



Food system sustainability: Questions of environmental governance in the new world (dis)order

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ABSTRACT

In a time of climate emergency, the question of environmental governance is not only critical, but also epistemic. How 'environment' is represented is as critical as how environmental crisis is managed. This essay addresses a debate of this kind by considering the complementary and contradictory relations between the concepts of 'multi-functionality' and 'food sovereignty,' as they define the global landscape. The juxtaposition of these concepts and their practical implications for political economy and ecology has its formative origins in a European-led debate over the role of agriculture, as a critical dimension of environmental governance. In this chapter I examine this debate as posing questions with broader, global significance.

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1. Introduction

Arguably, the new world (dis)order (Sonnenfeld and Mol, 2011) will be overdetermined by climate change which may well be irreversible. Environmental governance is central to how we manage our relationship to the biophysical world and its processes and cycles. We need to adjust how we live on the earth, rather than figure out how to manage the earth. Unfortunately, mastering nature is an (increasingly discredited) assumption integral to capitalist modernity, so sustainable solutions will require some kind of epistemic reorientation.

To give one contemporary example of 'earth management,' carbon accounting has been devised as a method of environmental governance whereby carbon credits can be traded with the goal of rewarding energy efficiency in production enterprises. Through the Kyoto Protocol, inefficient firms can purchase carbon credits by financing 'clean development' in the global South, without fundamentally altering the carbon emission equation. The asymmetrical North–South relationship enables a low-cost method of offsetting continued emissions in the global North (Roberts and Parks, 2007). The problem with converting the earth's carbon-cycling capacity into a commodity centralises (Northern, or corporate) power over the global atmospheric commons at the expense of a majority population living low-carbon lifestyles, and also promotes a 'false economy' ignoring energy subsidies and abstracting from heterogeneous carbon life-cycles across a biodiverse world (Lohmann, 2006; Monbiot, 2006; Pellizzoni, 2011).

Accordingly, rather than constructing an artificial carbon market, to internalise 'externalities' in an economy based on burning dead carbon, an epistemic reorientation would embrace practices that restore and renew living carbon as a sustainable form of ecological-economy. My argument in this paper is that agriculture is critical to such reorientation, and that there is a substantial distinction between appropriating green practices into current political-economic structures and developing methods of social production driven by an ecological, rather than a market, principle.

When the author of the British government's 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change proclaimed "climate change presents a unique challenge for economics: it is the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen" (Osborne, 2006, p. 1), he officially acknowledged the problems of economic 'externalities.' These are twofold. On the one hand 'externalities' typically refer to the uncounted material and social costs of capital accumulation, such as pollution and human displacement. On the other hand, there are unacknowledged enabling conditions for corporate accumulation, such as subsidies and environmental offsets. Martinez-Alier (2002, p. 257) alludes to the two-sided character of externalities where he observes:

While conventional economics looks at environment impacts in terms of externalities which should be internalized into the price system, one can see externalities not as market failures but as cost-shifting successes which nevertheless might give rise to environmental movements.

The implication that the environment is viewed as 'external' to the market, and can be addressed through pricing by the market and/or environmental mobilisation against market valuation, underscores that environmental governance (political-economic

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management of environmental processes and impacts) is an epistemic issue. By this I mean that the question of how the environment is represented, accounted for, and managed depends fundamentally on the optic deployed, which in turn is an expression of 'interest.' Subjecting the 'environment' to management is accomplished either through some mediating relationship such as price, or through restorative relationships to more closely integrate human activity with natural cycles. Arguably the latter are the more resilient approach as they proceed from a premise of living with nature, rather than subordinating it to commodity relations, which typically enable 'cost-shifting' offset practices through trading environmental services or carbon (see [Martinez-Alier, 2002](#); [Lohmann, 2006](#)). Insofar as agriculture, aside from its nutritional function, is responsible for about one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, it is an appropriate arena of consideration on rethinking environmental governance, the focus of this essay.

Environmental governance in the New World Order normally invokes market mechanisms, such as forms of ecological accounting linked to incentive structures such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and conservation farming. Internalising costs, an approach informing early conceptions of 'ecological modernisation' ([Mol, 1995](#)), would force the market to shift commodity production and consumption onto a green foundation. Such regulatory intervention may include, for example, the application of a market calculus to questions of 'environmental services.' Payment to farmers for environmental services,¹ as a way of promoting agricultural 'multifunctionality,' has been institutionalised as a form of environmental governance (see [Mol and Buttel, 2002](#)). Similarly, current proposals to develop markets for forest carbon, to be generated through the REDD protocol, extends this approach.

The question of pricing nature is quite problematic insofar as markets in natural 'services' necessarily separate and simplify interactive cycles and processes that express considerable variation across time and space. One critique of the market calculus embedded in REDD is that "Land claims will be simplified in order to allow transfer... 'resources' will emerge from trees and land, attempts will be made to homogenize people as 'stakeholders', efforts will be carried out to disentangle carbon from local social and ecological webs... livelihoods will be made exchangeable for compensation" ([Lohmann, 2010](#), p. 6). Such fractioning of natural processes and assignment of interest via pricing mechanisms compounds the externalisation of environmental costs by reducing nature to an economic 'service.' An alternative, ecological calculus, acknowledges the diversity of environmental processes and the artificiality of standardisation via a price metric, insofar as it cannot account for natural interactive complexity. An ecological calculus, then, is the obverse of the market calculus in privileging and protecting the environment, and reorienting human activity to restoring and valuing natural relations and processes on their own terms, rather than endowing them with market values and being subjected to a cost/benefit calculus.

In this epistemic distinction between 'market' and 'ecological calculus' lies a central paradigmatic debate concerning how to represent environmental crisis and how to govern, or manage, it in the current neoliberal world order. This article addresses and seeks to illuminate this debate by examining the adoption of multifunctionality as a policy instrument of environmental governance in the European Union, and comparing it with an alternative vision adopted by the food sovereignty movement. Critical engagement by the European food sovereignty movement offers an alternative

paradigm, geared to reorienting the social meaning and environmental contributions of agriculture. Arguably, this encounter has universal significance for how we might think about environmental governance, beyond agriculture and rural areas in Europe.

2. Multifunctionality and food sovereignty: origins

In different ways, contemporary global political economy has spawned multifunctionality and food sovereignty as potential alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm. Promoting maximal (but not optimal) productive efficiencies across all agricultural regions and a universal agro-industrial model via the rhetoric of 'comparative advantage,' the neoliberal paradigm generates substantial 'externalities.' These externalities, institutionalised in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, have involved huge subsidies to Northern agribusiness, allowing the artificial cheapening of agro-exports via a below-production-cost 'world price,' which in turn has undercut small-farming cultures and their forms of eco-system management ([McMichael, 2005](#)). WTO governance includes rules lowering trade barriers and eliminating Southern farm protections, exposing peasants to a crisis of low prices, the so-called 'cheap food regime' ([Rosset, 2008](#)). Northern farmers and Southern peasants alike have been displaced by a price system privileging soil and water-depleting monocultures, intensifying a food sovereignty counter-movement unified by questions of sustainability.

By deepening agro-industrialisation, neoliberal deregulation of trade in food products became a liability by century's end, and contributed, through environmentalism and food safety, to a signal 'ecological feedback' mechanism in the global North ([Campbell, 2009](#)). From pesticides, through food scares, to obesity, as [Campbell \(2009, p. 316\)](#) notes, "health issues then operated as a compelling site around which the wider environmental concerns... coalesced into actual consumer reflexivity in food purchasing decisions". In the countryside, the decimation of small and medium-sized farms, growing rural unemployment, and uneven regional development was directly related to the negative path dependency of high-input farming. A range of studies showed "that the amount of employment and total income generated by different styles of farming sharply decreases with the shift from local low external input types of farming to the large-scale industrial type of farming" ([van der Ploeg, 2006](#), pp. 262–263). In this context agricultural 'multifunctionality' has gained currency as a response to such ecological disturbances.

As a principle, multifunctionality embodies what neo-classical economics ignores: the social and ecological dimensions of farming. Farming is valued not only for its product output, but also for its contribution to ecosystem management, landscape protection, rural employment, fostering farming knowledge, rural life, cuisine maintenance, and regional heritage. As such, multifunctionality not only represents an alternative to industrial agriculture, but also identifies (local) agriculture as a public good, the condition for which is national sovereignty over agricultural policy – disallowed under the WTO regime.

As a perspective adopted by the European Union (EU), multifunctionality draws on the historic practices of agriculture as a social and environmental good in such states as Switzerland, Norway, Japan and Korea ([Losch, 2004](#), p. 341). These states have long traditions of 'agri-culture,' and have been reluctant participants in WTO trade liberalisation insofar as it threatens this principle. European perspectives on agricultural multifunctionality, "simultaneously a subject of negotiation, a foil or a reference point for the formulation of alternatives" ([Losch, 2004](#), p. 338), emerged through debate over the environmental and social crisis of agricultural productivism, food safety, and the politics of the WTO trade rules. Articulated for the first time in 1993 by the

¹ The UN's *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Synthesis Report* (2005) advocates viewing farms as public goods cleansing air and water, and preserving biodiversity, as opposed to just producing food products.

European Council for Agricultural Law, then through the 1990s by the Council of Europe, the OECD, and the FAO, ‘multifunctionality’ became both a designation of sustainable agriculture and a policy coordinate in the EU (Losch, 2004, p. 340). As such, it also was a factor in negotiations over the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (1995), into which the Europeans tried unsuccessfully to insert the multifunctionality principle, being forced to settle instead for generic ‘non-trade concerns’ language. As a result, multifunctionality was institutionalised in the WTO ‘green box’ essentially as a direct payment for environmental services (decoupled from the farm commodity price). The consequence is twofold: first, commodity prices, decoupled from farm subsidies, can be lowered for the purposes of export competition, and second, multifunctionality is institutionalised as environmental governance, with farmer compensation via a market calculus (Morgan et al., 2006, p. 32).

Direct payments to farmers have in fact allowed agricultural commodities to be sold at prices below production cost to grain traders and food processors, who command near-monopoly market power (Patel, 2007). Food dumping in world markets (de-peasantising) and ‘super-sising’ food products resulted. Additionally, payments matched farm size, so that by the mid-1990s, 80 percent of farm subsidies in the OECD countries supported the largest 20 percent of (corporate) farms, further disadvantaging small and medium-sized farmers in a deregulated (and increasingly privately managed) market for agricultural products. In Europe, in 1999 alone, 200,000 farmers and 600,000 beef producers left the land (Gorelick, 2000, p. 30).

Under these conditions, where farming has been valued predominantly as a business, with small and medium-sized farmers in debt or in exodus, a counter-movement advocating for real, rather than formal, multifunctionality, has spawned an alliance of rural communities with urban consumers and taxpaying citizens. That movement presents a “counternarrative to the neoliberal vision for European agriculture,” articulating a ‘moral economy’ position, “regarding the activity of farming as one of the defining conditions of rural space, the purpose of state assistance being to create the conditions under which family farming, rural landscapes and society can flourish” (Potter and Tilzey, 2005, p. 590).

Interestingly, the counter-movement echoes EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reformers in viewing the ‘European model of agriculture’ as an exception within the WTO’s neoliberal structure of governance (Potter and Tilzey, 2005, p. 591), as green box subsidies support some environmental initiatives (as ‘external’ to dominant market rules). Analysts Morgan et al. (2006, p. 46) claim a distinctive “European model of multifunctional agriculture” pointing towards a more sustainable trading regime, however Jadot (2000) disputes the existence of a ‘European farm model’ since the green box stands behind an export-oriented model. Arguably, the institutionalisation of environmental governance in this form (the green box) has generated a creative legitimating tension within Europe in relation to the trade regime. While McCarthy (2005, p. 774) suggests a “genealogy of ‘multifunctionality’ makes clear that it is a product of neoliberal reforms”, he also claims multifunctionality represents “an exception from an otherwise global set of rules” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 775). Advocacy for multifunctionality, then, may differentiate Europeans and their negotiators, but the claim to multifunctional agriculture remains substantively unrealised to the extent that it

performs an environmental governance function within the logic of a neoliberal market calculus (see also Pellizzoni, 2011).

Food sovereignty emerged in the 1990s in direct opposition to neoliberal political economy and its impact on farmers across the world. The progenitor of ‘food sovereignty,’ La Vía Campesina,² formed from a meeting of farmers’ organisations from Latin America and Europe in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1992. As founding member, Paul Nicholson of the International Coordinating Committee of Vía Campesina put it: “At that time, we issued a “Managua declaration” where we denounced the “agrarian crisis” and “rural poverty and hunger” resulting from the neo-liberal policies” (Nicholson, 2008, p. 456). Four years later, in Tlaxcala, Mexico, a Vía Campesina working group coined the term ‘food sovereignty,’ which “was adopted by the whole movement and then defended publicly for the first time at the FAO World Food Summit in Rome” later in 1996. Noting that “food sovereignty has become the backbone of our struggle,” particularly in proposing ways out of the crisis, Nicholson (2008, p. 457) summarizes: “We propose local food markets, the right of any country to protect its borders from imported food, sustainable agriculture and the defence of biodiversity, healthy food, jobs and strong livelihood in rural areas”.

In elaborating “the right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances” (NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty, Rome 2002, quoted in Ainger, 2003, p. 11), the concept of food sovereignty particularizes the socio-cultural and ecological (multi)function of agriculture to its territorial coordinates. French farmer activists Bové and Dufour (2001, p. 168) characterize the food sovereignty project similarly:

The strength of this global movement is precisely that it differs from place to place... The world is a complex place, and it would be a mistake to look for a single answer to complex and different phenomena. We have to provide answers at different levels – not just the international level, but local and national levels too.

The food sovereignty principle converges with and complements multifunctionality insofar as the latter is tailored to specific conditions:

[Agricultural multifunctionality] offers the possibility of building public policies on a new basis adapted to each national situation... multifunctionality implies adopting a paradigm of “negotiated objectives” that starts not from the “general case” but rather the “specific case.” (Losch, 2004, pp. 355–356)

Despite convergence on the significance of (ecological) place, these two concepts arise from different contradictions within the corporate food regime. Multifunctionality gained currency through the *crisis of industrial agriculture*, and food sovereignty gained currency through the *crisis of low prices* stemming from farm commodity dumping and the promotion of export agriculture via the WTO regime. Food sovereignty possesses strategic value as a counterpoint to the notion of ‘food security’ – as redefined by the neoliberal conception of food provisioning through the corporate-organised global market. Indeed, food sovereignty politicised corporate ‘food security,’ insofar as the latter was a normative, but misleading, claim legitimising governance through the market. Food security was claimed to be the benign outcome of a ‘free trade’ regime in agricultural commodities managed by transnational corporations and institutionalised in the WTO (McMichael,

² An international coalition comprising 148 organisations from 69 countries. In 2000, Vía Campesina joined with 51 other civil society organisations to form the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, which operates at the international policy level.

2003). The US and the EU were represented in this vision as ‘global granaries,’ supplying corporate supply chains to feed the world on a superior, more efficient scale than the world could feed itself.

The food sovereignty movement has challenged this claim on political-economic, ecological and cultural grounds, noting that ‘free’ markets exclude and/or starve populations dispossessed and impoverished as a result of agro-exporting – threatening family and peasant farming which are responsible for about 70 percent of global food production (ETC Group, 2009). In this regime, the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture institutionalised the ‘minimum export rule,’ denying nation-states the right to food self-reliance. In addition, competitive agro-exporting (via industrial agriculture, including biofuels) threatens environmental sustainability, and therefore the possibility of multifunctional agriculture. Thus the concepts of multifunctionality and food sovereignty provide complementary visions to alternative political currents within the neoliberal era, and together express its crisis, along with concerns about farm and food safety, obesity and the impact of industrial agriculture on the global climate.

3. Contradictory relations of multifunctionality and food sovereignty

Whereas multifunctionality and food sovereignty are integrally related concepts (multifunctionality as a food sovereignty practice), this section addresses the tension between them within the EU, insofar as the CAP offsets its emphasis on agro-industrial exporting with multifunctionality programming.

3.1. Multifunctionality

Arguably, ‘multifunctionality’ gains traction as a “conceptual innovation of protectionist rhetoric” (Losch, 2004, p. 343) insofar as it addresses local conditions. Justification, albeit contradictory, is for both internal and external audiences. For external legitimacy, given WTO requirements that states reduce farm subsidies, the EU relocates subsidies deemed ‘non-trade distorting’ or not directly linked to commodity production, to the box system. Green box subsidies account for over 60 percent of other subsidies in the CAP (Berthelot, 2010). Here such subsidies escape liberalisation requirements, and purportedly support multifunctionality, as a practical virtue in the CAP system, allowing minor funding for conservation policy. The bulk of subsidies, however, support overproduction for agro-exports released on the market with a world price up to 57 percent below the actual cost of production (People’s Food Sovereignty, 2003). The resulting impact on small farmers across the world is devastating (Rosset, 2008).

European compliance with WTO rules is accomplished through a complex decoupling and recoupling of subsidies. Decoupling applies to agricultural commodities, where price supports have been replaced with direct (majority) subsidies to producers, allowing commodity prices to fall. Recoupling applies to multifunctional practices (e.g. conservation farming, rural employment) paid for with (minority) subsidies routed through blue (production-limiting program subsidies) and green boxes (see Potter and Tilzey, 2005, p. 594). The contradictory consequence is that while CAP reformers are able to thus institutionalise environmental governance and rural development, rural environments overseas, particularly in the South, have no such support.

With respect to internal or domestic contradictions, these centre in the relations of corporate agriculture. Under conditions of financialisation (Burch and Lawrence, 2007), agriculture has been converted into industrial and retailing chains of inter-connected commodified inputs and outputs. Such corporatisation of European agriculture via financial takeovers has created an agro-industrial complex, reduced spatial identity, and eroded “the coherence of

the agricultural policy community” (Burch and Lawrence, 2007, p. 589). These shifts have significant governance implications for both multifunctionality and food sovereignty advocates.

With the dominance of agribusiness, farmer organisations have lost their sectoral identity and their traditional influence on policy-making (Hennis, 2001, p. 842), encouraging coalitions integrating agricultural, environmental and consumer policy. The more states are beholden to agro-industrial interests, the more organised are environmental groups, consumers and new farmer organisations, such as organic farmers and the *Confédération Paysanne* (Hennis, 2001, pp. 842–843).

With agriculture’s loss of sectoral identity, polarisation deepens between financial interests and civil society groups. On the one hand, finance ministries subordinate agricultural ministries, strengthening the agro-export interest as “national champions.” On the other, there has been a counter-trend, as nationally marginalised farmers “are increasingly active at the European level and operate often in coalitions with environmental groups or consumer organizations” (Hennis, 2001, pp. 844–846). Arguably, such region-wide cross-sectoral politics, combined with the de-sectoralisation of agriculture, results in a combined and uneven development of forms of ‘multifunctionality.’ Whereas there is a *politics* of multifunctionality geared to supporting low-input farming and rural development,³ there is also an *economics* of multifunctionality driven by WTO protocols, whereby farm support (disproportionately favoring agribusiness) is protected by a box system concealing subsidies under the guise of conservation. Tilzey (2006) has termed this “embedded neoliberalism,” that is, an institutionalisation of farm subsidies that ultimately privilege agribusiness and the market calculus.

One outcome of such embedded neoliberalism is bimodalism: supporting multifunctionality and monoculture simultaneously. It is, however, asymmetrical, as the Single Farm Payment (direct subsidies to farmers rather than crops) has been “in most cases not bound to employment or environmental conditions” (Sachs and Santarius, 2007, p. 53). The consequence of the single payment is direct subsidies to (predominantly corporate) farmers. Those (lesser) subsidies allocated to conservation are nevertheless governed by a market calculus, environments and landscapes being subjected to ecological accounting methods (pricing environmental services) in the auditing of farmer practices (McCarthy, 2005, p. 779).

The point here is that in a bimodal structure, multifunctionality serves as alternative agriculture practice (conservation farming) legitimising agribusiness. But to properly realise multifunctionality, that is, by rearranging “contested relationships between civil society, the state and the market. . . in ways which would usher in different types of autonomous development which would incorporate ecological worth” (Marsden, 2004, p. 143), this project would need to address the objective and subjective conditions promoting monoculture. This is where ‘food sovereignty’ assumes relevance, for constructing a multifunctionality project within transformed global political-economic relations, and agrarian subjectivities, is precisely the strategy pursued by the international food sovereignty movement.

3.2. Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty in Europe has achieved prominence through the *Coordination Paysanne Européenne* (CPE) and one of its leading

³ Echoed in the US, in the proposed Food from Family Farms Act, which “contains a price support system, food security reserves, and conservation set-asides with full planting flexibility, which would work together to guarantee prices that reflect the true cost of production. . . full implementation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP), offering incentives on working lands for more conserving crops and practices which fit well with diversified family farming, bio-energy and local food production” (quoted in Rosset, 2008, p. 109).

activists, José Bové. Judit Bodnár observes that Bové “has radically recontextualized the themes of agricultural production and peasantry with respect to globalization” in accordance with the CPE’s Charter for Sustainable Farming (CPE, 2003, p. 141). While land is central to this principle, the food sovereignty movement avoids invoking nationalist attachments to territory, appealing rather to unity in diversity. Bové notes that the “strength of this global movement is that it differs from place to place,” and Bodnár (2003, p. 142) observes that “Solidarity can be pitted against xenophobia only from the standpoint of a political rhetoric whose explanatory framework goes beyond the local, one that can insert its criticism into a system-level analysis where the system, in the case of contemporary capitalism, happens to be global”. The food sovereignty movement, by mobilising transnationally, addresses the problematic nexus between corporate globalisation and the specific needs of agrarian cultures to farm, rather than work, the land according to ecological principles. With regard to the land question, the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty notes:

No agrarian reform is acceptable that is based only on land distribution. We believe that the new agrarian reform must include a cosmic vision of the territories of communities of peasants, the landless, indigenous peoples, rural workers, fisherfolk, nomadic pastoralists, tribes, afrodescendants, ethnic minorities, and displaced peoples, who base their work on the production of food and who maintain a relationship of respect and harmony with Mother Earth and the oceans. (Quoted in *Vía Campesina*, 2006)

Rather than subordinating land as a factor of production, as understood via a market calculus, the food sovereignty movement refocuses the epistemic lens on the conditions by which diversified farming performs functions of social reproduction and eco-system maintenance. This vision produces a historically specific understanding of multifunctionality, especially given the phenomenon of a ‘planet of slums’ (Davis, 2006):

In the context of food sovereignty, agrarian reform benefits all of society, providing healthy, accessible and culturally appropriate food, and social justice. Agrarian reform can put an end to the massive and forced rural exodus from the countryside to the city, which has made cities grow at unsustainable rates and under inhuman conditions. . . (*Vía Campesina*, 2006)

Beyond the norm of land redistribution to smallholders, this vision revalues agriculture as a strategic foundation to social and ecological reproduction. João Pedro Stedile (2002, p. 100), a leader of Brazil’s *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), observes that beyond the idea of land belonging to those who work it, “We want an agrarian practice that transforms farmers into guardians of the land, and a different way of farming, that ensures an ecological equilibrium and also guarantees that land is not seen as private property”. Subjectively, this means constructing a vision of ‘agrarian citizenship’ (Wittman, 2009), as in the MST’s insistence on “linking up what it calls the struggle for the land with the struggle on the land” (Flavio de Almeida and Sanchez, 2000).

Thus, contrary to the modernist narrative of agro-industrial subordination and/or displacement of peasants, the food sovereignty movement advocates an alternative narrative whereby diversified smallholdings restore social and ecological sustainability by revaluing farming as the majority occupation of the world’s population (still), the major source of staple foods, and indeed proven to be as or more productive and resilient than soil-depleting industrial monocultures (Altieri, 2008; IAASTD, 2008; Pretty et al., 2006; McMichael and Schneider, 2011).

This is where the food sovereignty strategy is distinct from institutionalised multifunctionalism in environmental governance schemes, including the CAP. The international peasant coalition advocates universal multifunctionality, rather than current forms that reproduce a Northern (market) environmentalism at the expense of Southern peasants through subsidised dumping and relocating industrial biofuels plantations to the South in the name of green capitalism. These ‘market’ impacts have been characterised by the UN Human Rights *Rapporteur*, Olivier de Schutter (2010), as ‘responsibly destroying the world’s peasantry’:

If smallholders compete in the same markets as the large farms, they lose. Yet they render invaluable services, in terms of preservation of agro- and biodiversity, local communities’ resilience to price shocks or weather-related events, and environmental conservation.

The food sovereignty movement remains sceptical of monetisation of multifunctionality via ‘payment for environmental services,’ insofar as it privileges powerful interests within the world market.⁴ While Northern schemes of ‘multifunctionality’ presume, or proceed from, a notion of territoriality governed by national concerns (including within the EU), food sovereignty’s territorialism extends to international justice concerns. These include, first and foremost the rights of smallholders to land and to produce food for their societies, effectively reversing the mechanisms of the WTO trade regime. Agri-food self-reliance at the community or national scale, including fair trade practices to provision societies with insufficient or even no arable land, is viewed as the foundation for a sustainable global community.⁵ The point is, as Paul Nicholson, from the CPE, claims: ‘we use food sovereignty as the umbrella concept to defend the right of consumers to consume local food as opposed to the imposition of global food’ (2008, 35) – and this from Europe, the home of agro-export subsidies.

Beyond the *formal* guarantee of food sovereignty rights, the content of these rights is to be determined by the communities within countries themselves, rather than an abstract neoliberal principle of market (corporate) rights. In this way sovereignty is reformulated *substantively* through local applications of rights, in accordance with social and ecological requirements (see Patel, 2007). ‘Sovereignty’ is of course a strategic intervention to reverse the WTO rule forbidding national self-reliance in order to secure the rights of currently tenuous rural producers, and does not mean autarchy. Local markets primarily for local foods are valued in combination with ecosystem management by growers who produce landscapes in reproducing their farms. Whether they are paid for environmental services as small-holder (rather than agribusiness or energy) subsidies is beside the point, as immediate stewardship is the condition for durability. In this model, environmental governance is embedded in farming practices (as ecological calculus), rather than as a market incentive (or indeed an emission offset, as required in governance forms that proceed with a market calculus).⁶ Recent

⁴ This position dovetails with concepts of ‘global ecology’ (Sachs, 2003; Lohmann, 2006), critiquing the construct of a ‘global commons’ informing the Kyoto protocol, allowing northern polluters to displace their responsibilities through purchasing carbon credits generated through (questionable) southern conservation projects, and investing in industrial biofuel plantations.

⁵ In this vision, food sovereignty depends on access to credit, land and fair prices to be set via rules negotiated in a reformed UN and alternative multilateral institutions such as a Convention on Food Sovereignty and Trade in Food and Agriculture, an International Court of Justice, and a World Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty (Bové and Dufour, 2001, p. 8). Brazil’s MST exemplifies the international justice practice in its dual role of provisioning Brazil’s huge working poor population, and engaging in fair trade relations.

⁶ Of course, there are transitional needs, whereby in addition to solidarities from farmer cooperation, enlightened extension services geared to promoting conservation farming, agro-forestry or permaculture are necessary to consolidate ecosystem management practices where small-farming has deteriorated.

research on re-peasantisation, where farmers (from Italy to Guatemala) disengage from commercial inputs to avoid debt and dependence and to build ecological capacity in farming (e.g. management of soil health, nutrient flows, water cycles, seed varieties), exemplifies the ecological calculus at work (Ploeg, 2009; Isakson, 2010).

4. The environmental governance question

The complementary and contradictory relations between multifunctionality and food sovereignty ultimately concern the practical question of governance of environmental relations. Food sovereignty, articulated as a universal principle, is not a universal *model*. In Europe, food sovereignty means decoupling multifunctionality from current neoliberal forms of protection incorporated in the CAP reform, as expressed in the EU's vision statement of June 2003:

The reform will completely change the way the EU supports its farm sector. The new CAP will be geared towards consumers and taxpayers, while giving EU farmers the freedom to produce what the market wants. ... Severing the link between subsidies and production will make EU farmers more competitive and market orientated, while providing the necessary income stability. More money will be available to farmers for environmental, quality or animal welfare programmes by reducing direct payments for bigger farms. (Quoted in Wervel, n.d.).

Despite the final sentence, subsidy levels are projected to not change substantially through 2013, while the same 2.2 percent (99,000) of the 4.5 million farms in Europe will continue to receive 40 percent of the total payments (Lorenzen, 2007, p. 32). Subsidy support has included a modicum of 'rural development' measures (€1.2 billion annually). Environmental subsidies exceed by "more than seven times what the Indian farm sector gets as state support" (Berthelot, 2005). The view from the South is that: "EU agriculture subsidies (including the environmental subsidies) provide a cushion for the European farmer that insulates them from the volatility of the commodity markets" (Sharma, 2004, p. 1). In short, the subsidy system underwrites European agro-industry and its global-environmental impact through the dumping relationship.

According to the *Coordination Paysanne Européenne* (CPE), representing 18 farmer organisations in 11 countries, 'multifunctionality' as environmental governance provides legitimacy for European agribusiness. Challenging the disproportionate subsidisation of agro-industry at the expense of substantive implementation of multifunctional principles in Europe, the European Platform on Food Sovereignty (EPFS) – comprising farmer unions, consumer associations, development NGOs, environmental organisations, and labour unions, proposes alternative principles governing trade relations, including a "CAP based on adequate supply management tools to meet internal demand for basic products and end all dumping practices" (EPFS, 2005, p. 1). In other words, rather than allow (unequal) market relations to govern agri-food practices and policies, EPFS advocates socially and environmentally sustainable domestic and international practices and policies. Reformulating the purpose of farm subsidies, the CPE claims: "Public support to agriculture may well be legitimate, for instance for sustainable family farming to exist in every region, provided that this support is not used for low-price exports" (quoted in Madeley, 2006).

Acknowledging growing support for payment for environmental services, the Secretary General of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (Paris), has proposed an uncomplicated form of multifunctionality: "To benefit small farmers, family farms, a system is needed that benefits them directly – such as social

payments for producing public goods" (Madeley, 2006), where social payments are distinct from environmental audits. And the CPE (2003, p. 1) has claimed:

The European Union would benefit a lot by maintaining sustainable family farming, not only for guaranteeing food supply (food security), but also as regards the social and multifunctional role of agriculture. The present trend must be reversed: instead of concentrating the farms, an important fabric of small and medium-sized farms should be maintained, since they play an irreplaceable role in the following fields: a quality and diversified food production, landscape upkeep, wood and forest clearing, human territory occupation, etc. Maintaining the number of people working in agriculture is not a sign of economic 'backwardness' but an added value.

Van der Ploeg's research on 'repeasantisation' in the Netherlands and Italy in particular, and Europe and elsewhere in general, suggests an expanding social base already applying an ecological calculus to farming as a necessary survival tactic in a neoliberal market environment. In relation to European cohesion policy, he argues:

there will be an overarching need to create high employment and adequate remuneration levels in these new rural areas of the enlarged European Union. This definitively requires a reconceptualization of farming that goes beyond entrepreneurial and corporate models that tend to reduce employment levels and value added. Repeasantization will occur as a material need (if it is not already one) (Ploeg, 2009, 285).

The point here is that emergence of alternatives occurs within and against the paradigm to be superceded. With respect to environmental governance, then, food sovereignty's vision of substantive forms of multifunctionality is of small and medium-sized farms practising forms of agro-ecology, supported by supply management policies geared to domestic markets rather than overproducing food to be dumped on export markets opened by WTO liberalisations. Switching subsidy priorities to support diverse 'peasant' farming as the agricultural sector would accomplish 'payment for environmental services' without applying a market calculus, since agro-ecology would be an integral practice and value, not an 'add-on' value. In this formulation, environmental governance would be less of a specialised operation with monetary incentives, and more of a substantive part of a localised food system geared first to local markets and secondarily to international (fair) trade. Pressure by the food sovereignty movement in Europe does not ignore the principle of transnationalism, rather it recognizes the particular impact European agro-exporting has on the global South, and to transform that is a precondition of developing food sovereignty elsewhere.

Through policy activism by member organisations like CPE, replicated across more than 60 countries with national peasant unions, and then through its international coordinating committee, Via Campesina champions a low-input, labour-intensive form of agriculture across the world, politicising the corporate food regime and its rhetoric of free trade, food security and even multifunctionality (as incorporated in WTO protocols). Politicisation (demystifying claims of neutrality) is about revealing the worldwide agrarian crisis⁷ resulting from unrestrained industrial agriculture, as well as shaping the discursive agenda. Thus:

⁷ This includes the 'crisis of low prices' (Rosset, 2008) associated with dumping practices of the WTO regime, as well as the so-called 'food crisis' of 2007–2008, when food prices spiked sharply, under the combined influence of financial speculation, biofuels competition, rising energy costs, climatic conditions, and the incapacitation of smallholders to respond by expanding production as a consequence of the previous form of crisis (McMichael, 2009).

Multifunctionalism reflects a balance of forces. The EU acknowledges the strength of consumer feeling in favour of wholesome food, consumers' respect for biodiversity and their concerns about factory farming. We in the Farmers' Confederation don't want multifunctionalism to become a way of accepting intensive agriculture by giving society the impression that the state is taking care of the countryside. (Bové and Dufour, 2001, p. 125)

Discursive struggle in the court of public opinion and policy arenas like the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) includes evaluating sustainable farming's challenge to European agricultural bimodalism. Research across six European states estimates that "up to 50 percent of farmers are, to varying degrees, following broader or deeper rural development strategies, with many of them *combining* these with continued participation in conventional agricultural markets" (Morgan et al., 2006, p. 85). In relation to this, Dufour cautions that the Contract for Territorial Exploitation to encourage multifunctionalism:

in practice has meant that those who already have access to funds now receive more money to pollute a little less, but stay within the system. Such farmers take the maize premium with one hand, and with the other grab the grants for sowing grass along riverbanks and planting windbreak hedges around fields of GM crops, or industrial pigsties. The result is a two-tier agriculture: a lower tier of intensive but 'landscaped' farming, producing cheap standardized food for the poor; and a tier of sustainable agriculture, providing quality farm-fresh food for the well-off. (Bové and Dufour, 2001, p. 126)

Whether the food sovereignty movement's attempts to reclaim rural spaces from corporate agriculture will consolidate a niche phenomenon or a paradigm shift (Morgan et al., 2006, pp. 81, 85) is a question ultimately acknowledging that both are in play. Alternative food networks express "recent crises in conventional agricultural costs and prices," in addition to entrepreneurial opportunism (Morgan et al., 2006, p. 85). Van der Ploeg's documentation of a process of 'repeasantisation'⁸ associated with these above-mentioned crises, underlines how farmers embrace pluriactivity, a strategy of biodiverse farming supplemented with off-farm income and agri-tourism (2006, pp. 266–267; 2009). According to Bové: "If you add together the various initiatives – AOC [Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée], organic farming, changes in farm culture, sustainable farming – you begin to get a strong feel of a new farmers' movement which, I believe, will eventually marginalize industrial agriculture" (Bové and Dufour, 2001, p. 142).

5. Lessons from Europe

Transitional forces in the agri-food sector are clearly at work, and not only in Europe. New currents in food relations include repeasantisation (van der Ploeg, 2009), shortening food supply chains in the interest of Slow Food (consumer identification with bio-regional preservation), domestic fair trade schemes (Fonte, 2006; Jaffee et al., 2004), and building 'agrarian citizenship' in Brazil through land occupation (Wittman, 2009; Wolford, 2010). Whether these developments are on the margins, or increasingly in the interstices, of an agro-industrial system in crisis, they posit the possibility of shifting the governing principles from (unequal

market rule towards democratic governance, in the interests of social and ecological sustainability. The model, championed by the international food sovereignty movement, is one of restoring the control over agriculture to producers and local and national communities, in the interests of both food security and human stewardship of agricultural landscapes. Instead of environmental governance ruled by a market calculus (internalising externalities by pricing environmental services) compatible with the current 'food from nowhere' regime building a world 'agriculture without farmers',⁹ a 'food from somewhere' regime offers a paradigmatic shift (Bové and Dufour, 2001, p. 55; McMichael, 2002).

The paradigmatic shift is towards embedding agri-food systems in principles of ecology and cooperative advantage, involving an epistemic reorientation and institutional embrace of food sovereignty practices. In international fora on trade relations, *Vía Campesina* advocates the removal of agriculture from the WTO, and from governance protocols that subject agriculture and its ecological foundations to debilitating competitive market relations. In critiquing the WTO market regime, the food sovereignty movement reframes the discursive agenda: from qualifying industrial agriculture with multifunctionality, as practiced by the EU, to re-centering food's (situated) political, cultural and ecological relations everywhere. Whereas the former agenda modifies environmental governance in part through elaborating a payment for environmental services protocol, geared to internalising (pricing) 'externalities,' the food sovereignty movement seeks an uncompromising agenda of multifunctionality, based in non-monetary valuing of the complex ecological interactions involved in environmental sustainability. As in van der Ploeg's example above, this involves de-commodifying elements of farming (which is not the same as eliminating food markets).

In spite of willingness to forge strategic alliances with other social movements (e.g. urban unemployed, fair trade, and environmental groups) the food sovereignty movement thus far has managed to avoid co-optation, in part through its emphasis on rights (Desmarais, 2007). While food sovereignty practices vary regionally, the debate within the environmental governance literature regarding participatory approaches (and potential cooptation) is enlivened by a global solidarity movement anchored in such a foundational set of practices and rights claims that, to this point, staunchly resist cooptation (see Fisher et al., 2010, pp. 148–149). The standpoint of the food sovereignty movement is quite distinctive, insofar as it questions the epistemic assumptions underlying modernisation narratives that view smallholders as obsolete. Not only does this standpoint complicate the premises and possibilities of participatory governance (McMichael, 2010; see Evans, 2000), but also it recovers valuable lessons for the world at large from cultures constructed around replenishing ecosystems, and giving substance to the meaning of multifunctionality.

In the meantime, negotiations over 'ecological feedback' (including climate change) and regulatory developments may legitimize neoliberalism for a time, appropriating discourses and practices of multifunctionality, fair trade and public health concerns. But they cannot in themselves redress the global agrarian crisis and its associated 'export of sustainability' from the south (Gupta, 1998), nor can they legitimize the global process of accumulation by dispossession, and its impact on peasantries and farm labour (Harvey, 2003; Araghi, 2009). While neoliberalism may partially transform its methods of governance (such as pricing environmental services) it cannot ultimately provide solutions to its socio-ecological contradictions. These can only come through a substantive and substantial adoption of the principle of multifunctionality, that is, more than simply full-cost accounting where

⁸ Conceptually, this means small/medium farmers actively reduce dependence (and associated debt) on commercial inputs, choosing rather to rebuild their 'ecological capital' via agro-ecology (van der Ploeg, 2009).

⁹ This term comes from *La Vía Campesina*.

environmental costs are reduced to monetary metrics and internalised in prices. Multifunctionality needs to be *practiced*, as a method of valuing and farming the land as a complex set of ecological processes. The condition for this form of multifunctionality is not abstraction through pricing, but a social and democratic approach to agriculture.

Multifunctional practice holds the potential to overcome valuation of agriculture and food in the singular terms of price and profitability. To price each 'function' is to artificially sub-divide into abstract metrics a complex of practices that are by no means uniform, varying across quite diverse landscapes and distinctly situated farming conditions. The logic of such pricing is the calculus made by the European Union in particular, and governments elsewhere, that climate change and energy shortages can be mitigated through trade in carbon emissions to incentivize a shift to green technology. Carbon markets allow polluters to trade responsibility for emissions by purchasing carbon credits elsewhere, thereby attracting green investments away from where they are needed most (Sullivan, 2008). In addition, assuming carbon equivalences encourages an artificial substitution of biofuels for fossil fuels, in many cases glossing over the impact of industrial biofuels on landscapes, which release more carbon (and nitrous oxide) than the biofuel commodity itself replaces in a strict pricing regime (see, e.g., Lohmann, 2006; Fargione et al., 2008). The rush to convert European crop-land and southern forests to biofuel monocultures, as a green fuel, and, mistakenly, climate-proofing, is perhaps the logical extreme of the claim to internalise 'externalities.'

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the debate over multifunctionality in Europe as symptomatic of the controversy over 'environmental governance', with agriculture as the focus. While the empirics are European, the controversy has universal implications. European claims to practice and support multifunctional agriculture through the WTO subsidy structure are compromised by the priority given to agro-exporting and the subjection of environmental services to a secondary subsidy system that models environmental governance via a market calculus.

Arguably, this approach is self-defeating as it misrepresents ecological processes via a conventional market paradigm. 'Agriculture' here remains a commercially defined economic sector, in contradistinction to 'farming' – as an ecologically embedded activity combining eco-system replenishment and landscape management with cultural reproduction and labour-intensive low-carbon food and fuel production. This latter understanding of farming informs the food sovereignty movement, both in Europe, and across the world. It holds potential for an epistemic shift, from presuming agriculture is best practiced through large monocultures with technologies of 'biophysical override' to address its ecological contradictions (Weis, 2007), to revaluing farming as integral to social and environmental sustainability and public health. Thus in a future new world order, revaluing agriculture as the foundation of civilisation (in the material, rather than the chronological, sense) is arguably the basis for overcoming ultimately short-sighted neoliberal principles of environmental governance in the current world order.

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