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Civil society, corporate power, and food security: counter-revolutionary efforts that limit social change

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Abstract Food is produced, processed, packaged, transported, and sold in a stable, organized system or food regime. The current food regime is focused on calories empty of substantial nutrition designed primarily for the growth of capital and corporate power, fostered through the lax, often corporate-designed, regulatory environment of neoliberalism. The neoliberal food regime is responsible for systemic malnutrition and erosion of the ecological preconditions for food production, as a regularity of the system itself. Consequently, a main line of food vulnerability is the political system that insulates the current food regime from social forces demanding change. This insecurity is contrary to the public or larger human interest, but this unsustainable system remains in place through a stable arrangement of government prescriptions that follow corporate-elite interests. To understand this structural problem, this essay examines the power of the food industry which requires the manufactured consent of civil society. The paper finds that counter-revolutionary efforts, which are anticipatory and reactive efforts that defend and protect capitalist elite from social change, stabilize the neoliberal food regime through covert tactics meant to undermine public interest critics and activists. As a result of these elite-led interventions, true civil society has become less powerful to articulate a public interest that might otherwise intercede in the operation and structure of the food regime. Thus, one leverage point in this political problem is the capacity of civil society, once it is independent of corporate interests, to remove consent to an abusive system and to debate and demand a food system that neither systematically starves whole groups of people nor destroys the ecological systems that make food possible. Building food security, then, requires recapturing a semi-autonomous civil society and eliminating domination of the corporate elite and replacing it with politics aligned with a public and ecological affinity. Scholars, educators, and the public can reduce the food vulnerability by becoming aware of corporate interests and creating strategic alliances to form a new system with more humane and ecological priorities.

Keywords Food security · Gramsci · Counter-revolutionary movements · Social change · Food regime · Neoliberalism

Introduction

This paper examines the political-economic conditions of food insecurity in the USA-led international food regime. Within this regime, there are at least two central problems to food security today: the current system is not adequately providing good nutrition to US or world citizens and the ecological preconditions for agriculture are being torn asunder.

First, the world food system is not fulfilling its ostensible purpose as one billion people are hungry and two billions are overweight and both are forms of malnourishment driven by large corporate goals of profits instead of good nutrition (Stuckler and Nestle 2012). Hunger is worst in Sub-Saharan and Asian poor countries (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and International Fund for Agricultural Development 2014), but even in the USA, over 14 % of all households have *low or very low* food security—meaning that there was difficulty providing food for everyone in the household at some point in the year (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). The proportion

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of world hunger to population has steadily declined, but malnutrition, broadly speaking, has not.

Further, soil and biodiversity are eroding (Yang et al. 2003; Dirzo and Raven 2003) while climate and hydrological systems are changing (Kokic et al. 2014; Carpenter et al. 2011) and the pollutant load is increasing both in nitrogen (Robertson and Vitousek 2009) and synthetic chemicals (Conway and Pretty 2013).[1] Intensification of agricultural processes is committing current and future generations to larger and larger ecological problems, and as these problems move from the streambed to watershed to global water cycle, they are *scaled up* in spatial extent and time required for restoration.

This paper uses a Gramscian analysis of the food regime to show how retrenched powerful interests remain insulated from censure or reproach despite that insecurities continue to grow in the current food regime; further, the paper will demonstrate the potential for civil society to leverage its power for social change to this regime.

McMicheal explains that

> The *food regime* has always been a historical concept. As such, it has demarcated stable periodic arrangements in the production and circulation of food on a world scale, associated with various forms of hegemony in the world economy (2009a, p. 281).

Buttel (2001) affirms that one of the most durable theoretical frameworks in agrarian studies since the 1980s has been the food regime proposed and developed by Friedmann and McMicheal (Friedmann 1992; McMichael 2005, 2009a, b) and thus remains one of the more important analytical tools at our disposal.

Consistent with Carolan's (2013) analysis, I propose two categories of food insecurity that are a mundane or *normal* function of the current food regime. Normal does not mean unimportant or acceptable (see Robbins 2007), but that it is a regular result of the current food regime:

- Type I: systematic nutritional deficits that result from the normal operation of the current system or normal food insecurity.
- Type II: systematic erosion of the ecological preconditions of food production.

These insecurities are not accidental but are caused by and are central to the current political-economic structure. The USA-led international food system has *stabilized food insecurity* for billions of people at multiple levels through its normal operation. The problems exist because the food regime is led by a corporate and managerial elite who profits from economic growth entirely alienated from the real nutritional needs as well as the ecological systems upon which this and future food systems depend, and these governing elites are not forced to be accountable to the public interest. This proposition is, in fact, not very novel because scholars of the food system have argued similar points before (see for example Carolan 2013). What this paper attempts to add is observations about the way that capitalist elites have legitimized normal food insecurity and looming non-linear, ecological problems that contradict even the normal system by a process of counter-revolutionary efforts *within* civil society that affects governance of the same corporations. To be clear, revolutionary efforts are those that attempt to end a regime and counter-revolutionary efforts are those that work to defend a regime from change and "big food" has worked to keep the system in their favor by subverting change-oriented civil society.

Civil society is the social sector where individuals meet publicly but are not attempting to accumulate capital or trade for profit (economic society) or formally govern (political society). Civil society organizations (CSOs) themselves have changed since Gramsci's time. Dauvergne and LeBaron (2014) note that today's CSOs often internalize corporate interests, while they are also subject to increased monitoring and surveillance by the modern state. Conceptually, this means that CSOs, even before they face opposition, are operating as stabilizing actors in the neoliberal historical bloc. This paper, however, will focus on the opposition, or counter-revolutionary efforts, that real civil society faces from economic elites that protect a regime that *produces* food insecurities as regularity. In the earliest days of neoliberalism, Marcuse (1972) warned that counter-revolutionary efforts are and will be constantly developed to protect an aggressive global capitalism. To be clear, revolutionary, or sometimes even reformist efforts (think of the struggles to label genetically modified foods in the USA), to change the regime need *not* be well formed or even present in order for counter-revolutionary programs to exist, because elite suppression of dissent is anticipatory, often in place well before any threats to the regime form in any coherent way.

The central proposition of this paper is that

a) An organized system of corporate actors effectively govern the food system,
b) They do so with the goal of accumulating, mainly financial, capital, and
c) In order to keep this regime going, it must constantly remake the system in its own image through counter-revolutionary programs that purchase or coopt civil society and potential resistance.

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Stable, corporate hegemony establishes the political and moral context for law (institutions), distribution of wealth and harm, and the limits to ecological destruction that might otherwise restrain or redirect efforts to feed Earth's citizens well. The current food regime has generated contradictions to food resilience, while civil society has lost both autonomy (the ability to know its own interests) and sovereignty (the power) to assert a public interest in the food system, explained below. These statements imply a class-based international system, where today, we look especially to the financial system, where change-oriented civil society has virtually no presence (Scholte 2013).

This paper starts with an explanation of the Gramscian framework used to understand these dynamics. Next, the paper will identify the industrial food regime stabilized by the current neoliberal historical bloc that maintains social structure in line with elite interests, first domestically and then internationally. Finally, the paper will situate the food regime across US society and sectors that purposefully and forcefully erects obstacles to just distribution of nutritious food and adaptive sustainable management of food resources.

Theoretical framework: Gramscian political-economic analysis

Gramscian political analysis is grounded in Antonio Gramsci's (2011) *Prison notebooks*[2] written while he was a prisoner of the Italian fascist regime. First imprisoned in 1926, he wrote the notebooks as fragmented but nuanced political insights about the operation of the state, elites, the church, and many other issues from 1929 to 1935. He died in 1937 from health complications, never fully free from incarceration. Gramsci's contribution is at once a political theory and a framework for analysis that can be employed to better understand the dynamic social conditions for power and order (structure) and agency and social change (Levy and Newell 2005). Gramscian analysis theorizes that opportunities to keep *or* alter political-economic structure hinge mainly through the placement, maintenance, and shifting of consent in civil society. Since the original work, Gramscian and neo-Gramscian analyses have significantly evolved as a tool to understand contemporary dimensions of power. Neo-Gramscian analysis uses the concepts from Gramsci, like hegemony and historical blocs, but is less focused on class than Gramscian thinking, and this essay will use the more classical Gramscian framework.

Classical Gramscian method involves identifying the interactions of class-based elite interests of concentrated capital and civil society while analyzing the role of the state institutions in mediating the conflict of accumulating capital at the expense of the larger public. In particular, the Gramscian framework requires identifying the conditions in which ruling classes govern broad social structures. These ruling classes in today's economic system are primarily corporate and financial bourgeoisies (Carroll 2009) who are claiming a growing share of domestic and global income, in the face of widening and dangerous inequality (Piketty 2014).

In eras of globalization, there are global bourgeoisie (Carroll 2009); however, this ruling class does not have the same immediate set of interests, where holders of financial capital may differ from a shop owner. However, the inter-class fractions unify "around common economic and social function in the process of capital accumulation and sharing particular ideological propensities organically related to those function" (Pijl 1989, p. 11). The fractions do not have identical interests, but they do share the interests of keeping the capitalist system in place and not challenging the broader logic. Further, each ruling elite in each country is dependent on the flow of capital internationally; thus, internationally, one domestic ruling class negotiates across the frontier of other world ruling classes, and forms a similar compromise abroad as at home, to form a fragmented but unified world ruling class. However, intra-class fractions are also met with inter-class interests that also must be stabilized in order for a regime, or order, to form. These regimes are founded on ever-changing intra-class bourgeoisie compromise and unification, and a manufactured consent from civil society. The holistic arrangement that unifies fragmented interests must be legitimated by civil society, which then can be enforced by the state, is called a historic bloc. Neo-Gramscians see multiple historical blocs across different arenas, but this analysis will take the more traditional Gramscian approach that sees all policy arenas ultimately fitting within a holistic machinery of a comprehensive historical block. Historic blocs maintain the regime and project power through hegemony, Gramsci's most important concept. The hegemony of the historic bloc provides the moral condition for social action by defining the public interest or "shared common sense" that Van der Pijl and others call a "comprehensive concept of control" that allows for the historic bloc to reaffirm, strengthen, and consolidate over a long term (van der Pijl and Yurchenko 2014, p. 7).

Unlike simple brute force or agenda setting, hegemony wields much of its power through the subtle principles of *normalization* (Lukes 1974). Richard Day notes that the neoliberal project relies on normalizing "multiple lines of inequality" and that state

[2] This paper will use the three-volume complete set of *Prison Notebooks* compiled by Joseph A. Buttigieg. These essays are highly fragmented, and following any one concept in these volumes across Gramsci's writing is difficult, but using the complete *Notebooks* allows for reading the full context of the notes as opposed to edited selections.

> Domination and capitalist exploitation would be impossible if it were not for the fact that neoliberal societies are divided according to multiple lines of inequality based on race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, region (both globally and within nation-states) and the domination of nature (Day 2005, p. 6).

These inequalities are produced by the neoliberal project, alongside the food dangers that come with them. Hegemony is both constructed and maintained by the bloc of industry actors, civil society, and state authority, and hegemony is fundamentally powerful because it organizes a moral condition for consent and obedience:

> The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classic terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion (which in certain situations, therefore, are artificially multiplied) (Gramsci 2011, vol. 1, pp. 155–156).

Gramsci theorized that the order was maintained by the consent or the "appearance of consent" of civil society that legitimated the organization and reproduction of the interests of the ruling class. Inasmuch as citizens participate in hegemony and the stable order, they volunteer to obey the rules, and inasmuch as the appearance of consent is in place, state institutions can enforce the interest of concentrated capital as if it was the interests of the majority. In addition to this normalized power, however, are the coercive forces of military and police forces and the coercive economic power that require every person to participate in the economy so that they may subsist.

Alternately, however, this is where civil society can make a positive difference to governing in the public interest for food security, sustainability, and all myriad of social challenges. If civil society revokes its consent, legitimacy of the hegemonic bloc crumbles or at least shifts and a social change can follow that does reflect the public interest. This process, Gramsci warned, should be done strategically through a "war of position." This is where activists survey the field to assess alliances that could obliquely challenge the state through counter-hegemonic activities that could result in social change in the long term. Day (2005) warns, however, against the "hegemony of hegemony" where Marxist activists in the past have attempted to simply reverse the process of domination, but those new social projects show signs of rejecting the idea of domination all together and that this is the path to true liberation and freedom. Examples of these projects and movements include the world indigenous and peasant movements and perhaps the efforts of the world social forum, which also provide serious alternatives to the neoliberal food regime (Ridgeway and Jacques 2013). Also, taking on the state head-on will bring out the violent and coercive force of the state, visible today in the "securitization of activism" that Dauvergne and LeBaron (2014) document with increased monitoring and state-based suppression of activism. The fact that powerful elites feel the need for such measures indicates the potential that a semi-autonomous civil society could bring to governing.

To the extent that the hegemonic *function* is harder to deploy and the use of force creates political danger, corruption and the purchase of civil society, Gramsci held, were the common operation of fraud or legal cooptation:

> Between consent and force stands corruption-fraud… that is, the procurement of the antagonist's or antagonists' debilitation and paralysis by buying—covertly under normal circumstances, openly in the case of anticipated danger—their leaders in order to create confusion and disorder among the antagonists ranks (Ibid, p. 156).

Here, Gramsci is referring to antagonists in civil society that do not consent and who threaten the legitimacy of the hegemonic order. An example today would be animal rights activists who attempt to document the cruelties of slaughterhouses and find themselves criminalized under "ag-gag" rules, laws that are plainly in defense of industrial meat and capital, which make such documentation illegal (Carlson 2012). In these circumstances, it is possible that leaders of antagonists can be bought, or otherwise compromised, to sow confusion and disorder in counter-hegemonic programs. In particular, the rise of corporate partnerships with nonprofit political groups, like environmental groups, indicates that some activists have internalized neoliberal *common sense* so thoroughly that antagonism to corporate rule seems to be off the table completely for many groups (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014; Corson 2010).

The most important insight Gramsci brought to bear was that civil society was not simply made up of the public who knew their own interests. Rather, civil society was subject to programs that originate in economic society or the society of businesses and industry. These programs are designed to sow confusion such that the majority public believes that the ruling class interests are their own. In contemporary politics starting in the 1970s and 1980s, these programs grew and become more hostile to the public interest:

> Neoliberal entrepreneurs, intellectuals and journalists have been working to reverse the flow of social change, and they have been largely successful in doing so, all over the world. They have 'won the hearts of minds' of the middle classes of the global North and the elites of the global South, and they have shown their willingness to

> dominate—and in some cases to liquidate—antagonistic groups using armed force (Day 2005, p. 8).

The power of civil society to resist this hegemony rests in its ability to strategically and carefully shift its consent to something that truly does reflect the majority interests, including adequate social and economic access to nutritious food for all people at all times (see Ingram et al. 2010 for a comprehensive discussion of food security requirements).

The neoliberal historical bloc and the industrial food regimes: domestic and international dimensions

Food is grown, processed, packaged, and delivered through material, discursive, and organizational forces of production that have organized a hegemonic position for industrial food interests (Andrée 2005) in a stable regime. As noted above, the food regime framework originates from Friedmann's (1982) now landmark article in the *American Sociological Review*. Friedmann shows that the US food system cannot be studied in isolation from the international context because the US-led international food order was established in the 1950s post-war period. This regime initially produced food surpluses "well above effective food demand," and the accumulation of food stores partially organized food prices (p. S249).

In the introduction to this symposium on American Food Resilience, Professor Marten rightly points out that food stores have narrowed to dangerously low levels, allowing for external punctuated events to put the overall food availability in the USA at risk. Going back to Friedmann, we find that the reasons for both the twentieth century food stockpiles and later reductions to the stockpiles were organized through "orderly international arrangements which had maintained grain surpluses and depressed prices" (p. S250). US wheat surpluses were a result of policies from 1870 to 1929. During the pre-war food regime, European food demand increased by 600 %, prompting US specialization in wheat characterized by free trade and the gold standard, which all fell apart in the 1930s crisis (Ibid). As a response to the Great Depression, Roosevelt's Democratic Party established key government loans and subsidies for US agriculture. These subsidies promoted a surplus, which became something of a problem, because the quasi-governmental agencies received 70 % of the average annual crop. World War II provided an outlet for this surplus, but after the war, this surplus found other destinations (Friedmann 1982).

The post-war international food regime emerged as part of European reconstruction, where American food surplus built by US policy, became a tool of international relations via aid in the first stages of the Cold War. Food-related expenses constituted a third of the total Marshall Plan reconstruction budget, and by 1950, the US government was buying 60 % of all agricultural exports for aid (Friedmann 1982). The trend of using US aid expenditures to pay private grain producers was institutionalized in PL-480, the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, where title I of this law allowed the US government to trade aid, including food aid, to countries who paid in currencies that could not be converted. Private producers were paid by the USA, and the USA then traded the grain in Third World countries for currencies that had to be held in-country and used in-country—providing US local liquidity without congressional appropriation (Ibid).

This dynamic followed Gramsci's expectation that the structure of economic relations informed the larger international relations between countries of the world (Gramsci 2011, vol. 3, p. 259). The USA emerged as the dominant power after World War II and used its ability to generate excess grain to produce the post-war relations between countries. This food surplus was the productive base of the 1944–1971 capitalist order that Ruggie (1982) labeled "embedded liberalism." In embedded liberalism and Keynesian compromise, the working classes were brought into the historic bloc through broader distribution of wealth and the social compact and safety nets were a way to insulate working classes from the crises that is frequent corporate capitalism. Friedmann notes that the "linchpin of the general post-war stability was the international monetary order centered on the dollar" which allowed food-independent and self-sufficient countries to be penetrated by commodity relations that destabilized subsistence-based food security in these countries and opened new markets for American and, eventually, European firms. Ironically, these food self-sufficient countries were opened up to food commodities through US food aid that, at first, suppressed the price mechanism like a drug addict getting the first dose free from their dealer:

> In particular, the significance of the international food order lies in its contribution to the widening and deepening of capitalist relations within the world economy, by shifting vastly more of the world's population away from direct access to food and incorporating it instead into food markets (Friedmann 1982, p. S255).

Now, there are efforts, like the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, that argue they are rescuing the *formerly self-sufficient* countries from hunger through similar tactics that produce dependency and loss of ecosystem services (Holt-giménez 2008; Mushita and Thompson 2007). Thompson (2014) calls this penetration "philanthrocapitalism" where supposed charity is used to veil the capture and

privatization of Africa's vast ecological and genetic wealth, and this is consistent with Friedmann's research that the post-war regime allowed for capitalist penetration into subsistence economies.

Opening capitalist relations through the commodification of food provided the foundation for the world capitalist system. In this system, the focus is on growing commodities, capital, and financial assets, where food is a means to these ends. Thus, corporate tools that grow these commodities and financial assets are best engineered, as in monoculture and consolidation of the industry into fewer, more expansive firms that control many international inputs, such as the international meat complex (Friedmann 1992). This consolidation intensifies during the subsequent neoliberal food regime and is at the center of type I and II insecurities for the USA and the world.

When the US aid ended, it drove food prices up, but by that point, many Third World urban countries were dependent on these imports and subsidies and had even transitioned their own agricultural capacity to urban areas or other sectors. The 1970s marks the end of embedded liberalism and beginning period between 1971 and 1979 that various authors identify as the birth of a new liberalism, *neoliberalism*, that abandons the social contract with labor and begins the aggressive transfer of power to the economic sphere and an intensification of inequality both within and between countries (Centeno and Cohen 2012; Milanovic 2011; Piketty 2014; Harvey 2005). Similarly, after the post-war food regime collapsed, a neoliberal food regime eventually emerged. Centeno and Cohen's (2012) show that neoliberalism is a political-economic order that

1. Transfers power from civil society to economic society
2. Removes state interference in the market through deregulation, privatization, and concomitant financial support to large firms
3. Abandons the social contract of embedded liberalism
4. Removes limits to capital
5. Deregulates firms which then make high-risk bets that eventually fail and must be secured ("bailed out")
6. Requires austerity programs for the citizens in order to pay for the rescue of large firms
7. Causes social crises as a result of 1–6

Pechlaner and Otero (2010) likewise explain that the neoliberal food regime is

> …characterized by even deeper integration of transnational agrifood capital, where global sourcing is the norm, and the national regulation of agriculture is challenged both by corporate-economic strategies and by further international-trade liberalization pressures (p. 183).

In the 1980s, the USA systematically deregulated commodity derivatives, such as futures contracts, and relaxed limits to speculating in US food markets. Deregulation of commodity trading allowed banks and other financial actors like Goldman Sachs and AIG to trade derivatives and sometimes packages of derivatives bundled such that investment companies could hold over 50,000 wheat contracts and the assets under management from 2003 to 2008 grew from $15 to $200 billion (Clapp and Helleiner 2012). As banks and other firms saw food as just another financial chip in the portfolio, concentration built up to where only six traders controlled 60 % of the Chicago wheat futures contracts, allowing small changes in US asset management to affect global food markets and for these actors to drive up prices artificially (Ibid).

This literature clearly indicates that corporate control and capitalist interests are objectively in charge of the neoliberal food regime. Since the 1950s, the power of food firms has concentrated through the consolidation of food and tobacco firms beyond wheat futures. Rogers writes that, "All stages of the vertical system are becoming more concentrated as larger operations increase their size" (Rogers 2001, p. 4) where fewer firms are in charge of larger portions of the food commodity chain, and small changes by these actors can have large impacts on the system as a whole. Consolidation has been most visible in the processing stage:

> The processing stage has the fewest number of companies in the vertical food system, but the processor/food manufacturer is often considered the most powerful, influential firm in the system—the marketing channel leader. These are the food firms the world knows by name: Philip Morris, Coca-Cola, Cargill, Kellogg's, among others. About 80 % of all raw domestic food products pass through this stage, with only produce and eggs avoiding processing because they only require minimal market preparation services such as cleaning, sorting, and packaging (Ibid, p. 5).

Oligopolies in food markets, such as flour milling (Kim et al. 2001), exist in plain sight. The top 20 firms controlled 24 % of the value added in the food market in 1967 and 44 % in 1992, and it is presumed to be higher today, but data are lacking (see Rogers 2001). The seed market has shifted from small farmers, who replanted seeds from prior crop years, to a market dominated by three agri-pharmaceutical corporations: Syngenta, Monsanto, and DuPont (Howard 2009). As this paper is in final drafting, Syngenta is about to be merged with Monsanto, with Dupont and Dow Chemical expected to purchase spin-off parts of the business, all of which is expected to initiate further mergers to answer the Monsanto competition (Sutherland 2015).

During the 1980s, the beef industry rapidly consolidated so that the top four firms control over 80 % of beef sold by the 1980s (Ward 1988). The ideological attitudes of the Reagan Administration permitted the consolidation and generally opposed anti-trust enforcement: "regulatory authorities simply dismissed traditional concerns founded upon an assumed causal linkage between concentrated industrial structure and antisocial economic performance" (Schroeter 1990). Given these trends, some argue that three or four food system clusters are organizing to "control food from gene to dinner plate" (Andrée 2005, p. 148).

Counter-revolutionary efforts to suppress debate in civil society

Counter-revolutionary efforts to guard the accumulation of food-related capital are evident in many outlets, including campaign contributions and lobbying. This lobbying produces rent (profit) for the corporations and a loss of welfare for the larger public (Bhuyan 2000). These political activities are more transparent than the processes detailed below, but they effectively impact state policy. One Reuter's report on efforts to fight regulations on sugar and fat indicated that, "At every level of government, the food and beverage industries won fight after fight during the last decade. *They have never lost a significant political battle in the United States* despite mounting scientific evidence of the role of unhealthy food and children's marketing in obesity" (Conway and Pretty 2013, online, emphasis added). Here, the class interests of big food take precedence over the health of the public, including our children.

To the degree that economic and civil society has the power to affect political society (government), they are semi-sovereign, and to the degree that they know and voice their own interests, they are semi-autonomous. Thus, key questions here are how sovereign and autonomous civil society is in resisting the food regime and to what extent counter-revolutionary efforts suppress social change and social revolution.

Civil society has taken on a crucial democratic role in food politics, namely in the urban garden, slow food, local food, and polyculture movements as well as the food justice and food sovereignty movements which are important in the USA and around the world. These movements have hinged on different drivers: perceptions of health and risk, justice concerns, and environmental concerns. The various movements have fostered a sense that the industrial farming system of large operations with an underpaid workforce in distant places and food that moves through machines and chemicals before it becomes part of our own physical metabolism has removed some control over what happens to our bodies, ecosystems, and communities. Food activists have not been ignorant or passive, but their efforts do not affect the governance of the food regime in the same way as big food firms like Sysco or Goldman Sachs.

In addition, this activism leaves substantial racial and class barriers in tact that prevent large numbers of people from providing and accessing healthy food (Alkon and Agyeman 2011). In part, this is because food movements focus more on individual rather than social change. Werkheiser and Noll (2014) break the various food movements into three categories based on their focus: individual, systems, and community. They note that movements focused on individual needs, such as the organic movement, receive the most attention, while the movement really provides support for the industrial system or at least offers little challenge. The focus on individual responsibility is consistent with a neoliberal political environment, where acceptable change is limited to the individual through individual behavior changes like planting a tree or buying a bike, and worse, when dissent is issued in this individualistic manner, it can be commodified in terms of meaningless boycotts or purchases of expensive organic produce—none of which actually change the food system itself or offer the threat of removing consent (Maniates 2001). Further, civil society is losing autonomy through the rise of civic exercises increasingly organized by a professional marketing elite of public relations firms (Walker 2014) while corporations have increased their influence on protest, CSOs, and civil society leaders who have internalized neoliberal values like deregulation and the self-regulation of markets (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014). Further, counter-movement and counter-revolutionary efforts are on-going, anticipatory (Marcuse 1972), and influential. For example, the environmental skepticism and climate denial counter-movements that have been at work for decades disseminating doubt about ecological and climate science in order to avoid regulation of business and accountability for global environmental changes (Jacques 2006, 2009; Jacques et al. 2008).

As a rare transparent example, counter-revolutionary efforts in the food regime can be seen in the efforts of Richard Berman. Berman "receives millions of dollars from business to fight unions and oppose a higher minimum wage" (Greenhouse 2014, online) as CEO of the Washington D.C.-based Berman and Company consulting firm that organizes campaigns against food activists, animal rights, organized labor, and environmental activists, and regulatory efforts that may affect his clients. Berman accepts large-sum donations to his nonprofit groups, like the Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF), as a way to conceal the actual interests to benefit the alliance of food industry-related economic society (Lipton 2014). For this purpose, Berman has initiated organizations that create other organizations and programs that defend the broad goals of the neoliberal food regime corporations as well as whole programs organized to undermine the credibility of specific public interest civil society groups. For example, Berman is listed on IRS documents as leading the Center for

Table 1 A network of counter-revolutionary programs

Name	Focus	In their own words
ActivistFacts.com	General civil society monitoring and anti-regulatory programming	"The organizations we track on this site are tax-exempt nonprofits, many of which engage in anti-consumer activism. Many are linked by personnel, history, and finances. These groups promote false science, scare campaigns, and sometimes even violent 'direct actions' to threaten our right to choose certain products"
American Beverage Institute	Against alcohol regulations	"Founded in 1991, the American Beverage Institute (ABI) is the only organization dedicated to the protection of responsible on-premise consumption of adult beverages. ABI's strength stems from its composition—ABI is a restaurant trade association, representing America's favorite restaurant chains as well as hundreds of individual restaurants and on-premise retailers. ABI sponsors unbiased studies by university researchers and traffic safety experts to inform the debate on adult beverages, responsible consumption, and drunk driving. ABI also uses independent and government research to develop educational materials for people involved in the hospitality industry…Armed with extensive research, ABI combats misinformation campaigns by overzealous activists by promoting aggressive and successful earned media campaigns. In this offense approach our media team educates reporters and editors and, consequently, ensures that the truth about responsible adult beverage consumption reaches policymakers and the public…ABI actively participates in legislative battles at the state and federal levels"
Bad Idea California	Against minimum wage increases	A project of the Employment Policies Institute, "Activists promised that a higher minimum wage in San Jose wouldn't hurt employees. They were wrong"
Bad Idea New Jersey	Against minimum wage increases	A project of the Employment Policies Institute, "Activists promised that a higher minimum wage in New Jersey wouldn't hurt employees. They were wrong"
BigGreenRadicals.com	Defense of hydrological fracturing (fracking)	"Big Green Radicals is a project of the Environmental Policy Alliance (EPA), which exists to educate the public about the real agenda of well-funded environmental activist groups. The EPA receives support from individuals, businesses, and foundations." Specific attention to Natural Resources Defense Council, Food and Water Watch, Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and local Colorado fracking opponents
Center for Accountability in Science	Countering science and reporting on (mostly) food hazards	"Every day, consumers are inundated with headlines and talk show segments warning about how the products in their pantries, medicine cabinets, refrigerators, and under their sink could give them an array of terrifying diseases. In many cases, these scary stories vastly overstate the actual risk, causing unnecessary alarm. The Center for Accountability in Science provides a balanced look at the science behind these news stories and examines the organizations behind the effort to scare consumers"
Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF)	Food and beverage industry	Identified by CORE as one of its divisions, CCF's mission is: "Founded in 1996, the Center for Consumer Freedom is a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting personal responsibility and protecting consumer choices. We believe that the consumer is King. And Queen"[a]
Center for Organizational Research and Education	General civil society monitoring and counter-programming	"Dedicated to research and education about a wide variety of activist groups, exposing their funding, agendas, and tactics"
Center for Union Facts	Anti-union	"The Center for Union Facts is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that fights for transparency and accountability in America's labor movement. For too long, big unions have opposed employee rights, engaged in self-dealing and corruption, and made excessive demands that have killed tens of thousands of jobs and driven major cities into bankruptcy"
Center for a Democratic Workplace	Anti-union program	"The Coalition for a Democratic Workplace consists of over 600 organizations, representing millions of businesses, which employ hundreds of millions of employees nationwide in nearly every industry," which as now, "turned its focus to combating regulatory overreach by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)"
CSPIscam.com	Defense of industrial food industry	Direct counter-program against the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). The mission is identical and reads as if this program is the CCF:

Table 1 (continued)

Name	Focus	In their own words
		"The Center for Consumer Freedom is a nonprofit coalition of restaurants, food companies, and consumers working together to promote personal responsibility and protect consumer choices. The growing cabal of 'food cops,' health care enforcers, militant activists, meddling bureaucrats, and violent radicals who think they know 'what's best for you' are pushing against our basic freedoms. We're here to push back"
Employee Freedom Action Committee	Anti-union program	The website is no longer available, but according to (Evans 2008) the program is, "an ad-hoc alliance of industry groups opposed to federal legislation that would make it easier for workers to unionize," raising $25 million for the cause probably affiliated with the National Restaurant Association
Employment Policies Institute	Against minimum wage increases	"Founded in 1991, the Employment Policies Institute is a non-profit research organization dedicated to studying public policy issues surrounding employment growth. In particular, EPI focuses on issues that affect entry-level employment"[b]
EPAFacts.com	Against environmental regulations	"EPA Facts is a project of the Environmental Policy Alliance dedicated to highlighting the high cost of the Environmental Protection Agency's regulatory actions and peeling back the layers of secrecy surrounding the agency's actions"
EnvironmentalPolicyAlliance.org	Against environmental groups	"The Environmental Policy Alliance (EPA) is devoted to uncovering the funding and hidden agendas behind environmental activist groups and exploring the intersection between activists and government agencies"
GreenDecoys.com	Against conservation groups	"Environmental and left-wing foundations have poured millions into 'sportsmen,' 'hunting,' and 'angling' groups, using them as cover to push their pet causes. See the evidence and learn about the fringe agendas of these organizations." Special attention to the Izaak Walton League, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Trout Unlimited, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and Bull Moose for advocacy of land and water conservation and anti-energy pollution work
Guest Choice Network	Countered smoking restrictions	Became the CCF in 2001
HumaneWatch.Org	Countering animal rights	Specifically targeted to critique the Human Society of the United States (HSUS)
LeedExposed.com	Counter program to energy efficiency/renewable energy	No mission statement, but the homepage reads: "Did you know that LEED is not established by a government organization? …that it can add millions of dollars to taxpayer- and privately-funded building projects? …that, despite the costs, many questions remain about its benefit to the environment?"
MinimumWage.com	Against minimum wage increases	A project of the Employment Policies Institute "Facts about raising the minimum wage—who it harms, who it helps, and what economists say"
PetaKillsAnimals.com	Countering animal rights	Specifically targets to critique the organization, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)
Prop65scam.com	Defense of the chemical industry	"In 1986, environmental and public health activists convinced California voters to approve the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act—better known as Proposition 65. Prop 65 Scam exposes the law's many flaws that have imposed massive burdens on businesses without appreciably improving Californians' health"
RethinkReform.com	Against health-care reform	Principally organized to oppose the Affordable Care Act, "RethinkReform.com is a project of the Employment Policies Institute (EPI), a non-profit, non-partisan research organization dedicated to studying public policy issues surrounding employment economics. EPI sponsors non-partisan research by independent economists at major universities around the country" "Instead of understanding the economics behind how the insurance market works, politicians have encouraged a crude and simplistic view of why we're paying more for healthcare. This website is focused on providing easily understood explanations of how health insurance works, why healthcare is more expensive today, and why (absent reform) costs will continue to rise in the future"

Table 1 (continued)

Name	Focus	In their own words
ROCexposed.com	Anti-farm worker	Specifically organized as a critique of the Restaurant Opportunities Center, an organization with the mission to raise restaurant worker wages and working conditions. "The Restaurant Opportunities Center is a labor union front group disguised as a restaurant industry employment center and watchdog. ROC regularly issues factually flawed reports, files ridiculous lawsuits, and leads protests that harm many of the restaurant employees they claim to represent, all in an effort to attack and harass non-unionized restaurants. ROC's tactics have been compared to mob-style shakedowns, often employing intimidation and outright extortion in an effort to force restaurants into submission"
RottenAcorn.com	Against minimum wage increases and other poverty-related reforms	Specifically organized to critique of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, a collection of low-income advocacy organizations, "ACORN Is A Bad Seed. Something's rotten in the state of New Mexico, and Ohio, and Michigan, and Pennsylvania, and Florida, and…ACORN calls itself a community group, but it is really a multi-million-dollar, multi-national conglomerate. Its political agenda is driven by a relative handful of political thugs for hire. ACORN spends millions promoting economic policies (like raising the minimum wage), but doesn't always want to abide by them"
TippedWage.com		A project of the Employment Policies Institute, "Facts about the minimum wage for employees who earn tip income, such as servers and bartenders"

[a] 1996 appears to be a reference to Guest Choice Network started as a front group in the interests of Phillip Morris Tobacco Company

[b] 1991 may be a reference to the formation of the American Beverage Institute

Organizational Research and Education (CORE), where its primary areas are listed as "civil liberties advocacy," under the guise of personal responsibility and consumer choice. CORE, like a few other organizations he has started, then have started several spin-off programs and organizations identified in Table 1, which were found through interactive links across Berman's public efforts. We must assume that these are mere examples that happen to be visible to scrutiny. The extent to which similar programs and efforts exist beyond scrutiny is utterly unknown.

What is available in Berman's record is quite telling. Berman opined in a talk to the energy industry that was secretly taped:

> People always ask me one question all the time: "How do I know that I won't be found out as a supporter of what you're doing?…We run all of this stuff through nonprofit organizations that are insulated from having to disclose donors. There is total anonymity. People don't know who supports us" (Berman quoted in Lipton 2014, online).

Berman runs programs that go on the *offensive* against critics of food, energy, and other industries and their executives. Just at this one talk, corporate elites had donated "six figure contributions" to his charitable organization which he would, "…then hide their role in funding his campaigns" (Ibid). A 2005 *Washington Post* (Mayer and Joyce 2005) article reported that his campaign against food and dietary regulations had prompted some to call for the group's charitable designation to be rescinded and that it was known that corporate elites were funding Berman for anonymous cover for their true interests and involvement. Berman's group had, for example,

> …ran a television ad featuring the "Seinfeld" Soup Nazi character barking at an overweight consumer, "Nothing for you! Come back when you're thinner." The ad asks: "Has the war on obesity gone too far?" (Mayer and Joyce 2005, online)

Efforts like this *appear* to be from civil society, not economic society. To the degree they influence both real civil society and the state, real civil society is less autonomous and therefore less sovereign. Therefore, the ability for civil society to make demands for the public interest in food and the sustainability against the veiled private interests of a very real capitalist elite class within the food regime are substantially undermined. Take, for example, the campaign the CCF ran against critics of genetically modified foods:

> With the activist-driven effort to "label GMOs" heading to the nation's capital, we're warning Congressional staff (and their bosses) to make decisions based on sound science, not activist fear-mongering. In today's Roll Call—one of the newspapers about Capitol Hill,

for Capitol Hill—we're running the above advertisement (Center for Consumer Freedom 2014).

The advertisement was in *The Hill*, a news source for congressional representatives and their staff, and it featured a picture of a poor, presumably starving black child, presumably in Africa with the text

> **Kids need food not propaganda**. Science has dramatically improved our ability to feed the world with **safe genetically modified foods**. Attacking science only hurts those most vulnerable. **Don't believe the propaganda** (Ibid, emphasis in original).

It is rare that counter-revolutionary programs are so visible, because as Berman admitted—the capitalist elite participants want to be and can be kept anonymous while the efforts on their behalf fabricate a pseudo-civil society consent that can be used to legitimize the hegemony of corporate elite in the current food regime, which then translates to government policy and action.

The endorsement of corporate hegemony in political society is further visible in agribusiness policies, such as those that connect agribusiness subsidies, agribusiness interests, Federal Dietary Guidelines, and Department of Education funding for school lunch programs, all of which transfer industry interests into government policy and profit to the corporations (Nestle 2013). One stark example of this is the United States Department of Agriculture's Meat Animal Research Center, which has the "one overarching mission: helping producers of beef, pork and lamb turn a higher profit as diets shift toward poultry, fish and produce" (Moss 2015, p. A12), and this center has taken drastic and cruel measures squarely justified in terms of meat production and profit for the meat industry. Cruel measures documented by *New York Times* journalist, Michael Moss (2015), included altering rearing practices for lambs that resulted in 30–40 % mortality rates simply out of conspicuous neglect and placing multiple bulls in with a cow for hours to study their libido while the cow, whose head was locked in a *cage-like device*, was mounted for hours until both back legs broke and the cow had to be put down. These experiments are legal because science experiments benefiting agriculture are exempt from the 1966 Animal Welfare Act.

Another example of big food's corporate hegemony is the aforementioned ag-gag laws that criminalize documenting *agricultural facilities* from slaughterhouses and factory farms and even crop facilities, such as "One 2011 video showed employees at a Texas cattle farm bashing cows' heads with pickaxes" (Landfried 2012, p. 377). These laws, such as HF 589 in Iowa, are designed to "stifle public debate and keep consumers in the dark… [and] also protect the slaughterhouses that regularly send sick and dying animals into our food supply, and would prevent some of the biggest food safety recalls in U.S. history" (Carlson 2012, online) while hiding and protecting extreme animal cruelty. According to the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA 2015), these laws are in force in Montana, Kansas, Idaho, Utah, North Dakota, Iowa, and Missouri. They have been introduced in about half the states in the USA. Federally, activists can be charged with up to 20 years of prison under the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act that criminalizes interstate activists who create economic damage to *animal enterprises*—or any enterprise that uses or sells animal products, like Wal-Mart or the Circle-K store on the corner (Sareen 2014). These laws explicitly protect big food and agriculture from real civil society interrogation and protect overall the neoliberal historical bloc.

These are examples of how the managerial corporate class is governing priorities and food, environmental, and public interest groups are attacked, subject to counter-revolutionary pressures by groups like those in Table 1. The purpose of these counter-revolutionary programs is to defend the agriculture industry regardless of its social, ecological, or humanitarian impacts. In this way, declining autonomy and sovereignty of civil society removes or neutralizes authentic dissent that could otherwise lead agriculture, manufacturing, distribution, and consumption of more nutritious food (reducing type I insecurities) into more sustainable directions.

Conclusion

If true sustainability is something like the "imperfect process of building and maintaining global social systems of capable, accountable, adaptive, just, and free people who can make important decisions and tradeoffs with foresight and prudence who foster the robust, self-organizing, dynamic and complex ecosystems around the world for now and future generations" (Jacques 2015, p. 19), then the post-war and neoliberal food regimes are not sustainable and, in many ways, deliver disease and death through type I food insecurities (Carolan 2013) while the regime undermines the preconditions for producing food (type II food insecurities). Both results are contrary to any conception of the public or larger human interest, but this paper has argued that the unsustainable system remains in place because of a hegemonic order and a powerful neoliberal historical bloc. This order is stabilized by the manipulation of public interest civil society organizations that provide legitimacy and political cover for a system that increases type I and II food insecurities.

In addition, to the extent that American civil society continues to weaken and our central civic life becomes more anemic (Putnam 2000), the ability of problem solving

diminishes and our tolerance for extreme inequality increases. If neoliberal policies created growth in inequality (Jacobs 2014), it is possible that the decline of civil society autonomy, sovereignty, and activity may explain why current US society *tolerates* the worst inequality since the Great Depression (see Milanovic 2011; Piketty and Saez 2013, 2014).

Gramscian analysis suggests, then, that the way to confront this food regime and its larger political-economic structure is to strategically remove consent through a war of position against a food regime that organizes counter-revolutionary efforts as a project to expand, open, and defend capitalism for the benefit of its ruling class. If the US-led food regime is a productive base for the current capitalist order, challenging the hegemony of the current food regime could affect all of the relations, trajectories, and prospects of the respective world system and its class structures. Such revolutionary efforts only promise to be truly revolutionary if they abandon hegemony altogether. This requires that we clearly identify the forces of social control that reinforce "multiple lines of inequality" and the domination of the Earth, and consciously avoid replacing one form of domination with new ones (Day 2005, p. 6).

The world indigenous movement and the world peasant movement are two related examples, where human dignity, good and meaningful food, and sustainability goals are integral to the social vision of a good life, or *buen vivir*, or a *good life* (Ridgeway and Jacques 2013). These movements are made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of local organizations that know their interests independent of corporate elites, and urge the rest of civil society to recapture and

> …fundamentally reorient production and consumption based on human needs rather than for the boundless accumulation of profit for a few. *Society must take collective control* of productive resources to meet the needs of sustainable social development and avoid overproduction, overconsumption and overexploitation of people and nature which are inevitable under the prevailing monopoly capitalist system (Indigenous Peoples Global Conference On Rio+20 And Mother Earth 2012, online, emphasis added).

Feeding all the people of the world all the time with nutritious food, without systematic ecological destruction will be one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century, and even under the best circumstances, will likely experience serious setbacks. However, at this time, the political conditions have prevented even serious debate about the sustainable agriculture because counter-revolutionary programs have significantly compromised honest civic discourse and deliberation about sustainable food systems that favor the human prospect over corporate profit.

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