

# Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue

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Necessary Encounter?**

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Agricultural biodiversity, as part of a broader conception of biological diversity, plays an important role in the provision of global food supply.<sup>2</sup> The centers of origin and diversity for the world's major staple food crops are concentrated in the global South, and it is mainly poor subsistence farmers who engage in practices which create and maintain agrobiodiversity (Brush 2004, Boyce 2006). This raises crucial questions about justice in a context in which neoliberal 'restructuring' process in the agriculture sector, aimed at full integration with global markets, is putting immense pressure on the capabilities of these major stewards of agrobiodiversity to sustain their livelihoods. This process of liberalization is complemented with legal-institutional arrangements for the privatization of genetic resources through consolidating intellectual property rights, which further constrain the livelihood possibilities of small farmers.

At the international level, two important instruments, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provide the current governance framework for genetic resources. While these instruments are crucial in terms of their formal recognition of the role that local communities play in conserving agrobiodiversity, there is an ongoing debate about the justice implications of the mechanisms they envisage for the protection of genetic resources, particularly whether and to what extent those mechanisms provide a fair reward mechanism for the communities who conserve these resources (Cullet 2004; De Jonge and Korthals 2006; Schroeder and Pogge 2009; De Jonge 2011). On the other hand, one of the most important agrarian movements of recent decades, La Via Campesina has brought the idea of food sovereignty and peasants' rights to the global agenda as an alternative model of agricultural production with important implications particularly for small farmers around the world. Justice is a major pillar of the discourse that the movement embraces in their quest for the institutionalization of this alternative framework in the global governance of agriculture.

The purpose of this paper is to bring together elements in the debate on global environmental justice, conservation of agrobiodiversity and food sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> The paper will examine these debates with a case based on the field work I conducted with pistachio farmers in the Southeast part of Turkey, who are conserving genetic resources. Turkey is a center of origin and diversity of several field crops (including wheat and barley), as well as fruits and vegetables. Based on this field work, consisting of open-ended, in depth interviews with farmers who engage in practices that conserve genetic resources, the paper will look at the conditions for the conservation of agrobiodiversity. The paper hopes to contribute to the debate on food sovereignty by situating core elements of food sovereignty within the debate on global environmental justice, as a constructive dialogue between theories of environmental justice and food sovereignty can be of critical importance.

The paper is organized as follows: The first section will review the literature on global environmental justice, focusing on how the existing arguments reflect on the conservation of agrobiodiversity. Following this will be a brief overview of the existing international governance structure for genetic resources as embodied in the CBD and the ITPGRFA, and an overview of the debate on justice and genetic resources. The paper will then focus on the quest for food sovereignty and peasant rights, and whether the principal components of these

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<sup>1</sup> This is a draft paper. Please do not quote without the author's permission.

<sup>2</sup> Several definitions of the term agricultural biodiversity are offered. According to the Fifth Conference of the Parties (COP-5) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), agricultural biodiversity is 'a broad term that includes all components of biological diversity that constitute the agroecosystem: the variety and variability of animals, plants and microorganisms, at the genetic, species, and ecosystem levels, which are necessary to sustain key functions of the agroecosystem, its structure and processes.' Available at (<http://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7147>).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the agrarian question, conservation of agrobiodiversity and food sovereignty, see Isakson 2009.

demands provide key insights about attainment of a just framework for the stewards of agrobiodiversity. Finally, the paper will elaborate this discussion in the context of the concrete practices of small farmers conserving agrobiodiversity, and their struggle to continue their livelihoods in Turkey under increasing pressures of neoliberal restructuring process which is the defining feature of agricultural policy of the past decades.

### Global Environmental Justice, Agrobiodiversity and the Global Governance of Genetic Resources

From the devastating immediate impact of natural and human-made disasters from which the poorest communities suffer the greatest, to the gradual, insinuating impact of environmental bads upon the livelihoods of the marginalized, environmental justice has become an important catchphrase pointing to the inequalities in the distribution of environmental goods and bads. Environmental justice has been the subject of inquiry with regard to both environmental inequities that exist between, as well as within the North and the South (Harper and Rajan 2007: 328).

In his discussion on theorizing environmental justice, Schlosberg makes an important point that the focus at the beginning on unequal distribution has expanded so as to include “the definition of ‘environment’, the factors behind the production of environmental injustice, and the pluralist conception of the ‘justice’ of environmental justice.” (Schlosberg 2013: 38). As such, for the first point regarding what *environment* in essence constitutes, the issue is not limited to the preservation of wilderness, but rather entails a rethinking of the relationship between humans and non-human beings, with a focus on the ‘everyday environment and the larger natural world’. (Schlosberg 2013: 39). The second point about the factors that create environmental injustice point to social injustices as reflected in cultural and institutional structures, including but not limited to racism which was the initial focus of inquiry (Schlosberg 2013: 39). Finally, Schlosberg emphasizes how a pluralistic conceptualization of justice includes equity, recognition and participation, as well as “a capabilities approach to justice, which encompasses a range of basic needs, social recognition, and economic and political rights...” (Schlosberg 2013: 40).

The conservation of agrobiodiversity provides an excellent case to comprehend this broadened understanding of environmental justice. In terms of the redefinition of environment and the relationship between human and non-human beings, contrary to the common perception that humans are the cause of loss of biodiversity, agrobiodiversity is the very product of human practices continuing for thousands of years of agricultural production starting from the domestication of wild species (Boyce 2006). As such, human beings have altered the ‘natural’ environment in such a way as to enrich the diversity of species and genes. The production systems they have developed, the locally based traditional agricultural knowledge they possess, the crops they cultivate have at the same time co-evolved with their environment, and have provided the basis of a ‘way of life’ for these farmers in gene centers. In this sense, while Schlosberg’s emphasis on broadening the definition of environment is oriented towards inclusion of the ‘urban,’ the rural practices of farmers conserving agrobiodiversity presents an equally crucial path to rethink the ‘everyday environment’ and human beings’ relationship with the ‘natural world.’

With regard to redefinition of environment, Wittman’s emphasis on ‘thinking agriculture as an integral nexus between society and nature,’ and the break up of the metabolic relationship between society and nature through commodification of nature provides an important entry point to the discussion on environmental justice and how it relates to agrobiodiversity (Wittman 2009: 806). Indeed, this also provides the link to the second point that Schlosberg notes, namely that of social injustices as the root causes of, and which manifest themselves in environmental inequities (Schlosberg 2013: 40). In the words of Wittman, agricultural transformation, which entails production for the market, consequently resulted in the metabolic rift which ‘underlies and fosters the social and ecological effects of agricultural restructuring, including the erosion of agrarian citizenship as rural producers are separated from both means of production and rural social and

political networks’ (Wittman 2009: 808). With regard to the practices of farmers which conserve agrobiodiversity, agricultural liberalization process, complemented with the requirements for modernization and standardization of agricultural production, creates a condition in which these practices and ways of life have no chance of sustaining themselves, including the ‘environment’ within which those practices are embedded. One has to underline here that the major stewards of agrobiodiversity are poor subsistence farmers, who disproportionately bear the costs of neoliberal restructuring. Here, inequities manifest themselves in multiple forms: The farmers who conserve agrobiodiversity are essentially contributing to a global public good crucial for food supply of the world’s population, yet receive no compensation in return –a point I will turn to in the discussion about different notions of justice. While there are mechanisms envisioned for the compensation of these farmers at the global level with the CBD and the International Treaty, their realization in practice and the justice implications are highly problematic. On the top of that, these farmers increasingly lose the conditions in which they can continue their production patterns and livelihoods.

The third point that Schlosberg raises with regard to broadening the conceptualization of justice as to include several elements: equity, recognition, participation and a capabilities approach (Schlosberg 2013: 40) also provides crucial insights to the question of justice in the context of agrobiodiversity conservation. Drawing on Sen and Nussbaum’s capability approach, Schlosberg argues that the focus on capabilities encompasses within itself recognition and distributional aspects: for example, with respect to distribution, Schlosberg makes the point that ‘In an important sense, Sen and Nussbaum expand the distributional realm as they focus not just on the distribution of goods we need to flourish, but the processes we depend on for that flourishing to occur. Injustice comes not with a particular good denied, but with the capability that is limited.’ (Schlosberg 2007: 33). In the following pages, I will discuss elaborately how to think of this broadened conception of justice in the context of conservation of agrobiodiversity via a focus on the food sovereignty movement. Before going into this discussion, the next section will provide a brief overview of the existing institutional framework for the protection of biodiversity in general, and agrobiodiversity in particular, followed by an analysis of the justice implications of the existing framework.

### **The Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

In view of the international recognition of biodiversity loss as a global environmental problem, as well as the increase in economic benefits from the exploitation of genetic resources, the CBD was opened to signature at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development as the major international agreement on the protection of biodiversity. An important objective of the CBD is the *fair and equitable* sharing of benefits that arise out of the utilization of these resources. Through its article 8(j), the CBD underscores the importance of protection of traditional knowledge of local and indigenous communities in the conservation of biodiversity.

At the same time, the FAO has been a major arena where intense discussions have taken place on cultivated genetic resources in particular. The long debate on the recognition of the contribution of small farmers to agrobiodiversity via the notion of ‘farmers’ rights’ has culminated in the ITPGRFA, which entered into force in 2004. In relation to farmers’ rights, the International Treaty recognizes the “enormous contribution that the local and indigenous communities and farmers of all regions of the world, particularly those in centres of origin and crop diversity, have made and will continue to make for the conservation and development of plant genetic resources which constitute the basis of food and agriculture production throughout the world” (FAO 2001). The Treaty gives governments the responsibility for implementing farmers’ rights, which include the protection of traditional knowledge, and the right to participate equitably in benefit sharing and in national decision making about plant genetic resources.

## Justice and Conservation of Genetic Resources

The recognition by both instruments of the contribution of local communities and farmers and their related traditional knowledge to conserving genetic resources is crucial. With regard to the CBD, the emphasis on fairness was a consequence of the adamant position of developing countries of the South during the negotiation process of the CBD, who argued that while the genetic resources within their territories were treated as open access resources due to the common heritage of humankind principle that governed genetic resources, the products derived from these resources by the Northern countries (largely based on the traditional knowledge of local communities in the South) were protected by the intellectual property rights (IPR) regime. Based on this asymmetry in the governance of genetic resources, Southern states pushed for a change in the principle of common heritage of humankind, leading to the recognition of sovereign rights of states over genetic resources within their territories in the CBD. As such, the CBD has been viewed as a step forward for the realization of a fairer governance structure in North-South relations, particularly in the context of the growing trend towards privatization of knowledge. With the CBD, the regulation of access to genetic resources at the national level would be realized through bilateral agreements, also referred to as bioprospecting, (Brush, 2005: 79) which became the basis of access and benefit sharing (ABS) arrangements. The International Treaty, on the other hand, provides for a multilateral system for access and benefit sharing, applying to 36 crop and 29 forages. In accordance with the CBD, the International Treaty recognizes the sovereign rights of states over their genetic resources.

Yet, crucial questions remain regarding whether and how the mechanisms embedded within the framework provided by the CBD and the International Treaty to reward farmers who contribute to conserving agrobiodiversity will actually work towards a more just system in the governance of genetic resources and related traditional knowledge. Mainly, one argument has been that while the CBD can be regarded important for the establishment of equity *between* states, what the justice implications of the CBD will be *within* states remains an important question. In this regard, Brush suggests that under the CBD, “it remains unclear whether and how states will negotiate with farmers to reduce genetic erosion.” (Brush 2003: 192). A telling example is the way the protection of traditional knowledge in the CBD through Article 8 (j) is framed: its protection mainly left to states with broad flexibility in terms of how they would choose to ‘preserve and maintain’ traditional knowledge. Additionally, there are problems that inherently stem from linking the conservation of these resources and traditional knowledge to their privatization and commodification, which ABS mechanisms are mostly based upon.

Similar to the CBD, conceptualization of farmers’ rights in the International Treaty is framed in terms of equitable sharing of benefits with farmers who conserve crop genetic resources and thus contribute to innovations in plant breeding, and Blakeney suggests that “Inevitably, any calculation of the equitable share, which traditional farmers and indigenous communities might enjoy under a Farmers’ Rights or Traditional Knowledge regime, will be arbitrary.” (Blakeney, 2009: 125). Indeed, many farmers’ groups and NGOs viewed the International Treaty as a mechanism that transfers responsibility of implementing these rights from the FAO to national governments, yet not able to pose a real challenge intellectual property rights regimes and trade and environmental policies that threaten genetic diversity (Zerbe, 2007). With regard to implementation of farmers’ rights, for example, Brush underlines how small farmers as a group are politically weak at the domestic level, and the requirements for agricultural development render the negotiating power of farmers with governments almost nil (Brush, 2007: 1509). As such, both instruments aim to provide a fair compensation for the groups who conserve genetic resources because of their contribution to a global public good. However, the mechanisms envisaged largely convey the state as the major actor in deciding the terms of engagement with local communities, and remain firmly embedded in a neoliberal framework which advances further the privatization and commodification of genetic resources and the related knowledge, with questions about justice remaining intact.

Scholarly debate on justice and genetic resources has included discussions on the limits of commutative justice that the present framework for governing these resources is based upon, and the need for an emphasis on distributive justice. For example, De Jonge and Korthals (2006) argue that the existing mechanism of benefit sharing, relying on compensation and exchange, is based on an Aristotelian notion of commutative justice, which is “corrective in transactions between individuals or groups of individuals; it focuses on the equal or equivalent value of exchanges” (De Jonge and Korthals, 2006: 149). They criticize this understanding because it does not suit plant genetic resources. The reason for that is that these resources have “*non-rival* and *non-excludable* characteristics,” which make them hardly suitable for equitable exchange between two parties, on which ABS mechanisms is based (De Jonge 2011: 130). The establishment of sovereign rights of states over natural resources within their territories does not solve this problem. Indeed, this system may have positive harmful impact on the agricultural sector since it may provide an obstacle to the international transfer of genetic resources, with negative effects particularly for poorer countries (De Jonge and Korthals, 2006). The existing framework for farmers’ rights is equally problematic. Brush succinctly explains how the implementation of farmers’ rights can actually have unjust implications: “Inter-community exchange and seed flows expose claims by one community for rights to a specific crop resource to challenges from other communities...arbitrary allocation presents ethical problems of favoring one community over others.” (Brush 2007: 1508-1509).

At the same time, however, as De Jonge points out, while benefit-sharing system is based on the notion of *justice in exchange*, the CBD simultaneously integrates a notion of distributive justice based on need: “both in relation to the universal requirement to conserve biodiversity in order to meet fundamental needs of humankind, and with respect to the special needs of developing countries and traditional communities in so doing.” (De Jonge 2011: 138). He posits a similar point for the International Treaty on the embeddedness of the principle of need. In this context, an alternative model for benefit sharing would be based on a broader notion of distributive justice with the principle of equity, one that “is not concerned with compensating parties for their rights held or contributions made, but aims primarily to stimulate a more equitable distribution of the benefits of modern research and development.” (De Jonge 2011: 140). An example for that would be where upstream benefit sharing is emphasized so that the benefits that will be shared actually fit in with the needs of the poor (De Jonge and Korthals, 2006). The model that De Jonge foresees is based on the utilization component and not primarily exchange, which includes a strong responsibility on the part of user parties, and establishment of clear standards for valuing genetic resources (De Jonge 2011: 141- 142). In this framing, the importance of equal participation in the process of ABS negotiations, or the different knowledge and value systems of local communities and other parties in the context of power inequalities that exist between the actual stewards of biodiversity, the state and other negotiating parties are acknowledged. Ultimately, justice idea is based on a multilateral approach “in which the benefits are distributed according to a combination of other principles discusses-one could, for example, set allocation criteria that aim to compensate regions or groups of people (countries, communities) in accordance to their (historical) contributions to the conservation of biodiversity and food security, and with special attention to those with particular needs in this respect.” (De Jonge 2011: 143).

In a related discussion on justice and genetic resources, Cullet notes that while benefit sharing could be a means for “fostering a weak form of distributive justice in favor of provider countries...benefit sharing fails to address the imbalance built into the existing legal framework for the protection of knowledge,” as manifested in the global intellectual property rights regime but no equivalent arrangement at the global level for traditional knowledge (Cullet 2004: 377). As such, while acknowledging the constraints over its attainment in the existing system, he argues for an open access regime in governing genetic resources and related knowledge (traditional as well as knowledge which presently is protected by IPR regime) which would work relatively better than the present system for the principle of equity to be realized (Cullet 2004: 384-385). Schroeder and Pogge, on the other hand, argue that in a relatively equal world, common heritage principle that used to govern genetic resources could be considered fair, yet, “Free access to biological diversity cannot

be justified, however, in a context of extreme economic inequality where appropriation by some (on a first-come, first served basis) will lead to innovations unavailable to the global poor.” (Schroeder and Pogge 2009: 279). Hence, they argue that the establishment of sovereign rights of states over genetic resources through the CBD was a contextual and just move on the part of the international community. At the same time, they note that while “It is possible that the CBD will promote the fulfillment of basic needs and thereby mitigate the great distributive injustice of existing global institutional arrangements...the CBD is no substitute for a more ambitious reform of our global economic order that would realize social and economic human rights worldwide.” (Schroeder and Pogge 2009: 278). From a cosmopolitan justice framework, it is the responsibility of the members of the international community, not only of *the* state to its citizens to provide for the fulfillment of basic needs (Schroeder and Pogge 2009: 275).

As the discussion above shows, most of the debate about the governance of genetic resources revolves around a conception of how distributive justice can be achieved. While this is an important contribution to the debate on justice and agrobiodiversity conservation, what is missing in these accounts is an examination of the structural inequalities that exist and which perpetuate the unjust system. Without questioning the very system that creates the inequalities which require corrective measures as distributive equity, -importantly, the process of neoliberal transformation which is dramatically reshaping the agriculture sector and its implications on small farmers- and limiting oneself to discussing benefit sharing as the mechanism –which itself, in essence, relies on the market- for providing a more just system is crucially constrained.

In this context, what Schlosberg (2004, 2007) offers in terms of environmental justice, not necessarily moving beyond distributive justice but to acknowledge that justice entails not only equity but also recognition, democratic participation, and individual and group capabilities, -and that these are crucially linked to one another- can provide crucial insights to the discussion on justice and agrobiodiversity. Indeed, Schlosberg (2007: 81), in his analysis of demands for justice and global movements makes specific reference to what he refers to as movements for food autonomy and security. He argues that these movements articulate equity along with an emphasis on injustices stemming from the lack recognition of diversity of local identities and cultures, and the “validity and value of traditional systems of providing food to populations.” (Schlosberg 2007: 87). Justice demands of these movements, however, are not limited to these elements: Complementing them are vocal expressions of the rights of peasants to information, as well as participating in the decision making processes in matters pertaining to agriculture, and an emphasis on injustices based on the destructive impact of agricultural liberalization and industrialized agro-food system on the capabilities of local farming communities to sustain their livelihoods, as articulated by La Via Campesina (Schlosberg 2007: 90-93).

It is in this context that the next section will analyze the food sovereignty movement. As I noted above, based on the discussion by Schlosberg, food sovereignty has important corresponding points to the elements of justice that he underlines. A crucial question in this regard is whether and to what extent the movement goes a step further in challenging the very structure and the system which the current agricultural production is based. In this context, I will argue that the discussion on global environmental justice and food sovereignty have the potential to offer critical insights to broaden the understanding of what justice entails.

### The Quest for Food Sovereignty and Peasants’ Rights

Food sovereignty is vocally articulated by one of the most important agrarian movements, La Via Campesina. The framework for food sovereignty provides an overarching critique of the neoliberal paradigm that dictates the global governance of agriculture. In their Nyeleni Declaration on Food Sovereignty, La Via Campesina defines food sovereignty 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 those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than demands of markets and corporations...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.” (Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty, Via Campesina 2007).

In the words of Desmarais, Via Campesina “is arguing for a fundamental shift in who defines and determines the purpose and terms of knowledge, research, technology, science, production and trade related to food” (Desmarais 2002:100). The issues they concentrate include, among others, genetic resources and biodiversity, gender and peasants’ rights, reflecting linkages between different levels of social organization, and “local issues and local activism drive the Vía Campesina’s global interventions.” (Desmarais 2002: 109). Wittman importantly argues that in the space opened by ‘social and ecological crisis of reproduction,’ “the food sovereignty movement, based on the principles of agrarian citizenship, ecological sustainability, and social justice, proposes a distinct departure from the dominant mode of production.” (Wittman 2009: 821).

As such, the food sovereignty framework, with a forceful critique of the existing organization of the economy in the agriculture sector, argues for an alternative system of production which is reflected in its concrete practices through their interventions in global norm making and local initiatives in search of mechanisms that will foster greater control over agricultural production by peasants themselves. In terms of who Via Campesina represents, Borras underlines that “Via Campesina has a highly heterogeneous membership not only in terms of class, gender and ethnic terms; the ideological persuasions of its members vary as well. But in spite of apparent differences, in terms of worldviews, there are important unifying commonalities too. Chief among these is that most of Via Campesina’s mass base more or less represents sectors in the global North and South that are already economically and politically marginalized.” (Borras 2008: 93).

Recent moves by Via Campesina include campaigns for agrarian reform; seeds: heritage of rural peoples in the service of humanity, and ending all forms of violence against women- and a global campaign for an International Convention on Peasants’ Rights (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010: 165). As such, the focus area of Via Campesina and the overall food sovereignty framework has direct implications for small farmers in the global South who conserve agrobiodiversity. In particular, the global seed campaign, which was launched in 2003 is directly relevant to conservation of agrobiodiversity. A recent publication titled *Our Seeds, Our Future* by La Via Campesina states that

“La Via Campesina is developing its seed campaign along two axes:

- 1) by exchanging know-how from farmer to farmer, and organizing collectively to produce and conserve locally our own seeds intended for small-scale farming and organic farming;
- 2) by fighting against the Monsanto Laws, and enshrining in the laws of each country and at the global level the recognition of the inalienable rights of peasants and family farmers to conserve, use, exchange, sell and protect their seeds.” (La Via Campesina 2013: 3).

These two components clearly demonstrate the multi-level nature of the work that the movement engages, by providing linkages between the local, national and the global levels: a focus on myriad mechanisms to conserve seeds i.e. through sharing of knowledge at the local level, complemented with struggles at the national and international levels against the institutionalization of intellectual property rights over plant genetic resources and the establishment of the rights of peasants. As such, the seed campaign is very much about the re-establishment of control by peasants themselves over production process, which is a foundational component of food sovereignty.

In parallel, the Declaration of Rights of Peasants<sup>4</sup>, adopted by La Via Campesina in 2009, among several other rights, include the right to seeds and traditional agricultural knowledge and practice (Article V); the right to agricultural means of production (Article VI); right to information and agricultural technology (Article VII); freedom to determine price and market for agricultural production (Article VIII); right to the protection of agricultural values (Article IX) and the right to biological diversity (Article X) all of which are directly about opening a space for the farmers who conserve agrobiodiversity through assigning a set of rights that would be critical in enabling them to continue their practices and maintain their livelihoods. Looking at the overall rights framework that the Declaration articulates, the *recognition* of peasants and their ways of life, the importance of *participating* in decision making processes, and importantly, the emphasis on ensuring the conditions in which peasants can maintain the livelihood they have chosen come to the forefront as important components.

In this context, an important question is how we can situate the components of food sovereignty and peasants' rights within the pluralist definition of environmental justice provided by Schlosberg. For example, in their discussion on the trends of food movements which counter the hegemonic corporate food regime, Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011: 128) argue for what they label as the radical movement, epitomized by the movement for food sovereignty that “the notion of *entitlement* and the *redistribution* of wealth and power within the food system run throughout the discourse and practice of the movements within this trend.” Drawing on Sen and his discussion of entitlement, Holt Gimenez and Shattuck note that: “In this view, hunger is not caused by low productivity, unemployment, poor wages or inadequate distribution, but by inequities in the determinants of production, reproduction, and distribution, i.e. the entitlements extending to relations of exchange, modes of production, social security and employment. Redistribution is not merely the redistribution of wealth or goods, but concerns the restructuring of entitlements” (Sen 1981, cited in Holt Gimenez and Shattuck 2011, 128). This provides an important entry point to what Schlosberg suggests about a pluralist conception of environmental justice. In her analysis of the Declaration of Peasant Rights, Claeys notes that “A large number of these rights emphasize redistribution and access to resources...The other new rights claimed by the movement contest the commoditization of labour and emphasize recognition” (Claeys 2012: 850). As such, the analysis of food sovereignty movement shows that their demands comprehensively encompass various components of justice, which include demands for redistribution, recognition, participation, and capabilities.

In a discussion on ‘reclaiming the meaning of “peasant,” Desmarais argues that recognition of peasant identity is a critical constitutive element in the rights struggle of La Via Campesina (Desmarais 2008: 140). This ‘politicized identity’ “reflects people who share a deep commitment to place, people deeply attached to a particular piece of land, people who are all part of a particular rural community, people whose mode of existence is under threat” (Desmarais 2008: 140). At the same time, Claeys points to a crucial debate about the focus of the movement, in fact a reflexive look in terms of where to base the struggle: “Making the struggle for peasants’ rights too much about identity and recognition may damage Via Campesina’s long-term goals, if questions of redistribution are set aside. Whether Via Campesina puts the emphasis on its transformative political project –and alternative societal project, food sovereignty-or on the distinctiveness of the peasantry, will largely determine its future chances of success as a social movement” (Claeys 2013: 7).

This brings us to a much contested terrain in the debate on environmental justice: For example, Schlosberg makes a case against Harvey’s emphasis on a universal definition of justice that goes beyond the particularistic definitions of justice by various movements which initially are critical in the mobilization of a struggle against injustices in different contexts. (Harvey 1996, quoted in Schlosberg 2007: 177-178). Schlosberg notes that while he fully agrees with the following statement by Harvey that attaining

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<sup>4</sup> Available at (<http://viacampesina.net/downloads/PDF/EN-3.pdf>).

environmental justice is only possible by “confronting the fundamental underlying processes (and their associated power structures, social relations, institutional configurations, discourses and belief systems) that generate environmental and social injustices.” (Harvey 1996: 401, quoted in Schlosberg 2007: 178), he at the same time argues that this does not necessitate prioritizing the universal to the expense of the particular, with an embracing of the pluralism in defining justice (Schlosberg 2007: 178).

An argument in this regard can be that the components of justice and the imminent link between them which Schlosberg emphasizes acquire a meaning *only* in perspective of the existing inequalities that Harvey refers to, which create and perpetuate the injustices that the movements are challenging. Without a systematic account and critique of these inequalities which exist in material and ideational realms, demands for recognition, equity or construction of capabilities can remain as superficial efforts because the root causes of the lack of these elements of justice would be eschewed.

With reference to Harvey’s discussion on resistance movements as ‘movements against accumulation by dispossession’ and ‘expanded reproduction’ movements, and the significance of forging a link between the two (Harvey 2005: 203, quoted in McMichael 2008: 44), McMichael notes that La Via Campesina represents a combination of these movements. In the words of McMichael, the movement for food sovereignty is “constituting an increasingly significant political economy of representation (Patel 2006) that combines politicization of neoliberal policy, claiming rights beyond market rights, with an agrarian identity based in a value complex weaving together ecological subjectivity and stewardship as a condition or social and environmental sustainability.” (McMichael 2008: 46). In view of Claeys’ point above, whether La Via Campesina will manage to forge a balance as McMichael suggests without undermining its transformative potential will be important.

In this context, looking at the concrete practices of farmers at the local level which conserve genetic resources, and the impact of restructuring process on production patterns can provide crucial insights about how to rethink the debate on environmental justice, agrobiodiversity conservation, and food sovereignty. It is in this framework that the paper will now examine the process of conservation of agrobiodiversity by small farmers in Turkey, in which neoliberal transformation of the agriculture sector has accelerated in full speed through a World Bank directed reform plan. The next section will first provide a brief overview the state of agricultural policies in Turkey, which will be followed by a discussion of the field work.

### Agricultural Policies in Turkey

While liberalization in the agricultural sector started in the 1980s, the most important restructuring came when Turkey adopted a set of policies directed by the World Bank. Eder (2003) notes that in line with the neo-liberal agenda, the fundamental problem in Turkey’s agriculture was identified by the World Bank as government intervention and market-distorting subsidies. The Agricultural Reform Implementation Program (ARIP), approved by the World Bank in 2001 and which organized the restructuring process, states that the overall aim of the program is “dramatically reducing the artificial incentives and government subsidies, and substituting a support system that will give agricultural producers and agro-industry incentives to increase productivity in response to real competitive advantage” (World Bank, 2002). The main focus of ARIP thus has been on approximating agricultural prices in Turkey with world prices, eliminating agricultural subsidies, eliminating or reducing credit channels, and privatizing the State Economic Enterprises and Agricultural Sales Cooperatives (Eder, 2003). In this transition process, direct income support system (DIS) was introduced as the mechanism to support farmers in view of the losses they would suffer.

The structural transformation that the ARIP has mandated is complemented with legal changes with a series of legislation, rules, and regulations directly related to institutionalization of intellectual property rights and

the seed sector.<sup>5</sup> While it is not possible to go into details within the scope of this paper, Aydın succinctly summarizes the impact of this major transformation:

Deregulation in the agricultural sector has meant that rural producers have to compete in the global commodity markets with no or little help from the state and without much preparation for the transition. Having lost their access to productive resources such as inputs, credits and marketing facilities, and having been starved of state investments in agriculture, rural producers are not only losing their competitive edge but are also facing the danger of being unable to sustain their production...The extent and speed of liberalization in Turkish agriculture in the last five years have left very limited scope for farmers to intensify their 'self-exploitation' in the form of survival strategies. (Aydın 2010: 181).

The redefined role of the state in this framework is to “complement market mechanisms” (Keyder and Yenal 2011: 65). Referring to structural changes that occurred in the Turkish countryside and which still is ongoing, Keyder and Yenal note that as a result of this transformation, “...the locally bounded nature of economic and social life, the dominance of land cultivation as the main means of livelihood, easy access to relevant information networks, the preponderance of family-based vocational guidance and the prevalence of village-wide welfare arrangements, are increasingly being undermined” (Keyder and Yenal 2011: 83). It is in this context that the following section will look at the practices of pistachio farmers in the Southeast part of Turkey who have been growing traditional varieties of pistachio. The section will provide an overview of how the process of liberalization impact farmers’ livelihoods, particularly those farmers who are stewards of agrobiodiversity, and how to rethink the debate on justice and the conservation of genetic resources in view of the experiences of these farmers.

### Farmers’ Practices in Turkey

As noted earlier, the centers of origin of the world’s crops are concentrated in a few places which are known as Vavilov Centers (after the Russian botanist Nikolai Vavilov), most of which are located in the developing countries of the global South (Boyce, 2006). Turkey is located on two Vavilov centers of origin, the Near East and the Mediterranean, and is the center of diversity for several crops, including wheat and barley. Turkey also has genetic diversity centers of many wild, transitional and cultivated forms of annual and perennial herbaceous and woody plants (Agaoglu et al 1997, quoted in Ercisli 2004: 419). As such, conservation of agrobiodiversity in Turkey is of great significance for the future of genetic resources.

The focus of the paper is pistachio, for which Anatolia is one of the gene centres (pistachio and mastic tree, - *Pistacia vera*, *Pistacia lentiscus* and 5 wild species-) (Kaya, Kün and Güner, 1998). While pistachio production takes place in several locations in Turkey, it is a traditional product of South East Anatolia, where about 90 % of the total pistachio trees are located (Tunalıoğlu and Taşkaya, 2003). In Gaziantep, located in the Southeastern part of Turkey, near the Syrian border, agricultural production is mainly concentrated on cereals and fruits (pistachio, olives, and grape). Some of the towns and villages are entirely dependent on pistachio production for their livelihoods. In the fields where it is not possible to grow other agricultural products such as cereals, because of weather conditions, soil characteristics, or the slope of the land, pistachio production has been possible because it can grow in these harsh conditions. Production takes place mostly in dry conditions, though it is of high quality. One characteristic of pistachio production in Gaziantep is its periodicity, which leads to volatility in the quantity of production from one year to the next.

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<sup>5</sup> These include, for example, the 2004 Law on the Protection of Breeders’ Rights for New Plant Varieties, and the 2006 Seed Law. For a detailed discussion about these changes and their likely impact on the conservation of agrobiodiversity, see Aksoy 2010.

State policies for pistachio production have been inconsistent over the years. Between 1968-1980, pistachio production was included in the agricultural support system, however, after then, support has been granted sporadically (Tuğ 2002, quoted in Tunalıoğlu and Taşkaya 2003). Support policies included price supports and input subsidies. The Southeast Agricultural Sales Cooperative (Southeast Union) plays a role through purchase of the product from the farmers. Yet, this has also been irregular, as while in some years it did purchase produce either on its own behalf or the state, in other years, it did not (Tunalıoğlu and Taşkaya, 2003). One point that should be emphasized is that in addition to the irregularities in product purchases, the share of purchase by the Union has been between 0,3 % and % 14,9 of total production, which is an indicator of the limited role that the Union plays (Aksoy et al 2008: 141; Tunalıoğlu and Taşkaya 2003). Accordingly, with drastic reduction in support mechanisms, pistachio farmers are largely left vulnerable to the vagaries of the market.

The field work that the paper is based on was conducted in five villages in Gaziantep in June 2008, consisting of in depth interviews with 24 farmers who have been producing pistachio. These are mainly small farmers with plots ranging between 10-100 decars on average, and they largely depend on pistachio production for their livelihoods. These pistachio trees produce a traditional variety, Antep Red, which is of a very high quality. Some farmers have also indicated that along with pistachio, they grow vineyards. Additionally, a number of farmers also plant wheat, lentil and chickpea for home consumption. Even though they used to grow several local varieties of grape, and traditional varieties of wheat, barley and lentil, many of the farmers have in the past years quit growing these. For example, farmers indicated that even though they used to grow several local varieties of grape, lack of irrigation, lack of financial means to use inputs, and drought that persisted over years have led them to turn the vineyards to pistachio groves.

The farmers also used to grow traditional varieties of wheat. The bread made with those varieties is expressed as delicious, and these varieties were most suitable for firik (a special type of cracked wheat-bulgur) which is characteristic to the region. However, many farmers have either turned to modern varieties of wheat, or have altogether quit cultivating wheat. Indeed, some now buy the wheat that is necessary for making bread, and cracked wheat that are major staples of their diet from the market. A similar pattern is observed for the traditional varieties of barley, lentil and chickpea.

All of the farmers indicated that some of pistachio trees are left to them from their fathers and grandfathers, and over the years, they themselves have planted as well, usually in place of the ones that have lost their productive capacity. ***“Pistachio grove from the grandfather, vineyard from the father”***, meaning that the best pistachio trees would be the ones that are old, whereas vineyards could be younger. The longevity of a pistachio tree is very important for the farmers, and they express the proudness when they are able to “look after” the tree so that it can endure for more than 100 years. The interviews show that the farmers’ possess detailed knowledge about the characteristics of soil in different parts of their land. Based on experimenting with different crops in their fields, they decide which crop and which variety is most suitable for their land. For pistachio production, choosing the right tree for grafting, and the method by which to graft is another component of being able to continue productive capacity of the trees in the grove. In addition to its traditional production, the major reasons given for pistachio production are its suitability for the land and soil characteristics, and that it endures in dry conditions. The farmers have learned how to graft, plow the soil under the tree, use fertilizer, harvest and several other practices from their parents in order to make sure that the trees will be healthy and their productive life will be long. They acquired this knowledge through observation, practice and oral transmission from generation to generation. This knowledge also pertains to the local varieties of grape, and traditional varieties of wheat, lentil and chickpea they used to grow. In the word of farmers:

***“The produce, the taste of the pistachio, everything comes with the labour you give to it. You have to take care of the tree, it is like a human being.”***

***“The bread we used to make with Kırmızı Havran (traditional variety) would be tasteful, even neighbours would get its smell. Not with this wheat.”***

***“We used to cultivate Kırmızı Havran, it would grow so well. It did not even need fertilizer to grow. With this wheat (modern variety) even when you use fertilizer, you do not get much.”***

Sharing and exchanging is another important feature of growing pistachio, where a good tree would provide the material for grafting. Sharing the seeds of barley, wheat and chickpea is also common.

***“Not every tree is good to use for grafting. You have to know which one is good. You exchange with your neighbours, friends, relatives. There is no money involved.”***

***“Everybody shares with one another. This year I cultivate barley. If it is good quality, I give to my neighbour. Next year I will get chickpea from him if it is good.”***

***“When and how to prune the tree, to plow the soil under the tree, everything I learned from my father. He learned from his father.”***

Yet, with younger members in the family moving to the city, there are important constraints on the transmission of this knowledge from one generation to the other.

***“My father taught me what I know. But my sons do not know anything. They are in Antep. They went when they were young to work. Sometimes they come during harvest to help.”***

Almost all the farmers have been receiving direct income support (DIS) as they are eligible for it.<sup>6</sup> The farmers expressed that sustaining their livelihoods have become increasingly daunting in the last 5-10 years because of the difficulties they encounter during production due to unfavorable weather conditions, including drought, the lack of means to use important inputs, such as fertilizers to improve yield, as well as the marketing of their products. After harvest, farmers bring their produce to the pistachio wholesale market to sell to merchants. One major complaint, however, is that the price they receive cannot even meet their production costs, and they have no other option but to sell the produce because they have debts to cover from previous year.

According to accounts of farmers, this was not always the case. In the past, when the Southeast Agricultural Sales Cooperative was setting prices for sale of the pistachio nut, how they would determine the price was by visiting a significant number of producers and collecting information about the costs of production. After that, prices would be set accordingly so that the producer would be able to earn some cash for sustaining their livelihood. Yet, in the current system, with no rules or regulations, the producers are entirely dependent on the market for the price of their product. Currently, the producers are complaining that the representation mechanisms in the Southeast Union are highly limited, hence, they are not able to voice their concerns about pistachio production, and its role has already been importantly constrained when compared to the past. While the DIS is welcomed by the farmers as it covers to some extent their costs, it is viewed as inadequate for providing the conditions for them to sustain their livelihoods.

These farmers are maintaining genetic resources via growing the traditional variety of pistachio. They also used to grow local varieties of grape, wheat, lentil, barley and chickpea, which is crucial for the maintenance of genetic resources for these crops. However, this has significantly declined over the past years. Their

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<sup>6</sup> DIS was designed to support particularly small farmers in the transition process.

production is largely based on the traditional agricultural knowledge that they have learned from their parents and grandparents, and they continue practices of sharing and exchanging not only knowledge but also the material that is necessary for the continuation of growing traditional varieties. Most are entirely dependent of the income that they will earn from the sale of pistachio. For some farmers, even for their bread to consume at home, they rely on the market. Pistachio does not provide them the necessary food for subsistence, as it has a limited range of use for nutrition purposes when compared to crops such as wheat, corn or lentils.

When asked about what conditions are necessary for continuing their livelihoods, in terms of the production process and marketing of pistachio, the farmers indicated that they would want to be represented in the Southeast Union as producers, so that their voices can be reflected in the decision making processes. In addition to that, they noted that the authorization of the Union to organize a stable market condition is important, and the setting of a floor price for pistachio, and lowering the prices for agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and diesel oil via subsidies or other means would be crucial for their production. The importance of the provision of public goods such as investments in basic infrastructure (e.g. sewage systems), a right for healthcare, and a general recognition of the problems that the farmers have to struggle with were also among the responses.

## Discussion

These experiences of farmers, who are major stewards of agrobiodiversity, yet faced with immense pressure to continue their livelihoods in a context in which neoliberal reforms have significantly reduced the scope for adaptation strategies, bring crucial questions about justice to the forefront. On the one hand, the practices of farmers, how they articulate their relation to what they produce, their firsthand experiences and experiments with the soil, different crops and varieties, the traditional agricultural knowledge they possess and which continually accumulates are all crucial components of their identity as farmers. On the other hand, because of neoliberal restructuring process, they are forced to change these practices away from diversification to becoming more and more dependent on the market, which creates a vicious circle.<sup>7</sup> Let alone their recognition as stewards of agrobiodiversity, and being rewarded for their contribution to the conservation of genetic resources, these farmers are increasingly losing the conditions in which they can sustain their livelihoods.

A recent report by the General Directorate of Cooperatives of the Ministry of Customs and Trade (2012) indicates that in spite of their high quality in terms of taste, local pistachio varieties cannot compete with pistachios of major exporter countries such as Iran and the US, and that there should be incentives for the production of varieties which have competitive advantage in global markets. In these accounts, there is an ongoing emphasis on how Turkey, despite being a genetic centre for pistachio, lags far behind in terms of its export potential because of lack of standardization. In this framing, pistachio farmers are represented as producers with no technical knowledge, and who should be trained for producing pistachios with desired traits to compete in global markets. This emphasis on standardization and increases in productivity and efficiency is reflected in other venues. For example, in the interview I conducted with the lead researcher in the Pistachio Research Station in Gaziantep, while *ex situ* conservation of genetic diversity is expressed as the main task of the institution, there was also great emphasis on increasing the productivity of the pistachio groves through the introduction of certified varieties, as well as irrigation and other techniques. The

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<sup>7</sup> We should at the same time note that the growing influence of the market in production process does not necessarily have uniform consequences. Isakson, in his discussion of Guatemalan peasants conserving crop genetic resources, notes that “Rather than becoming fully subsumed into a globalised corporate food regime, Guatemalan peasants are committed to maintaining a high degree of self-sufficiency in the production of maize, beans, and other *milpa* crops” (Isakson 2009, 754).

researcher acknowledged the difficulty in telling a farmer to change what has already been planted. Yet, at the same time, he noted that the fragmentary distribution of land is one of the major impediments to increasing productivity. However, this fragmented land is actually an important factor that allows the farmers to experiment with different varieties according to the characteristics of the soil and land, and is crucial from a genetic resource conservation viewpoint.

The analysis of the factors that are crucial in the conservation of genetic resources by the farmers shows how it is important to preserve the context within which the diversity as well as the knowledge with regard to genetic resources evolves.<sup>8</sup> Also, the collective nature of the conservation process as exemplified in the sharing and exchange practices shows the limitations of an approach that requires the identification of ownership in relation to these resources. For example, if there was a compensation scheme based on who holds the right to the particular variety that the farmers have been cultivating, how will the state determine who is entitled to the right given the nature of cultivating practices? Following Brush (2007), one can argue that in the absence of a way to do this, arbitrary favoring of a single farmer, community or region is bound to be unfair and in contrast to any equity claim that the overall framework is based upon. The existing international framework mainly leaves the fate of farmers' rights to be determined at the national level. In an important way, this shows the limitations of a framework that is based on commutative justice.

As an alternative to the existing benefit sharing mechanisms, Brush suggests that "...benefit sharing must come from a more traditional transfer of international capital: development assistance focused on programs to improve rural incomes in genetically diverse farming systems...Bilateral and multilateral development assistance that funds rural development activities and benefits the stewards of crop resources can be justified as part of the reciprocal obligations of industrialized countries to developing countries" (Brush 2007: 1511). At the same time, De Jonge and Korthals' arguments for distributive justice which entails a fair distribution of the benefits of research particularly geared towards poor farmers could be an important mechanism to support farmers to continue their livelihoods. Additionally, a mechanism which is based on the recognition of farmers in terms of their contribution to agrobiodiversity, and which is specifically geared towards the continuity of practices which conserve genetic resources is participatory plant breeding (PPB).<sup>9</sup> PPB can provide a fruitful framework particularly for the recovery of local varieties of grape and traditional varieties of wheat, lentil and chickpea which are not cultivated any longer. This is crucial not only from the perspective of conserving genetic resources, but also because this can enable the farmers to *diversify* their production through cultivation of different crops and varieties, reducing their dependence on pistachio production for sustaining their livelihoods, which has become increasingly daunting.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, viewed in the context of the agricultural transformation that the farmers need to operate within, the broader framework for justice that Schlosberg argues for, and which encompasses equity as well as recognition, democratic participation, and individual and group capabilities become all the more crucial. One reason for that is that neoliberal restructuring process legitimizes a particular form of agricultural producer for which stewards of agrobiodiversity are not 'fit.' The recognition of the 'peasant,' and their 'ways of life' in this regard can be a crucial *first step* in the efforts towards a more just framework. Complementing that are establishment of participatory mechanisms in decision making processes that have a direct impact on their livelihoods, which is included the peasants' rights scheme. As the interviews suggest, farmers articulated several times their demands for the establishment of an institutional framework where they can be

<sup>8</sup> See also Brush 2005: 106-107.

<sup>9</sup> "This technique involves farmers and scientists in the identification of outstanding crop populations, improved seed selection and management, recovery of "lost" varieties, improved information and seed exchange among farmers, and farmer selection of breeding material developed by scientists." (Brush 2003: 199).

<sup>10</sup> At this point, one has to underline that there are several limits that the PPB confronts. For a detailed discussion, see Brush 2004, 210.



represented, and participate in decision making.

As for the establishment of *basic* capabilities, the interviews with farmers also show that one important mechanism for the support of the activities of the farmers would be the public provision of services such as irrigation, improving schools and health services which are of utmost importance for the sustainability of the livelihoods of these farmers. The findings of the field work in Gaziantep suggest that the farmers increasingly have difficulties in maintaining their livelihoods, and a significant portion of their income goes to expenses not related to agricultural production. In such a context, the provision of these public services that aim at improving the infrastructure in those communities can be very important to support these farmers in continuing their agricultural practices.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the capabilities approach that Schlosberg (2007: 30) elaborates is mainly about capabilities “...which allow or assist us to translate basic goods into the functioning of human life.” In this context, I will argue that the food sovereignty framework and the demands for peasants’ rights provides a crucial reference point that corresponds to the plural nature of justice, which comprise capabilities that Schlosberg argues for. In the Turkish context, demands pertaining to food sovereignty have been articulated by the Confederation of Farmer Unions, which has been involved in the struggle on behalf of small farmers in various instances. A telling example of their efforts was an open letter to the parliamentarians when the draft Seed Law was still being debated, by the Initiative for the Confederation of Farmer Unions, (which later became the Confederation) which called for the rights of farmers. The Confederation is a member of La Via Campesina, and embraces food sovereignty as the major principle guiding its actions. Basing their arguments on justice and equality, in the letter it is stated that:

“Farmers and peasants think that women, men and their families; have the right to determine the kind of the plant they want to produce; to denounce the plants which would be harmful economically, ecologically and culturally; to determine the forms and conditions of farming they want to perform; to save and develop local agricultural knowledge; to use agricultural facilities; to choose personally and collectively their product types, quantities, qualities, and the particular way of breeding and cultivation democratically; to choose a technology that is convenient to human health and ecology and to use this particular technology in breeding and cultivation; to develop and grow their native species.” (GRAIN 2006).

As the letter reveals, several components of peasant rights are openly articulated with a vision as to institutionalize peasants’ control over productive resources. In another instance, during the period when the first regulation on GMOs was adopted and the preparations for the Biosafety Law were on its way, the Confederation prepared a brochure about GMOs, pointing to environmental, economic, and health implications of genetically engineered crops, explicitly rejecting GMOs and stating the need for the establishment of the basis for agricultural production process which enables the conservation of local varieties, and protecting traditional knowledge of the farmers. As such, the position of the Confederation, the principles it stands for, and its ongoing struggle can be a crucial entry point in the Turkish context to push for changes in the existing framework that determines agricultural policy at the national level. While working towards formation of institutionalized channels for uniting peasants through the establishment of farmers unions-which itself was a long process-, and strengthen its local base, the Confederation is at the same time actively engaging in struggles at the national level on various fronts and issues as the examples above show, among several others.

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<sup>11</sup> For a further discussion on the policies that could enable farmers to conserve genetic diversity, see Boyce 2006, 97).

## Conclusion

This paper has aimed to elaborate whether a productive dialogue could be fostered between the debate on global environmental justice and food sovereignty via a discussion of the process of conservation of agrobiodiversity. As the discussion above illustrates, there is an ongoing debate on justice and the conservation of genetic resources, and whether the mechanisms embedded in the global institutional framework for conserving genetic resources provides a fair system. While this framework is crucial in terms of its recognition of the importance of local and indigenous communities in the conservation of genetic resources, the mechanisms they envisage remain significantly constrained. On the other hand, a close evaluation of the components of food sovereignty and the peasants' rights scheme reveal that they encompass the major dimensions of the pluralist notion of global environmental justice that Schlosberg argues for. An important reminder here is that the overall demands for food sovereignty rely on a comprehensive reassessment and a stark critique of the existing institutional and policy framework that heavily relies on neoliberalization of the agriculture sector, complemented by the institutionalization of intellectual property rights, on the basis of a broader perspective that includes rights to development, equality and justice. The concrete practices of farmers who conserve agrobiodiversity and how they are affected by this neoliberalization process in the Turkish context is a telling example of the struggles farming communities in the global South have to engage merely to sustain their livelihoods, with severely constrained coping strategies. At the same time, however, building on major components of food sovereignty and the rights of peasants, there is a struggle at the national level by the Confederation of Farmers' Unions on various fronts to challenge various policies that directly have an impact on small farmers. Despite several hurdles, the Confederation has built an important momentum in the legalization and institutionalization of farmers' unions, and cooperated with other actors in major policy issues such as GMOs, as well as others. Food sovereignty, comprehensively adhering to multiple dimensions of environmental justice, provides a crucial reference point for farmers' struggles at various levels of polity.

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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” was held at Yale University on September 14-15, 2013. The event brought 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 was 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.

The Yale conference was a huge success. It was decided by the organizers, joined by the [Land Deal Politics Initiative \(LDPI\)](#), to hold a European version of the Yale conference on 24 January 2014 at the ISS in The Hague, The Netherlands.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Zuhre Aksoy](#) is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Bogazici University, Turkey. She holds a PhD in Political Science from University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research focuses on environmental politics, political economy of development, and North-South relations. Specifically, she has been working on agrobiodiversity conservation, multi-level linkages in the conservation of genetic resources, the debate on farmers' rights and the protection of traditional agricultural knowledge. In addition to a focus on Turkey, she has been working on the global governance of crop genetic resources. Publications include: *Global Justice: From Theory to Development Action*, in *Journal of International Development* (with Theo Papaioannaou and Helen Yanacopoulos, 2009); “The Legal-Institutional Framework and Agrobiodiversity Conservation in Turkey” in *Rethinking Structural Reform in Turkish Agriculture: Beyond the World Bank's Strategies* (2010); and *Local-Global Linkages in Environmental Governance: The Case of Crop Genetic Resources in Global Environmental Politics* (forthcoming).



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