Food Movements Unite! ? Food sovereignty, the agrarian question, and the contours of organising from below in the South African food system

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Abstract

Significant scholarly attention has been given to the global food sovereignty movement. However, the global movement is ultimately rooted in national and local contexts. The political dynamics of movements in such contexts call for ongoing exploration, especially as to how the global discourse and principles of food sovereignty take root politically and socially. This article therefore provides an account of the movement terrain of organising members of popular classes around food questions in South Africa, and with which food sovereignty as a global idea, practice and political project articulates. A typology shows that the civil society forms of organising around food and food system change fall between justice-centred and food-centred conceptions, and they cohere around lifestyle, organic, food justice and systemic politics. The article shows how the form and content of this food movement emerged through the particularities of a settler colonial society and the associated articulations between race, class, gender, and ecology. Based on this, I argue that these types, their content, and their politics have been shaped through the historical, conjunctural relationship between the agrarian question and the national question in South Africa, which can be understood through Stuart Hall's concept of articulation. This argument has wider implications for how we think about food movements in the South – the potential to understand them in relation to the particularities of agrarian change in post-colonial contexts, the associated patterns of class fragmentation, and politics, that have been historically engendered by underdevelopment, precarity, and subordinate relations to the global economy.

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Introduction

Food sovereignty has become the key rallying call of the global social movement La Via Campesina ('Way of the Peasant'), one of the world's largest global social movements that claims to represent about 200 million small-scale food producers worldwide (LVC, 2021). At a food sovereignty world assembly in Mali in 2007, the resulting Declaration of Nyéléni articulated what has become one of the most widely used definitions of food sovereignty. It elaborated on various principles of food sovereignty that have become widely seen as the key coordinates of advancing food sovereignty. These principles offer instruments to resist the spread of industrial agriculture and the corporate food regime, and to advance alternative food systems defined by rights to ecologically healthy food systems, culturally appropriate food, and decision-making power (Kesselman, 2017). Key in this conceptualisation of food sovereignty is the democratisation of, and strengthening social control over, the food system.

However, applying food sovereignty to the many dimensions and actors of the food system has not come without its analytical, political and concrete tensions. As an idea, mobilising frame, political project and discourse that has garnered extensive global attention is likely to do, food sovereignty has become a 'fundamentally contested concept' (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015: 433). It has thus inspired academic conferences, journal articles and special journal issues devoted to deepening and interrogating its dimensions. An important source of debate has emerged from agrarian political economy and reflects many ongoing debates in the field on agriculture, class (and class agency), politics, and capitalist development (Edelman et al., 2014). A prominent aspect of this debate revolves around the role that structural processes of class differentiation in agriculture under capitalism or political agency of subjects respectively play in hindering or advancing the possibilities of realising food sovereignty's ideals of resolving industrial agriculture's contradictions by replacing it with ecologically harmonious production through egalitarian social and economic relations.

This article seeks to contribute to further discussion on approaching and understanding food sovereignty politics and organising in the Global South, and proposes that southern agrarian questions (McMichael, 1997; Moyo, Jha and Yeros, 2013) can be an important lens through which to do so. In the context of the global movement politics of food sovereignty as a response to the socio-ecological crisis-inducing global food regime, I examine the nature of the organised food movement in a particular post-colonial context of the Global South: South Africa. The dynamics of transnational agrarian and food sovereignty movements have been well analysed (Borras et al., 2008; McMichael, 2014). However, the global food sovereignty movement emerged from particular national political settings and movements, such as the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). As the coverage of transnational movements by Borras et al. (2008) and Voss and Williams (2012) point to, ongoing attention to the localised dynamics and contents of movement building, where movements are ultimately rooted and constituted, remains relevant in terms of understanding the dynamics of food movements and food sovereignty in concrete contexts of agrarian change.

The article paints a picture of the 'food movement' in South Africa in terms of civil society organising on the issue, and which is the terrain with which the global food sovereignty discourse, practice, and politics has articulated to shape the nature of food sovereignty organising in the country. That is, actual food sovereignty organising in South Africa reflects not just the organising principles that are core to activists' understanding of food sovereignty, such as the six principles outlined in the Nyeleni Declaration (2007). They also reflect longer historical forms of organising oppressed people during colonialism and apartheid, and the varying political articulations of race, class, gender and ecology that such organising happened through. A typology shows that the array of organising around food and the food system can be categorised by variables of justice-centred and food-centred conceptions of change in the food system, and that they cohere around *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice* and *systemic* politics. These categories can be identified in other social contexts as well. However, there is some particularity in their historical construction, content and social relationships in a context like South Africa, that have been shaped through the particular race-class dynamics of its racial

capitalism, acutely theorised by Stuart Hall (1980). I argue that in this context a key element to understanding the constitution of the food movement in South Africa is its historical relations with the intersecting national and agrarian questions, which can be understood through the concept of articulation.

A wealth of social and food movement literature has examined movement formation and action through concepts such as repertoires of action, framing, and opportunity structure (Tarrow, 1993; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Zentgraf and Kalix Garcia, 2024). However, in light of Stuart Hall's approach to conjunctural analysis (Featherstone, 2017), the article's focus is instead to situate the types in the historical processes and social relations that came together to produce them, particularly in relation to the intersecting national and agrarian questions. My approach to the agrarian question reflects a critical agrarian political economy framework that has principally been concerned with the relationship between agriculture and capitalism, the class relations within agriculture, and the associated politics arising out of the agrarian question (Cousins, 2013; Bernstein, 2010). The national question was broadly about overcoming the combination of racial oppression and class exploitation under South African colonialism and apartheid, where the country's accumulation model was based on the super-exploitation of the Black majority's labour and their political repression (Drew, 1996). Key to this process was the agrarian question, which proceeded through creating the conditions for accumulation in agriculture under white control, through racialised land dispossession, the simultaneous reliance on agriculture for survival on diminished land that was left for the Black majority, and the development of a large-scale and highly commercialised, white-controlled agricultural and food system.

A key political task of the national liberation movement was thus to 'resolve' the national question through winning the struggle for democracy and to ensure the socio-economic redress and upliftment of the country's majority through the pursuit of equality. However, for those like Jara (2013: 267), the national question remains 'unresolved', seen in the post-1994 adoption of neoliberal economic policies by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) that stifled more deeply addressing the racialised patterns of poverty and class inequality. As such, South Africa is today considered the most unequal country in the world, and this inequality retains a strong racial pattern (World Bank, 2022; Chatterjee et al., 2023). This is reflected in the country's agrarian structure. Liberalisation, de-regulation, and a lack-lustre agrarian reform programme have left intact or reinforced many historical inequalities in land ownership, access to resources, and farming, the conditions of work across the agro-food system, and has seen ongoing corporate consolidation and control (Greenberg, 2015; Hodge et al., 2021). Furthermore, alongside this highly productive and 'modern' commercial system South Africa experiences high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition: around 60% of households experience some form of food insecurity and 65% cannot afford a healthy diet (Simelane et al., 2023; FAO et al., 2022). As we will see, the agrarian question has historically been and remains an important condition for food movement organising in South Africa in the vein of food sovereignty.

The article proceeds as follows. The second section elaborates on the theoretical framework with which the article engages and through which to approach the movement relationship between the agrarian question and food sovereignty in South Africa. The article is theoretically situated in agrarian political economy, which is concerned with the relations between agriculture, class and capitalist development. It is within this literature that much of the debate on food sovereignty has taken place. I adopt a materialist analysis consistent with such an approach, but combine it with the necessity of politically specific analysis through the notion of articulation developed by Stuart Hall (1980; 1996a). Articulation is an important tool in conjunctural analysis, which I suggest is key to understanding the historical, relational and politically fluid nature of today's movement, which can be understood as developing through processes of articulation. The fourth section describes the methods used to investigate the food movement in this context, which is presented in the fifth section. The sixth section discusses how this food movement has historically been shaped by the forces of the agrarian question and politically specific articulations of class, race, and national liberation politics. I conclude with the necessity to situate food sovereignty politics and movement organising in the South, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, within national histories of the agrarian question, the political traditions that have emerged,

and the kinds of articulations that take place today amidst the contradictions of insertion into a neoliberal and unequal world economy. This may be useful for a fuller understanding of food sovereignty politics and its potentials, at national and transnational levels.

Theoretical Framework – The Agrarian Question and Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty has reignited debates on agrarian change and the agrarian question (see Edelman et al., 2014; Shattuck et al., 2015; Alonso-Fredjas et al., 2015). Much historical thinking on the agrarian question has principally been concerned with issues around the development of agriculture in capitalist societies and associated class relations. One of its principal early theorists, Karl Kautsky, thus defined the agrarian question as, 'is capital, and in what ways is capital, taking hold of agriculture, revolutionising it, smashing the old forms of production and of poverty and establishing the new forms which must succeed?' (quoted in Akram-Lodhi, 1998:135). In this sense, Bernstein (1996) identified three inter-connected problematics that have characterised the classical agrarian question. The first is that of accumulation, relating to the role of agriculture in generating surplus resources for industrialisation and structural transformation. The second problematic can be termed one of production, concerned with the extent to which capitalist class relations have developed in the countryside. The third is concerned with politics, the political forces and processes that the accumulation and production problematics gave rise to (Akram-Lodhi, 1998). As a result, Bernstein (2006) terms the classical agrarian question as one of capital. Key in these approaches to the agrarian question is the inevitable tendency of rural class differentiation and its attendant implications for politics.

Bernstein's classification of the classical agrarian question as one of capital is largely a preface to his argument that under current conditions of capitalist globalisation, much of the South is today instead confronted by the agrarian question of labour (Bernstein, 2006). That is, the agrarian question is no longer one of capital as under contemporary conditions of globalisation industrialisation does not necessarily require capitalist development in agriculture. Rather, there is a global fragmented class of labour – the precariat, the informal working class, petty commodity producers – that is rendered surplus to the accumulation needs of capital. It is thus the intensified reproductive crisis of labour and, consequently, how to secure social reproduction for classes of labour, and the consequent role that land may play in this, that for Bernstein (2006) constitutes the agrarian question today.

This conception has generated much debate and critique in agrarian theory, including that it simplifies the relationship between agriculture and capitalist development in the South, it remains capital-centric rather than appreciative of the multiple forces shaping rural livelihoods and economies, and does not appreciate the symbiotic relationships between capital and labour (Hendricks, 2014; Dasgupta, 2021; Murisa and Helliker, 2011). Its framing has also become an important pillar of debate on food sovereignty, such as between Bernstein and the prominent food sovereignty advocate, Phillip McMichael (Bernstein, 2014, 2016; McMichael, 2014, 2016). In many senses, the debates encompass varying positions long existent in the literature on the agrarian question on the nature of agrarian change and its relation to capitalism. In particular, they include the relationships between agents of change and structural class determinants, class formation and its relationships to ecological crisis and political organisation, and the implications of fragmentation of classes of labour for politics and agrarian change. Some see much of this debate as seemingly displaying a mutually exclusive emphasis on agency and structure respectively (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). Yet a key actor in the debate who focuses strongly on political agency, McMichael (2014), argues that the peasant is a political rather than analytical category that is actively constituted by the terrain and lines of struggle in particular contexts. Both assertions point us to concretely understanding the nature of agency and resistance in situated and contextual ways.

One attempt to understand agrarian agency in politically specific and contextual ways, from a southern perspective, is by Moyo et al. (2013). They situate the dynamics of the agrarian question, in former settler

colonies in particular, in relation to the politics of national liberation. They argue that the notion that the agrarian question of capital is resolved, based on the reduction of the question to industrialisation, is based on a particular European experience. Rather, given disarticulated forms of development and underdevelopment during and after colonialism, the agrarian question remains relevant and unresolved, and for countries like many in Africa is one of national sovereignty in relation to capital – the agrarian question of national liberation. Land and agrarian reform thus remain central to democratised forms of national development. They emphasise the role of rural social forces in contesting economic subordination in the global economy and capital centric economic policies that limit the gains of national liberation. This also raises questions about the national political relations that these dynamics occur through. Whereas scholars like Bernstein have tended to treat the conditions creating fragmented classes of labour as an accomplished fact, for Moyo et al. (2013) it is precisely those constraining conditions that are the object of political agency, and on which transforming those conditions is contingent.

Key in these debates on the agrarian question are therefore the roles of, and relationships between, structural agrarian constraints and political agency in the context of the national question. I suggest that beyond only their argument about national liberation, an important implication of Moyo et al.'s approach is that it reflects an attempt to deepen a relational analysis that asks us to situate agency and movements in historically, politically, and contextually specific ways, rather than reading their potentials and significance off structural constraints. This means that, in placing the emergence of the South African food movement from the agrarian question, 'trajectories of agrarian change are not a story foretold, but the product of multiple and dynamic politics' (Alonso-Fradejas 2015: 493). This points to the conjunctural and contingent nature of the food movement's emergence from particular agentic engagements with the structural features of the country's agrarian and national questions.

Articulation provides a methodological and conceptual tool through which to undertake conjunctural and dialectical analysis of multiple determinations. I use articulation as developed by the Gramscian theorist Stuart Hall. The concept was initially developed in the South African context in a seminal article by Harold Wolpe (1972), as a way to understand the relationship between 'pre-capitalist' modes of production and the development of industrial capitalism in South Africa. While making a critical contribution, Wolpe was also criticised for his functionalist, mechanical, and overly structural readings of such articulation (Friedman, 2015). Hall thus further sophisticated the concept through a Gramscian frame. Antonio Gramsci's focus on hegemony in analysis of capitalism and social phenomena was grounded in the need for historical specificity, which meant treating objects of analysis as 'historical articulations' (Hall, 1980). As explained by Stuart Hall (1996a), a Gramscian analysis therefore means moving beyond a reductionist approach that reads off political developments from their economic determinations, to incorporating analysis of the 'mediations' structuring the relationships between the economic foundations and the actual phenomena and processes shaping social reality in a particular instance. This includes unpacking the role of agency in any particular conjuncture, and the forces shaping it, as part of how social phenomena, including class, are actively constructed, so producing 'a "unity" out of difference' (Hall, 1991: 136).

The concept of articulation is a way to undertake historically specific analysis, and to understand this 'unity' as constructed by dialectical forces and as a product of multiple determinations – material, ideological, subjective, and political. Hall's (1980: 329) elaboration of the concept of articulation partly reflects notions of 'joining up' and 'giving expression to', beyond simply juxtaposition. Articulation can be used in the sense of the combination of relations and structures into a 'complex unity' that is dynamic and overdetermined, in the sense that the unity is not simply the sum of its components. In this sense, processes of articulation are generative of social structure and realities. This includes the production of collective political action and mobilisation through the intersections of various elements like history, class, gender, race, and culture and subjectivity (Levenson, 2022).

Key in the formation of movements is the 'common sense' they organise around. Further to his Gramscian approach, one of Hall's key contributions was also to bring culture more strongly into class analysis, in the context of ideology and hegemony, and building counter-hegemony. Culture can refer to the system of shared meaning through which people make sense of the world, and therefore act on it. In this sense it is therefore critical in shaping subjectivity, and it is powerfully shaped by ideology – 'the ways in which ideas of different kinds grip the minds of the masses' (Hall, 1996b: 26) and so constructs the 'common sense' (Hall, 1996a). Ideology can play a role in stabilising a system of power and domination, but it also entails processes through which new forms of consciousness are developed and that can organise concrete action against oppressive systems (Hall, 1996a). In this light, varying ideological and political responses can be developed to similar material problems, including those that historically formed the types constituting today's food movement in South Africa. This also allows us to see how in the food movement ideological and cultural dimensions have historically shaped varying practices in response to concrete situations – such as methods of farming, organising, and the political orientation of such organising.

A class analysis of the food movement through the conceptual frame of articulation and conjunctural analysis may help view the streams constituting it as particular 'historical articulations' of social groups, material conditions (including ecological ones of soil degradation and drought), and cultural and political outlooks that underpinned them, in the context of the national and agrarian questions. This will be unpacked further, after a brief description of the methods used to investigate the South African food movement.

Data and Methods

To uncover the various components that have articulated to produce the food movement, the research focused on the historical contexts that they emerged and evolved through, the histories of the initiatives, the political motivations behind them, the social groups that drove the initiatives and that articulated around them respectively, the central issues that they organised and currently organise around, the tactics and modes of organising, and the involved actors' comprehensions of their context and work (their 'common sense'). The research took place over a roughly 3-year period between 2015-2018, which examined 36 initiatives across six of South Africa's nine provinces (Gauteng, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape). This covered initiatives operating in rural as well as in urban areas – due to South Africa's model of uneven development and semi-proletarianisation, the agrarian question pervades both the rural and the urban (Jacobs, 2018). My sampling approach started from my initial knowledge of initiatives to target, which was based on my prior involvement in activist food networks, while I also connected with further initiatives as I came to know of them through the research process. I aimed to examine and engage with a cross section of initiatives that organised in different parts of the country, different social groups, and around different issues related to food and the food system.

A number of methods of investigation were then employed. Extensive engagement of secondary literature on the history of the agrarian question, food, and resistance informed an understanding of the historical context of the emergence of the segments of the South African food movement and of its actors, including the material conditions they were responding to, and information on the initiatives themselves. Primary data was also gathered, including through analysis of historical documents, accessed through archives, online, and through interview subjects. These played an important role in understanding the historical roots and the ideological and political motivations (the common sense) that shaped how they understood the problem they sought to address, the solutions, and the actors they sought to organise. I also undertook 26 interviews with key informants, who included researchers and scholar-activists knowledgeable on agrarian, food and movement issues, and those situated at important vantage points such as in NGOs active on land, food, or agrarian issues. These provided further data on the historical and political contexts of the initiatives under study and an insight into some of internal dynamics of movement building that occurred after 1994.

I also conducted 52 in-depth interviews with participants across the different categories identified as comprising the food movement. Participant observation allowed me to build a more complete and dynamic picture of the initiatives I studied through more sustained engagement (Robson and McCarton, 2016). This involved more 'passive' forms of observations in the field, as well as participant observation through my participation in events like annual general meetings (AGMs), becoming a member of a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) group and so attending organic farm assessment visits, and participating in direct actions such as marches by the movements or campaigns I was studying. This participant observation overlapped with my own years of activism and involvement in the food movement since 2011. Lastly, I undertook extensive analysis of primary organisational documents like information booklets, strategy and planning documents, reports, and press statements. Thematic analysis of the data was then conducted through Nvivo to identify the historical roots and the problems the movements responded to, the social relationships through which they developed, their political comprehension of the material context, practical solutions advanced, forms of organising, and changes over time. These methods of primary data gathering allowed for developing an insight into the current terrain of formal organising around food system change and of the types constituting it as historical articulations, the social relations they developed through, and the class, racial, ideological and political mediations that have shaped them.

Findings – A Typology of the Food Movement in South Africa

South Africa's largely corporate-controlled food system has been characterised as 'unjust, unsustainable, unsafe, and unkind' (Cock, 2016: 4). Patterns of inequality, employment precarity, and food insecurity in the food system reflect also the wider inequalities of South African society, and the injustices underpinning them. These are some of the contextual features within which we can situate the various streams of the food movement and how they relate to them.

The first level of findings is that the food movement can be broadly divided into organisations and initiatives that start from a food-centred and justice-centred perspective respectively. In short, in food-centred approaches, the starting point is the outcomes of the industrial food system in terms of food's quality, health aspects and the environmental impacts of its production. These concerns are elaborated across different class and social contexts to produce particular configurations. Food-centred approaches can focus on both better-off and poorer communities, although not necessarily from the standpoint of justice. Questions of social justice can be present, but tend to be understood largely in ameliorative terms and as an 'additive property' (Figueroa, 2015: 502).

Justice-centred also shares these concerns about the industrial food system but, in the context of South Africa's social inequality, they are refracted through a central emphasis on rights of popular classes, and so their framing agenda tends to be on social and distributional inequalities, the race, class and gender implications of food system injustices, and the rights and struggles of farm workers and dwellers. The starting point for those towards the justice-centred axis is therefore the needs and rights of the poor and marginalised and challenging the social relations that induce deprivation, including corporate power, and through which attempts to advance resistance to the industrial food system is refracted. An important structuring dynamic of conceptions of justice here have been histories of various national liberation traditions that have connected to struggles on the ground that are shaped by the social and economic contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa. The meanings of justice in relation to food are thus closely tied to contesting the patterns of class, racial and gender inequality forged under national oppression, and intensified in various ways by economic forces after liberation.

The distinction between food-centred and justice-centred reflects how, while 'objective' food system contradictions may be commonly recognised, approaches to addressing them are refracted through varying concrete interests, class positions, and cultural and political lenses (Figueroa, 2015). Figure 1 presents a

typology depicting a framework for understanding the food movement in South Africa. The key axis is between food-centred and justice-centred approaches. When combined with the second axis of an emphases on either consumption or production as the locus of action/protest, we see four particular configurations of mobilisation identifiable in the South African context. Indeed, consumption and production are in reality linked in multiple ways. How the initiatives and organisations conceptualise consumption and production, and their implications, in interaction with a food- or a justice-centred conception of a food system, produces broad configurations that I have categorised as *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice*, and *systemic*.

The axes of the typology are also relational in that in reality there are inter-relations between initiatives in them, such as the produce from small township farmers in the *organic* category supplying elite consumption in the *lifestyle* category. The positions of the organisations and movements in the typology are also not static: where they are positioned may depend on the historical period (they may shift over time), the issue at stake, or the network relationships they are acting through at a particular time. There can also be overlaps between initiatives in different categories. For example, some from *organic* and *systemic* may both promote and support similar sorts of farming methods at the technical level, and rather are distinguished by how they approach questions of distribution, politics and power. The initiatives and movements in each category can therefore be seen as historically specific configurations that exist, and can shift between, categories – as 'historical articulations' (Hall, 1980). As such, particular initiatives, organisations or movements tend to exist within a network, often as nodal points that bring together various historically patterned tendencies. As the next section will show, their histories are also interconnected.

Figure 1: Typology of the food movement in South Africa

	Food-centred (Ameliorative)	**Justice-centred (Systemic)**
Consumption	Lifestyle • 'Clean' food • Authenticity • Local • 'Foodies' • Bring supermarkets on board • Politics: individual consumption – vote with forks • Examples: niche food stores and restaurants, sections of Slow Food	Food Justice • Ensure capacity of poor to access nutritious food baskets • Linkages made: social justice organisations • Politics: regulation for social and environmental justice; explore critical social questions through food • Examples: ACB and Biowatch anti-GMO campaigns; PACSA – increase social grants to help poor cope with food price increases; coalition to confront bread price fixing (Black Sash, COSATU, Children's Resource Centre *et al*)
Production	Organic • Soil and nutritional health • Entrepreneurialism and livelihoods (food security through sustainable agriculture) • Greening of food system • Individual innovations aggregated into change – 'pioneers' • Organise actors around market change • Politics: regulation to grow market sector • Linkages made: other food-related organisations • Examples: South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO); PGS; Siyavuna; sections of Slow Food	Systemic • Food sovereignty linked to distributional demands, rights, entitlements: agrarian reform, land, housing • Movement power to contest power relations • Politics: Change social relations, hence class-based organising • Linkages made: socio-economic issues • Examples: Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC); Inyanda National Land Movement; SA Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC); Rural Women's Assembly; Tshintsha Amakhaya; anti-extractivist struggles intersecting with agriculture

Type 1: Lifestyle – Food-centred Consumption

Initiatives and actions in the *lifestyle* type exhibit an emphasis on the food itself, with the key activity being

that of consumption as the means to achieve desired outcomes. It is largely a lifestyle approach that pays little attention to concerted collective effort for social change. The prime subjective motivation for actors is eating, transforming and enjoying (mainly organic) food. 'Local' is thus prominent in this sphere's cultural and practical repertoire, but tends to carry little social justice concern. The sphere's main material grounding is circuits of consumption composed of restaurants serving organic produce and grass-fed meat, niche food shops, artisanal bakeries, and initiatives that build a closer relation between producers and consumers than the industrial food system, like farmers markets and organic box schemes.[1] Their main social agents are the health-conscious middle class, chefs, 'hipsters', 'foodies' and food critics. This modality exhibits what are in themselves important elements of a sustainable food system, but they are embedded in middle and upper-middle class circuits of consumption with participation largely dependent on financial means, and with little connection to social justice. As Ledger (2016: 185) writes of such initiatives in South Africa:

> *[M]any of the people who shop at the new organic food stores and farmers' markets in South Africa are looking for 'alternative' food; that is, certified organic, free from chemical additives and produced in an environmentally friendly and/or humane way… But there may be nothing 'solidarity' about these alternative networks at all. In fact, there is not, particularly in South Africa. My research suggested that the majority of people who shop at organic stores have little or no interest in social justice or the welfare of farmworkers, or the fairness of the food system or how their purchases might contribute to any of these goals.*

These *lifestyle* approaches therefore contribute to developing food system patterns and relationships that are alternative to the industrial food system, but through existing class relations. They may also link with an aspect in the *organic* sphere, to small farmers from poor communities as producers who are linked into niche consumption driven by desires for wholesome, nutritious and 'clean' food, such as Harvest of Hope, which operates in townships on the Cape Flats.[2]

Type 2: Organic – Food-centred Production

The networks and organisations operating under the *organic* type historically emerge from a production perspective, with an overriding concern with the health of the soil linked to agriculture, which evolved into an ecological critique of the industrial food system and so efforts to elaborate sustainable methods of food production. As such, those under this type reflect various efforts of practising what has broadly been termed sustainable agriculture. The *organic* category has historically been constituted through intersecting agency rooted in, broadly, two class and race contexts. Firstly, by the (white) middle class seeking to forge alternative environmental and spiritual lifestyles. This group emphasised a 'pioneer' approach to change that rests on the aggregation of individual innovations and entrepreneurial action. Secondly, organic methods of production in South Africa have also developed in concert with longer historical efforts to ameliorate soil degradation, hunger and malnutrition in poor rural and urban communities through ecologically centred community and household food production. In poorer communities in the Global North, notions of food justice have linked community agriculture to wider efforts to confront systemic economic and racial inequalities (Battersby, 2013). Here, however, the organic movement in poor communities has been organised as a more instrumental response to key outcomes of the historically engineered social reproduction crisis in poor black communities – hunger and malnutrition (*ibid*). Thus it partly reflects the historical ideological foundations of organic that were rooted in paternalist responses to the effects of racial oppression. This has largely taken the form of livelihoods development approaches, in which organic food production is positioned as a means to address the consumption challenges of malnutrition and hunger.

These organic livelihood approaches have historical origins as welfare interventions in sites of poverty, but also evolved into the social economy practices during the post-apartheid era that seek to eliminate poverty through entrepreneurship and market inclusion (Williams, 2014). As the manager of a small-scale sustainable agriculture support organisation in KwaZulu-Natal Province explained of the initiative:

[1] For example, www.munchingmongoose.co.za; www.wensleydale.co.za.
[2] https://abalimiharvestofhope.org.za

> *[The] programme identified one of the key barriers to get income earning potential as distance from markets, not necessarily having transport, not necessarily having the entrepreneurial skills to be able to go out into more urban markets and market. So we've built a whole marketing side to the programme that is farmer-owned… (Siyavuna1, interview, 2016).*

A key ideological thread of this *organic* sphere that ties together middle- and working-class actors is thus that of advancing a combination of ameliorative and entrepreneurial actions as alternatives to the industrial food system's ecological and nutritional contradictions. The key approach is thus to expand the private sector around organic, through (social) entrepreneurship; to organise actors around market change, with technical frameworks, standards and policies as foremost mechanisms to advance change in the food system – a 'common sense' reflecting an articulation of desires for clean food with needs for developmental inclusion in the post-apartheid market economy.

A key organisation that is building bridges between Types 1 and 2 is the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO). SAOSO emerged out of the historical efforts of 'pioneers' in the organic sector, but now also includes elements from the *lifestyle* category. In the 2020s, it is playing a role of consolidating economic and social linkages between organic production and (elite) consumption articulated around their vision of a healthy food system. As the coordinator of SAOSO explained:

> *So there is the elite organic market, but then there's the clean food market at the bottom that has to grow. We have got to get all the people selling on the road, all of the people selling in the townships, all of the people selling to their communities, they've got to be selling clean food. So for me organic is, everything has to be based on those organic standards. Even PGS [Participatory Guarantee Systems] is based on those organic standards (SAOSO1, interview, 2017).*

There are also organisations and movements that focus on resource distribution, labour conditions and wages, and social policy, as key elements to address the inequitable nutritional outcomes of the current food system, in the vein of food justice.

Type 3: Food Justice – Justice-centred Consumption

The term *food justice* emanates from the United States context, largely as a response to institutionally racist development patterns and the resulting inordinate prevalence of food insecurity in poorer communities of colour linked to limited consumption options (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011), and has also extended to campaigns to improve farmworkers' wages and working conditions (Alkon, 2013). The term is scantily used in the South African context, perhaps partly due to the prevalence of household and community food production being advanced as more instrumental responses to food insecurity (see Battersby, 2013). However, there have been initiatives and struggles that reflect a food justice approach by focusing on the food system and consumption through elements of distributional justice, class and race.

Three variations to the *food justice* approach in South Africa can be identified. First, campaigning has occurred around the impacts of the dominant food system on the consumption capabilities and patterns of poor and working-class households in the context of low wages, social grants, and high unemployment levels. This included organisations like Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA),[3] which undertook community organising but also monitored prices and associated dynamics in the food system. They called for shifts in the distributional regime (the necessity to increase wages and social grants) so as to better enable poor households to access nutritious food baskets, arising from the acknowledgement that '[t]he racial structure of our labour market and wage levels has not been transformed (PACSA, 2017: 1). It also included work to confront corporate power in the food system and its effects on health and nutrition. While some organisations continually lobby around particular issues (e.g., GMOs and biotechnology, the constitutional right to healthy food, water and environment and its implications for confronting corporate power), alliances

[3] PACSA closed doors and Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity (PMBEJD) was subsequently established, which conducts similar work to which PACSA did.

and campaigns have tended to be temporary. Mobilisation was typically instigated by egregious instances of injustice and exploitation by powerful corporate actors.

Second, there have been efforts that start with food consumption – its nutritional quality, aesthetics, and enjoyment – but lean towards justice as activists use food to forge connections across class, race and space so to explore questions of justice, nutrition, art, human relations, and (de)colonisation (Rousell, interview, 2017). In many ways, they engage with food in similar tangible ways as the *lifestyle* sphere, but they shied away from its perceived class and racial exclusivity. For example in 2016, young Slow Food activists who were frustrated by what they saw as Slow Food South Africa's class and racially narrow purview established the Slow Food Youth Network. As one activist described of its formation:

> *…because Cape Town[4] is cliquey and small, when we started this whole thing [Slow Food South Africa] food was only about money and food was about nutrition and food was very fancy and elite and whatever. And when we realised that we needed to open that up – because we're so sensitive to whiteness down here, because it's a city that's built on segregation – we decided we needed to start inspiring so much more around food than Slow Food (SFYN 1, interview, 2017).*

This network took a different approach to organising activities that subjectively engaged with food in ways more reflective of wider material realities and appropriate to particular racial and class contexts.

A third aspect to *food justice* organising around consumption relates to farm- and food service-worker justice, in two respects. The first is organising over wages and working conditions, pointing to improved wages as essential for addressing the food insecurity that prevails among farm workers (Louw, interview, 2016; Ledger, 2016). Particularly in the Western Cape Province, where the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU) operates, such conditions of farmworkers is prominently framed through race. A large platform of the Unions' work is to highlight the racially oppressive labour relations and lack of respect[5] as farm work is still primarily experienced and understood through paternalistic and often oppressive relationships between Coloured[6] and Black workers and white farmers (Wilderman, 2015). This aspect has also included some mobilising amongst workers in other parts of the food chain, such as in processing and retail, who are afflicted by precarious work, outsourcing, low wages, and exclusion from union organisation (for example, see Dor, 2017; VoC News, 2019).

Type 3: Systemic – Justice-centred Production

Consumption has also been a focus of organising for worker justice through an appeal to consumers as members of the food system. An example is the campaign by CSAAWU and supporting organisations to boycott the wines of Robertson Winery, which extended to Norway and Sweden through transnational trade union cooperation.[7] Such justice-oriented approaches to farm and food worker organising still exist, albeit somewhat on the margins. For example, farm worker organising by the labour movement has historically been weak. A key reason is that the nature of commercial farms makes linking with workers notoriously difficult, reflected in the fact that only about 10% of farm workers are unionised, and in the intensified precariousness of farm labour (TCOE, 2016). Much of this organising that links with critiques of the food system and rural social relations is being advanced outside of the traditional labour movement, linked to organisations from the systemic type like TCOE, Surplus Peoples Project (SPP), Women on Farms Project (WFP) and the Eastern Cape Agricultural Research Project (ECARP). Farm worker organising has thus also related to the *systemic* sphere, as their living and working conditions are grounded in a critique of the production structure and distributional regime governing food systems.

[4] South Africa's first colonial city.

[5] Lack of respect shown by farm owners towards workers is a common refrain by workers in the Western Cape, which is indicative of the racialised patterns of domination on commercial farms.

[6] Coloured is an official racial classification in South Africa, referring to people of mixed-race heritage.

[7] See CSAAWU (2017); Amandla! (2017).

In the *systemic* configuration, I refer to organisations that ground their perspectives and actions in justice, by centring land, food, access to natural resources, housing and gender justice as rights and entitlements of the poor and marginalised. These organisations recognise the undermining of these rights by the dominant agrarian and food production structures. They thus organise members of marginalised communities around alternative food and agrarian production methods (principally agroecology), and link it to confronting the wider justice-related issues facing communities, linked to key features of the agrarian question. As with the livelihoods development approach in the *organic* type, they also aim for sustainable livelihoods, but see the restoration of the land and access to natural resources that were lost under colonialism and apartheid and the need to dismantle the neoliberal structure of the South African economy as necessary conditions for building those sustainable livelihoods. Here the notion of food sovereignty is not only related to the contradictions of the industrial food system itself, but is grounded in the problems of landlessness, land rights and agrarian reform, inequality, rural democracy and gender justice that need to be fixed by pushing for structural change, especially through a new agrarian reform. For example, the Inyanda National Land Movement (2015: 40) argues that food sovereignty 'cannot be separated from pro-poor agrarian transformation' and envisions

> *an alternative people's agrarian system that is based on the equitable ownership of land and natural resources, ecological sustainability, agro-ecological production, and the democratic ownership and control of production, the input system, processing, distribution and marketing (2015: 35).*

This is closely aligned with La Via Campesina's framing of food sovereignty (see Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Patel, 2010). In this systemic sphere, food sovereignty is thus ideologically informed by class-based distributive perspectives, whereby the achievement of entitlements is linked with structural shifts in class and power relations. The prominent form in this sphere is the NGO-movement/community relation. As will be discussed in the next section, the NGOs predominantly emerge from anti-apartheid currents and position themselves as supporting the creation of movement and community agency.

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Lifestyle, organic, food justice and systemic therefore constitute the differentiated terrain of a national food movement, and with which the global idea of food sovereignty has been formally articulated in the South African context. Thus, food sovereignty frames the actions in the different types, but different aspects may be emphasised. Although actors in the systemic current were the first to connect with the global food sovereignty movement and bring the discourse into organising in the country, the other spheres have reinforced their connections and overtime have begun to utilise the term as well. In other words, approaches to and meanings of food sovereignty in South Africa are shaped by the varied historical trajectories, political practices, class relationships and 'common sense' that each of the types reflect. Food sovereignty has therefore not been elaborated in a uniform way. For example, given the history of those in the organic stream, organisations like SAOSO largely associate food sovereignty with a food system based on ecological production methods, achieved within the existing economic, political and distributional framework. Such organisations are of course grounded in social concerns, but those in the systemic stream tend to express a more expansive, counter-hegemonic notion of food sovereignty that has been articulated with a desire to challenge the limits of national liberation, imposed largely by capital-centric macroeconomic policy. For example, the Inyanda National Land Movement (2015: 40) argues that food sovereignty "cannot be separated from pro-poor agrarian transformation." Such organisations thus promote agroecology in similar practical terms as the organic stream, but try to link this with an emphasis on political claim-making through mass, class-based mobilisation and organisation.

However, there are also overlaps among the four types of movements outlined above, such as in their technical practices of agroecology, seed saving, and biodiverse production systems, which confirm them as relational types. Each movements' actions are filtered through and aligned with varying political currents and ideological underpinnings that have longer histories rooted in the politics of South Africa's national question.

I therefore now turn to discussing the types (*organic* and *systemic* in particular) as articulatory outcomes of varying historical political responses to dispossession and underdevelopment that resulted from structural processes of agrarian and ecological change.

Discussion – Historical Articulations with the Agrarian and National Questions

The four types discussed in the findings that constitute the food movement in South Africa display discrete characteristics by which it is possible to categorise them. However, they must be seen as products of historical and contemporary processes of articulation between the national and agrarian questions, ecology, class, race, gender, and political agency. As 'articulatory practices' (Hart, 2002: 32) they are not simply the result of the static intersection of these factors, but can also be generative of social practices and realities. Here social practice can be understood as composed of an act (such as a particular way of farming) that takes place amidst material arrangements, is shaped by those material arrangements, but can also in turn shape material arrangements. These acts are also shaped by the actors' understandings of those material arrangements (Shatzki, 2010; Shove and Walker, 2014). These practices developed and continue to evolve through relations with each other and the wider social formation. They were generated through the material arrangements structured by the national and agrarian questions, but also how various class and race actors comprehended and engaged politically with the material arrangements of that relationship, thus taking us to the terrain of ideology, culture and subjectivity. This is particularly evident in the case of the *organic* and *systemic* streams, which have the longer historical record of engaging on food questions with the conditions of Black, marginalised communities, and which have, through different political frames and forms of organising, sought to advance agrarian-centred responses to poverty and hunger.

The *organic* stream, rather than historically originating only in middle-class concerns for healthy and clean food, in fact has a much longer history that emerged from a nexus of African elite and European missionary agency in the early 1900s. This nexus sought to deal with the ecological and nutritional consequences of the evolving agrarian question that was engendering racialised land dispossession and overcrowding in the rural 'native reserves' (Khan, 1994). In these conditions, they promoted sustainable agriculture methods amongst the peasantry that sought to rebuild soil health. However, coming from liberal political orientations, their methods failed to connect with wider peasant mobilisation over the decades. Specifically, they sought to promote what today would be known as organic agriculture as a means to pre-empt the political mobilisation of the peasantry that might have challenged the political sources of soil degradation and poverty (Rich, 1993). Furthermore, in themselves these practices were insufficient to meet the livelihood needs of rural Africans in the face of ongoing processes of marginalisation and dispossession. Reflecting particular political articulations between African elites, missionaries, local ecological conditions, and the soil conservationist discourse circulating across settler colonies in the first half of the twentieth century (see Beinart, 1984), their key protagonists largely promoted these initiatives and farming practices through ideological underpinnings that, to paraphrase Stuart Hall (1996b), reconciled and accommodated their target subjects to their subordinate place in the social formation.

After the rise of apartheid in 1948 and the consolidation of rural Bantustans as places to store labour surplus to the needs of industry and commercial agriculture, organic agricultural livelihood practices continued to evolve in poor rural communities. This included the involvement of liberals intervening to respond to the resultant rural poverty that occurred in relation to the state development apparatus that sought to develop these Bantustans as self-sustaining, semi-independent ethnic homelands. These efforts taking place in rural working-class communities connected with urban, middle-class processes to grow clean and healthy food and sustain soil health (Rosenberg, interview, 2018). The organic movement thus further developed through an articulation between middle class concerns for clean food and healthy soil and the declining material conditions of rural working-class communities, through the conduit of rural development workers. These practices also spread into urban areas as middle-class actors sought to instil 'empowerment' and 'self-

reliance' in Black township communities suffering from hunger and malnutrition as a result of low wages and unemployment (Roux: no date). These practices reflect a political and ideological frame through which they sought to organise hungry, black communities in response to the consequences of particular material arrangements.

The *systemic* sphere has much of its origins in the national liberation movement of the apartheid era. The national liberation movement worked to mobilise racially oppressed communities to contest the contours of the national question and overcome minority rule. However, its historical lacuna was a sustained political connection with the agrarian question in the form of mass rural resistance to state interventions that undermined rural people's autonomy and livelihoods between the 1940s and early 1960s (see Bundy, 1984; Drew, 1996). These rural mobilisations were unable to sustain independent rural organisation due to the challenges posed by the isolated rural geography and a lack of a wider movement infrastructure. So by the 1980s, liberal and left-leaning anti-apartheid NGOs had become the key link between rural communities still experiencing land dispossession and the political and legal sphere (Alexander, 2006).

Initiatives falling in the organic and systemic types continued to evolve as they engaged differently politically with the opportunities and limits of the liberation era after the democratic breakthrough in 1994 – consequent shifts in material arrangements allowed their practices to further evolve in the democratic era, in the context of the adoption of a neoliberal economic framework by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the slow pace of land and agrarian reform. For the organic livelihood stream, political liberalisation, greater donor and corporate social responsibility funds, combined with stunted land reform, provided grounds for the expansion of small-scale sustainable agriculture amongst subaltern communities within the prevailing structural constraints (Auerbach, 2017). In this era some organic organisations also sought to diversify their racial and class base, further connecting with working class communities. They simultaneously sought to expand the market opportunities for organic agriculture and enrol this diversity of actors. The *systemic* sphere, however, sought to reconnect political mobilisation of subaltern communities with agrarian and food issues after the ANC state failed to realise transformative programmes around land and agrarian reform and resource re-distribution (Greenberg, 2006). This coincided with connections between organisations in the systemic type, such as Surplus People Project and Trust for Community Outreach and Education, to the global social justice movement, such as through the World Social Forum. Through this such organisations connected with food sovereignty movements and actors, and attempted to translate food sovereignty into the South African context of continued racialised class inequality reflected in its agricultural structure. Sustainable agriculture methods similar to those in the *organic* stream also came to be elaborated, but framed through food sovereignty and connected to attempted popular class organisation to transform the prevailing agrarian structure. Success in the latter regard, however, has been limited, seen in the slow pace of land reform and the failure to realise alternative agricultural productive arrangements (Greenberg, 2015). As a network that sought to increase coordination and movement power with civil society organisations working for agrarian reform, Tshintsha Amakhaya, noted in 2015, this lack of agrarian reform and necessary policy change has reflected weak movement power in relation to the state and market (Tshintsha Amakhaya, 2015).

The food sovereignty discourse and practice (forms of organising, who is organised, and agroecological methods) in South Africa is thus articulated through contingent interconnections between the different streams (convergences) as well as through their political divergences. This brief overview of the historical development of the food movement in relation to popular classes has sought to show how the typology presented in the findings section has developed through historical articulations between class, ecology, and the national and agrarian questions, shaped in not entirely predictable ways by their articulations with varying forms of political agency in relation to the national question.

This suggests that the types constituting the food movement in South Africa can be seen as articulatory practices that are not static or self-contained, but as nodal points reflecting a "'unity' out of difference" (Hall,

1991: 136), that are relational, dynamic and shifting. Key in the South African context is how they have been shaped through differing ideological and political engagements with the country's agrarian question and the evolving relationships between race and the political system. The varied yet also relational forms and politics constituting the food movement in South Africa, and through which food sovereignty is filtered and further articulated, therefore suggests limits to trying to associate food sovereignty agency with a clear or idealised food sovereignty subject, as reflected in some agrarian debates. Given that articulation is also generative of social phenomena (Hall, 1980), a more useful frame of analysis may be how histories and social practices around sustainable food articulate with prevailing class realities, political histories, subjectivities and modes of organising to produce 'the sovereign' of food sovereignty, or the subject, in politically contextual ways. Such processes can therefore also be seen as potentially productive of further political possibilities (Featherstone, 2017).

The latter may include opportunities to build stronger articulations etween initiatives and actors in the different categories of the food movement. For example, while localised practices of sustainable agriculture have tended to reflect instrumental responses to hunger and malnutrition (i.e., less connected to collective action that challenges the social order), they could also contain seeds of alternative social relations and processes of conscientisation necessary to wider transformative social and political action (van der Ploeg et al., 2004; Siebert, 2019; Paganini et al., 2021). The ongoing political relationship between the agrarian question and the national question in South Africa has been an important modality through which these articulations have happened, and may continue to occur.

Conclusion

In the context of the global food sovereignty discourse and movement, this article explored the food movement terrain in South Africa, with which the food sovereignty discourse articulates. It described for the more formal forms of organising around food system questions, while future publications will focus more on the dynamics of such organising at the grassroots/subaltern level. It showed that the food movement in South Africa can be understood as broadly differentiated into *lifestyle*, *organic*, *food justice*, and *systemic* approaches. Key to understanding them is how they emerged from, relate to, and engaged with key features of the South Africa's agrarian and national questions, and today's conditions of a highly unequal agrarian structure, a corporatised food system, and social inequality. However, rather than seeing these types of approaches as clear-cut and self-contained, one can understand them as relational. They sometimes overlap practically, often emerge from similar conditions, and can influence each other through material and social interactions. They have also developed in highly relational terms to key historical processes and material circumstances that have defined South Africa's history, in terms of race, land, class, and ecology. Key in shaping the types has been particular kinds of political agency informed by different ideologies and cultural subjectivities in a racially oppressive society, especially as they relate to the popular classes. They can thus be understood as articulatory practices that emerged out of not entirely predictable articulations between the conditions of national oppression as well as the opportunities and limits of national liberation. In this sense, the national question, and its unresolved nature post-apartheid, has been an important structuring dynamic of the food movement. These factors point to the need for attention to contextual and politically specific analysis regarding the relationship between agrarian change, food sovereignty, and agency, in understanding the variegated nature of food sovereignty movements in particular social contexts, and their political potentials.

This article therefore makes a contribution to thinking about the formation of food movements on historically constructed terrain. The implications for thinking about food movements in the Global South, and in former settler colonies in particular, are to situate them in relation to historical forces related to the national question that they have emerged through. In other words, we must include in our analyses the national class relations and the engagements of food movements with contemporary processes related to globalisation and the world economy (McMichael, 1997). This points us to consider not only the elaboration of the technical

sides of agroecology in examining food sovereignty movements, for example, but to analyse them in integral relation to the forces and relations that they are articulated through, as social practices. The concept of articulation also enables us to think about how such practices are not merely the product of overarching social processes, but also about how they could be productive of alternative social relations and realities that generate new politics and practices beyond the limits of unresolved national questions.

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