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Rural Social Movements and Diálogo de Saberes: Territories, Food Sovereignty, and Agroecology

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Abstract[1]

While many contemporary rural social movements once argued for increased industrial farming inputs and machinery for their members, the past few years have seen an accelerating shift toward the promotion of agroecology as an alternative to the so-called Green Revolution. In this paper we both describe this phenomenon in its historically specific context, and provide some theoretical tools for understanding it. From the construction of the *food sovereignty* paradigm by the transnational social movement *La Via Campesina,* which was critically shaped by the encounter and *diálogo de saberes* (dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing) between different rural cultures (East, West, North and South; Peasant, Farmer and Rural Proletarian; etc.), and by the increasingly politicized confrontation with neoliberal reality and agribusiness in its most recent phase of expansion. We borrow the concepts of material and immaterial territories from Brazilian critical geography to understand both *agroecology-as-practice and agroecology-as-farming* in the growing territorial dispute between rural social movements and agribusiness, and the role played in these disputes by both as elements in the (re)construction of peasant territories. The paper provides examples of the construction of peasant territories and partial re-peasantization through agroecology, as part of the search by peasants for relative autonomy from input, credit and output markets around the world.

Introduction

While many contemporary rural social movements once argued for increased industrial farming inputs and machinery for their members, the past few years have seen an accelerating shift toward the promotion of *agroecology* as an alternative to the so-called Green Revolution (Altieri and Toledo 2011, Rosset et al. 2011). In this essay we both describe this phenomenon in the historically specific context of the transnational peasant movement *La Via Campesina* (LVC), and provide some theoretical tools for understanding it.

The history of this evolution passes through the construction and elaboration of the *food sovereignty* paradigm by LVC, and has been critically molded by the on-going internal encounter and *diálogo de saberes* (DS) —dialog among different knowledges or "ways of knowing"—between diverse peasant cultures (East, West, North and South; peasant, family farmer, indigenous and rural proletarian; farmer and farm worker; etc.). This encounter and dialog has been shaped by the increasingly politicized confrontation with neoliberal reality and agribusiness in its most recent phase of expansion (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; Rosset in press). In this process, member organizations have been informed by their experiences with *movement forms* of agroecology (i.e. *campesino-a-campesino* or farmer-to-farmer processes) and with their growing number

[1] This paper is under review at the *Journal of Peasant Studies*.

of agroecology and political leadership peasant training schools in the Americas, Africa and Asia.

We provide a theoretical framework for understanding and interrogating this growing interest in agroecology among rural social movements on all continents, situated in the neo-Narodnik tradition of the heterodox Marxist school of peasant studies (Sevilla Guzman 2007). In particular we use the work of critical geographers in Brazil (Fernandes 2008a,b, 2009) on the material and immaterial territories that are increasingly disputed between rural social movements and agribusiness (along with other agents of land grabbing similarly fueled by transnational financial capital), and the role played in these disputes by both *agroecology-in-practice* and *agroecology-as-framing* as elements in the (re)construction of peasant territories. We draw on the work of Enrique Leff (2004, 2011) and of agroecology pedagogues from an LVC member organization, the Landless Workers Movement of Brazil (MST), to explain the roles of DS in collective construction of mobilizing frames (Benford and Snow 2000)—in immaterial territory—for resistance, and for promoting agroecology (Tardin, 2006; Toná, 2008; do Nascimento, 2010; Guhur, 2010). Finally, we draw on the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) and his heirs on critical peasant pedagogy to explain the movement form of agroecology, and its role in bringing agroecology to scale in peasant (re)territorialization.

We compare concrete examples of the construction of peasant territories and partial re-peasantization (in the sense of van der Ploeg 2008, 2010) through agroecology, as part of the search by peasants for relative autonomy from input, credit and output markets around the world.

Disputed Territories

The research of Brazilian critical geographer Bernardo Mançano Fernandes on conflicts between peasants and agribusiness led him to develop a theory of contested territories that helps us to understand current territorial conflicts (Fernandes 2008a,b, 2009, Fernandes et al. 2010). He argues that social classes and relationships generate different territories and spaces that are reproduced under conditions of continual conflict; as a result, there are spaces of domination and spaces of resistance (Fernandes 2008a,b). Territorial disputes are carried out in all possible dimensions: economic, social, political, cultural, theoretical and ideological (Massey 1994, Escobar 2004, Bezner 2007, Fernandez 2008a,b, Martinez Torres, forthcoming). In the case of rural areas, these disputes are exemplified by the struggles between grassroots social movements and corporate food regimes over what he calls both *material* and *immaterial* territories (Fernandes 2009).

The dispute over material territories refers to the struggle to access, control, use and shape, or configure, land and physical territory consisting of communities, infrastructure, soil, water, biodiversity, air, mountains, valleys, plains, rivers, and coasts.

Immaterial territory refers to the terrain of ideas, of theoretical constructs, of interpretive frameworks, and he posits that there are no material territories that are not associated with immaterial territories. Therefore the dispute over real and tangible territories and the resources they contain, necessarily goes hand in hand with the dispute over immaterial territories, or the space of ideology and ideas (Bezner 2007, McMichael 2007, Fernandes 2009). Contestation over immaterial territories is characterized by the formulation and defense of concepts, theories, paradigms, and explanations, all of which are used to convince others. In other words, the power to interpret and to determine the definition and content of concepts is itself a territory in dispute (Fernandes 2009).

On one hand are agribusiness and its ideological and financial support infrastructure in the World Bank, governments, finance banks, think tanks, and elite universities, as well as advertising agencies and corporate media. In what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called "monocultures of knowledge" (Santos 2009), formal, instrumental and economic rationality is used as a tool for domination, control, "efficiency" and economization of the world. They create and put forth a framing language of efficiency, productivity, economies of scale, trade liberalization, free markets, and "feeding the world," to build the consensus needed in society to gain control over territories and (re)configure them for the needs of industrial agriculture and profit-taking (Nisbet and Huge 2007).

These processes have been aided by the recent decades of neoliberal policies – characterized by deregulation, privatization, cutbacks of essential services, open markets and free trade–, and have led to a centralized pattern based on corporate producers of inputs, processors and trading companies, with production that is de-contextualized and de-linked from the specificities of local ecosystems and social relations (van der Ploeg 2008). The unifying, economistic and "scientific" rational is not only divorced from any social commitment to solve real problems of real people and the real environment (Guiso 2000), but imposes a knowledge monoculture that annuls diverse local and traditional knowledges, transforming these into what Santos (2009) calls "absences" (Sevilla Guzmán 2013). This logic is of course one of the driving forces behind the planetary environmental and social crises.

In this system production and consumption are de-linked in both time and space, while operations act on a global scale with strategic alliances between input suppliers, processers, traders, supermarket chains and finance banks to form agrifood complexes called the *Corporate Food System* or *Regime* (McMichael 2009, 2010) or *Agrifood Empires* (van der Ploeg 2008, 2010). The recent boom of export crops, agrofuels, large-scale strip mining, and industrial monoculture plantations (Barney 2007, Bebbington 2007, Stédile 2008, Emanuelli et at. 2009, Rosset 2009, McMichael 2010), is putting

agribusiness[2] and other sectors that exploit rural resources in direct and growing conflict with the peasantry and other rural peoples over the social and economic appropriation of nature (Fernandes 2008a,b, Gerber et al. 2009; Sousa 2009; Sevilla Guzmán 2013).

On the other hand, social movements comprised of peasants and other rural peoples are actively defending material (and immaterial) spaces from, and contesting them with, these Food Empires. Since the Corporate Food Regime is typically transnational in nature, peasant social movements have increasing organized themselves into transnational alliances, the most important and largest example of which is LVC (Desmarais 2007, Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2008, 2010). LVC is a global alliance of organizations of family- and peasant farmers, indigenous people, landless peasants and farm workers, rural women, and rural youth, representing at least 200 million families worldwide. LVC is a global "space of encounter " among different rural and peasant cultures, whether East and West, North and South, landed and landless, or Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Animist, Christian and Atheist (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010, Rosset in press).

Diálogo de Saberes (DS) and Food Sovereignty

For the purpose of this discussion, we will define *Diálogo de Saberes* (DS) as:

> A collective construction of emergent meaning based on dialog between people with different historically specific experiences, knowledges, and ways of knowing, particularly when faced with new collective challenges in a changing world. Such dialog is based on exchange among differences and on collective reflection, often leading to emergent re-contextualization and re-signification of knowledges and meanings related to histories, traditions, territorialities, experiences, knowledges, processes and actions. The new collective understandings, meanings and knowledges may form the basis for collective actions of resistance and construction of new processes.[3]

In this sense, LVC itself is a space where an enormous (DS) takes place, which puts the (re)appropriation and sharing of knowledges (the absences of Sousa) into play. These lead to emergent discourses that question the dominion of mercantile and objectivizing rationality, the commodification of nature and economization of the world. In contrast to the totalitarian and uniform dominant world view, in the dialog of the absences the movements and organizations are constantly creating new, emergent knowledges and collective readings of reality (Sousa 2009, Calle Collado et al. 2011, Sevilla Guzmán

[2] Although transnational agribusinesses already had a major presence in Latin America, for example, since at least since the 1980s (Burbach and Flynn 1980, Teubal 1987, Marsden and Whatmore 1994), this new wave of investment is much larger due to the bigger injection of crisis-driven capital.
[3] Elaborated by the authors.

2013). These come from dialog among the veritable "ecology of knowledges" that exist among the excluded people, and that are closely linked to and identified with their specific territories (Sousa 2009, Cárdenas Grajales 2010).

Enrique Leff (2004:15-24, translated from Spanish) tells us that:

> Theories and scientific disciplines construct paradigms that create epistemological obstacles to the integration of knowledges outside their disciplines… Since metaphysics, dominant thinking has reified the world, enclosing it with rigid concepts and categories (being, nature, thing, mind, body)… *Meaning* in the world, is reactivated in a potent movement unleashed through the DS, which is the exact opposite of the desire to fix the [unchanging] meaning of concepts in dictionaries and glossaries… In DS, beings and knowledges from outside the time and space of positivist knowledge relate with one another.

DS begins with the recognition, recovery and valorization of autoctonous, local and/or traditional knowledges, all of which contribute their experiences (Leff 2011).

> DS is an opening and a call to subaltern knowledges, especially to those that sustained traditional cultures and today resignify their identities and position themselves in a dialog of resistance to the dominant culture that imposes its supreme knowledge. DS is a dialog with interlocutors have been stripped of their own words and memory, traditional knowledges that have been buried by the imposition of modernity, and the dialog becomes an investigation, an exegesis, an hermeneutics of erased texts; it is a therapeutic politics to return the words and the meaning of languages whose flow has been blocked (Leff 2004:26)

In LVC these knowledges have been able to dialog with each other, and also with "scientific" and "expert" opinion in form of technical staff and allies invited to internal meetings, creating what Guiso (2000) calls a collective hermeneutics. In the words of an indigenous leader who participated in the First American Continental Encounter of Agroecology Trainers of LVC[4],

> Your Western *cosmovision* is an interesting one, and we could learn a lot from it. But first you must accept that is in fact a cosmovision, one among many, and that you can also learn from our cosmovisions. Once you accept that, we can have a horizontal dialog.

The DS between the territorially-specific indigenous worlds and non-indigenous peoples inside LVC has profoundly affected attitudes toward Nature. The non-indigenous organizations have learned from indigenous people about the importance of thinking in

[4] 10-20 August 2009, Barinas, Venezuela.

terms of "territory" rather than just "land," and about the imperative to live in harmony with and to take good care of the Mother Earth. The indigenous people inside LVC were the first to sound the alert about climate change, now a priority issue, and their influence is felt strongly in the growing rejection of industrial farming practices that "damage the Mother Earth" and in the embracing of related rationale of agroecology to restore degraded soils and ecosystems. This harkens back to Leff's affirmation that: "DS is inscribed in an environmental rationality that leads to the deconstruction of the totalitarian globalization of the market, opening the way to construction of sustainable societies from the starting point of a diversity of significations of nature" (2004:16).

Leff (2004) distinguishes DS from concertations or stakeholder mediations where the goal and the outcome reflect some kind of compromise solution, whose mid-point "positions" reflect the geometry of power, and certainly produce nothing new. In truly horizontal DS, even when grassroots groups dialog with intellectuals or scientists, "new theoretical and political and discourses are invented that interweave, hybridize, mimic, and confront each other in a dialog between communities and academy, between theory and praxis, between indigenous and scientific knowledge" (16). No "average position" emerges from this kind of DS, but rather "notions of development, biodiversity, territory, and autonomy emerge to configure strategies that mobilize social actions that legitimize rights which reinvent identities associated with the social re-appropriation of nature" (Ibid). As Sousa (2009) puts it, from the dialogs among the absences come "emergences." Thus from the dialog inside LVC, and between LVC and both other rural peoples (Rosset in press) as well as with intellectuals and scientists, has come a series of emergent and mobilizing new ideas and processes. These range from emergent ways to understand changes in historical contexts, new processes to collectively transform reality in material territories, and new shared interpretive frames (in immaterial territory) for internal mobilization and for the battle of ideas in the larger public imagination. Sevilla Guzmán (2013) and Calle Collado et al. (2011) have placed food sovereignty and new visions of agroecology among the "emergences" from contemporary social movement dialogs.

Food sovereignty emerged from the grand DS that is LVC, as a common framework that allows diversity and takes the specificity of each place into account. When farmer and peasant leaders from the Americas, Europe and Asia met each other in the early 1990s, they came with the expectation of encountering strange beings with whom they would have little of nothing in common. But through DS they discovered both their true diversity and the fact that they had common problems and common enemies from beyond national borders, and that they needed to struggle together. They did not settle for what the preexisting concept of "food security" which they considered mediocre (Rosset 2003), but rather developed food sovereignty as something completely new and most importantly, as a banner for joint struggle (Desmarais 2007; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). The concept emerged from on-going internal dialogues that began in the early 1990s, and was further elaborated at the International Forum for Food Sovereignty

hosted by LVC in Nyéléni, Mali[5], in 2007, to which LVC invited sister international movements of indigenous people, fisher folk, women, environmentalists, scholars, consumers and trade unions for a giant DS. Food sovereignty was defined there as:

> The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal-fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations" (Nyéléni Declaration 2007).[6]

Key pillars in the construction of food sovereignty for LVC are: agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory (Rosset in press); the defense of national and local markets; and agroecology (LVC 2010a). In fact, the agroecology consensus inside LVC, built through DS over the past 5 years, sees agroecology as mere technicism of little transcendence if divorced from food sovereignty, which is the larger frame that gives it meaning (Rosset et al. 2011, LVC 2013).

DS and Agroecology

When land is acquired through struggle, it is often degraded land or, when peasants have used industrial farming practices, they have themselves incurred significant degradation. Faced with this reality, peasants are finding ways to manage or recover soils and agroecosystems that have been severely degraded by chemicals, machines, excessive mechanization, and the loss of functional biodiversity caused by the indiscriminate use of Green Revolution technologies (Lal 2009). Severe degradation means that even the ability to mask underlying causes with ever higher doses of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is limited (Marenya and Barrett, 2009), and the cost of

[5] See http://www.nyeleni.org [Accessed 31 May 2013].
[6] Available at: http://www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290 [Accessed 31 May 2013].

doing so is in any event becoming prohibitive, as prices of petroleum-derived farm inputs have soared in recent years (Economic Research Service 2011). This often leaves agroecology as the only, or best alternative open to small farmers (LVC 2010a).

The fact that agroecology is based on applying principles in ways that depend on local realities means that the local knowledge and ingenuity of farmers must necessarily take a front seat, as farmers cannot blindly follow pesticide and fertilizer recommendations prescribed on a recipe basis by extension agents or salesmen. Methods in which the extensionist or agronomist is the key actor and farmers are passive are, in the best of cases, limited to the number of peasant families that can be effectively attended to by each technician, because there is little or no self-catalyzed dynamic among farmers themselves to carry innovations well beyond the last technician. Thus these cases are finally limited by the budget, that is, by how many technicians can be hired. Many project-based rural development NGOs face a similar problem. When the project funding cycle comes to an end, virtually everything reverts to the pre-project state, with little lasting effect (Rosset et al. 2011).

In reaction to this reality, a form of DS that has become a central methodology for promoting farmer innovation and horizontal sharing and learning is the *Campesino-a-Campesino* (farmer-to-farmer, or peasant-to-peasant) methodology (CAC). While farmers innovating and sharing goes back to time immemorial, the contemporary and formalized version was developed locally in Guatemala and spread through Mesoamerica beginning in the 1970s (Holt-Giménez 2006). CAC is a *Freirian* horizontal communication methodology (*sensu* Freire 1970), or social process methodology, that is based on farmer-promoters who have innovated new solutions to problems that are common among many farmers or have recovered/rediscovered older traditional solutions, and who use their own farms as their classrooms to share them with their peers. Dialog takes place when visiting the farm of a peer, seeing, touching, feeling, even tasting an alternative practice as it is actually functioning on that farm, allowing peasants to imagine and translate it into their own vision. Later, on their own farm, they may test it out and/or adapt it in their own way, with their own creativity, sometimes recreating the practice but sometimes coming up with completely new practices/solutions.

Conventional top-down extension can be demobilizing for farmers, because the objective of technical experts all too often has been to replace peasant knowledge with purchased chemical inputs, seeds and machinery, in a top-down process where education is more like *domestication* (Freire 1973, Rosset et al. 2011). CAC is mobilizing, as peasants become the protagonists in their own processes of generating and sharing their own (and appropriated) technologies. CAC is a participatory method based on local peasant needs, culture, and environmental conditions that unleashes knowledge, enthusiasm and protagonism as a way of discovering, recognizing, taking advantage of, and socializing the rich pool of family and community agricultural knowledge which is linked to their specific historical conditions and identities (Machín Sosa et al. 2010,

Rosset et al. 2011). In other words, it is a methodology that is based on, and facilitates DS.

Another method developed by member organizations of LVC in South America to work on agroecology is *Diálogo de Saberes en el Encuentro de Culturas* ("DS in the Encounter between Cultures"). It is somewhat formal methodology based on Freire's (1984) dialogic methods for recognizing the different cultures and cosmovisions present in a given territory, and facilitating a process by which they collectively construct their understanding and positions (Tardin 2006; Toná 2009; do Nascimento 2010; Guhur 2010). The method is "capable of creating horizontal relationships between technicians and peasants, between peasant and peasants, and between them and the society as a whole, based on the philosophies, politics, techniques and methodologies that go hand in hand with their emancipation and liberation" (Tardin, 2006:1-2). The method is based on a horizontal dialogue between peers that have different knowledges and cosmovisions. They share their life histories, and engage in collective exercises to characterize the surrounding environment and space, to collect information (data) about the reality in that space, to systematically analyze that information, and using Freirian (Freire 1984) generating questions move toward collective intervention to transform the reality, followed by a new sequence of reflection.

In a book written by, and largely for, LVC, Machín Sosa et al. (2010:16, translated from Spanish) similarly note that "for the social movements that make up La Via Campesina, the concept of agroecology goes much farther that just ecological-productive principles," as can be seen clearly in the LVC document excerpted about.

In 2010, LVC defined what it called "sustainable peasant agriculture" as follows:

> We can find examples of sustainable peasant and family farm agriculture all over the planet, though the names we use vary greatly from one place to another, whether agroecology, organic farming, natural farming, low external input sustainable agriculture, or others. In La Via Campesina we do not want to say that one name is better than another, but rather we want to specify the key principles that we defend. Truly sustainable peasant agriculture comes from a combination of the recovery and revalorization of traditional peasant farming methods, and the innovation of new ecological practices… We do not believe that the mere substitution of 'bad' inputs for 'good' ones, without touching the structure of monoculture, is sustainable… The application of these principles in the complex and diverse realities of peasant agriculture requires the active appropriation of farming systems by peasants ourselves, using our local knowledge, ingenuity, and ability to innovate. We are talking about relatively small farms managed by peasant families and communities. Small farms permit the development of functional biodiversity with diversified production and the integration of crops, trees and livestock. In this type of agriculture, there is less

> or no need for external inputs, as everything can be produced on the farm itself. (LVC 2010a:2-3)

The last 5 years have been a period of rapid development of an agroecology process in LVC and its member organizations. Part of the process has consisted of holding regional and continental "Encounters of Agroecology Trainers." These have been held in the Americas (2009 and 2011), Asia (2010), Southern, Central and Eastern Africa (2011), West Africa (2011) and Europe (2012), as well as a first Global Encounter of Peasant Seed Farmers, held in Bali (2011). The declarations from some of these meetings illustrate the growing place of agroecology in LVC (see LVC 2011a,b,c for examples).

This process has served several important purposes so far. One has been to help LVC itself to collectively realize the sheer quantity of on-going experiences with agroecology and sustainable peasant agriculture that are currently underway inside member organizations at the national and regional levels. The vast majority of organizations either already have some sort of internal program to promote agroecology, or they are currently discussing how to create one. Another purpose these encounters are serving is to elaborate detailed work plans to support these on-going experiences and to link them with one another in a horizontal exchange and learning process. It also has been the space to collectively construct a shared vision of what agroecology means to LVC; that is the philosophy, political content and rationale that links organizations in this work.

Taking agroecology to scale by La Via Campesina

La Via Campesina incorporates large numbers of peasant families in self-organized processes that can dramatically increase the rate of innovation and the spread and adoption of innovations, and has made possible the scaling-out (broad adoption over wide areas and by many farmers) and scaling-up (institutionalizing supportive policies for alternatives) successful experiences (von der Weid 2000, Holt-Giménez 2001, Pachicho and Fujisaka 2004, Altieri and Nicholls 2008b, Rosset et al 2011). This scaling up of agroecology supports the findings of Wezel et al. (2009) who argued that the word *agroecology* is variously used to refer to a *science*, a *movement* and a *practice*. In this section we present some of these successful cases of agroecology by member organizations of La Via Campesina.

Member organizations have in recent years set up CAC agroecology programs in many countries in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, have produced agroecology training materials, and sponsored seed fairs and seed saving and exchange networks in a number of regions and countries. One enormously successful national program has been developed by the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), a member of LVC, in Cuba. They adopted CAC social methodology along with a conscious and explicit goal of building a grassroots movement for agroecology inside the national organization (extensively detailed in Machín Sosa at al. 2010 and Rosset et al. 2011). In less than ten

years the process of transforming systems of production into agroecological integrated and diversified farming systems had spread to more than one third of all peasant families in Cuba. During the same time period when peasants became agroecological, the total contribution of peasant production to national production jumped dramatically, with more autonomy due to reduced use of farm chemical and purchased off-farm inputs, and greater resiliency to climate shocks (Machín Sosa at al. 2010, Altieri and Toledo 2011, Rosset et al. 2011).

LVC has not only organized national and international exchanges so that farmers can see for themselves and learn from the best cases, but it has also recently begun to identify, self-study, document, analyze, and horizontally share the lessons of the best cases of farmer-led climate-robust agroecology and food sovereignty experience. One example of this is the Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZNBF) in Southern India. A grassroots agroecological movement has grown rapidly, and cuts across the bases of some member organizations of LVC, which is now facilitating exchanges with farmers from other countries across Asia (Palekar undated, Babu 2008). The ZNBF movement is partially a response to the acute indebtedness in which many India peasants find themselves. The debt is due to the high production costs of conventional Green Revolution-style farming, as translated into budgets for bank credit, and is the underlying cause of the well-known epidemic of farmer suicides in that country (Mohanty 2005). The idea of ZBNF is to use agroecological practices based totally on resources found on the farm, like mulching, organic amendments, and diversification, to break the stranglehold of debt on farming households by purchasing zero off-farm inputs. According to LVC farmer leaders in South Asia, several hundred thousand peasant families have joined the movement.

A number of LVC member organizations in the Americas, Asia and Africa have peasant owned and run cooperative seed enterprises that multiply and distribute local seed varieties, and some of these and other member organizations has pressure and cooperated with other actors and local governments to open farmers' markets for ecologically produced food, and experimented with other direct-sale to the consumer systems. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Organic Smallholder Farmer's Forum (ZIMSOFF) is a recent member of LVC. The current president of ZIMSOFF is an agroecology promoter from Shashe in the Masvingo agrarian reform cluster. Shashe is an intentional community created by formerly landless peasants who engaged in a two-year land occupation before being awarded the land by the governments' often maligned but basically misunderstood land reform program (see Scoones et al. 2010, Cliffe et al. 2011, and Moyo 2011). A cluster of families in the community are committed to practicing and promoting diversified agroecological farming that transformed the former cattle ranches area into the sustain of 365 small holder peasant farming families and set up the Shashe Endogenous Development Training Centre. In 2011 they hosted a regional agroecology encounter of LVC organizations from Southern, Central and Eastern Africa in which all participants were able to "to witness first hand the successful combination of agrarian reform with organic farming and agroecology carried out by local small-holder farming families" (LVC 2011a). They also decided to establish an international

agroecology training school in Shashe, to train peasant activists from LVC organizations in the region as agroecology promoters using the CAC method. Through ZIMSOFF they are having national impact and through LVC, international impact.

LVC has also created political leadership training academies in many countries and several regions to prepare peasant leaders to pressure governments for needed policy changes. It has taken steps to engage on an on-going, critical but constructive way with "peasant friendly" policy makers in local, provincial and national governments in diverse countries, and with select programs and functionaries in international agencies, to promote the implementation of alternative, more agroecology-, climate-, farmer- and consumer-friendly public policies. In countries with less friendly governments and policy makers, member organizations have organized massive mobilization political pressure to encourage them to more seriously consider alternatives.

In the continual dispute over the immaterial territory of agroecology, the latest arena is that of solutions to climate change. LVC has been actively denouncing so-called "false solutions" to climate change –agrofuels, GMOs, carbon markets and REDD and REDD+ (LVC 2010b), and has more recently sounded the alarm about the possible cooptation of agroecology by the World Bank and others via the creation of soil carbon markets, with slogans like "Our Carbon is Not for Sale" and "Agroecology is Not for Sale" (LVC, 2011d).

LVC believes that it now has a sufficient number of pioneering experiences underway –particularly in training– to be able to effectively synergize them and achieve a significantly enhanced multiplier effect and scaling-out and scaling-up of agroecology by integrating and networking them into regional systems for exchanges of experiences and lessons, mutual support, and coordinated lobby and pressure work to push governments to implement policies more favorable to peasant farming, agroecology and food sovereignty, and by extension the construction of peasant territories.

The growing tendency to promote agroecological farming is part of (re)configuring a space as a clearly peasant or family farm territory. This promotion is part of the reconfiguration of both material and the immaterial territory. For example, Martínez-Torres (2012, and forthcoming) has recently analyzed the case of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil, one of the most important and militant peasant organizations in the Americas, and a leading member of LVC. In the past, the MST appealed to public opinion to back its occupations of the idle lands of absentee landlords based on the injustice of a few having more land than they could use while others went landless. But recent waves of transnational investment have capitalized Brazilian agribusiness, which in turn is turning once idle land into export, pulp and agrofuel monocrop plantations of soy, sugar cane, *Eucalyptus* and pine, with associated environmental degradation caused by excessive use of chemicals and heavy machines, and the elimination of biodiversity. As idle lands dry up, the landless are left only with the option of occupying the "productive" lands of agribusiness. As a result, they have had to re-frame their arguments as they seek the support of public opinion. Now they

do so by contrasting the ecological and social wasteland of agribusiness plantations ("green deserts") with a pastoral vision of agroecologically-farmed peasant lands, conserving biodiversity (similar to the theoretical arguments of Perfecto et al. 2009), keeping families in the countryside, and producing healthy food for local markets ("food sovereignty").

This example shows how social movements must promote and implement agroecology in a much more overtly politicized and ideological manner than do other actors in the sphere of alternative farming practices, like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers, government agencies and the private companies. We say more overtly political and ideological, because any technological choice brings political and ideological baggage with it. But the fact that their use is politicized (agroecology-as-farming), in no way means that the families who belong to these organizations and movements are not engaged in everyday practices of cultivation and harvest (agroecology as-practice), nor that the organizations themselves are not involved in the complicated task of building processes to promote and support the transformation of productive practices. In promoting the transition from Green Revolution-style farming – in which families depend on input markets–, to more autonomous agroecological farming, and thus reconfiguring spaces as peasant territories, social movements engage in the process of *re-peasantization*.

Re-Peasantization and Agroecology

Jan Dowe van der Ploeg (2008) has put forth a theoretical proposition about the peasantries of today. Rather than defining "peasant," he chooses to define what he calls "the peasant condition," or the "peasant principle," characterized by the constant struggle to build autonomy:

> Central to the peasant condition, then, is the struggle for autonomy that takes place in a context characterized by dependency relations, marginalization and deprivation. It aims at and materializes as the creation and development of a self-controlled and self-managed resource base, which in turn allows for those forms of co-production of man and living nature that interact with the market, allow for survival and for further prospects and feed back into and strengthen the resource base, improve the process of co-production, enlarge autonomy and, thus reduce dependency… Finally, patterns of cooperation are present which regulate and strengthen these interrelations (van der Ploeg 2008:23).

Two characteristics stand out on this definition. The first is that peasants seek to engage in co-production with nature in ways that strengthen their resource base (soil, biodiversity, etc.). The second is precisely the struggle for (relative) autonomy, via the reduction of dependence in a world characterized by inequality and unequal exchange. According to van der Ploeg (2010), peasants may pursue agroecology to the extent that it permits them to strengthen their resource base and become more autonomous of

input and credit markets (and thus indebtedness) while improving their conditions. This use of agroecology to move along a continuum from dependency toward relative autonomy – from being the entrepreneurial farmers they in some cases had become, toward being peasants again – is one axis of what he calls *re-peasantization* (van der Ploeg 2008). Another axis of re-peasantization is the conquest of land and territory from agribusiness and other large landowners, whether by land reform, land occupations, or other mechanisms.

The overall process of re-peasantization is analogous to the (re)configuration of space as peasant territory, and agroecology can be and increasingly is a part of both (Martinez-Torres, 2012, and forthcoming). When farmers undergo a transition from input-dependent farming to agroecology based on local resources, they are becoming "more peasant." Agroecological practices are similar to, and frequently based upon, traditional peasant practices, so in this transition re-peasantization takes place. And in marking the difference between the ecological and social wasteland of agribusiness land, and ecological farming on land recovered by peasants, they are reconfiguring territories as peasant territories, as they re-peasantize them through agroecology.

Conversely, when peasants are drawn into greater dependence, use of Green Revolution technologies, market relations, and the debt cycle, this is one axis of *de-peasantization.* Another axis of de-peasantization is when land grabbing corporations or states displace peasants from their land and territories, and reconfigure these as territories for agribusiness, or mining, tourism, or infrastructure development (Rosset 2011, Margulis 2013, McKeon 2013, McMichael 2013, Sassen 2013). Meanwhile, re-peasantization is based on reducing external dependence (Sesia 2003), part of an overall process that Barkin et al. (2009:40) call a "new communitarian rurality" because it also includes a renewed emphasis on cooperation and strengthening rural communities.

The twin processes of re- and de-peasantization move back and forth over time as circumstances change (van der Ploeg, 2008). During the heyday of the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 70s, the peasantry was incorporated *en masse* into the system, many of them becoming entrepreneurial family farmers (de Janvry, 1981). But today, faced with growing debt and market-driven exclusion, the net tendency is the reverse, according to van der Ploeg (2008, 2010). He presents convincing data to show that even those farmers in Northern countries most integrated into the market are in fact taking (at least small) steps toward becoming "more peasant" through relatively greater autonomy from banks, input and machinery suppliers, and corporate middlemen. Some even become organic farmers. In other words, there is net retreat from some or many elements of the market (Muñoz 2008).

Numerical re-peasantization can be seen in the end of the long-term decline in the number of farms and the number of people dedicated to agriculture, and even a visible up-tick, in countries like the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2010) and Brazil (Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário 2009). In fact what one observes is an increase

in both the number of small family-size farms and an increase in large-scale commercial farms (agribusiness), with a decline in the numbers of intermediate size classes. In other words, in today's world, we are essentially losing the middle (entrepreneurial farmers) to both re-peasantization and de-peasantization.[7]

We are increasingly witness to a global territorial conflict, material and immaterial, between agribusiness and peasant resistance (van der Ploeg 2010, Martínez-Torres forthcoming). In this context we see the post-1992 emergence of LVC as arguably the world's largest transnational social movement (Desmarais 2007, Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010), promoting agroecologically diversified farming as a key element in resistance, re-peasantization and the reconfiguration of territories (Sevilla Guzmán and Alier 2006, Sevilla Guzmán 2007).

In a document about the internal agroecology process, produced by LVC for its IV International conference, we can see elements of territorial disputes, and DS as part (re)configuring peasant territories and re-peasantization through agroecology:

> As women, men, elders and youth, peasants, indigenous people, landless laborers, pastoralists and other rural peoples, we are struggling to defend and to recover our land and territories to preserve our way of life, our communities, and our culture. We are also defending and recovering our territories because the agroecological peasant agriculture we will practice in them is a basic building block in the construction of food sovereignty and is the first line in our defense of the Mother Earth. We are committed to producing food for people; the people of our communities, peoples and nations, rather than biomass for cellulose or agrofuels or exports to other countries. The indigenous people among us, and all of our rural traditions and cultures, teach respect for the Mother Earth, and we commit to recovering our ancestral farming knowledge and appropriating elements of agroecology (which in fact is largely derived from our accumulated knowledge) so that we may produce in harmony with, and take good care of, our Mother Earth. Ours is the "model of life," of farms with farmers, of rural communities with families, of countrysides with trees and forests, mountains, lakes, rivers and coasts, and it stands in stark opposition to the corporate "model of death," of agriculture without farmers and families, of industrial monoculture, of rural areas without trees, of green deserts, and of wastelands poisoned with agrotoxtics and transgenics. We are actively confronting capital and agribusiness, disputing land and territory with them. When we control territory, we seek to practice agroecological peasant agriculture based on peasant seed systems in it, which is demonstrably better for

[7] Nevertheless, this somewhat stylized dichotomy should in no way be taken to imply that there no longer are a very significant number of medium-scale farmers who still maintain both agribusiness and peasant identities. There are.

> the Mother Earth in that it helps to Cool the Planet, and it has been shown to be more productive per unit area than industrial monoculture, offering the potential to feed the world with safe and healthy, locally produced food, while guaranteeing a life with dignity for ourselves and future generations of rural peoples. Food sovereignty based on agroecological peasant agriculture offers solutions to the food, climate, and other crises of capitalism that confront humanity [LVC 2013:69-70].

It is clear that LVC sees agroecology as part of the territorial dispute with agribusiness, and that *agroecology-in-practice* is part of producing food while taking care of the Mother Earth, and making a territory into a *peasant territory*, or *re-peasantizing* it, while *agroecology-as-framing* is critical to defending those peasant territories in public opinion. This excerpt also highlights the critical played by the dialog (DS) among different rural traditions and cultures, with particular reference to indigenous cosmovision.

Conclusions

In recent decades we have witnessed the growing quantity, coherence and credibility of old and new voices from rural areas in international arenas, and a growing search through DS for collective meanings and actions in response to the crisis at a planetary scale that industrial agriculture and the commodification of nature have wrought in the world. Here we see both the co-production with nature and the construction of peasant/indigenous territories, both material and immaterial, where the Mother Earth is defended rather than injured. To quote Enrique Leff (2004:23):

> The real potential of DS is not in the generation of "consensus" among perspectives that erases difference through "rational" communication and negotiation among "interests," but rather its capacity to produce dialectical synthesis. DS is real communication between beings constituted and differentiated by their knowledges… a Pleiad of cultural beings constituted by their own identities, each with their "denominations of origin," yet at the same time these are reinvented as they differentiate themselves (by resisting and desisting) from the unitary global thought and identity. This encounter between beings in the ideology of knowledges is the spark that ignites human creativity, where cultural diversity leads to discursive innovation and the hybridization of rationalities and meanings that produce branching processes that weave together diverse pathways of thought and [collective] action.

Above all, the shared vision that is emerging through on-going DS sees agroecology as a socially activating tool for the transformation of rural realities through collective action, and as a key building block in the construction of food sovereignty.

Rural social movements through DS respond to the discursive battle over immaterial territories with framing arguments (see Benford and Snow 2000) based on the benefits of family-based diversified agroecological farming, in terms of feeding the world with healthy, local food, good stewardship of the rural environment, the preservation of cultural heritages and the peasant or family farm way of life, and resilience to climate change (see Borras et al. 2008, LVC 2009, 2010a, Martinez and Rosset 2010, Starr et al. 2011). At the same time they put forth a critique of agribusiness and industrial agriculture for producing unhealthy food and generating inequality, greenhouse gases, hunger, environmental devastation, GMO contamination, pesticide poisoning, the destruction and loss of rural cultures and livelihoods. In this struggle to (re)configure the immaterial territory of ideas and ideology they seek to (re)construct a consensus in society for the defense of peasant and indigenous material territories against corporate land grabbing, build support for land occupations by landless peasants, and change public policies toward food sovereignty, based on agrarian reform, local markets, and ecological farming.

Van der Ploeg's (2008, 2010) emphasis on the struggle for autonomy is echoed time and again, as organizations and families stress the advantages offered by agroecology in terms of building relative autonomy from input and credit markets (by using on-farm resources rather than purchased inputs), from food markets (greater self-provisioning through mixing subsistence and market crops), and even by re-directing outputs toward local and ecological or organic markets where farmers have more influence and control (and thus greater autonomy from global markets). Not only are these clear steps toward re-peasantization, but they are increasingly part of creating peasant territories.

Here it is important to note that agroecology is playing an increasingly central role for social movements like La Via Campesina in both arenas of territorial dispute. In the discursive struggle, social movements contrast agroecological farming by peasants and family farmers with the destructive practices and unhealthy food produced by industrial agriculture and agribusiness. This becomes more difficult when agribusiness responds with organic, GMO-free, and other types of "labeling games" (Martinez-Torres 2006), in turn forcing social movements to draw ever finer and more political distinctions between "true agroecology" and corporate "green washing" (see for example, LVC 2011d).

To conclude with La Via Campesina own words:

> One of our tasks has been to come to a common understanding of what agroecology and agroecological peasant agriculture mean to us. This is particularly important now because agroecology itself is under dispute by corporations, governments and the World Bank, with the scientists and intellectuals who knowingly or unwittingly work for them. This neoliberal attempt to co-opt agroecology can be seen in government "organic agriculture" programs that promote monoculture-based organic exports for niche markets,

> and subsidizing companies to produce organic inputs that are even more expensive than the agrotoxics whose costs led to the debt-trap so many rural families find themselves in. It can also been seen in the so-called "climate smart agriculture" of the World Bank that, similar to REDD for forests, would allow TNCs to become the owners of the soil carbon in peasant fields, dictating the production practices to be permitted, all as a pretext to allow large corporate polluters to keep polluting and heating the planet. We believe that the origin of agroecology lies in the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of rural peoples, organized in a dialog among different kinds of knowledge ("*diálogo de saberes*") to produce the "science," movement, and practice of agroecology. Like seeds, then, agroecology is a heritage of rural peoples, and we place it at the service of humanity and Mother Earth, free of charge or patents. It is "ours," and it is not for sale. And we intend to defend what we mean by agroecology, and by agroecological peasant agriculture, from all attempts at cooptation (LVC 2013:70).

This agroecology-as-framing, this agroecology in the dispute for the immaterial territory that agroecology itself is, is informed by on-going DS at all levels of LVC. At the same time, agroecology-in-practice moves forward as part of re-peasantization and the (re)configuration of territories, using DS as the underlying methodological and pedagogical principle.

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Food Sovereignty:
A Critical Dialogue

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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A CRITICAL DIALOGUE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES

A fundamentally contested concept, food sovereignty has — as a political project and campaign, an alternative, a social movement, and an analytical framework — barged into global agrarian discourse over the last two decades. Since then, it has inspired and mobilized diverse publics: workers, scholars and public intellectuals, farmers and peasant movements, NGOs and human rights activists in the North and global South. The term has become a challenging subject for social science research, and has been interpreted and reinterpreted in a variety of ways by various groups and individuals. Indeed, it is a concept that is broadly defined as the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system, and to produce sufficient and healthy food in culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable ways in and near their territory. As such it spans issues such as food politics, agroecology, land reform, biofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), urban gardening, the patenting of life forms, labor migration, the feeding of volatile cities, ecological sustainability, and subsistence rights.

Sponsored by the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University and the Journal of Peasant Studies, and co-organized by Food First, Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS) and the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, as well as the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute (TNI), the conference "Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue" will be held at Yale University on September 14–15, 2013. The event will bring together leading scholars and political activists who are advocates of and sympathetic to the idea of food sovereignty, as well as those who are skeptical to the concept of food sovereignty to foster a critical and productive dialogue on the issue. The purpose of the meeting is to examine what food sovereignty might mean, how it might be variously construed, and what policies (e.g. of land use, commodity policy, and food subsidies) it implies. Moreover, such a dialogue aims at exploring whether the subject of food sovereignty has an "intellectual future" in critical agrarian studies and, if so, on what terms.

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