

hunger in the form of having to skip a meal in the last year. Indeed, in a context where those who support the proposed mining attempt to paint the communities of Umgungundlovu as desperately poor, local residents consistently assert that they do not know poverty. As one resident explained:

> If we are at Mdatya and Sigidi, all the places here on the coast, there is no one who cannot be ploughing from day one. You are ploughing the *madumbe*, if there is a boy the age of maybe 25, 26, 27, 30, he is free to plough their own potatoes, their own *madumbe*. That is why we are saying no one is poor at the coast (A24, interview, 20 September 2017).



Figure 8: A farmer in Sigidi Village stands in her newly-cleared field almost ready to be planted with sweet potato. While she is a full-time farmer, her household also survives from income earned by her husband's employment in the nearby Wild Coast Sun hotel.

This is principally due to reliance on the land and ocean for food production and resource harvesting, which could be said to constitute a generalised mode of social reproduction across the communities. Zamchiya (2019: 10) also found that, on average, homesteads produce 2.5 times the recommended minimum daily carbohydrate requirements – the average daily carbohydrate consumption of even the least resourced households was still 115% above the recommended minimum (*ibid*: 12). Households were also consuming sufficient ratios of carbohydrates, proteins and fats (Zamchiya, 2019; Koen, 2016). In the context of low cash incomes, access to the means of production through the commons is a critical reason for these high levels of food security.

This food security is achieved through a range of consumption sources. In the context of generally low cash incomes, households depend to a high degree on their own production of food, but also for consumption on the corporate industrial food system for products like bread, bread flour, rice, gravy stock, tea and coffee, sugar, cooking oil, and 'junk food' like soft drinks, sweets and chips. These are procured through 'multiple shopping strategies' (Aliber and Mdoda, 2015: 30) from small-town supermarkets, independent retailers and village *spaza* shops (see Figure 9). Despite local production of maize, shopping also includes the purchase of maize meal (also see Kennedy, 2015: 39-45).



Figure 9: A spaza shop in one of the Amadiba villages.

However, as Zamchiya (2019) and Koen (2016) show, the major contribution to household food security is achieved through agriculture and land-based sources. All households covered in the two surveys reported undertaking some kind of agricultural production. Most homesteads have various kinds of livestock, such as chickens, cattle and goats. Cattle in particular are important household resources, as they provide a range of benefits including milk, skins, meat on special occasions and draught power for ploughing. Chickens also provide meat and eggs. Almost all households farm their own staples such as maize, beans, *madumbe*[62] and sweet potatoes in open fields for consumption (see Figures 8, 10 and 14), and many also produce vegetables like spinach, cabbage, peppers, tomatoes and fruit such as bananas in gardens closer to the

[62] Xhosa for taro yam, a starchy root vegetable.

homestead. As such, households generally feel that they are able to secure their own livelihoods in very direct ways, as explained by one farmer:

> Most of the food we eat here we produce ourselves, like the veggies, I never buy the veggies. Carrots, tomatoes, they all come from the soil. And also the mealies, I use mealies in many ways. Either to make mealie meal out of it or to feed the livestock. And also sweet potatoes. Most of the food I eat *it comes from my own hands* (A3, interview, 9 March 2016; emphasis added).



Figure 10: Men of a family prepare a field with an ox-drawn plough for sowing sweet potatoes on an early spring morning, 2017, Sigidi Village.

Households also depend on the surrounding environment for harvesting fish and shellfish from the ocean, and gathering wild foods and medicinal plants on the land. Water for livestock and household consumption depends on the numerous rivers, streams and springs that run through the villages, the usage of which is regulated by customary rules (Zukulu, 2012). The dependence on the local environment extends to non-food materials, such as wood in the forests for cooking fires, fencing and roofing poles and the construction of ox-drawn sledges; river sand for making building blocks; grass and *izingilo* reeds for thatching; and the long leaves of the *ilala* plant – which grows in rivers and streams and whose net-like roots help to maintain the crystal clarity of the water – for tying the bundles of thatch together (Figure 11 below).



Figure 11: The Mphahlane River (left), which separates the villages of Sigidi and Mdatya. The ilala *plants in the river are used for tying bundles of thatch together, such as for those being used in construction of a homestead rondavel (right).*

Gaining much of their sustenance from local sources, it might therefore be said that the Umgungundlovu communities illustrate low levels of rural dependency, in contrast to many of the rural areas of the former homelands, where households are heavily dependent on transfers from outside as a result of low local sources of income and high unemployment (Eastwood et al, 2006). This is something of an anomaly in the South African context. As was discussed in Chapter 4, the general experience of black rural populations after colonisation was one of land alienation, the decline of independent agriculture and its stagnation under the homeland system, and a primary dependence on the dominant agro-food system for food consumption needs. Amadiba's contrast to this is the result of both geography and political struggle. As with 45% of the former Transkei (McAllister, 2005), the Amadiba area was never subject to betterment planning due partly to its remoteness as well as to its participation in the Pondo Revolt of 1960, in which Mpondoland peasants rose up against the state and collaborating chiefs in opposition to betterment planning and the attempts to impose distorted forms of traditional leadership under the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act (Mbeki, 1964; Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2011). The result is that, rather than clustered villages separated from arable and grazing lands, villages are still constituted by homesteads scattered across the landscape, with kraals and home gardens situated in each homestead, and arable fields dotted around the landscape that is also common grazing land. Having retained access to the means of production, customary relationships to land, resources and agriculture have continued into the present (Baleni, 2016).



Figure 12: A farmer in Mdatya Village, displaying the sustenance gained from the land, freshly boiled sweet potatoes from her field. Bags of fertiliser are in the background.

This provides a basis for residents to deny experiences of poverty, and in general experience wellbeing linked to the wealth of the ecology that surrounds them. As another woman farmer reflected, '…life is here is so easy, is so nice, it is peaceful. I feel like I am rich with the soil because I can get whatever I want from the soil. Even that butternut [on top of the table], I planted for myself' (A5, interview, 10 March 2016). Such pronouncements of wellbeing also reflect the way patterns of agrarian production and reproduction in the commons are in turn bound up with social and economic relationships between households, and provides further reasons for rejecting the label of 'poor', as another farmer explains:

> We are not poor… [M]aybe someone, if I'm harvesting *amadumbe* and sweet potato, if I know that you are not ploughing those things I can call you, okay come Andrew, help me to harvest. When you are done with harvesting maybe I can give 50kg for free and you can go home and cook. It is how the customary way of amaMpondo is doing (A19, interview, 19 September 2017).

However, Umgungundlovu was still integrated into the wider colonial and apartheid economy as a labour-sending area (key to the mines on the Witwatersrand and the sugar plantations of Natal) and so the defence of local natural resources also reflected the relationships with the wider economy that communities actively sought to craft; elements of which still endure today. As Beinart (1982: 3) describes of Mpondoland's colonial incorporation:

> [T]he people of Pondoland were by no means unresponsive to the opportunities and pressures which accompanied colonisation. At issue were the terms on which they were incorporated, the degree of control which they could exercise within their community in the face of larger social forces which they could hardly influence. Protection of communal access to resources provided one of the best means of defence.

The participation of especially men in migrant labour was therefore largely aimed at 'building the homestead' so as to allow for the reproduction of an agrarian space of relative autonomy (McAllister, 1991). In this sense it is partly as a result of amaMpondos' political determination from below to shape the terms of their incorporation into the national economy that land-based systems of food provisioning remain a central component of household livelihoods in Umgungungdlovu.

As the above discussion suggests, production and consumption patterns have historically been dynamic, and continue to be so, as they evolve through their connections to the wider economy in ways that might not necessarily be seen as reflective of food sovereignty. On the food consumption side; historically, maize replaced sorghum as the main grain crop produced and consumed. From as early as the 1940s store-bought maize began occupying a greater place in diets stimulated by the availability of cheap maize meal grown by white commercial farmers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State (Kennedy, 2015). Most production of maize rests on the use of farm-saved seed, but many households also report consuming store-bought, highly processed maize meal from the dominant agro-food regime, because it takes less time to cook and younger generations prefer its taste and finer texture. In turn, it appears that purchased rice is increasingly replacing maize meal as a staple grain in diets, also along generational lines (Kennedy, 2015). Households' food consumption is also linked to the corporate industrial food system via the purchase of common commercial products.

These consumption shifts are also linked to changes in production relations. As more farmers in recent years have increased their production of sweet potatoes and *madumbes* for the market, some reported that they no longer grow maize for household consumption but only for livestock

feed, preferring to devote available land and labour to income-earning production. Increased production for the market has also seen greater usage of artificial fertiliser and some pesticides (see Figure 12). A key contemporary shift on the production side in some villages is that incipient processes of agricultural petty commodity production have been intensifying over the last few years as farmers have widely started producing *madumbes* and sweet potatoes for the market. Agricultural production in Umgungundlovu used to be mainly for household consumption, with small amounts of produce sold locally. A few farmers would also sell small amounts of *madumbes* and sweet potatoes across the Mzamba River at Lurholweni township, where they would transport the produce in ox-drawn sleds to the Mzamba Gorge, carry the bags down the gorge to the river, take them across in a canoe to the other side, from where a small trader would pick them up. A couple of farmers also reported taking small amounts by public transport to sell in the town of Bizana, about 60km away, since the 1980s.

However, a buyer then started driving a truck into Sigidi to pick up produce in the mid-2000s. Slowly more farmers started selling to the traders as they saw the benefits of producing for the market (a common explanation was that they saw such farmers being able financially to send their children to school). As a result there has been increasing commercialisation of farming over the last few years as farmers supplying the traders multiplied. At the time of writing there were at least six traders that procured produce from the four northern-most villages of Kwanyana, Mtolana, Mdatya and Sigidi, on a regular basis. They transported them to Durban and Bizana, where they were sold to informal traders. For example, one trader – who also lives in one of the villages, owns a local *spaza* shop, and is engaging in capitalist farming of sweet potatoes and *madumbes* through the employment of wage labourers – carried a truckload of produce to Durban three times a week (A18, interview, 18 September 2017). As a result of this market, 64% of homesteads were supplying the market with sweet potatoes and 50% were selling *madumbes* (Zamchiya, 2019: 8). From rough calculations based on the number of loads procured by traders each week at the time of research, about R90 000 a week was flowing into one village alone, Sigidi, amounting to about R4.5 million per year (Zukulu, pers. comm., 2018).



Figure 13: An extended family in Sigidi Village collectively harvest a field of sweet potatoes for market.

A key change in production relations in Umgungundlovu recently has therefore been the scale of production for the market, which has increased the income of many households and the direct economic benefit that they derive from access to the land. In a context where post-1994 saw the deepened commodification of many of the means of social reproduction (electricity, water, food) (Hart, 2013), historical defence of the commons means Amadiba coastal communities have a wide base of non-commodified sources of social reproduction on which they can rely. However, at the same time, connecting to a market through petty commodity production also improves the position from which they participate in other commodified areas of life associated with wage labour, such as paying for education, clothes, foodstuffs and so on. A farmer from one of the most successful farming households in terms of the extent of land under *madumbe* and sweet potato production, in the village of Mdatya, described the value of farming in this way:

> I was a worker doing some piece jobs in the cities but I wasted a lot of time while I was in the cities doing those piece jobs because all the money I was earning was going to food, transport and rent. So there was nothing to send home. I decided to come back home, I ploughed the fields as I was doing before. But coming back from the city changed my life, because when you are independent being your own boss is good, because now I am a sweet potato, *madumbe* and mealie farmer. I even built my homestead after coming back from the city. I raised my children, the likes of Siyavuya. I sent them to school, paid for their education while depending on my farming here at home (S'Nako Media, 2020: 0:22 in video).

These experiences of the land and the wider economy are also gendered. It is mostly males that have participated in migrant labour and so have wage labour experiences through which to

assess the importance of land-based livelihoods. Reflecting the historically gendered role within the wider accumulation model of reproducing the rural home (Nyoka, 2020), most women have remained 'pure peasants' their whole lives. As such, for many women their direct relationships to land and agrarian practice are experienced through historical continuity and evolution. As one woman farmer described:

> This farming I am doing has always been part of my life, even before I got married but then we were producing less because it was only for eating at that time. And now after I got married we continuing the same thing even in this village of farming for consumption. But now, it has changed a bit, it is not just only for consuming and is also for selling. There's lots of crops that we produce on this land (A1, interview, 9 March 2016).

At the localised level, women have experienced combined continuity and change in terms of gendered relations in households and to land and labour. Incorporation into the wider economy over time through migrant labour has also shifted the roles of women in the household and community (Zukulu, interview, 23 January 2021; Beinart, 2021). Thus gendered divisions of labour are evident. For example, household reproduction work (child care, cleaning, cooking, collecting of water and firewood) remains primarily the task of women and children, and women are traditionally primarily responsible for cultivation of the fields while men manage cattle and ox-drawn ploughing. There are clear gender role demarcations at ceremonial gatherings, and at community meetings women and men usually sit apart. But there are also dynamic aspects to these gender relations. Both women and men working in the field with a hoe during cultivation and harvesting are a common site (one woman even told me that her role as the coordinator of the production process in her fields included coordinating her husband's labour). The actual gendered divisions of labour in cultivation vary according to households and how it is balanced with participation in the wage economy outside the community. Women have as equal right to speak as men, and are often as vocal, at community meetings and *komkhulu* (ACC leadership, interview, 16 March 2016; own observations). The *iNkosana* of Mgungundlovu (the highest customary leadership position, bar the chief of the overall Amadiba area) is a woman. Some (WoMin Collective, 2017) have attributed the militant role that women have played at the forefront of the anti-mining struggle to this combination of gendered patterns and the relatively (and unusually) empowered position of women in Amadiba's system of customary rule.



Figure 14: One of the largest fields of market-oriented sweet potatoes in Mdatya Village. This and the homestead's other fields are worked solely by the wife and husband, with help from children when they return from school.

Relations to land and agriculture are also experienced generationally. While for many of the older generation most women remained at home, more of the younger generation have sought jobs, which principally occur outside of the area. However, while some young people have gone to university and found jobs elsewhere, others have also been drawn back into land-based livelihoods. One young woman explained that having finished high school she had hoped to find a good job outside of Amadiba, but could only find low-paid work as a domestic worker in Durban. With the opportunities presented by the rise of market-oriented farming, she decided to leave her job and start farming with her family. She therefore now contrasts the autonomy experienced in the production processes with domestic employment:

> To work under someone, I don't like to work under someone going to control you, do this now, do that now. I want to be self-employed. Now I am able to grow sweet potato and sell them, there is no one saying now do this now do this, I just think and do. There is no foreman, no manager. I am a boss of myself (A13, interview, 28 June 2017).

The importance of agrarian practice to household reproduction has thus been entrenched, variously refracted across dynamic relations of gender and generation. But what of class? Indeed, the continued extent of agricultural production and the associated expansion of petty commodity production raises the question of differentiation emerging via accumulation from below (Cousins, 2013), which critical agrarian theory has shown has bearing on the nature of

agrarian politics (Mamdani, 1987; Borras et al, 2022). In addition, as Veltmeyer (1997: 151) has argued, it is important to see agrarian communities like Amadiba not as 'a vaguely defined organic whole held together and constituted by a sense of belonging and shared social identity', but as 'a complex of diverse class relations'.

Zamchiya undertakes a class differentiated analysis[63] of the Umgungundlovu households, but also acknowledges that the ways in which residents combine production, resource harvesting and income sources 'make distinguishing those who are better or worse off difficult' (Zamchiya, 2019: 11). In any case, differentiation is a methodologically complex process to track, every aspect of which no single study of a particular context can hope to fully document and analyse (White, 1989; Gray and Dowd-Uribe, 2013). A single study can only attempt to illuminate a particular issue in the context of particular patterns of differentiation. Differential access to wage labour plays a role in income stratification between households in Amadiba, as indicated by Zamchiya (2019). This is also evident between villages. For example, the northern-most village of Sigidi has a slightly more prosperous appearance to it in the form of homesteads with more 'modern', rectangular buildings, and a greater number of buildings overall in homesteads, which are important signs of cash incomes. This is also linked to geography: it is a simple walk across the river to where some members of households are employed in the Wild Coast Sun, or to where a taxi can be caught to employment in the town of Port Edward. Sigidi residents thus have relatively easier access to the wage economy. It is also the nearest village for the trucks of the *madumbe* and sweet potato traders to access and thus gains the greatest monetary benefits of all the villages from the sale of produce (Zukulu, interview, 23 January 2021; Kennedy, 2015; own observations).

However, the continued extent of agricultural production and the associated expansion of petty commodity production raises the question of differentiation emerging via accumulation from below (Cousins, 2013). The exact extent of accumulation from below engendered by market-oriented production in Mgungundlovu would require ongoing examination, and its incipient nature would also imply a limited extent of class differentiation. However, some markers of an

[63] His presentation of class differentiation is a little challenging to interpret, however. While it is useful in showing differential income levels and usage of local resources translated into monetary value between households, he has not sufficiently shown it to be linked to a process of class formation and distinctions, which is what labelling it as a process of *class* differentiation implies. Differentiation is not only a matter of differences in income and monetary value of resource harvesting, but of the *relations* between households in the context of the development of commodity relations (White, 1989); in particular, their differentiated relations to land, capital and labour.

incipient process of accumulation from below are evident. For most households producing for the market has at least allowed for simple reproduction at a higher level of consumption (Otero, 1999), as it has improved capacities for covering basic living costs through the market, like purchasing food items not produced locally, paying for school and university-related costs, investing in the building of more modern household structures and purchasing more consumer food items. The increase in production of sweet potatoes and *madumbes* that has enabled this illustrates the potential for expanded reproduction over time. Some households are, indeed, already expanding the size of fields significantly, investing in items like cows for greater ploughing capacity, increasing savings, and hiring extra labour, indicating processes of expanded reproduction (Cousins, Weiner and Amin, 1992).

Furthermore, market relations are replacing some reciprocal social relations in production, such as a decline in cooperative labour arrangements like *ilima*, which used to be a key practice in maintaining social and moral bonds of solidarity and reciprocity between households (McAllister, 2005). Now farmers say they need to devote their available labour to their own market-oriented production rather than sharing it, and farmers that require extra assistance tend to hire labour on an *ad hoc* daily basis. As one farmer said about the lack of cooperative work groups since the rise of market-oriented production, 'It [*ilima*] was relevant when people were just doing it for fun. Now it's not for fun, it's for business' (A1, interview, 9 March 2016). Another explained:

> Everybody is busy, busy. People now are producing for selling most of the time, and *ilima* was not for selling, it was for living and you were not in a rush. Now everybody needs to produce at the same time because we have a season we can produce in. But if you take time to go to *ilima*, you will be left behind. People are rushing to produce as much as possible (A6, interview, 9 March 2016).

The clearest line of differentiation evident within Umgungungdlovu, however, is between ordinary residents and a small number of local 'emergent capitalist farmers' (Bernstein, 2010: 104) who employ wage workers and have invested in ancillary activities like trading, retail and transport; what Hart calls 'diversification for accumulation' (quoted in Bernstein, 2010: 107). This also reflects how, in much of the global south, rural differentiation is also a function of access to resources outside of agriculture through livelihood diversification (O'Laughlin, 1996). An example is the assassinated former chairperson of the ACC, 'Bazooka' Radebe, who

ran a taxi business, a mechanical workshop and ploughed farmers' fields with his tractor for a fee.

The political struggle against the mining and toll road has united the vast majority of Umgungundlovu households across these incipient lines of differentiation. One aspect of this suggests that the extent of differentiation is not sufficient to generate antagonistic interests and political dynamics. The other aspect is how differentiation is not a simple determinant of politics and interests, but acts in dynamic relation with a number of other social, cultural and political factors that mediate the actual social outcomes of these processes in relation to the organised struggle. I will briefly point to three of these factors. Firstly, the common access to land and natural resources has provided an important common basis for this struggle, but it also limits the political implications of differentiation. As Mafeje (2003) has described of lineage modes of production on customary land in sub-Saharan Africa, differentiation arising from accumulation from below need not automatically be exploitative or predatory. Thus although patterns of social differentiation can be identified across households, for just about all of them land-based livelihoods remain central to their reproduction (Zamchiya, 2019). This might also endorse Mafeje's (2003) argument that non-commodified land tenure potentially allows farmers to benefit from connecting to markets on a more equitable basis. Similarly, generally low levels of mechanisation possibly further dampen tendencies to differentiation, as it means that the ability for production to respond to the market has not been overly determined by levels of capital investment, but more by ability to mobilise labour to raise productivity (Holt-Giménez *et al*, 2021; White, 1989).

As has been found in other parts of the world, it might therefore be suggested that in Amadiba as well, despite the commercialisation of farming, widespread 'capitalist relations of production have not [thus far] resulted: we do not find the polarization of rural society into large farmer-operators and landless wage-labourers, and the basic unit of production remains the family farm' (White, 1989: 23). Irrespective of differing levels of assets and income, land as an object of struggle has therefore remained a common basis for organisation. This has an historical precedent in eastern Mpondoland: due to the continued functioning of central institutions in Mpondo society amidst colonial incorporation, and the availability of and continued communal access to land and resources, clear differentiation amongst the peasantry was also limited historically (Beinart, 1982). This points to the fact that it is not only economic and ecological factors shaping the course of differentiation, but political and cultural processes as well.

The second factor is that social relations around the key means of production, land, is managed through strong structures of participatory democracy, in which membership of the community guarantees political participation and consequent access to land (see Zukulu, 2012: 40-44). In this historical context of the Pondo Revolt, local customary rule was not distorted as a result of being turned into appendages of apartheid state rule. As such, it maintains key democratic elements, and does not actively subordinate women, as is often the case under traditional leadership in much of rural South Africa (Ntsebeza, 2013b). The continued existence of participatory customary institutions, historically autonomous from state control in Amadiba, is aimed at maintaining social cohesion and communal harmony and means that land access depends on a social rather than a state bureaucratic process (McAllister, 1991). The vast majority of Amadiba residents therefore report that they feel secure on their customary land,[64] which is provided for through the legitimacy of local customary procedures around land tenure (Zamchiya, 2019). It might be said that customary democratic relationships to land act as a buffer against politically significant differentiation, and a common social basis for struggle across lines of possible differentiation.

Thirdly, rather than local processes of differentiation that we have seen being necessarily antithetical to class-based mobilisation across the affected communities, scholars like Jacobs (2018) and Sikor and Pham (2005) have drawn attention to how peasant actors can organise to counter and contest aspects of differentiation and ensure that it does not threaten basic subsistence for all members of a community. They thus show that the relationship between differentiation and collective action in a specific context can also be a function of the 'negotiation' and contestation processes that relevant actors undertake. In Amadiba this can include the active reproduction of cultural norms that help to maintain social connections across households and communities, such as the collective participatory processes for guaranteeing access to land, and the sharing of livestock between unequally endowed households, which can temper differentiation processes. Another way this is seen amongst farmers in Amadiba is how they collectively organise market access in ways that ensure some do not benefit at the expense of others. Different households have different capacities for production output levels, shaped mostly by labour availability. However, each farmer is given a turn to supply their available produce. Each trader that collects *madumbes* and sweet potatoes has a local contact who acts as

[64] The small percentage who said they did not feel secure pointed to the proposed mining as the reason for their sense of insecurity (Zamchiya, 2019).

a coordinator for a certain number of farmers. Before sending a truck to collect produce, the trader phones the coordinator to inform them when the truck, which carries 140 bags of produce, will be coming. The coordinator will communicate with the farmer whose turn it is, and only if that farmer cannot supply the 140 bags will the next farmer be contacted to make up the difference (A1, interview, 9 March 2016; A14, interview, 27 June 2017). In this way, farmers are able to sell all the produce they have available without being undercut by fellow farmers in the village.

Lastly, local incipient processes of differentiation are to an extent subsumed within a democratic project from below against accumulation from above. The overall class character of the Amadiba struggle is shaped by the communities' class relation to the wider social formation and, in particular, the class project of accumulation from above that the proposed mining and toll road represent. As Neocosmos (1993) argues, processes of accumulation from below through petty commodity production (nascent in Amadiba) tend to be more democratic because they represent the least rupture with existing production relations. In contrast, accumulation from above is rooted in interests external to the community and so is an inherently anti-democratic process that requires extra-economic coercion by the state, state-connected organisations and individual state agents – most dramatically demonstrated in the assassination of the ACC's Chairperson in 2016, as well as incidents of violence against community members opposed to the proposed mining. The proposed mining therefore creates a clear political class divide in the struggle, and forms of popular democracy, rooted strongly in land, provide an important common community axis of political class organisation against this. In this context, differentiation from below can be seen as just one dynamic political feature of this class struggle to defend access to the means of production against development from above.

This section has so far described how a key part of the context shaping the transformative nature of the struggle in Amadiba is the extent of agrarian reproduction, and the threat posed to it by a class project from above, which means that it provides a significant material basis from which an organised politics connected to agriculture and food emerges. Furthermore, while actual production and consumption practices indicate certain features not necessarily aligned with technical food sovereignty ideals, the historical, dynamic reproduction of social and customary relations around land provide an important political basis and conduit through which food and agriculture in generalised community reproduction is connected to a transformative politics. This includes their role in providing political connection across a non-homogenous community

in light of nascent patterns of differentiation and relationships to the wider capitalist economy. This trend of differentiation may expand into the future. However, in the current conjuncture, equal access to the commons, shared community membership, and common customary rule appear to provide an important basis through which relations of differentiation are negotiated in the constitution of community-wide struggle. These material relations have therefore provided an important basis for the content and nature of the political struggle, but they have also not been an automatic determinant. I therefore now turn to examining the active construction of the struggle upon this basis, including some negotiation and contestation of differentiation. This includes how local food and agricultural practices have been brought into this wider organised resistance politically, reflected in popular democratic demands.

Building the Politics of the Struggle

The widespread material centrality of agriculture and land to the livelihoods and lives of Umgungundlovu residents suggests that it can provide an important cultural resource for the framing of agrarian collective action, rooted in a concrete referent. It is notable that in asking residents their reasons for opposing mining and why staying on the land is important to them, there was a notable consistency across participants that also reflected the public pronouncements of the Amadiba Crisis Committee. This would seem to suggest that the subjective orientations towards land and agriculture also reflect the political subject formation that has taken place through the struggle (Levenson, 2022). This section examines how agriculture has been incorporated into a transformative politics through repertoires of action that combine daily livelihood activities, resistance to mining and enacting aspects of a desired alternative development model.

The first element of this relates to the framing of mobilisation and organisation by community members and the ACC, and the associated building of a shared discourse through which the proposed mining and the struggle may be understood and conducted. Through the ACC, the community has deployed a range of tactics and strategies to resist the proposed mining and toll road, including forcing officials to account at community meetings at *komkhulu* (the community's principal customary decision-making body); marches; physical tactics to prevent mining-related activities, like blocking mining functionaries from entering the area, uprooting prospecting equipment, and physically chasing prospecting staff and environmental impact assessment (EIA) practitioners out of the area; media interventions and legal cases. A key

agrarian theme runs through tactics and the language that is used in their enactment. This is notably seen in the use of agrarian metaphor when making a point. An example of such common responses is a resident's riposte at a community meeting when a chief linked to the contested Mpondo Royal House[65] invited the community to accompany his delegation to observe the proposed route of the toll road through their villages and fields: 'Why would I go shopping for a cow if I don't plan to buy a cow?' (Pers. obs., 29 June 2017). This agrarian discourse is commonly used when confronting those in positions of power, as was observed at a meeting at *komkhulu* in April 2017 where the community and ACC demanded that the CEO of the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL), Skhumbuzo Macozoma, account to them on the attempted imposition of the N2 highway through their lands. ACC leader, Nonhle Mbuthuma, told him:

> Don't say we are starving. We have never come as poor beggars to your house and asked for anything. We grow our own food. We plant sweet potatoes, we plant *amadumbes*. We are not hungry. If you want, we could dish up for you now. We can dish up for you now! (Clarke, 2017: 1:06:31 in video).

This framing of resistance through agrarian discourse might be seen as 'an innovative use of available cultural resources to make rational adaptations to a system of domination and oppression' (McAllister, 1991: 139). However, more than being simply cultural and material resources simply lying around ripe for the taking, it is through an active, collective political process that prevailing agrarian practices and customary process are deployed for making democratic citizenship demands. This shared discourse politicises agrarian practice, and a key mechanism for building it is the community meeting (Figure 15). Such community meetings at *komkhulu* provide a platform for sharing factual information on mining- and toll road-related developments, as well as for building a collective political subjectivity through 'framing strategies' (Ondetti, 2008), through which their resistance is understood and enacted, and presented to the wider public, the media and the state. Such framings are built through a discourse that community members air at community meetings through which local relations

[65] The saga is a complicated one that is bound up with the dynamics around the proposed mining and N2 toll road. In short, the King of Mpondoland, Mpondombini Sicgau, was deposed by Jacob Zuma in 2011 based on the findings of the Nhlapo Commission. His Royal House was an obstacle to the proposed mining and he staunchly defended the right of the Amadiba to say No' until his death in 2013. Zuma appointed Zanozuko Sigcau as the new King, although in 2013 the Constitutional Court ruled that Zuma had not followed correct procedure in appointing him. Zanozuko Sigcau publicly supports the mining and N2. The matter is ongoing between him and the late King's wife, Queen Lombekiso Sigcau, and his heir, Princess Wezizwe Sigcau. For more information on the saga and its relation to the proposed mining and toll road see the documentary *The Shore Break* (Grunenwald, 2015) and Clarke (2014b).

of production and reproduction, and of customary rule, are linked and reified. The *komkhulu* and the ACC consistently reject the legitimacy of processes and meetings that are not conducted in the customary manner, which is that matters affecting all villages must be discussed at their representative forum, *komkhulu*, where ordinary residents can interrogate matters and confront relevant authorities (Baleni, 2016), a form of direct democracy (Williams, 2013). In this sense, through appeals to customary rule and the link to land-based livelihoods, 'tradition' is re-articulated to prevailing political exigencies and in the context of constitutional democracy. Such framing of a collective political subjectivity is evidenced by the consistency between different community members' explanations of their reasons for opposing the proposed mining and toll road, which align exactly with the themes of information that the ACC leadership explained they consistently shared at community meetings (ACC leadership, interview, 16 March 2016).

The active building of a shared discourse at community meetings provides an important way through which residents express their daily apprehensions to the concrete organisation of the struggle. This includes centring the threat posed by mining to land rights, farming and natural resource access, and highlighting, sharing and celebrating existing agrarian and food practices, such as displaying crayfish caught in the ocean, and individuals describing recipes passed down through generations that rely on local produce at community rallies. It also includes maintaining cross-generational land-centred consensus as a crucial element of sustaining the struggle. This is reflected in the following example, in the speech of an elder, Mashona Wetu Dlamini, to young people at a community meeting at *komkhulu* on the importance of protecting the land for their own and future generations' sakes, and of maintaining the cohesiveness of the struggle in the face of violent attacks by pro-mining actors:

> I'm not going to say you must go and kill them because they kill us. There is no way they will finish us because we have people giving birth to new leaders every day. Others are still at the school. The thing that the people is changing is the youth.
>
> …Even if you say you want a job, you want income, you still need somewhere to stay and somewhere to grow your food, you still need, you can't be sitting, you can't just be sitting under the tree. You need a home to stay. You can't sell your land. I encourage useful discussion because there is no way we are going to give away our land, we just encourage that we report as much as we can and get the people to talk about this because you know when it comes to the time when we have to leave this area then we'll go to other people and they'll say 'No, we not giving you any land because you sold your land.'

> …So you won't sit on both sides because there will be no job for you in the mine as well, so you just going to be *embambe*.[66] You will become *embamba* and that is why we are saying we are not going to give our land away.
>
> …Whether you like the mine or you don't like the mine, once your land is taken away from you then you have no base, you will belong nowhere. And you won't be able to do anything (Clarke, 2015: 0:50 in video).

The above contribution to building a shared discourse shows the way land provides sustenance and a sense of personhood gained from both having it and using it, and the social relationships rooted in it. These inter-generational conversations to build a shared discourse have been a deliberate tactic to bring young people into the struggle. Initially most young people across the Amadiba villages were in favour of the mining due to expected jobs, but through the sustained work to engage them, young people have become a driving force in anti-mining mobilisations and much of the ACC leadership is young. Thus, behind community framings of the struggle, lies an active process to build a shared discourse through dynamic community conversations. This shared discourse promotes agrarian practice as a form of commonality that underpins the organised struggle (Veltmeyer, 1997). Land and agrarian reproduction are therefore central to this shared discourse and framing, which is dynamically related to predominant practices of production and reproduction.

This relationship is seen in how such practices have also become understood and further shaped as acts of resistance. The second repertoire of action through which agriculture and local food provisioning have been connected to a transformative politics of food, then, is through particular types of engagement with space. A consistent justification in the media and public discourse in support of the proposed mining is that the Amadiba communities are desperately poor, and that this poverty is reflected in the inability to use the land around them, and hence its 'emptiness'. As mentioned above, residents have sharply contested their labelling as poor and the perception that the land is not used, but those in the village of Sigidi decided to respond to this by increasing its usage through agriculture to make their use of space more visible.

[66] The literal translation of *embambe* refers to holding someone. The meaning in this context is that one will lose one's independence and be rendered passive, helpless and rootless. In essence, one will no longer be held by the land and the social relationships rooted in it. *Embambe* thus refers to a situation of such helplessness, while the latter usage of *embamba* is the label of someone who is helpless and adrift.



Figure 15: Members of Amadiba coastal communities meet outside komkhulu to engage a chief linked to the Mpondo Royal House about the N2 toll road, September 2017.

This has taken two forms. The first was to spread the village's cattle grazing practices to further reaches of their land. At a village meeting it was decided that a fence needed to be built between the village and the grass-covered dunes that, if the miners had their way, would one day be mined. A similar fence had existed in the neighbouring village of Mdatya for some time, explained in more instrumental terms of needing to protect crop fields from cattle (A23, interview, 20 September 2017). However, while it was needed to serve a similar purpose in Sigidi, it also came to be described in more politically resonant terms: keeping the cattle on the grass-covered coastal dunes as a tactic to show that the land was being utilised, in order to counter arguments like the residents being too poor to make use of the land. After the Department of Agriculture was vainly approached for support, fence poles were cut from the forest and households each contributed an amount to finance the purchase of fencing wire (A10, interview, 10 March 2016). Men from the village constructed the fence from its south-western border at the Mphahlana River all the way to the north-eastern boundary, where a deep gorge lined with indigenous forest opens up into a wide estuary that spills the contents of the Mzamba River into the Indian Ocean. The cattle graze along the dunes during the day and it is their daily ritual to walk to the gate in the fence as the sun begins to go down and they wait for their owners to fetch them and herd them back to their kraals. While the villagers have framed this act of building a fence to protect the commons politically, its material basis is that increased

production of *madumbes* and sweet potatoes called for greater protection for these crops from the cattle that were otherwise left to graze on the mixed-use landscape. The changes in production relations, contingent on a market connection, thus further enhanced the feasibility of what villagers frame as a political act.

The second connected element was to increase the amount of land that is farmed. One young person who returned from domestic work in Durban described her involvement in the struggle as follows:

> I realised the only way to protect the land is to utilise the land. Because I am part of fighting to protect the land but you can't just fight for the land without utilising. That is why I thought okay I must do something so that when I am defending the land it is not just the words (A13, interview, 28 June 2017).

Another farmer expressed a similar sentiment: 'The way I'm being involved to fight against mining is to occupy the land and use the land as much as possible' (A3, interview, 10 March 2016). Increased production for the market made both acts materially viable, but they were concretely incorporated into a transformative politics that challenges power and prefigures more democratic relations, by fusing existing production and reproduction activities with practices of resistance. As Tarrow (1993) argues, repertoires of resistance in collective action also emerge from peoples' histories, traditions and daily practice: 'the repertoire is therefore not only what people *do* when they make a claim, it is what they *know how to do*…' (Tarrow, 1993: 283; original emphasis). It could be that villagers like these no longer see farming and local resource harvesting only as an act of provisioning, but a political act.

A third way that food and agriculture are connected to transformative food politics through the enactment of the struggle, is via the shaping of nascent class relations in relation to the organised struggle. Internal division and contestations are inherent in any community, like the Amadiba (Bozzoli, 1987). However, 'community' can nonetheless point to a territorially defined nexus of social relations that, while constituted by power relations and contestations, also exhibits identifiable community ties cemented through a range of social and customary relations. A community can thus be seen as a dynamic of class relations, a social and political process that is continually made and remade (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1997; Veltmeyer, 2018). In this regard, the relationship between class relations and the political struggle has been somewhat contingent and dynamic, shaped also by its dynamic relationship with community

ties and the political construction of community identity through shared discourses. This is illustrated in the example of two prominent businessmen in the community. Critical agrarian theory might regard them as 'emergent capitalists' (see Bernstein, 2010: 104), but both have been an important part of the community's class struggle against the attempted class project of accumulation from above. Their economic class position is not the only factor that has shaped them and the roles they play.

The first case is that of the first Chairperson of the Amadiba Crisis Committee, Sikhosiphi 'Bazooka' Radebe. He was a prominent businessman in the community whose activities included owning a taxi business, a mechanical workshop, and providing ploughing services for farmers' fields. His immediate economic interests did not necessarily contradict wider community interests, and he commanded much respect in the community for his business success. His prominence in community relations led to his also being elected as the Amadiba Crisis Committee's first Chairperson at its formation in 2007 (ACC leadership, interview, 16 March 2016). However, his role in the anti-mining struggle was not a foregone conclusion. In 2003 the Xolobeni Empowerment Company was formed, officially as TEM's 'community empowerment partner', a group of local people who through political party and state positions and connections had positioned themselves to benefit as the 26% BEE shareholders in the mine. As a prominent businessman and person in the community, he was subsequently co-opted into Xolco. As with many community members, he initially believed the mine could be of benefit to the community through the provision of jobs and infrastructure. However, when he realised who really stood to benefit from Xolco and he asked questions about its relationship to the Amadiba communities, he alleges that he was poisoned and almost died. That is when he decided to leave Xolco, and he exposed its existence to the communities at a *komkhulu* meeting in 2007.[67] As a principal figurehead of the anti-mining struggle, he was assassinated in 2016, allegedly on the orders of the pro-mining leadership. In this instance, Radebe's political influence on the struggle was the result of his agency and community ties on the basis of shared land, customary ties and social relations.

The second example is one whom agrarian theory might also term an emergent capitalist farmer, and who also owned a local shop and traded *madumbe* and sweet potatoes, but who has played a role in the struggle against the proposed mining through supporting the growth of agriculture

[67] See video interview at Clarke (2019).

as a popular democratic alternative. Thembeka[68] has supported farmers through providing a market by purchasing their produce and transporting it to markets, as well as other forms of support. However, this role also came about in part as a response to pressure from below. His marketing role meant that he was a middleman between farmers and the market. One of the key mechanisms of differentiation is the transfer of surplus from direct producers (White, 1989), which can occur through a variety of relationships, such as in the development of capital-labour relationships or, as might be the case with Thembeka's trading activities, through marketing arrangements between direct producers and traders. In this sense, the economic interests of producers in Amadiba could be seen to conflict with those of traders. This is apparent in the somewhat mercenary attitude some outside traders showed towards the farmers they procure from (A16, interview, 16 September 2017). In turn, farmers complained about their relationships with those traders regarding price and non-payment and therefore desired ways to bypass traders to the market, illustrating how they saw themselves losing at the traders' gain. However, socially, Thembeka is positioned differently from other traders, as he was born and lives in one of the villages. His community ties and requirements of social personhood in the rural, agrarian communities of Amadiba pose certain obligations as well as desires on his part to benefit his community. He thus appears to live with certain tensions between his economic and social positions, and so felt himself compelled to perform further actions in his relationship with farmers, and in community processes and structures. This confirmed the primacy of his political and social ties to them beyond an established economic relationship. As is the case in many anti-extractivist struggles (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1997), the need for him to do so was given added impetus by the evolving construction of community identity and belonging through the politics of the anti-mining struggle.

Thembeka therefore closed down his taxi business after his credentials were called into question given his consequent association with the regional taxi industry, which was seen as pro-mining (A18, interview, 18 September 2017). Beyond his already positive contribution to agricultural development, Thembeka undertook additional actions aimed at creating a closer convergence between his and the farmers' economic interests, like paying them the going price for their produce but then topping up bags sold to hawkers to make them fuller but without charging them more (so attracting a greater share of this market and thus increasing demand and overall profit for both himself and producers). He also maintained social relationships through giving

[68] Not his real name.

young people free farming inputs and advice to help them start farming, and supporting them in attempts to improve produce quality. At community organisation level, this could involve not charging for his vehicle to be used to transport community members to mining-, toll road- and farmer-related meetings.

Thembeka therefore had an objective economic relationship to farmers in the community, but the totality of the relationship was shaped also by his social ties and the political context of the struggle, which in turn shaped the economic relationship between him and direct producers. The construction of the shared discourse and community identity through the struggle thus has real political effects on nascent class relations. As Veltmeyer (1997) points out, this does not mean that potential class differences are simply subsumed or replaced by community ties, but a form of commonality is produced based on a shared discourse. A shared discourse can therefore play an important role in managing class relations and producing unity in the political struggle through organising a negotiation between material interests. Neither the shared discourse nor political unity are necessarily whole or uniform, but are in a sense always incomplete and require ongoing 'maintenance'.

The illustration of a transformative agrarian politics in which food is an important element therefore emerges from a context of common access to and defence of land, combined with generalised agrarian reproduction, which has translated into widespread meanings attached to agrarian reproduction. Through a political process these have been further elaborated and fed into a shared discourse that in turn shapes material practices of agrarian resistance. This also provides a modality through which material class relations are politically worked, with a shared discourse of land and agrarian reproduction providing one of the key terms of adherence to the political struggle. However, understanding the context in which food and agriculture merge with transformative politics would not be complete without considering further important factors in shaping this politics: the relationship between the communities and the state, the nature of leadership, and wider alliances. At a particular conjunctural moment, the Amadiba community's web of relationships contributed to a transformative politics influencing its relationship with food and agriculture .

Relationship to the State and Wider Alliances

The character of state intervention can be a key factor shaping the political nature of a struggle. The state can individualise activity of subalterns such that they seek 'to maximise their welfare individually through charity from above' rather than collective democratic struggle (Mamdani, 1987: 221). Or, as Williams (2008) has shown, under particular political conditions it could also contribute to a generative, counter-hegemonic politics from below. Otero (1999) shows that when the state threatens the basis of reproduction of direct producers, their class organisations are likely to assume an overtly oppositional character. However, the existence of a threat in itself is insufficient to determine the nature of the struggle. Indeed, in Otero's research, a key factor in whether a struggle transitioned from oppositional to either bourgeois-hegemonic or popular democratic was the nature of the leadership, which influences whether its autonomy is sustained and the kinds of alliances it forms with other organisations.

The organised Amadiba struggle has exhibited high levels of autonomy in terms of both its relationship to the state and wider alliances, reflected in how priorities determined through community organising processes have guided such relationships. This autonomy was not a given from the beginning, however. The prospect of mining initially caused a significant amount of confusion and division, amongst the Amadiba communities over what it would mean for their livelihoods. This appeared to stem from the fact that there remained a general belief in the role of the ANC state in addressing the national question by delivering on its 1994 promises of development (Berry, 2009; SWC, 2007). As a leading anti-mining activist, Nonhle Mbthuma, explained, '…it was recently after [the achievement of] democracy, and everybody, we trusted the ANC. Nobody was against something that is coming from the ANC because ANC is Mandela' (RLS, 2020: 02:04 in video). Yet at the same time, functionaries of the state were telling the Amadiba communities that they would only receive development (improved roads, electricity, running water, education, jobs) through mining (Berry, 2009; SWC, 2007). There was thus a dissonance between continued grassroots expectations on the post-apartheid ANC state and its official propositions to the Amadiba communities.

Given this initial confusion, the eventual understanding of the state's role as a threat and the consequent mobilisation were the result of a process initiated by agency and leadership from within the community. This happened first through customary democratic processes at a community meeting at *khomkulu* in 2007, where prominent community members whom the

mining company attempted to buy off to support the mining chose instead to report their experiences to the community. Secondly, with the consequent establishment of the Amadiba Crisis Committee out of customary processes at *komkhulu*, emergent young leaders of the ACC sought to respond to the communities' expressed needs for better understanding of the proposed mining, development in general and their rights. This led to an alliance with an outside NGO willing to support the response to community needs, Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC). Through the subsequent Simbhadame programme discussed below, whose key methodology was to facilitate community members developing, through their own collective agency, 'a concrete understanding of wider social forces' (Mamdani, 1987: 221), delegates were elected to travel to communities affected by titanium mining in Richards Bay in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Their return with reports to a meeting at *komkhulu* of those communities' suffering was a key moment in cementing organised resistance to the proposed mining. This was arrived at through a process engendered by local leadership and wider alliances.

The ACC has formed alliances with a number of organisations. These include a key alliance with activist lawyers from the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) and the law firm Richard Spoor Inc., which has been critical in translating priorities of the political struggle into legal interventions that have posed the official barriers to the commencement of mining (see Bennie, 2020). However, I focus here on the alliance with Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC) as an example, because, apart from an activist social worker, it was the only external organisation that supported the community in the first few years of the struggle. SWC originated in 2003 as a loose grouping of environmentalists under the banner of 'Save the Wild Coast', in response to the proposed N2 toll road and the threat it posed to the 'untouched' and sensitive ecologies of the Wild Coast. In this sense it emerged from the mainstream, historically white, middle-class environmental movement and reflected its traditional concerns with flora and fauna. Cock (2006) contrasts this movement with the environmental justice movement, which places the rights and needs of the poor and excluded at the centre of its concerns. However, as Bennie (2010: 138-144) showed, SWC came to embody the concerns of both of these movements, and over time adopted a more explicit environmental justice perspective. This was largely a result of two factors. The first was that two social justice-oriented activists joined the organisation in 2005 and insisted on connecting with the affected communities and their expressed needs as the guidepost for SWC's activities and legitimacy (Heather, interview, 1 July 2021). The second was a series of informal engagements between these SWC members and a few young, emergent community leaders, who expressed the communities' need for support in engaging with the

development question in the context of the proposed mining and toll road. This led to a collaborative journey of listening, learning and decision-making between SWC, ACC, community members and *komkhulu* about the way forward.

NGOs have been critiqued for their potential to de-politicise and substitute for class-based struggles (Matthews and Nqaba, 2017; Veltmeyer, 2018).[69] However, I suggest that SWC played an important role at a critical time that contributed to deepening the community's transformative, self-organised class struggle, which came to articulate with food and agriculture. That is, although SWC was not self-consciously politically radical, its interventions had the effect of contributing to building a radical, or transformative, politics through their articulation with local material conditions, social relations, and customary rule. There are two important aspects to unpacking this. The first was the maintenance of autonomy in relationship to SWC. The relationship began partly because of the agency of leadership from within the community, and the alliance with SWC resulted from discussions with community members and their needs. The most urgently expressed need was for more information and understanding on different development options as a basis for community decision-making.[70] This sparked a working relationship in which SWC supported the struggle by helping to facilitate knowledge gathering and sharing on the mine and toll road and alternative development options, and by initially undertaking the wider advocacy beyond the community level (SWC, 2016). Based also on the request of community representatives, SWC began a programme to support sustainable livelihoods in Amadiba to strengthen alternatives to projects like proposed mining and toll road; what SWC called the 'proactive' leg of the struggle. To facilitate this relationship, the SWC formally constituted itself in 2007 as *Sustaining* the Wild Coast (as opposed to 'Save the Wild Coast'), reflecting its shift to prioritising local needs and agency.

The nature of this relationship was shaped by a confluence between community agency and by the disposition of those within SWC. SWC volunteers tended to be of a more liberal political persuasion and so, rather than a defined political end-point and seeking to organise communities

[69] This includes the way in which Tessaro and Kepe (2014) frame the role of those like SWC in the development debate on the Wild Coast. In relation to my research findings, they appear to drastically mis-interpret its role.

[70] As Bennie (2010) has shown, the Amadiba communities have deep desires for development in the form of improved infrastructure, healthcare, educational facilities and jobs, but state functionaries consistently told them that they would not have development without the mine and toll road. As such, community representatives' first request to SWC was to help facilitate information sharing in the communities about different development options, as well as on their Constitutional rights in relation to development, so that the communities could make an informed choice about which development path(s) they desired. SWC's response was that it did not know what the options might be, but would walk the journey with them to find out – hence Simbhadame (Heather, interview, 1 July 2021).

around it, sought rather to support existing community agency in defining and achieving their own goals in an autonomous way. The awareness that they were largely white, middle class and lived in urban centres meant that they tended to be self-conscious about not trying to guide the struggle in any way, going so far as a principled refusal to participate in any community decision-making. Sandy Heather, who facilitated the community work from SWC's side, stated, 'We were completely and utterly asking to be dictated to by the people concerned' (Heather, interview, 1 July 2021). This meant that it deliberately positioned itself to respond to expressed community needs, while the communities were left to develop their own politics, forms of organising and programmes as they saw fit.

The agency and assertiveness of community leadership in directing the struggle, together with SWC's mutual commitment to respecting and supporting such agency, meant that the nascent organised struggle maintained its autonomy in relation to the NGO, SWC. This was further illustrated when in 2018 the Amadiba Crisis Committee informed them that they no longer required their support in the struggle against mining and the toll road, and had formed new political alliances with more explicitly political partners like the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) to take this strategy forward. SWC was therefore requested to devote its resources and energies principally to supporting community-led, alternative development options in agriculture and eco-tourism (SWC, 2019).

The second important aspect to the relationship with SWC was the participatory development work that it co-facilitated (and continues to do) to support the achievement of sustainable livelihoods as an alternative to mining and other large-scale developments. In 2008, with the support of traditional rural development organisations like the Alliance of Rural Communities (ARC), it began rolling out a local livelihoods development programme, which participants named Simbhadame.[71] The key characteristic of Simbhadame was that while the three phases of the project were pre-planned, the content, process, methods and direction of each were designed by participants themselves as the process unfolded. The first phase thus involved an open-ended process of information-gathering and sharing based on workshops in which participants worked out for themselves what information they needed. SWC paid for facilitators from the community to be trained in 'Training for Transformation', a methodology based on Paulo Freire's liberatory pedagogy. Simbhadame was principally a space for community

[71] Simbhadame means 'we discover' in amaMpondo, and was also chosen for the fact that it combines letters from the six villages represented in the programme (one inland village was included).

members to learn through various means and to develop and unfold their own agency – central to a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire, 1996).

Simbhadame resulted in activities like permaculture training and gardening projects, which constituted organic livelihood interventions that on their own might have done little to challenge wider power relations shaping local conditions. However, in an in-depth evaluation of the project (Berry, 2009), participants reported how some of the strongest results were less tangible outcomes. They credited Simbhadame with helping to address the confusion that promotion of the mining caused by providing them with deeper knowledge of the mine and its implications; for contributing to sowing deeper social connections and unity between households and the villages of coastal Amadiba; and for instilling common values and collective self-confidence – what may be understood as helping to strengthen the 'social capital' necessary to movement building. Its practical outputs thus focused on local development projects, like food gardening, but the social process that it engendered around these was a critical aspect of the way resistance to the proposed mining coalesced. Through this, the Simbhademe process also helped to surface and further develop the local leadership who came to spearhead the anti-mining struggle (Berry, 2009). The contents of the 'Simbhadame Song' composed by its participants about the programme illustrates how closely they associated it with strengthening their struggle against the proposed mining and toll road. The song targets a national centre of state power, the capital city of Pretoria, and those (such as the chief of Amadiba) who are seen to be able to afford cars because of their involvement in the proposed mining, at the expense of ordinary residents' land rights:

> *Jesus forgive me for not praying.*
> *Does it mean you are a Christian when you are seen in Pretoria?*
> *We cannot be rich in rural areas.*
> *Only a few clever people will benefit from our land.*
> *Look, today the culprit is buying a car.*
> *We will go on a big march to Pretoria to ask who sold the land.*
>
> (quoted in Berry, 2009: 28)

Simbhadame was therefore aimed at supporting livelihood projects in the villages, many of which included support to organic food gardening and training. However, the political context within which the organic livelihoods development programme took place meant it bolstered the anti-mining struggle in ways that had notable political significance. The process to plan for

development projects appears to have strengthened the anti-mining struggle, and the reported expansion of organic household food gardening provided for further assertions of autonomy in food production against the development plans from above. Simbhadame therefore contributed to strengthening autonomous social processes.

The maintenance of relative autonomy of the organised struggle from the state is a result of a confluence of several further factors. One is the maintenance of a system of customary governance that has historically remained autonomous from the state, and so the means of production (land and natural resources) continue to be governed autonomously. This is largely a result of the Pondo Revolt, which prevented the implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act, and presents a contrast to many of the former rural homelands, where 'traditional authority' was incorporated as a mode of colonial and apartheid rule and which has continued to be instrumentalised for political control in the post-apartheid era. Centred around the *komkhulu* of the Amadiba coastal area as the legitimate expression of the people's will, customary rule has thus been operationalised by the ACC and communities to assert democracy against the state, including rejecting the legitimacy of and marching on the chief of the Amadiba area once he threw his lot in with the mining.[72] The assertion of customary rule against state power went so far as the state removing the Mpondo King, Mpondombini Sigcau, allegedly for refusing to bend to the will of the state and instead playing his customary role of reflecting the will of the people by opposing the proposed mining and toll road (see Clarke, 2014b for details of the saga). Traditional customary rule has thus provided a lever of autonomy in relation to the state.

The legitimacy of customary rule and its autonomy from state power also reflects a history in which popular organising has occurred relatively independently of the state and the ANC, where the ANC failed to connect politically with rural uprisings, including the Pondo Revolt (discussed in Chapter 4). While electorally for most of the post-apartheid era the region was an ANC stronghold, this relative independence of popular organisation from the state has continued, partly due to the failure of the state to extend its developmental and political presence to the area, seen in virtual non-existence of state infrastructure. As one resident observed:

[72] As discussed earlier, the Amadiba Administrative Area (AAA) is split in two – the inland Section 21, and the coastal Section 24 (Umgungundlovu). Each has its own traditional council (*komkhulu*), and falls under the authority of a chief, Lunga Baleni. Baleni's authority has been rejected by Umgungundovu residents since he threw in his lot with the mining and toll road, on the basis that he has abdicated his role of representing the will of the people (see Bennie, 2017). However, the traditional council of Mgungundlovu, *komkhulu*, has continued to function as the community's central instrument of (legitimate) customary rule, and in opposition to Chief Baleni.

> I think the government is not treating everybody equally because since 1994 there was nothing in this community like other places. But the government is trying to impose a new thing [mining] before they fulfil those promises after 1994. Because all the other places you can find there is RDP houses, there is also electricity. But here there is nothing, but the government has another agenda instead of doing what the whole nation was agreed about (A5, interview, 10 March 2016).

The Amadiba Crisis Committee thus emerged autonomously from the state, out of a popular mandate channelled through the *komkhulu* and, indeed, in opposition to the state. As an 'invented space' formed through grassroots collective action aimed at confronting power relations and challenging the status quo (Miraftab, 2004), a consistent tactic of community organisation through the ACC has been to force state authorities and representatives of the mining class project to yield to the communities' own spaces by insisting that any attempts at consultation that concern the communities' land are only legitimate if they take place at *khomkulu*, as per customary procedure. 'Invited spaces' are only participated in when it makes strategic sense or, as in one example, when an ACC delegation attended a meeting organised by the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy. The meeting aimed at some kind of 'compromise' after the High Court ruling on the community's right to consent, yet withheld any active participation except to inform him that they would only engage with him actively on the issue if it took place at *komkhulu*.

However, oppositional organisations are not necessarily able to impose their will on the state and ruling class. To begin shaping policies in their favour while maintaining independence from the state requires deepening the popular-democratic nature of organisation (Otero, 1999). One of the key victories in imposing its will on the state was, of course, the 2018 legal ruling affirming the communities' right to consent before the state could grant a mining right and which, by setting legal precedent, potentially also created a shift in the wider political economy of mining in South Africa regarding power relations between communities on communal land, the state and mining companies. Far from a legalistic victory, as emphasised by the key activist lawyer representing the community, the content of the challenge and its success in imposing the will of the struggle onto the state through the law was contingent on the prior mobilisation and organisation of the affected communities (Lorenzen, interview, 6 August 2019).

The struggle has therefore made inroads in imposing its will on the state from an autonomous standpoint, much of which is linked to production demands, lending it a popular democratic nature. This is reflected in the example discussed earlier of how the democratic control over the

key means of production, land, was in one village asserted through building a fence and making active use of the land, and the assertion of extended use of the land through increased agricultural production as a form of resistance. This defence of democratic production forms is reflected in the ACC leadership's refusal to bow to state plans and its steadfast assertions directed at the state of popular democratic production and rights. This is illustrated in one statement issued in response to the SA National Road Agency's (SANRAL) depiction of poverty in the area as justification for the toll road:

> When shall this stupidity stop? How can we be poor when we have land? We grow maize, sweet potatoes, taro, potatoes, onions, spinach, carrots, lemons and guavas, and we sell some of it to the market. We eat fish, eggs and chicken. This agriculture is what should be developed here. It is not falling apart like in many other places in Eastern Cape. We have cattle for weddings and traditional rituals. We have goats for ceremonies. We are not a part of the 'one out of four South Africans who go hungry to bed'. We have a life. Poor infrastructure is not poverty (quoted in *GroundUp*, 2016: html).

Rather than accepting state plans, in 2013 a community development plan partly developed through the Simbhadame process was also delivered to the state (ACC, 2013). In the context of the historical dearth of developmental intervention by the state, after the high court ruling, which had quashed the mining legally,[73] the then Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Senzeni Zokwana, acceded to an ACC demand to hold a meeting in the community to discuss state support for the agricultural development path that the communities sought (ACC, 2019).[74] An important part of the wider context that has enabled local systems of food production and provisioning to be implicated in a transformative politics is therefore the link between production and popular organisation, which started as oppositional and has evolved to popular democratic by remaining autonomous from the state as well as attempting to impose its will on the state, with a notable degree of success.

[73] Politically, however, the anti-mining victory was not put to bed by the 2018 ruling. Soon after, Minister Mantashe continued to hold meetings in the community, in which community members were teargassed, and insisted on holding a survey to determine community consent. His Department also said it would take the ruling on legal appeal, but was yet to formally do so at the time of writing.

[74] Zokwana was, however, removed from his position in a cabinet reshuffle two weeks later, and no outcomes of the meeting were acted on by the state (ACC, 2022).



Figure 16: The ACC and allies protest outside the Departemnt of Mineral Resources headquarters in Pretoria during the High Court case on the right to informed consent, April 2018.

As Otero (1999) argues, the nature of leadership of an organised struggle is critical to determining the kind of the relationship to the state and of alliances with wider organisations, and hence the nature of the struggle. I discussed that two nodes of community leadership in the struggle are the *khomkulu*, the council of traditional leaders of Umgungundlovu, and the entity that emerged from *khomkulu*, the Amadiba Crisis Committee. Leadership was thus grounded in autonomous customary legitimacy. Key also was the autonomy that leadership of the ACC and *komkhulu* enacted by maintaining community priorities as the basis of engagement in wider alliances, such as SWC, which was also contingent on SWC's political conviction in respecting the agency and decision-making of affected actors. It appears that the results of the nature of state intervention, as well as the nature of alliances that the ACC formed, combined to further create a political struggle to which food and agriculture were connected so as to illustrate a transformative agro-food politics, leaning towards what Otero (1999) might term as popular democratic – a popular struggle to deepen democracy, entailing popular production forms. This represents a strengthening of civil society in relation to the state.

Conclusion

After identifying key political currents (*lifestyle*, *organic livelihoods*, *food justice* and *transformative*) of organising that actively respond to ecological and social problems in the South African agro-food system in Chapter 5, this chapter sought to understand how some of

these categories (principally transformative and organic) are built and articulate with political organisation of popular classes in local contexts of agrarian change. In the case of Amadiba, while food sovereignty was not an explicit mobilising frame, it analysed how a transformative politics of food that in its contents and concrete modalities reflects the original politics of food sovereignty. This emerged from pre-existing practices around agriculture and food, as well as organic livelihood practices, that formerly may not in and of themselves have expressed politics. The struggle to which agriculture and food have been articulated in transformative ways is at base an economic one: a national class project of accumulation from above threatening communal access to the means of production. This provided an important starting point in terms of the affected communities' 'class position and location in a matrix of power relations' (Levinson, 2022: 210). In turn, community resistance partly stemmed from the central place of agrarian and land-based relations of production and reproduction to household survival, to which the proposed mining poses a significant threat. But the chapter showed that the transformative course of the struggle has been shaped by historical, social and cultural relations and dynamics (imbuing processes of differentiation as well) that have in turn also interacted with and shaped concrete production relations. We might therefore see this outcome as a conjunctural phenomenon, and elements of contingency.

The conjunctural process that enabled the politicisation of food and agriculture in this way was also constituted by political subjectivation that brought daily interactions with land, food and agriculture into the realm of the political, which in turn further imbued these relations and practices with deeper political significance. This is seen, for example, in how existing cultivation practices and organic livelihood interventions like household gardens promoted through the Simbhadame process were brought into a transformative terrain and provided a basis on which to contest power relations. How existing agricultural practices have also become instrumentalised as tactics in the struggle further illustrated an active process of political subjectivation (Levenson, 2022).

The political response that was key in building a transformative politics that reflects the food sovereignty impulse also emerged from certain kinds of leadership from customary processes and its confluence with external agency through alliances, that interacted in ways not always predictable to produce this transformative struggle entailing food politics. The emergence of transformative politics from an institution of customary rule, and grounded in defence of democracy, was also contingent on prior historical struggles to maintain institutions of

customary rule as people's organs. The autonomy these relationships facilitated supported the process of building a collective political subject, often through prisms combining memory through historical invocations of grassroots power, post-1994 democratic aspirations and customary relations. This provided a modality through which both incipient differentiation from below and resistance to capitalist imposition from above could be thought, mediated and enacted. The reflection of a transformative food sovereignty politics in the Amadiba anti-mining struggle would therefore seem to affirm Mike Davis' contention that 'class capacities emerge conjuncturally, in the confluence of struggles and within class antagonism, and this is where the most radically transformative organising occurs' (in Borras et al, 2022: 16). I would suggest that it is these broader, interconnected processes in the Amadiba context that have allowed existing relations of agrarian production and reproduction to be actively integrated into a transformative politics of food. This wider politics has defended a space for, and further stimulated, potentially democratic forms of production, accumulation and class formation to proceed.



Figure 17: One of the ACC leaders and his young son look out over the Mtentu River Gorge at sunset, June 2018. The Mtentu River would form the southern boundary of the proposed mining tenement area.

Chapter 7: Marginal Conditions and State Dependency: The Tensions in Building a Transformative Food Sovereignty Politics in the Mopani District

Introduction

Mopani Farmers Association in Limpopo Province is part of a national formation, Inyanda National Land Movement, which was birthed with the support of the Trust for Community Outreach and Education. Inyanda and TCOE advocate for a transformative vision of food sovereignty that emphasises structural transformation through demands for far-reaching agrarian reform and rural democratisation, and the centrality of grassroots political organising of the rural poor and landless to achieve this. The key way that this food sovereignty vision has translated into MFA's practice at the local level is through attempting to expand agroecology production.

However, this chapter finds that MFA's implementation of agroecology has reflected more an organic livelihoods approach: seeking to advance an ecological production technique through existing property, class and power relations. Indeed, while noting its success as an independent farmer organisation beyond the existence of its support NGO, an external evaluation of TCOE and its work with Inyanda also noted with regard to MFA: 'Some of the challenges relate to a disconnect between food production and politics of movement building; with the association confirming that they are more focused on food production and less on confronting power and authority dynamics' (SGC Consulting, 2017: 24). I suggest therefore that while Inyanda aspires to build food sovereignty politics in South Africa in ways that advance sustainable food production and consumption patterns together with confronting the post-apartheid agrarian question and inequality, doing so through its local affiliates is subject also to the contexts in which those affiliates are located. Through the MFA, this chapter seeks to examine the tension between the aspiration of transformative food sovereignty politics by the wider movement structure and the local context within which MFA operates.

It does so by examining some of the prevailing material circumstances, social practices and processes of articulation that have translated an attempted transformative politics of food into a practice of organic livelihoods. I show that structural constraints pose significant challenges to advancing agroecology and a transformative food sovereignty politics, seen in the material ecological and socio-economic conditions that have historically challenged attempts at

agricultural development in the region. However, part of the seeming disconnect between agroecology and *transformative* politics should also be understood in terms of the *actual* politics through which agroecology is advanced. I therefore also show that MFA emerged from and operates within a hegemonic generative politics, in which agroecology is delivered as a technical production option but disconnected from building alternative civil society structures of power from below that attempts to shift the social conditions of production.

To show this, the chapter proceeds as follows. The first section gives more background to the MFA and what it seeks to achieve. This is followed by a brief evaluation of its attempts to advance agroecology and secure state support for farmers. To understand the prevailing basis for attempting to build a transformative food sovereignty politics, the third section explores the prevailing social relations of production and reproduction in the region in which MFA organises, which poses constraints on the potential for wider agrarian mobilisation. In the fourth section, I argue that farmers' active negotiation of colonialism, Bantustan state formation and the associated development project, and processes of rural differentiation, produced particular pathways into agriculture, despite an historical arc of de-agrarianisation and proletarianisation. They also show that such negotiation reflect and developed through patterns of class and gender differentiation. Given this context, the fifth section turns to farmer experiences of the challenges they face in agriculture as a livelihood option, illustrating that a further challenge to any attempt to build transformative food politics is that agriculture on its own provides a rather fragmentary material and social basis. The sixth section explores how the elaboration of agroecology through an organic livelihoods approach arises also out of prevailing farmer and organisational relationships to the state, in which the state maintains the initiative over the direction of farming in the region. I show that this is historically embedded in a contradictory moral economy in which the state was both an agent of dispossession and also an agent of survival for many amidst the consequences of dispossession and adverse incorporation into the wider economy. The reproduction of these political relations under ANC rule, and in which MFA is situated, poses a further constraint to the creation of collective political contestation beyond the interests of a relatively more privileged farming stratum.

'From apartheid to development':[75] The Emergence of the Mopani Farmers Association

[75] Levin and Weiner (1997: 3).

The MFA emerged out of a particular historical relationship between the national question, national liberation politics and the agrarian question. Rather than being rooted in agrarian organising, it emerged from a national liberation politics rooted in civic, student and worker organising that linked development, nationalist and democratic demands. The creation of the MFA stemmed from support provided by a development NGO, Itireleng. Itireleng was formed in 1988 by Matome Malatji, not long after the Lebowa[76] revolt of 1986. The upsurge against apartheid and Bantustan authority in the Northern Transvaal that culminated in the revolt aligned students, the United Democratic Front (UDF), trade unions,[77] business people and development workers in the national struggle (Lodge, 1991; Delius, 1990). A key social layer that drove the political resistance were those responding to the social crisis being experienced in the Northern Transvaal homelands as a result of drought, economic marginalisation and dysfunctional Bantustan state bureaucracies, such as South African Council of Churches fieldworkers, Operation Hunger workers, and rural development activists (Lodge, 1991) – a layer that included Matome Malatji.

Malatji initially worked for Ithuseng Development Association, which was established by the Black Consciousness activist and medical practitioner at the time, Mamphela Ramphele, and provided health services, childcare facilities, nutrition programmes, support in establishing income generating cooperatives, literacy training and education programmes to about 120 000 people (Tooley, 1990). After leaving Ithuseng, Malatji went on to establish Itireleng in 1988, partly in response to requests by the Chemical Workers Union (CWU) to help address some of the development challenges of many of their members' home villages. The organisation initially worked on adult education and linked it to supporting group development projects (Malatji, interview, 30 November 2017). Itireleng therefore developed from nationalist and worker organising. This embodied an oppositional politics in the mould of national liberation politics that sought to build resistance to apartheid and Bantustan rule, as well as popular democratic elements that sought to build the autonomous capacities of communities from below.

[76] Lebowa was made up of 16 patches of territory, much of which was not far from Gazankulu. The region in which MFA organises today, the Mopani District, covers areas that were part of both Gazankulu and Lebowa. The study site, Dzumeri Area, fell within Gazankulu.

[77] Trade unions had started organising workers in the mines bordering Lebowa, such as the United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (UMMAWASA) and the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa. Most of the workers who worked on these mines on the South African side of the border lived on the Lebowa side, creating an important linkage with communities there (Lodge, 1991).

This organising only turned to the agrarian question in the post-liberation context. Given the shifting of the matrix of power relations in which it operated towards a democratic state, I suggest that this agrarian organising took place within what Williams (2008: 9) terms 'hegemonic generative politics'. The shift to land and agrarian issues reflected the fact that the Trust for Community Outreach and Education, the national organisation to which Itireleng was affiliated, was shifting away from a 'welfarist' approach of health and education provision in rural communities in the 1990s, to supporting organising over the land and agrarian questions (Andrews, interview, 7 April 2016). With establishment of the ANC state's land reform programme after 1994, community members increasingly started asking Itireleng for assistance in reclaiming their land through the restitution pillar of the programme. It became clear that farmers in the existing villages also required greater agricultural support. As Malatji explained, 'we had to respond' (interview, 30 November 2017). Under the new political dispensation, Itireleng felt farmers needed to be organised in order to collectively receive the developmental support and resources that the state was now positioned to deliver. In this context, Itireleng acted as a development service organisation that sought to train farmers to become commercial smallholders supplying wider markets, provided them with inputs and equipment, and acted as a facilitator between farmers and state development programmes (Malatji, interview, 30 November 2017). Itireleng therefore emerged from a wider oppositional politics against the apartheid state, but shifted to a more collaborative relationship with the democratic state, seeing its political objectives as aligned.

Consonant with the TCOE's emphasis on supporting grassroots agency and movement building, Itireleng also sought to bring collective farmer agency to the fore and so they organised the nine Area Associations spread across the Mopani District, that together constitute the Mopani Farmers Association. MFA was launched in 2007, with the rationale of bringing farmers together to share information and challenges horizontally to improve their production; and, centrally, to act collectively to access state resources for farming investment, ostensibly to also overcome patronage and individualised relations that seemed to prevail between farmers and the state (MFA1, interview, 23 January 2016; Nkhwashu, interview, 31 October 2016 2016). In the post-1994 context, MFA therefore emerged not so much from an oppositional or popular democratic rationale but rather has sought recognition by the post-apartheid state in the context of the latter's developmental mandate. This might be characterised as a 'hegemonic generative politics' that seeks to establish new institutions and practices but in ways that also further the initiative of the state over civil society structures (Williams, 2008: 9).

This localised trajectory and political orientation meets with the transformative, counter-hegemonic politics that TCOE has sought to advance through its local affiliates like MFA. Given the ANC state's failure to enact significant agrarian reform nationally, TCOE's political orientation has aimed at supporting class-based organising from below to address the causes of rural poverty and inequality. TCOE's participation in regional and global movement networks such as the World Social Forum and People's Dialogue, which seek to advance counter-hegemonic alternatives to globalised neoliberal capitalism and its national and local incarnations (De Sousa Santos, 2006), has influenced its approach, such as to food sovereignty. The movement that TCOE helped create and to which MFA is affiliated, the Inyanda National Land Movement, has an explicit class agenda, expressing a transformative politics that calls for widespread agrarian transformation in the interests of the poor (Inyanda, 2015). It also questions the industrial model of agriculture and associated productivism, and calls for new ways of conceiving of wellbeing, moving beyond economic growth and grounding human relationships to land in ecological parameters. As Andrews (2017: 88) explores, it proposes a transformative politics of food sovereignty that 'is fundamentally linked to changing both social relations as well as relations between society and nature'. The conception of food sovereignty that it advances is therefore about 'a break with existing productive and propertied social relations' (*ibid*).

The central production practice through which to recraft human-nature relationships as part of this vision of food sovereignty is agroecology (TCOE, 2014). TCOE was introduced to agroecology over the 2000s through its transnational activist connections and has become a key component of its vision of agrarian transformation (Andrews, interview, 7 April 2016). Amidst slow progress on land reform, TCOE and Inyanda have continued to promote agroecology training and practices amongst affiliate members, thus within and against the prevailing limits of the contemporary agrarian question. Agroecology is therefore the key element through which MFA has connected with the food sovereignty discourse, as a result of training provided by the TCOE affiliate, Itireleng, that used to support it (Malatji, interview, 30 November 2017).

However, my research suggests that agroecology has been advanced by MFA largely in the frame of organic livelihoods – as a technique to green existing production patterns, within prevailing economic and social structures. This tends to emphasise the role of individual farmers in undertaking practices that reduce reliance on artificial, conventional outputs and to

undertake practices that naturally build soil fertility, in order to adapt to climate change and protect the health of people and the planet. Farmers I interviewed tended to understand agroecology in productive terms, as a way of potentially reducing reliance on external inputs like chemicals and so lowering costs, and a way of producing food that does not harm the earth or people's health by using harmful chemicals and pesticides. As one market-oriented smallholder farmer expressed:

> [Agroecology] is important for MFA because MFA looks for the health of the people. They only look for the health of the people by seeing that people are sick now, there are so many diseases that are there. By getting an information or the training that the MFA had they are learning more about the danger of the chemicals, the danger of the fertilisers when it's in the soil or while it's in the food. That is something that make the MFA to look on for agroecology (MFA8, interview, 4 November 2016).

Agroecology has therefore been rolled out as an organic livelihood option within prevailing social and political relations, in contrast to its origins in Latin America as a transformative social and political practice grounded in social movement power (Holt-Giménez *et al*, 2021). While MFA has provided agroecology training to a cross-section of farmers, it historically and in the present has primarily focused on organising and advocating for the interests of market-oriented smallholder farmers (Malatji, interview, 30 November 2017; MFA22, interview, 3 December 2017; own observations). However, in my research engagements with market-oriented smallholder farmers in the research site of Dzumeri Traditional Administrative Area, while most farmers reported attempting to incorporate some aspects of agroecological principles into their production, they reported the present inability to shift away from conventional production techniques. Most put this down to the required transition period and the associated challenge of how to meet the need to rest and rejuvenate the soil while sustaining production and income during this transition period; dealing with pests while trying to transition away from pesticides; and generally lacking the technical expertise to effectively execute a transition process. Only one farm was producing without industrial inputs like chemical pesticides and fertilisers. It seems that features of the prevailing technical conditions of production, especially recurrent drought and low financial resources (linked partly to poor state support), have limited the ability of most smallholder farmers to individually make the shift to agroecological production. As one farmer explained:

> But the problem, the workshop [conducted by MFA] is there but to come and do practical it was another thing. Because the workshop, they taught us, but when the people gone, go back to their

> villages, there's no water, there's no resources then. So always workshop, workshop, but practically it's not there (MFA2, interview, 21 January, 2016).

Even a key member of the leadership of MFA, who within the organisation, in meetings, and in wider national social movement forums is highly vocal about the importance of agroecology,[78] has not yet been able to shift his farm to agroecology, and is still reliant on chemical pesticides to protect some of his crops from pests. This, he explained, is because of the economic costs that he cannot afford of leaving his farm fallow for a number of years to deprive a pest of the crops it requires to reproduce in the soil (MFA1, interview, 1 November 2016). Even the one farm that that was producing without conventional inputs was no longer operational due to lack of water by my second research trip – under the drought that was ravaging the region, the borehole had dried up and so he could not water his crops, and in addition, while in hospital with heart problems, the borehole pump had been stolen (MFA10, interview, 1 November 2016) (Figure 18). Various features of the technical conditions of production – resource limitations in particular – therefore seem to combine to undermine the capacity of market-oriented farmers currently practicing conventional agriculture to shift to agroecology.



Figure 18: Left: A crop of chilli plants in a portion of one farmer's organic farm in January 2014. Right: The same farm was no longer producing in November 2016 after almost two years of drought and a stolen borehole.

As will be discussed below, the challenges of elaborating agroecology practices in the region are not simply about MFA's capacity, but also reflect the difficult socio-ecological conditions that have historically plagued attempts at agricultural development in the region. In addition, in the eyes of some of the leaders of MFA, the lack of appropriate state support for agriculture in

[78] This is my observation from time spent during research on MFA, as well as various national activist meetings and platforms that we both attended.

general also poses a further challenge to the elaboration of agroecology amongst smallholder farmers. The manager of the MFA indicated the challenges farmers face in shifting to agroecology. For him, the resource issue was key:

> Let me say that we are gradually, they are gradually shifting. But like we mentioned, they have got challenges. Look, I have indicated that we do not have resources, we are spreading the word of agroecology but resource-wise, we are disabled.

In contrast, he suggested that the state also used its resources to continue locking farmers into conventional practices, which the MFA has been unable to counter. 'The Department of Agriculture, it's still the main problem,' he argued:

> But you will be given bags and bags, 50kg of seeds, for free [by the provincial Department of Agriculture]… Secondly, agroecology, it's user-friendly to the environment, but they still give farmers very expensive and toxic chemicals to use on their farms… Look, as vulnerable as these farmers are, sometimes they are tempted, they are tempted to accept these, these free offers. One other thing is their [extension officers] lack of knowledge… [T]heir lack of knowledge on agroecology, it's also very much disturbing, because whenever they visit these farmers they will tell you that you cannot sustain your activities through agroecology, because agroecology can never feed this nation. And this government wants you to feed the nation. That's why they are giving you fertilisers for free… (MFA4, interview, 31 October 2017).

This suggests that while farmers and the MFA complain about poor state support (discussed below), the state still plays a key role in determining the kinds of production undertaken through its deployment of resources. However, the MFA works within a differentiated rural social structure, with differentiated forms of agrarian production and reproduction. While the shift to agroecology as a result of MFA training has been limited amongst market-oriented smallholders, where it has been taken up has tended to be mostly in household gardens – in spaces of social reproduction. Household gardens lend themselves towards agroecology production, having historically been characterised by low external input use, diverse production and intercropping (Hart, 2009) and, in the research, farmers reported virtually no state involvement in their home gardens. Thus some market-oriented smallholders report producing food agroecologically in their home gardens but are still struggling to make the transition in their market-oriented production, as discussed above. In contrast, in some villages household agroecology farming appears to be flourishing, especially linked to the initiative of a member of the MFA executive together with another community activist linked to Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)-South Africa.[79] These operate under altogether different social

[79] See https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-06-16-backyard-agroecology-gardens-bring-relief-to-starving-limpopo-villages/ and https://www.pgssa.org.za.

forms, on smaller parcels of land, with access to municipal water, and without the economic pressures of market production, such as covering overhead and wage costs.

The MFA and farmers therefore face significant structural challenges in advancing agroecology amongst smallholder farmers. At the same time, MFA has tended to advance agroecology as a technical production option, resembling an organic livelihoods approach, which seeks to green production practices of existing market-oriented and household farmers, yet in this form has not been able to confront these structural constraints. The social conditions and relations through which agroecology has been elaborated and which determine its fortune therefore require deeper examination. To begin exploring these questions and their inter-relationships in more depth, the next section turns to unpacking the historically determined conditions in which MFA seeks to enact collective agency – the terrain in which food sovereignty politics through agroecology is shaped and re-articulated.

Historically Constrained Conditions of Agrarian Reproduction

To understand the social and technical conditions of production through which MFA seeks to elaborate agroecology, it is important to understand the historical context. A key aspect of this is the marginal conditions of production, engendered through overlapping processes of dispossession, proletarianisation and the agricultural development project under Bantustan consolidation, and through which agrarian production and reproduction was historically circumscribed. However, within an overall arc of de-agrarianisation, MFA's base is also a product of how agriculture has been reproduced under these marginal conditions through particular class and gender relations. This contrasts with the situation in Amadiba, which has, due to historical circumstance and political struggle, experienced a relatively unbroken agrarian trajectory from which the wider economy has been engaged in more widespread and favourable terms. This brings to light how constraints to agroecology adoption among farmers also reflect the historical conditions of marginalisation that have plagued agriculture more generally as a development option in the region.

Areas like Dzumeri and the Mopani District exhibit 'rural dependency', reflecting their historical role as labour reserves. This structural relationship of dependency is evident across much of the former homelands of Limpopo Province, where the majority of households are heavily dependent on transfers from outside the rural areas as a result of low local sources of

income and high unemployment. Today, about 77% of the population living in the area that used to fall under Gazankulu are classified as living below the lower bound income poverty line (Noble *et al*, 2014: 6), and the unemployment rate in Greater Giyani as well as Dzumeri is roughly 60% (Greater Giyani Municipality, 2020: 22; StepSA, 2018). The incomes of most households are thus highly dependent on public transfers and family remittances. Changes have taken place since 1994: villages have been electrified, water reticulation introduced, and the introduction of social grants has been an important lifeline to many households. Yet, as Van der Waal (2017: 220-221) describes:

> The former Gazankulu Bantustan in the Limpopo Province still reflects the basic elements of apartheid times: traditional leadership controlling tribal [*sic*] land, a proletariat dependent on migrant wages and social grants amidst high levels of unemployment, and a substantial difference between the quantity and quality of infrastructure and services in comparison to urban middle-class areas.

These patterns of rural dependency can be seen as an outcome of 'premature de-agriculturalisation' (Eastwood, 2006:1325), where the racialised course of accumulation from above (Cousins, 2013) displaced black populations from agriculture without a concomitant shift to employment in non-farm sectors. However, these conditions are embedded within a wider geography of agrarian capitalism, mostly large-scale, globally integrated fruit farms (especially citrus)[80] that historically drew much of their labour from the villages of Gazankulu and Lebowa. The research site is situated within one of the non-contiguous pieces of territory that made up the small Gazankulu homeland and were surrounded by the land of these commercial fruit farms of 'white' South Africa. These conditions of marginalisation thus exist within an integrated but unequal rural economy, one structural marker of which is the historical concentration of 60% of Limpopo's farmland into two percent of its farms (Eastwood *et al*, 2006). The socio-spatial contrast is depicted in Figure 19, taken by Google Earth in November 2016 during the height of the drought that was ravaging the region, showing the southern portion of Dzumeri Area in which Mpakani and N'wa-Marhanga villages are located. The irrigated large-scale agrarian production structures and more in-tact natural vegetation can be seen on the diagonal bottom left, south-west of the line that used to divide the commercial farmland of former 'white' South Africa (and irrigated by the Groot Letaba River running along the bottom of the image) from Gazankulu. A clear contrast is evident in the different land use patterns of the former homeland

[80] 25% of South Africa's oranges are produced in the Mopani District, making it the largest orange producing district in the country (StatsSA, 2020c).

on the top right diagonal of the picture, characterised by distinct zones of drought-stricken rangeland, dense settlement, and (at the time) uncultivated dryland farming plots.

Whereas Amadiba is generally characterised by ecological abundance, an important constraint on agriculture's potential in the former homeland areas of Mopani District is the prevailing ecological conditions, foremost of which is water scarcity due to drought, unreliable rainfall and limited infrastructure. The Mopani District has experienced a drought every decade of the twentieth century (Hay, 2015; see Figure 20), with consequent hardships for farmers and households, particularly the threat of famine (Perlman, 1992). Hay (2015) documents in detail how drought and water scarcity consistently plagued the ability of Bantustan agricultural schemes and post-apartheid agricultural interventions to generate livelihood-sustaining farming activities, which for Hay also calls into question the ability of the current land reform programme and agriculture to improve livelihoods in the region.



Figure 19: Image showing the spatial relationship of the study site to the nearby large-scale commercial farmlands. Source: Google Earth, November 2016.

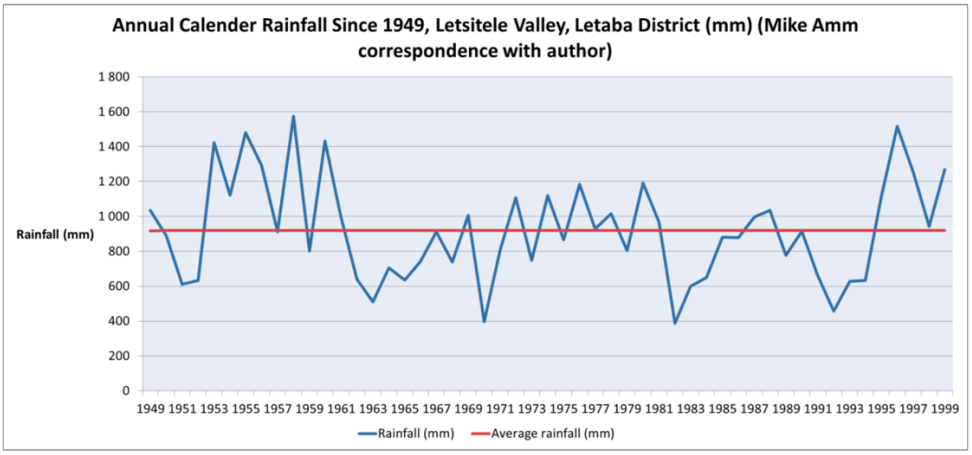


Figure 20: Annual Calendar of Rainfall 1949-1999, Letsitele Valley, Letaba District (Hay, 2015: 199).

However, access to water to sustain agriculture in a very dry region is not purely an ecological question, but a historical and structural one as well. The reason drought hit the rural communities of Gazankulu and Lebowa so hard and constrained attempts to develop agriculture was because of the politically-induced poverty and underdevelopment (Perlman, 1992): historical undermining of agrarian reproduction through dispossession from the means of production and consequently reordered (and constrained) agricultural production possibilities (in contrast to Amadiba), proletarianisation in a racialised low wage regime, and structural unemployment since the 1970s. On my first couple of field work trips during 2016 and 2017, the area was still in the grip of a terrible drought that lasted for about five years. Even during summer, the trees that were previously lushly foliated could not even sprout leaves and the ground beneath them was only bare sand. When driving on the roads, one had to watch out for donkeys that would stand on the tarmac's edge trying to nibble at what little greenery grew from the protected cracks between the tarmac and the gravel verge. This contrasted with the lush greenery of the historically white commercial farmlands that bordered the old Gazankulu homeland areas (Figure 19) and which, due to decades of public support (Boche and Anjuère, 2015; Eastwood *et al*, 2006), had the advantage of infrastructure and access to water rights that could sustain their production. In contrast, the production of many smallholder farmers in my research site had been severely constrained by water shortages (or the theft of borehole pumps) and some were simply unable to continue producing; or, in the case of one member of MFA, had taken it upon himself to dig a well in the dry river bed along his farm's boundary, from which he pumped water to his fields (Figure 21). The constraints on production are questions not simply of geography and climate, but of the distributional relations of class, race and power,

and the role of the state in relation to these structural conditions – the social conditions of production.



Figure 21: A MFA member inspecting the well he had dug into the dry riverbed bordering his farm, from which he used a diesel pump to extract water for irrigating his crops.

The fact that agriculture practice was nonetheless reproduced historically, although heavily circumscribed, reflects a history in which dispossession occurred through a relatively drawn-out process in stops and starts, shaped by agency from both above and below, in what Hay (2014: 745) aptly describes as a 'tangled past'. These processes led to both a constraining and a reordering of agricultural patterns. When the state started taking land for white agriculture in the 1920s, existing inhabitants had to find new places to live on plots of land that the state had assigned to chiefs. A second key process occurred from the 1950s as residents on scattered lands and labour tenants ejected from commercial farms (as a result of the shift to full time farm labour) were pushed into the reserves, which were being consolidated through the purchasing of Trust land under the 1936 Native Land and Trust Act (Harries, 1989). This was a critical turning point in shaping the agrarian futures of the black inhabitants of the region. As Hay (2015:) observes, 'One of the greatest injustices of the 1936 Land Act was not simply that "Africans" as a whole were dispossessed of land, but because individuals were constrained in how they could access land, and they lost independence.' The scales of household reproduction were thus fundamentally tipped away from agriculture towards proletarianisation, with household survival depending on wages earned beyond the immediate geographic area. In efforts to formalise the Gazankulu homeland for Tsonga speakers,[81] scattered homesteads were moved into 'closer settlements' that divided land into 'economic units' to be administered by

[81] Or having to identify with Tsonga ethnicity to secure continued access to land and resources (see Harries, 1989), a classic case of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012).

the state via tribal authorities,[82] with the aim of promoting self-supporting farmers on economic land units (Fischer, 1987). These were made up of separate arable land, cultivation fields and residential stands clustered in grid-like formations. In contrast to Amadiba, therefore, historically relationships to land were significantly re-ordered. These were the historically produced conditions under which agrarian relations would thenceforth be reproduced.

A third key process to both constrain and re-shape agriculture in the region was the homeland development project and its focus on developing agriculture under socially engineered conditions, the aims of which were to increase agricultural production and create employment to prevent urbanisation (Hay, 2015). The Gazankulu state sought to develop a class of dynamic, larger-scale commercial farmers who could contribute to economic growth, through partnerships between the apartheid state, the Gazankulu parastatal the Shangaan-Tsonga Development Corporation (STDC), and private sector actors (Fischer, 1987). Requiring large pieces of land for plantations of sisal, citrus, bixa, mango and the like, ordinary farmers often lost further land to these estates (Fischer, 1992). This was also a gendered and classed process: the subject of agricultural development was typically seen to be the male farmer, and it was usually already better-off businessmen who had the capacity to take advantage of the opportunities at capitalist farming that these projects offered. With most men from ordinary households working on commercial farms or mines on the Rand, it was the women responsible for household cultivation who bore the direct brunt of losing land to these estates (Schneider, 1984). The reordering of relationships to land and agriculture and the consequent constrained extent to which it could contribute to livelihoods; subordinate terms of proletarianisation; increasing dependence on the market to earn wages and purchase the necessities of life; and persistent drought combined to create chronic hardship for the majority of households. Whereas those in Amadiba invoke the current experience of bounty linked to the land, in Gazankulu such invocations often pointed to the bounty of the past in the context of present suffering resulting from removal (see Schneider, 1984; Vibert, 2016). This is reflected in a song commonly sung by women in one area of Gazankulu during the devastating drought of the early 1980s:

> *Go into the unknown*
> *They take us to the wild country*
> *We have left our figs and mafureira almonds and lala beer*

[82] I use the term 'tribal' to refer to such structures in the pre-1994 era, the designation of the time. Similarly, I use 'traditional' for the post-1994 era, reflecting also the official conceptualisation of this form of rule under the democratic state.

We have left our graves behind us
We have left the wild fruits
And there is no relish in this place
Malnutrition is destroying us
(quoted in Harries, 1984: 5-6)

Rather than simple linear de-agrarianisation due to dispossession, agriculture continued in the homelands but in more constrained and fragmented ways. The fact that agriculture tends to be practiced mostly by the income poorest households on the one hand, and by a much smaller number of better-off households on the other, suggests the role of differentiation in shaping agricultural forms under the marginal conditions that prevail in those like Dzumeri. Furthermore, the conditions of underdevelopment and rural dependency created by the historical processes described above meant that agricultural production did not provide a foundational basis alone from class formation could emerge. Rather, different kinds of agricultural production tended to in part reflect differentiation prior to, or external to, agriculture. Firstly, it was largely members of the homeland petty bourgeoisie who could take advantage of the large-scale agricultural development schemes to develop black capitalist farmers. This class had its origins in the production of grains for the market in the first half of the twentieth century. As the prospects for continued accumulation from below were steadily circumscribed from the 1930s by growing land restrictions, this class shifted to investing in education and other economic endeavours, so reproducing a homeland petty bourgeoisie. The Bantustan development project offered opportunities for re-entry into agriculture through the large-scale agricultural development schemes, as these farmers were able to take advantage of their education levels, capital and, in many cases, state patronage connections to qualify for participation (Schirmer, 2000; Phillips, 2018).

A second locus of class formation outside of agriculture but that influenced agricultural patterns was the formation of a middle class. Its creation was stimulated by the funnelling of large amounts of money by the apartheid state into the homeland development apparatus in an attempt to realise the economic viability of the homelands. This enabled the creation of a professional strata through state employment as teachers, nurses, administrative bureaucrats and in development work such as agricultural extension officers (Chipkin and Phillips, 2014; Hay, 2015). A third important component of class formation to shape agricultural forms in the former Gazankulu, and Dzumeri, was proletarianisation. A major component of this was the draw of employment in the mines on the Rand, combined with the growing land restrictions from the

1930s and the need for cash to purchase consumer items and pay various taxes. The process was further accelerated by overcrowding and increased pressure on land from the 1950s (van der Waal, 2017; Schneider, 1984). For those still practising agriculture, proletarianisation was also able to help facilitate further investment in farming, such as cattle, which could be used for ploughing extensive areas for subsistence dryland agriculture (Fischer, 1992). Proletarianisation was also agrarian in nature, as many inhabitants of Gazankulu found employment on surrounding commercial farms of the Lowveld (Mhlongo, 2020), as well as on the agricultural projects and schemes of the homeland. For example, by 1985 around 9 892.5 hectares of land were under some kind of farming scheme. Of those working on the schemes, 844 were farmers and 4 189 were permanent and occasional workers (1 512 permanent and 2 677 occasional workers). This employed work on the schemes had a gendered aspect as well, in that most farmers were male and more women than men were employed as workers (Hay, 2015: 192).

In addition to the large estates, agricultural development schemes came to include irrigation schemes aimed at supporting smallholder farmers. Given these prior mechanisms of differentiation, on a single scheme, one could find an array of class and gender differentiated farmers: retirees (such as ex-teachers) who hoped to supplement their pension by farming for own consumption or selling some produce for a profit; wealthy farmers who had their own tractors and farmed principally for sale and employed workers; as well as farmers from migrant worker households who farmed to bring in extra income or a supply of food for the household. Most of the latter were wives of migrant workers (Hay, 2015).[83]

Hay documents, however, how a consistent feature of the Bantustan agricultural development schemes in Gazankulu was their failure to engender a viable 'national' agricultural system through large-scale estates, petty commodity producers and market gardeners. Farming conditions were made difficult principally by water shortages, consistent theft of irrigation infrastructure, and chronic unemployment since the 1970s. The latter both cemented the importance of land and agriculture in the diversified livelihood strategies of proletarian

[83] See also van Averbeke and Mohamed (2006) for a more contemporary exploration of the variation of farmers on an irrigation scheme in nearby Venda. Part of the value of their analysis is that their characterisation of different 'farming styles' appears to illustrate how such styles are a function of differentiation, but also of shifting household circumstances, as well as how, amidst these changing circumstances, farmers on functioning irrigation schemes have the possibility of moving from subsistence to petty commodity producers (see van Averbeke and Mohamed, 2006: 153).

households but also constrained their capacities to invest in agriculture (Vibert, 2016). Most small farmers were thus highly dependent on state subsidisation and provision of inputs. Differentiation also played a role as many schemes were paralysed by disputes between ordinary members and the schemes' elites as a result of elite capture (Cooper, 1991; Hay, 2015). These difficult conditions of farming were therefore only made worse with public divestment amidst constrained resources in the latter days of the homeland state and after the 1994 transition. Most irrigation schemes in the region therefore collapsed. As a result of these intervening historical factors, agriculture is less associated with the combination of historical continuity and sustained reproduction than in Amadiba. As researchers noted about an agricultural scheme in the Mhala District of Gazankulu in the 1980s: 'The extremely precarious character of agriculture in the area makes it very difficult for individuals to sustain a reverence for farming as a way of life' (Bosman et al; cited in Hay, 2015: 204).

The rural dependency of the region and the marginal conditions of agriculture are compounded by poor state support, but also reflect structural underdevelopment that even large investments in agricultural development in the past have not been able to overcome (Hay, 2015). In this sense, the conditions of agriculture also reflect a wider distributional question that implicates South Africa's broader agrarian structure. Eastwood *et al*'s (2006) research has shown that, without land redistribution, support to households in former homelands of Limpopo Province to engage in agriculture has limited ability to improve livelihoods to any significant extent, especially those of the poorest. However, the region seems to be trapped in structural inertia. For example, Hay (2015) further suggests that one of the impediments to agrarian transformation has been the barriers posed to land redistribution to aspirant market-oriented farmers by the official land restitution process (which has dominated land transfer in the region as opposed to the redistribution pillar of the national land reform programme). She shows that it has reinforced the power of chiefs and claims to land on an ethnic basis, been fraught with overlapping land claims and consequent delays, and restituted land has mostly failed to yield agricultural success, for a number of reasons.[84] This is the context of entrenched underdevelopment in which the remaining discussion should be situated.

[84] See Hay (2015: Chapter 6) for a detailed discussion of the record of land restitution in the Mopani District and its dynamics and impacts. A key focus of Hay's is to problematise the idea of agriculture as a development option in the region given the record of historical failure for the reasons she outlines. To back up her claims she documents the agricultural failures of the *restitution* programme, but she does not substantively engage with the fact that much of her evidence and arguments seem therefore to point to the need for more far-reaching land *redistribution* given the problems of trying to develop agriculture within the constraints of the former Gazankulu and Lebowa homelands. For example, this is the logic of argument raised by Tembeka Ngcukaitobi (CSRP, 2022), who, while

Yet, agricultural practice has endured sufficiently in the former homeland areas of Gazankulu and Lebowa for MFA to organise around. Despite a macro-historical arc of de-agrarianisation, this raises the question of the nature of local agrarian relations in circumscribed conditions, and the social basis of their active reproduction. Key in this is that, given the continued conditions of underdevelopment in which agriculture is practiced, its forms have largely been contingent on processes of differentiation prior and external to agriculture. The apparent lack of differentiation from *within* agriculture further illustrates the constraints on accumulation from below, related to lack of resources for investment, poor state infrastructure and support, and challenging productive conditions (which will be expanded on in the discussion which follows).

Differentiation and Pathways into Agriculture

Amidst the historical and contemporary conditions described above, four related forms of farming can be identified in the Dzumeri area through which agrarian practice is reproduced. MFA's founding approach was to connect with farmers with market-oriented potential, to support them in producing crops demanded by the market, and to help connect them to markets. As such, it was less focused on those farming principally for household reproduction and who constitute the bulk of farming households in the region. These comprise two types: dryland farming and home gardening. The dry land farms are usually situated in a designated area on the border with the villages (see Figure 22), where households who have accessed land here cultivate maize, cucurbits, melons, peanuts, beans and cowpeas. These crops are rainfed, but in home gardens that have access to a tap, households can grow a combination of vegetables, fruits and green maize. These types of farming tend to be characterised by low input use, with manure and plant residues from the previous season ploughed back into the soil for fertilisation, and high levels of intercropping are usually practiced (Hart, 2009; MFA24, interview, 5 December 2017). This farming tends to be a household-based activity but also serves varying purposes for households. For the better-off, it is a source of supplementary food (and is often also expressed in terms of cultural continuity), while for poorer households it plays a more important role in food security. Indeed, as has been mentioned, 84% of households in the region who do not have an income engage in agriculture (Hay, 2015: 279). For such households, this production plays

acknowledging the restorative importance of land restitution, argues that land redistribution holds greater political and concrete relevance from a popular class livelihood perspective. Similarly, Du Toit (2013) warns of the complexities of the primacy of reparative justice and its potential to sideline questions of distributive justice, which, he argues, together with social equality should be at the centre of agrarian policy.

a critical role in terms of food security. As Rogan (2018) has found, households in the former homelands who fall below the food poverty income line but practice own agriculture are nonetheless less likely to be food insecure compared to households of similar income (such as in urban areas) who do not produce food. It is therefore these households' own agency in food production that prevents hunger despite structural marginalisation.



Figure 22: View of adjacent dryland plots where ciltivation of maize, cucurbits, melons and beans are undertaken by households. Picture taken in December 2017, by which time enough rain had fallen to allow for tree leaves to return.

These farming types therefore provide an important source of subsistence mostly for those who exist at the bottom of integration into the wage economy; semi-proletarianised households for whom reproduction still depends, in part, on agrarian activities only partially integrated into the circuit of capital (Moyo and Yeros, 2005b). However, the agency enabling this is also gendered. About 57% of households in Giyani are headed by women, and this production for households is predominantly an activity undertaken by women (Hart, 2009). Many women spoken to emphasised the role this farming had played in looking after and raising their families amidst difficult conditions (MFA21, interview, 4 December 2017). It might be said that these types of farming therefore incorporate what Ossome and Naidu (2021) call the agrarian question of gendered labour, in that they are largely contingent on the role of women's labour in producing and reproducing life on the margins of dominant structures of accumulation.



Figure 23: A smallholder dryland farmer, who raised her children alone and sent them to school mostly with the proceeds of farming and local piece work, walks in her uncultivated field. Cultivation in the period the picture was taken had been delayed by the municipality erecting a raised water supply reservoir in her field (without her consent) – witness the compacted earth and heavy machinery tyre tracks.

The agrarian question of gendered labour was also at the root of the next visible farming form in the Dzumeri Area, group farming projects involving women.[85] These groups have their origins as Care Groups that were established in the early 1980s as the decadal drought triggered a crisis in the reproduction of life in the region. The lack of rainfall prevented women from cultivating their dryland fields and at the time households did not have tapped water to enable homestead production. With their husbands earning sub-subsistence wages, many semi-proletarian households teetered on the precipice of starvation (Perlman, 1992; Breslin *et al*, 1997). As a member of Group A described '[our husbands] couldn't provide enough because the wages they were earning wasn't enough for the family, which was the reason why our children were suffering malnutrition' (group interview, 3 November 2016).[86] In this context, the Care Groups emerged from a combination of Bantustan state and NGO agency, together with the collective agency of women from affected households.

To address the malnutrition and inability to produce, the Department of Agriculture grouped women in each village together so that they could provide production infrastructure in one place to enable the production of leafy greens and other fresh produce to address the high rates of

[85] Although one group I interviewed had one male member.
[86] I do not mention the name of the villages that these groups are located in, because each village only has one of them and so to name them would undermine anonymity.

child malnutrition and associated diseases (see also Vibert, 2016; Piñán and Vibert, 2019). In the case of Group B in another village of Dzumeri, some of the infrastructure built for a project aimed at engendering male-centred agricultural accumulation, but which had failed, was turned over to the village's Care Group (Group B, interview, 6 December 2017). The Care Groups were part of the architecture of agricultural development in Gazankulu, with many initiated through the interaction of state health workers, agricultural extension officers, the Department of Agriculture, the Shangaan-Tsonga Development Corporation (STDC) and local tribal authority structures (Hartman, 1993). But it was women's agency from below that interacted with these institutions to realise the project and keep them functioning, many of them to this day. As a member of Group B said, 'The Department of Agriculture supplied us with the resources, but we had to build it with our bare hands' (group interview, 6 December 2017). By 1985, there were 46 of such gardens spread across Gazankulu (Hay, 2015). Thus, while the homeland state's class and gendered agenda in agriculture was initially the promotion of larger-scale, male capitalist farmers, malnutrition and drought pushed it also to support women in agriculture for the social reproduction of poor households. This led to a new mechanism through which agrarian practice was historically reproduced, through the labour of women from semi-proletarianised households. A number of these gardens remain operational today, primarily serving the social reproduction needs of their members' households.[87]

The fourth key form of farming in the Dzumeri Area is smallholder market-oriented farmers who farm primarily for income. This is the key farmer type that MFA has sought to organise. In Cousins' (2009; 2015b) class-analytic categorisation of South Africa's agrarian structure, they are part of the 250 000 or so black market-oriented petty commodity producers and small-scale capitalist farmers who operate mostly in the former homelands. These farmers tend to be those who are comparatively better-off and who have resources obtained from outside agriculture to invest in farming. These farmers have obtained the resources to invest in this agriculture from savings built up through proletarian employment in urban areas, or are retired professionals with their roots in the homeland petty bourgeoisie, such as teachers and state development workers, who used a combination of their savings and retirement packages to invest in their farming enterprise.

[87] See Vibert (2016) and Piñán and Vibert (2019) for more detailed exploration through the lens of one group.

In the context of Limpopo's unemployment and poverty levels, these farmers can be seen as part of a minority of the population – 16.8% – who have income from their own business (StatsSA, 2020b: 57). Most of these farmers in the Mopani District are also male (SAFL, 2016), although two of the farms in the Dzumeri Area I encountered were run jointly by wife and husband. A key aim for these market-oriented farmers is to bolster the reproduction of their households through attempted expanded reproduction – accumulation from below (Cousins, 2009). As one who at the time of being interviewed was in the process of establishing a collective farming enterprise with other aspirant market-oriented farmers commented, 'We have realised that we can make money out of the soil, there is a lot of money in the soil. We can dig out that money' (MFA25, group interview, 3 November 2016). They depend on hired labour and farm principally for markets, supplying mostly 'loosely organised value chains' (Cousins, 2015b: 257). Crops like chilli, okra and tomato are sent to the fresh produce markets in Pretoria and Johannesburg, and crops like tomato, cabbage, spinach and green maize are supplied to local markets – local villagers as well as hawkers from the town of Giyani who come to the farm and pick and transport the produce themselves.

The fact that most of these farmers are from comparatively better-off households reflects how investment in the establishment of the farming enterprise and associated infrastructure has depended largely on the farmer's own resources, in the context of poor state support and infrastructure (compounded by challenging ecological conditions). Before 1994 Bantustan state investment in infrastructure and support with inputs allowed for this type of farming to take place on development projects like irrigation schemes, although it was still perennially limited by water shortage, damage and theft of infrastructure, and poor market linkages (Hay, 2015). I came across one exception to this, however; someone who was able to operate as a successful small-scale commercial farmer in Dzumeri until the year 2000. He started his operation in the 1980s independently of a development scheme, as he was able to use resources from prior employment (savings as well as farming equipment given by the commercial farmer he worked for), and his relation to the royal house to access land next to a small dam from which water could be drawn for irrigation (MFA1, interview, 1 November 2016). However, for the remainder, they had emerged after 1994 under particular conditions.

Hart (2009) and Hay (2015) argue that the removal of state supports and the liberalisation of agriculture in post-apartheid South Africa reinforced the tendency for cultivation to either be associated with poorer households as a food security practice or with better-off households who

have the resources to invest in equipment and to afford external inputs (that is, smallholder market-oriented farmers). In the absence of comprehensive state support, including state-financed irrigation schemes, these farming enterprises have therefore developed largely from individual initiative and resources on plots of land obtained adjacent to villages. This is also a key factor distinguishing them from the women's farming projects, which, due to their poor membership, depended for their establishment on state resources and still today are dependent on the patchy and haphazard support from the Department of Agriculture for things like repair of infrastructure and provision of inputs (Group A, group interview, 3 November 2016; Group B, group interview, 6 December 2017).

The fact that the above forms of farming in large part reflect differentiation external to agriculture points to the marginal conditions of underdevelopment that continue to challenge accumulation from below and associated differentiation from within agriculture. Most farmers experienced what might be called precarious, or stunted, accumulation, where few have indicated the ability to achieve sustained expanded reproduction, despite stated aspirations to do so. This is largely due to water shortages as a result of lack of resources to invest in necessary extraction and irrigation equipment, in turn also reflecting lack of state investment. As one aspirant commercial farmer explained:

> So my greatest problem now it's finance, ja. I don't have money, because I have got about six permanent employees that I pay in each and every month. And when drought, eh, comes like this it becomes tough for me to, even to finance my employees (MFA12, 4 November 2016).

Due to the stunted nature of accumulation from below in agriculture, with class distinctions reflecting prior forms of differentiation, a political class distinction has hardly developed between capitalist farmer and hired labour from within agriculture: even the workers on this farm were 'understanding' of their low wage of R50 a day, justifying the level of wages by pointing to the fact that, due to the drought, in some months income was so low that the farm owner did not take income home while they still received their wages (MFA13, interview, 9 November 2016). This suggests that both farmer and hired workers were acutely aware of the precarious nature of farming under the prevailing conditions. Similarly, one of the women's farming projects, Group A, was over time supported by MFA to produce vegetables for the market, such as retailers in Giyani and the fresh produce markets in Johannesburg and Pretoria. However, they could not sustain these markets as they were never able to produce on a consistent scale, and could not justify the transport costs of moving low quantities. In addition,

the lack of resources also meant they were not able to replace worn infrastructure such as water pipes (Group A, group interview, 3 December 2017). Thus due to lack of resources and inconsistent state support, they have not been able to produce and supply markets at a scale sufficient to engender expanded reproduction. Despite aspirations to market produce, they primarily produce at a scale that directly serves household social reproduction, in addition to patchy sales to local villagers.

This situation – stunted accumulation from below in the context of ecological change – is sharply illustrated in the case of regression of a farm operated by a father and son. The father had previously worked as a supervisor on a white-owned commercial fruit farm in the region. When the farmer emigrated in the 1980s, in addition to his retrenchment package he was 'rewarded' with a tractor and other farming equipment, which he used to start his own farm next to his village. His son described how the farm ran successfully during the 1990s, commercially producing mangos as well as vegetables, such that his father could afford to send him to university in Johannesburg together with a significant monthly allowance (MFA1, interview, 1 November 2016). His measure of the farm's success is also that during this period about 25 workers were employed full-time, and an additional 25 during harvesting times. However, today he explains that they only employ 4 workers, at below the minimum wage level for the agricultural sector, because that is the most they can afford. The early impacts of climate change combined with state absence seem to be the reasons for the farm's decline: the floods in the year 2000 that resulted from five weeks of heavy rainfall in the region (devastating large parts of Mozambique) completely silted up the dam that they drew water from for irrigation, rendering it unusable (MFA27, interview, 7 December 2017). Much of a season of crops that significant resources had been sunk into (seed, fertiliser, pesticides, wages) was also lost. Further resources were then sunk into drilling new boreholes for irrigation, but with persistent drought conditions subsequently, only two out of six of them provide water. In Cousins' (2009; 2015) class analytic categorisation of small-scale farmers, lacking sources of finance to reinvest in the farm after the devastation meant that he went 'backwards' from an apparently successful small-scale capitalist farmer engaging in expanded reproduction, to much of their effort now having to be focused on retaining a position as market-oriented, petty commodity producers only just able to afford hired labour. It is apparent that prevailing technical conditions of production – principally drought and lack of state support – are limiting accumulation from below.

In this section we have explored some aspects of the social relations of production and reproduction in parts of the region that used to fall under the Gazankulu Bantustan, and the Dzumeri Area in particular. I suggest that the prevailing agrarian material conditions and relations pose a challenging basis for building transformative politics, in contrast to Amadiba. Due to a combination of geography, politics and struggle, there has been much clearer continuity in agrarian and land-based livelihoods in Amadiba, and this continued ecological dependence has enabled a stronger position from which to engage with the inequalities of the wider economy, and a stronger material basis for the development of transformative agrarian politics. In Dzumeri, dependence on land for livelihoods was limited and reordered by dispossession and closer settlement planning, within a process of proletarianisation. Households had more limited access to land, therefore, and household reproduction and the agriculture that remained became more dependent on wages and remittances. These are the material relations through which agriculture has been reproduced, which has taken place through specific articulations of dispossession, differentiation, ecology and state formation. This has resulted in more specific pathways through which farming has been reproduced, rather than as a more generalised mode of community reproduction, so providing a narrower basis of interests and mobilisation for a wider transformative politics.

In turn, MFA has attempted to advance agroecology as a productive technique within these material conditions and agrarian relations, seeking to green existing production relations in the frame of an organic development approach. In turn, the Association's rationale and practice has generally tended to emphasise the market and production interests of market-oriented smallholders, potentially narrowing the social basis of politics further. However, as the discussion above has shown, agriculture alone provides a relatively narrow social basis for building a potential wider politics of transformation. Alone, it also provides a rather fragmented basis for political subject formation for a transformative food sovereignty and agroecology politics and practice, which the next section illustrates.

The Fragmented Realities of Agriculture

The extent to which the differentiated pathways into and forms of agriculture in Dzumeri are able to meet the aspirations of those involved is uneven, including along intersecting lines of gender, class and generation. For household and dryland farmers, their aspirations for these practices are largely met through the provision of supplementary food to their households, but

the aspirations of those who seek income, accumulation and jobs from farming largely remain unmet, indicating the challenging material conditions described above. The perceptions that agrarian actors in Dzumeri have towards agricultural practice therefore remains fragmented and often caught up in individually-grounded (yet unmet) aspirations, at times leading to contestation along these lines. This contrasts with Amadiba, where a concerted process of political subject formation collectively enrolled actors across class, gender and generation around a shared agrarian discourse and politics.

For all household and dryland farmers I interacted with, the aspirations attached to their farming is to contribute directly to the reproduction of their households, as it has done historically. As one farmer in Mzilela Village who had raised her children alone by means of farming for the household, small sales and local piece work explained:

> I was born near Tzaneen and grew up in a village called Rikotso around Nwamitwa. Life was good because we were ploughing for ourselves and producing our own food. But I moved from Rikotso with my father to start a new life here and we continued our life here in a similar way as I was in a family that used to farm, which was a lesson for me. Because the farming life was part of where I came from and I am still doing it today (MFA21, interview, 4 December 2017).

Another farmer who farmed on dryland and in a home garden to feed her household similarly illustrated this sense of continuity in farming's ability to contribute to reproduction:

> I grew up in the family where we survived on farming. My father worked when I was young and we still had the farming. By the time I was a teenager my father was no longer working so we survived on farming. From that we used to eat all the traditional food like *samp*[88] and our own butternut (MFA24, interview, 5 December 2017).

This ability to realise aspirations for direct reproductive needs, however, is also related to a perception of those needs arising from poverty. As the same farmer continued, 'Because with the poverty I was able to survive on farming, I could see that I must continue farming so that I could look after my children' (*ibid*). This also indicates a gendered dimension to this practice, related to her social reproduction role. However, this role is also often marked by change. While the collective women's farming projects were a new mode of farming that emerged in the 1980s, they also gave access to members to pieces of land for continued dryland household production, where today they continue their 'cultural way of farming' to directly feed the household (MFA20, interview, 3 December 2017). Thus for the members of the women's farming projects,

[88] Maize kernels that are pounded, removing the shell from the pulp, which is then boiled, sometimes together with beans.

their involvement in agriculture has also principally been valued for its role in provding food for their families and meeting other household needs, which selling small amounts of produce locally helped allow:

> This project bring a lot of change here in a positive way. We have been able to provide for our families, we were able to feed our families, and from selling our produce we were able to buy what we were lacking at home. Our husbands were even so happy about our involvement here that sometimes they would come and help when we had a lot of work to do (Group B, interview, 6 December 2017).

These experiences therefore also reflect processes of social and gendered differentiation, somewhat expected given the historical gendered dimension to proletarianisation under racial capitalism (Scully and Webster, 2019). For women like those who entered the women's projects or continued household subsistence production, continuing their agricultural practice was a matter of household survival. However, for the (mostly male) aspirant commercial farmers, most of whom joined the professional strata or obtained an urban job before re-entering agriculture, the desirable form of farming is not subsistence-oriented of the kind the farmers above reflected on, but market-oriented farming. Whereas most of their households still undertake home gardening or dryland farming to supplement household food consumption, their present market-oriented farming is associated with the aspiration for accumulation, as with the farmer who said 'There is money in the soil.' While their households may have engaged in subsistence agriculture when they were growing up, this was associated with poverty and so it was only after having obtained a job elsewhere that they had then had the resources to enact their agricultural aspirations, in more commercial form. As one farmer explained:

> It was the poverty my friend, poverty. I've grown in a very poor family. My background was very, very poor while I was growing. I would have gone to the school but I find that no money to go to school. By that time there was no bursaries that I would have to get and help me to go to school. And when I've gone to the mine, the money that I earn there it was very little as four-hundred-and-twenty something when I started working. And I would have to support my younger brothers, my younger sisters, you see. I find that it's difficult for me to carry on with my education. Then I just decided to work. You see? So that it is something that is why it is taking a long time not to start agriculture (MFA8, interview, 9 November 2016).

Accumulation is therefore a key aspiration for market-oriented farmers, and is associated with being achieved through a particular model of farming. For example, when a farmer talked about his involvement in household subsistence production in his youth, he did not describe it as farming: 'I couldn't say that agriculture may do because many black people were not farming,

so I thought maybe it could be a different thing because it was only for the whites, should I say.' When he said 'black people were not farming', he meant not farming in the larger-scale commercial model, like the large commercial farms that surround the district: '…with black people there was no farming, we were just, eh, dry land farming, so we plant mielies there, but for irrigation no black people had' (MFA9, interview, 1 November 2016).

An additional aspiration linked to the commercial, conventional model of agriculture is understood through the proletarian prism of jobs. With the unemployment rate in Greater Giyani at 60%, the area manifests a critical labour question, and so it is unsurprising that many hope that agriculture can help create jobs. This includes the aspirant commercial smallholders, whose vision of the purpose of their farming fuses with proletarian aspirations for jobs. As a farmer explained, 'I tried to tell them [general community members] it's not that big, the problem is just electricity. Should you get electricity and start planting even two small plots, you will be something, even if two plots, you can work on your own. *And grow up and hire some people*' (MFA9, interview, 3 November 2016; emphasis added). Similarly, the chairperson of MFA at the time explained of his core aspiration for his irrigated vegetable farming enterprise:

> My wish is to, to plant more than two hectares, or three hectares, to get people who can help me and then they can go get a living together. Because you know our place always we struggle about jobs. If I can do more then I see I will have four or five people who can depend on me and then get living at their home. It's my dream (MFA2, interview, 21 January 2016).

However, the limits posed by water shortage and lack of state support mean that most farmers have not realised their aspirations for accumulation from below through farming on larger land sizes, good infrastructure, supplying markets and employing workers. For these reasons as well, three of the market-oriented smallholders I spoke to had applied for commercial farms through the formal land reform process outside of the former homeland. In the context of unrealised aspirations, their current smaller-scale operations are seen as transitory as they seek to one day practice 'proper farming', represented by the large commercial fruit farms that surround the region, their symbolic and material power perhaps enhanced by the contrasting conditions of their own farming. A conversation with one of them illustrates this:

> MFA12: Should I started farming earlier, today I should be somebody amongst people. Ja.
>
> A: How would you have liked to see yourself? Like can you describe to me your farm that you would like to have?

MFA12: Ja, um, in fact to remain in a small, eh, like to be small-scale farmer. I want to become a *real farmer* and get a farm around Constantia[89] or somewhere. [emphasis added]

A: Where's Constantia?

MFA12: Just around Letsitele, there's white people there. Isn't it that now there's a mix of whites and black? So a lot of blacks are in there, so I also want to, to match with, I want to match with them, I don't want to remain in a small place like this. That's what I, I was dreaming of. That's why I regret and say I wish that should I have started earlier *I could be somebody* in the Constantia area. Not here. [emphasis added]

A: Why do you prefer that farming to this?

MFA12: Because this is a play. The place is too small, is too small. The place is *very* small. You can see it's even congested. I want a land, in fact, I don't want a plot. Because I know I can run a land. I can run a big farm. I got that skill. But money is the problem.

A: So for you this is small?

MFA12: Is small. Is too small according to my dream. I only don't have maize, I don't want to be here. If only I can wake up tomorrow and find myself somewhere then I'll be the happiest and practice my farming activity, than playing. I take it, this is just playing. But what can I do? (MFA12, interview, 4 November 2016).

If he had the finance to invest in his current farm and make it more productive, he would see it only as a launching pad to a larger farm:

I don't have money, even to manage this small place. If all I can get money to manage this small place then I would be able to go outside. Because if you have money, money buys everything, it's possible to get to any place if you got money. But if you don't have money, it's not easy (*ibid*).

The ability of different forms of farming to meet aspirations differs, therefore, along lines of gender and farming form: for mostly women subsistence farmers and those in projects, agriculture has met their households' sustenance needs, while for most individual aspirant commercial farmers their aspirations remain unrealised. However, generation is also an important factor in relation to perception of the role that different actors seek for agriculture to play. This was an important dynamic in the fortunes of the Group A women's farming project. During my fieldwork it was clear that to both the project members and the village residents the project retained its value in terms of representing local agency for social reproduction of the community. 'It was part of chasing away the hunger and it has been here so long,' one of the members' daughters described (MFA26, personal communication, 5 December 2017). Indeed,

[89] A commercial farming area about 15km from Dzumeri Area, halfway between Giyani and Tzaneen.

a young customer at the project one day said, 'It is *our* farm. We get it all here' (personal communication, 5 December 2017; emphasis added).

However, the sense of community's members' claims to the project together with those of the members also became grounds for contestation, largely along generational lines. For the members of the project, it was valued for its role in continuing to contribute to the reproduction of their households. Although the state and even the members themselves aspired to see the project as a commercial operation, the members said that they had not been able to earn a stable income from it for a number of years. This was evident in the relatively small area cultivated with crops like chillies and tomato. What revenue the project did make from local sales was used for maintenance and repairs, just to keep the project ticking over. Yet every day they would still go to the project, much of it spent doing beading work (see Figure 24) which they would sell in the village to earn extra income. Asked why they continued then to come every day, they explained that despite the lack of income, the project still provided them with fresh produce for their households, and so they were keeping the project running for the sake of their families.



Figure 24: A member of Project A makes bead products in the shade of the verandah of the project's storage building.

Yet the project was also important for the economic security of their households in other ways. One aspect of this was the access to land that being a member of the project secured. As mentioned, a portion of the land was used for their household production. Having access to land on this sort of scale is important – in recent times, in order to access land for agricultural production, one had to pay the municipality a fee of R1200 per hectare. As it was fenced with the support of the Department of Agriculture in the 1980s, it also provided a secure place to

grow their crops for household food security. The fact that they were members of the project on which the land belongs is what gave them claim to the land.

However, the historical role of the state in establishing and supporting the project, even though current support was patchy and inconsistent, meant that remaining members of the project also allowed for the possibility of continued access to state resources. For example, the project owned a tractor which the members had purchased with the winnings from a government agricultural award. Rather than helping to deepen the commercial production of the project, it instead served the members' household needs, in two senses. One is that the tractor was used to plough their households' dryland fields on the project land. The second was that they also rented out the tractor to other farmers to plough their fields, which provided a source of income for them in the context of a low and precarious income from farming. The project also still received occasional state support such as in fertiliser provision and seeds. Holding on to the project thus continued to provide an important basis for their household livelihood strategies.

There was also a generational view to these strategies. The members were entitled to pass their membership on to a child, and so remaining as project members also underpinned generational claims to the project that, given the potential role of the land in economic security, could underpin generational household reproduction. However, this generational continuity through the current membership was confronted by a generational dissonance over the purposes the project should serve and how, as well as the wider village claims to the project, mediated by the state. A daughter of one of Project A's members explained that while she had a certain entitlement granted by its existing members to join the project should she wish, she felt her full participation faced a number of barriers. Key was that the project in its current form could not meet her economic needs but that she also could not afford to invest time hoping that the project would become economically successful. Indicating the position of the project as part of the older members' multiple livelihood strategies, rather than singular livelihood source, she felt that they could be patient as they had a monthly pension to rely on, but 'as a young person you need income as you have the needs you have to take care of.' As she further explained:

> It's not that youth are not interested, the only challenge is that I'm the youth, I have a daughter, I have my own responsibilities and needs. Can you imagine if I have to work with them for six months without getting any income? Where am I going to get the money to buy the cosmetics, clothes and all those kinds of things that I need? It's not that as the youth we are not interested,

> we really like to be part of what they doing. We like and understand and want to join them but the thing is, *yoh*, it takes time (MFA26, interview, 3 December 2017).

Mosoetsa (2014) has documented this generational dissonance over livelihoods amidst precarious economic circumstances in other contexts. Whereas for the mothers the agrarian component in and of itself provided an important element of their household reproduction strategies, members of the younger generation I engaged with tended towards a different expectation of the role it should play in their own and their potential families' reproduction, more closely related to a good income. All the young people I had conversations with qualified their potential interest in agriculture via its potential for business opportunity. In a particularly upfront discussion, while waiting to meet with an interviewee I had a discussion with his son, who was then studying entrepreneurship at the University of Pretoria. When I told him I was there to discuss the MFA, he asked how he could join and if they 'push money', which he needed so that he could farm. Asked why he was interested in farming, he explained, 'Because I want to be a billionaire.' These aspirations of younger people regarding what agriculture should achieve appear to reflect a combination of 'objective economic circumstances and subjective measures of worth and value' (James, 2015: 22). The subordination of the practice of agriculture to personal economic ambitions is unsurprising, given what this chapter discussed about the historically and continued marginalised conditions of agriculture in the former homeland region, and the consequent dependence on wage employment and, after 1994, state transfers. Material needs and socio-economic aspirations have for a long time transcended agriculture, seen in historical markers like the fact that the locus of the anti-apartheid struggle in the region in the 1980s was student struggles rooted in school and tertiary institutions (Niehaus, 2000; Beinart, 2012).[90]

Young unemployed people in the village looking for jobs, like the daughter of the one of the members, did nonetheless feel that the project might be able to meet their aspirations for economically attractive jobs, with sufficient state support (MFA26, interview, 3 December 2017). However, Department of Agriculture officials said they could not invest resources in the

[90] Even in the 1980s, while the majority of surveyed secondary school students in one study felt that agriculture was important for development, only 2.5 percent sought it as a career (cited in Hay, 2015: 206), unsurprising given the historical trajectory described above. Similarly, in the 1980s the most prestigious agriculture school in Gazankulu, Kheto-Nxumayo Agricultural High School, was regarded so not for the value of producing farmers but, given generally poor perceptions of agriculture, for its production of doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses and other professionals (see Hay, 2015: 204-205).

project with old members that could no longer achieve full productive capacity of the project and that their aim was to invest resources in younger people. At the time of fieldwork, Department of Agriculture officials had therefore been trying to convince the existing members to hand the project over to the youth of the village, but the members were fearful of doing so because they said on past experience, they feared that younger people are 'too lazy' to keep the project going, and they had trust issues related to financial management and work discipline (MFA26, interview, 3 December 2017; Nkwashu, pers. comm., 7 December 2017). The project was therefore in a certain limbo, reflecting low productive capacity and divergences in reproductive circumstances and priorities along generational lines.

However, youth claims emerging from the sense of 'village ownership' over the project, combined with the state's decisive mediating role, finally did effect a transfer. By 2021, the project had been dormant for two years with no production. The matter was eventually mediated by the Department of Agriculture, the *nduna* and his councillors, and the local development committee, where it was explained that, going back to the original history of the project, it was one that belonged to the community, including the land, and so anyone from the village wishing to work there should be allowed to do so. An agreement was therefore reached for young people to start working there. By August 2021 they had started bush clearing and fence repair (MFA26, interview, 23 August 2021). This example appears to reflect generational divergence as well as contestation between the purposes and aspirations associated with agriculture: between its ability to contribute to direct sustenance for older members, and for the perceived need to provide immediate income for younger people.

This section has illustrated that while there are some common understandings and expectations on agriculture, there is also notable divergence in aspirations and expectations. This indicates that, linked to the concrete material realities in which agriculture is practiced and by whom, the 'common sense' remains fragmented, including along intersecting lines of class, gender and generation. However, while for household producers the modest objectives of agriculture are largely realised, for many such aspirations remain unmet by existing material realities. For aspirant commercial farmers pursuing accumulation from below and employment creation, and youth seeking income through agriculture, agricultural aspirations are more strongly articulated to the desire for 'transformed conditions of life – a place-in-the-world, a standard of living, a "direction we would like to move in"' (Ferguson, 2006: 19) – but which agriculture in its current conditions is failing to provide. This is in stark contrast to Amadiba, where for many agriculture

and land is associated as a centrepiece of household and community advancement. This reflects marginal historical conditions of underdevelopment in the Mopani region, the challenging ecological conditions, and the general failure of the state to provide a coherent support infrastructure for agricultural development in the former homelands (Aliber *et al*, 2009).

This fragmentation of agricultural common sense partly reflects that MFA has advanced an organic livelihoods politics to advancing agroecology, rather than one articulated to a transformative food sovereignty politics that makes prevailing common sense 'coherent through collective practices and processes of transformation' (Hart, 2013: 315). However, such fragmentation also reflects the reality of the fragmented material and social basis of agriculture that MFA is confronted with, and so of agroecology and any attempt to build a transformative food politics from. This suggests that, unlike in Amadiba, agricultural practices and their associated social relations *alone* may not provide enough of the pre-existing fragments of common sense to be mobilised into a transformative food politics of agroecology. As a productive practice agroecology cannot in itself undertake a re-articulation of existing common sense into a political project, such as that to which Wittman's (2009) concept of 'agrarian citizenship' refers – a mode of organisation and collective practice that combines production and political participation to contest power and construct new bases of citizenship. However, the limits posed by prevailing material conditions to the prospects of building a transformative food politics also point to the question of changes in political relations required to shift those conditions. Key in the political nature of a struggle (and in our case, of whether food politics is transformative or organic in its process and outcomes) is the relationship that farmers have with the state, as Otero (1999) illustrates. The scope that MFA has to engage politically with these material conditions is therefore a question I now turn to in the final section of the chapter.

Farmer Organisation and State Power

Within the frame of food sovereignty, the discussion thus far might suggest that marginal conditions of agriculture calls for a politics of transformation to challenge and transform the structures inhibiting the realisation of transformed conditions of life. This might further call for articulating agricultural challenges to wider developmental and social aspirations beyond simply agriculture. For example, Hart (2013: 20) has suggested the need for the re-articulation of existing livelihood claims to broader and more collective demands for 'redistributive social change and livelihood guarantees.' However, for this to happen would suggest popular

democratic or counter-hegemonic generative organising (Williams, 2008), where a popular organisation organises subalterns to collectively impose their will on the state grounded in popular modes of production and reproduction. As Otero (1999) has shown, an important determinant of whether political organisation takes this direction is the organisation's relationship to the state, which is in turn partly shaped by its leadership. However, in the region, the state currently appears to maintain the political and technical initiative in relation to farmers as well as the MFA, further inhibiting the potential for a transformative food politics. This must be seen in the historical context of state evolution in the region, and the state-society relations through which MFA emerged (discussed in the second section of this chapter).

I suggest that a key characteristic of the state-society relationships in which farmers are embedded has historically been a moral economy based on an 'implicit contract' (Moodie, 1986: 1-2) of mutual expectations and values. Such a moral economy has bound community members and state functionaries in a wider system within an 'accustomed institutional context' (Wolf; quoted in Edelman, 2005: 333) over shifting material and political relations. The colonial and apartheid state was historically responsible for dispossession, and the reordering and circumscription of social and agrarian relations in the region. Conversely, the social consequences of dispossession and the political need to stem urban migration meant that many households' survival also became closely dependent on the homeland and apartheid states, which played a strong paternalist role in administering land and social affairs, development, and control, through varying institutional arrangements (see Hartman *et al*, 1993).

The apartheid and Gazankulu state apparatuses thus became closely entwined with community life (in contrast to Amadiba). Tribal authorities were central in this arrangement. They were deeply integrated as extensions of apartheid state rule at local level and, indeed, the Gazankulu state emerged from the foundation of tribal authorities statically codified by the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act. Within the tribal system of rule orchestrated by the apartheid state, and in the context of historical land loss and flux, chiefs eager to carve a Tsonga position initially formed the Machangana Territorial Authority in 1962, which became the Legislative Assembly of Gazankulu once it was gained self-governing status in 1973 (Harries, 1989; Hartman *et al*, 1993). Tribal authorities and their roles were therefore codified statically into the functioning of state power from above.

At the local levels, tribal authorities were integrated into and played key roles in organising administrative, land, agricultural and development processes (Niehaus, 2001; Chipkin and Phillips, 2014). This included their role in development schemes, which often depended on the cooperation and active role of local tribal structures in order to lend them 'administrative legitimacy' (Fischer, 1992: 465) amongst ordinary community members. Village Development Committees were also important mechanisms, chaired by village *ndhunas* (ward headmen), that aligned community agency, tribal authorities and the state on the basis of development (see Hartman *et al*, 1993). Agricultural extension workers also played a prominent role in village life, through development projects and through their paternalist roles in the context of droughts, for example, as seen in the case of the establishment of the women's garden projects.

Today, various state structures are still prominently integrated at community level, as illustrated by the decisive role of the state in mediating the fate of Group A women's project, as well as the perception by members of Group B that the future fate of their project was in the hands of the local state. This close presence of the state is illustrated also in community processes and events. During my stay in Mzilela village, my host invited me to attend with her the graduation ceremony of the local nursery school, to which all village members were invited. Included amongst the honoured speakers at the graduations were, in addition to the *ndhuna*, representatives of the Department of Social Development as well as the police service.

Traditional leadership remains in the post-apartheid era an important modality through which state (and ANC) power remains embedded at community level. Across the Lowveld in the late 1980s and early 1990s, structures of Bantustan state authority, including chiefs and teachers, were severely challenged by (mostly male) youth through ongoing revolt organised mostly under the banner of the ANC. However, after the ANC's unbanning, in much of the Lowveld political power was reconstituted as ANC branches mushroomed across the region. These ANC structures largely came under the control of those who had developed positions of power under the homeland system – businessmen, teachers and chiefs. In a national context where the ANC struck a compromise with the traditional leadership lobby post-1994 (Ntsebeza, 2005), political power from the homeland structures in the Lowveld (replete with its basis in traditional authority) was transferred into structures of the ANC, with formerly contending actors vying for influence and patronage through the ANC (Niehaus, 2000; van Kessel and Oomen, 1997).

The ANC state, through various modalities, therefore maintains a high degree of presence and involvement at village level in enacting a paternalist role. This includes traditional authorities' role in land allocation, which occurs through a less social and more bureaucratic process of application whether for residential, farming or business purposes. In this, they also play a prominent role in coordinating state agricultural intervention. When a farmer applies for land through the traditional authority office, they are kept on a register that is shared with the local government's Department of Agriculture 'so whatever assistance the government may give they must know who is doing what, where,' according to the chief of the Dzumeri Area (Chief Mabunda, interview, 6 December 2017). A paternalist orientation in development delivery frames outlook and practice of the local municipality's agricultural support office as well. For example, an official in the department for agricultural support of Giyani Municipality explained that if an NGO entered the area and started working with farmers independently,

> We will phone to say, guys, it is important that we must have a relationship, because we are servicing the same client. If we don't want to confuse those people [farmers], let us work together. So, we make sure that there is no institution that goes to farmers with us not knowing… [S]till we are the custodians of agriculture as a department. Every institution has to respect this institution together with us. So, we make sure that we strive for the relationship with the NGOs that are dealing with agriculture in our areas (Nkwinika, interview, 1 December 2017).

This sense of good intention combined with control was further manifested in the fact that the provincial Department of Agriculture insisted that I present my research proposal to them for approval before commencing my fieldwork in the area.[91] This close political relationship between farmers and the state is not contested by farmers, but rather expectations are contested within its boundaries, in which the state maintains the upper hand.

To understand whether farmers have built a sense of collective agency in relation to the state through the MFA, it is useful to briefly examine the nature of the relationship between the farmers it organises and the state. This is characterised by three key features. Firstly, rather than farmers collectively seeking to advance their interests in relation to the state, they instead tend to have individualised relationships with it. For some farmers, the state is seen as generally providing insufficient support, and where support has been accessed it tends to be a result of individual manoeuvring. This can differ by farmer type, however. A key difference between individual aspirant commercial farmers and women's groups, for example, is that the former

[91] Due to logistical reasons, we did not end up meeting in person, and so we instead agreed for me to email them my research proposal for 'vetting'.

established their operations with their own resources and with near-zero state support, and where they do access state support, it is usually haphazard and occasional. Women's groups, however, were formed through the state and have depended on state support to sustain them. Even though such support is insufficient to raise the productive potential of the projects, they remain enmeshed within state agency, and members can see its agency as central in determining the fate of the project. As one member of Group B project said of what might happen to the project once the members are no longer physically able to work in it:

> When we are too old to work on this farm we don't care who will take over. Whether the government will continue to run it and start to employ other people and make a profit out of it for the government, or they will give to the community, or they will give to anybody to who the government will be interested to give to, we don't care (Group Interview, Project B, 6 December 2017).

At the same time, within these individualised relationships with the state, some farmers have a positive perception of state support. As one farmer said of how he felt about the support received from the Department of Agriculture:

> Too much, very, very happy. Very, very happy because I was failing to buy [the inputs myself]. Like for instance, planting tomatoes, I was having no money to buy the seed for the tomatoes and I was having no money to buy the fertilisers. So they just give me a lot of fertilisers (MFA8, interview, 4 November 2016).

This also points to how state support is viewed in dependent ways, as simply the purchase of inputs that farmers cannot afford. However, this expression of satisfaction also points to a second feature of farmer-state relationships, which is that receiving inputs and resources can also be a function of the way in which farmers individually 'manage' their relationships with state officials, most notably extension officers. A particular example illustrates this. While sitting under a tree interviewing the same farmer on his farm, a bakkie[92] drove through the farm gate. While it was driving up the track towards us I asked the farmer who they were, but he now seemed distracted and evasive. The bakkie pulled up alongside us and an extension officer – wearing stilettos – and her colleague stepped out. The farmer went over and subserviently dropped down on his knees in the dust to greet her. After they had completed inspecting his fields and giving him advice, the farmer opened the back door of their bakkie and put two boxes of okra on the back seat for them. Nothing was said during the exchange. After they had left I

[92] Pick-up truck.

asked him what it was all about. The extension officers had given him 10 000 tomato seedlings for his farm, but he had given another farmer 2 000 of them to plant on his own farm. He said he had gladly done so as this farmer had assisted him in establishing his farm by giving him fertiliser and providing his tractor to plough the fields at no cost; he only had to pay for the diesel. The extension officers had found this out and so he made a show of acting subserviently and gave them a 'gift' to placate them and maintain the flow of resources. 'If you want to catch the lion you must go with the light,' he explained. 'It means that for them not to talk too much you must give them something. They will come only to assist you, they will assist you in the way they will feel. Assist you more, in other words' (MFA8, Interview, 4 November 2017).

The fact that farmers enact individualised, subservient management strategies with state officials to attract and retain support was similarly illustrated by another farmer, who complained that extension officers 'impose everything on us. They don't give us a chance to decide what we want. So they decide for us. And then when you start questioning they feel threatened and then they start to maybe to distance themselves from you' (MFA7, interview, 2 November 2016). These interactions demonstrate that, rather than an administrative-democratic relationship with state officials, of formally defined roles and procedures shaping interaction with rights-bearing citizens, it is one defined more by patronage. The flow of resources is shaped also by the dynamics of personalised relationships between officials and farmers, in which farmers need to display a certain deference to Department of Agriculture officials. Although on a much smaller scale than the context described by Hart, these actions might be described as a form of 'investment in social relations' (Hart, 1989: 36) that farmers make individually and upwards towards the state in efforts to secure continued support.

A third way in which state priorities shape farmer practice is in how aspirant commercial farmers have tried to attract state support through the formation of cooperatives. One of the rationales for the organisation of farmers through the MFA was to try and strengthen their capacity to access state resources through a collective voice of the area associations and the district association, MFA (Nkwashu, interview, 31 October 2016). In the context of the state having positioned cooperatives as a key developmental vehicle (especially in agriculture) and so an important condition for receiving state resources (Nkwinika, interview, 1 December 2017; Bennie, 2019), the MFA encouraged Area Association members to register cooperatives to better their chances of accessing state resources. As one farmer explained:

> Well, with cooperatives, we have been encouraged by the government and this NGOs, that if we are a cooperative, you can even get assistance from the government, from, um, financial institutions. Yes. They regard you, they take you into consideration when you are a cooperative. That's how we decided to register (M11, Interview, 4 November 2016).

The formation of cooperatives is therefore a response to state demands that determine the flow of resources. A number of aspirant commercial farmers I spoke to had registered their enterprises as cooperatives, and the leaders of the Dzumeri Area Farmers Association (DAFA) had also registered the Association as a cooperative in the hope of attracting state resources (MFA1a, interview, 23 January 2016). Collective action between farmers has devolved into individual actions of registering cooperatives in response to state initiative, as a means to attract resources. They might therefore be seen as extensions of invited spaces, where farmers seek to realise their aspirations through spaces and mechanisms that are legitimised by the state and facilitate action within the confines of the status quo (Miraftab, 2004).

The entrenched individualised farmer relationships with the state, including individualised 'maanagement' of state relationships to secure continued support, therefore pose a further challenge to the MFA in terms of building collective power in relation to the state. It also reflects the longer historical context in which shifts as well as continuity in material and political state-society relations have shaped expectations and engagements from below. These relations have long been defined by a certain paternalism, bound together through a moral economy that includes the political ideal of ANC delivery through localised political relations, and where dissatisfaction and some contestation might occur, but largely on the terrain of ANC politics and the state. The continued prevalence of the ANC state can be seen in the party's ongoing electoral dominance in the region,[93] and it continues to be a pervasive force in shaping state-society relations. In short, the above descriptions of farmer-state relations show that the state has individualised the activity of farmers such that they generally seek 'to maximise their welfare individually through charity from above' rather than collective democratic struggle (Mamdani, 1987: 221).

They therefore also reflect MFA's situation in these political relations. Earlier in the chapter I discussed the historical emergence of the MFA from the national liberation project and its alignment with hegemonic development in the context of the national question. According to

[93] The ANC won close to 75% of the vote in the 2021 local government elections (https://results.elections.org.za/dashboards/lge/).

Otero (1999), how independent a popular organisation is in its relationship to the state and other political organisations is a key factor in shaping its character and the political outcomes it achieves. In this regard, realignment of national liberation, homeland development and traditional leadership forces is partly reflected in the MFA's close working relationship with the state. The Area Associations constituting the MFA were organised in cooperation with traditional authorities, given their registration of farmers in their areas of jurisdiction (and are organised along the boundaries of the demarcated areas of traditional administration). The MFA also maintains a close relationship with the municipal Department of Agriculture on issues related to land and agricultural support. As the MFA's Public Relations Officer (PRO) in 2016, who also served on the Dzumeri traditional council, and by 2021 was the Chairperson of the Association, related:

> [W]e went to the municipality to put our case clear as Farmers' Association, this is how we want to work with you, municipality. This is how we want to work with you, the Department of Agriculture. I'm telling you there is no way there can be a meeting here in the municipality without them letting our association know and Giyani is so big but there will always be a representative from Dzumeri Area Farmers' Association… The Department of Agriculture will not conduct anything without a letter to Dzumeri Area Farmer's Association. The same applies to our district, there's no way that there can be an event in Mopani District without as Mopani Farmers Association getting an invitation. We worked hard for recognition, and it was through that which we said we want to do (MFA1a, interview, 23 January 2016).

This framing by the then PRO of MFA appears to indicate greater initiative on the part of MFA in asserting its priorities to the state. However, this may be more aspirational. Apart from occasional incidences such as when the MFA organised members to reject the GMO maize seeds handed out by the Department of Agriculture and to insist on the provision of non-GMO seeds, the prevailing relationships between farmers and the state suggest that farmers have not been able to collectively impose their will on the state through the MFA in a systematic way; to strengthen civil society in relation to the state. Thus an official of the municipal agricultural support office reflected an understanding of the MFA as partly an extension of the state's agency:

> You know, sometimes, yes, we just help someone, and you pass, but if you are organised, then we will begin to say, but this is a structure that we must recognise. So, we do everything with these people [MFA]. In essence they are our mouthpiece. They are our link. The committee of MFA is our link with the farmers. We want to communicate something to farmers, we communicate with them. So, our relationship with them...in essence we are inseparable. We are just working together (Nkwinika, interview, 1 December 2017).

Indeed, this close relationship is further cemented through the simultaneous role of the MFA's Chairperson as the Chairperson of the Greater Giyani Agricultural Forum, which was established by the municipality's agricultural support office as the official engagement platform between the state and producers in the municipality. MFA thus also operates within the prevailing parameters set by the local state, taking advantage of available opportunities to pursue benefits for farmers amidst their difficult farming conditions. This discussion points to the fact that MFA faces significant constraints in attempting to build a transformative agrarian politics in line with those of Inyanda National Land Movement, including the socio-ecological conditions that constrain the reproduction of agrarian relations in specific and circumscribed ways, the consequent social and politically fragmented agricultural base, as well as the political relations in which MFA operates. These appear to pose significant challenges to the ability of MFA to build 'the self-activity and self-organisation' of its base and 'capacity for sustained social struggles' (Jara, 2019: 20) on a purely agricultural basis. As such, building agroecological alternatives largely remains limited to an organic livelihoods approach.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine some of the 'multiple relations and determinations' (Hart, 2018: 7) shaping the political nature of efforts by the Mopani Farmers Association to elaborate a food sovereignty politics in the Mopani District of Limpopo through agroecology. In particular, it explored how the attempts by TCOE and Inyanda to embed a transformative food sovereignty politics in movement building to confront the social and ecological inequalities of South Africa's agrarian question has, due to a number of factors in the Mopani District, been advanced more as an organic livelihoods development option. This promotes a production technique in response to social and ecological problems, and within prevailing social and economic relations. The chapter explored the political determinations of this outcome and the material context and the constraints posed to MFA's ability to build a politics linked to agroecology production that confronts predominant power relations structuring aspects of South Africa's agrarian question.

The chapter showed that MFA organises to advance agroecology and the interests of smallholder farmers in historically and structurally marginalised agrarian conditions that pose notable obstacles to building a transformative agro-food politics. This contrasts with Amadiba, where continued access to the commons has ensured a wide base of land-based and agrarian

reproduction for households. The lack of dispossession and the ongoing customary relations through which the commons is collectively managed have allowed for more politically autonomous forms of nascent differentiation to occur. Thus, there is a widespread popular relationship to land-based livelihoods, available for a collective political subjectivation process. However, relationships to agrarian livelihoods in Dzumeri are much more fragmented, shaped by dispossession and differentiation historically tied closely to state formation and social engineering. This is seen in the different forms of farming, shaped partly through their intersections with historical patterns of differentiation, including the intersections between class and gender differentiation. Farming therefore plays a more fragmented role in household reproduction strategies across communities, so providing a narrower basis of agrarian interests and mobilisation for a transformative agro-food politics on their own. Amadiba and Dzumeri are therefore structurally quite different, and the material conditions in the latter seem to endorse Jara's (2019: 20) assertion that '[t]he development of potential alternatives is constrained by the very features of South Africa's agrarian structure that need to be transformed.'

However, as Otero (1999) shows us, material socio-economic conditions do not alone explain forms of politics and political class formation. The nature of political responses by popular organisations, not solely determined by socio-economic conditions, when organised in certain ways and with enough power can also be key in constituting transformative outcomes in a given context. Politically, MFA has been oriented towards prevailing material relations of agrarian differentiation by pursuing a vision of farming grounded in smallholder market-oriented petty commodity and capitalist farming, but in conditions and political relationships that undermine their achievement. It is therefore materially limited in its potential to articulate the interests of market-oriented farming to a wider vision and project of social transformation. MFA has tended to work less to politicise the farming that serves simple reproduction, but which has played a more sustained role in supporting poorer households, grounded in a strongly gendered base. This is therefore partly a gap that the Rural Women's Assembly, also linked to TCOE, has sought to address through feminist-oriented local organising.[94]

MFA's political outcomes should also be understood in terms of the wider political relations in which it is situated, and state-society relations in particular. The challenges of building

[94] See https://ruralwomensassembly.wordpress.com/.

collective power and autonomy in relation to the state (an important condition for building transformative food politics) in Dzumeri is limited not only by organisational capacities, but by the historical relations of dependency between farmers and the state, which play uneven but important roles in reproducing farming practice in difficult conditions. In this context, MFA is further challenged in the extent to which it is able to infuse agroecological practice with an emancipatory thrust through those existing political relations. Instead, agricultural practice in the region remains articulated to the state through historically-constructed state-society relations that include dynamics of ANC hegemony – the social authority that hegemonic state practice appears to have and which is articulated through community-level civil society structures and power structures of the state, traditional leadership, and the local Department of Agriculture.

While Chapter 5 identified key categories of food politics organising in South Africa, the contrasting experiences of agro-food politics in Amadiba and MFA illustrate the importance of understanding how these types are built through situated conditions and contextually specific forms of agency and resistance. The two cases, in their differences, show the important role that material conditions play in structuring the possibilities of an agrarian food sovereignty politics. The transformative politics in Amadiba did not simply spring out of these material conditions, however, but required active processes of political articulation to bring various elements together into a transformative politics. That is, building a transformative food politics required a successful articulation of prevailing relations of reproduction, aspirations and collective self-agency to a politics that seeks to deepen democracy, transform aspects of economic, social and power relations, and assert greater access to and control over means of production and the surplus. The possibilities for this in Mopani appear more constrained, both in terms of material conditions and hegemonic relations. Given the successes of building a transformative politics in Amadiba, it provides somewhat of a frame to consider the question of transformative politics in the conditions in Mopani District, and whether such might be possible. This might pose questions for which social layers within a differentiated rural structure could possibly be the key base of political organisation. Furthermore, because agrarian activities do not constitute the major proportion of community reproduction relations poses the question of the potential for the articulation of agro-food politics to wider community politics over social reproduction needs, such as to collective mobilisations seen in some parts of the region demanding investment in public provisioning for social reproduction (see van der Waal, 2017), through a

counter-hegemonic frame. This is a question I will reflect further on in the next, concluding chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Globally food systems are integrally implicated in the planetary crisis. The global food system contributes some of the largest emissions causing climate change (Tubiello *et al*, 2021), is the single largest source of biodiversity loss (Benton *et al*, 2021), and contributes to rural dispossession, poor health and malnutrition (Bello, 2022). Given that food systems are not simply linear value chains of economic activity linking production and consumption, but are shaped by and through wider environmental, social and cultural systems and processes, and at multiple scales (HLPE, 2017), the nature of movement responses to the food system's structural problems (and the nature of alternatives) cannot simply be read off those structural problems. Rather, they are shaped through the national, class, political, and socio-ecological relations of a situated context. To explore the multiple determinations of responses from below to structural food system-related contradictions, this thesis shed light on the food movement in South Africa.

South Africa has an advanced and concentrated dominant agro-food sector that is globally integrated and highly productive. It is also an upper-middle income country that is in the aggregate relatively wealthy. However, in the most unequal country in the world, this sits alongside stubbornly consistent (and since COVID-19 lockdowns, rising) levels of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition that belie both the country's wealth and the productive power of its agro-food apparatus. This agro-food system includes a sharply unequal agrarian structure that was forged through dispossession and underdevelopment for the country's majority, the lack of transformation of which is arguably one of the key structural features of the South African economy that locks-in persistent unemployment, inequality and poverty (Baloyi *et al*, 2022). For a number of scholars examining the South African agro-food system, this has raised important questions about the nature, extent and possibilities of agrarian and food politics from below to contest these patterns in pursuit of a more just agrarian structure, food system and society. While South Africa has in macro terms experienced noticeable de-agrarianisation, some scholarly and activist attention on this topic has been given impetus by the rise of transnational agrarian movements since the 1990s, one of the most vibrant amongst global social movements (Borras *et al*, 2008; Baletti *et al*, 2008). A key discourse and political project to emerge from these movements to contest the spread of transnational corporate food capital and neoliberalism (principally La Via Campesina) is food sovereignty.

In the South African context where I suggest there has been in recent times a relative gap in the scholarly coverage and exploration of rural as well as agrarian politics from below, the thesis examines food sovereignty organising in the country, specifically through its intersections with the country's unresolved agrarian question. While not reducing the rural to the agrarian, it nonetheless studies some of the intersections between attempts at organised food politics from below, land, ecology and the politics of agrarian change. It is situated in agrarian debates on food sovereignty theory, often stylised as that between 'agrarian populists' who emphasise the political potential of peasant/smallholder agency and 'agrarian Marxists' who emphasise the structural dynamics of agrarian change under capitalism, the constraints it poses to the constitution of a transformative food sovereignty political agent, and to the achievability of the food sovereignty vision itself.

The thesis adopted a class analytic perspective on food sovereignty, grounded in agrarian political economy, which is alive to material and structural processes of rural differentiation (including gender and race) and class formation. However, prompted by the thinking of scholars like Moyo, Jha and Yeros, and Archie Mafeje, it also emphasised the articulating *political* component of agrarian change, such that not all processes and outcomes of material relations of change can simply be read of structural conditions. Rather, a deeper, situated analysis of what Archie Mafeje called 'mediations' between objective, structural conditions and more subjective forms of consciousness, organising and politics is required to build a more nuanced and politically relevant understanding of both collective action and agrarian change. I therefore examined the nature of the South African food movement and how it articulates with food sovereignty, class, race, gender and the agrarian question. This involved looking at historical relationships between food, resistance, the agrarian question and the emergence of the dominant agro-food system structure, and how the food sovereignty discourse articulates with the contemporary food movement in the context of the agrarian question. To more deeply understand the concrete dynamics of these intersections, I also interrogated how food politics articulates with localised trajectories of agrarian change, politics and ecology.

Out of these explorations, the thesis argues that the food movement in South Africa has been constituted through conjunctural, contextual and contingent processes of agrarian change, including contrasting forms of resistance. Beyond simply affirmations of a historical trend of agricultural decline and de-agrarianisation on the one hand, and urban working class formation on the other, it examined how the power of the state and capital from above, but also the patterns

of various forms of agency and resistance from below – through relations of class, gender and racial differentiation – also shaped the actual course of agrarian change, class formation and the rise of the dominant agro-food system. To undertake this analysis of agrarian change, resistance and food politics, it employed the concept of articulation, a Gramscian methodological and conceptual tool through which to undertake conjunctural and dialectical analysis. Despite overall de-agrarianisation, it therefore sought to understand the articulation between extant agrarian relations and food politics through a class lens.

It showed that the agrarian is still a necessary frame through which to understand the historical construction and the contemporary nature of the food movement in South Africa today. It did this through analysing the historically evolving forms of agency and resistance against the backdrop of the development of the dominant agro-food system structure. Such resistance and organising has historically articulated with racialised land dispossession, the national question, national political organisation, and intersecting forms of gendered, race and class agency to produce the varied but interconnected food movement landscape of today. I suggested that the movement can be categorised as broadly composed of *lifestyle*, *organic* (including organic livelihoods approaches in marginalised communities), *food justice* and *transformative.* Rather than a single frame of food sovereignty in civil society in South Africa, the concept and practice has become articulated to the different types. The political content in different currents therefore also reflects differing configurations of class and race interactions, and political outlooks and relationships to the market and the unresolved national question. In its political perspective and aspirations, the *transformative* sphere, however, most closely reflects the global approach to food sovereignty, which emphasises class-based questions, transformation of power relations through popular movement action, and a redistributive thrust.

At the same time, although these types are of course rooted in material relations, rather than each type being a simple reflection of a particular class or race base, one might more fully understand them as 'articulatory practices'. This means they were constructed through varied articulations of material relations, class, gender, race, and ideology and, as articulations, they have to be renewed and so are also continually remade relationally to each other and the shifting political context. As relational categories, each one reflects their development through evolving configurations of race, class, ecology and politics. This is particularly evident in the *organic* sphere. Instead of only reflecting an easy association with middle class privilege as it ordinarily does, in the South African context it developed as an aspect of the food movement through the

articulation between middle class dispositions towards clean food and soil with conditions of African underdevelopment and agency, within the global circulation of conservationist ideas and practices. Such responses were framed through particular political responses to the national question, from racialised paternalism (especially towards rural African women) to liberal self-help. It continues to evolve, however, under conditions of the unresolved national question, as well as in relation to other spheres like *lifestyle*, and even *transformative.* The actual content and practice in the *organic* sphere, therefore, has been shaped by its contextual development through the relations established by South Africa's national and agrarian questions.

Such relationality has two important theoretical and political implications. Firstly, rather than only ending with the association between a particular type and a singular class base, the deeper political question might be to centre the agency of working class and semi-proletarian subjects and understand how linkages with such food movement tendencies articulate with their agency and organising. Secondly, and linked to this, given that food insecurity is not only a symptom of the food system itself and is also one symptom of wider class inequalities, the issue is whether and how it articulates with 'class struggles over the reproduction of living labour' (O'Laughlin, 2021: 4). This includes struggles across wage and precarious work, production for own consumption and petty forms of production, and for public provisioning. The typology offered in Chapter 5 can therefore be used as a tool to conceptualise connections between organised food politics and wider, class-based organising for socio-ecological change.

Such relational articulations extend to a notable feature of the food movement in South Africa as it relates to working class or semi-proletarianised actors across the *organic, food justice* and *transformative* spheres, which is the role of NGOs. This is particularly relevant to the *transformative* sphere, which on paper tends to emphasise the collective, emancipatory self-activity of subalterns to confront South Africa's unjust agrarian structure. The prominence of NGOs in this sphere is partly an outcome of the political failure of the national liberation movement – which was primarly centred in urban working class and petit bourgeoisie political agency – to connect with rural mobilisations against colonial and apartheid incursions into agrarian reproduction in some sort of 'worker-peasant' alliance. These rural mobilisations were unable to sustain independent rural organisation due to the challenges posed by isolated rural geography and a lack of a wider movement infrastructure, and so by the 1980s liberal and left-leaning NGOs had become the key link between rural communities still experiencing land dispossession and the political and legal sphere. The prospect of a more organic land and

agrarian movement after the democratic breakthrough was dashed by a number of factors, including fragmentation of political alignments to address the unresolved national question, central to which is the land question. One of the notable features of the question of the social force to resolve the agrarian question today, and of a food sovereignty movement analysis, is therefore progressive rural NGOs working to support independent organisation of rural forces (including urban linkages) (Jara, 2019). NGOs are also actors in the global food sovereignty movement, and I avoid the temptation of easily asserting that NGOs depoliticise struggles or that food sovereignty politics in South Africa is defined by the relatively *civil* world of NGOs. Rather, although NGOs are often the interlocuters between global food sovereignty politics and community dynamics of organising in the overall South African food movement, they do not principally shape the actual politics at community level. The latter requires an examination of the resulting articulations through investigation of concrete cases of agrarian organising, to better understand the conditions through which particular forms of agro-food politics (such as *transformative* or *organic*) emerge. While I track the role of NGOs in forging the food movement in South Africa (as well as their attempts in the *transformative* sphere to build grassroots movement mobilisation to challenge power and inequality) and examine some of their articulations with local politics and practice in the case study chapters, further assessing the NGO-movement relation in the South African food movement would be an important area of continued research.

Contextual Articulations

The forms of food politics identified in the typology travel to, but are also constituted in, situated contexts with their existing histories, politics and socio-ecological relations. Whether agro-food organising takes on a *transformative*, *organic livelihoods* or *food justice* character is shaped by the articulation of a number of conditions and factors. The exploration of agrarian organising in Amadiba in the context of the struggle against proposed mining and of the Mopani Farmers Association showed that an important basis shaping or constraining the political nature of agro-food organising is the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Due to its particular history and ecology, although it is a semi-proletarian community, the agrarian remains a significant component of prevailing relations of production and reproduction in Amadiba. The agrarian therefore provides an important material condition of struggle. However, in the Mopani District, communities are much more proletarianised and de-agrarianised, and agriculture is reproduced in more marginal ecological and economic conditions. Therefore,

while agrarian relations incorporate MFA's key constituent – farmers – they do not on their own provide as broad a basis for a wider class-based politics. The Amadiba communities have built a popular democratic agrarian politics that defends popular control over the means of production, confronts prevailing class power relations associated with the minerals-energy complex, and mobilises to deepen democracy – illustrating a transformative food sovereignty politics.

But in the case of the MFA, prevailing socio-economic conditions pose greater constraints on the ability to build a transformative food politics. This includes contrasting patterns of historical differentiation in the Mopani District and Amadiba. Labour migration historically linked Amadiba households into circuits of capital, and resulting semi-proletarianisation and other forces potentially fragmented class experiences and locations of Amadiba residents beyond neat distinctions between capital and labour. While such processes might otherwise create deeper challenges for class-based mobilisation of such fragmented rural classes, in Amadiba continued access to the commons through the maintenance of customary institutions meant that stark differentiation was somewhat dampened. Furthermore, social access to the commons also means that existing patterns of differentiation have not undermined communal access to the means of production. Such common access to land and material resources thus appears to have provided a wider common base for convergence of interests and popular democratic mobilisation.

However, with more extensive land dispossession and social re-ordering in the Mopani District, forms of farming were more closely patterned by rural class and gender differentiation. Such differentiation was also closely inter-connected with Bantustan state formation, and how various rural groups were positioned in relation to that state. In the post-apartheid era, the relationship between differentiation and farming continues also to be mediated by farmer relationships with the state; whereas in Amadiba, nascent differentiation tends to be mediated through community-controlled customary institutions and through daily negotiation between farmers. The result in MFA's area of operation is a more fragmented and differentiated agricultural context, both economically and, to some degree, politically. In a context of constrained land access and ecological marginality, seeking to advance the interests of a smaller class of farmers, in a class and gender differentiated setting, poses challenges for connecting with a wider set of interests so as to pursue a popular democratic politics. Yet subaltern classes in the area are also diverse and fragmented, which poses challenges for a coherent class-based

mobilisation around agroecology. As such, in conditions not of its own making, the MFA is able to elaborate an approach to food sovereignty through advancing agroecology largely as an organic livelihoods option.

Material socio-economic conditions are a critical element underpinning class relations and politics, but they are not the whole story of the construction of particular forms of agro-food politics. I argue that the contextual articulation of a further number of factors and processes are key. In the case of the MFA, agroecology has not necessarily articulated to a wider class-based politics. In Amadiba, transformative food politics arose from prevailing agrarian relations, as well as from the ways in which such relations were articulated to the struggle against proposed mining. Building this politics was not foretold simply by structural, contextual factors, but was contingent also on the articulations between kinds of leadership, collective agency, wider alliances, and autonomous relationships forged with the state, and the way they came together at conjunctural moments that contributed to building a struggle tending towards a popular democratic nature. This suggests that important in building food sovereignty politics from below is not only the question of food and its technical conditions of production, but the wider contingent and conjunctural factors to which a popular democratic struggle is built, and to which food questions can be articulated to build a transformative food politics. Of potential wider significance, especially to more de-agrarianised contexts that do not necessarily provide the same agrarian base for an agrarian politics, is that critical components in constituting the struggle have also been its links to wider democratic questions, related to the democratisation of land, labour and, indeed, the state – questions pertinent across agrarian contexts in South Africa, especially in light of the continued push for mining and the legislative reification of traditional authorities in former homelands.

There is a further important factor that appears to have bearing on the potential construction of a transformative politics of food sovereignty, which is the role of the state. The Amadiba case appears to affirm Otero's (1999) argument that key in building a popular democratic struggle is autonomy in relationships with the state. In Amadiba such autonomy has been maintained because of the orientation of prevailing leadership, but also results from the threat that state interventions in support of mining pose to existing relations of production and reproduction, and the general political distance between the state and Amadiba communities because of state neglect. The post-apartheid ANC state has generally asserted an approach to development that is about neoliberal containment and control from above, which Greenberg (2006) has shown in

resource poor contexts has historically played a significant role in containing the emancipatory possibilities of organised food politics from below. However, while the relationship to the state is partly an 'internal' function of leadership as argued by Otero, organisational relationships to the state should also be understood in the longer historical context and political relationships through which reproduction has been secured in marginal conditions. The MFA and Amadiba cases, in their contrasts, therefore point to the role of what Hart (2002: 298) describes as 'structured contingencies':

> Far from endless openness and diversity, they compel attention to locally and regionally specific forms of struggle, *and* to the multi-layered structural limits and constraints within which they operate, and of which they are a part. What emerges, in other words, are structured contingencies – sets of situated practices that are contingent on what is already there, which is itself the outcome of previous processes (original emphasis).

Attempts to build transformative food sovereignty politics are therefore not only a function of attempting to build a particular movement politics from an internal perspective, but require greater analytical attention to 'external' historical, structural and state relationships that play a notable role in shaping political possibilities. This is particularly evident in the case of MFA, which emerges from a particular history and patterns of political relationships that tied it closely to the national liberation movement, which now occupies the state and works to subordinate civil society to the state and economy (Williams, 2008). This also suggests that at the level of political practice, the building of a transformative politics of food cannot simply attempt to impose ideals of transformative politics from the 'outside', but has to take cognizance of the very real contextual, situated factors that shape the forms and possibilities of existing politics, and through which food sovereignty is filtered.

This still prompts the question of the possibilities of transformative politics amidst these contextual and material factors. Both the case of the Amadiba struggle and the MFA illustrate the importance of material and structural conditions in shaping the possibilities for political action. In Amadiba, the ecological, socio-economic, and agrarian conditions have provided favourable ground for a transformative and counter-hegemonic politics to develop. In the Mopani District, challenging ecological conditions, historical dispossession and rural dependency, and a restricted agrarian base reflect the structurally marginalised conditions that undermine both agrarian reproduction and so a material basis for agrarian politics. However, the Amadiba case also brings into relief the role that politics can play in shaping the material conditions. As Otero (1997) showed, action by the state that threatens access to the means of

production and reproduction can provoke an oppositional struggle. But it is not foretold that that oppositional struggle will become a popular democratic/transformative one, but can be coopted into a bourgeois-hegemonic direction. Which direction it takes is a matter of politics – the forms of leadership, alliances, and political relationships that are actively forged, and so questions of agency.

It was not foretold that this would happen in Amadiba – many anti-extractivist struggles in South Africa have been tamed and coopted by capital and the state. The ability of the struggle to move from oppositional towards a transformative direction has been contingent on various historical and political factors, like a customary authority that has remained democratic and accountable due to historical struggle, formation of relationships that have strengthened the struggle, and the active assertion of autonomy from the state. The building of this ostensibly counter-hegemonic politics was a result of an active process of articulating subjects, identities and a political project, to paraphrase Stuart Hall (1991) – a conjunctural process. This political agency has in turn had material effects on local agrarian change in that it has defended the space for agrarian production and reproduction to continue and evolve. This includes the dynamics and course of differentiation, as the material lines of differentiation are negotiated and contested through the politics of the anti-mining struggle, as part of producing 'a "unity" out of difference' (Hall, 1991: 136) through articulation. From this perspective, neither the politics nor the material process of change are entirely a foregone conclusion: the popular democratic nature of the political struggle (the outcomes of which will have notable implications for what kinds of future material changes are facilitated or foreclosed) depends on the continued renewal of a democratic mode of leadership that remains collectively oriented and accountable to community and customary processes, and organisationally avoids cooption by hegemonic political forces.

The role of articulation and conjuncture in the Amadiba case perhaps encourages us to think further about the role or potential of politics in the Mopani case. It is clear that politics is not autonomous from material and structural conditions. But through conjuncture and articulation, the Amadiba struggle highlights that politics is also not unidirectionally determined by material conditions, and has the potential to influence or transform them. The Mopani case, in its difficulties, would seem to affirm the weight of structural factors (including the course of differentiation) in limiting the possibilities of a transformative, class-based mobilisation and so the material ability to realise an agrarian trajectory in the direction of food sovereignty. But,

given the lessons of Amadiba, there may still be scope for considering the building of a more transformative politics. Because of conditions in South Africa (and which are true also of those in the Mopani District) of de-agrarianisation, structural unemployment, and poverty, Hart (2002) argues for the articulation of agrarian questions to demands for a social wage as a basis for a wider emancipatory politics. Following Figueroa (2015), we might suggest the need for the 'de-centring' of food, and its political articulation to a wider set of social, class-based questions. In a setting like the Mopani District, from a food movement perspective this could call for consideration of how to articulate agriculture to other class-based issues in pursuit of a transformative politics. This also throws up the question of the source and nature of the social agency to ignite and advance this, and which social bases (along lines of gender, class and generation) to articulate into such a project. To build such political articulations into coherent forms of mobilisation remains a challenging task, especially given the class fragmentation of the subaltern rural population. However, the example of the MST in Brazil appears to point to the fact that it is possible to build class-based collective action across such fragmented subaltern groups. The MST organises a cross section of subaltern actors, from landless workers to peasant households and disaffected urban workers, into a project based on reclaiming land and expanding the base of social reproduction of working people, through agrarian reform and agroecology. The processes it employs of political subjectivation and articulation of interests and identities into that of 'landless worker' perhaps indicates the possibilities of organising fragmented subaltern subjects around common class action (Carter, 2010; Fernandes, 2015). It is not a clean-cut or final process, however, as the MST's experience indicates that it requires ongoing practices of articulation and renewal, a necessarily incomplete and continual process (Wolford, 2015; Sauer and Mészáros, 2017).

This process has to work with concrete material and ideological realities. In their contrasts, both the Amadiba and Mopani cases seem to point to the importance of multiple factors and conditions beyond only food and agriculture in shaping the success and challenges in realising a transformative politics that implicates food and agriculture. It seems clear therefore that a lesson for the food movement is not only to attempt to build food politics on an agrarian basis, but to start from a class and gendered standpoint of relevant subjects as living labour, and understanding the totality of relations, processes, and means through which they seek to reproduce themselves as living labour, the varying political spaces of contestation and organisation such activities bring them into, and how to articulate food politics with these multiplicities of actions and contestations, rather than to centre food as a singular object of

politics. Given the role of state-society relations in shaping the form of agrarian politics evident in a given context, it suggests the need to also consider the hegemonic ideological relations and associated common sense that prevail. As Stuart Hall (1980: 334) wrote, this speaks to Gramsci's concern for how such prevailing common sense 'can be so actively *worked upon* so as to transform them into the basis of a more conscious struggle, and form of intervention in the historical process' (original emphasis). This might suggest that a potential lesson for the food movement is to not only critique the corporate food system and seek alternatives in this frame. There is also work to 'disrupt' local hegemonic political relations by seeking to identify, support and nurture alternative modalities, practices, and socio-ecological ethics to those of what Andrews (2017) describes as the ruling liberation movement's subordination of development to capital accumulation, commodification, and technological fetishism. But it may have to start with the aspirations and identities that remain linked to the national development imaginary and 'work upon' them, to 'rearticulate' them towards a more popular democratic politics.

Socio-ecological Futures and the Agrarian Question

I situated this thesis partly in response to the economically reductionist aspects of Philip McMichael's and Henry Bernstein's arguments on the agrarian question and food sovereignty. This prompted greater attention to historical and political specificities, and how paths of agrarian change and processes of class formation in fact partly reflect prior political and class struggles. I therefore argued that food and agriculture were historically and still are conjunctural to wider processes. This calls for greater attention to how food and agriculture articulate with class struggles and longer political histories in conjunctural moments, rather than conceptualising food sovereignty as simply about food and the food system. This also suggests limits to assertions of an abiding social subject to support or interrogate the food sovereignty concept and project, *ala* Phillip McMichael and Henry Bernstein. Whereas Bernstein's food sovereignty critique largely emanates from a structural standpoint, the argument of this thesis about the conjunctural, contingent and contextual political nature of the agrarian question and agro-food politics from below extends a structural perspective to a simultaneous emphasis on *processes* – of struggle, production and reproduction, subjectivities, and their articulations with gender, race and class (O'Laughlin, 2021). That is, rather than a pure food sovereignty subject (which both McMichael and Bernstein assume in their promotion and critique respectively), any potential food sovereignty subjects need to be understood not from the aspect of the ideal

subject required to achieve food sovereignty, or only a rigid perception of their structural class position, but from the actual construction of subjects in the context of their 'unified' class, gendered, racial and ideological formation through particular historical and political processes.

Based on this, Bernstein's critique of food sovereignty might be somewhat turned around. Instead of a calculated deconstruction of its vision and political agency, intellectual, practical and political energy could instead be devoted to addressing the objective need to feed the world in ecological harmonious and egalitarian ways, based upon a recognition that the industrial food system and associated global capitalist class relations are failing to do so. As Ajl and Wallace (2021: 8) suggest:

> …when taking the perilous step of sketching out the cookshops of the future, the task at hand is to collaborate with the sustainable practices direct producers engage and to stick to non-negotiable demands such as unalienated production, ecological literacy, and egalitarianism.

A more useful frame of analysis may therefore be how histories, practices and capacities of sustainable food production, distribution and consumption articulate with prevailing material realities, common sense, modes of organising, and wider emancipatory objectives and politics; or, in practical political terms, how to build such an articulation. This seems to have less to do with any idealised promotion or critique of a pure peasant or food sovereignty subject, but about the broader articulations between land, food and socio-ecological questions upon which to build a transformative project. This, it seems, is a conclusion that Bernstein has also clarified. After all his admonishment of agrarian populism, he recently reflected on the agrarian question in the current conjuncture and reinforced a central argument of this thesis about the political specificity of the agrarian question. 'Moving from political economy to politics' he writes,

> entails many additional determinations and complexities, as well as capacity to confront the contingent, the indeterminate and unanticipated, and to change positions, that goes far beyond the comfort zone of class purism and other illusions.

As such,

> the challenges facing any Marxist agrarian politics would be helped by critical engagement with the most progressive (anti-capitalist) of today's agrarian populism, and the diverse rural struggles it embraces, rather than dismissing a priori all agrarian populism as necessarily and equally 'wrong' and 'reactionary' (Bernstein, 2018: 1146).

In this sense, it may be more important to view food sovereignty less through a structural lens of an endpoint and blueprint for food production and distribution, but rather in terms of how its impulses might (or might not) contextually and conjuncturally connect with efforts to build transformative politics that seeks non-alienated production and living, distributional justice, and the secure socio-ecological reproduction of life and living labour. Given the findings of this thesis, such process is one that has to work through very real material limits, contradictions and fragmented conditions in South Africa, and poses the ongoing political challenge of articulating diverse constituencies, actors, identities, and material practices around a transformative, counter-hegemonic project.

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A7. 2016. Sigidi Village, Umgungundlovu, Eastern Cape, 9 March.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Clearance, Information and Consent

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Bennie

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H15/06/04**
PROJECT TITLE	Re-thinking the agrarian question in south Africa: Contestation and alternatives in the South African agro-food system
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr A Bennie
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Social Sciences/
DATE CONSIDERED	19 June 2015
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	12 July 2018

DATE 13 July 2015 **CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor M Williams

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ **Signature** _____/_____/_____ **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Participant Information Sheet

For research project: 'Re-thinking the agrarian question in South Africa: Collective Organising and alternatives in the South African agro-food system.'

Department of Sociology, Wits University

Andrew Bennie
Student Number: 0510293F

Good day,

My name is Andrew Bennie. I am currently conducting my research for a PhD degree in Sociology at Wits University in Johannesburg. I am wanting to study movements, initiatives and organisations that are doing important work in building alternatives in the food system in South Africa in order to address hunger and landlessness. I am doing this study because I want to understand the direction of agrarian change in South Africa by studying what organisations and initiatives such as yours are doing. More specifically, I want to understand the visions and ideas of the people that are actually building these initiatives, what you want to achieve, and how you want to do it.

I would therefore highly appreciate the opportunity to spend some time to interview you about your work. This will involve questions aimed at looking a bit at your own history, how you got involved in this initiative, why you got involved, how the initiative itself started, what you hope to achieve, challenges you've faced, and so on. I would also appreciate the opportunity to, if possible, spend a bit of time with you outside of the interview to see the work that you do.

I am not able to offer any financial reward for your involvement in this research project. Rather, your involvement will contribute to the broader debate on agrarian change and food sovereignty in South Africa, and will therefore assist in furthering knowledge in this field. It may also help to highlight the work that you are doing.

If you agree to participate in this research I will ensure that:

- Your involvement in the research does not place you in any physical danger;
- Should you wish to remain confidential, your identity will not be revealed in the written thesis or any public materials. Your identity will only be known to me. On the other hand, if you do not mind/would like your name to be mentioned in the written thesis, then please indicate so to me.
- There is no obligation for you to participate in this research and there are no consequences if you choose not to.
- If you choose to participate but at a later stage choose to withdraw, you are free to do so and there will be no consequences.
- During interviews I prefer to use a recorder to ensure all the information you give me is captured. However, if you prefer for me not to use the recorder, please indicate so. There will be no consequences if you choose for the interview not to be recorded.
- If you have any concerns or questions during the interview or research process, please do not hesitate to communicate this to me.

Thank you again for your time. Should you wish to contact me at any time about the research, my details are bennieand@gmail.com or 072 278 4315.

If you have any other concerns about the research process, you can also contact my supervisor, Professor Michelle Williams at michelle.williams@wits.ac.za or 011 717 4433.

Kind Regards,
Andrew Bennie
Student Number: 0510293F

Consent Form to Participate in Research

I, _____, hereby confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet and agree to participate in this research. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential unless I indicate otherwise. I also understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, with no consequences.

For further information: Andrew Bennie bennieand@gmail.com / 072 278 4315.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2: Interview Schedules

Semi-structured interview guide: Key informant

Background

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself and your background, and how you are involved in the land/agrarian/food sector.
2. When we look at the food system in South Africa, what are the key issues/problems?
3. What for you is the relationship between agrarian change and food system change?

Collective Resistance/Organising

4. What changes does the food system need towards a fair and just food system? How can these changes come about?
5. Do you think that collective/movement responses have an important role to play in pushing for and impacting on land and agrarian reform?
6. Looking at some of the history of resistance in the agrarian/food system space, were there any key initiatives other than the LPM post-1994? Could you tell me a bit about the LPM, how it formed and what its key issues were? Was the food system at all an issue?
7. What for you are the key areas of struggle currently in the agri-food system in SA? What is the terrain of struggle currently?
8. What problem(s) are they responding to?
9. What are their goals?
10. What are their key modes of organising?
11. What have they achieved?
12. What are their challenges?

Factors Shaping Collective Responses

13. How have these initiatives come about?
14. What for you are the factors that have shaped these responses? What has caused them to come about?
15. Given the radically unequal land ownership in the country, the concentrated agrarian and food system, the hot political issue that land is, and the high levels of hunger, one would think we would have some kind of national movement response. Where there was potential for one, it was the LPM, which failed. Do you have any thoughts on the lack of a coherent movement in SA?
16. What are the challenges/barriers to forming collective or movement responses?

Impacts on Agrarian Food System Change

17. What changes in agrarian and food system dynamics do these struggles and building of alternatives engender and hence what are the implications for agrarian and food system change? At what levels?

Food Sovereignty in SA

18. Could you tell about what your understanding of food sovereignty is? Its importance?

19. Do you feel it is relevant to SA conditions? In what ways?
20. It is usually considered that land and agrarian reform is crucial basis for FS. But in SA in context of de-agrarianisation, is there a sufficient demand for land for agriculture? How do we think about FS in context where it seems most demand for land is for very small sizes for housing and supplementary food production?
21. How do you deal with the issue of commodity relations? Does FS help us to think about decommodifying food? How?
22. How did we come to speak of food sovereignty in SA? Who are the key actors using this term as a goal and guide of struggle? How do they understand food sovereignty?
23. What for you are the key challenges that have to be overcome to achieve food sovereignty in SA? What are the key movement challenges in this regard?

Semi-structured interview guide: Participant

1. Life history: Please tell me a bit about yourself, like where you were born, your childhood, your experiences etc.
2. How did you get into your current activity (eg. Farming, activist etc)? How did you get the land? What crops do you produce? How do you produce? Where do you sell?
3. What challenges do you face? Why in your view are you faced with these challenges?
4. How do you try to overcome these challenges?
5. Do you interact with other farmers/community members etc? In what ways? About what?
6. Do you have involvement or interactions with other organisations? Tell me about them.

Origin and Aims

7. How did you get involved in this organisation/movement/initiative? Why? What motivated you to do so? What issue/problem did you think it would deal with?
8. When did you organisation start? Why? What were its objectives or what problems was it wanting to address?
9. Who actually initiated it: social positions, roles etc
10. How did you start it? What means etc
11. What is the current vision of the organisation? What is it fighting for? How was this vision developed?
12. Does the organisation include food sovereignty in its vision/aims/objectives? What does food sovereignty mean? How did you come to talk about food sovereignty?

Key tactics

13. What tactics have you used to try and achieve your aims?
14. Have you faced challenges in achieving your aims and vision? If so, please tell me about them.

Leadership

15. Who is the current leadership of the organisation? What do they do occupation wise? What is their role as leadership? How did they become leadership?

Class and Political Consciousness

16. Have you always been a farmer? How did you get into doing it? Why? Is this your only economic activity? What else do you do?
17. Do you own land? Where do you sell? Do you have equipment? How did you finance it?
18. Is this (eg. Farming) your only livelihood activity? What are your other sources of household livelihood?

19. How did you come to be involved in this project/initiative/movement? Why did you get involved? What is the vision you have in terms of what you are struggling for?Why do you struggle over farming instead of say looking for a job?
20. How do you hope being part of this organisation might challenge them/what do you want to achieve by being part of this organisation?
21. What has your involvement in this organisation actually comprised?
22. Did being involved in this initiative/project/movement change you at all or result in changes in how you saw the world? How so?

Experiences of Struggle

Political and other relationships

23. Does the organisation have relationships with any other organisations or movements? What has this involved? Have they been of any benefit to your struggle?
24. Any challenges/tensions?

State

25. What interactions have you had with the state? Do you have any demands you feel the state should be meeting? What has been the state's response to your demands and initiatives?

26. Is there anything else you would like to add?

27. What for you would make my research relevant for your work/struggle?

Thank you for your time.