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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY: CONNECTIONS AND FRAGMENTATION

Diverse food economies or multi-variant capitalism: the community dynamic shaping contemporary-food systems

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Abstract

Community practices are being rehabilitated and reinvigorated due to a set of extraordinary historical circumstances. Within this context, the paper focuses on the various types of community practice, community discourse and communitarian reference points, influencing national food system dynamics. It begins by illustrating how corporate dominated food systems have appropriated community concerns and motifs for profit, and proceeds to describe several of the many counter-responses to corporate-dominated systems. These 'alternatives' are not necessarily anti-capitalist, and are best conceived in Gibson-Graham's (2006) 'post capitalist politics' framework and its language of 'diverse economies'. While numerous 'alternative' systems embed themselves within the capitalist market they aim to advance multiple ends beyond profitability. Still, I question the extent to which multi-variant capitalism offers transformative political possibilities. In so doing, I reflect on the reverberations from past community development theorising and highlight useful new intellectual currents.

Introduction

A set of extraordinary historical circumstances is catapulting community renewal and community practices to the forefront of public agendas (encompassing those of the state and civil society). In no particular order, the critical events include:

- climate change related weather events raising the spectre of food insecurity beyond 'The Third World';
- a major worldwide economic recession, with flow-on effects for livelihoods and social and health equity;
- peak oil scenarios, leading to political instability globally and to demands for 'alternative' bio-fuels using agricultural lands and crops;
- the US Presidency being won by a multi-racial community organiser, who thus far has eschewed the neo-liberal privileging of the individual over community and society.

Their potency lies in their synchronicity as well as their capacity to generate a welter of contradictory commentary; thereby, undermining well-established authorities in the state, the scientific professions and the more modern charismatic authority of the market (Dixon 2003). The ontological security that follows from assumptions that problems can be resolved at 'higher' levels is being undermined. "Business-as-usual" is off the menu; and there appears to be openness to considering the entire panoply of remedies: from colonising other planets to retreat into self-sufficient and reliant Earth-based enclaves; and from global to local movements calling for ecological and just solutions immediately and planned into the future.

In short, community-oriented actors - extending from global networks of organisations which privilege communitarian processes to locality based services - are being offered another chance to prove their social problem solving capacities if not their social transformation capacities. In the meantime, President Obama's speeches throughout 2009 provide timely legitimacy to community organising as one strategic approach.

Why have I chosen to focus on food systems as a way of exploring contemporary community practice[1] dynamics? There are three reasons. First, I am employed to research the relationship of food system transitions to health, well-being and inequity. Second, community organising in the pursuit of food security has a proud history. Third, social mobilisations centred on food security and sovereignty have become evident in rich and poor nations alike. Examples are drawn from my work in Australia, Thailand and international-level involvement with a WHO sponsored project on the health equity dimensions of urban food systems.

I am not alone in believing that food system transformation is a major global priority, with potential for social transformation within and between countries. In *Public Health Nutrition*, a leading public health ecologist reflected on "What President Obama can do in the world". He nominated five arenas of action for "that mighty food producing and consuming country":

- Addressing the 'what' and 'how' of production
- Leading on dietary change
- Reforming global institutional architecture
- Engaging with climate change
- Reducing inequalities (Lang 2009).

Within this context the paper has three aims, namely to**:**
1. describe the centrality of 'community' to the practical and discursive functioning of food supply chains and culinary cultures;
2. focus on the transformative possibilities of food systems which offer space (what 30 years ago was called 'room to manoeuvre') for community renewal more broadly;
3. argue the case for the utility of contemporary economic geography to community practices theorising. This third goal serves to ground a reflection on transitions in conceptions of power mobilised over the forty years for which the *Community Development Journal* has been a major international chronicle. This section amounts to

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[1] By community practices I refer to "the conscious application of principles, strategies and skills to build and maintain a sense of community, both as an end in itself and as a vehicle to achieve social, economic, political and cultural change" (Dixon et al. 2003, p.5)

a "beyond the fragments" argument, another community practice pre-occupation (and in hindsight one that was prescient) from 30 years ago (Rowbotham et al. 1981).

In addressing the first point, I anticipate covering the fragments to the story of community's presence in food systems. The dialectical nature of the appropriation of community motifs and practices is amplified in the second section. The final section describes potentially useful new theorising regarding community, and acts as basis for reflection on past theorising in relation to community based social change more broadly.

How 'community' asserts itself in food systems

I begin by asking how the idyll, concept and language of 'community' resonates through, and shapes, food systems. This is not intended to be an exhaustive account, rather to indicate the everyday and very common presence of community-in-food systems.

<u>Corporate engagement with community-in-food systems</u>
There are many instances of how food corporations appropriate 'community' for profit, in terms of both the feel-good factor (community idyll) and popular instrumental concerns, such as health and well-being. In one of the earliest explorations of this strategy, Belasco provided an engaging account of the food service sector's exploitation of civil society's genuine interest in counter-culture and ethnic cuisines during the 1960s and 1970s. In an appeal to people wanting a convenient ethnic experience, giant chains were established to sell Mexican tortillas and heat-and-serve pizzas (Belasco 1993).

This was one of many instances of corporate food actors mobilising positive associations to community. Responding to negative concerns about deficits in the food supply or ideas of risk among food consumers, 'community' was incorporated into numerous strategies: in what has been called the diets-making complex (Dixon and Banwell 2004), the corporate-environmental food regime (Friedmann 2005), and the corporate-social justice food system involving ethical trading initiatives like Fair Trade (Hughes 2005).

In the dietary arena, Nestle corporation has arguably been involved in community engagement for longer than any firm: 140 years or so. Indeed it uses a venerable past as part of contemporary appeals to acting in the common interest, with mention in numerous company publications to its pursuit of the UN Millennium Development Goals. As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility Charter, the *Nestle Creating Shared Value Report: Nutritional needs and quality diets* is replete with depictions of village life, descriptions of micro-finance loans to developing country farmers, and vignettes on the company's health and wellness activities in select South American countries. The word 'community' does not appear, but the positive community attributes of caring, sharing and support for local capacity and leadership resonate through the pictorial and textual framing of the company.

Equally, supermarket chains are showing marked enthusiasm for engaging with community concerns regarding the environment and social justice. Referring to the UK food retail sector, Friedberg (2004) has identified the emergence of an 'ethical complex' driving supermarkets to demonstrate socially-responsible supply chain governance. Retailers like Tesco and Marks and Spencer have adopted unique 'food miles' logos to signify air-freighted goods (MacMillan et al.

2008), with an implicit aim to secure market advantage through corporate reputation as an ethically responsible retailer (Hughes 2007).

In recent responses to challenges to their authority, due to market concentration and a perception that they lock out small independent food retailers, Australian supermarkets have moved to position themselves as industry leaders in social and environmental sustainability through corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, triple bottom line reporting and ethical traceability schemes. Unlike UK retailers, they do not have their own 'fair trade' initiatives: possibly explained by the fact that Australia does not share a history or geography with any major fair trade producing countries (an exception being neighbouring Papua New Guinea). While Australian supermarkets have not yet pursued the social justice or the 'red' consumer concerned by low income country producer livelihoods, they have sought out the 'green' consumer (see the Bryant and Goodman distinction 2004) using organic produce as the primary vehicle (Lyons 2007).

Direct appeals to community are at times overt. In its submission to the 2007-2008 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Inquiry in Retail Sector, Coles supermarket chain cited the positive impact of its 'community footprint' in terms of employment opportunities and ongoing investment in local communities, a reputable and safe food supply, operating as a conduit to consumer markets for producers, and its support for local growers affected by extreme weather conditions *(Coles)*.

Both of Australia's giant supermarkets reported sourcing product from Australian farmers and producers wherever possible, and Woolworths sought to define itself as *'Truly Australian'*. In this vein, Woolworths runs annual appeals for drought-stricken farmers. Aldi, the German company new to the Australian scene, also sought to emphasise in its submission that while it is a multinational corporation it is reinvesting all of its profits in Australia through new stores, employment opportunities and through sourcing Australian products almost exclusively[2].

State sponsored protection of food security and the culinary commons

Prior to the spate of initiatives of 'joined-up-policy' and Third Way sponsored public-private partnerships, community practice theorists were highlighting the contradictions and dilemmas inherent in state-sponsored interventions into community life (see Hoatson 2003, p.30). While there has been subsequent debate about whether states have been retreating from civil society, there are signs that governments are becoming more interventionist in relation to national and local food systems. Justified in terms of addressing food supply security, diet-related disease and farmer livelihoods, several Asian states are acting to protect traditional culinary practices in the face of the corporate food regime (Dixon 2009). Japan and South Korea appear to be at the forefront of advocating that their populations continue to respect culinary practices and foods that are deeply rooted in the community psyche.

However, these governments are not simply keen to ensure food security at the nutrition level but to secure an ontological security through protecting valued dietary practices. Enacted by the Japanese Government in 2005, the Basic Law on Shokuiku, for example, is intended to tackle numerous concerns: diet-related disease, poor eating behaviours (eg irregular meals);

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[2] I acknowledge Libby Hattersley's work in analysing the submissions to the Inquiry.

body image, food safety, over-dependence on imported foods, and loss of traditional food culture through globalisation. Food producers and consumers are both covered by the Law which provides both nutritional guidelines and culinary culture guidelines with advice like: "take advantage of your dietary culture and local food products, while incorporating new and different dishes"; and, "promote people's understanding of agriculture, forestry, fishery and food industry". (see www.maff.go.jp/)

In one sense Japan's is a recent attempt to reclaim authority over its food supply, while Cuba in contrast has had little option but to pursue a state sponsored food self-reliance strategy over four decades due to the US blockade on food imports. Its urban agriculture and a vibrant organics industry are becoming a showcase for those eager to promote healthy cities, sustainable environments and food secure populations (Dixon et al. 2009b).

<u>Civil society</u>

- Food sovereignty movements

Two of the most commonly referenced social movement responses to corporate food provisioning systems include the global Slow Food Movement and Via Campesina. The Slow Food International Manifesto was endorsed by delegates from 20 countries in 1989. Slow Food has evolved into an elaborately structured social movement, based on alliances between producers and consumers ('co-producers'), who are committed to making explicit the links between bio-physical, food sovereignty and cultural issues. Today there are 85000 individual members worldwide. The Manifesto states in part (Petrini 2001):

> *"Our [20th] century, which began and has developed under the insignia of industrial civilization, first invented the machine and then took it as its life model….*

Based on recognition that food, place and people are inextricably tied, the Movement's structure is built upon local chapters which celebrate the communitarian and ecological nature of food. It is an exemplar of a sophisticated grassroots octopus, despite being highly rule-and principle based and centrally run out of Italian headquarters. It has a publishing arm, global networking capacity, vast international face-to-face gatherings, a product/food service sector audit arm checking the 'credentials' of all who attempt to trade on its reputation, an educational wing which runs a University, and a set of discursive practices which energise social elites and peasants alike. In addition, Slow Food has established the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, committed to defend agricultural bio-diversity and gastronomic conditions. (see www.slowfood.com). The Foundation does "not reject markets but rather seek[s] to 'multiply niches' as an alternative strategy to expansion of one set of products and procedures art the expense of all others" (Friedmann 2005, p.261)

More in tune with a labour organising model is Via Campesina, formed in 1992. It consists of several million landless peasants, family farmers, agricultural workers, rural women and indigenous communities across 56 countries. Its primary purpose is at once straightforward and profound: to secure livelihoods from the land based on a philosophy that

… biodiversity is not only flora, fauna, earth, water and ecosystems; it is also cultures, systems of production, human and economic relations, forms of government; in essence, it is freedom (cited in McMichael P. 2004, p. 277).

To this end, the movement is active in international fora arguing for:
- Peasant and family farm-based production
- People's food sovereignty
- Decentralized food production and supply chains.

(see viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php)

Via Campesina is responsible for catapulting the idea of 'food sovereignty' as distinct from 'food security' into global consciousness. This latter term arose from multi-state institutions, like the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in the middle of last century. Food security refers to universal access to affordable and appropriate nutrition, but the way in which the 'good nutrition' is produced and distributed is not questioned. Food sovereignty, in contrast, is concerned with the democratisation of the producer-consumer relationship. In a book-length analysis of the organisation, Desmarais claims that "its strategies defy traditional patterns of organizing in the rural sector, and the sheer magnitude of its international presence – its dynamic nature, cultural diversity, and wide geographical distribution – speak to its transformatory potential" (2007, p. 9).

- Household activities

Activity in this sphere is the realm of 'organic intellectuals'. These are best observed in domestic kitchens around the world, with sociologist Daniel Miller (1995) proclaiming the housewife to be the most powerful global actor of the era. Their provisioning decisions and stratagems cause market actors to 'kill', reformulate and create products. This provocation could be queried from many perspectives, not least gender, food security and political economy. Miller's proposition nevertheless highlights the collective potential of millions of individual food providers to perpetuate or transform communitarian culinary cultures as needs arise. Home cooks both adopt corporate food fads yet daily reproduce cross-generational folklore and skills. Household cooks were the most prominent faces in the 2007-08 food riots which erupted from Honduras to the Philippines; and as such home food providers compete with food corporations as the guardians of the most fundamental moral economy.

Household activities become very prominent when different population groups – based on religion, ethnicity, caste and class – attempt to safeguard their culinary culture. A strong example of this can be found in Thailand. In contrast to tourist stereotypes about Thai cuisine being devoted to hot and spicy dishes, lie more subtle features which derive from Thai people's understanding of their place in nature and the universe. The following is an extract from Seubsman et al. (2009).

According to Buddhist influenced Thai medicine, the human body is composed of four dhātu or elements: earth, water, wind, and fire…, which must be in alignment otherwise an 'element imbalance' occurs, and illness results. One way of balancing is to eat after the fashion of the primary body element, which is influenced by the month of birth.

'Earth' people should eat … astringent food or faad (found predominantly in Thai herbs, mangosteen, and green guava); waan (sweet, as found in milk and palm sugar); mun (a potato like- oil composite found in peanuts, potato, pumpkin, taro root, and coconut milk); and, kem (a salt taste coming from earth and sea salt, fish sauce, fermented and dried fish).

Indeed, culinary cultures in many parts of Asia (the Philippines maybe the exception) caution against premature claims about the globalisation or the westernisation of diets.

- Civic agriculture

Organic agriculture – in the double meaning of free from industrial agro-chemicals and as arising spontaneously to meet human nutrition needs – has been the mainstay of food provisioning for millennia. With twentieth century urbanisation and industrialisation demanding women's labour, civic agriculture traditions have been maintained through household gardens and community allotments. In dialectical fashion, civic agriculture has been central to community organising and development over the twentieth century. In the US, the 20 million Victory Gardens, or war gardens, planted throughout American cities supplied 40% of the nation's food towards the end of World War II. They provided functions beyond supplying the population with cheaper fresh produce, supplying another plank for nationalist sentiment and cohesion as well as improving the nutritional status of the population (Hynes 1996).

Civic agriculture was provided a new impetus from the environmental and food counterculture movements of the sixties and seventies. Within this context, civic agricultural protagonists shifted the focus away from simply increasing economic and nutritional efficiencies in food production, and instead adopted a broader perspective which used localised food production as a way of developing and strengthening communities (Lyson 2004; Dixon et al. 2009b). They have broadened the civic-oriented distribution chains through farmers markets, community supported agriculture or box schemes, and harvest trails (Knowd et al. 2005).

Recently the new occupants of the White House have revived a civic agriculture leadership role, through turning over part of the gardens surrounding the presidential home to food production, just as it had been used by Eleanor Roosevelt for her own Victory Garden (Anon 2009). These thoroughly modern 'monarchs' are emulating the traditional royal figureheads of Prince Charles in the UK and his championing of organic food systems, and the King of Thailand's patronage of the King's Product line of regionally branded specialty foods.

- Gleaning

Providing the training ground for a new wave of, often young, community activists is the ancient ritual of gleaning: collecting 'left-overs' or edible waste. In an Australian case study, Edwards and Mercer (2007) argue that reclaiming foods from dumpsters (the large waste bins at the back of food service sector outlets) and redistributing them is a contemporary example of "activist's use of space, place and culture in relation to social issues" (2007, p. 279). The redistribution takes one of two forms: either for direct consumption by the dumpster divers themselves or via preparing meals from the ingredients for non-commercial exchange at street stalls and soup kitchens. According to Edwards and Mercer (2007), the resulting 'gleaning culture' is characterised by a commitment to the informal economy, free food and an anarchic

organisational format which is devoted to challenging the dominant materialist and capitalist ethos of Australian society.

The transformative possibilities of community referenced food systems

The foregoing material is intended to provide an overview of key manifestations of 'community-in-food systems'. The strategies for re-embedding food in social relations are highly varied: from highly orchestrated (the corporations and food sovereignty movements), through the pursuit of customary attachments to food either in blissful or wilful ignorance of the corporate *zeitgeist* (the messy domain of civil society), and governments simultaneously protecting corporate activities and the culinary commons.

From this birds-eye view it is not possible to conclude whether community-in-food provisioning provides a mechanism for citizens to reclaim the food-related commons. Some highly contradictory processes are in play.

In the Nestle report referred to earlier, the world's biggest food corporation states that its fundamental goal is "creating benefit through our business value chain – starting with the free technical assistance to almost 600000 farmers who supply us, through the social and economic impact of our 456 factories located in rural areas, as well as through nutrition education for children currently reaching over 10 million young people". Yet, much like the corporate-led Green Revolution that spread across South-east Asia feeding millions of people, vast inequities arise when only some producer communities are permitted into corporate supply chains (McMichael 1994).

Based on the Australian and UK experience, the impact of supermarket supply chains raises questions of the corporate delivery of equity and sustainable food-based livelihoods. Through their support for the organic food and fair trade sectors they are contributing to environmental sustainability and social justice aims. However, mobilising such ethical motifs on a grand scale means that they must constantly reconstitute and spatially diffuse industrial forms of production, distribution and consumption. So while they portray their efforts to sustain the social, environmental and economic fundamentals of social life, it is not surprising that these firms are pilloried in critical reviews on the community impact of their activities. *Tescopoly* (Simms 2007*)* and *The Wal-mart Effect* (Fishman 2006) both document for the UK and US respectively how giant firms can have detrimental effects on the social dynamics as well as the physical environment of villages and suburbs.

In the Australian context, the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance has also noted that increasing supermarket concentration in the retailing sector has resulted in a reduction in local shops, impacting on the walkability and social connectivity of local neighbourhoods (www.sydneyfoodfairness.org.au). It pointed out that the loss of local shops disproportionately affects people without private transport, those with mobility issues and living in areas poorly serviced by public transport.

There is a growing chorus of academic work which adopts a proposition that supermarkets:

> … are vehicles of social and ecological reorganization: transforming historical relations embedded in local food systems, crop varieties and knowledges, rural communities, peasant producers and small farmers, waste recycling systems, biological processes, hydrological cycles, and a variety of urban experiences and cultural lifestyles (McMichael and Friedmann 2007, p.297)

In what Friedmann calls "very specific and unequal compromises among social movements, states, and powerful agro food corporations" (2005, p. 230), trading on 'green' credentials is a feature of international food systems. She goes onto add that "Parallel to the selective appropriation by the 19th century capitalism of demands for reduced exploitation – initially in the form of shorter hours of work – green capitalism can selectively appropriate demands of environmental movements for reduced pollution and depletion" (p.233).

Thus, it is timely to question the extent to which food provisioning systems, underpinned by agro-ecology, food sovereignty and community philosophies, have the potential to dilute the potency of the citizen-consumer subjectivity, so assiduously courted in the last quarter century by supermarkets and firms like Nestle. Is it possible that diverse food sub-systems offer a platform from which to cultivate a citizen-producer subjectivity which is quite distinct from the alienated industrial worker? Instead of everyday practices being guided by a consumption ethos, are we seeing a transition to an ethos resonating with 'we are all producers in this together'? Mass media stories of the return to backyard gardening and chicken coops hint at this possibility.

So, how can we understand the transformative potential of 'community-in-food systems'?

New theoretical insights: the diverse economies approach

Whether transformative potential is necessarily anti-capitalist has provided a central platform of debate within community practice circles for decades. For Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) however, this is a sterile and gendered debate, and in its place they have established a 'post capitalist politics' framework. With its foundational construct of 'diverse economies', transformative potential often entails market mechanisms. With the exception of gleaning and some not-for-profit cases of civic agriculture, the examples provided above embed themselves within the capitalist market, and yet still fall within the Gibson-Graham purview of community-oriented enterprise because they would claim to share an ethic that " privileges care of the local community and its environment" (p.80). For Gibson-Graham, the important political fulcrum is whether "interdependence is recognised and acted upon or whether it is obscured and perhaps denied" (p.84), as is the case in orthodox economic analyses which valorise surplus value.

Using some key reference works of the 1990s, the authors support the following line of argument when it comes to community economics, namely that:
- the wholesale embrace of 'community' across the political spectrum is understandable, because governments have sought to use the language to simultaneously withdraw public services in favour of private provision, while investing in major public oversight of private lives;

- the 'ideal of community' is just that, and the idyllic becomes only remotely possible if one departs from the fiction that there is a 'human immanence' and a belief in a 'common being';
- a more accurate and empowering ontological position is of 'being in common'. In practical terms this means to liberate community endeavours from a conformity to the local, face-to-face interaction, small-scale, and a caring position;
- rather than pose industrial, exploitative economies with a singular "alternative economy" like '*the* community economy' there is a need "to liberate economic difference" (p.85).
- it is necessary to align multiple economic forms with ethical decision-making. In this sense, the 'economy' that attaches itself to 'community' is best conceived of "as a site of decision, of ethical praxis, instead of as the ultimate reality/container/constraint" (p. 87).
- To arrive at ethical decisions, the following questions need to be posed:
  What is necessary to personal and social survival?
  How is social surplus to be appropriated and distributed?
  Whether and how social surplus is to be produced and consumed?
  And, how is a commons produced and sustained? (p.88)

Not surprisingly, the green and just corporate strategies described earlier are the most troubling in terms of their ethical potential because they have a hierarchy of needs which is topped not by protecting the commons, but growing profitability – this is where environmental externalities are discounted in often dubious self-regulatory audit schemes. As a result of their cash flows and economies of scale, corporations can force out smaller competitors with consequences for the diverse food economy. In a report commissioned by the Victorian government on the sustainability of its food supply, the consultants remarked that any "loss of small/medium sized producers with diverse and local knowledge could reduce overall capacity for adaptation and the resilience of the food system overall" (Larsen et al. 2008, p. 11). Instead of squabbling with capital's impact, they outlined a number of what they called "innovation opportunities" which would increase the possibility for diverse food systems, including:

- increase diversity of food production to increase the likelihood of harvest even in unpredictable conditions
- changes to planting dates and varieties, more resilient crops and systems
- opportunities for low-input agriculture techniques (including organic systems), as they have been found to be particularly 'resilient and productive' in climate adaptation strategies
- redundancy and flexibility in processing, logistics and distribution systems (Larsen et al. 2008).

Resonances with earlier CD theorising

Gibson-Graham's work resonates with a timeless pursuit within community development: how to proceed beyond the fragments of the local, the small and the different; or in their words, "how do we multiply, amplify, and connect these different activities?" (p.80). The response they give is also familiar, lying as it does in "a counter hegemonic discourse … that can establish (some of the) contours of a shared political practice" (p.81). Drawing on post-structural principles, Gibson-Graham argue for the resignification and enactment of

alternatives (p.81). Here there are echoes of the Gramscian notion of 'prefiguration', or the practice in the here-and-now of politically desired ways of living.

The community economy is a critical part of the mix for Gibson-Graham's idea of diverse economic institutions, and indeed many of their examples derive from, or at least resonate with, the local economic development initiatives of a quarter a century ago. In its most progressive formulation, the community economics field of the 1960s onwards was oriented to re-socialising economic relations rather than solely jobs creation. Community economic cooperatives and worker cooperatives and enterprises under community based boards were considered one strategy for forging links between labour and community movements. Based in Gramscian politics, participatory democracy through worker ownership was discussed as the most progressive form of politics. Community practice scholars drew practical inspiration from Mondgragon in Spain (as do Gibson-Graham), the rural electricity cooperatives and the Community Development Cooperative movement in the US (Blakely 1994), from red Bologna and other communist local governments (Mowbray 1986), from the UK (Craig et al. 1979; the 1995 Special issue of CDJ: Craig and Mayo).

Reference to ecological relationships is a relatively novel development within community discourse. For Marxists and post-Marxists like Gibson-Graham though the idea of human-nature interactions is not new; and it is interesting to note in agri-food studies the re-discovery of Marx's notion of the 'metabolic rift' to describe the current rupture between production, consumption and the environment (Campbell 2009).

What economic geographers and others have done is to argue in favour of the contingent and fluid nature of environmental-social relations which arise from networks of large and small actors and non-human 'actants', such as landscapes, bio-organisms and government policies. As social actors, networks are considered to be highly strategic endeavours and yet unpredictable because the synergies between the network elements is unknowable. Social networks are central to the Gibson-Graham distinction between 'common being' (the dominant understanding of community) and 'being-in-common', or working together to achieve shared and solitary ends. Actor networks exemplify the community development observations from the 1980s and 1990 that power is expressed in multiple forms and sites.

Diverse networks can potentiate inclusive participation; but it remains debatable whether enrolment in corporate supply chain networks is a contemporary form of co-option, signalling a diminution in opportunities by some actors to assert their authority and needs. As network theorists point out, only a case by case analysis can answer such questions.

So while 'in and against the state' has been a critical pivot for community action, the 21st century sees an explicit focus on 'in and against capital'. While Gibson- Graham's concept of post capitalist politics expresses the idea that there are diverse food economies in operation, the term 'multi-variant capitalism'[3] may better capture the reality that much of the diversity described above is welded onto existing capitalist arrangements. This reality leads back to a bigger question as to whether is possible or desirable to unify the current fragmentary responses to food security and sovereignty.

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[3] David Adamson raised this point with me.

Conclusion

Community discourses are re-appearing throughout industrial and alternative food systems. What is becoming clear is that the alternatives are not necessarily anti-capitalist and could not exist outside of a capitalist framework, even as they try to reformulate what capitalist relations might look like. This paper argues that there is a rich new vein of economic geography theorising to help structure an understanding of the fragmentary activities behind food production, distribution and consumption. A 'post-capitalist' framework helps to organise the disparate food system initiatives as they are driven by a wide spectrum of political ends and means, geographically dispersed, socially and ethnically specific and are subject to different regulatory pressures. The framework contains elements of progressive feminist and socialist community development theorising of 40 years ago, It reminds us that food's very fundamental human and ecological character introduces a lifeworld authority that constantly undermines the market authority of corporations and the bureaucratic authority of states. Whether a plethora of post-capitalist activities, many of them dependent on capitalist relations, can have transformative potential awaits the experience that lies ahead.

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