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Family Farms, Land Grabs and Agrarian Transformations: Some Silences in the Food Sovereignty Discourse

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Family Farms, Land Grabs and Agrarian Transformations: Some Silences in the Food Sovereignty Discourse

Adwoa Yeboah Gyapong

Abstract

In the past decade, West African countries have had their 'fair share' of agricultural land grabs-many of which are driven by investments from industrialised and other middle-income countries especially China, Brazil and India. This has spurred small, modest and big campaigns/resistances by (trans)national agrarian movements. Food Sovereignty movements, in their narratives countering land grabbing, put strong emphasis on 'family farming' as the main collective action frame. In West Africa, the family farming discourse also emerge from the historical contexts of a predominantly family labour- small scale farming, and also projects an alternative outlook on agrarian futures as against neoliberal versions of agrarian development. Whilst the pro-family farming' discourse contains a strong political appeal to the mass base of the movement, it appears not to be adequately linked to differentiation within the peasantry- it oversimplifies diversity within impacted rural communities, and tends to overlook the struggles of other rural working classes and groups who are among the most vulnerable to land and other resource grabbing. In particular, farmworkers are poorly recognised in food sovereignty discourses and their interests often conflated with that of farmers. Given that land grabs not only shape, but are also shaped by ongoing agrarian transformations accompanied by diverse and unpredictable livelihood experiences. It is argued that, for demands to adequately reflect the agrarian struggles of the rural working poor, movements have to engage with the diversity and changes within the peasantry – this will certainly reveal contradictions and complexities about broad narratives against land grabs but at the same time could provoke debates and framings that are beneficial for building food sovereignty.

Keywords: Food Sovereignty; Family farm; Land grab; Farmworkers; ROPPA; West Africa

1 Introduction

The African continent remains the most targeted region for large-scale land acquisitions accounting for about 42 percent of global land deals[1] (Nolte, et al 2016). It has been widely acknowledged that land deals in Africa are rooted in the long history of colonial genealogy, postcolonial modernisation policies that were inclined towards state-led large-scale agricultural development policies, more recently, the emergence of a (neo)liberal hegemony of which agricultural development has been premised on free trade and capital mobility to promote transnational investments (Amanor, 1999). In the West Africa context, contemporary land deals are characterised by both new land acquisitions and relatively old state-led large-scale farms which have over the years, had renewed agreements to promote transnational and private sector interests under the rhetoric of increased productivity, growth and food security. In the current post food crises era, transnational large-scale agricultural land deals in West Africa have been conventionally driven by Western investors from United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy France, America and Norway etc. especially in the oil palm and non-traditional export sector. Yet in recent years, the so-called ‘‘rising powers” have also been playing new roles in agricultural investments, with almost fifth of land deals in West Africa involving China, Brazil, India[2]. China for example, in 2011 launched the West Africa regional office of China- African Development Fund (CADFund) in Accra to facilitate and accelerate the industrialization and agricultural modernization in West Africa. Whilst some stress on the development potentials of these new south- south solidarities and connections, many have shown reservations, arguing that they are veiled forms of ‘‘neo-imperialism”, resource extraction, exploitation and capital accumulation (Amanor & Chichava, 2016) Many of these partnerships for, and investments in agricultural developments appear to be applicable to large scale schemes, leaving to the margins the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and peasants.

Food sovereignty movements fighting for the sustenance of peasants’ production systems often articulate that through the proliferation of large-scale agricultural land deals by transnational investors, peasants become trapped in a cycle of exploitation, marginalisation and inequitable incorporation. Food sovereignty movements have thus capitalised on the ‘land grab’ phenomenon as an effective framing opportunity to raise ‘awareness around the (potential) negative impacts of large-scale land investments and to suggest sustainable alternatives (Larder, 2015). In West Africa, the regional food sovereignty movement Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest[3] (ROPPA) articulates family farming as a counter narrative to land grabs. The discourse has been framed along three main lines-the need for the preservation/valorisation of family farms; that family farming is inherently productive and sustainable compared to large scale schemes, and that land grabs dispossess family farmers and peasants from their livelihoods. These framings are set in the regional context of a predominantly small-scale family farming oriented food system. It also projects an alternative outlook on agrarian futures in West Africa as against the neoliberal versions of agrarian development. In resonance with Keck & Sikkink's (1999), by so doing, they have gained political recognition -mainly by helping set the agenda against land grabs and provoking media and policy attention at regional and national levels.

Whilst the ‘pro-family farming’ discourse contains a strong political appeal to the mass base of the movement and raised international awareness on capitalist development on rural land frontiers, it is argued that in order for the movement’s influence to transcend the agenda setting to relevant policy interventions, claims and demands have to be adequately linked to the ongoing questions of agrarian transformations and differentiation within the peasantry-especially by not conflating the land related interests farmers and farmworkers. As rightly indicated by Kay (2015, p.80) the problems of peasant farming and rural wage labour are not unconnected but rural wage workers raise particular issues that

[1]The biggest scale of land grabs has however occurred in five countries including Indonesia, Ukraine, Russia, Papua New Guinea and Brazil.
[2] http://www.landmatrix.org/en/
[3] Network of Peasant Organisations and producers in West Africa

have not yet been fully discussed in food sovereignty literature. Similarly, different livelihood experiences influence how the differentiated peasantry perceive, are affected and respond to land grabs-food sovereignty movements have to engaged with these real issues. This paper, making use of media reports, newsletters and reports of food sovereignty movements, particularly ROPPA, as well as studies by engaged (activist) researchers, points out some of the silences in demand framing, and suggests the need for movements to engage with issues regarding: diversity of the peasantry and in family farming; increasing rural wage labour, and values/ideologies of peasants on agriculture in West Africa.

2 The West African Context of Food Insecurity and an unequal Food System

The West African sub-region is endowed with rich land and food resources, albeit there are vast variations in distribution especially in the northern and southern divides. Agriculture contributes to the largest share of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Past and present governments continue to build in structures to strengthen it. In many parts of West Africa, the immediate post- independence period (1960s-70s) was characterised by strong state interventions and development policies aimed at promoting food self–sufficiency (such as the import substitution policies of President Nkrumah of Ghana in the early 1960s). By the mid 1970s however, many of these policies had not been entirely successful, coupled with unfavourable natural conditions (droughts, floods, pests and diseases affecting crops and animals), mismanagement, and political upheavals. Towards the end of the 1970s, when the world was also experiencing financial crises, the World Bank attributed much of the poverty and food insecurity to excessive state intervention in agricultural development. This would be followed by modernization and liberalization interventions particularly the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which sought to give markets a greater role in development. Under such ideological influence and with conditionality from international organisations, over the years, many (West) African states reduced support and subsidies for food production (although support for cash crops more or less remained). Liberalization programmes were also not any magic bullets for developments, and at the turn of the century till date, there has been redefinition of the role of the State and markets albeit generally geared towards supporting the former to facilitate and strengthen the functioning of markets through neoliberal and new institutional policies (Burnett & Murphy, 2014).

West Africa has been adversely impacted by successive regimes of (neo) liberalization thereby inclining many policies towards the advancement of capitalism. The neoliberal agenda has in the recent past been manifested in the emergence of cooperate food system where (West) Africa is seen to be a fertile ground for lucrative large and industrial scale food production for exports. A 2009 World Bank report with a special focus on West Africa, describes the Guinea Savannah Zone[4] as 'empty lands' that should be harnessed for investments without adequately recognising their use by pastoralists and other livelihoods that such lands support (Toulmin & Gueye 2003). Such interpretations do not only expand the frontiers of accumulation for capital, but also to meet the demands of international consumers whose food 'wants' have to be globally sourced at all times regardless of natural seasonal variations. This system, results in power and resource concentration, hunger, economic and physical dispossession of small-scale farmers, and negates efforts that seek to boost local production (Friedmann, 2016; McMichael, 2009). Similarly, neoliberalism and its associated free trade policies, requires nation states to open up their markets to the world to the low-priced food imports which do not only alter local tastes and preferences to those products, but also systemically stifles local production and rural development[5]. Addressing food insecurity in West

[4] From western Senegal to eastern Nigeria, and including portions of Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin

[5] Other factors including high population growth rates- it doubled from 1990 to 2015 (180-150 million people) and fast-growing pace of urbanisation- average of 50 percent of the West African population living in urban areas also contributing factors (Bini, 2016).

Africa thus transcends technical and market solutions to alternatives that emerge out the historical and political context of access to resources, food production and distribution.

Yet, as it has been occurring on a global scale especially in the post food crises era, large scale land acquisitions have been supported by many mainstream international development organisations and now through the rhetoric of a South- South cooperation initiated by the BRICS as the pathway to enhance productivity for food security and to promote rural development through job creation. Mention can be made of Brazil's involvement in commercial rice production in Ghana for both domestic and international markets, and China's involvement in large scale commercial agricultural development though ancillary support in the form of irrigation, agro-processing, agricultural technology and infrastructure (Kojo Sebastian. Amanor, 2015). With the promises of partnership for development, many African states have been exploring alternatives to north-south development through south-south co-operation in agricultural development. Whilst these South–South cooperation are premised on shared (political) identities and respect for national interests compared to the conventional north-south relations, the agricultural projects and initiatives accompanied by the BRICS agricultural investments may not be significantly different. Under varied structural, institutional, and state-society relations, they have also been accompanied by large-scale, chemical intensive and mechanised agricultural modules which produce diverse outcomes, often to the detriment of smallholder family farming and rural development- a key issue for transnational food sovereignty movements including ROPPA.

3 A Brief Overview of ROPPA

ROPPA was established to represent the interests of smallholder farmers and their national organizations to promote family farms- the dominant mode of agricultural, forestry and pastoral production in West Africa (ROPPA, 2014a). ROPPA was born out of an initiative from farmers' organizations and agricultural producers across West Africa. It was formally constituted during a regional conference of peasant organizations in June/July 2000 at Cotonou (Johnson et al., 2008; ROPPA, 2014b). Prior to this conference, there had been on-going resistances and struggles by the Sahelian and Francophone West African Civil Society and peasant organisations against the ills of globalisation and the adverse effects of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) – unfavourable agricultural policies, poor rural socio-economic infrastructure and poverty on small-scale farmers (Mckeon, 2009; McKeon, 2005). Farmers' organisations saw the need for representation and participation in their own national level rural development policy-making processes. To strengthen their political cause and to gather a greater international support, they began processes of exchange across the sub-region (McKeon, 2005). Thus, between 1998 and 2000, several consultative meetings were held on the way forward, of which one way was to develop a capacity-building fund to support farmer organisations. The July 2000 assembly sought to make a decision on the sustenance of the capacity building fund and subsequently the creation of ROPPA. These organisations identified with similar rural development and farming constraints of which they were driven to tackle together. Pre-existing peasant organisations such as the National Committee for Rural Peoples' Dialogue (CNCR) of Senegal is generally acknowledged for playing a key role in the establishment of ROPPA (Hrabanski, 2010; McKeon, 2005).

Upon its inception, ROPPA's membership included national farmer organisations from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. Later peasant organisations from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia joined, making it a 13-member union[6]. Whilst most of the member farmer organisations had been in existence and operational prior to ROPPA, others were formed rather later (SWAC, 2007) and perhaps could have

[6] ROPPA makes mention of associated member farmer organizations from Cape-Verde and Nigeria, but it is not clear which particular organisations they are and the existing nature of engagement

been more informed by ROPPA's vision and objectives. The institutional objectives of ROPPA are built around 3 key themes: advocacy and solidarity; capacity training and development, and regional and international level partnerships. These objectives are for the purposes of effective representation and recognition, policy influence, and the sustainability of family farming and smallholder agriculture in West Africa. ROPPA maintains that it has positioned itself to defend the rights of about 45 million peasants across the region. In principle, since its establishment, ROPPA has been inclined towards the vision of food sovereignty and draws inspiration from post-colonial policy attempts of food self-sufficiency, but its alliance with Vía Campesina since 2001, has helped strengthen its political recognition and shape its demands on family farming.

4 Family Farming Narratives in Food Sovereignty Discourses (Emphasis on West Africa)

Family farming covers a broad range of situations, however they are generally characterised by the particular connection between the structure and composition of the household, its assets and farming activities (Toulmin & Gueye, 2003). Family farms are linked to small, large and extended family units who engage in small-scale agro-ecological (crop) farming activities using family landholding accessed through inheritance, gifts or loans(Touré & Seck, 2005). In that, family farming is built on a resource base – access to land, seeds, livestock, fisheries, water, family labour, local knowledge and skills, social networks and institutions that are fundamentally uncommodified (Toulmin & Gueye, 2003). They are smallholder farms managed and controlled by a household head and dependent on unpaid family labour who receive food, shelter and social supports as rewards (Toulmin & Gueye, 2003). Family farms are considered important production units that are dependent on (unpaid) family labour where the socio-economic links between the members are family connections, and the unit is linked with others in a social web. In its practical sense, family farming appears to incline more to crop farming. It is however worth noting that in food sovereignty discourses in West Africa, 'family farmers' is usually used interchangeably with 'peasants' to encompass men and women, peasants and small-scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisher folks, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food within a rural community. It has often been argued that the use of 'peasants' is a political strategy to draw attention to the special relationship rural people have with land, to highlight their social and economic rights and political identity, including also their cultural and religious lives[7].

In the case of West Africa, 'family farms' is often used as it is contextually significant. Upon various consultative meetings during the beginning years of ROPPA, the promotion of family farming became central to ROPPA's demands (SWAC, 2007). Since then, the aim has been to influence regional and national agricultural policies to make them family farming oriented. The promotion of family farming linked to the prevalence and uniqueness of (crop)family farms in rural West Africa- in that it has been the predominant system of food production before and after the advancement of capitalism. In addition to this natural tendency, the persistence of the family farm framing could also be linked to the class origins of the mass base of ROPPA. The scanty literature available on its historical background provides some indications that its mass is predominantly crop farmers. ROPPA was primarily an initiative of Senegalese CNCR[8] (established in 1993) which was established to give farmers a unified voice in agricultural policies that affect them (Hrabanski, 2010; McKeon, 2005). The advent of cash cropping of groundnuts by the French colonial administration disrupted pre-

[7]https://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/human-rights-mainmenu-40/peasants-right-resources/2147-peasants-rights-are-unique-and-require-urgent-protection-say-elizabeth-mpofu

[8] CNCR had benefitted from capacity building programmes, taken part in international dialogues even at the World Bank and therefore had considerable negotiating skills and gained much support in Senegal

existing sustainable family farming systems, degraded the fertility of soils, and subverted the complementary activities of cultivation and livestock farming (McKeon et al 2004). Later farmers (groundnut farmers mainly) had also become victims of structural adjustment programmes, falling prices of products, low demand for products, and a lack of access to inputs (McKeon, et al, 2004).

Given these contexts, family farming has been promoted. Right upon its inception, ROPPA's prime goal was to influence regional policy for the promotion of family farming and fair trade, reflected in its early anti-liberalization struggles[9] against the cotton sector and subsequently other base products such as cocoa and soybeans etc. (Grossman et al, 2006). ROPPA has been instrumental in making family farming central to the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) agricultural policy, and at the national level, and its national platforms in Mali and Senegal have also lobbied for national agricultural policies to be oriented towards food sovereignty. ROPPA has continued to raise awareness on all platforms and extends its influence across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to ensure that food security is improved by an adequate level of self-sufficiency without the neglect of family farms. In the 2006 Niamey declaration on food sovereignty, ROPPA and its alliances contextualised food sovereignty in West Africa as "the right of every country or group of countries to define their agricultural policies in the interests of their populations, to develop and protect their productive activities and their markets so that they can satisfy the populations' demand for sufficient healthy food which is culturally and religiously acceptable and, at the same time, constitute the basis for fair remuneration of the labour of family farms " (ROPPA, 2006 pg. 1). As a food sovereignty campaign, and in the anti- land grab demands, the family farming counter-narrative has been advanced in three (3) major interrelated ways.

First is the '*Preservation, recognition and the valorisation of family farms'.* Family farming make up a significant share of rural people's way of life in West Africa. As Several accounts have been recorded on their persistence which is linked to their adaptability (Becker, 1990; Gyasi, 1994), robustness (Bélières, et al 2002), and their embeddedness in strong family relations and cultural bonds-what Ngwainmbi, (2000) refers to as the 'economy of affection'. Contrary to the predictions of the demise of family farms since the 1950s, they have been maintained even in the changing regional political economy- colonial policies and their introduction of commercial (export oriented) farming, postcolonial modernization attempts and contemporary capitalist hegemony associated with the changing land tenure relations, organisation of farming (Becker, 1990). But even so, some have argued that even during the British colonial administration, 'the peasant system was considered a tried and inexpensive method of producing tropical export crops'-such as the case of cocoa production in Ghana (Carrere, 2010 p.47). As such, the purpose was not to replace completely the peasant system of production with large-scale schemes, but to find innovative ways of improving their integration into competitive markets. In comparison to large-scale commercial production schemes that have emerged since the advance of capitalism, family farms have proven to be relatively more viable and robust and therefore must be maintained and modernized, not replaced by large scale agricultural systems. Not only do land grabs threaten the history of family farming but even more, mainstream discourses and projects that promote land grab most often shoves family farming to a sub culture that is under-valued poorly recognised (ROPPA, 2014). In ROPPA, (2014, p. 43) Nora McKeon explains this further, indicating that

> 'Africa's food security is without any shadow of a doubt based on the diversified production models adopted by its millions of family farmers and their links to those who consume their products. There is a severe disconnect between this reality and the model that is being proposed by these corporate-led programmes and, alas,

[9]The liberalization of the cotton sector had led to several upheavals and strikes by producers in Mali. Economically dispossessed small holder farmers rallied against excessive cotton subsidies in the USA and EU because it distorted prices and affected export returns (Koita 2013; Losch 2004). ROPPA coordinated the 'Big Noise petition,' to the WTO in Cancún 2003 and Hong Kong 2005 meeting for the elimination of USA and EU cotton subsidies (Koita 2013).

> enthusiastically accepted by many African governments and the leadership of the AU/ NEPAD/CAADP. There is a severe disconnect between rhetorical recognition of the key role played by Africa's smallholder family farmers and the fact that family farming is portrayed as an archaic model which is incapable of evolution'.

In 2014, ROPPA and the food sovereignty movement in Africa joined the world to celebrate the year as the United Nations (UN) Year of Family Farming, and in the preceding years, throughout its establishment, it has pushed for a cause for family farming in the formulation of regional agricultural policies and food import tariffs to boost productions by family farms (Johnson et al., 2008).

Second, '*family farmers mostly bear the brunt of land grabs through unfavourable terms of incorporation, dispossession and loss of livelihoods'.* This dominant claim is often projected in contradistinction to mainstream perspectives that show optimism about the development potentials of regulated land deals (see Deininger, et al, 2011). This narrative does not only emerge from (West African) food sovereignty movements' framings and discourses but also resonates with several theoretical postulations (Hall, 2013; Levien, 2013; Peluso & Lund, 2011) and empirical evidence from human rights and political economy perspectives. There are reported cases of land deal related land shortages in Ghana (Nyantakyi-frimpong & Kerr, 2016); decline in production among smallholders and their vertical incorporation into agribusiness (Kojo Sebastian Amanor, 2012); loss of livelihoods in Mali and Sudan (Kitchell, 2014) among many others. As such, in 2012, the leadership of ROPPA played key roles in the FAO's Committee for Food Security to reject, and suggest alternatives to the World Bank's Principles for Responsible Investment which according to them, sought to legitimatize land grabs instead of protecting the needs of small-scale and family farmers (ROPPA, 2014b). In west Africa, the calls for the promotion of family farm demands even transcends issues of land grabs to the broad questions of free trade and agribusinesses. Following the West African context of dumping and food imports, ROPPA began its campaigns with the goal of engaging with the rules of play in international trade in the region. In its early days, one of the key issues being the liberalization of the cotton sector, had led to several upheavals and strikes by producers in Mali. Economically dispossessed smallholder farmers rallied against excessive cotton subsidies in the USA and EU because it distorted prices and affected export returns (Koita 2013; Losch 2004). Since then, ROPPA's flagship demands have continued to be in defence of trade restrictions and the valorisation of family farms- that small-scale farmers deserve decent income and recognition for their labour and their contribution to food security (ROPPA, 2006).

Third is the '*pros and cons'* argument in relation to productivity and sustainability of family or small-scale farming as against large-scale models, is also very dominant in food sovereignty framings. The productivity framing falls in line with the widely observed phenomenon and the theoretical debate of the inverse relationship between farm size and farm productivity. After Amartya Sen's (1962) Farm Management Surveys in India, the relationship between size and yield became central to debates on agrarian development. This perspective underlies much of the economic justification for movements' opposition to land grabs. As Van der Ploeg, (2014) has strongly argued in defence of capability of family farms to produce (more than) sufficient good food for the households of family farmers and the growing world population, in West Africa, this translates into the 'Africa can feed itself' campaign. For ROPPA, to make family farms suitable to feed Africa's growing population requires their modernization. It is quite unclear what is actually envisioned of family farms when modernization is mentioned in ROPPA's demands, but in very broad terms we can say that it is when family farms are not perceived as backward or only capable of subsistence but rather supported with inclusive research (including farmer-to farmer learning such as ROPPA periodic Farmers' University, and other bottom up approaches) and policies for them to meet Africa's food security needs, create jobs and wealth (ROPPA, 2014a). Already, about 80% of food grown in Africa is by small-scale family farmers (GRAIN, 2014), and with the adequate support, the continent will not have to rely on large-scale farms for rural development and food security. Not only do family farms have great land/yield productivity, but they do so sustainably. As van der Ploeg, (2014 p 1004) has rightly indicated, 'when looking at land productivity the most important lens from the perspective of environmental sustainability peasant

farms generally achieve higher levels of production per unit of land than capitalist or entrepreneurial farms. Family farming thus contributes to the 6th pillar of food sovereignty as framed by transnational movements, which declares that

> 'Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agro ecological production and harvesting methods that maximize the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialized production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming'. (LVC 2007:1) [10]

Family farming is premised on agro-ecological systems of production which promotes sustainability as compared to large-scale chemical dependent mono-cropping systems which threatens the sustainability of local food systems. The particularities of family farming: the scale and use of labour; it works with nature- seed preservation and reuse, manure, and non-dependence on pesticides etc. are central to the sustainability. Large-scale production schemes, on the other hand is characterized by monoculture-of crops which depletes soils reproductive capacities, and animal factories- Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations(CAFOs) which also generate excessive waste production. Similarly, large-scale production is often highly dependent on agro-chemicals (pesticides, weedicides etc.) and fertilizers. Not only does this have occupational safety implications on farmworkers, but also leads to growth of herbicide-tolerant weeds and adverse implications for/of greenhouse gas emissions (La Via Campesina, 2015a). Similar narratives are made on the health implications of Genetic Modification (GM), and the extremely mechanized systems also associated with Greenhouse Gas pollution and destruction of biodiversity. It is worth noting that most food sovereignty movement do not challenge the industrialised agricultural model from purely scientific explanations obviously because of the existence of counter scientific narratives to support such systems (e.g. productivity). However, as mentioned in Rosset and Martinez-Torres (2012) it is premised on the idea that agricultural practices of local people or peasants are built on contextualized and diversified farming systems rooted in years of long term experimentation, local knowledge and skill development and cultural practices that are climate resilient and ecologically beneficial as compared to industrialized production models (Altieri 2009; van der Ploeg 2014; Akram-Lodhi 2015). The food sovereignty movement, agroecology does not necessarily conflict with modern science rather rejects the pre-eminence of and total dependence on the latter, arguing that peasants be given the right to be selective about scientific methods that complement their local practices. Evidence of such benefits has been reported in a number of empirical studies in Cuba, Latin America and West and Southern Africa (La Via Campesina, 2015b; Pimbert, 2006). As ROPPA's Djibo Bagna states in his interview for the 'vision paysannes' magazine, (ROPPA, 2014c p18), West Africa has 'complementary agro-ecological zones- 'what can be done in coastal countries and what can be done in the Sahel can be complementary' to support family farming in a sustainable way. Family farming is thus considered as farming system that has a great potential in contributing to the multi-functionality of agriculture (IPC, 2006).

[10] www.nyeleni2007.org.

5. Family Farms, Land Grabs and Agrarian Transformations: Some Silences

Recognition and valorisation of family farms: Bringing in Differentiation and Wage Labour

As it has already been established, the promotion of family farms stands tall in the agenda for food sovereignty and in the anti-land grab discourses in West Africa. The emphasis on the protection of family farms through trade restrictions and resistances to land grabs tells a lot about the contexts of West Africa's food insecurity but also brings to light the role that small-scale/ family farms play in the agricultural sector especially when given the needed support and recognition. What seems to be absent in the narrative is a linkage to its diversity and the changes that have occurred over time especially with regard to labour question. Some of the idealized descriptions of family farms tend to overlook growing fragmentation of large households (Norman, et al, 1981; Snyder, 1981); nucleation and individualization and seasonal variation in household size and composition (Snyder 1981). Several studies in West Africa have accounted for the diversities and transformations in the West African family farms, although many of these are even outdated. Family sizes vary from small nuclear families to complex domestic units of extended family relations and in age- sex structure. In predominantly Muslim[11] countries such as Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso, family farm households are generally bigger (could be up to 90 members) as compared other secular and Christian environments (Toulmin & Gueye, 2003; Venema, 1978). But even within countries, variations still exist. In a similar vein, families/households access to and ownership of land differ widely from less than 1 hectare to about 25 hectares across the region. In addition, even within the families, there are sometimes cases of individual farm fields where such members usually adult males commit their labour to both farms. From this we see that the composition of family farming households alone and their access to resources will, to a large extent, determine their susceptibility to risks and vulnerability, ability to cope and their class positions within their agrarian society as poor, middle or rich households.

As a farming system which functions both as a production unit and a complex social organization, family farms have, and continue to experience changes in their modes of production and reproduction- particularly the labour dynamics. That family farms are conventionally run by family labour is not contested, but overlooking the age long dynamics and processes oversimplifies demands. The scanty and largely outdated[12] literature on family farms in West Africa even provide evidence of substantive and complex wage labour relations among family farmers. Yet it is often assumed that wage labour relations occurs mainly on the frontiers of large-scale farms (c.f Cramer et al, 2008a). Unlike the Russian peasant that Chayanov studied, food sovereignty discourses must also engage with the 'new rurality'(. For the many rural folks of present day, not only may their labour be 'unfree' for family farms (Hyden, 1986; Van Hear, 1984), they also diversify their livelihoods given open doors of education, non-farm jobs and (peri) urban linkages that usually attract the youth and adults in rural and peri-urban communities where equitable access to socio-economic services are limited, coupled with poor returns from agriculture (White, 2012). Whilst an earlier research in Ghana by Van Hear (1984) attributed the viability of the family farm as being a fall back haven for members[13], a relatively new study by Amanor revealed a decline in the moral economy of the rural farm households. Intergenerational struggles around morals, control of youth by elders and redistribution is reflected on the one hand, increasing withdrawal of youth's labour services in family farms, and on the other hand, an increase in land sales and sharecropping (Amanor, 2001,2010). When they choose to engage in farming, many would rather become labourers and sharecroppers outside their family land where their

[11] Due to religious acceptance of polygamy
[12] many of which are dated between 1970 and the early 1990s
[13] he argued that this is because household members who work as labourers could withdraw if terms are considered poor thus using the family farm as a bargaining strength. Not only is the likelihood of this argument limited, it does go back to strengthen the point that even those earlier days, wages were important for the peasant economy.

remuneration is guaranteed. In such cases, they also compete with migrant farmworkers. Aside from the increasing youth exodus which naturally reduces the family labour force, there are instances when family farm heads and other members' sell off their own labour supply to other farms to supplement family income needs for social and economic purposes. The social organization of the family also undergoes transformations over time and with variations in age-sex structure as well as nucleation, the dynamics of labour availability also changes over time. This usually arises in cases of insufficient land, land degradation, ageing, losses and sometimes national policies and land reforms that affect land holding of families (Bernstein, 2002; Wilson, 2015; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). Individualisation in West Africa has been attributed to their colonial history of the introduction of cash crop production, monetisation of the economy, and cash needs of young adult males (Becker, 1990; Norman et al., 1981). As according to Bernstein (2010), this colonial trend of commodification was evident in the forced commercialisation of crops, means of consumption, tools, labour and land. It would however be disingenuous not to mention that with differentiation in family farm assets and resources, there are some farmers who could be relatively rich or middle farm households whose labour needs may not necessarily emanate from lack but rather, expanded reproduction for both consumption and marketing (Bernstein 2010).

Yet, food sovereignty descriptions of family farming have been akin to a family labour oriented peasant economy. Unlike Via Campesina Latin America where some emphasis is given to farmworkers, perhaps because they have more organized associations (Borras, 2008), in West Africa, farmworkers most often appear among the list of rural folks or people of the land but in demand framing, they are generally conflated with farmers and wage labour poorly recognized. In the 2006 Niamey call for West Africa food sovereignty, where food sovereignty, the demand for '*fair remuneration of the labour of family farms'* reflects their interests for beneficial trade but also emanates from the 'unpaid', 'small-scale' 'family labour – family farms analogy'. There is often the tendency for movements to give precedence to the local-global/capitalist-peasants narratives of inequality, or equate family farms to small-scale non-capitalist units. When this happens, issues of rural farm labour –some of which may tend to contradict food sovereignty ideals, are often overlooked. For instance, within local agrarian systems, family farmers may have relative autonomy over the labourers they employ. Farmworkers are marginalized by family/small-scale farmers depending on the payment methods, the farming season, the type of work, their class positions etc. Indeed, some have even noted that in comparison to large-scale farming, farmworkers employed by family farms, work under worse economic conditions (Cramer et al., 2008; Oya,2013). Following that, in many West African Countries, traditional cash crops are largely produced by not- so -poor family farms (Cocoa- Ghana, groundnuts -Senegal, Oil Palm- Benin, Cotton- Mali, Niger etc.), they are usually based on profitability and expanded reproduction and therefore it is not sufficient to say their capitalist intentions are just a matter of a little degree. Again, with small-scale (family) farms integrated into commercial markets through contract and out -grower schemes whereby they themselves are exploited by large corporations, their farmworkers become the final 'consumers' of the costs in such contracts- through low wages and tedious working conditions (Baglioni, 2015). But farmworkers also defy homogenous descriptions and in fact as mentioned earlier double as farmers and/or petty commodity producers (cf.Vercruijsse, 1979 on the dynamics of farm-wage labour-commodity production in Ghana). The differentiation of farmworkers into classes- landless, landed, less landed, proletariats, in terms of identities- women (widowed, divorced, single, married), migrants, ethnicities etc. and in relation to their demographic cycles such as age, all go a long way to determine their control, power and marginalization in their employment relations with small and large-scale farmers and eventually their access to food. For food sovereignty movements in West Africa to adequately address the food insecurity and the agrarian struggles of the working poor, the everyday relation between (family) farmer and farmworkers have to be empirically assessed so as to illuminate the contradictions and intricacies that arise on the ground in efforts to protect labourers and food sovereignty (Bowles, 2013).

6 Land Grab Related Dispossession of Family Farmers: Differentiation of Peasants, Impacts and Responses

Internal differentiation within the peasantry is a widely recognised phenomenon in issues of agrarian development- even when interpreted differently form Marxist political economy and moral economy perspectives. This is often true for food sovereignty movements (many are inclined to moral economy ideologies) who are often found in contested positions of having to present broad claims and demands in defence of family farmers and the peasantry as a whole, but also aware of the class struggles and differentiated interests. Peasants as we have known them to be, are differentiated in class- relations to land and other means of production, identity, age, social status etc. (Bernstein, 2010; Lenin, 1964; Scott, 1976). When food sovereignty movements frame issues broadly, they present the peasantry as political category that acts as a unifying frame for making known the struggles of the people of the land (McMichael 2014a), but this also increases the tendencies of oversimplification of complex issues.

Empirical evidence has been growing on the political economy of impacts, revealing the differentiated impacts of land grabs on land relations in rural agrarian societies (Borras, et al, 2012; Hall et al., 2015). This is often manifested in land use change –from food to cash crops and biofuel crops; transformation of systems of ownership and most significantly dispossession from means of production (Borras & Franco, 2012). Some farmers affected by physical eviction from their agricultural land as a result of land grabs. In the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana, a forty-year joint venture (between a traditional council and transnational investors) involving a 65,000ha jatropha project, has led to differential outcomes for migrant occupants and natives of the land. Whilst chiefs justified the project on the account of securing jobs for the youth, it has also led to the dispossession of migrant farmers whose lands were significantly affected because of non-payment of grounds rents to chiefs and their land holding posing as a threat to the authority of chiefs (Boamah, 2014). In a similar land deal in the same region, migrant charcoal producers who often paid their tributes were protected from dispossession (Boamah, 2014, p. 419). For farmers who may not necessarily be evicted, they also have to deal with declining farm-gate prices and increasing competition from large-scale investors who are inserted into logistical chains and economies of scale which capture production and displace struggling smallholders-this is typical of the pineapple sector in Ghana (Amanor, 2012; Clancy, 2013). For women whose land rights are weak, land grabs further exacerbate their predicaments under three main conditions; when land transfers deny them of their usufruct entitlements, when land use changes and reclassification reduces their land rights, and when through state interventions (such as titling) and the compensation packages transforms the rules of access to privilege the interest of men- e.g. land allocation and registration under household heads (Behrman, et al 2012; Kevane & Gray, 1999; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). But the situation could be even more complex. For instance, in some settings, women advocacy groups show optimism in market-led land policies even when they recognize the power relations that structure demand tend to favour men; because it creates opportunities for women to circumvent discriminatory customs that limit their access and control over land (Tsikata, 2003).

When land grabs transform land ownership and use, the agrarian question of labour becomes inevitable. In that, how large-scale production schemes results in labour redundancy or generate employment for rural people (especially the land dispossessed) is most often complicated (Li, 2011; Oya, 2013). Many studies have also shown that, the absorption of rural labour is not always assured, even for those dispossessed when matching skills are not available, when labour conditions are poor and farming models are highly mechanised (for evidence in Ghana, see Nyantakyi-frimpong & Kerr, 2016; Schoneveld & German, 2013). Nonetheless, in cases where employment is created, some will have access and others not, and the organisation of production is also determined by power relations. In principle, land deals provide two main windows of opportunities for rural employment i.e. wage work and contract farming but the outcomes in relation to the terms of incorporation are most often variegated. In the recent study conducted in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia by Hall et al, (2017), there are instances where land deals have created better paid jobs for permanent/highly qualified and temporary

workers but for those integrated as wage labourers usually have low wages. Wage work on large-scale farms is also associated with a growing feminisation of labour, especially farms engaged in non-traditional exports- horticulture, flower, fruits and vegetables sector (Dolan & Humphrey, 2000). It is a reflection of the broadening scope of agrarian change in many rural societies, coupled with the 'favourable' customary institutions that influence capitalists' preference for women for particular tasks- women farmworkers have 'nimble fingers', less conflictual and more willing than men to accept lower wages (Bernstein, 2010; Kay, 2015). Whilst paid labour opportunities sometimes serve as short term livelihood diversification strategies especially for women who may be cash trapped and do not have secure access to and control of (family) land and its outputs, many a time, they also become sites of exploitative relations.

Formal and informal institutions at the local, national and global levels on the one hand, determine land grabs processes (distribution of resources, labour relations, etc.) and on the other hand, become the objects of societal contestation and demands for change where necessary. In both ways, institutions influence how land grabs affect different classes or groups within agrarian societies. States' imperative toward both accumulation of capital and the maintenance of their legitimacy determines the limits of *and* possibilities for large-scale investments while their authority and capacity in the regulation and allocation of land and labour resources for large scale investment most often brings variegated implications on different classes of labour and rural inhabitants (Fox, 1992; Moreda, 2016; Schiavoni, 2016). Similarly, customary institutions of land tenure and production systems, traditional practices and norms (e.g. gender roles) also add to the dynamics of impacts. In the Ivorian cocoa sector case study by Amanor, (2012), it is interesting to note that although the liberalization of agricultural markets and its associated collapse of state marketing boards has tended to erode the bargaining power of smallholders, the small-scale production system of cocoa remains untouched because of the enshrined and well established historical and cultural relations of production. In such traditional institutional contexts, smallholders face less risks of eviction and land dispossession as compared to non-traditional sectors such as fruit and vegetables production (e.g. pineapple production in Ghana) which are being significantly affected by large scale schemes. That notwithstanding, many critical studies have also exposed how customary institutions of land tenure, norms and social relations inherently discriminate and marginalize women with regard to access to and control over land. In contexts where customary laws imply that women ride on the back of their partners' land, land grab facilitated dispossession denies women of even their limited access. In addition, with a growing feminization of labour on large-scale corporate farms, and coupled with non-existence/non-adherence to formal labour regulations[14], patriarchal customary institutions sometimes become the benchmark for the determining of conditions of work. In such situations, women in particular face double exclusion/ or marginalized inclusion by both formal/state and informal/customary institutions (Julia & White, 2012; Razavi, 2009). In effect, differentiation embedded in class, identity and institutional relations brings about diverse impacts of land grabs although emerging evidence show it has not brought significant improvements in livelihoods- at best, rural people's conditions are only maintained, and the worse cases where through dispossession, livelihoods are ripped off. Even when rural people benefit there are usually some constraints under which it occurs- desperation and short term needs. Women in particular, when engaged in land grabs as wage labourers and contract farmers, are usually caught in the complex web of being attracted to (seasonal) livelihood diversification and economic empowerment opportunities whilst at the same being exposed to structural vulnerabilities posed by institutions that 'work together' to benefit and marginalize them in the implementation of land grabs. Many rural people find themselves in contested spaces of negotiations and tensions and sometimes take incoherent but pragmatic measures to deal with land grabs.

Every day, men and women affected by land grabs, given different relations of agency, structural and institutional processes show diverse forms of political reactions-some of which could undermine the vision of food sovereignty. These are often manifested in ways that may not always show as overt protests but also through everyday politics, manifested in a form of 'production and action'. As

[14] this is not to say formal labour regulations are fundamentally premised on equity and equality

Edelman, et al., (2015 pg.467) have indicated, responses toward land grabs 'extends far beyond 'resistance' in its many manifestations- to demands for compensation, insertion and even counter-mobilizations against land deal resisters'. Evidence of such has been reported on the Malibya project in Mali which involves the transfer of 100,000 hectares of land for an irrigation project- those who lost their land have resisted out rightly, less landed farmers see it as opportunity for improved yields, and the state even rationalises it as a pathway to national food sovereignty (Larder, 2015). When food sovereignty movements engage with some of these complex realities (in interventions and alternatives suggested), on one hand, it may reveal contradictions of interests that are bound to occur, which can provoke discussions on other forms of power relations (especially within local/ domestic institutions) that marginalises some groups' access to and control over land-and how sometimes it places them into more subordinated class relations- into landless or near landless classes. On the other hand, it could also reinforce arguments on the different forms of vulnerabilities associated with land grabs on different classes/groups- including wage workers and women.

7 Beyond Pros and Cons: Widening discourses to address Ideologies and Agrarian Futures

The issues above reveal the diversity, complexity, and fluidity in the processes of change in rural agrarian systems. It is also becoming quite apparent that some of the tensions between the food sovereignty ideals (of protecting local food systems through small-scale/ family farm production and local consumption) and the interests of its mass base (the rural masses) may also lie in differences in values and ideologies of the latter on how agriculture should be developed to benefit them. In ROPPA, there is a growing emphasis on the modernization/valorisation/professionalization of family farming but it is still not very clear how this is envisioned. Whilst within the movement it usually links up to discussions on equitably integrating farmers into to (regional) markets and promoting demands for their products, some farmers may perhaps consider it as an avenue to fully transforming their production systems. For instance, a leader of the Ghana national platform of ROPPA (who also coordinates an Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa-AGRA project in Ghana) at some point registered his admiration for commercial agriculture and therefore interested in '*how small-scale farmers could one day be commercial farmers*'[15] –this is not too surprising given that the class base of GFAP seems to be that of mainly middle-rich farmers. Family farmers may not necessarily practice what is preached about the pros of family farms system-its productivity and sustainability even when shown real concerns about their agrarian conditions and struggles. As noted by Scoones, (2008 p 340), especially when some farmers are keen to engage with global markets to improve their livelihoods, some may not be averse to trying out new GM crops. In similar ways women and youth are attracted to wage work on large farms to meet their daily livelihood needs even when they are aware of its sustainability implications- to them and their societies.

Many of these conflicting values may even not conform to particular, defined set of (class) interests but emerge out of the changing rurality. The histories of peasants, their routes into peasantry and the contexts that shape their desires, behaviour and the values (Hyden, 1986). Whilst some may be family farmers by choice, for many others, peasantry has been a coping strategy and/or externally imposed- who could have been 'trapped' into peasantry by poverty driven urban- rural migration, social and family demands- taking care of the aged, or sick, marriage relations and perhaps other economic hardships- failed business ventures etc. If the peasants of today do not compare to the Chayanovian descriptions and have diverse raisons d'être, then it cannot be assumed that they have equal degrees of intrinsic attachment to land. For example, communal, stool and state lands mean differently to different people of the land-their perceptions of its present and future benefits to the community, how it should be put to productive use, and how much access they have to it. For instance, a small-scale 'family farmer' who tills an inherited family land and a small-scale individual farmer who acquired his land through personal purchase could have different reactions to land sale/lease. To the former, there

[15] http://www.mafs-africa.org

is a likelihood of greater cultural and historical relationship to the land that surpasses an economic value. Economically, those who receive substantial returns from non-farm activities may perceive land differently from full time farmers. Closely linked is the usually neglected question of what form of attachment (esp. economic) to land - as working owners, absentee owners, workers/labourers, settlers, etc.? For farmworkers for example, not only is their economic relationship with land relatively stronger than that of the 'somewhat pure peasant- family farmer', but also they could have a stronger relationship to land in its communal logic than in personal terms.

Transcending the dynamic rural systems, the broad socio-economic contexts within which peasants find themselves could also shape their ideologies and interests in food sovereignty and the issues of land grabs. In many developing countries, peasants are still second-class citizens with de facto restrictions on their geographical mobility and with limited access to social services (Edelman, 2013). The extreme levels of socio-economic inequality -inequitable share of public socio-economic infrastructure such as schools, healthcare facilities, potable water, electricity, communication technologies and good transportation networks etc. brings a very distinct dimension to the fight for peasants' rights in such contexts. In fact, peasants' parents in West Africa increasingly invest in their children's education in the hopes of future pay-offs thereby raising the probability that their future working lives would not be spent in peasant agriculture (Bryceson, 2000a, p. 44).This goes back to reflect the cash needs of peasants in socially deprived rural communities that are squeezed between declining agricultural returns and poor access (economic and physical) to basic needs (Bryceson & Howe, 1997). For most peasants living under such social conditions, their land related interests and ideas vis-a-vis food sovereignty principles, may only be sustained by improvements in social conditions for themselves and their households. Food sovereignty movements in Africa may also have to go beyond focusing on the pros of family farming to engaging with some of these ongoing changes which are in themselves rooted in international and local political economy but unfortunately, has become the lived realities of rural working poor.

8 Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to highlight some of the complexities of class dynamics and agrarian transformations within which food sovereignty has to be constructed in the light of a raging land rush by Western and 'rising powers' from the south. Indeed, most of these changes are in themselves products of the international political economy- colonialism, neoliberalism, commodification and the free flows of capital and trade as spearheaded by global powers and it is these issues that on the one hand, drive the antagonism between food sovereignty and corporate agriculture /land grabs and on the other hand, seek the valorisation of family farming and peasant food systems. Yet, because these ongoing agrarian transformations have also created a differentiated peasantry-landed and landless farmers and farmworkers, petty commodity producers, migrant workers, women and other minorities groups etc. who may have diverse experiences and interests in land grabs. This is usually accompanied by diverse and unpredictable short-term livelihood strategies some of which may even challenge the vision of food sovereignty. This implies that for framings to have influence beyond political mobilisation and agenda setting, to reflecting the agrarian struggles of the differentiated rural working poor, movement leaders may have to engage with questions of ongoing transformations. It is worth noting that in October 2015, ROPPA conducted a workshop with its national platforms which focused on the observation and monitoring of family farms to strengthen family farm related public policies (ROPPA, 2015). It is hoped that it provided an opportunity for engaging with questions of differentiation. Addressing issues of agrarian change certainly uncovers some of the contradictions likely to arise from differentiated interests, as well as provoke debates on issues of representativeness and class alliances within ROPPA and other food sovereignty movements. Yet, doing so also has significant benefits for strengthening the course for food sovereignty. First it helps to nuance claims regarding the adverse impacts of land grabs i.e. to bring in the variegated forms of adversities, among the marginalised (not only family farmers or peasantry as one unit but even among others classes and groups who may suffer distinct and different forms of dispossession and exploitation)- across

different timelines and space. Second, it will enable movements to engage with other structural issues that facilitate land grabs-i.e. underlying constraints that make them attractive to marginalised groups (discriminatory patriarchal and domestic norms and institutions), that create the enabling environment for them to be implemented (customary and formal land tenure systems) and institutions that do not protect local people's integration into land grabs as wage workers or out growers from exploitative relations. Lastly, the changing ideologies, values and perspectives on agrarian futures could also be a reference point in education for food sovereignty peasant communities – not assuming family farming practices are inherently agroecological in the light of increasing agricultural policies that premised on cheap flows of agro-chemicals. ROPPA's knowledge sharing platforms including the periodic farmers' university and the Woman's college could explore these possibilities. Addressing values that are shaped by the broad-socio economic contexts of peasants may go beyond the capacities and focus of food sovereignty movements, but it reminds us that perhaps the building of food sovereignty must go hand-in-hand with general socio-economic improvements and equitable access to social infrastructure for the rural working poor.

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