PhD Thesis

Building Emancipatory Strategies, Producing Political Subjects:
Alternative Food Economies in the Basque Country and Greece in the Crisis

Rita Calvário

Supervisors:

Giorgos Kallis, Eric Clark and Giacomo D'Alisa

PhD in Environmental Science and Technology

Institute of Environmental Science and Technology

Autonomous University of Barcelona

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Abstract

Alternative economies are commonly depicted as a product of the will of individuals or groups, or as a spontaneous and cumulative reaction to an impact, be it crisis or neoliberalism more generally. Their fate is to transform the world, either gradually or through the clash of models. On the other hand, critics usually see them as a product of neoliberalism, or even capitalism. They are condemned thus to co-optation and marginality, or they just embody neoliberal forms, practices, and subjectivities. In this thesis, I chart an alternative explanation for why and how alternative economies emerge and develop, as well as provide a different lens through which to understand their transformative potential.

I investigate these questions by looking at alternative food economies in the post-2008 economic crisis. In order to gain a deep comprehension of real-life events embedded in context, I base my research on two case-studies: the case of new agroecological 'peasants' in the Basque Country (Spain), and that of 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece. Drawing on fieldwork research, on analytical tools derived from political ecology and food sovereignty literatures, and on Bensaïd's and Gramsci's insights on radical politics, this thesis deals with important conceptual and practical questions regarding resistance to neoliberalism, emancipatory strategies, and political agency.

My main argument is that alternative food economies can be an integral part of activist strategies engaged in struggles over hegemony, which seek to produce critical and active subjects and, ultimately, move the subaltern to a position of leadership. In the Basque Country, denaturalizing hegemonic ideas and practices regarding agribusiness, and normalizing peasant alternatives, is a key focus of small farmers' strategy of building alliances and a large social movement fighting for food sovereignty. In Greece, tackling famers' difficulties and food insecurity through 'solidarity' is a strategic step towards advancing counter-austerity ideas and practices to engage people in 'practical-critical' activity.

Whereas alternative food economies may provide opportunities to politicize politics, create spaces of politicization and self-organization of the subaltern, and generate learning processes on how society-nature relations can be organized differently, they also face challenges, as they are not outside (because there is no outside to) capitalism. The difficulties faced by agroecological producers call us to pay more attention to the relation between working-time and free-time for politics in alternative models. Efforts to develop alternatives must focus on providing the subaltern with the material and subjective conditions that enable them to become 'agents of their own history'. A politics that tackles social reproduction needs and builds a 'politics of hope' is therefore relevant. Indeed, environmental struggles may involve broader social and political goals, beyond concerns over access to resources and the environment or securing livelihoods; this shows the productive relationship between diverse struggles.

Resumen

Las economías alternativas se presentan comúnmente como un resultado de la voluntad, o como una reacción espontánea y acumulativa a un impacto, ya sea la crisis o el neoliberalismo en general. Su destino es transformar el mundo, ya sea gradualmente o a través del choque de modelos. Por otro lado, las perspectivas críticas generalmente las ven como un producto del neoliberalismo, o incluso del capitalismo: condenadas a la cooptación y la marginalidad, o simplemente encarnando formas, prácticas y subjetividades neoliberales. En esta tesis, expongo una explicación alternativa a cerca de por qué y cómo emergen y se desarrollan las economías alternativas, así como una perspectiva diferente a través de la cual evaluar su potencial transformador.

Investigo estas cuestiones examinando las economías alimentarias alternativas en la crisis económica posterior a 2008. Con el fin de obtener una comprensión profunda de los acontecimientos de la vida real incluidos en el contexto, baso mi investigación en dos estudios de caso: los nuevos campesinos agroecológicos en el País Vasco (España) y las distribuciones de alimentos solidarios "no intermediarios" en Grecia. Basada en investigación de campo, herramientas de ecología política y soberanía alimentaria, y sobre las ideas de Bensaïd y Gramsci sobre política, esta tesis trata de cuestiones conceptuales y prácticas relacionadas con la resistencia al neoliberalismo, las estrategias emancipadoras y la agencia política.

Mi argumento principal es que las economías alimentarias alternativas pueden ser una parte integral de las estrategias activistas que participan en las luchas por la hegemonía, que buscan producir sujetos críticos y activos y, en última instancia, mover a los subalternos a una posición de liderazgo. En el País Vasco, la desnaturalización de las ideas y prácticas hegemónicas sobre el agronegocio y la normalización de las alternativas campesinas es un enfoque clave de la estrategia de los pequeños agricultores de construir alianzas y un amplio movimiento social que lucha por la soberanía alimentaria. En Grecia, abordar las dificultades de los agricultores y la inseguridad alimentaria a través de la solidaridad es un paso estratégico hacia el avance de las ideas y prácticas de contra-austeridad y en la activación de los sujetos en la actividad "práctica-crítica".

Mientras que las economías alimentarias alternativas pueden brindar oportunidades para politizar las cuestiones sociales, crear espacios de politización y autoorganización del subalterno y generar procesos de aprendizaje sobre cómo las relaciones sociedad-naturaleza pueden organizarse de manera diferente, también enfrentan desafíos, ya que no están fuera (porque no hay un exterior) del capitalismo. Las dificultades a las que se enfrentan los productores agroecológicos son un llamado a prestar más atención a la relación entre tiempo de trabajo y tiempo para la política en modelos alternativos. Los esfuerzos para desarrollar alternativas deben centrarse en proporcionar las condiciones materiales y subjetivas para activar a los sujetos en la actividad política. Aquí es relevante una política que aborda las necesidades de la reproducción social y construye una "política de esperanza". De hecho, las luchas ambientales pueden involucrar metas sociales y políticas más amplias que van más allá de las preocupaciones sobre el acceso a los recursos o la seguridad de los medios de subsistencia. Esto demuestra la relación productiva entre diversas luchas.

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

EHNE-Bizkaia: Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna

ELB: Euskal Herriko Laborarien Batasuna

MST: Landless Workers Movement

S4A: Solidarity for All

SOS-Halkidiki: anti-gold mining movement in northern Greece

X-M: 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece

Introduction. Alternative Food Economies in Times of Crisis

1. Introduction

At the end of 2012, when I started my PhD, we were living turbulent times—and we continue to do so. The US subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 unfolded a major financial crisis, underpinning the biggest global economic recession since the 1930s. Capitalism itself was in deep crisis. This, however, was not an exceptional situation. As David Harvey (2014, ix) best clarifies,

> Crises are essential to the reproduction of capitalism. It is in the course of crises that the instabilities of capitalism are confronted, reshaped and re-engineered to create a new version of what capitalism is about. Much gets torn down and laid waste to make way for the new.

Several factors will condition the outcomes of this process, besides capital. These include the state, technology, and social conditions (ibid.). Whereas state power and social conflict will be determinant, new technologies and organizational forms will be only influential (ibid.). The former two shape social relations, while the latter are shaped by them.

The main response of capital and the liberal state to the crisis was the implementation of austerity, as a necessary condition to restore growth (Blyth, 2013). Austerity is a liberal policy of budgetary discipline for "rolling back the frontiers of the state" (Peck, 2012, 629) in order "to reduce workers' salaries, rights and social benefits" (Douzinas, 2013, 28), and to "facilitate even more predatory activity in the private appropriation of the commons" (Harvey, 2011, 86). In Europe, draconian packages of austerity were largely pushed by the tripartite committee of the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund—the 'Troika'—in countries facing public budget difficulties due to policy priority given to bailing out troubled banks, and also to creditors' speculative behavior. These countries include Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus, and Spain, although in different degree and depth. In these countries, the financial and economic crisis was translated into a sovereign debt crisis.

Austerity is an economic policy, as well a complex ideological phenomenon. As Seymour (2014, 6) argues, austerity "is an attempt to shift the material foundations of

society in a fashion which partially addresses the causes of crisis, but which does so on terms compatible with the interests of the 'traditional ruling class'. And it is at the level of politics, not economics, that this response is organized". Austerity is a class strategy which pushes the state to pursue capital's growth interests, and which is built upon ideological discourses and practices. For Bramall (2013, 1), austerity is "a site of discursive struggle between different visions of the future. This site of struggle extends... into environmental, anti-consumerist, and feminist politics, into the terrain of media, consumers, popular culture, and people's everyday life".

Clarke and Newman (2012) exemplify one of its dimensions with the case of the United Kingdom. They show how the government's framing of the crisis as a moral failing, which it associates with individual selfishness, statism and welfarism, has contributed to spread authoritarianism, nationalistic, and xenophobia ideas and practices. Similar outcomes can be found in Greece (Mylonas, 2014; Pentaraki, 2013). The ideological side of austerity also relates to 'Big society' ideals; that is, the overturn of the welfare state, with transfer of its functions "to 'civil society' and exercised through self-help, mutual aid, charity, philanthropy, local enterprise and big business" (Coote, 2011, 82). Bhattacharyya (2015) argues that elites are not concerned with consent; they seek instead to remake everyday life and shift the ways in which people think about equality and solidarity. This ideal of a self-organized society has a spatial dimension too. Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) show that the pro-austerity government in the United Kingdom has an ideological agenda based on localism and a new understanding of local self-government.

The disastrous and uneven socio-economic costs of austerity have fueled social conflict and mobilization (Douzinas, 2013; Fominaya and Cox, 2013; Porta and Mattoni, 2014). These include traditional mass-protest and strikes (Psimitis, 2011), as well 'novel' forms of protest such as civil disobedience actions (Sergi and Vogiatzoglou, 2013), the Indignados and Occupy movements (Tejerina et al., 2013), and alternative solidarity economies and practices in places like Greece and Spain (Conill et al., 2012; Sanchez, 2012; Rakopoulos, 2014; Stavrides, 2014, Arampatzi, 2016). Whereas there is a wide literature on anti-austerity mass protests, less attention has been paid to alternative economies and practices.

The few studies approaching alternatives and austerity usually portray them as pathways

for building social resilience (Camps-Calvet et al., 2015; Guidi and Andretta, 2015); generating transformative social innovation (Murray et al., 2010), a new economic culture (Castells at al., 2012) or social fabric (De Angelis, 2012); or renewing forms of self-organization and (individualized) collective action in the face of a state less prone to accept social movement's demands and an individualized society less susceptible to mobilize (Forno and Graziano, 2014; D'Alisa et al., 2015). In a celebratory mode, alternatives are understood as ways of responding to the hardship of crisis, while combining resistance to neoliberalism (if not capitalism) with prefigurative activism. More critical views look at alternatives (and also to anti-austerity protests in general; see Featherstone, 2015) as outcomes of "autonomist, anarchist and localist perspectives" which "seek to change the world without taking power", thus leaving "an increasingly consolidated plutocratic capitalist class... unchallenged in its ability to dominate the world" (Harvey, 2014, xii-xiii). Resilience is seen as 'futile', as it pacifies social unrest and undermines social mobilization (Diprose, 2015), whilst social innovation is understood as a way of furthering neoliberalization and the 'Big Society' (Dowling and Harvie, 2014). But are alternative economies and practices just about resilience, social innovation, resistance, prefigurative politics, localism, anti-statism, or anti-politics? Are they our last hope for reshaping some sort of self-organization, 'collective' action, and incrementally achieve social emancipation in a world devastated by neoliberalism and its austerity agenda, or do they signal the eclipse of politics and political strategy?

This thesis considers these questions in relation to alternative food economies, in the context of the post-2008 economic crisis period in the Basque Country (Spain) and Greece. It focuses on food for three important reasons. First, since 2010 there is "an excess of about 13.5 million people… living with food insecurity" in Europe (Loopstra et al., 2015). In some of the most affected countries, this has led to the emergence of alternative food economies (Skordili, 2013, for Greece; Camps-Calvet et al., 2015, for Spain), or to the re-shaping of existing ones (Guidi and Andretta, 2015, for Italy).

Second, the post-2008 growth of alternative food economies follows the "increase of [alternative agrifood movements (AAMs)] in recent years in response to the growing legitimation crisis of the conventional agrifood system" (Constance et al., 2014, 3). This crisis regards "both the environmental and socioeconomic externalities of conventional, chemical-intensive, monoculture agriculture such as poor nutrition, obesity, food safety,

food deserts, animal welfare, food and farm worker marginalization, and systematic rural depopulation" (ibid., 21). The conventional food system thus is increasingly showing its inadequacy to satisfy social needs, a situation which is being exacerbated in the current economic crisis.

Third, an important debate on the 'emancipatory question' has developed in agrifood studies in the face of the co-optation and assimilation of alternatives (such as organic agriculture, fair trade, or local food systems) by the hegemonic powers of capital (Constance et al., 2008, 2014). Critical views of market-based activism (or 'political consumerism', Forno and Graziano, 2014) argue that it promotes ideals of individual responsibility and choice in the market which fit well within the neoliberal agenda. Guthman (2008, 1171) highlights this paradox: alternatives may seek to oppose neoliberalism, but they "seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and mentalities". From this perspective, alternatives food economies (including the voluntary sector) in the context of crisis may be understood as band-aids to austerity, contributors to 'Big Society' ideals, or shapers of a 'new spirit of capitalism' (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005 for a discussion on how neoliberalism absorbed much of the counter-cultural ideals of alternative movements in the 1960s). This is not a novel critique to alternative economies (see Amin et al., 2003 on the 'social economy'). Yet, in the agrifood sector, the political framework of food sovereignty offers an alternative pathway to the dualism between 'believers' and 'skeptics' regarding the transformative potential of alternative food economies. Food sovereignty calls for an economic alternative to be achieved through advancing solidarity economies, oppositional collective action, and radical policy reforms. The way these combine, however, is a topic of debate in academic and activist circles.

In short, in this thesis I focus on alternative food economies because they express important material, symbolic, and political dimensions. In the current economic crisis, the growing failure of the conventional agrifood system to respond to the social needs of the many is catalyzing food conflicts, and, in some cases, the rise of alternative food economies. A better understanding of why and how alternatives emerge and develop in this context may contribute to the debate on the 'emancipatory question' in agrifood studies and beyond. In addressing these questions, I am sensible to Guthman's (2008, 1172) calls to "interrogate the micro-politics of various activist projects, in terms of what strategic decisions under-gird them, how these strategies are operationalized and

what sort of subjectivities they create", as well "to consider how place-based contingency shapes outcomes".

Greg Albo (2013, 1-2) argues that the class politics of austerity

> has renewed the critique of neoliberalism, and even capitalism, and opened up new spaces of political opposition…. Thinking about fundamental economic alternatives—something that had been declared as either utopian or improbable speculation even on the left—is again receiving attention. The theoretical and political questions of socialist strategy have returned, including how centrally a strategy for not just challenging but changing the state must figure in them.

This thesis introduces alternative food economies in this debate, inquiring into how they contribute to renewing the critique of neoliberalism, and even capitalism; to open new spaces of political opposition; to think about economic alternatives; and to address questions of emancipatory strategy. It does so by approaching alternative food economies, not only for their relevance in both the crisis and before, but also to introduce a still under-studied and under-theorized environmental dimension in this debate. This dimension transcends the struggle for access and control of resources or livelihoods, to engage with the ways in which 'food' informs the politics of grassroots struggles for alternative socio-ecologies beyond the scenarios set by austerity. In approaching these questions, a better understanding of the lived dimension of crisis and austerity, as expressed in alternative food economies, can provide pathways for informing political strategy and agency. In the next section, I elaborate on the objectives and specific research questions driving my inquiry.

2. Research aims, questions and rationale

In this thesis, I aim to shed light on the nature of alternative food economies in the context of economic crisis by looking at the practices, ideas, and relationships of new agroecological 'peasants' in the Basque Country (Spain) and of 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece. I address the following overarching research question: *Why and how did alternative food economies develop in the post-2008 economic crisis?*

The concrete exploration of the Basque and Greek cases will serve as an entry point for contributing to broader debates regarding the possibilities, challenges, and transformative potential of alternative (food) economies in specific historical and geographical conjunctures. Through drawing on field-based empirical research, on analytical tools derived from political ecology and food sovereignty literatures, and on Bensaïd's and Gramsci's insights on radical politics, this thesis deals with important conceptual and practical questions regarding resistance to neoliberalism, emancipatory strategies, and political agency.

In addressing my research question, I seek to achieve three interrelated objectives. First, to more deeply understand the material and subjective factors influencing the emergence and development of alternative food economies in the context of crisis. I seek to theoretically and empirically elucidate the role of particular conjunctures and activist strategies in the shaping of alternative food economies, the barriers faced, and relations with state power. This avenue of inquiry expects to contribute to debates on transformative politics. Second, to illustrate the ways in which alternative food economies inform a 'radical' politics based on building social and political contestations for challenging, and also transforming, the state. This objective seeks to illuminate the articulation between a politics of everyday life, ideological struggles, generative practices of alliance-building, and efforts of politicization and social mobilization of members of subaltern groups, while shedding light on some of its possibilities and challenges. Third, to unpack the contribution of struggles over 'food' to advancing broader social and political contestations beyond strictly agriculture or food issues. This objective seeks to expound the ways in which contentions around the environment—and particularly 'food'—inform struggles over hegemony.

Each of these objectives corresponds to a particular research question and set of sub-questions. The latter is directly related with the specificity of the case-study analyzed for addressing the objective in question.

1. *How and why do alternative food economies emerge? How do they evolve, and what is their contribution to transformative politics?*

   - Where did the alternatives come from and what is their horizon?

- What barriers do they face and how do movements deal with them?

- How do they relate with the state?

2. *How does developing alternative food economies on the ground inform emancipatory strategies seeking to radically transform the agrifood system (and thus, necessarily, society)?*

- Why did Basque small farmers opt for food sovereignty?

- How does EHNE-Bizkaia advance food sovereignty through repeasantization? And how does it articulate practical alternatives with ideological struggles, and a politics of alliance-building and social mobilization?

- What are the organizational implications of food sovereignty?

- What are the political views of new agroecological 'peasants'?

- What challenges does agroecology face to activating new 'peasants'?

3. *How do struggles over the environment—and particularly 'food'—inform a subaltern politics of hegemony?*

- How did the politics of austerity in Greece shape conflicts over the environment?

- How did grassroots resistance movements mobilize alternative ideas and practices of the environment to contest austerity as the hegemonic response to crisis?

Chapter 1 draws on Bensaïd's understandings of politics as the 'art of strategy' to look at the particular conjunctures and activist strategies that influenced the growth of new agroecological 'peasants' in the Basque Country and of 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece, and to assess their transformative potential. Chapter 2 follows a Gramscian political ecology approach to scrutinize how repeasantization (agroecology, solidarity supply-chains, and localization) informed a radical politics of food sovereignty and small farmers' mobilization in the Basque Country. Chapter 3 also engages with a Gramscian political approach to illuminate how the 'environment'—and 'food' in particular—was mobilized in subaltern' struggles against the normalization of austerity as the hegemonic response to crisis in Greece. This chapter includes an

additional case-study regarding the movement against gold mining in Halkidiki (Northern Greece), based on a collaboration with Giorgos Velegrakis and Maria Kaika. Although this case does not concern alternative food economies directly, I decided to include it here because it complements my own research focus in showing how local environmental conflicts can scale-up to combine with contestations to austerity.

In the last Chapter, after discussing my research findings, I conclude by arguing that actually existing alternative food economies, rather than being just a response to immediate needs, or about expanding difference or autonomy at a distance from the state, can be the outcome of activist strategies within the contingencies of struggle which aim to politicize politics, expand social conflict and confrontation, and challenge and transform the state, within an emancipatory horizon. My main argument is that alternative food economies can be an integral part of activist strategies engaged in struggles over hegemony, which seek to produce critical and active subjects and, ultimately, to move the subaltern to a position of leadership.

In the next section, I present the main debates that underpin my research questions and objectives and lay out the theoretical framework that guides my analysis.

3. Literature and contributions

I situate my study in the field of political ecology. The reasons for this are diverse. First, I position alternative food economies as an outcome of food conflicts, often involving struggles over land, seeds, livelihoods, and the like. Thereby, alternative food economies are often a result of conflicts over the control and access to resources and the environment, which are entangled in power relations. Political ecologists have a foundational commitment to the study of environmental conflicts (Robbins, 2011), and to the understanding of contestations from the perspective of the marginalized (Wolford and Keene, 2015). In this thesis, I investigate alternative food economies precisely from the perspective of contestations from below.

Second, political ecology has emphasized the role of social agency and local processes in shaping the agrifood system. For instance, Watts and Goodman (1997, 10) argue that "the pace and direction of liberalization remains uneven and underdetermined" in

agriculture. As Hall (2015, 511) explains, both depend on "the context of local agrarian histories, crop particularities, social organization, and ecological conditions". In this thesis, I explore alternative food economies as embedded in particular contexts, paying attention to local specificities in shaping conflicts over food.

Third, political ecology provides important contributions for the analysis of contestation from below. Wolford and Keene (2015) highlight four of these. According to them (ibid., 574-575), "political ecologists understand all struggles to be a struggle over objective and subjective conditions"; "emphasize the importance of place (the spatial context) and conjuncture (the temporal context)… [in] the formation and maintenance of protest"; situate "discourses or narratives that frame contestation" over the environment "within broader structural relationships"; and "[shed] light on the relationship between the interests of the state… and political activists on the ground". All of these features of a political ecology framework offer guidance to my research.

Political ecologists, however, tend to approach contestation largely from the angle of resistance (Wolford and Keene, 2015; Heynen and Sants, 2015). For instance, theories of 'moral economies' (Thompson, 1971; Scott, 1976) and 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1985) have had a significant impact in political ecology (e.g., Watts, 1983; McCarthy, 1998; Turner, 2004; Wolford, 2005). This has implied a greater methodological focus on the performativity of conflict, with less attention to the ways in which movements strategize their struggle in particular contexts and relations, and combine political, spatial and ecological strategies. Little research has focused on a broader set of questions about how contestation is generated and enacted in given conjunctures, as well the complex ways through which critical and active subjects are produced. Only more recently, a political ecology infused by Gramscian political theory has started to address these questions (Mann, 2009; Ekers et al., 2009; Ekers et al., 2013).

In order to investigate alternative food economies in the post-2008 economic crisis period from the perspective of contestations from below, embedded in context and beyond the angle of resistance, I employ Bensaïd's and Gramsci's understandings of radical politics. I seek to expand political ecology insights on how environmental conflicts and movements take part in 'politics'. To conduct my analysis, I enter into dialogue with existing theories and positions that debate alternative food economies and transformative politics. I engage with two general bodies of literature: one regards

debates on prefigurative politics and social change; the other on alternative food movements and food sovereignty. In the next section I outline the main debates in both sets of literature. My intention is not to offer a complete and detailed account of these rich and contested debates—a task beyond the scope of this study—but to focus on the arguments that are relevant to my research.   In section 3.2. I present Bensaïd's and Gramsci's theoretical insights that will allow me to contribute to these debates.

3.1. Prefigurative politics and social change

Alternative economies and practices can be understood as embodying a prefigurative politics. This entails the creation in the 'here and now' of a more just, democratic and sustainable society, including, for instance, "the development of consensus-oriented decision-making procedures, the democratization and 'horizontization' of organizational structures and the establishment of alternative relations of property, power and production" (Sande, 2013). A prefigurative politics includes ends-means consistency, integration of future ideals into everyday practice, and direct action. Therefore, it has an experimental and exploratory nature. It represents also a critique and alternative to political strategy, representative democracy, and organizational centralism. In Leach's (2013) words, a prefigurative politics

> is motivated by more than a commitment to moral action in its own right; it has been pursued as an alternative to both vanguardist and structural-reformist strategies for social change. Rather than looking to a revolutionary vanguard to seize existing power structures and implement revolutionary change on behalf of the masses or to trade unions or political parties to leverage reforms within the existing system, a prefigurative approach seeks to create the new society "in the shell of the old".… In this sense, a prefigurative strategy is based on the principle of direct action, of directly implementing the changes one seeks, rather than asking others to make the changes on one's behalf.

Prefigurative politics usually is evaluated according to two distinct analytical and normative approaches (Yates, 2015). The work of Breines (1989) and Epstein (1991) illustrates one of them. These authors argue that a prefigurative politics involves the rejection of strategy because it has no explicit political goals, nor does it focus on building an organizational structure for advancing change. For Breines (1989), a prefigurative politics entails building egalitarian and democratic forms in which to construct a "a way of life that [calls] for equal and caring relationships" (ibid., 48)—that

is, to build 'participatory democracy' and 'community'. This way of life, she argues, refuses the violence of hierarchy and centralized organization. It is a call to "refuse to cooperate with the machine, literally refuse to fight, and build instead a community which might serve as an alternative moral and personal standard" (ibid., 56). For Epstein (1991, 16), a prefigurative politics aspires to bring about a "broad redefinition of social values", that is, to enact a cultural revolution.

The second approach understands prefigurative politics as protest, and focuses on the performativity of protest. In describing the alter-globalization movement, for instance, Graeber (2002, 332) argues that this was a movement "about creating new forms of organization… based on principles of decentralized, nonhierarchical and consensus democracy… [aspiring] to reinvent daily life as whole". Maeckelbergh (2011) argues that a prefigurative politics is not a rejection of strategy, but a strategy in itself. In viewing strategy beyond the idea of "hierarchical and fixed" organizational structures "only demanding reforms from the state" (ibid., 6), she claims that the development of decentralized networks based on "horizontality" and "diversity" was strategic for the alter-globalization movement to challenge inequality and redesigning the way power operates (ibid., 13). For her, social change entails a cyclical process of continuously fusing means and ends, through which to "slowly make the state and multilateral organizations obsolete" (ibid., 14). This approach thus calls for focusing on the process of protest, rather than to its outcomes, demands, successes, or goals. For Sande (2013), in order to evaluate a political practice, "what matters is how [means and ends] mutually evolve, interplay, change and cohere during or within the practice".

Within this focus on process, in approaching the way in which contestation is conducted, emphasis has been given to the way protest gives rise to alternative forms of public space (Dhaliwal, 2012); to new democratic practices (Hardt and Negri, 2011), sociabilities (Juris, 2012), subjectivities (Douzinas, 2013) and relationships (Stavrides, 2014); and to "new egalitarian lifestyles and forms of social and ecological organization" (Swyngedouw, 2014, 134). This approach moves beyond views of resistance as "performance, drama, and spectacle [with no] thinking about how to get from where we are to the society that we want" (Epstein, 2013, 81–82).

A focus on process allows us to pay attention to the particularities and dynamics of struggle, rather than just cataloguing from above resistance as defensive. For instance,

Kaika and Karaliotas (2014, 28) suggest that the Indignados' movement must be evaluated by "the broader impact [it] had in kindling imaginaries and practices of acting beyond the temporalities and spatialities of the [existing social] order", and not by the (un)success in revolutionizing it.

However, limiting the focus on the performativity of protest risks paying less attention to how contestation is generated and enacted in particular contexts and relations, with all its contradictions and challenges. In part, this is due to accounts that follow a 'transcendental', 'metaphysical' or 'speculative' notion of the political "free from the mediations of historical geographies, social relations, and the contradictions of everyday life… and the mundane world of state-sanctioned politics" (Kipfer and Hart, 2013, 325). Those who read protest as prefigurative politics fall into the same 'error' they seek to correct: they ignore the different circumstances in which movements engage with, and attempt to sidestep, the strategies of capital and the elites. For instance, Swyngedouw (2014, 123) argues that the "political emerges" from the "performative staging and acting of equality in the face of the in-egalitarian practices embodied in the instituted 'democratic'" order. Thus, politics consists in enacting the 'truly' political.

Accounts closer to neo-anarchism or 'autonomous' and 'open' Marxism celebrate protest as a signal of rebellion (Graeber, 2002a; Hardt and Negri, 2001, 2009), even if expressed in the negative terms of refusal (Holloway, 2005). In general, transformative politics is not about 'taking power' (Holloway 2010, 2), but about the creation of a "new society within the shell of the old" (Hardt and Negri, 2009, 8). Thereby, "resistance, exodus, the emptying out of the enemy's power, and the multitude's construction of a new society are one and the same process" (ibid., 69). This is a process of "exposing, delegitimizing and dismantling mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy from it" (Graeber, 2002a, 68); that is, of expanding 'cracks' within capitalism with "the idea that the struggle for a different society must create that society through its forms of struggle" (Holloway, 2010, 45). A transformative politics thus entails the blossoming of plural autonomous projects at a distance from the state, connected by their broad critique of authority and domination in all forms, not by a logic of hegemony (Day, 2005). The objective is not to seize or influence state power, but to make the state gradually loose its social relevance or to defer to an indeterminate future any direct confrontation on the terrain of the state.

Efforts to "progressively enlarge the social spaces of social empowerment" and "largely by-pass the state" are called by Wright (2012, 228) 'interstitial strategies'. More commonly associated with the aforementioned politics of 'cracks', the 'diverse economies' framework originally developed by Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) also fits in this schema. In an approach close to Breines' and Epstein's ideas described above, a diverse economies framework also seeks to re-draw culture and social values, with an emphasis on economic practices and institutions. This framework proposes to look at the economy as a hybrid; that is, containing no capitalist 'essence' that would limit the possibility of change from within the economy. Thereby, it seeks to give visibility to non-capitalist forms of production and reproduction in order to inspire the unconstrained growth of moral economic communities based on an ethics of care and new subjectivities. Unlike a politics of 'cracks', this approach does not embody conflict and struggle: it is not about increasing autonomy and resistance, but about building difference.

Wright (2012), who adopts a perspective of analytical Marxism, argues that interstitial strategies are necessary in any strategy of social transformation, but need to be complemented with symbiotic (that is, reformist) and ruptural strategies. For him, the creation of 'real utopias' "make possible the creation and deepening of socially empowered institutions from the bottom up. These new relations both function as practical demonstrations that another world is possible, and potentially can expand in ways which erode economic power" (ibid., 268). However, in order to overcome limits and confront opposition from capitalist forces, "it may take political mobilizations and confrontations characteristic of ruptural strategies to enlarge the spaces within which interstitial transformations can occur" (ibid). In his view, this compound strategy might overcome capitalism if structural limits are not strong enough. If they are, he concedes that the "best we can do might be to try to neutralize some of the most harmful effects of capitalism" (ibid., 270). He concludes, tepidly:

> The best we can do, then, is treat the struggle to move on the pathways of social empowerment as an experimental process in which we continually test and retest the limits of possibility and try, as best as we can, to create new institutions which expand the limits themselves. In doing so we not only envision real utopias, but contribute to making utopias real (ibid.).

All of the aforementioned pathways to social change embody an incremental perspective, in which the accumulation of social forces will somehow transform the

world. The state is either to be ignored, dismissed (in the hope it will disappear) or reformed. In some approaches, this might imply a politics of conflict and social mobilization, in others it does not. In this thesis, I react against and move beyond this perspective by engaging with Bensaïd's and Gramsci's insights on radical politics for studying alternative food economies in the post-2008 economic crisis. I choose these two authors because they emphasize the centrality of politics and of the productive moment of struggle, considering their relation with both historically-produced conditions and state-sanctioned politics. As Thomas (2009a, 33, 34) argues, a Gramscian-inspired (and I would add, a Bensaïdian) approach "attempts to act as the theoretical comprehension of actually existing practices, describing their tendencies and lines of potential development as concrete acts of organization and coordination rather than normatively prescribing their necessary forms from above…. [T]hese practices are already subject to over-determination by the speculative logic of the bourgeois political, posited as objects of its contemplation and ideal coordination".

A framework inspired by Bensaïd's work will allow me to address the question of how contestation is generated and enacted in particular contexts and relations, with particular attention to the activist strategies that under-gird the development of alternative (food) economies in given conjunctures (Chapter 1). From Gramsci, I will draw analytical tools to address the complex ways in which materiality and ideology combine to produce (or not) critical and active subjects, within a perspective of alliance-building and social mobilization (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

3.2. Alternative food movements and food sovereignty

The negative ecological, economic, and social costs of the industrialized-corporate-globalized capitalist agrifood system have led to the growth of diverse food conflicts and movements through the 1990s and 2000s (Hinrichs and Eshleman, 2014). These movements include struggles for food alternatives such as organic agriculture, slow food, fair trade, localism, food safety, food justice, and food sovereignty.

Struggles over food are plural and not united in a single movement, but scholars often designate them under the umbrella terms of 'alternative food networks' (e.g., Morgan et al., 2006; Goodman et al., 2011) or 'alternative agrifood movements' (e.g., Constance et

al., 2014). This is so because each of these terms "captures a diverse set of issues, initiatives, and organizations, which together reflect widening disenchantment with conventional corporatized agriculture and food" (Hinrichs and Eshleman, 2014, 139). Their characterization as 'movements' by some scholars, derives from an understanding that they express "persistent, patterned, and widely distributed collective challenges to the status quo" (Allen, 2004, 5). They also have been positioned within 'new social movements', which are usually seen as rotating around lifestyles, identities, and recognition rather than 'material' issues (ibid.).

In this thesis, I adopt the term 'alternative food economies' to designate forms of food production and reproduction "that are in some way different from mainstream capitalist economic activity and give occasion to rethinking the economic system in itself" (Hillebrand and Zademach, 2014, 9). I do not use the term 'network' because my analysis of the case-studies focuses more on individual initiatives and less on their interconnection. Likewise, I do not use the term 'movement' because I consider that individual initiatives or their sum may be part of a social movement, but do not constitute in themselves a movement, that is, a form of collective action. Here, I follow Barker's (2013) attempt to define what a social movement is. According to him, resistance may be individual, but "a movement entails some kind of organization, implying not just collective identities but collective projects, and mutual sharing of ideas" (ibid., 48). This kind of structure, however, is of a network-type rather than constituting an 'organization' (ibid.). He adds that movements also are fields of argument both internally and externally, and that movements are not necessarily bottom-up and progressive (ibid.).

There is a widespread literature on alternative food economies in academic fields as diverse as economic geography, rural sociology, consumer studies, and critical agrarian studies. A main point of debate regards the transformative potential of such projects, related to the degree of their 'alterity'.

Allen et al. (2003) distinguishes between 'alternative' and 'oppositional' strategies: the former focus on developing alternative models through which incrementally erode the conventional agrifood system at the edges of existing political-economic structures; the latter involves efforts to directly challenge those structures in order to create a new configuration in the agrifood system. According to them, initiatives often combine

alternative and oppositional stances, moving along a continuum between these two poles. They give the example of the organic agriculture movement, which in its origins embodied a structural critique and oppositional stance to the conventional agrifood system, but progressively lost both to give place to a more entrepreneurial culture. The same shift can be identified for the fair trade and localist movements (Constance et al., 2014).

The blunting of the transformative potential of alternative food economies is related to their conventionalization—through market co-optation, mainstreaming, or institutionalization. In a remarkable review of alternative agrifood movements, Constance et al. (2014) summarize what happened with the organic agriculture and fair trade movements: the growing consumer demand for organics and fair trade was followed by their institutionalization through 'weak' official certification schemes, which facilitated their appropriation by agribusiness and transnational corporate actors. This has shaped the thesis on 'conventionalization', according to which market-based solutions for capitalism's ills are easily assimilated by capitalism itself, thus dampening the transformative potential of alternatives (e.g., Guthman, 2004; Jaffee and Howard, 2010; Allen and Kovach, 2000; Shreck et al., 2006; Raynolds et al., 2007).

The conventionalization thesis is often associated with an argument about the 'bifurcation' (or marginality), which can be synthetized as follows: as agribusiness and large retailers provide alternative goods such as organics and fair trade in mass markets, they drive smaller and more sustainable, ethical initiatives to become marginal actors in the agrifood system (Constance et al., 2008). In studying the agro-industrialization of food alternatives in California, Guthman (2004) has shown that 'deep organic' growers were forced to intensify production to respond to economies of scale, squeeze of farm-gate prices, and increased land prices resulting from the entry of agribusiness in organics. Other cases, however, have shown that conventionalization also can benefit small and alternative growers, at least in the short term and with due state support (Constance et al., 2008).

In criticizing the capital-centered character of the above explanations, more reflexive and social constructivist approaches have emphasized the role of social agency in configuring the agrifood system. Following those frameworks, several scholars argue that alternative food economies make it possible to disclose the diverse food cultures

and economies that exist beyond the 'alternative' versus 'conventional' duality (Morgan et al., 2006; Goodman et al., 2011). According to them, alternatives embody 'moral economies' embedded in place, built upon ethical relationships between farmers, consumers, and local communities. Rendering alternatives visible can inspire a 'politics of possibilities' (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006) and move the agrifood system towards more just and sustainable configurations, often by achieving progressive policy reforms at the local or regional scales.

Accounts closer to the traditions of 'autonomous' or 'open' Marxism (Hardt and Negri, 2001, 2009; Holloway, 2005), also underscore the dynamic and generative character of alternatives. But rather than just positioning alternatives as 'different' to capitalist forms, they see alternatives as embodying resistance to neoliberalism. Ploeg's work (2008, 2010) is illustrative of this approach. He argues that, in face of the negative effects of neoliberal globalization, peasant and smallholders across the world are 'choosing' to de-commodify their practices in order to survive; he concludes that, these practices, when "taken together… become powerful and have the potential to change the panorama" (2010, 17).

Critical views on the 'agency' of alternatives and its alterity, argue that

> the focus on local scale and individual action does little to challenge the dominant food system and instead fits well within the neoliberal agenda of the globalization of the agrifood system based on individual choices rather than collective action…. Too often market-based approaches fill the gap that government vacates as part of neoliberalism regarding its duty to protects its citizens from the market power of global capitalism (Constance et al., 2014, 20, 31).

This type of critique constitutes the thesis on 'neoliberalization'. In part, this proceeds from Foucaldian-inspired approaches on neoliberal governamentality which see neoliberalization as a hybrid process that "attempts to enforce market logics in… [the] governance [of social spaces] and to produce subjects who employ market rationales in their day-to-day behavior" (Guthman, 2008, 1173). These accounts allow us to attend to the effects of local resistance in the shaping of spatial differentiated neoliberal routes, but tend to affirm the supremacy of neoliberal logics.

The political framework of food sovereignty provides an alternative response to the 'emancipatory question' in agrifood studies (Constance et al., 2014). According to

Trauger (2014, 1136), food sovereignty builds upon "the successes of the social movements that have come before it and seeks remedies for the failures of those movements". Their proponents accept both the conventionalization and neoliberalization critiques, advocating that oppositional collective action and engagement with the state are necessary to secure social justice and human rights for all (Constance et al., 2014).

With origins in peasant struggles and self-sufficiency food policies in the global South (Edelman et al., 2014), the term gained traction through Vía Campesina. Vía Campesina is an international movement that "brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world" (Vía Campesina, 2007). It was founded in 1993 as the self-organized and mass-based response of peasant farmers to the wave of neoliberalization sweeping the global South in the aftermath of structural adjustment programs and free trade agreements (see Desmarais, 2007 for a detailed history of Vía Campesina). The first definition of food sovereignty (1996) reflected this context and focused on self-sufficiency and the right of nations. The second (2002) moved to "the rights of peoples" to define food production, trade, and their degree of self-reliance. The third and last (2007) expanded the previous definition by embracing the "aspirations, needs and livelihoods of those who produce, distribute, and consume food", as well as the aim to develop "a model of small scale sustainable production benefiting communities and their environment" and a society "free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations" (Vía Campesina, 2007).

This shift in the definition resulted from the plurality of movements and positions that are part of Vía Campesina, and of its own accumulated experience of struggle and debate. Nowadays, Vía Campesina "comprises about 164 local and national organizations in 73 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether, it represents about 200 million farmers" (Vía Campesina, 2007). Shattuck et al. (2015) also highlight the relevance of the 'shifting terrain'—socioeconomic, geopolitical, and ecological—in which rural social movements operate since food sovereignty was originally created. According to them, these include growing financialization of agriculture and food, increasing ecological concerns, more intense rural-urban circular migration, and wider problematization of health issues.

The current definition of food sovereignty entails the struggle for a democratized, localized, ecological, and de-commoditized agrifood system, within a "radical egalitarianism" perspective that aims to eradicate "the equality distorting effects of patriarchy, racism, and class power" (Patel, 2009, 670). If the idea of food sovereignty "now inspires collective action among tens of millions of people all over the world" (Shattuck et al., 2015, 422), it is also fraught with tensions, contradictions and challenges. In this thesis, I focus on those that are relevant for the topic under study.

Scholars have emphasized the limits of discourses centered on rights and efforts to institutionalize food sovereignty (Hospes, 2013). In countries where food sovereignty has been enshrined in the constitution and legal framework, advances are few and often contradictory (McKay et al., 2014; Giunta, 2014; Schiavoni, 2015; Clark, 2016). McKay et al. (2014, 1175) argue that food sovereignty embodies "a contradictory notion of sovereignty, requiring simultaneously a strong developmentalist state and the redistribution of power to facilitate direct control over food systems in ways that may threaten the state". This is consistent with McMichael's (2009) and Patel's (2009) argument that 'multiple and competing sovereignties' exist in food sovereignty: whereas the state is called to be a guarantor of rights, the 'right of peoples' also calls for advancing alternative forms of democratic organization beyond the modern state. These 'external' and 'internal' dimensions of food sovereignty are not irreconcilable, but "how to navigate them is a major question" (Shattuck et al., 2015, 425). For instance, Claeys (2015) argues that the right-talk of Vía Campesina entails re-defining the notion of 'rights' so that it challenges the legitimacy of the state as the only sovereign authority. Trauger (2014) argues that the liberal state is part of the problem and cannot be the solution for advancing the food sovereignty goals of de-commodifying food and de-centralizing decision-making. She suggests to explore the gaps of the liberal state by developing autonomous spaces of sovereignty through which to re-work central notions of power, economy, and territory, as well as to (re)develop non-capitalist subjectivities. Iles and Montenegro (2015, 481) propose a relational understanding of scale to reveal how "movements, peoples, and communities… are creating multiple sovereignties and are exercising sovereignty in more relational ways".

Shattuck et al. (2015, 425) extend this proposal and call for a relational approach to sovereignty that goes beyond views of food sovereignty as being either 'of the state' or 'of peoples/communities'. As they point out, efforts centered on building local

alternatives are "necessary, both to address immediate needs and to demonstrate tangible alternatives, but it cannot replace organized efforts to turn the power of the state toward the food sovereignty project. Few other bodies have the power to undertake reforms essential to building food sovereignty" (ibid.). Inspired by Gramsci's notion of the integral state, they underline that "sovereignty, like hegemony, is built and contested within state institutions, within market conditions, within the institutions of civil society, popular culture, and the language with which people understand their daily lives" (ibid., 426). A relational approach, they argue, allows scholars and activists to focus on the terrain of struggle in which contestations operate—that is, on social relations—and to better comprehend how power is structured, experienced in everyday life, and challenged in given conjunctures. As a result, they conclude that "local specificities" shape food sovereignty and activist trajectories: "food sovereignty does not have to— and will not—look the same everywhere" (ibid., 427). This thesis gets inspiration from this relational approach, and seeks to expand it.

A focus on 'local specificities' allows for a better understanding of the ways in which 'food' contestations develop in particular places, as well of the challenges and contradictions they face. However, just underscoring local plurality provides few inputs for theoretical generalization. For instance, how do alternative food economies participate in organized efforts to turn the power of the state toward the food sovereignty project? And how can they challenge the ways in which power is structured and experienced in people's everyday life?

In this thesis, I draw on Bensaïd's and Gramsci's insights on radical politics to provide a theoretical lens through which to analyze food sovereignty struggles. Bensaïd's work helps me to situate alternative food economies within emancipatory strategies, with attention to 'local specificities' (Chapter 1). A Gramscian approach provides pathways to uncover the intricate relationships between a politics of everyday life and questions of ideology, alliance-building, and political agency (Chapter 2). Addressing the question of the 'nature' of the state is also of crucial importance to attend to this problematic (I go back to this point in the Discussion Chapter).

3.3. Bensaïd's and Gramsci's insights on radical politics

As it is always the case, Gramsci's and Bensaïd's ideas are a product of their time. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a Marxist intellectual, journalist, anti-fascist activist, and a prominent leader of the Italian Communist Party. Fighting the resurgence of 'economism' and idealism in left politics in the late 1920s, he devoted especial attention to what it would take to enact a mass class-based politics. In the 33 notebooks he wrote (1926 to 1934) while imprisoned by the fascist regime of Mussolini, he developed at length his ideas on the integral unity of the capitalist-state form and its production of the 'political' in bourgeois society; and on the 'philosophy of praxis' and its potential renewal of working-class mobilization and hegemony-building (Thomas, 2009).

Daniel Bensaïd (1946–2010) was a French philosopher and left militant who played an important role in the May 1968 student movement. He practiced a critical and creative Marxism for renewing political and strategic thinking in neoliberal times. His oeuvre was motivated by the concern of freeing Marxism from both the rigid determinacies of structuralism and the fluid relativities of social constructivism, as well as by an engagement with the main debates emerging in left politics in the late 1990s, regarding resistance to capitalism and strategy. He particularly dialogued and reacted against the ideas of 'changing the world without taking power', resistance for resistance's sake, and attempts to define the 'political' from above.

More specifically, in this thesis, I engage with Bensaïd's idea of politics as the 'art of strategy', and with Gramsci's notion of 'philosophy of praxis'. Both authors emphasize the centrality of politics and of the moment of struggle in transforming the world.

Bensaïd departs from Walter Benjamin's non-linear conception of history to assert a "historical present… full of possibilities, where politics takes precedence over history in deciphering tendencies that do not possess the force of law" (2002, 13, 14). Traveling with Gramsci, he conceives "politics as strategy and error as the risk in any decision" (ibid., 5). In seeking "to liberate the notion of a secular revolution from the spell of the sacred Revolution" and of the "grand proletarian Subject", he calls for thinking politics as the art of strategy (2009, 157, 165; own translation). For him, both sociological (or historical) determinism and voluntarism lack a strategic perspective. The former is based on the certainty of *the* event in a linear history and theology of progress; the latter

on the cult of the immediate, of the becoming, or of plural micro-revolutions, all of which affirm "a categorical imperative of resistance, or a formal faithfulness to the event" (ibid., 169; own translation). Politics is for Bensaïd (2009) a 'strategic art' that provides resistance with a 'strategic horizon' and mediates between necessity and the contingency to expand possibility—with no 'prophecies' of fate.

In Bensaïd's view, politics is born in the moment of rejection to accept the unacceptable, which occurs within an unfavorable balance of forces. Without strategy, however, there is no possible victory; thus, the necessity of moving from a politics of resistance to counterattack (2004). This requires the elaboration of alternative proposals; a reflection on the ways through which to advance them; and a sensible comprehension of the 'strategic time of politics'. Strategic thinking thus entails elaborating alternatives as well as intervening in the historical present. This involves a "political temporality… of the medium term, between the fugitive moment and the unattainable eternity" (ibid.), and a "political sense of the moment, the opportunity, and the bifurcation opened to hope…. At the end this is… the response adapted to a concrete situation" (ibid.). The strategic time of politics is thus "a broken time, full of knots and wombs pregnant with events" (2007, 151).

In fighting to win, it is necessary to advance solidarity and unity among the exploited and oppressed in order to counter the dispersal of popular struggles. For Bensaïd, Gramsci's idea of hegemony is a concept for thinking strategically about how to build unity. This involves the mutual transformation of sociopolitical forces in the process of struggle, not just an undifferentiated sum of social antagonisms. For him, capital is the unifying principle around which diverse struggles can converge, transform themselves, and form a political alternative. This is so because capital cross-cuts diverse forms of oppression and social antagonism; class struggle is not separated from other conflicts in society, and it cannot be reduced to the confrontation of labor and capital in the workplace: "class exists only in a conflictive relationship with other classes… [and is] determined at the level of the production process as a whole" (2002, 100, 111). The unity of the diverse in a counter-hegemonic project does not entail a hierarchy of struggles, neither organizational uniformity. On the contrary, if "politics is a matter of choice and decision, it implies an organized plurality" (2007, 155).

For Bensaïd, the question of the state is central. The state is not just one more power

relation among others, but the point in which, in a given historical configuration, "power relations and relations of force are knotted and stitched" (2009, 165; own translation). In his view, the 'social illusion' about the "self-sufficiency of social movements, in which the world can be changed without taking power or by making do with counter-powers" (2006), is the mirror image of the 'political illusion' of those who think of "'political' emancipation being fully realized through the achievement of civil rights" (ibid.). The state is an unavoidable terrain of struggle, but change is not possible from within the state. He follows Gramsci in emphasizing the importance of showing "that another society is possible" for constituting a political alternative; this, he adds, "must be demonstrated to some degree before the seizure of power lest this be a leap into the unknown, a half-hearted running jump, a smash-and-grab or a putsch. So the notion of transitional demands and that of the united front are tools for winning over a majority" (2011).

Bensaïd's insights on politics as the art of strategy provides pathways for better understanding how contestation from below is generated and enacted in particular contexts and social configurations. He invites us to approach contestation through an analytical framework that refutes all mechanical formulas, either capital-centered or privileging agency. Instead, he shifts attention to the activist strategies that undergird and operationalize contestation in given conjunctures, to their horizon of struggle, and to the ways in which they grab opportunities, face barriers, engage in a generative solidarity building practices, and deal with state power.

In Gramsci, too politics is about "the art of intervening in the conjuncture on the basis of the historical factors that have composed it and which it in turn composes" (Thomas, 2009, 333). His notion of 'philosophy of praxis' provides tools to grasp the ways in which this 'art' unfolds. Through this notion, he

> proposes a dialectical resolution of the failings, on the one hand, of a strict determinism that cannot comprehend the transformative dimensions of *praxis* and, on the other hand, of a radical voluntarism that cannot discern the features of the given elements with which such *praxis* must necessarily initially set to work (ibid.; emphasis in the original).

Gramsci puts particular emphasis on questions of political agency; that is, on what it will take to engage the members of subordinated social groups in 'praxis'—understood in the sense of "revolutionary", "practical-critical" activity (Marx, [1845] 2005). This is

a central task of politics, as no economic 'laws' or powerful ideas exist that can mechanically rise the subaltern into a social and political force.

He positions the human being, or person, "as the elementary 'cell' of hegemonic struggle" (Thomas, 2009, 375). Gramsci adopts a relational conception, in which the person is not "divorced from the natural world and... cannot be understood outside of specific socio-natural relations in particular places and particular times" (Loftus, 2013, 184). That is, the person is conceived as "an ensemble of social relations constituted in and through practical activity and in relation to nature" (Hart, 2013, 313). This is a notion that moves away from the "liberal notion of a sovereign individual subject... [and] the structuralist conception of the subject as an effect of knowledge/power or interpellation" (Kipfer and Hart, 2013, 330). In his reflections of 'What is a man?', Gramsci (1971, 352; own emphasis) elucidates that he or she should be conceived

> as a series of active relationships (a process) …, in as much… as he [or she] belongs to organic entities which range from the simplest to the most complex. Thus man [or woman] does not enter into relations with the natural world just by being part of it, but actively, by means of work and technique.

Therefore, the person is not a passive recipient of knowledge/power, but interiorizes the 'external' social relations in which he or she is embedded and develops his or her social activity through practical and everyday relationships with others and the natural world.

The "particular 'subjective' modes of being-in-this-particular-world" through which the person apprehends the world are shaped by different levels of historical experience at work (Thomas, 2009, 394-395). They are thus plural, fragmented, and often contradictory, and give rise to what Gramsci calls '*senso comune*', or common sense: a "divided, incoherent, inconsistent conception of the world" (ibid., 373). The experience of the subaltern classes "is one of a continual molecular transformation, of disaggregation that decreases the capacity to act of both the individual and the class to which they belong" (ibid.).

A chief task of politics is to forge a coherent conception of the world, and elevate common sense to 'good sense'. This entails a philosophy of praxis understood as "the critical art of finding, on the one hand, the adequate theoretical form of a practice, capable of increasing its capacity to act; and, on the other hand, the adequate practical form of a theory, capable of increasing its capacity to know" (ibid., 383). That is, the co-

determination between theory and praxis.

Empowering individuals of subaltern classes to "work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1971, 323), requires a politics "rooted in the messy practices of making a life in the world" (Loftus, 2013, 179) that works "against *and* within the contours of popular culture" (Kipfer and Hart, 2013, 330; emphasis in the original). This is a work of transforming subjectivities into critical activity in and through a politics of everyday life. For Gramsci, however, it is by the means of the direct involvement in political action of transforming others and the world that the members of the subaltern classes transform themselves. In Gramsci's words, "one can say that [the person] is essentially 'political' since it is through the activity of transforming and consciously directing other[s] that [the person] realizes his [or her] humanity, his [or her] 'human nature'" (1971, 360). All of this requires 'coherence': "to potentiate oneself and develop oneself… [involves] modifying external relations both with nature and, in varying degrees, with other(s)..., in the various social circles in which one lives" (ibid.).

The politicization and mobilization of the 'subject' are thus central in any emancipatory strategy, which entail dealing with questions of ideology and materiality in everyday life. This strategy, however, is not only directed at individuals, but also at social groups or classes. A philosophy of praxis works therefore as a 'coherent ideology' or 'conception of the world' that, through the integration of practical and theoretical elements, increase the collective capacity to critically know and to struggle, consistently. In other words, it aims to move the subaltern classes out of their condition of subalternity, and "to constitute themselves as classes capable of exercising political power" (Thomas, 2009, 227). This requires the construction of an alternative hegemonic project to that of the ruling class; a project that is built upon the alliance of subaltern classes (the majority), counter-posing the 'continual molecular transformation, or disaggregation' of popular struggles.

For Gramsci, "hegemony is a particular practice of consolidating social forces and condensing them into political power on a mass basis" (Thomas, 2009, 194). This involves engagement in 'civil society', understood as the "terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes" (ibid., 137). However, civil society is not opposed to the state; on the contrary,

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it presupposes and is over-determined by the state (ibid., 180). Likewise, the state-form results from the condensation and transformation of class relations in the struggle for hegemony. Thereby, the state in its 'integral' form is a terrain of struggle.

In order to build political power on a mass basis, or hegemony, requires "a class's transition from a merely corporative to a properly hegemonic or political phase, in which it posits its own particular interests as valid, or at least capable of providing leadership, for the society as a whole" (Thomas, 2009, 190). In this process of acting in 'political society', the subaltern classes must endeavor "to forge 'political hegemony' also before seizing state power"; that is, to forge their own hegemonic 'apparatus' of institutions and practices (ibid., 194). All of this presupposes the moment of struggle, and envisions the moment of 'organic crisis': a "crisis of the entire social formation, both its economic 'content' and its political 'form'" (ibid., 145).

In this thesis, I find Gramsci's notion of philosophy of praxis particularly useful to address the question of how building alternative food economies contributes (or not) to expanding the moment of struggle, outside of any mechanical formulas. That is, to illuminate the ways in which a politics of everyday life and its relation to 'nature' take part in the 'art of politics'. In this, I follow others in attending to the productive relationships between Gramsci's theory and political ecology (Mann, 2009; Ekers et al., 2009; Ekers et al., 2013). In my study, an understanding of philosophy of praxis as the co-determination of theory and praxis, and a 'coherent ideology', provides insights for examining the ways in which everyday life, ideology, alliance-building, and political agency are mutually constitutive in advancing struggles for food sovereignty (Chapter 2) and contestations to austerity (Chapter 3).

4. Research strategy

The issue of alternative food economies in the current context of economic crisis is a recent and understudied topic. In this thesis, I thus explore and describe the material and subjective influencing factors, the processes, relationships, and people's motives for action, in order to provide an explanation of why and how alternative food economies emerge and develop, as well as to assess their transformative potential. My goal is to advance fundamental knowledge of this social phenomenon, and to inform the practice

of grassroots left activism. This is, therefore, explanatory research built upon exploratory and descriptive investigation, with the goal of theory-building and of stimulating 'practical-critical' activity.

To pursue these goals, I follow a dialogic method: I enter in constant dialogue with existing theories and positions, either reacting against, agreeing with, extending or moving beyond them. In the process, I strive to illuminate the conjunctures and activist strategies in which alternative economies emerge and develop, as well the ways in which they contribute (or not) to building social and political contestation, with a special focus on questions of political agency (such as politicization and mobilization of the subaltern). To this end, I follow a research approach and methodology that pays attention to the voices, actions and lived experiences of people developing alternative food economies in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, situating them within broader social relations as unfolding in particular places. I get inspiration from Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis', which has informed my adopting the case-study method and qualitative research techniques.

4.1. The 'philosophy of praxis': overall method…

Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' is composed of a historicist, dialectic, philological and criticism method (Buttigieg, 1990; Haug, 2000; Thomas, 2009). He is critical of both positivist science and idealism. The former for its search for 'objective' facts of a reality 'external' to human consciousness; the latter for its "self-defeating thesis of the non-existence of reality or the merely 'subjective' dimension of our knowledge" (Thomas, 2009, 305). For Gramsci, "the reality we really do know and live is constituted by our social relations and our equally relations with nature" (ibid., 304). Whereas a material world does exist, we apprehend that reality through our active, practical engagement in that world. Here, social relations are conceived as historically determined, "in the first instance, from the interests imposed by the world of production… and then modified in the *struggle* to impose them upon society as a whole in hegemonic relations between and within classes" (ibid., 396; own emphasis).

In order to understand social relations, however, Gramsci argues that "'structures' cannot be conceived 'speculatively'. Rather, they should be considered historically, as

the ensemble of social relations in which real men [and women] move and operate, as an ensemble of objective conditions that can and must be studied with the methods of 'philology'" (cited in Thomas, 2009, 100). Likewise, ideologies are to be conceived not as direct emanations from the 'real', but as a product of social relations. That is, they "are the terrain on which, or forms in which, members of a social group come to "know" in a particular, 'practical' way the determining conditions of their lives within a particular historical situation … [and] the struggle in which they are engaged" (Thomas, 2009, 101). As a result, there is no knowledge outside ideologies; these are not fixed and static, but dynamic and open to be challenged and transformed.

Against any form of 'metaphysics', Gramsci emphasizes history in the "sense of difference, multiplicity, [and] the specificity of the particular', thus engaging 'in the practical world of philology and criticism', rather than assuming 'the privileged vantage point of contemplation" (Buttigieg, 1990, 78-79). In Gramsci's words, a 'living philology' is 'the "'experience' of historical materialism, is history itself, the study of particular facts. […] 'Philology' is the methodological expression of the importance of particular facts understood as definite and precise 'individualities'" (cited in Thomas, 2009, 333). The point, however, is not to "record history in its infinite variety and multiplicity", but to establish "complex network of relations', which 'give rise to general concepts and theories" (Buttigieg, 1990, 81). Put differently, his historicism has a relational, dialectical character, and "demands a ceaseless movement from the particular to the conceptual, and back" (Ekers, 2013, 229).

Gramsci's method is therefore deeply attentive to historically and geographically situated practices, as knowledge emerges "through experience of immediate particulars", as well as through situating ideas and practices within the particularities of a given historical conjuncture (Ekers and Loftus, 2013, 18). This method can be understood as "coherent, but non-systemic thinking which grasps the world through human activity… It is a thinking that indeed addresses the whole, but from below, with a patient attention to particularity" (Haug, 2000, cited in Ekers and Loftus, 2013, 21).

4.2. …and my research

In my research, Gramsci's method translates into the importance of focusing on people's actions, lived experiences, beliefs and meanings, as well as of situating them in and beyond the settings in which they are embedded. This calls for methods that give insights on individual action and meaning-making, and consider their intricate relationships with the broader political, economic and social contexts. Furthermore, this requires an on-going and reciprocal movement between the particular and the conceptual, allowing for a theorizing that goes beyond what is immediately knowable but which must be tested in the cauldron of real-life and against competing theories. Gramsci's method also implies being aware that no research is value-free. This requires reflexivity about one's own theoretical positioning and a continuous interaction between empirical evidence and theory.

The case-study method is best suited for grasping the world through focusing on human activity, with a patient attention to particularity, and within a specific historical situation. First, it allows the in-depth examination of the "many features of a few cases over a duration of time with very detailed, varied, and extensive data, often in a qualitative form" (Neumann, 2004, 20). Second, in providing a systematic and holistic understanding of real-life events embedded in context, it is appropriate for addressing 'why' and 'how' questions and to build theory. As Yin (2003, 10) argues, "case-studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes". In highlighting the processes and relationships that shape particular events, case-studies allow analytical generalization that can be tested, compared and refuted (ibid.). As alternative economies of food are found in other geographical and social settings, particularly in the context of economic crisis, the analytical framework derived from this study can be easily applied and tested. This is indeed a requirement of the Gramscian method described above.

In my research, the focus on people's actions, lived experiences, beliefs and meanings required the use of qualitative data-gathering techniques. These comprised semi-structured interviews, ethnographic field-notes, participant observation, and collection of secondary material. Interviewees were selected through 'purposeful' (rather than statistical) sampling. The number of interviewees corresponds to the 'saturation' of responses.

The on-going movement between the particular and the conceptual, between empirics and theory, resulted in changes in the research design several times along the research process. My initial focus was on 'back-to-the-land' movements in the context of economic crises. I sought to understand why and how people with no agrarian background moved from the city to the countryside to adopt a primarily agrarian lifestyle (Wilbur, 2013, 145), also inquiring about their socio-ecologically transformative potential. In rural studies, 'back-to-the-land' is understood as a differential moment of counter-urbanization (Mitchell, 2004; Halfacree, 2008) that imprints in rural spaces a 'radical rurality' (Halfacree, 2007); or as 'progressive ruralism' (Woods, 2003), which is different from and challenges mainstream trajectories of rurality, based on industrial agriculture, a globalized food system, and a consumptive countryside.

I thus started research with broad questions regarding 'back-to-the-land' movements. As I collected data and established preliminary relationships between 'back-to-the-land' and alternative food networks in crisis-ridden Spain and Greece, I felt the need to redesign my research project. In Spain, new agroecological 'peasants' linked to a radical politics of food sovereignty were on the rise in the Basque Country during the crisis. In Greece, solidarity food distributions emerged as one of the most relevant social outcomes of the crisis. As a result, I shifted my focus onto alternative food economies more generally and their relationship with the crisis, re-drawing my research questions and strategy. In the field, research questions also evolved considerably, and as empirical data accumulated, I chose to make sense of the material through Bensaïd's and Gramsci's political theories.

This trajectory is better detailed in the next sections. First, I justify why I located the case-studies in Spain and Greece, and how and why I selected new agroecological 'peasants' in Biscay and 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece as situated sources of knowledge and analysis (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013). Then I describe the methods used, and discuss questions of positionality within the research process. I finally offer concluding thoughts on the research methodology and its limitations.

4.2. Site selection and situated sources of analysis

This study focused on Spain and Greece because these are among the countries worst hit by the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent implementation of austerity policies. First, in both countries, the economic situation boosted strong social indignation and mass-protests such as the 'movement of the squares' (Porta and Mattoni, 2014). Second, this was followed by the development of an important grassroots, 'alternative economy' sector that went beyond mere survival reasons (Castells et al. 2012, and Conill et al. 2012, for Spain; Rakopoulos 2014, Sotiropoulos and Bourikos 2014, Vaiou and Kalindides 2015, for Greece). Lastly, it was accompanied by a renewed interest among people in moving back to agriculture (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013, for Greece; El País 11/02/2013, for Spain). These three socio-spatial dynamics were not so evident in other countries also deeply affected by economic crisis and austerity policies, like Portugal and Ireland. Furthermore, the wide environment of resistance and social contestation to the class politics of austerity in Spain and Greece (described by some as a hegemonic or regime crisis, e.g. Kouvelakis, 2011, for Greece, and Antentas, 2016, for Spain), could offer more possibilities for alternatives to take on a transformative role. The focus on two countries also provided insights on the development of grassroots alternative food economies in different geographical, socio-economic and political contexts.

I selected one case-study for each country. In Spain, I focused on the new agroecological 'peasants' supported by the small farmers' union Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna (EHNE-Bizkaia) in Biscay, a province of the Spanish Basque Country. In Greece, I turned my attention to the 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions which emerged across the country after 2012. This selection has no comparative analysis purpose. Instead, both cases are complementary: one focuses on rural and 'peasant' farming alternatives, the other on urban and consumer-led alternatives. The selection thus aimed at broadening the scope of research, providing a larger picture of alternative food economies along the agrifood system. My goal was to unpack the influencing factors and dynamics of alternative economies of food within the crisis, not to compare their commonalities, differences and outcomes. The selection of case-studies come along my preliminary research experience, which is detailed next.

Preliminary research and case-study selection

Because I was living in Barcelona, spoke Castilian and was more familiar with the history and culture of Spain rather than with that of Greece, I started my preliminary research in this country. From January to September 2013, I held informal interviews with several researchers who were investigating 'back-to-the-landers' ('*neo-rurales*' in Castilian) and alternative food networks in Spain; with long-time activists involved in the food sovereignty movement at the national and regional levels (Madrid and Catalonia); with rural development organizations promoting and supporting young people in the countryside and engaged in sustainable farming (e.g., Abraza la Tierra, Plataforma Rural); and with leading activists promoting the development of alternative economies in the post-2008 economic crisis (e.g., Cooperativa Integral Catalana).

During this period, I attended the first national conference on Youth for a Living Rural World (Jovenes para un Mundo Rural Vivo). The event, which took place on the June 28 to 30, 2013, was organized by Rural Platform (Plataforma Rural), a grassroots organization that groups several agrarian, rural development, consumers, and ecologist organizations in Spain, and is an international member of Vía Campesina. This conference brought together diverse organizations and young producers—some in alternative farming models, others not—to share experiences about and debate the challenges faced and pathways to follow. This is where I got to know the work of some of EHNE-Bizkaia's professionals and new agroecological 'peasants'. I also participated in the third gathering of 'Rurales Enredadxs' (Networked Rurals) (August 29 to September 1, 2013), a loose network of individuals and informal collectives constituted around back-to-the-land ideals—a move to the countryside to live a simpler, self-sufficient and ecological lifestyle—that directly arose from the 'Indignados' square movement.

Based on this preliminary field experience, and additional internet searches, I attempted to list and map out diverse 'neo-rural' alternative projects. Most of the projects I found preceded the crisis; and the few that appeared after 2008 were individually-led or small 'eco-communities' with a loose (if any) relation to the context of crisis. Of these, many seemed to be incipient experiments, or ended shortly after their start due to internal tensions (as the only agrarian project of Rurales Enredadxs). Furthermore, post-crisis experiments were dispersed throughout Spanish rural areas, and situated in regions with

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significant differences regarding land tenancy, crop cultivation and breeding, farms size, and agrarian history. This would have made research a difficult endeavor. Finally, statistics could not confirm any clear 'back-to-the-land' trend or pattern, nor point to places or regions that could be more dynamic from this point of view. Actually, the increase in urban-to-rural migration, or the growth of agriculture in some regions, seemed to be linked to immigrant workforce (Arnalte at al., 2013). Nonetheless, statistics were not reliable, due to their focus on 'big' numbers and inability to capture short-term changes. For instance, those who migrate to the countryside often formalize later, if at all, their change in residence or employment status.

With this information at hand, I decided to situate my study in Biscay, a province of the Basque Country, Spain, and focus on the new agroecological 'peasants' supported by the small farmers' union EHNE-Bizkaia. The union inserts this support within its objective of promoting food sovereignty in Euskal Herria (the free Basque Country). According to them, their work "has catalyzed the entry of young farmers in the sector" (EHNE-Bizkaia, no date), and the crisis has increased people's interest in their support (EHNE-Bizkaia, 2012). The focus in one province had the advantage of reducing the number of factors that could influence this process. Moreover, while highly industrialized, the Basque Country has a strong agrarian connection, both historically and culturally. This was expressed, for instance, in the growing concern of the regional and local governments with the ageing of agricultural workforce (e.g. Youth Council of Euskadi, 2010). By following the work of EHNE-Bizkaia, I could more easily sample data for examining the relationships between farming projects and the transformative ambitions of food sovereignty.

I conducted fieldwork in Biscay from October 1 to December 2, 2013. During this time, I had the opportunity to attend the II International Seminar on Short-Supply Chains in Estella-Lizarra, in Navarra (October 25 to 27, 2013). This gave me a broader picture of the existing alternative supply-chains across Spain, its links with producers and its discourses and demands.

During the fieldwork period, I abandoned the research focus on 'back-to-the-land'. As I conducted interviews with new agroecological 'peasants' in Biscay, it became clear that urban-to-rural migration was not a central issue. For instance, many of the interviewees were urban commuters; or had always lived and worked in rural areas; or had an

agrarian background, but decided to set up their own projects. Before interviewing new agroecogical producers supported by EHNE-Bizkaia, I carried out pilot interviews with four back-to-the-landers who had moved from the city to the countryside in Biscay. I found that these were rural commuters (lived in the countryside but worked in the city), they produced only for self-consumption, and their simplicity living projects were individual initiatives with no link to any broader socio-political project (like that of food sovereignty, for instance). Furthermore, a focus on 'radical rural spatiality' (Halfacree, 2007) or 'progressive ruralism' (Woods, 2003) did not allow me to approach more deeply 'why' and 'how' questions, or to reflect on the transformative potential of alternatives. My interests shifted therefore towards 'alternative food economies', 'food sovereignty', and 'transformative politics'. I approached the Greek case with this theoretical shift in mind, but open to what the 'experience of immediate particulars' in particular conjunctures would bring.

From February 14 to 21, 2014, I conducted preliminary field research in Greece. I had already collected some contacts and data. In academic conferences and meetings, I had spoken with researchers investigating the 'return to the land' or the emergence of alternative food networks in Greece in the context of crisis. And I had informally interviewed a few 'back-to-the-landers' in Greece, whom I identified personally or through personal contacts.

A national meeting of the 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions which took place on the February 15, 2014 in the town of Katerini, in Central Greece, was a good opportunity to start preliminary field research. The 'no-middlemen' distributions were widely covered in the internationally press—known as the 'potato movement'. In this event, I listened to and spoke with many of the activists and farmers involved in these initiatives, mostly from Central Greece, some islands, and Thessaloniki (groups from Athens were absent). Through these conversations, I got a sense of some of the debates, tensions, and challenges traversing the groups and actions.

In a later travel to Athens, I informally interviewed professors and researchers from the University of Agriculture, and the Department of Geography of Harokopio University. This allowed me to get a fuller picture of the Greek agriculture and agrifood system, before and after the crisis. In particular, I got access to quantitative data on the people searching for short-term agricultural training during the crisis period, gained knowledge

of the capital-restructuring dynamics of the food retail sector. I informally interviewed the responsible of Solidarity for All (S4A) for 'agrifood' issues. S4A is a structure set up by the radical-left political party SYRIZA before it came to power in January 2015, and funded by the salaries of its parliamentarians. Its objective is

> To facilitate the communication between all networks and structures of practical solidarity, as well as the exchange of experiences and "know-how" among them […] To assist and serve all the existing projects in any possible way (provision of materials and people, economic support, mutual cover of needs, etc.), as well as to assist to the sharing of existing experience and know-how in order to encourage and promote the creation of new ones, in geographical areas or thematic areas not covered. To disseminate to all those hit by the crisis and the consequences of the memoranda aggression, the political concept that we must take our lives in our hands…. To organize solidarity campaigns of a national level, in close communication with the local solidarity structures.... To promote the international campaign for Solidarity to the Greek People, in a political and financial level, through mobilizations, international action days, economic support, support in medicines and foodstuff, horizontal connection of organizations or groups from abroad with structures and solidarity networks in Greece (S4A, March 2013).

In our conversation, the S4A representative gave his perspective on the origins, objectives and dynamics of the solidarity movement in Greece, with a special focus on the food sector. I also attended an event of the 'no-middlemen' group of Piraeus, a working-class district in the region of Athens. There, I informally interviewed one of its leading activists, as well two farmers participating in the distributions. Additionally, I informally interviewed an activist from the 'no-middlemen' group of Kipseli, a low-income and immigrant neighborhood in the city of Athens; as well as a member of one of the first (and few) fair trade and organic cooperative in Athens, created before the crisis.

Having gathered substantial information on 'back-to-the-land' and alternative food economies within the crisis context, I decided to select the 'no-middlemen' food distribution initiatives as my second case-study. The reasons are multiple. First, the data signaled an increase in 'return to the land' only in the first years of the crisis (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013). Second, it was hard to know what kind of projects people were developing and where (projects seemed mostly individually-driven). Third, it was only with the rise of the solidarity movement "to respond to the sharpest needs for survival and to the need for collective organization" (S4A, 2013), that alternative food

economies developed beyond the 'cultural preferences of the few' (Morgan, 2013, 4), and that the word 'food sovereignty' started (timidly) to emerge in public debates (Konstantinidis, 2016)—before the crisis, the few existing alternative food economies were more focused on organics, fair trade, and *farmers' market*s. Fourth, the 'grassroots social solidarity movement is one of the most important developments and form of resistance and people's self-organization to emerge in the last four years', especially relevant for the food sector (S4A, 2015). Among diverse actions such as food-banks, social groceries, and soup-kitchens, the 'no-middlemen' distributions were the only ones directly connecting farmers and consumers, and advancing an alternative to conventional supply-chains. They were a type of *farmers' market*s organized around solidarity principles, which included price and quality control.

Both case-studies are illustrative of alternative food economies that emerged or gained a renewed dynamism with the context of economic crisis. Also, both are expressions of struggles for food sovereignty—the right to control and decide over the agrifood system—even if not explicitly declared as such in Greece. Finally, both are entangled with a dynamic of resistance to neoliberalism, one led by small farmers, the other by urban consumers. In sum, both provide situated sources for analyzing the influencing factors, potentialities, challenges, and transformative potential of alternative food economies in the context of crisis.

The specific 'situated geographies' of the two countries has shaped my selection of case-studies. Before the crisis, Greece had little experience with grassroots alternative food economies. Although there was an important farmers' cooperative movement in the country, its development was primarily related to state tutelage and the social-democratic policies of PASOK's rule during the period of 1981-2000 (Tsakalotos, 1998). The model followed was one of agrarian modernization, high-input production, and selling to conventional retailers, with the goal of improving the competitiveness of small farmers. It was with the crisis and anti-austerity protests that alternative food economies started to emerge more widely, and became more connected to solidarity supply-chains than to the production sector.

Before the crisis, Spain had already an activist-oriented 'social and solidarity economy' movement in the agrifood sector. This movement was born in the later 1980s and it expanded in the 2000s after the alter-globalization global protests. It is mainly

constituted by groups and cooperatives of agroecological consumption (Vivas, 2010). A significant part of this movement embraces the political framework of food sovereignty, though not without contradictions (Di Masso et al., 2014). The expansion of agroecological production is an important aim of this movement, for which the entry of younger people in agriculture is considered necessary (Montllor, 2013). In the crisis, there is no significant changes in alternative supply-chains (at least visible ones as in Greece). The food sovereignty movement is well developed in Spain, through the action of several environmentalist, local development, international cooperation, and agrarian organizations and networks. The international peasant organization Vía Campesina is well established in the country, unlike in Greece. For instance, the two European representatives of International Committee of Vía Campesina are from Spain: and one is from EHNE-Bizkaia, where I conducted my research.

4.3. Research process

In researching the cases described above, I employed qualitative investigative techniques, including participant observation, ethnographic field notes, and semi-structured interviews. I also collected and analyzed secondary data, including documents such as press news, grassroots initiatives' publications, official documents, and statistics. These techniques allowed me to turn "to the object/subject relationship and its dynamics, in relation to social context", and to be "immersed in the field" in order "to understand and engage with the meanings and priorities of those involved in the research process" (Konstantatos et al., 2013, 275).

From October to December 2013 I carried out fieldwork in Biscay, Spain. From April to June 2014 I conducted fieldwork in Greece. Together, these resulted in approximately 20 weeks of field notes.

Participant observation

Participant observation, "whereby the researcher interacts with people in everyday life while collecting information, is a unique method for investigating the enormously rich, complex, conflictual, problematic, and diverse experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities of human beings and the meanings of their existence" (Jorgensen, 2015, 1). Its

main data collection strategy are field notes (Neumann, 2004, 288). Participant observation embodies what Burawoys's (1998, 7) calls a 'reflexive science' approach, in which knowledge or theory emerges

> from a dialogue between us and them, between social scientists and the people we study. It does not spring from an Archimedean point outside space and time; it does not create knowledge or theory tabula rasa. It starts out from a stock of academic theory on the one side and existent folk theory or indigenous narratives on the other. Both sides begin their interaction from real locations.

I preferred participant observation to over 'action-research' because I was not previously engaged in any of the activist projects studied, I had lived neither in Biscay nor in Greece, and I needed time to conduct two different case-studies in two distinct historical-geographic settings. An action-research approach was therefore not realistically feasible.

As part of a 'secondment' period, I worked as a volunteer in EHNE-Bizkaia from October until December 2013. I informed EHNE-Bizkaia about the objectives of my PhD research, and we mutually agreed that I would produce a report in Spanish analyzing the main obstacles faced and concerns raised by new agroecological 'peasants'. I delivered this report in early February 2014.

EHNE-Bizkaia is a union of small-farmers created in 1976, which evolved into a food sovereignty activist organization since the late 1990s. It participated in the foundational congress of Vía Campesina in 1993. It currently employs 20 people distributed in four offices. Its 800 members (around 10% of all farmers in Biscay) pay an annual fee, receive technical services, elect its board, and determine its politics. Since 2007, EHNE-Bizkaia supports new *baserritarras* (peasants, in Basque), through training in agroecology and a network of community-supported agriculture called Red Nekasarea. Red Nekasarea includes 80 *baserritarras* and 700 households; the latter are divided into consumer groups of no more than 30 households (EHNE-Bizkaia, 2012).

As part of my 'secondment', I agreed with EHNE-Bizkaia to take minutes at Red Nekasarea *baserritarras*' meetings with the union at the council level, and to help in EHNE-Bizkaia's stand in farmers' markets organized by municipalities. I attended four local meetings of *baserritarras* and worked in two *farmers' market*s (mainly preparing and selling local food and drinks). Both were extremely important for my insertion in

the field, to get acquainted with the functioning of the union and Red Nekasarea and the stories and social realities of its members (both agroecological and conventional *baserritarras*). Furthermore, both enabled me to get a fuller picture of the Basque agrarian context, the challenges faced by *baserritarras*, and the ways in which they understood food sovereignty and agroecology.

I spent most of my time either in the main office of EHNE-Bizkaia in Durango, or following the technicians responsible for Red Nekasarea and new agroecological 'peasants'. In the main office, I familiarized myself with the union's work and dynamics in its several areas of work, including administrative and juridical support, social media development, coordination with Vía Campesina and international relations, and project management. There, I also collected and started analyzing its diverse publications and leaflets. I was under the supervision of Isa, the technician of Red Nekasarea. I often followed her fieldwork and had long conversations with her. She was fundamental for my integration in the field and for my understanding of the Basque agrarian contextand the food sovereignty project of EHNE-Bizkaia. The responsible for new agroecological 'peasants' and the area of training, Unai, was also crucial for my fielwork. I attended three training sessions in agroecology for new *baserritarras* given by Unai: one theoretical session about the 'ideological component' of agroecology; and two practical ones, which involved visits to agroecological, meat and egg production farms. I also accompanied him on technical visits to two agroecological farms, and attended a meeting he held with former trainees in agroecology (about the state of development of productive projects in agroecology, challenges faced in the process, what kind of support the union could provide, and the like). Finally, I followed a visit from a Latin America delegation of Via Campesina to the Basque Country: I attended a meeting between both organizations; participated in a public debate on food sovereignty and peasant struggles in the global South; and engaged in informal conversations with its delegates. Finally, I attended two international seminars in which EHNE-Bizkaia participated: one on alternative short-supply chains, in which an agroecological *baserritarra* presented the work of Red Nekasarea; the other, on struggles for food sovereignty both in the global South and the global North, with the participation of several organizations, mainly from South and Central America.

Whenever I attended a 'formal' event such as a training session or a meeting, at the beginning I would explain briefly who I was, what my research consisted of, and why I

was there. I always wrote down field notes, including factual information as well my impressions, reflections and learning from what I saw and heard.

In Greece, my first encounter with the 'no-middlemen' groups was in their national meeting, in the town of Katerini (February 15, 2014). With the information collected in this event, and contacts provided by S4A or obtained through personal networks and Internet searches, I participated in five 'no-middlemen' food distributions in the region of Athens (Piraeus, Helleniko, Petropoulis, Kipseli, and Faliro), one in Thessaloniki (Botsari Park, in the city of Thessaloniki) and three in Central Greece (Larissa, Lamia, and Volos). This participation allowed me to observe differences of organizing between regions; for instance, in the way of dealing with volunteers, consumers, and farmers, as well as concerning the groups' politics.

Whereas in Central Greece the interaction between farmers, consumers and organizers is often minimal—as the distributions are very 'structured' and focus on the distribution of food *per se*—in other regions this interaction was more fluid and generally occurred in a festive and politicized environment. In the regions of Thessaloniki and Athens, distributions frequently involved political information about 'solidarity' and 'austerity' in leaflets, banners, leftist music and slogans. There, several of the groups participated in other solidarity and political activities in their neighborhoods. Many showed solidarity with other grassroots struggles as well. For instance, they provided information on struggles such as those against gold mining in Halkidiki, water privatization, and electricity cuts; or sold the cleaning products manufactured by Viome, a workers' run factory. (The groups of Central Greece, on the contrary, privileged small capitalist Greek companies, in order to guarantee cleaning products in enough quantity, good quality, and low prices).

My participation in the distributions also made me realize that the groups' composition was very different regionally. Groups in Central Greece had a small core group of activists, but many volunteers who would help during the distributions. Groups in Thessaloniki and Athens usually had more activists, but less volunteers. A possible explanation is that the former are less politicized, which attracted more people with a 'charity' or 'philanthropic' spirit. Another main difference regards gender. The groups of Central Greece had practically no women involved in organizing, leading, or speaking publicly. Women acted mostly as volunteers and took on support tasks. This had been

clear also in the Katerini national meeting, where few women were present, only one or two talked publicly talked, and appeared mostly to serve food and drinks during the intervals. Moreover, although horizontality and consensus decision-making were common principles in the functioning of all groups, those from Central Greece gravitated mainly around one male figure, who was the leader and spokesperson. In Thessaloniki and Athens, the groups were more mixed and tasks were distributed more horizontally; in Thessaloniki I mostly encountered women in a leading role, whereas in Athens groups were generally more diverse (although in some groups men were the ones who led and talked).

Before attending the distributions, I would inform the groups about my purpose and my research by mail or phone. I often tried to set up an interview on the spot; when it was not possible, I would interview activists at the group's headquarters or at a place of their choice. During the distributions I also tried to talk with farmers, which was an easier task in Athens and Thessaloniki due to their format.

Finally, I attended the Petropolis and Kipseli groups' assemblies, both in Athens. There, I became aware of the type of people who participated in the groups; their dynamics, tensions, and main debates; how that distributions were organized (for instance, which criteria were used to select dates, places, farmers, and the like); and the assemblies' focus on logistical issues or political questions.

Conducting participant observation in distributions and assemblies in different regions and neighborhoods allowed me to grasp differences of context which influenced the ways that groups were organized. For instance, in low-income or socially tense neighborhoods, it seemed more difficult to organize distributions through pre-orders; there, groups preferred to organize distributions more like festivities, in order to create a spatial and collective dynamic around a politicized notion of 'solidarity'. In middle- and high-income neighborhoods, consumers seemed to behave as if they were in a conventional farmers' markets, with less awareness of the 'solidarity' purpose of distributions.

Semi-structured interviews

By conducting semi-structured interviews, I aimed to unpack the influencing factors,

processes, relationships and lived experience of those participating in alternative food economies in the context of crisis, as well to understand the Basque and Greek context more broadly. Semi-structured interviews lasted, on average, one and a half to two hours. I followed a general script and list of topics, but interviews were flexible and open, allowing participants to elaborate on certain points of interest (Denscombe, 2014). Interviews were a way to 'give voice' to others through research (Cloke et al. 2004, 151). Anonymity and confidentiality was assured for all interviewees, and permission was always sought before recording interviews, in line with university guidelines and ethics procedures. In this thesis, all names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of informants, aside from a handful who explicitly stated that they wanted their real name to be used.

In Biscay, I interviewed 26 new agroecological producers. 16 of them were trained in agroecology in 2012 and 2013, while the other 10 were members of *Red Nekasarea*. I first asked why they decided to move to the countryside and become *baserritarras*, and how this decision and process occurred; if not mentioned, I would explicitly ask if the economic crisis played a role in their decision to move, as well as if EHNE-Bizkaia's agroecological training and Red Nekasarea had any influence in it. From there, I normally asked what changed in their lives (life-work time balance, quality of life, relation with urban spaces, lifestyle, and the like), and why they and how they engaged in agroecology and alternative supply-chains. This would lead frequently to a set of questions on the importance of accessing knowledge and alternative supply-chains. Then I asked about the challenges they faced when moving to agriculture and, if it was the case, to the countryside. At this point the interview focused on questions regarding land access and public policies, rural housing, farm viability, costs of production, and food prices. Finally, I asked what was food sovereignty and agroecology for them, how they thought it could be implemented, and how they saw EHNE-Bizkaia's work in this field. During the interview, or at the end, I would explicitly ask factual data on land tenancy, production and exchange, and working hours.

After interviewing *baserritarras*, I formally interviewed Unai, the technician responsible for new *baserritarras* and training, and Unzalu, EHNE-Bizkaia's coordinator. I conducted these two interviews together with a Basque researcher who focused on questions of land access and gender. My questions to Unai focused on new *baserritarras* (who they are, the influence of crisis, their relation with older

baserritarras, and the like); the training in agroecology (its objectives and ideological component); the challenges of expanding agroecological production and Red Nekasarea; and how EHNE-Bizkaia deals with the challenge it encounters. With Unzalu, my questions focused on the agrarian context of the Basque Country and the impact of agricultural and land policies; EHNE-Bizkaia's history and politics; why a political project food sovereignty and agroecology, how to implement it, challenges envisioned, and future perspectives, including organizational ones.

In Greece, I interviewed 23 core activists from no-middlemen groups in Athens (12), Thessaloniki (7) and Central Greece (4). I first asked them why they decided to organize the no-middlemen distributions, what their objectives were, and how they organized them. Then I inquired about the background of activists and volunteers, as well as of farmers and consumers. Finally, I asked about the main challenges they faced and how they dealt with them, as well as about future perspectives regarding distributions and solidarity actions in general.

Document analysis

Documentation produced by EHNE-Bizkaia and 'no-middlemen' groups were important sources of information for gaining deeper understanding of the context, discourses and practices of both projects. In the Basque case, documents included the magazine *Baserri Bizia*, Red Nekasarea's internal regulation, and thematic publications and web-based platforms on issues like food sovereignty and agroecology. In the Greek case, documents comprised mainly groups' leaflets and websites. I also reviewed documents produced by S4A summarizing the characteristics and outcomes of the solidarity movement, especially in the food sector.

Between January 2013 and July 2015, in order to acquire contextual information regarding Spain, the Basque Country, and Greece, I collected international and national press articles on 'return to the land' and alternative food economies within the crisis context.. During this period, also I collected official data on agriculture, the food retail sector, and urban-to-rural migration. These included statistics produced by the OCDE, Eurostat, national institutes of statistics in Spain and Greece, and the Basque Regional Institute of Statistics (EUSTAT).

Data organization and analysis

After transcribing the interviews, I thoroughly reviewed them alongside my field notes in order to capture key points. I organized and structured this information using descriptive and analytical codes that emerged from both the data itself and my conceptual framework. Coded data were then grouped and analyzed.

4.4. Positionality, research challenges and limitations

Adopting qualitative methods requires openness and flexibility, as well reflecting on the researcher's positionality (Gilbert, 1994; Mcdowell, 1992; Gibson-Graham 1994; Moss, 2002; Crang, 2003; Sultana, 2007). Here, I follow Neely and Nguse (2015, 147) in their argument that

> While an accounting of the characteristics that make up our positionalities on the broader terrain of power is necessary, it is not sufficient. Relationships make accounting for our role in the production of knowledge a bit messier. As some of the work on reflexivity has shown, we must simultaneously account for our positions in all of the relationships in which we find ourselves.

Put differently, whereas researchers need to reflect on how their individual positioning within global power relations (such as class, gender, race, and geography) shape the research process and the production of knowledge, these are also shaped by pre-existing power relations within the field site, the relationship established between the researcher and the researched beyond pre-established hierarchies, and other multiple relationships influencing the researcher's perspectives and knowledge.

My position in the field was that of a foreigner. At the time, I also held a generous (even though temporary) wage compared to the average income of those interviewed. In Biscay, most *baserritarras* were struggling to secure farm viability, and many of them had come from a previous situation of unemployment or precarious jobs. In Greece, the activists I interviewed from no-middlemen groups were suffering harsh cuts of income due to austerity policies, with many being unemployed with no job prospects. Nonetheless, by coming from Portugal, a Southern European country also hardly affected by economic crisis and austerity cuts, in many ways economically less privileged than Spain and Greece during the 'golden years' of economic growth; and by

sharing a social and personal experience of unemployment and precarious jobs, I felt welcomed during the entire fieldwork and 'one among equals', despite differences of language, culture, and personal trajectories.

Language was partly a barrier. I did not speak Euskera or Greek, nor was I fully comfortable with Spanish vernacular and idiomatic expressions (especially as spoken in the Basque Country). In Biscay, I used Spanish (which is an official language, even though most interviewees spoke Euskera in their daily life), whereas in Greece I used English or a Greek interpreter. I was also an 'outsider' to the local contexts and the projects I studied. I probably missed nuances of personalities, political positions and events, or historical background and context. On the other hand, I benefited from a more detached position and critical distance in my assessment of the two projects. I came to the field with my own theory-shaped perspectives and beliefs. Perhaps the short duration of fieldwork did not allow the reality I encountered to challenge my beliefs as much as it could have with a more sustained engagement. Nonetheless, research questions evolved considerably over the fieldwork period, as mentioned above.

As all research, mine has limitations. First, the scope of the research is necessarily limited. In Biscay, I focused solely on new agroecological producers who had connection with EHNE-Bizkaia's work. I decided not to interview people who engaged in alternative farming models without having this link. Despite my initial efforts in this sense, it proved to be an extremely difficult and time-consuming process. In Greece, I investigated mostly 'no-middlemen' groups that were either suggested by S4A (though not all of them collaborated with this organization), indicated by the activists I interviewed, or sufficiently organized to develop websites or reply to my e.-mails and phone calls. I left out self-organized groups which were less visible or less well-connected with the regional networks I studied. I also decided not to approach no-middlemen distributions organized by municipalities or private-capital (although I visited some). Second, I did not go into as much detail on the historical and geographical context in which the projects were situated, nor into the ways in which they attempted to (re)construct place, space, and scale. Finally, I paid less attention to the productive and reproductive aspects of alternative models, and to their internal relations of power (for instance, regarding gender).

CHAPTER 1

Alternative Food Economies and Transformative Politics in Times of Crisis: Insights from the Basque Country and Greece[1]

Why and how do alternative economies emerge, how do they develop and what is their contribution, if any, to transformative politics? Alternative economies proliferate in the countries worse hit by economic crisis and austerity, such as Spain or Greece. Yet the existing literature is stuck in a counter-productive division between celebration and critique. We move beyond this division applying philosopher Daniel Bensaïd's understanding of politics to two alternative food economies, one in the Basque Country and one in Greece. We illuminate the activist strategies and specific conjunctures within which the two alternatives emerged and explain how they develop in the face of political-economic barriers. Alternative economies, we conclude, can be transformational when they are inserted in activist strategies directed to extend conflict, social struggles and challenge the capital–state nexus.

1. Introduction

Every day more and more Spaniards leave the asphalt for the countryside: ... youngsters and families return to the countryside searching for a life that is more sustainable, quiet and affordable (ABC 2013).

[The no-middlemen movement] is typical of the new and inventive ways Greeks are finding to help themselves and each other in the country's fifth straight year of recession (The Guardian 2012).

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There is a documented rise of alternative economies in contexts of economic crisis and austerity policies that reduce wages and shrink the welfare state (see Rakopoulos, 2014, for Greece; Conill at al., 2012, for Spain; Abramovich and Vázquez, 2007, for Argentina). Alternative economies refer to forms "of production, exchange, labour/compensation, finance and consumption that are in some way different from mainstream capitalist economic activity and give occasion to rethinking the economic system in itself" (Hillebrand and Zademach, 2014, 9). Some see in the recent rise of alternative economies a potential for radical social change, with the formation of a new economic culture (Castells at al., 2012) or social fabric (De Angelis, 2012).

For anti-power (Holloway, 2010), counter-power (Hardt and Negri, 2009) and anarchist (Graeber, 2002a) theorists, social change will not come by seizing or influencing state power. It will come by expanding new social forms, spaces and practices 'outside' capitalism, emptying the state gradually from its relevance. Theories of anti-power call for dissolving power by expanding de-commodified spaces (Holloway, 2010), whilst theories of counter-power emphasize the power of the 'multitude' to flee from subordination and exercise power in non-capitalist spaces, resisting continuously capitalism's attempts for co-optation (Hardt and Negri, 2009).

A related literature on diverse economies focus on documenting non-capitalist forms of production. In adopting a non-capitalocentric view of the economy, the objective is to render alternatives visible and stimulate a 'politics of possibilities' towards a post-capitalism future (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006). For anarchist, autonomist and diverse economies theories alike the challenge is how to expand and connect different 'cracks' within the capitalist system, with a logic of affinity and not of hegemony.

Starting perhaps with the confrontation between Marx, Engels and 'utopian' socialists and anarchists, there is a long lineage of Marxist thought critical of alternative economies. Harvey, for example, recurrently argues that alternative economies have no autonomy from competition and the coercive state and that, often unintentionally, facilitate a neo-liberal agenda of dismantling the welfare state; for him, the challenge is how to up-scale 'militant particularisms' into a hegemonic project (see Sheppard, 2006). Others criticize localist actions for their disregard of state power and an abandonment of

'strategic' thinking (Fuentes-Ramirez, 2014). Although critical Marxists increasingly recognize the importance of combining 'interstitial' with 'ruptural' strategies (Wright, 2012), their theorizations remain abstract as they are usually situated outside the 'real movement' of conflict and struggle.

The literature on alternatives is divided between 'believers' and 'skeptics' (Hillebrand and Zademach, 2014). The former are interested in how alternative economies build a politics of possibilities; the latter on their limits within capitalism. Our starting premise is that this division is intellectually and politically unproductive. On the one hand, the lack of engagement on the part of the skeptics with the question of the origins and dynamics of alternative economies has led to an under-theorization of the conjunctures of their development. For instance, Castells at al. (2012), inspired by a diverse economies framework, argue that the crisis led people to engage more and more in non-capitalist economies. A new economic culture forms as a result, which in turn drives to a "direct political conflict whose outcome will determine the world we will live in" (Conill et al., 2012, 245). De Angelis (2012, 15-16), from an autonomist perspective, argues that the "explosion of the middle-class" with the crisis instigates the "explosion of alternatives as dominant forms or modes of production …, a necessary element of [a] process of radical transformation". For Holloway (2010, 151), the crisis is a sign of liberation as it results from "a failure to subordinate ourselves to the degree that capital demands from us". These accounts posit an automatic link between economic crisis and the rise of alternatives; in turn the destiny of these alternatives to confront (and supersede) capitalism is taken for granted. But as we will argue, the emergence of alternative economies is far from a spontaneous and cumulative reaction to crisis; and their transformative character is far from given.

On the other hand, the overemphasis of skeptical scholars on 'limits' underplays the socio-spatial dynamics of alternative economies, and overlooks their potential insertion in activist strategies with a transformative horizon beyond a politics of difference or autonomy. This is unhelpful: in places like Greece or Spain alternative economies proliferate and inspire; they demand to be assessed properly.

We are not the first to recognize the need to go beyond this division between believers and skeptics. We share Fickey and Hanrahan's (2014, 395) call to "identify and document potentially emancipatory forms' for their 'subversive potential'", namely by

considering the gendered and other powered arrangements of diverse economies (Jonas, 2014; Samers, 2005; Lawson, 2005; North, 2005), and their contingency to historical-geographical contexts (Jonas, 2010). However, the subversive potential of alternatives alone may not be enough. As Bensaïd (2009, 151; own translation) argues, a politics of "subversion is subordinate to what it resists and fights against; this is the weakness of the stoic rhetoric of resistance, despite its determination not to surrender to the order of things". It is in Bensaïd's work that we find a framework that allows the development of a critical theoretical lens from which to both analyze and explain alternative economies, assessing their transformative potential.

The next section of this paper argues that from Bensaïd's perspective the core analytical question concerns the activist strategies and specific conjunctures that lead to the emergence and development of alternative economies. Transformative are those activist strategies that have a horizon to supersede social relations of domination through a politics of conflict and social struggle, seeking political alliances and convergence, not simply affinity. Such projects put at the forefront the issue of challenging, and also transforming, the state. The point is not whether such projects face limits or not (of course they do), but how they confront and respond to concrete barriers.

The third section presents methods and case-studies: two alternative food economies in Biscay (a province of the Basque Country, Spain) and Greece. The fourth section applies Bensaïd's framework explaining the activist strategies and specific conjunctures behind the two alternative economies, and how they have responded to political-economic and institutional barriers. The article concludes with ways to look at why and how alternative economies emerge and develop and how to think their transformative potential.

2. Politics as the art of strategy

Daniel Bensaïd (1946-2010) devoted his oeuvre to the question of politics and social emancipation from capitalism. He was a critical Marxist who rejected determinist, voluntarist and incrementalist understandings of social change (Bensaïd, 2002, 2007, 2009). For him, economic conditions such as a crisis will not spontaneously (nor through spreading radical ideas or spectacular actions) turn the working class into a

political subject and force. Social change, he argued, also would not be achieved by the passive accumulation of social forces and incremental changes, either through institutional politics or its mirror image of an anti-state politics. For Bensaïd social change is "determined conjointly by struggle and necessity" (2002, 2); necessity to overcome capitalism, but with a struggle contingent on historically produced conditions and conjunctures. Between necessity and contingency—between the possible and the not yet here—intervene politics; politics as "strategy and error" (2002, 5) for expanding possibility. Politics for Bensaïd is the art of uncovering historical possibilities, conflictual moments, weak knots, and favorable situations, acknowledging potential limits and barriers, to theorize and intervene strategically with a horizon of changing the balance of social forces and seize power.

The question is precisely how the exploited and oppressed may become a social and political force. For Bensaïd there is no automatic translation of social classes into political subjects. It is from the experience of conflict and struggle that the "knowledge of the reciprocal relations between classes is acquired" (2007, 150). Politics thus is not to be levied in 'outside' spaces, but from the inner contradictions of capitalism. The moment of rupture with ruling power is not reducible to the event of seizing state power. It results from sustained conflict and struggle in all social spheres as antagonisms of class, gender or race are mutually constitutive. And from these processes "a general crisis of the reciprocal relations between all the classes in society" might emerge and make rupture possible (2007, 150).

State power is always at stake in politics. The state is an arena of condensation of social antagonisms. It works through "institutions and mechanisms that are ideological, material and armed" (2009, 227; own translation). It is imperative to struggle for the state, but without an illusion that reforms can radically change society. This depends also on deep processes of social radicalization and the emergence of new forms of power that confront and dissolve the old social structures. Thus the importance to enact "procedural revolutions in the ways of living before and after taking political power" (2009, 158; own translation). Bensaïd hence avoids fusing the social into the political; both have relative autonomy. He also rejects the division between reform and revolution. Reforms are not in themselves reformist or revolutionary. It depends "on their purpose and the social dynamics they help to create, if they allow to expand social struggles and political consciousness or to detour them" (2009, 201; own translation).

Transformative politics for Bensaïd is about extending self-organization and struggle in all realms of life with a horizon of changing the balance of forces, envisioning their condensation into a hegemonic project putting into question political power and its institutional forms. And this without separating the social from the political, i.e. avoiding the illusion that resistances can bring systemic change without confronting the political power of elites. Confronting such forces requires strategic thinking and action, self-organization and the condensation of positions. The expansion of struggles and their convergence is not spontaneous, and cannot be determined a priori.

From Bensaïd's perspective there is no reason why an economic crisis should lead to a new economic culture or social fabric. There is nothing that automatically connects alternative economies to political subjects and conflict, to social transformation. Contra skeptics also, the point is not merely to identify barriers and risks of fragmentation, co-optation, and particularism. The question is how activist projects in concrete historical-geographical contexts develop alternative economies as part of their transformative strategies, how they respond to and deal with difficulties, and whether ultimately they contribute to extend social struggles and confront the capital-state nexus. The interesting analytical question in other words is how activist projects strategize their struggle in particular conjunctures and respond to barriers.

Bensaïd provides an analytical and normative framework. Analytically, he invites a consideration of the activist projects in which alternative economies develop, considering their transformational views and how they strategize their struggle within particular historical-geographical conjunctures. Projects that attempt only to secure space at the interstices of capitalism or expand acritical difference are unlikely to be transformative. Projects that seek to overcome social relations of domination and orient their strategies to extend social struggles and confront the capital-state nexus, while searching for political convergences that overcome fragmentation are relevant to transformative politics.

3. Case-studies and methods

We ground these issues on two alternative food economies in countries at the maelstrom of the current economic crisis, Spain and Greece. In these countries the crisis has

catalyzed the growth of alternative economies, especially in food production and distribution. In the literature on alternative food networks, one finds believers that place practical alternatives and local progressive reforms as ways to imagine and create just and sustainable food systems (Goodman et al., 2011) and more skeptics like Guthman (2008, 1171), who investigating agro-food activism in California, finds that oppositional forms "seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and mentalities". Following Constance et al. (2014, 6) we want to understand better the barriers and opportunities for alternatives to "act as emancipatory agents to transform the agrifood system".

Between 2008 and 2013, Greece lost almost 1 million jobs, wages decreasing on average by 38% (S4A, 2015). In 2013, 28% of Greeks reported that there were times in the last year that they did not have enough money to buy food for their families, up from 8% in 2007 (Dugan and Wendt, 2014). In Spain, unemployment more than doubled between 2008 and 2014. Almost 2 million Spaniards depend on food banks (*El País*, 12/09/2013). In Greece, "the economic crisis has led to the reinstatement of a 'new rurality', in which agriculture seems to attract new attention" (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013, 287). In Spain, the press and small-farmers organizations often make bold claims about a 'return to the land' (*El País*, 11/02/2014). Compared to Greece, Spain had a 'new peasant' movement before the crisis (Montllor, 2013) and a history of radical alternatives in the countryside (Breitbart 1975). In Greece the "grassroots social solidarity movement is one of the most important developments and forms of resistance and people's self-organization to emerge in the last four years" (S4A, 2015), whereas in Spain the solidarity economy movement was already consolidated.

The first case study, in the Basque province of Biscay, focuses on the new agroecological 'peasants' supported by Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna (EHNE-Bizkaia). EHNE-Bizkaia started as a union of small-farmers in 1976 and evolved into a food sovereignty activist organization, member of La Vía Campesina. It currently employs 20 people distributed in four offices. Its 800 members pay an annual fee, receive technical services, elect its board, and determine its politics. Since 2007 EHNE-Bizkaia supports new *baserritarras* ('peasants' in Basque) with training in agroecology and a network of community-supported agriculture - the 'Red Nekasarea'. Only 1% of the Basque active population works in agriculture (EUSTAT, 2014). At the onset of the

crisis the number of people applying for EHNE-Bizkaia's training increased, from 30-40 in 2010 to 150-200 in 2013, with a socio-demographic shift from mostly women with an agrarian vocation to ex-industrial, male workers (EHNE-Bizkaia, 2012). From 2008 to 2012, 50 new people settled as *baserritarras* with their support.

The farms of *baserritarras* are small-sized, frequently less than one hectare. Usually the *baserritarra* lives in or near the farm-holding; short distances to the city allow some to commute. *Baserritarras* do multi-cropping for self-consumption and direct sale; they practice a low-input eco-farming agriculture based on agroecology. Often family members have non-farm jobs, while diverse *baserritarras* share the farm. We call them 'peasants' because they endorse claims of 'peasantness' and practice farming grounded in nature and local communities (Ploeg, 2008).

Red Nekasarea includes 80 *baserritarras* and 700 households; the latter are divided into consumer groups of no more than 30 households (EHNE-Bizkaia, 2012). Each group is supplied with vegetables by a single *baserritarra*, who has to collect the other products and deliver the weekly basket at a pre-fixed place. The food basket includes vegetables, meat, milk, eggs, and pasta. Red Nekasarea's internal regulation sets technical and social norms: environmental requirements, working conditions, and the expected income of *baserritarras*. Consumers assume a one year-contract at a fixed price after a three-month trial. The producer determines the contents of the baskets depending on season. The price is determined by *baserritarras* given the costs of production, and agreed with the consumer groups directly. *Baserritarras* periodically meet at the county level, with the participation of EHNE-Bizkaia.

The second case study focuses on the 'no-middlemen' distributions in Greece. Volunteer-based groups there organize distributions where farmers sell directly their products at pre-agreed prices. In by-passing the intermediaries, consumers have access to quality products with prices 20% to 50% lower than in retail markets, whereas farmers are paid better and on the spot, which is not the case when merchants mediate. Producers are selected according to quality, price and proximity. Typically consumers have to pre-order minimum quantities by internet or phone. Most groups require farmers to give for free 2-5% of their goods to impoverished families.

The no-middlemen initiatives began in 2012 after farmers distributed potatoes for free

in the central streets of Thessaloniki. This was a protest against low prices and merchants' tactic to reject part of the produce to control final prices. While farmers were in difficulty, food prices "have remained relatively high despite the recession" (Skordili, 2013, 136). A civic group from Katerini, in Central Greece, organized then direct sales of potatoes at low cost. Similar initiatives spread across Greece, especially in the big cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. The deliveries diversified beyond potatoes and covered most basic needs with products like flour, olive oil, legumes, honey, and cheese. In 2014 there were 45 no-middlemen groups, 26 in Athens; 5.000 tons of food was distributed from 2012 to 2014 (S4A, 2015).

Groups self-organize with open assemblies, and decisions are consensus-based. Each group has on average 19 core activists and 29 volunteers that help in distributions (S4A, 2015). Most groups organize also other solidarity actions in the neighborhood. There is no central coordination of the initiatives, though groups often coordinate informally at the regional level. Some groups, mostly in Athens, receive logistical support from Solidarity for All, a structure set up by the political party of SYRIZA, and funded by the salaries of its parliamentarians. Five national events were organized between 2012 and 2015, three in Katerini and two in Athens.

A typical distribution in Central Greece offers one to ten non-perishable products, each provided by a single producer. Only professional farmers participate, and they issue invoices. Information about deliveries is spread through the internet and flyers. Consumers have to preorder a minimum quantity. On the day, consumers pay to the coordinating 'secretariat' and collect the items from the truck of the producer. Dozens of volunteers dressed with traffic vests guide producers and consumers. Distributions take place in parking lots in peripheral areas, and have municipal permits to occupy the public space. In Thessaloniki instead, typically there are no preorders, and consumers pay directly to farmers. Distributions offer 20 to 40 products, including fresh vegetables and fruits. This is facilitated by Thessaloniki being at the middle of an agricultural plain. Groups there work only with small-farmers, with the same product being supplied by several producers. Non-professional producers can participate and there is no requirement for invoices. Distributions take place in central streets. They rarely have municipal permits and often face problems with tax auditors or the police. Athens' distributions follow a model in-between these two: groups usually work with preorders, have a high number of products and farmers, and give preference to small-farmers.

Distributions in Athens and Thessaloniki involve political information in leaflets, banners, leftist music and slogans. Debates may be organized on issues such as solidarity, austerity, or neo-nazism. Most groups are involved in other political actions in their regions, e.g. struggles against the privatization of water, electricity taxes or road tolls.

The network of *baserritarras* signals an alternative model of producing food; the no-middlemen initiatives an alternative model of distributing food. These food economies are 'alternative' because they defy conventional markets based in generalized commodity production for maximum profit. They focus on social needs and promote solidarity, reciprocity, and not-for-profit production.

Methodology

We have followed a case study approach as it allows an in-depth exploration of the complex relationships, processes, meanings and nuances involved in real-life social phenomenon such as alternative economies, embedded in context (Snow and Trom, 2002). This entails an understanding of people's motives for action, with consideration of their explanatory power; hence the use of qualitative methodologies and the continuous feedback between fieldwork and research design (Porta and Keating, 2008).

The first author conducted interviews, observant participation, and collected secondary material from the two cases. Between October and December 2013 she worked as a volunteer in EHNE-Bizkaia. She informed EHNE-Bizkaia about the objectives of her research, and the agreement was that she produced a report summarizing the findings from her interviews. She attended three training sessions in agroecology, participated in four local meetings of *baserritarras* of Red Nekasarea, visited farm-holdings, attended two international seminars where EHNE-Bizkaia participated, followed the visit of a Via Campesina delegation from Latin America, and worked in EHNE's stand in two farmers markets. She interviewed 26 new *baserritarras* trained in agroecology in 2012 and 2013 or being part of Red Nekasarea, asking about motivations, challenges, meanings of agroecology and food sovereignty, while collecting data on land, production, and working time. In Greece, a preliminary research period in Athens in February 2014 included conversations with key-informants: university professors, researchers, food cooperatives, farmers and activists from two no-middlemen groups,

and Solidarity for All. Between April and June 2014, 23 core activists were interviewed from no-middlemen groups in Athens (12), Thessaloniki (7) and Central Greece (4). Questions concerned motivations, organizational issues, and prospects. The first author also attended a national meeting of the no-middlemen groups (February 2014, Katerini), participated in the assemblies of two groups in Athens, and observed three distributions in Central Greece, one in Thessaloniki, and four in Athens.

The focus on qualitative methods required openness and flexibility, as well reflexivity on the subjectivity of the researcher (England, 1994). Language was partly a barrier. In the Basque country, Spanish was used—a language perceived by some as colonial. Speaking Spanish with activists and new peasants risked a distancing (less so though when used by a foreigner). In Greece, interviews were held in English or with an interpreter. Distance was often overcome by the similar history and culture shared among southern Europeans. The first author was an 'outsider' not involved in the movements. She may have missed nuances of personalities, political positions and events, or historical background and context. On the other hand, she benefited from a more detached, and critical when needed, assessment of the two projects. This is a situated research and there is no claim to impartiality. The researcher came to the field with her own theory-shaped perspectives and beliefs. Perhaps the short duration of fieldwork did not allow empirical reality to challenge them as much as it could have. Nonetheless, research questions evolved considerably over the fieldwork. Empirical research started with a very broad political ecology framework. As empirical observations accumulated and regularities were discerned, there was a choice to unite and give meaning to the material through Bensaïd's theory. In that sense, this is situated, grounded research.

4. Alternative economies in the Basque Country and Greece

Here we apply Bensaïd's analytics. We first investigate the activist projects and conjunctures of emergence of the two alternative economies and ask what is their strategy and horizon of struggle and whether they go beyond a politics of 'cracks'. Next we focus on the barriers they face, and how they respond to them; in particular we are interested whether they attempt to organize to challenge state power, and if yes, how.

4.1. Where did the alternatives come from and what is their horizon?

The crisis did act as a catalyst in the decisions of many individuals to shift to agroecological agriculture in Biscay or to organize to bypass middlemen in Greece. These dynamics however did not appear out of nowhere, and the alternatives are not exhausted in responding to the unemployment or food poverty generated by the crisis. Both built on activist projects with a transformative horizon and an ability to strategize struggle within specific conjunctures. The goal of these projects are collective and political, and they seek transformative change through a politics of conflict and social struggle.

The origins and politics of alternative food economies in Biscay

EHNE-Bizkaia is a small-farmers' union with a long history of political activism. By the late 1990s it had clear that small-farmers interests could not be defended 'without talking of the model of production and the model of development one aspires to', Unzalu[2], coordinator of EHNE-Bizkaia, remembers. The adoption of food sovereignty as political framework was informed by international debates put forward by La Vía Campesina, but mainly by neo-liberal policies which aggravated the impacts of agrarian capitalism on the livelihoods of small-farmers, and an acceleration of the uncontrolled urbanization of agricultural land. These tendencies called for a problematization of the model of agriculture and a proposal of alternatives.

EHNE-Bizkaia hence started promoting 'repeasantization', i.e. reducing the dependence of small-farmers on capitalist markets by a shift to agroecological production, alternative food networks (Red Nekasarea) and re-localization. This was not merely a survivalist reaction by small-farmers. The intention was to politicize agro-food issues, attract new young *baserritarras* to face an increasingly aged sector, and generate a dynamics of social mobilization, while experimenting and advancing a proposal on how the agro-food system can be organized differently - that of 'food sovereignty'. This new praxis of developing alternative economies had the ambition to construct a broader

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[2] To protect the anonymity of our interviewees we use fictional names. We use real names only for members of ENHE-Bizkaia who had no problem revealing their identity.

social movement of baserritarras for food sovereignty through alliances with consumers, trade-unions, social movements, and political forces. In "Euskal Herria we can have 4.000 producers in the core base of this movement, and from 4.000 go up to 8.000, 10.000 people that converge and develop it", Unzalu argues[1]. This broad movement arose in 2011 under the name of Etxalde. From a Bensaïdian lens, repeasantization is a strategy through which rejuvenate the sector and politicize and mobilize popular classes around a political project of food sovereignty.

This shift of strategy had practical implications. In order to promote agroecology as the pathway for restructuring agriculture, EHNE-Bizkaia stopped training farmers in conventional farming. Training also became a tool through which attract new young *baserritarras*, as well reach out society with diversified offers opened to anyone interested. Red Nekasarea supported both these objectives.

The *baserritarras* we interviewed said they were attracted to agriculture or saw it as a feasible option after attending debates or training sessions by EHNE-Bizkaia. The broader crisis context played a role in their decision to become farmers, but it was one factor among others. The availability of (almost) free training in agroecology was appealing, many claimed. Technical training is vital for launching a new farm. Agroecology was also attractive, we were told, because compared to the high investment required for entering conventional farming, it depends very little on external inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, or technology. Red Nekasarea protects new *baserritarras* from market uncertainties and middlemen, ensuring that they can start gradually, plan their production, and have a regular income. Consumers in the network pay a fixed amount per year, and in this way the risks of production are shared and the initial costs of investment secured. Bittor, who started in 2011 says "It was hard at the beginning. We did pretty badly financially, our produce was pathetic. But we went there [to Red Nekasarea] and people said: 'you are starting, relax, and go ahead'".

EHNE-Bizkaia promotes cooperation between baserritarras during the training, and later through on-line communication tools. This, many told us, helps them face insecurities and create a mutual-aid environment.

Unlike common depictions in the Spanish and international press of a spontaneous 'return to the land' move of youth pushed by the crisis, what we find in Biscay is a well

strategized and supported move with clear political purposes.

The objective of EHNE-Bizkaia is not to just build practical alternatives through which show that another agro-food model is possible and better. The aim is to politicize agro-food issues through the clash of models and create a broad social movement fighting for food sovereignty. Hence the strong ideological discourse on alternatives. Unai, who is responsible for training, explains "If for us food is a right…we have to explain how the system works and the alternatives we have and want".

EHNE-Bizkaia's ideological discourse unpacks the political-economic relations structuring the agro-food system, calling for its radical transformation. When then new *baserritarras* engage in alternative economies they understand these as embedded in a political project with transformational ambitions. EHNE-Bizkaia also wants the new *baserritarras* to realize that the aim is to insert alternative projects within a dynamic of transformation that implies collective action and social mobilization. This explains, for example, the understanding of 'peasantness' as a political claim, rather than a fixed economic condition. More than half of EHNE-Bizkaia's members actually are *baserritarras* practicing conventional farming who actively support the political project of food sovereignty and agroecology. As Unzalu explains there is no division between conventional and 'alternative' producers:

> The conflict is between models of production, not the people in different models…. The organization is not here to defend the model that each is practicing; it is here for the whole sector…. It is political powers that instigate the confrontation between people, instead of models.

EHNE-Bizkaia's strategy of repeasantization entailed the development of alternatives of production and distribution, together with a strong ideological work. The purpose is to create a dynamics of self-organization and collective action fighting for food sovereignty (Etxalde), rather than to build economic difference or antagonistic autonomous spaces. A Bensaïd's framework helps to uncover these dynamics.

The origins and politics of the no-middlemen initiatives in Greece

The problem of 'middlemen' has been a high profile political question in Greece with the transformation of the food sector into "an arena of oligopolistic competition" (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013, 288). As an orange producer from Piraeus' group

explains:

> Greece has one of the worst supply-chain circuits in Europe. There are three main problems with merchants: low prices, frequently lower than the farmer costs; they do not pay regularly, creating indebtedness; there is no standard agreement setting the rules between farmers and middlemen.

Food poverty in Greece is both "the result of inadequate households' income, as well of limited choices of sourcing food in the city due to food retail sector consolidation. Corporate retailers have been criticized for greed and unethical pricing practices" (Skordili, 2013, 129). The inflation of food prices during a recession suggests unwarranted middlemen profiteering. As Panagiota, a young activist from Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, explains:

> It was very obvious that something was very wrong. With the crisis and lower incomes, prices did not go down, yet farmers were in difficulties…. In the central market they throw food away to keep the prices high…. With our initiatives the price cannot be too low for farmers so that they can continue to produce.... If we don't strengthen the Greek production, prices will go up.

The no-middlemen distributions did emerge within the crisis to face a growing situation of food poverty. But they do it by tackling some of the structural factors behind it, and have broader political objectives. Crucially, the no-middlemen initiatives are part of a larger grassroots solidarity movement triggered by "the multifarious struggles of Greek society against the Troika and the bailout programs, especially the occupation of the squares in the summer of 2011" (S4A, 2015). Many no-middlemen groups from Thessaloniki and Athens arose out of post-squares neighborhood assemblies, whilst others were inspired by them or the broader anti-austerity environment. Olga, a young precarious worker from Thessaloniki, explains that her group was created

> three years ago to campaign against the additional property tax included in the electricity bill; when this struggle declined, we thought of other actions to resist austerity and built up solidarity with the ones affected. We decided to start the food distributions.

Solidarity is a crucial strategic objective of the no-middlemen groups. A logic of mutual-aid intends to "give hope", "help people to self-organize", and "pass from the I to the We", as different activists tellingly put it. The objective is to provide the material and subjective conditions so that people mobilize against the politics of austerity and reflect on "what kind of society and democracy they want to claim", as Thanos, an

unemployed activist from Toumba, Thessaloniki, explains.

For Eva, a middle-aged lawyer from Thermaikos, Thessaloniki, the food distributions were not only about responding to food poverty and farmers' problems, but:

> also a good chance for us to speak about the crisis, the government that led us to the crisis, about Troika and the EU that oblige countries to be in crisis. We wanted people to get out of their houses, to come with us, and rise up.

Food distributions are also a 'symbolic battlefield' around notions of 'solidarity' (Chatzidakis, 2014). The conservative (at the time) government, private-capital, the church, and the neo-nazi party 'Golden Dawn' are holding their own food distributions based on philanthropy, charity, entrepreneurship, or xenophobia (the neo-nazis serve 'only Greeks'). The groups we studied instead make much of their insistence on no monetary transactions, equal relations, reciprocity, and horizontal democracy.

Political inclinations differ among groups. In Athens, there is a stronger presence of activists affiliated to radical left political parties. In Thessaloniki there are more activists that are autonomist-oriented. In Central Greece, activists insist on their 'civil society' character. Nonetheless, all share the goal of defeating the politics of austerity. Kostas from Piraeus thinks that "the difference between the groups is organizational, not political. There are different experiences but our main goal is the same".

For many in the no-middlemen, the control of the agro-food system is central in a strategy of toppling the neo-liberal austerity agenda. As one activist at the national meeting tellingly put it: "We cannot achieve political uprising in a country that does not produce enough food".

While the struggle against austerity is crucial, the actions of the group are envisioned as setting a path towards a radical transformation of the agro-food system and the whole of the economy. Like their counterparts in the Basque Country, the no-middlemen initiatives aim to reconstruct and reorganize a non-corporate agricultural and food sector. As Thanos says: "one of our aims is to contribute to reconstructing production through the solidarity economy, and to encourage small-farmers to cooperate between them and sell outside traders".

From a Bensaïd-inspired perspective, no-middlemen distributions grounded in solidarity are part of a strategy to resist austerity, while promoting learning processes on how to

re-organize the agro-food system. More than building difference or autonomy, activists organize distributions as a tool to politicize the crisis and mobilize the popular classes to fight austerity and claim alternative futures.

4.2. Responding to barriers by extending struggle and confronting the state

In the case of the Basque Country, the main barriers for new peasants are access to land and the viability of their ventures. For the no-middlemen distributions the main problems are repression from the authorities, co-optation and fatigue of activists. Both respond with a politics of protest and political demands, while they seek to transform the state itself.

Political-economic barriers: private property, competition and the state

In Biscay 75% of the population lives in urban areas. Only 30% of the territory is designated for agriculture (Bizilur et al., 2015). Access to land is difficult because of high prices, urbanization pressures and private ownership (Youth Council of Euskadi, 2010). Many owners are reluctant to sell or lease land to new farmers, because they can get a higher price later for real estate. According to official statistics, the average price for a hectare of land in the Basque Country was 15.000 Euros in 2007 (MAGRAMA 2013), but it can go up to and over 100.000 Euros, which was the price paid that same year by a baserritarra we interviewed. All interviewees, except those who had family property, argued that access to land 'was the hardest part' of their experience.

Economic viability is another core concern. New peasants aim to secure affordable prices so that they "can feed the workers, not elites". This is also an important objective of Red Nekasarea. Selling however at social prices may not be viable, given the high costs of land and food transport and the decline of consumers' purchasing power due to the effects of crisis and austerity. Wages, transportation costs, or mortgage interest rates, are all factors that determine the viability of farms, determined by a capitalist economy that is beyond the influence of small-farmers. As Benate, an ex-precarious media worker who is now a *baserritarra* put it: "like it or not, we live in this world. We still have costs even if we earn a living differently and have a different lifestyle, with lower expenses". To keep the food price low *baseritarras* try to reduce costs by increasing self-provision

and their hours of work, or devalue their own payment. This might be difficult in an already labor-intensive farming model, in which "the effort required is huge… and you put a lot of hours that no one will pay", as Maite, daughter of ex-*baserritarras* put it.

In Greece instead, the main obstacle was the authorities' repression. No-middlemen groups in Athens and Thessaloniki could not obtain municipal permits to occupy public space. The police often intervened and ended distributions. Athanasia, an activist in Maroussi, Athens, explains that in January 2014:

> the mayor of the city sent the police and tax auditors and they fined producers 1.000 Euros each. They asked for their papers and they were legal. They asked for invoices and they had them. They finned them because there was no permit to occupy the place. But the market was not in the middle of the street or in any central zone. It was in a dirty, poorly located place that no one uses.

A Parliament law passed by the conservative government in May 2014 (the '2014 law') aggravated the situation: it forbids itinerant trade near shops with similar products and in municipalities with more than 3.000 inhabitants; requires that stationary markets are proposed and approved by municipal or regional authorities; adds obstacles to farmers who want to obtain permit to sell directly; and increases the fines and includes an imprisonment penalty for those who prevent controls from the authorities or have no permit.

Another threat is the co-optation of initiatives by conservative mayors and private-capital. As Alekos from Vironas, Athens, explains, the no-middlemen distributions organized by the mayor in his neighborhood "do not create a different logic between the farmer and the consumer; it is only about low prices and the reelection of the mayor". In the last years, several strictly commercial no-middlemen initiatives have popped-up (*Ekathimerini* 2014).

The activists we talked to complained also of fatigue. The sustained engagement of farmers and consumers in the solidarity groups has proven difficult. Nikos, a university professor active in Thermi, Thessaloniki, concedes that: "by now we are tired and disappointed because producers are tricky and consumers are passive". Fatigue relates also to the personal conditions of activists. Most of them are unemployed and suffer themselves from the effects of austerity policies. Furthermore, they are aware that their volunteer unpaid work may substitute that of middlemen merchants, or contribute to

shift to society the burden of dealing with the effects of austerity.

Responding to barriers: re-organizing and scaling up institutional battles

The obstacles posed by the capital-state nexus on alternative economies are considerable, and may become fatal. However, from a Bensaïdian perspective, the question is how activist projects *respond* to such barriers.

EHNE-Bizkaia helps new baserritarras find plots of land, and often intermediates with ex-*baserritarras* to facilitate deals. But this is not enough; structural barriers call for struggle to change structures. Land policy has been at the center of the political activism of the organization. EHNE-Bizkaia has contested the model of development for the Basque Country, and its disregard for agro-food issues. A "historical battle" was won when the regional government approved its proposal to set up a public land fund to facilitate farmer's access to land. This fund, active since 2010, is composed of public land and out-of-use private land rented at non-speculative prices to farmers for a minimum of five years (with priority to young farmers). Unzalu accepts that this is more of an ideological victory than an effective solution to the land problem. However, its significance is that it "challenges the primacy of private property". For EHNE-Bizkaia authorities should recognize agricultural land as an "irreplaceable value of production", protect it from urbanization, and guarantee its social function—that of food production that covers social needs. The state therefore is not left aside, but a central locus of action for EHNE-Bizkaia.

Food prices and farm viability are a major concern for EHNE-Bizkaia. There is awareness that there is a limit in pursuing food sovereignty within the contours of the market. EHNE-Bizkaia calls for the direct intervention of authorities to redraw the agro-food system away from the corporate model. Unzalu argues for the

> need to re-arrange the entire agrifood system and recover the public function
> [of the state]. Why should the 'public' be limited to regulate and give
> subsidies? Why not intervene, organize and control?

This struggle for reforms, however, is not an end in itself; in a Bensaïdian fashion, it is conceived as a "strategic tool to dispute spaces and proposals" (Bizilur et al., 2015, 3) and extend social mobilization. Unlike Greece, nonetheless, there are few attempts, other than discursive, to combine food sovereignty struggles with anti-austerity

struggles. Perhaps there is too much emphasis on the building of alternatives and this does not allow a re-alignment of political practice at the current conjuncture.

In Greece, different groups respond differently to the authorities, and this is a major point of divergence within the 'movement'. The groups of Central Greece are more 'legalistic'. Groups there organize pre-orders so that distributions are qualified as e-commerce, a grey area in the law. They tend to collaborate with conservative mayors to obtain permits, staying away from central streets. The groups of Thessaloniki and Athens instead refuse to cooperate with conservative mayors as they see them as complicit in applying austerity. They insist that they have to resist attacks from the authorities by gaining popular support for the distributions; the politicization of actions is thus fundamental. The groups of Athens are more careful in how they handle the confrontation though: they always ask for permit (which is often denied), usually work with professional farmers who can issue tax invoices, and often they too organize preorders and place distributions outside central streets. Most of Thessaloniki's groups refuse to do any of this and were heavily targeted by authorities with the result that many groups and distributions there stopped.

Despite differences, all groups agree that the law has to change if distributions are to continue and grow, and especially if the agro-food system is to change structurally. Many groups are discussing internally and collectively changes to the legal framework, while voicing publicly their opposition to the 2014 law. Many activists hoped that a victory of left-wing SYRIZA in the January 2015 elections could bring institutional changes that would support their initiatives. Athanasia, from Maroussi, Athens, spoke for many: "before the new law I was optimistic. With this government there is no optimism; with another government there would be a boost of solidarity, but this government is breaking, destroying everything". (Despite SYRIZA's rise to power, the 2014 law has not changed at the time of writing this paper).

Many groups considered it important to change power in their municipalities. Solidarity groups as such did not participate in the last local elections of June 2014, though some of its members in Athens and Thessaloniki took part in SYRIZA-backed or independent candidacies. Most of our interviewees are also clear that they want autonomy from political parties and state institutions so as to maintain a social movement character and keep struggling for deeper social change, including of the state itself. As Kostas from

Piraeus explains:

> if with the municipal elections the panorama changes, the movement has to
> discuss how to keep its independence and work with municipalities of the
> Left, but not to work for them and kill the movement …. We also don't want
> to be absorbed by the government [in case SYRIZA wins], but to be part of
> the struggle for another economy against the capital. The state should change
> towards the solidarity economy.

Like in Biscay, the state is not left aside. Many no-middlemen groups make adjustments
to the distributions so that these are not stopped or co-opted by institutions, while
attempt to advance policy reforms. In a process akin to Bensaïd's understanding of
politics, this is done with the prospect of extending social struggle and building
alternative forms of social power. Groups hence develop tools to counter some of the
difficulties faced in organizing and mobilizing the popular classes.

For instance, groups in Athens and Thessaloniki increasingly organize the distributions
as festivities to promote the involvement of farmers and consumers other than in the day
of the distributions. In Kipseli, Athens, the group organizes a collective soup on the
occasion, and in Zografou, Athens, activists organize activities for children. The
organization of the groups through open assemblies is also a way to involve more
people in the long-term running of the groups; some groups in Thessaloniki organize
assemblies on the day of the distribution to attract more participants. Besides the food
distributions, the groups organize also other solidarity actions like free lessons or social
clinics, or regularly promote debates, movies projections, or gatherings in the
neighborhood.

The promotion of self-organization and politicized spaces around 'solidarity' is very
important for the groups. As Kostas explains: "all of us are leftist and we do not want to
act like a salesman or become a salesman; it is important that people understand this,
and we try to convince them of our solidarity purpose". Solidarity is to be understood as
oppositional to philanthropy and charity. Activists know that "they are covering a lacuna
of the state", but, as Nikos from Thermi, Thessaloniki, argues: "we are not replacing the
state. We have a political agenda, we set issues in the agenda and we force the state to
react".

There is currently a debate within the groups about the evolution of the distributions
into "a network of linked co-operatives" (Rakopoulos, 2014, 106) that would allow the

distributions to go beyond the role of safety-nets based on voluntary labor. Cooperatives could create permanent spaces for farmers and consumers, provide jobs and potentiate solidarity in economic relations, but come with their own risks to the groups' purpose of extending social struggle and forcing changes from above that are beyond the scope of this article. SYRIZA's surrender to the Troika's program of austerity has left no prospects for a state-backed re-conversion of the economy along solidarity lines in which the groups could be active participants in a restructuring from below, including a transformation of the state. This situation poses new challenges for activists and their horizon of struggle.

5. Conclusion

How and why do alternative economies emerge and develop in times of economic crisis? Alternative economies, or at least the two cases that we studied, are not just the direct outcome of the social hardship of crisis. They are a product of activist strategies developed within specific conjunctures. In the Basque country, an already existing movement of small-farmers for food sovereignty facilitates the move of non-farmers to land and agroecological farming, a move with reinvigorated interest under the crisis. In the case of Greece, a grassroots solidarity food network was catalyzed by anti-austerity mass mobilizations and the speculative behavior of food intermediaries.

Issues of space, place and scale are relevant for both projects. ENHE-Bizkaia links explicitly food sovereignty with the question of control over the territory, adopting a relational perspective of scale in which the local, national and global co-determine each other. The food distributions in Greece are local and regional in scope, but are envisioned as part of a re-localization of the Greek economy and territory governance. These are relevant fields and areas for further research which are outside the scope of this article. We did not go into as much detail as we would have liked in the territorial or historical-geographical character of the projects, and their attempts to (re)construct scale. This should definitely be part of future research on alternative economies. Our contribution here is to offer to the reader a new analytical and normative lens to look at alternative economies beyond the stale dichotomy of celebration or skepticism.

This paper, inspired by Bensaïd's political theory, illustrates how alternative economies

can be central in transformative strategies and reciprocal to more classic forms of protest-type politics. The projects we studied play an important role in politicizing the crisis, the economy, and the agrifood system, as well in extending conflict and social struggle, and offering views of possible economic alternatives. In the Basque Country, 'food sovereignty' is the strategic idea and practice for an alternative model of development that challenges established land and power relations across the countryside and the city. In Greece, a praxis of 'solidarity' confronts neo-liberalism and the politics of austerity. Both activist projects are keen to politicize their initiatives and activate subjects into collective action, as well to form strategic alliances with other social and political forces to up-scale their struggle. They also seek to challenge the state, and not simply replace it or act in-between the market and the state. In this process they are aware of the need of changing the state itself and to amplify democracy from the grassroots. In that sense, we can argue that they are (always tentatively and potentially) transformative.

What are the implications of these findings for broader debates on alternative economies and social change? A diverse economy approach (Gibson-Graham 2006; Castells et al 2012) may help to open individuals to critical thinking; however, it tends to essentialize alternatives when going against essentialized views of capitalism. Anti-power (Holloway, 2010), counter-power (Hardt and Negri, 2009; De Angelis, 2012) and anarchist (Graeber, 2002a) frameworks highlight the positive capacity of individuals to resist the powers of capital but they fetishize resistance by refusing to deal with state power. Critics like Harvey (see Sheppard, 2006) on the other hand, pay excessive attention to limits and not to the ways activist strategies may build transformative projects on the basis of developing alternative economies. Bensaïd's theory charters a different potential for alternative economies and in relation, a different way to look at them.

The two projects studied here *did* insert alternatives into oppositional strategies with a transformative horizon. They did go beyond fragments in resistance by embracing a social movement perspective engaged in a politics of strategic alliances, avoiding fragmentation. They did not intend to replace either the market or the state and they did not see the latter as a mere compliment to their action. Instead, they directly confront market forces and state power with the ambition to enact deeper changes in society and dissolve old social structures. They stepped out of the private sphere, the location of

merely 'doing differently', and acted in the public realm, the location *par excellence* of politics. This was not the result of a spontaneous reaction to the impacts of the crisis. It was the outcome of strategic actions within the contingencies of struggle and its rhythms. These alternative economies are positioned within a transformative movement, but whether this transformation advances depends on whether activist projects effectively contribute to shift the balance of social forces.

CHAPTER 2

Food sovereignty and new peasantries: on re-peasantization and counter-hegemonic contestations in the Basque territory[3]

This paper contributes to debates about the potential of repeasantization and its contribution to food sovereignty with a case study from the global North, where such questions are relatively under-studied. I examine how EHNE-Bizkaia, a Vía Campesina member organization from the Basque Country (Spain), advances food sovereignty through repeasantization. I also analyze the motivations of new peasants engaged in agroecology, their understandings of food sovereignty, and the challenges that they face. Using a Gramscian political ecology framework, I argue that whereas repeasantization contributes to a shift from corporatist to counter-hegemonic struggles, the political-economic and biophysical contexts structure agroecological production in ways that limit the extent to which new peasantries can become 'agents of their own history'. I conclude that closer attention to peasants' messy practices of making a living is needed to address questions of political agency.

1. Introduction

Alternative food movements that seek to contest the conventional agro-food system are increasingly using the framework of food sovereignty (Constance et al., 2014). Food sovereignty advocates the democratization of agro-food systems by putting "those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations" (Vía Campesina, 2007). Food

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sovereignty also proposes that the human right to food be guaranteed through repeasantization, agroecological production, localization, and the de-commodification of productive resources. Repeasantization can be understood as "the process through which agriculture is restructured as peasant agriculture. It may also refer to a quantitative increase in the number of peasants" (Ploeg, 2013, 135). Peasant agriculture includes forms "of farming in which coproduction [with nature] based on a self-controlled resource base is central and within which wage labor is (almost) absent" (ibid., 134). The transition from input-dependent farming towards agroecological production is then part of repeasantization (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012).

Scholars have focused on the nature of food sovereignty. Only recently there is a growing literature that looks at the challenges of implementing food sovereignty in different contexts (Edelman et al., 2014). Research also has a geographical bias. When looking at the global North, studies usually favor urban and consumer-led struggles (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015). While there is a prolific literature on the activities of peasant and rural social movements in the global South, there is less engagement with how small-farmer organizations in the global North, under a different set of circumstances, promote food sovereignty and actively work to form new peasants. Most studies address repeasantization in the global North from the perspective of adaptation, resistance, and autonomy (e.g. Ploeg, 2010; Trauger, 2015), with less attention to how repeasantization informs a politics of food sovereignty and small farmers' mobilization. This is precisely what this article wants to investigate. Although neoliberal globalization may trouble global North-South divides, and food sovereignty attempts to move beyond such binaries, the countryside of regions like Europe or North America have specific features that merit separate (and comparative) study. For instance, deagrarianization and terciarization are older and deeper processes in (for shorthand) 'the global North', and likewise the penetration of capitalist relations of production in agriculture.

I ground my analysis in a study of how Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna— EHNE-Bizkaia, a union of small farmers in the province of Biscay (Basque Country, Spain) and member of Vía Campesina, advances food sovereignty through repeasantization. EHNE-Bizkaia was founded in 1976 and currently has around 800 associates. In the mid-2000s EHNE-Bizkaia began promoting agroecology, supporting new *baserritarras* (peasants in Basque), and developing the community-supported agriculture network, *Red Nekasarea*. These actions are embedded in its goal of

promoting food sovereignty for Euskal Herria (the free Basque Country). I also examine the dynamics of repeasantization by discussing the motivations, political views, and challenges of some new peasants who were recently trained in agroecology by EHNE-Bizkaia and/or are part of *Red Nekasarea*, but are not necessarily members of EHNE-Bizkaia.

This paper draws on qualitative research conducted between October and December 2013 in Biscay, where I lived and was a participant observer in EHNE-Bizkaia activities such as agroecological training sessions (3); *Red Nekasarea baserritarras*' meetings (4); international seminars (2); technical visits to farm-holdings (3); farmers markets (2); and visits from other Vía Campesina organizations (1). I interviewed the coordinator of the union and the two technicians that oversee the support given to new *baserritarras* and *Red Nekasarea*, respectively, on agrarian and organizational issues. I also interviewed 26 new *baserritarras* (who supported by EHNE-Bizkaia) about their motivations, challenges, and understandings of food sovereignty.

To conduct this analysis I adopt a Gramscian political ecology framework. This framework "provides pathways for understanding how the intersection of politics, space and nature informs subaltern mobilizations" (Karriem, 2013, 144). Analytically, it has great potential to examine how the 'environment' is mobilized to contest hegemonic ideas and practices, and to forge an alternative hegemony. The framework can help obtain insights into the contribution and challenges of repeasantization to advance food sovereignty. With this research I seek to contribute to the growing Gramscian-inspired political ecology literature by shedding light on some of the challenges related to political agency that the production of alternative ecologies might carry.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly presents the politics of food sovereignty and the contemporary debates on the 'peasant' question. Section 3 elaborates on a Gramscian political ecology approach. Section 4 analyzes how EHNE-Bizkaia advances a politics of food sovereignty through repeasantization, and its organizational implications. Section 5 examines the processes of politicization and mobilization of new peasants, and some of the challenges they face, and I conclude in Section 6.

2. The politics of food sovereignty

Food sovereignty provides an alternative concept to food security, and an alternative practice to the conventional agro-food system. Its proponents talk "about the inequitable structures and policies that have destroyed rural livelihoods and the environment and thus produced food insecurity", arguing "that the food system needs to be predicated upon a decentralized agriculture, where production, processing, distribution and consumption are controlled by communities" (Akram-Lodhi 2015, 565). They aim to restore "democratic forms of local and national food systems, on the foundation of low-input eco-farming and consumer rights to adequate and appropriate foods" (McMichael, 2014, 195).

2.1. Progressive and radical approaches

Alternative food movements struggling for food sovereignty can be divided into a radical and a progressive camp (Constance et al., 2014). Both converge in a critique of contemporary capitalism for producing inequalities in the agro-food system; in the rejection of neoliberal and reformist responses to food crises; and in the vision of alternative models based on peasant farming, agroecological production, and community-based food systems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). They diverge, however, in determining what pathways are best for advancing food sovereignty. Progressive food movements focus on practical alternatives and local reforms (e.g. local food councils, community-supported agriculture, agroecological farming) as a way to imagine and create sustainable and just agro-food systems. Meanwhile, radical food movements combine those actions with a social movement approach, integrating the goal of destroying the power structures of capitalism (ibid.). Without this radical transformation, they argue that progressive actions can be co-opted or assimilated by neoliberalism (Constance et al., 2014). Vía Campesina is a leading organization in the radical camp. Its political project of food sovereignty establishes the clash between

> two divergent and opposing models of social and economic development. On the one hand, a globalized, neoliberal, corporate driven model where food is considered to be just like any other commodity and agriculture is seen exclusively as a profit-making venture, with productive resources increasingly concentrated in the hands of the agro-industry. Vía Campesina, on the other hand, envisions a very different, more humane, rural world

where "food is first and foremost a basic human right", agriculture is based on peasant small-scale production, uses local resources and is geared in domestic markets (Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013, 4).

Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011, 113) argue that "the nature and extent of reform or transformation possible" depends of the convergence of progressive food movements with the radical camp, and that these must be based on non-instrumental alliances. Although cross-class alliances are needed, they sustain that "linking the livelihood interests (production and reproduction) of underserved communities in the North with those of the besieged peasantry in the Global South probably offers much stronger foundations for a more durable convergence" (ibid., 136). Only through this 'unity in diversity' is it possible to force "the state for the implementation of re-distributive land reform, social protections and safety nets" (ibid., 129), while seeking to "challenge and transcend the state" (ibid.). The role of the state in food sovereignty is a contentious question (Edelman et al., 2014), and beyond the scope of this paper.

A 'radical' politics of food sovereignty such as that advanced by rural movements like Vía Campesina, is developed through repeasantization and social mobilization seeking structural change that is facilitated by radically different public policies.

2.2. Advancing food sovereignty through repeasantization

Repeasantization informs "a politics of the 'peasant way'" (McMichael, 2014, 195). However, the "question of how to define 'peasant' and 'peasantry' has a long, complicated and contentious history" (Edelman, 2013, 2).

Peasants have been understood as a socio-economic category, or a social process (Vanhaute, 2012). For the former, peasants occupy a distinct class position in-between capitalists and wage-earners or constitute a specific mode of production. For the latter, peasants are (re)produced by the social relations of capital; whereas some sustain that forms of non-capitalist agriculture may persist insofar capital needs and 'exploit' them, others argue that capital has commodified subsistence and obliged peasants to differentiate (into capitalists, proletarians, or petty commodity producers) (Bernstein, 2010). According to the differentiation thesis, petty commodity producers (small and family farmers) are not exploited neither they constitute a class (ibid.). This partially informs Bernstein's (2014) skepticism towards food sovereignty, as it may incorporate

groups with antagonistic class positions.

Ploeg (2010, 2013) argues that peasant agriculture has an intrinsic logic, oriented to maximize labor income and not subsistence. He agrees that peasants are petty commodity producers as they produce for the market. However, he claims that they can resist commodification "through the re-grounding of farming on nature and the development of multi-functionality...in which specific forms of decommodititization play a key role" (2010, 1-3). For Ploeg, peasants are in a constant "struggle for autonomy and improved income within a context that imposes dependency and deprivation"—the "peasant condition" (2013, 61). The "peasantry both suffers and resists: sometimes at different moments, sometimes simultaneously. Similar confusion and apparent contradictions apply to agriculture as a whole; it sometimes witnesses processes and periods of depeasantization and sometimes of repeasantization" (ibid., 6).

Ploeg argues that in the context of neoliberalism, repeasantization is the dominant trend worldwide. He claims that if "individually these expressions are innocent and harmless: taken together they become powerful and have the potential to change the panorama" (2010, 17). In analyzing Latin America, Kay (2000) shows that this process is more complex: producers shift back between depeasantization, semi-proletarianization and repeasantization.

The struggle over rural livelihoods informs the diverse approaches to the contemporary agrarian question (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010). Bernstein and McMichael offer two distinct perspectives that resemble the classic debate on the fate of the peasantry. The former argues that farming is quasi-irrelevant for accumulation purposes. Thus smallholders and rural workers are just struggling for their reproduction needs as laborers and are compelled to disappear (Bernstein, 2010). The latter sustains that they are resisting and struggling against capital by moving towards the 'peasant condition', and by waging a conflict with capital as a political question—that of 'food sovereignty' (McMichael, 2014). More than a structural economic category, 'peasantness' is a political claim to bring together those who suffer "the violence of commodification of land, labor, genetic resources and knowledges" under the "desire and need for unification" (ibid., 199), for instance in Vía Campesina (Desmarais, 2007). In this view, the 'peasant' is understood as a political subject within a Polanyian type of counter-movement to capital and neoliberal hegemony (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011;

McMichael, 2014).

This article adopts Ploeg's (2013) definition of the peasant condition because it describes ways of farming which seek to cut dependencies from conventional markets, such as agroecology. His Chayanovian approach, however, focus less on the political dimension of repeasantization, thus offering few tools to analyze how repeasantization informs a 'radical' politics of food sovereignty and small farmers' mobilization. McMichael's approach on the agrarian question emphasizes precisely this political dimension. By portraying the 'peasant way' as a counter-movement, however, it situates the clash of models at a global, 'universal' level, and overlooks the complexity of food sovereignty struggles in local contexts. Both Ploeg's and McMichael's approaches provide few tools to examine the reciprocal relationships between practical alternatives, ideological struggles, and alliance-building. Or to address questions of political agency. To confront these issues, I propose the use of a Gramscian political ecology framework, the justification for which follows.

3. A Gramscian political ecology approach

Gramsci's theory provides pathways for understanding how 'nature' is entangled in ruling-class hegemony and how it may inform a subaltern politics (Karriem, 2013). Hegemony is about the intellectual and moral leadership of elites over other social groups, allowing them to govern; this depends on the consent of subordinate social groups, who internalize the elite's ideology around which everyday life is organized as common sense.

'Nature' contributes to consolidate hegemony by being transformed in everyday life through labor and technology. For Gramsci, "the humanity which is reflected in each [individual] is composed of...:1. the individual; 2. other [human beings]; 3. the natural world" (1971, 352). However, this relation with others and the natural world is "not mechanical", but "active and conscious" (ibid.). Each individual is composed by plural, fragmented, at times contradictory, conceptions of the world present in society. In other words, individuals are not passive recipients of ideology; rather, they have the capacity to understand and transform themselves and the world in which they live in. Only politics can potentiate this capacity.

A prime role of politics is to empower individuals of subaltern classes to "work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1971, 323). Politics is a means through which it is possible to raise critical thought and class consciousness. More than a transmission of knowledge or ideology, this is about a politics "rooted in the messy practices of making a life in the world" (Loftus, 2013, 179), that works "against *and* within the contours of popular culture" (Kipfer and Hart, 2013, 330; emphasis in the original). This is a work of "translating—elaborating, modifying, and transforming meaning" (ibid., 326) that "involves elaborating the good sense in popular culture while denaturalizing unexamined elements of the same culture" (ibid., 330). But this goes beyond advancing ideological struggles in everyday practices. For Gramsci, theory and praxis are co-determining: individuals transform themselves by transforming others and getting directly involved in subaltern struggles. In other words, a political project without social mobilization, and vice-versa, is incomplete. He also argues that "to potentiate oneself and develop oneself" involves "modifying external relations both with nature and, in varying degrees, with other(s)..., in the various social circles in which one lives" (1971, 360). Transforming subjectivities thus requires the transformation of the relation of individuals with the others and the natural world.

Consciousness-raising and mobilizing subjects must be followed, in Gramsci's perspective, by a process of moving consciousness towards a unitary and coherent, or hegemonic conception of the world. This conception can lead, articulate and reciprocally transform various subaltern social groups and thus change the correlation of social and political forces. For Gramsci, this implies a politics that moves consciousness from narrow economic-corporate interests towards a "'universal" plane" (1971, 182).

Gramsci offers insights into how to advance an emancipatory political project. This requires elaborating a project that incorporates the concerns of popular classes; a praxis that translates this project into the everyday life of the subaltern so that they internalize it; this can only happen through their self-organization and mobilization, and the capacity to critically learn from struggles and everyday life contexts. 'Nature' matters because subaltern normalize hegemonic ideas and practices through their daily interactions with nature by means of labor and technology. Therefore, 'nature' cannot be outside a politics of the subaltern as it is from those interactions that critical worldviews and a radical politics may emerge (Loftus, 2013). Karriem's (2013) study of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil is illustrative of these reciprocal

relationships. He shows that agroecological experiences and the integration of ecology in MST's ideology have contributed to raise consciousness of individuals in relation to themselves and the world, and to forge a hegemonic conception of the world that informs the movement's struggles.

When analyzing food sovereignty movements from a Gramscian perspective, the analytical lens falls on the translation of the political project of food sovereignty into everyday practices and how those contribute to raise critical thought, forge a hegemonic conception of the world, and politicize and mobilize the subaltern. These questions are addressed in the following sections. After presenting the agrarian context of Biscay and why small farmers opted for food sovereignty, I examine how EHNE-Bizkaia advances food sovereignty through repeasantization. I highlight the articulation of practical alternatives, ideological struggles, and alliance-building, and analyze the organizational implications of food sovereignty. Finally, I focus on questions of political agency, emphasizing the efforts of EHNE-Bizkaia in politicizing and mobilizing new peasants and the difficulties posed by everyday life contexts.

4. Basque territory: small farmers' struggles and food sovereignty

Deagrarianization and abandonment of farmland occurred widely over the last half century in the Basque Country prompting a shift from mainly subsistence-oriented agriculture to commercial family agriculture. Currently, agriculture employs only 1% of the active working force; the sector is capital-intensive and specialized in fruit and livestock production (EUSTAT, 2014). Most farm-holdings are privately owned (92%) and are small to medium size family farms (less than 20 hectares), with nine out of ten farmers aged over 40, and 33% over 65 years old (EUSTAT, 2014a). Between 1999 and 2009, 8.136 of 24.546[4] (33% of farm-holdings) were lost (ibid). Biscay is the Basque Country's smallest and more densely populated province (520 inhabitants per square kilometer) and has the highest number of farm-holdings—7.064 (ibid). Over 80% of the province's municipalities are classified as rural, but more than half the population lives in urban areas (EUSTAT, 2014b).

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[4] These numbers are indicative; they are influenced by the use of different statistical criteria in the census.

The abandonment of agriculture and aging of farmers have been highlighted as the main problems to be tackled by public policies (e.g. Youth Council of Euskadi, 2010). However, public policy has mainly applied business-as-usual measures established by the European Common Agricultural Policy based in agrarian modernization, capital-intensification and subsidies. In terms of land, the Basque Country also suffered the effects of the increased urbanization of Spain, a process that has been occurring since the late 1980s. In such a small, dense and rugged territory, most fertile valleys were occupied by infrastructure, industry and housing, whereas commercial intensive forestry extended to the slopes. New pressures over agricultural land arose from more recent trends of counter-urbanization and 'rural commuting' (Elizburu, 2006).

4.1. Resisting neoliberalism through food sovereignty

EHNE-Bizkaia is a small-farmer's union in Biscay with a long history of political activism. It currently employs 20 people distributed in four offices. Its 800 members (around 10% of the total farmers in Biscay) pay an annual fee, receive technical services, elect its board, and determine its politics. More than half of EHNE-Bizkaia's affiliates are life-time farmers who are over 50 years-old and practice conventional farming. The others are engaged in agroecological farming and their background varies from being children of farmers, landless rural workers to non-farmers.

In 1981, EHNE-Bizkaia and similar unions in Euskal Herria formed the confederation EHNE, representing around 6.000 small farmers (Mann 2014). Each union maintained its own structures and technical staff, but strategic decisions were transferred to the confederation. In 1992, EHNE joined the family farmers' coordination organizations in Spain (Coordinadora de Organizaciones Agricultoras y Ganaderas, COAG), and Europe (Conféderación Paysanne Européenne, CPE). And, in 1993, EHNE participated in the foundational congress of Vía Campesina.

According to my interviews with the professionals of EHNE-Bizkaia, the quest for food sovereignty in Biscay emerged from the effects of agrarian modernization, increased urbanization and neoliberal policies on small farmers' livelihoods and local ecologies, and the need for alternatives to business-as-usual policies. An agrarian model—based on high technology, intensive production, credit and debilitating indebtedness—that was

promoted by public policies, started collapsing with the rise of input prices during the 1990s and the lack of control that farmers had over the prices of their goods as supply-chains became increasingly dominated by corporations. In this period, EHNE organized many strong protests, and the concerns of small farmers clashed with the policies of the Basque government that gave little importance to agriculture. Small farmers realized that demands over prices and subsidies were insufficient, and that they lacked popular support. Consequently, they examined critically their models of production, as well the broader models of development and land-use change, and developed an alternative approach to strengthen their struggles and contest neoliberalism. Significantly, this "could not be done without others in civil society, like consumers", a technician commented. This was a call for EHNE-Bizkaia to elaborate a political project capable of both addressing the structural problems of agriculture and incorporating popular classes' concerns—that of 'food sovereignty'.

The increasing age of farmers in agriculture was also a major issue as "the sector is losing people every day. Farmers are old, and they don't want their children to continue in agriculture", a technician explains. For EHNE-Bizkaia there was an urge to promote new entrants to agriculture, which implied avoiding the technology-debt dependency path of conventional models. Agroecological models are advantageous for their low dependency on investment, technology and external inputs. To work, these had to be supported by alternative supply-chains for reducing market uncertainties and attract the entry of new people. The EHNE-Bizkaia sought to take advantage of the perceived changes in the lifestyle aspirations of the youth. For example, the coordinator underlined how "ten years ago it was impossible to find a young man or woman who wanted to be in agriculture..., whereas now there are a lot, many of them coming from the cities". The economic crisis also increased the interest in agriculture, mainly of ex-industrial workers (EHNE-Bizkaia, 2012).

In short, food sovereignty emerged from the daily needs and struggles of small farmers in Biscay, who had to reinvent themselves. EHNE-Bizkaia has shown a capacity to critically learn and construct a political project from the reality of struggles and everyday life contexts. For EHNE-Bizkaia the option of food sovereignty was both practical and political, in a process akin to McMichael's (2014) understanding of repeasantization. Practically, reducing dependencies from corporate markets would offer the means through which to respond to the difficulties of (at least some) farmers, and

above all, rejuvenate agriculture and gain new potential militant energies. Politically, practical alternatives would provide the basis for envisioning in the ground a radically different agro-food system and wage a conflict with capital in political terms. EHNE-Bizkaia's alternative vision for the Basque context is based on a peasant economy constituted by "small, local and diversified farming systems based in short distribution and commercialization systems, where cooperation and self-provision predominate" (Bizilur, EHNE-Bizkaia and Etxalde 2015, 9; own translation). This 'clash of models' sustains a political project that ambitions to incorporate the concerns of popular classes and gain their support, while moving beyond the corporate interests of small farmers towards a universal praxis for the "right to decide" on "what and how to produce, distribute and consume" (ibid., 7). Following a Gramscian approach, it matters very much how this is done; that is, how this project is translated into everyday life so that it challenges hegemonic ideas and practices and mobilizes the subordinated social groups.

4.2. De-naturalizing agribusiness, popularizing alternatives

Food sovereignty implies a new politics, complementary to a politics of protest and demand for reforms. The 'clash of models' is a call for an ideological struggle against the normalization of conventional models. In order to advance this struggle and give unity and coherence to its project, EHNE-Bizkaia integrated agroecology into its ideology and program. This meant, for instance, that it stopped training farmers in conventional practices, and encouraged the shift from industrial to agroecological farming whenever possible (technology-debt dependency paths of conventional models and age issues are the main difficulties faced). Agroecology also informed the union's interaction with institutions for the change of policies and the curricula of agrarian schools.

In order to expand agroecological production and rejuvenate agriculture, thus translating an alternative vision for change into everyday practices, EHNE-Bizkaia gave priority in supporting the entry of new *baserritarras* with training in agroecology and the development of *Red Nekasarea*. The first courses in agroecology started in 2007. A specific long-duration course only for new *baserritarras* opened in 2012. Red Nekasarea is a community-supported agriculture network developed in 2007. By 2012, there were 700 households divided in 27 consumer groups (a maximum of 30

households each), served by 80 producers (EHNE-Bizkaia, no date). Each group is coordinated by one *baserritarra*, usually the supplier of seasonal vegetables, who collects the other products (milk, meat, eggs and pasta) and delivers the weekly basket to a specific agreed upon place. *Red Nekasarea* has an internal regulation that sets technical and social norms such as environmental *requirements*, working conditions, and the expected minimum income for *baserritarras*. Consumers have to sign a one year-contract at a pre-agreed price after a three-month trial. The price is determined by baserritarras according to their costs of production, and agreed with consumer groups directly.

EHNE-Bizkaia's two-pronged approach had important results. With the organization's support, from 2008 to 2012, more than 50 new agroecological *baserritarras* settled on the land. The number of people applying for its training increased from an average of 30-40 in 2010 to 150-200 in 2013. For new *baserritarras*, alternative models and access to (almost free) training played an important role in their move to agriculture. According to the interviewees, low-input production practices allowed them to start with little investment and proceed gradually. *Red Nekasarea* also supported this process by encouraging them to plan production, while guaranteeing them secure earnings (independently of the seasonal variations of production). This gradual development gave the new *baserritarras* time to adjust to new working rhythms, gain new knowledge, and decide how to develop their full-time or part-time projects. Most of the interviewees agreed that this trial period was significant because many had no agrarian background and/or had only been practicing farming as a hobby or for self-consumption. As such, EHNE-Bizkaia is actively cultivating a peasant condition which is about cutting dependencies while favoring the conscious engagement of new producers in an activity with long-term processes of learning-by-doing, and in accordance to their needs and desires.

In translating the 'clash of models' into everyday practices, EHNE-Bizkaia is contributing to normalize alternatives across society. Part of this involves an effort to overcome the social prejudices against *baserritarras* and what a life in agriculture is. Most of *baserritarras* interviewed said that their agroecological techniques instigates curiosity and have contributed to "breaking myths" on farming practices that were

generally perceived as "bad" such as "using local seeds and native breeds", as Lorea[5] put it. In some cases, these have affected the practices of others. Iker comments that his father, who farms for self-consumption, "now does things differently, although he denies it; he uses fewer chemicals and has started a seed bank". *Baserritarras* also mentioned that at first their families saw their choice as a "return to an outdated past" and a "life of poverty", but they then changed their ideas of what an agrarian life can look like. Agroecology thus works against the contours of popular culture to address the ideological processes of 'racialization' of the peasantry. This echoes "Gramsci's engagement with the Southern Question and his reading of the politics of uneven development in Italy, where racialization is sustained by the articulation of spatialized patterns of differential accumulation strategies and presents a challenge to working-class solidarities" (Short, 2013, 198). For Gramsci, superseding such prejudices was fundamental to form alliances across geographical divides. Whereas he focused on the then minority of the urban proletariat, in the highly industrialized context of Biscay it is small farmers who are at the forefront of reworking solidarities.

The lives of the new *baserritarras* I interviewed are based in multi-cropping in low-input eco-farming models and production for self-consumption and direct marketing. Like Ploeg (2010, 2013) argues in the case of new peasantries, the *baserritarra* in Biscay seeks to reduce dependencies from corporate markets and gain autonomy, thus adopting a 'peasant condition'. Farms are often less than one hectare; usually *baserritarras* live on or near the farm-holding, but short distances to the city allow some of them to commute every day. Family members usually work outside the farm and many of the productive projects are shared between two or more non-family members. In Biscay, non-paid family labor is not a specificity of a peasant-like agriculture, nor constitutes a potential advantage in relation to capitalist farms.

The interviewees—whose ages range from eighteen to forty-five—also have no adversity to technology and do not seek to reproduce past peasant lifestyles. They recover past knowledge due to its agronomic usefulness and seek to innovate by using local resources and sharing knowledge through a '*campesino-a-campesino*' methodology (see Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012). Iban, a son of *baserritarras* who

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[5] To protect the anonymity of my interviewees I use fictional names.

moved to his family's land after a period of unemployment, said that "before, the *baserritarra* worked for him/herself and tried to hide his/her 'secrets'; now we share seeds, knowledge, experiences, etc.... Higher mobility certainly helps, but minds have changed". Agroecology also has recuperated and reworked much of those secrets, contributing to "dignify the work, knowledge and local culture of *baserritarras*" (EHNE-Bizkaia no date; own translation). Ana emphasized that new *baserritarras* recognize that "much of past knowledge is very valuable and we have a lot to learn from what old *baserritarras* want to share with us". While helping to demystify much of the social prejudice against *baserritarras*, agroecology also works within the contours of popular culture in the move towards an alternative worldview; and all of this without essentializing the 'peasant'.

Generally, *baserritarras* are fulfilled with their new agrarian lifestyle. They point as advantages working outdoors, the less stressful rhythms of work, greater autonomy and control of their lives, and a better work-life balance (especially important for those with children). These formed part of their motivations to engage in agriculture; others were more economic, such as unemployment, low wages, or precarious conditions. Although many face economic difficulties, they see this activity as a viable alternative to wage-labor. As Maite, who before worked in an administrative job, explains, "with the food baskets I can make what I would earn now as a salary". Nonetheless, this is not just about low wages. Most of the interviewees argued that they would not change back to a well-remunerated and stable employment in their area of expertise if presented with the opportunity; some actually have refused such offers. The drivers of repeasantization are more complex than typical economic-based explanations.

New *baserritarras* also do not renounce many of the perceived benefits of urban lifestyles and maintain regular connections with the city. Adopting an agrarian lifestyle is not about anti-urban ideologies and essentialized views of the countryside. In Biscay, the countryside and the city are both spaces for organizing and mobilizing the subordinated social groups. Consequently, with a view to popularize food sovereignty and agroecology, EHNE-Bizkaia has extended the scope of its activities beyond its direct social base. Now it offers training aimed at the general public, and thus going beyond its membership and potential new *baserritarras*. In its daily activity, EHNE-Bizkaia combines the interests of small farmers with those of other social groups. EHNE-Bizkaia has also developed tools of communication for the general public. It

publishes a magazine, thematic brochures, and is active in various social networks to ensure that the struggles of Basque farmers are linked to other local and global struggles, and with larger questions such as ecology, feminism, and anti-imperialism. A critique of capitalism provides the link as EHNE-Bizkaia seeks to provide a basis for the remaking of solidarities between subordinated social groupings by moving consciousness from the local and particular towards the global and universal.

Importantly, this is done also by engaging in local food struggles for instance against corporate retailers or for procurement of agroecological products by the public sector. These involve working in alliance with other actors (local retailers, public servants, school boards, and the like), which subsequently informs EHNE-Bizkaia's interactions with institutions. In this way, solidarity links are built on the ground, in specific struggles.

In efforts to normalize alternatives, amplify popular support, and increase collaborations with other social groups, EHNE-Bizkaia frequently gives public talks on food sovereignty and agroecology in schools, municipalities, etc. It also collaborates regularly with NGOs, such as *Veterinarios sin fronteras* (Vets without borders) (see Desmarais et al., 2014).

4.3. Scaling-up and out, and building a counter-hegemonic movement

A new politics had organizational implications. EHNE-Bizkaia maintains its corporatist character and still organizes, represents, and defends small farmers. However, now it does all this under the political project of food sovereignty, thus moving from what Gramsci called a "corporate" to a more "'universal" plane" (1971, 181-182). By this he meant the up-scaling of solidarities beyond the members of the same professional group and social class, to include other members of the subordinate social groups. This, he argued, marks a passage to a political phase, "bringing about not only a union of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity" (ibid.).

In practice, EHNE-Bizkaia dedicated technicians to develop the aforementioned priorities—agroecology, new peasants, *Red Nekasarea*, and communication, and less to other areas. For EHNE-Bizkaia, these had to be done by people with a technical and an activist profile. The focus on food sovereignty had important costs as some affiliates left

the union. However, this decision was made by the majority of affiliates, who are conventional farmers (and continue to be so). While there was no major break of solidarity on the "purely economic field" (Gramsci, 1971, 181), small farmers have shown the capacity of "transcend [their own] corporate limits" (ibid.). As EHNE-Bizkaia's coordinator explains, the "conflict is between models of production, not the people practicing different models".

Another cost was the split of EHNE-Bizkaia and EHNE in 2010. For EHNE-Bizkaia, the work developed in Biscay had to be expanded in Euskal Herria. And the outcomes of that work had to scale-up and overcome fragmentation, namely by building alliances with other social and political forces. All of that required a new organizational praxis, leadership and alliance-building capacities combined with a move away from a corporatist to a social movement approach that is more horizontal, flexible, and activist. EHNE-Bizkaia, as the coordinator said, was clear that "the shift towards food sovereignty had to be connected with the constitution of a movement that could be a space of unity of diverse actors".

This broad social movement led by *baserritarras* in Euskal Herria was born in 2011 under the name of Etxalde. Its objective

> is to bring together a new collective subject who fights for the implementation of food sovereignty. Most of our work aims to connect initiatives that exist and promote new ones..., prioritizing the entry of new people in sustainable agricultural models, and the practice of values like solidarity, social justice, and equality between men and women (Etxalde, 2015).

EHNE-Bizkaia was pivotal in forming Etxalde and much of its activity is directed to strengthening this movement, yet both organizations are independent. The new peasants it supports are expected to join Etxalde, together with the small farmers who, practicing alternative models or not, defend food sovereignty. Politically, all of them are *baserritarras*.

Until now this article has examined how EHNE-Bizkaia advances food sovereignty through repeasantization. The question that remains is that of political agency: how do individuals of subordinated social groups become activists in order to transform themselves, others, and the world in which they live? For Gramsci, this depends on a politics rooted in everyday life. I now turn to how EHNE-Bizkaia politicizes and

mobilizes new peasants while shedding light on some of the challenges the organization faces in doing so[6].

5. Tricky balances: politics and the art of making a living

For the advancement of food sovereignty, EHNE-Bizkaia explicitly links the development of practical alternatives with the aim of mobilizing new peasants. A multidimensional understanding of agroecology enables this approach. By agroecology EHNE-Bizkaia understands "a model that looks at the [farm] in a holistic way... [in which] the productive, the socio-economic and the socio-political dimensions are equally important. This way, attention goes beyond monetary and commodity relations to include the social and environmental effects [the farm] produces" (no date; my own translation). At the productive level, the "ecological working of nature is the reference for practice" and the agro-ecosystem is the unit for designing sustainable farming systems (ibid.). At the socio-economic level, agroecology builds on the "endogenous development" of rural territories and "new forms of articulation between production and consumption, such as short-supply chains...[that] establish relations based on equity and social justice beyond the neoliberal criteria of prices and quantity" (ibid.). At the socio-political level, agroecology builds on the transformative potential of practical "alternatives to challenge the current policy framework... by developing forms of collective social action, acquiring the nature of social movements" (ibid). However, the "political dimension [of] food sovereignty can only be developed by linking productive experiences with political projects whose ambition is to correct the inequalities produced historically" (ibid). For EHNE-Bizkaia, peasants are called to be active subjects in constructing food sovereignty. This requires an effort for their politicization and mobilization.

EHNE-Bizkaia attempts to politicize new *baserritarras* from the start. This is why training has an explicit ideological component. In explaining how and why capital

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[6] A major shortcoming of this article regards the lack of engagement with of questions of the state, and the Basque conflict in particular. Both are important for a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. Nonetheless, seriously dealing with them would remove attention from the role of repeasantization in advancing food sovereignty, which is the goal of this paper.

structures agriculture and what food sovereignty is, EHNE-Bizkaia seeks to promote critical thought and influence the design of productive projects (that work with and not against nature and characterized by non-competitive economic relationships). An ideological discourse also helps to demotivate those who approach agroecology only as a niche market or just an employment alternative. In developing their projects, new *baserritarras* are made aware of the transformational intent of food sovereignty and the necessity to scale-up and out through social mobilization. Ideology aims at shaping ideas and practices around political objectives.

Similar to Gramsci's understanding of ideology as a tool of empowerment from below, EHNE-Bizkaia encourages peasants to use their capacity for critical thought. For instance, it is up to *baserritarras* to politicize the consumers in *Red Nekasarea*, and often, *baserritarras* instead of EHNE-Bizkaia professionals, give public talks on food sovereignty and agroecology. EHNE-Bizkaia also attempts to foster self-organization by organizing collective spaces for *baserritarras* to discuss problems, elaborate analysis and construct proposals. Once a year it organizes large political-activist events. More regularly, it promotes meetings of *baserritarras* in *Red Nekasarea*. And, Etxalde is the space par excellence for the self-organization of *baserritarras*. In Gramsci's view, self-organization is fundamental for generating processes of debate, education, and alliance-building. The outcomes of attempts to politicize and mobilize new *baserritarras* are analyzed next.

5.1. The political views of new baserritarras

The *baserritarras* interviewed consider that agriculture has the social function of feeding the population and they generally argue that "food cannot be left in the hands of capital", as Iban tellingly puts it. "More than an alternative", agroecology and alternative economies are a "logical choice", Akox says. For him and many others, these models respect producers' work, ensure the right to food, reconnect production with the natural cycles, protect land, and produce healthy food. *Baserritarras* internalize the 'clash of models' in their understandings of agriculture.

New *baserritarras* also express social justice concerns and refuse to deliver high-quality food for the well-off. Agroecology may serve as a form of differentiating their products,

but not of adding value. Irati, who had been a farm worker before, explains that "often my products are cheaper than the food of conventional models that are sold in big retailers". Although their goods are affordable, they do sell for a small sector of the population that has the possibilities (time, access to information, and the like) to participate in alternative networks such as *Red Nekasarea*.

Food sovereignty is understood as building autonomy and the right to decide. Whereas some emphasize self-sufficiency (often connected with self-management ideals), in general, interviewees highlighted the importance of ensuring the right to food for all. Notwithstanding, it is not always clear if they consider their own lifestyle as the pathway for others to follow, i.e. framing food sovereignty in terms of liberal notions of choice. Most of the *baserritarras* interviewed are not politically active or organized. Only three of the 26 are affiliated with EHNE-Bizkaia, although all of them consider its work very important. Many show willingness to affiliate, more as a way to support further training in agroecology so that others can also benefit, and less so to be organized into a collective. A few are reluctant to affiliate since they do not like trade unions or hierarchical organizations in general, and prefer assembly-type organizing. Some participate in local agro-assemblies (formed by *baserritarras*), that are spaces geared to re-enforce mutual-aid and advance food sovereignty locally. For instance, these can push municipal councils to modify territorial plans, facilitate access to land, or promote *farmers' markets*. Nonetheless, these assemblies seem more oriented towards problem solving and practical issues, and less so to politics.

In some cases, this participation seems to reflect transformative views based on localism. For Ixone, for instance, the "way of changing things is by going little by little... at a local level". Although others point that incremental changes are not enough, and highlight the need to achieve more structural changes to support local processes, it is not clear just how this can be done. In Akox's words, "how to turn local experiences into a real alternative, this is the big question... The consumer groups help but they are not the solution..., we need more tools. Which ones? I don't know. Public policies so far have gone fully in the opposite direction". Generally, *baserritarras* see themselves mainly as agroecological producers who contribute to building food sovereignty, mostly by giving visibility to alternatives. Others delegate the more political work to EHNE-Bizkaia, often arguing they lack time due to work or family duties. None of them mentioned Etxalde while many did not know of this new movement. The interviews

demonstrated that many new *baserritarras* have difficulties in scaling-up from the local towards a global perspective. This raises questions about the limitations of a politics based on localization and everyday practices.

New *baserritarras* have incorporated food sovereignty proposals in their views and productive projects. However, during the fieldwork, neither EHNE-Bizkaia nor Etxalde have been successful in organizing and mobilizing them. The translation of food sovereignty ideas into everyday practices so that they are accepted and internalized is insufficient for mobilizing new peasants. Concerning Gramsci's question of political agency: raising critical thought and an emancipatory consciousness, and turning individuals into activists are co-determining, but non-linear processes. It is possible that holding the next International Conference of Vía Campesina in Euskal Herria may catalyze dynamic mobilization and "energize Etxalde", as EHNE-Bizkaia's coordinator comments. Nonetheless, understanding how the 'messy practices of making a living' of peasants affect social mobilization is necessary. For Gramsci, the capacity of individuals to act is not separated from the material conditions in which they live.

5.2. A fulfilling life, but hard...

New *baserritarras* are so pressured from the political-economic context that they find it difficult to engage more actively in politics due to time constraints and concerns over economic viability. The situation worsens when many of them face a number of biophysical and social obstacles that might help explain why they find it hard to go beyond their everyday life context and get active in the political realm.

A main challenge new *baserritarras* face is gaining access to land. Interviewees said that this often involved a long and hard process and was the most problematic part of starting agriculture. Most of them had no family land with renting being the main option. Difficulties had to do not only with poor soils, lack of supply of land, and excessively high prices, but also land-owners' aversion to sell, rent or transfer land-use rights. For Kepa, who cultivates a plot of rented land with his two brothers, "access to land was the hardest part. We spent two and a half years searching. We saw a lot, but either it was too expensive, unusable, or both". When people have access to land, contracts or informal agreements are frequently unappealing because they are often

short-time or unstable. Tetxa, who cultivates a plot of land on loan, explains that "we were lucky that a friend of my mother let us cultivate this abandoned plot.... But with one condition: if it is classified for urban uses, we have to leave it so she can sell it at good price". In general, new *baserritarras*, either with family land or not, have access to poor soil or small plots of land that make it difficult for future expansion.

The mediation of access to land through market means that new *baserritarras* lack the control of a fundamental productive resource. The atomization of land in the hands of numerous small land-owners makes it difficult to implement collective projects. In translating food sovereignty into everyday practices, EHNE-Bizkaia and new peasants face conditions not entirely of their own choosing. These limit the extent under which productive projects can be developed distinct from more conventional economic forms and practices. An alternative project must deal with these tensions, otherwise, it risks falling into abstraction or idealism, which are at odds of Gramsci's understanding of politics as the co-determination of theory and praxis.

Interviewees attribute difficulties in accessing land to the territorial policies of the Basque government that favor urbanization of agricultural land. In their view, land has become a commodity and a source of differential rents. In fact, the Basque Country has higher average prices per hectare than most other Spanish regions (Magrama, 2014). Land-owners' reluctance to make land available is explained by socio-cultural factors, such as attachment to property rights. Lokiz, who became a peasant after years working in precarious conditions, puts it like this: "there's a lot of land not being used... but the owners don't want others to use it.... They fear that if you use it, you'll have rights over the land".

Another main challenge *baserritarras* face is economic viability while trying to maintain 'social prices'. By reducing dependencies from upstream markets and intermediaries, but also not accounting for all of *baserritarras'* labor, food baskets at *Red Nekasarea* are sold at affordable prices. However, this is a difficult balance. Kepa spoke for many when he said that "the only thing that drives me mad is the economic part, I'm delighted with the rest of it". For people with children, having the partner working outside is crucial. Irati explains, "Agriculture is full of uncertainty. For two single people, it's ok. For two people with a loan and two children, a stable income please".

Although many now have lower costs of living since an agrarian life is "more humble" in Iraia's words, new *baserritarras* have daily expenses that are beyond their control thus reducing their autonomy. Many maintain social prices through a process of cost-shifting that includes accommodating the burden of inflation, or declining wages, or increases in costs of production. Costs of production usually are reduced by more self-provision, which implies adding working hours in an already labor-intensive model. More working hours always implies less time for leisure, and active involvement in political activity. Efforts to cut dependencies from conventional markets and generate an alternative logic of production and reproduction thus face constraints from the broader context. The generalized commodification of social relations in the global North may bring challenges to adaptation-as-resistance approaches.

A direct outcome of *baserritarras'* financial difficulties is the non-formalization of their social rights in what remains of the Spanish welfare state, especially in social security schemes. Only a few made this choice voluntarily, out of a desire to live outside the system. This situation conveys a gap in rights that is not compatible with the food sovereignty discourse on human rights. It also signals the incapacity, or unwillingness of the Spanish government to protect the new producers.

For Gramsci, the state is not a separate sphere from society and market forces. As Shattuck et al. (2015, 425-426) argue, "Sovereignty, like hegemony, is built and contested within state institutions, within market conditions, within the institutions of civil society, popular culture, and the language with which people understand their daily lives.... Efforts to build food sovereignty must and often do engage in all these spaces..., not without conflict or contradictions". This is precisely what EHNE-Bizkaia attempts to do.

Access to land is a major focus of EHNE-Bizkaia's struggles. Over the years it has demanded action from the Basque government to protect, plan and redistribute land. With repeasantization, these struggles gained visibility as demands for access to land increased. Now EHNE-Bizkaia combines its struggles for policy change at the regional level with a more systematic work at the local scale. In their view, the local is where the "alternative model proposed by food sovereignty... is put into practice" (Bizilur, EHNE-Bizkaia and Extalde, 2015, 14; own translation). However, this is not to be confused with "localism or reductionism... [as] without accounting for the structural factors we

cannot understand the reality in which we live. Our proposals depart from the analyses of the interdependency between the hegemonic model, which produces multiple inequalities, and the alternatives" (ibid.). EHNE-Bizkaia pushes municipal governments to study the potential of agroecological production and facilitate access to land. It attempts to work closer to where *baserritarras* make a living, while the outcomes of these local processes are expected to feed struggles elsewhere and vice-versa as in a process of scaling out.

EHNE-Bizkaia's approach is akin to a Gramscian 'relational view of sovereignty' (Shattuck et al., 2015), in which political action must engage "in and across specific places, spaces, and scales, each with their distinctive determinations and strategic selectivities" (Jessop, 2005, cited in Karriem, 2013, 152). Notwithstanding, most of the interviewees had little connection with this work at the time of the interviews. And, on the issue of economic viability and peasants' long workday, the approach of EHNE-Bizkaia is less clear. It seems to focus more on demands for greater control of the agro-food system by the state and appeals for *baserritarras* to maintain prices low through self-provision, and less so on developing pathways for alleviating their work-load. More reflection, both in academic and activist circles, is needed on the relation between alternative models, working-times, and economic viability within alternative economies.

6. Conclusion

In analyzing repeasantization in Biscay, this article sheds light on how the interplay of politics and the production of new agroecologies contributes to advancing the transformative ambitions of food sovereignty. Using a case study from the global North and drawing on a Gramscian political ecology approach, I explore the role of repeasantization in building counter-hegemonic contestations and emphasize the possibilities and challenges of alternative practices in activating subjects towards collective mobilization. In doing so, I demonstrate how repeasantization contributes to advance ideological struggles, build alliances, and to politicize and mobilize the subaltern.

I argue that, in the Basque context, whereas repeasantization contributes to move from corporatist to counter-hegemonic struggles, the political-economic and biophysical

contexts structure agroecological production in ways that limit the extent to which new peasants can become active subjects. In a process akin to Gramsci's understanding of politics, EHNE-Bizkaia has developed the capacity to critically: elaborate a program of food sovereignty from the reality of small farmers' struggles; translate this program into everyday life by developing alternative forms of production and reproduction so that it can be internalized by the subordinated social groups; and move the struggle to a political phase. EHNE-Bizkaia combines theory and praxis for normalizing food sovereignty ideas and practices, with a view in creating a popular will for its implementation. Finally, EHNE-Bizkaia tries to avoid fragmentation into the particular and local by promoting a consciousness among small farmers and new *baserritarras* of transformation beyond corporatist interests and their self-organization into a social movement of 'national' scope—Etxalde. The latter is understood as a space, led by *baserritarras*, where dispersed local struggles and various social groupings can converge around a 'unitary and coherent' conception of the world (as Gramsci would put it). Etxalde is envisioned as a potential hegemonic social force struggling to transform the agro-food system on the basis of new society-nature relations.

Despite the efforts of EHNE-Bizkaia, the 'messy practices of making a living' (Loftus, 2013, 179) of *baserritarras* make it hard to extract themselves from the local and the particular and to get more involved in political activity of a more universal nature. Issues over access to land, economic viability and working-times are the most pressing issues. In the global North, where commoditization of life is so prevalent, cutting dependencies from corporate markets may be difficult and remain a cost-shifting process. This calls for recognizing the potential difficulties faced by new peasantries, instead of just highlighting their positive capacity of resistance. It also suggests the need of finding practical ways to ease the everyday life of new peasants, with an eye to releasing time for politics; alternative models should be based on the needs of the subaltern.

This research has paid special attention to questions of political agency, which are understudied in the literature on repeasantization and food sovereignty. I suggest a Gramscian political ecology approach offers a powerful lens through which to examine the relationship between everyday practices, ideological struggles, alliance-building, and social mobilization, with attention to particular historical-geographical contexts and institutional settings.

Scholars using this approach have emphasized the possibilities for the emergence of transformative subjectivities from interactions with nature. Less attention has been paid to how the material conditions in which those interactions occur open or close possibilities. This article highlights some of the challenges the production of new (agro)ecologies may bring to mobilize subjects. And suggests that precarious lives add challenges for politicizing and mobilizing subjects. A Gramscian political ecology approach cannot miss the double face of the 'messy practices of making a living'.

CHAPTER 3

The Political Ecology of Austerity: An Analysis of Socio-Environmental Conflict under Crisis in Greece[7]

This paper focuses on two largely understudied and interrelated aspects of the post-2008 economic crisis: how the politics of austerity influences the dynamics of environmental conflict, and how the environment is mobilized in subaltern' struggles against the normalization of austerity as the hegemonic response to crisis. We ground our analysis on two grassroots conflicts in Greece: the 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distribution networks (across Greece) and the movement against gold mining in Halkidiki (northern Greece). Using a Gramscian political ecology framework, our analysis shows that by reciprocally combining anti-austerity politics and alternative ways of understanding and using 'nature', both projects challenge the reproduction of uneven society-environment relations exacerbated by the neoliberal austerity agenda.

1. Introduction

Defined by Harvey (2011, 85-86) as a class politics for re-engineering society and privately appropriating the commons, austerity has become the main response from capital and state institutions to the post-2008 crisis of late neoliberalism. Despite a wealth of analysis suggesting that austerity measures accentuate rather than repair socio-economic problems under conditions of crisis (e.g. Krugman, 2009), policies of budgetary discipline "to reduce workers' salaries, rights and social benefits" (Douzinas, 2013, 28) prevail. A growing body of academic literature has focused on examining the disastrous and uneven socio-economic impacts of austerity (e.g. Reeves et al. 2015;

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Hill, 2013; Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; Peck et al., 2013).

The environmental dimension of austerity has received less attention. Amongst the notable exceptions is the work of Hadjimichalis (2014), which examines how austerity and a discourse of economic recovery facilitates land dispossession, whilst Lekakis and Kousis (2013) and Apostolopoulou and Adams (2015) show how these factors increase environmental degradation. Other scholars have emphasized how discourses of 'crisis' and 'austerity' have been combined with ideas like green growth and self-provision to enhance social control (Ginn, 2012) or intensify accumulation strategies (Goodman and Salleh, 2013; Safransky, 2014; Caprotti, 2014). Still, this newly emerging literature has thus far paid little attention to how the tensions and contradictions arising from austerity influence the dynamics of environmental conflict and how they may give rise to new forms and practices of social mobilization and resistance. This paper does just that. Following Armiero's (2008, 61) suggestion that focusing on "conflict" allows to shed light on alternative "ways of understanding and using nature", in this paper we focus empirically on two grassroots conflicts that arose under crisis: the 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distribution networks (across Greece), and the movement against gold mining in Halkidiki (northern Greece).

The emergence of new forms of social mobilization and resistance has received significant academic attention, with scholars highlighting the novel aspects of anti-austerity protests including the shift of focus to national sovereignty, distrust in the institutions of representative democracy, and an emphasis on participatory and deliberative visions of democracy (Porta and Mattoni, 2014). Scholars also argue that the Occupy movement and new solidarity networks have led to the creation of new subjectivities and communities (Douzinas, 2013), and to the re-making of social relationships (Stavrides, 2014), or emphasize the power of popular spontaneity, informality and creativity to undermine neoliberal hegemony (Leontidou, 2014). Other scholars draw attention to the plurality of contestations, noting that not all are progressive or emancipatory. Examining the occupation of the Syntagma square in Athens, Kaika and Karaliotas (2014) show the existence of two distinct Indignant Squares: one often divulging nationalistic or xenophobic discourses, the other centered on an inclusive politics of solidarity. Featherstone (2015, 27) also cautions "against ways of opposing the austerity politics in ways that intensify divisions and exclusionary nationed imaginaries/practices". Analyzing emergent 'urban solidarity spaces' in

Athens, Arampatzi (2016) shows that 'solidarity from below' is a counter-austerity narrative that aims to empower the disempowered in face of growing xenophobic, charity and philanthropy ideas and practices; and that the development of the 'social-solidarity economy' expresses an alternative paradigm to austerity, not without processes of negotiating differences among activists. This rich debate on new social movements and resistance, however, has paid less attention to the relation between austerity and environmental conflict and to the ways in which the environment is mobilized in subaltern' struggles against austerity.

In this article we address these questions by looking at the aforementioned grassroots conflicts. These were chosen because they complement each other: the 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distribution networks (henceforth 'X-M') emerged as a response to the general social hardship of austerity measures and became a way of localizing resistance to austerity after the downturn of national mass-protests. The Halkidiki movement (henceforth 'SOS Halkidiki') started out as a local environmental conflict (against the expansion of gold mining at the area) and became engaged in broader resistance to austerity policies. Although Greece is not the only country to be affected by the economic crisis, it has nevertheless undergone one of the lengthiest and most intense programs of austerity in Europe after 2010. The framing of crisis as "a national and moral problem" (Mylonas, 2014, 305) that can be traced back to an "overgenerous welfare state" and to its "laziest people" (Pentaraki, 2013, 701), has contributed to boosting authoritarian, nationalistic and xenophobic ideas and practices. A wide range of resistance movements to austerity were formed which do not simply contest austerity measures per se but also address the broader ideological and political aspects of austerity. As Bramall (2013) argues, austerity is a site of discursive struggle between different visions of the future playing out in the terrain of popular culture and people's everyday life. It is precisely "in the problematic articulation of the moral and the economic [that] the struggle for consent is being fought out" (Clarke and Newman, 2012, 15) by grassroots movements. Our two case studies are illustrative of these dynamics.

To conduct this analysis, we follow a Gramscian political ecology approach. With a special focus on Gramsci's notion 'philosophy of praxis', this approach provides pathways for understanding how austerity shapes the dynamics of environmental conflict and social mobilization more generally. More specifically, it can help to obtain

insights into how the subaltern fight against the normalization of austerity and attempt to forge an alternative hegemony.

2. A Gramscian Political Ecology Approach

Recently, a growing number of scholars have utilized Gramsci's work in order to develop a more systematic understanding of how the 'environment' is entangled in the exercise and consolidation of ruling class hegemony (Ekers, 2009; Perkins, 2011), and also of how it informs subaltern mobilizations (Karriem, 2013). In this paper we focus on the latter and engage with Loftus's (2013, 179) argument that "nature must be situated within the overall philosophy of praxis".

Gramsci's concept of a 'philosophy of praxis' gives expression (and also guidance) to subaltern struggles. He highlights the importance of developing autonomous forms of political practice and elaborating "a superior conception of life" (cited in Thomas 2009, 436) in the move from a position of subalternity towards one of leadership, or hegemony. This concept is grounded on his broader political theory on the nature of power in capitalist societies. For him, the ruling class governs through a combination of (economic and/or physical) coercion and (active and/or passive) consent. The hegemony of elites, i.e., their ability to provide intellectual-moral leadership over other social groups is predicated upon this combination. Consent is produced when the values, norms and institutions of the elites around which everyday life is organized are accepted and internalized as natural, i.e., constitute part of the common sense for a given society. As Liguori (2009) puts it, common sense is a sort of people's philosophy shaped by elites' hegemonic ideas and practices. Therefore, Gramsci argues, any form of political action that targets (state) power cannot succeed unless it involves a long-term process of intellectual-moral reform of the subaltern classes.

Gramsci establishes the individual "as the elementary 'cell' of hegemonic struggle" (Thomas, 2009, 375). For him, each individual is composed by plural, at times contradictory, world-views present in society. As Ives and Green (2009, 3) argue, the fragmentation of common sense "is a political detriment, impending effective political organization". What is needed, then, "is a deep engagement with the fragments that make up subaltern historical, social, economic and political conditions" (ibid.).

Therefore, a prime role of political intervention is to empower individuals—understood as ensembles of social relations (Thomas, 2009)—to "work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1971, 323). This transformation of subjectivities by a political practice "rooted in the messy practices of making a life in the world" (Loftus, 2013, 179), "involves elaborating the good sense in popular culture while denaturalizing unexamined elements of the same culture" (Kipfer and Hart, 2013, 330).

For Gramsci, however, it is not enough to critically know; "one must also be able to *do* in order to know more adequately" (Thomas, 2009, 123; emphasis added). Put differently, it is through the direct involvement in political action of transforming others and the social relations in which one is embedded that individuals transform themselves. In Gramsci's words, "one can say that [the person] is essentially 'political' since it is through the activity of transforming and consciously directing other [people] that [the person] realizes his[her] humanity, his[her] 'human nature'" (1971, 360). The unity between the capacity to know and the capacity to act requires coherence. That is, it involves a praxis that adopts "a systematic (coherent and logical) conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1971, 136), which recognizes "its own foundation in common sense" (Thomas, 2009, 374) and "comprehends its own conditions of possibility" (ibid., 382). Both knowledge and practice are thus co-determining and co-evolving.

The concept of philosophy of praxis is particularly pertinent when it comes to understanding and changing society-environment relations. Gramsci notes that individuals and social (subordinated) groups "enter into relations with the natural world... actively, by means of work and technique. Further: these relations are not mechanical. They are active and conscious. They correspond to the greater or lesser degree of understanding that each [individual] has of them. So one could say that each one of us changes [one]self, modifies [one]self to the extent that [the person] changes and modifies the complex [society-environment] relations of which [the person] is the hub" (1971, 352).

In other words, individuals shape, and are shaped by their relations with the environment through social labor and technology. As hegemonic ideas and practices are internalized in day-to-day interactions with the environment, so the ability to "develop oneself... [involves] modifying external relations both with nature and, in varying

degrees, with [others]" (ibid., 360). Thereby, to politicize and mobilize the subaltern within a unitary and coherent conception of the world also involves a transformation of the relationship between human beings and the environment.

A philosophy of praxis is also about generating practices of solidarity-making among subaltern in order to form a 'hegemonic bloc'. According to Featherstone (2013), Gramsci has a relational understanding of solidarity in which alliances are not instrumental additions but involve the mutual transformation of the groups that ally with each other. In this process, Gramsci argues, the subaltern must become conscious of their capacity for self-organization and self-government. This implies an active attempt to forge 'political hegemony' before even seizing state power. Without such an attempt to transform leadership in civil society into political hegemony, civil hegemony itself can only inevitably "be disaggregated and subordinated to the existing... political hegemony of the ruling class" (Thomas, 2009, 194). A philosophy of praxis thus seeks to develop alternative ideas and practices for re-structuring relations of social and political power, and this necessarily includes society-environment relations.

From a Gramscian political ecology perspective, when examining grassroots movements and resistances, the focus of analysis should fall on the ways in which alternative ideas and practices related to the environment are mobilized on the terrain of popular culture and everyday life for politicizing and mobilizing the subaltern. In the two case studies we detail in the following sections, such alternative ideas and practices become mobilized are discusses as stimuli for a broader struggle against the normalization of austerity and for forging an alternative hegemony challenging elite power. In a process akin to a philosophy of praxis, this involves a political practice rooted in the messy practices of making a living for transforming subjectivities and engaging the subaltern in political activity (a self-reinforcement process); generate solidarity-making among subaltern; and potentiate self-organization and learning processes of self-government.

3. Case studies and Methodology

The first case study focuses on the X-M, which consist in local markets organized by solidarity groups where farmers can sell their products directly to consumers at a pre-agreed price which is 20% to 50% lower than the standard market price. These initiatives began in February 2012 in the town of Katerini, central Greece, by distributing potatoes (hence the X-M is also known as the potato movement). Distributions rapidly spread across the country, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki where the effects of austerity are more severe. The products diversified to include flour, vegetables, olive oil, and others. In 2014 there were at least 45 solidarity groups across Greece, 26 of which operated in Athens; each group comprised an average of 19 core activists and 29 volunteers who helped with food distribution (S4A 2015). Groups self-organize through open assemblies and consensus procedures. They informally coordinate at the regional level, with five national events organized between 2012 and 2015, three in Katerini and two in Athens. More than 5,000 tons of food has been distributed between 2012 and 2014 (S4A 2015).

The second case study focuses on the SOS Halkidiki. This movement was born out of an environmental conflict that had been simmering for years, but gained momentum and national scope, culminating in international recognition and attention, when, in the aftermath of the crisis, the government decided to lease the rights for gold extraction in the area to a Canadian mining company, Eldorado Gold. The project has been presented by national and European state authorities as the type of solution Greece needs to overcome its debt crisis. It involves land dispossession and negative impacts on local livelihoods and ecologies. The movement that resists this project formed in March 2011, with mass mobilizations and local assemblies across 16 villages in the municipality of Aristotle (18,294 inhabitants, according to the 2011 Census). Over the last years it has challenged the environmental permit given to the project at the Council of State (Greece's highest administrative court), organized protests, scientific and cultural events, solidarity actions with other movements, and succeeded in growing into a national movement with global networking, despite facing the opposition of local miners and state violence.

This paper draws upon qualitative research. A preliminary research period in Athens in February 2014 included conversations between the first author, Rita Calvário, and key

informants: academics, food cooperatives, farmers and activists from two X-M groups, and the coordinator for food issues of Solidarity for All (a structure set up by the political party SYRIZA). Between April and June 2014, Calvário conducted 23 in-depth interviews with core activists from the X-M groups in Athens (12), Thessaloniki (7) and Central Greece (4). The questions asked concerned motivations, organizational issues, and future perspectives. She also attended a national meeting in Katerini (February 2014), participated in local assemblies in Athens (2), and observed distributions in Central Greece (3), Thessaloniki (1), and Athens (4). Between October 2014 and March 2015, the second author, Giorgos Velgrakis, conducted 27 in-depth interviews with local activists of SOS Halkidiki (20), miners (5), and councilors of Aristotle municipality, where the mining is taking place (2). Interviews aimed at identifying the rationale behind the local conflict and its relation with austerity politics.

4. A Political Ecology of Contesting the Class Politics of Austerity

In this section we look at the X-M and the SOS Halkidiki to examine how the politics of austerity in Greece has shaped conflicts over 'food' and 'land uses' and how grassroots resistance has mobilized alternative ideas and practices to contest austerity as the hegemonic response to crisis. In the X-M case, building 'solidarity from below' (Arampatzi, 2016) is a counter-austerity narrative and an alternative pathway out of the crisis. In the SOS Halkidiki case, resistance involves alliance-building with other movements and advancing alternatives to austerity-driven patterns of development. By bringing a Gramscian political ecology approach to the analysis we shed light on the ways in which alternative understandings and uses of 'nature' are set in motion so as to politicize and mobilize subaltern groups, and generate solidarity-making, new forms of self-organization and learning processes of self-government.

4.1. X-M: Politicizing Austerity through 'Food'

Issues of food poverty, combined with questions of social justice and uneven development hit home for many, as austerity forced "thousands of lower and middle-income households to substitute nutritious food for fewer and cheaper products, living on diets of inadequate nutritional value and quality" (Skordili, 2013, 130).

This radically changed both conceptualization and practice of 'alternative food networks' in Greece. Prior to the crisis, alternative food networks catered mainly for the "cultural preferences of the few" (Morgan, 2013, 4). The X-M and other grassroots food distribution networks emerged to tackle the severe effects of austerity on the social reproduction needs of the many. But unlike alternatives such as solidarity food banks and social groceries, the X-M goes beyond distribution of food as such, to address some of the structural factors behind food poverty. Panagiota, a young X-M activist in Kalamaria, explains that the X-M emerged because "it was very obvious that something was very wrong. With the crisis incomes decreased but food prices did not go down, whilst farmers themselves came under increasing economic pressure" (Interview, Thessaloniki, May 16, 2014). As Skordili (2013, 136) notes, "A concurrent issue in the national press is the widening gap between the price paid to farmers and the final price of goods on supermarket shelves; the latter has remained relatively high despite the recession". The inflation of food prices suggested unjustified middlemen profiteering. Bypassing intermediaries was considered necessary to lower the prices but also to support domestic production and thus secure food provision. Konstantinos, a founder of an organic food cooperative, comments that "under crisis alternative food networks shifted focus from fair trade to local production: Why support farmers of the global South and not local farmers?" (Interview, Athens, February 15, 2014). For Giorgos, a long-time left-wing activist engaged in the group of Petropoulis, an important achievement of the X-M is that "land is now being cultivated again" and "the prices [went] down in supermarkets too" (Interview, Athens, April 12, 2014). For many in the X-M, support for domestic production and control of the agro-food system are central to toppling the neoliberal austerity agenda. As one activist argued at an X-M national meeting, a "country that does not produce enough food cannot uprise from external debt-creditors" (Katerini, 16 February 2014).

In addressing broader questions of production and control, the X-M is a practical manifestation of food sovereignty: the right of farmers, consumers, and communities to control and decide on "what food is produced, where, how, by whom and at what scale"' (Desmarais and Wittman, 2014, 1156). As this is not about advancing liberal notions of choice, the X-M are not typical *farmers' markets*, which simply provide alternative market circuits to conventional supply-chains. In each X-M group, prices are not set individually by farmers and/or consumers, but are collectively decided in horizontal

assemblies, according to social criteria: to ensure a fair price to farmers so "that they can then continue to produce", Panagiota explains, and to guarantee affordable prices to lower and middle-income strata of the population. The point is to conciliate the interests of farmers and consumers against the interests of traders. Most groups also only work with small farmers and have set strict product quality standards (taste, durability, absence of chemical residues). The goal is to support small-scale local farming and promote sustainable, health-oriented agriculture. Many groups show environmental concerns and adopt measures to reject farmers who abuse rural workers. However, these measures are difficult to implement. The main objective of the X-M is to "encourage small farmers to self-organize to sell without the intervention of traders", explains Thanos, an unemployed man from the group in Tumba (Interview, Thessaloniki, May 18, 2014). This is done by a 'learning-by-doing' process, in which farmers must become aware of the advantages of mutual cooperation (rather than competition). In calling farmers to sell at affordable prices and give 2-5% of their goods away for free to impoverished families, the X-M also seek to 'educate' farmers to move beyond narrow profit-making interests and engage in solidarity-making relationships with consumers and the population in general.

In short, the X-M deploys into everyday life an alternative conception of the agro-food system directed away from narrow economic-corporatist interests. This is an alternative based on re-localization, small-scale farming, short-supply chains, popular control and solidarity that builds upon the daily needs and struggles of the subaltern. As Sotiris (2014) argues, these types of networks "are not only means to deal with a problem. They are also learning processes in order to see how things can be organized in a different way". Thereby, for activists in the X-M, food distribution is not only a response to the social hardship of austerity measures. Rather, they are inserted within a philosophy of praxis of forging a hegemonic conception of the world. Katerina, an X-M activist in the low income neighborhood of Kipseli, spoke for many when she said:

> We don't want to deal only with the crisis. We also want to promote different ways of selling, working, etc. We want to provide quality food at fair prices, but also to participate in the reorganization of production through the solidarity economy (Interview, Athens, April 13, 2014).

This effort depends greatly on the active involvement and self-organization of farmers and consumers. As Kostas, active in the group of Piraeus, explains: "[in the X-M] we do

not want to act like or become middlemen" (Interview, Athens, April 10, 2014).

The perspective of some groups to constitute "a network of linked co-operatives" (Rakopoulos, 2014, 106) emerges from this strategic objective of restructuring the agro-food system and potentiating self-organization. What also becomes evident, however, are some difficulties in organizing the X-M, such as repression by the authorities, activist fatigue, and co-optation by capital and pro-austerity municipalities. Activists also state very clearly that distribution must go beyond safety-nets and voluntary work. Discussions around alternatives within the local groups and national meetings run in parallel with the development of "proposals that come from the political life of the movement to push the government", Giorgos comments.

Another way of resisting austerity is by undermining a "charity rhetoric [that] has been employed to legitimize the rationality of austerity and transfer the financial burdens of public cuts to local or non-state institutions...; and countering exclusionary, racist and xenophobic practices... [of] blaming 'the other'" (Arampatzi, 2016, 7). This is done by promoting solidarity as "a lived shared experience forged in common among [equal] participants" (ibid.). The organization of X-M through open, horizontal assemblies supports this process.

In order to fully understand the dynamics of X-M vis-à-vis austerity is necessary to consider the broader context of resistance and social mobilization. The neoliberal offensive that accompanied the implementation of austerity in Greece was widely contested from 2009 to 2012. Numerous demonstrations, strikes, and occupation of city squares in 2011 attest to the development of social struggle whose "immediate political effect was the rapid loss of moral and political credibility for the bipolar Greek political system" (Hadjimichalis, 2013, 128). The downturn of this wave of mass protests was followed by the rise of a number of "grassroots social solidarity movements" (S4A 2015). Hadjimichalis (2013, 128) notes that "most major [protest] events found their continuation in these initiatives, deepening and extending the question of how to link 'our problems' to the quest for broader political change". Nikos, a university professor engaged in the X-M group of Thermi, explains that:

> the [anti-austerity] movement is declining all over Greece. There is know-how of how to join people in social movements and protests, but there is fatigue [as well]. The only movements succeeding are the initiatives that not

only react [to austerity] but also do something positive. Through the solidarity actions we put issues on the political agenda and force the state to react. We also give a positive feeling to people, call on them to become engage (Interview, Thessaloniki, May 15, 2014).

In mobilizing alternative ideas and practices around 'food', activists in the X-M convey the idea that austerity and its 'politics of fear' are not inevitable. The activists aim to construct a 'politics of hope' that gives the material and subjective conditions for the subordinated social groups to "claim [their] rights… and think on what kind of society and democracy they want to claim", as Thanos argues. A main objective of the X-M is to politicize subjects and get them involved in collective action, while supporting the critical elaboration of a 'superior conception of life', as Gramsci would put it. This effort of politicization is made through an anti-austerity discourse that is more explicit in some groups than others. Most of the groups distribute leaflets and put banners with anti-austerity messages, organize debates on issues such as privatization and the farright, and try to create convivial spaces in which to contest the 'politics of fear'. Alekos, a middle-aged unemployed man from the X-M group in Vironas, says that:

We have posters denouncing the politics of crisis and austerity and urging people to take a stand…. We give out leaflets during food distributions, but also outside them. We want to inform people and get them involved. (Interview, Athens, April 15, 2014).

For the X-M, thus, tackling social reproduction needs is considered a strategic step towards activating subjects and advancing counter-austerity ideas and practices. Over time they have become much more than food distribution networks, and have come to embody a philosophy of praxis for transforming subjectivities and mobilizing the subaltern. Through a politics rooted in the messy practices of making a living, the X-M express an autonomous form of political practice that seeks to denaturalize austerity, charity and exclusionary ideas and practices, to normalize relationships of solidarity in all social realms and to generate practices of solidarity-making, potentiate new forms of self-organization and learning processes of self-government.

Although there are different political orientations within and between the groups, the activists interviewed were aware that their activity is over-determined by the state and that therefore dealing with the state is inescapable. Generally, they claim that they struggle not for replacing the welfare state with a network of 'solidarity from below', nor for a simple return to the 'old' welfare state. They thus reject co-optation by state

institutions and instead demand that 'the state transform itself towards the solidarity economy', Kostas argues. For many, struggling for changing government power, either nationally or locally, is considered necessary. Some activists took part in the June 2014 local elections as part of their understanding that they need to build alternative local power to strengthen their activity. Activists thus show an ambition to re-structure the social relations of production and generate new forms of social and political power from below beyond the limits of traditional forms of bourgeois power. In doing so, they attempt to articulate different forms of political action.

4.2. SOS Halkidiki: Denaturalizing Austerity-driven Development Patterns

The debt crisis in Greece acted as a lever to reinstate the "old-fashioned faulty view that at times of economic crisis, environmental protection is a luxury and hindrance to development" (Lekakis and Kousis, 2013, 316). In fact, the environment is being actively remade within the austerity framework through the creation of financial mechanisms that promote the fast and massive privatization of natural resources and state-owned assets (mainly public land) (Velegrakis et al., 2015). Under the debt-related discourse of "national survival", "urgency", and "obligation", there is an escalation of land dispossession towards extractive, luxury tourism and large energy-orientated projects based on corporate interests (Hadjimichalis, 2014, 503). The leasing of land for the implementation of a gold mining project in Halkidiki at the height of the crisis is illustrative of these dynamics and the growing conflicts over land and land uses.

Halkidiki, a prefecture in northern Greece, has a long history of ore mining. Over the last forty years this has been a direct source of contestation and conflict for local residents. In 2011 the government approved a large-scale private project for the expansion and intensification of gold extraction at the area. It has granted Eldorado Gold rights over land, permits for mining, fiscal incentives, and a fast-track approval procedures. The Canadian corporation acquired 31,700 hectares of agricultural and forest land, two pre-existing mines, and waste tailings exploitation structures, and it plans to construct a new open-pit gold mine and a metallurgy factory. The three mines will increase the current annual gold production tenfold (ENVECO, 2010). Eldorado Gold's most controversial project is the development of an open-pit/underground mine in the middle of the Skouries forest on the Kakavos Mountain. According to the

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company's own estimates, the open pit alone can lead to several environmental problems such as air pollution, emissions of heavy metals, deforestation and pollution and depletion of the area's water resources (ENVECO, 2010; Hartlief et al., 2015; SOSHalkidiki, 2013).

The announcement of the project faced great opposition locally. Health and quality of life concerns aside, in a region where the economy mainly depends on tourism, farming, bee-keeping and fisheries, increasing gold extraction puts into serious jeopardy the sustainability of existing local economic activities. Between March and December 2011, the villages of Megali Panagia and Ierissos organized small protests, created assemblies and advanced a legal battle against the permit for gold mining. In March 2012 the first mass mobilization took place at Skouries forest. Since then, more local assemblies were formed, while solidarity committees were created in Athens and Thessaloniki and a nation-wide campaign developed.

Since the approval of the project, the government has propagated the idea that mining is the only possibility for creating jobs and developing the region, especially under crisis. By portraying SOS Halkidiki as a localism and anti-development reaction, it has tried to socially isolate the movement and enforce divisions amongst residents. This discourse has been particularly directed at the local work force, constituted mainly by miners. The objective is to enforce the project's acceptance and have workers internalize the idea that there is no alternative. In a general crisis context of unemployment, low wages and precariousness, while the corporation has promised secure jobs and high salaries for miners, several ministers have visited the miners and ensured them that "the state is responsible for securing the project. It is a signal to world markets that the country is open for business and protects foreign investments" (Hartlief et al., 2015). Alexis, a young miner, illustrates the general feeling of the miners,

> Our grandfathers were miners, our fathers were miners, and we will be miners as well. It is our only option to survive in our villages; our only alternative to migration. (Interview, Athens, March 11, 2015).

A discourse of 'mining as the only possible future' has influenced the movement's approach. Miners are fighting for their jobs, but so are the anti-mining activists. Those who oppose mining range from the long unemployed, low-income unskilled workers, seasonal employees at the local tourist industry to young people with no job

opportunities locally. However, this diversity of local inhabitants is united not just in opposition to the mining project per se or by protection of their local environment, but also by a critical approach towards the hegemonic models and pathways of development. Contrary to the miners who just support a developmental logic on the basis of their narrow and immediate economic-corporatist interests, local activists have moved towards a more universal plane. The movement has problematized issues of development and elaborated alternative proposals for the local economy based upon social needs of the inhabitants, requirements of participatory democracy, and views of the environment not based on domination. In this process, it has developed a proposal for an alternative development of North-East Halkidiki together with other institutional and economic actors (e.g. Technical Chamber of Greece—Makedonia's department—the agriculture School of Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki and the Hotel Association of Halkidi). This proposal is based on the creation of jobs within a sustainable economy and environment through the promotion of small-scale agriculture, ecotourism, local fisheries and forestry activities, and a network of local cooperatives. In creating a space for experimenting with alternative visions, discourses and practices of local development, SOS-Halkidiki integrates in its struggle a philosophy of praxis for forging an alternative conception of the world.

A second aspect that has influenced the movement's politics was the high level of repression it faced. After an incident where activists bombed part of Eldorado's local premises in February 2013—an action condemned by the movement itself—activists were classified as terrorists by the government. This resulted in the detainment, interrogation, and illegal DNA sampling of more than 250 local residents. Anna, a 65 years old pensioner from Ierissos, speaks about police brutality in local demonstrations:

> The police used tear gas in the main square. It was the first time in my life I saw riot police. I was shocked and really scared. We had to face a very cruel situation. (Interview, Ierissos, November 10, 2014).

State violence, however, has only contributed to focus the struggle against the developmental strategies that dictated the project, instead of continuing protesting against the corporation. Petros, a 62 years old farmer, notes,

> We are not fighting against a greedy company. We fight against a state that is not protecting our rights. We address our demands to the Prime Minister, not to the CEO of Eldorado Gold. (Interview, Ierissos, November 10, 2014).

The use of the same type of violence faced by broader anti-austerity protests, also has played a role in transforming ideas of self and other, and contributed to the construction of a shared identity among both struggles and for future synergies. Maria, a 39-year-old unemployed woman, explains:

> In June 2011, when watching on the TV the Syntagma square mobilizations and the riot police operations, we thought that this was something far away from us; that it was something happening only between the police and anarchists; only tacking place in Athens. A few months later I saw the riot police in my village. They were really brutal. I didn't understand why they were beating us. Why, when we were just trying to protect our forest? Then, I completely changed my mind about the Syntagma square movement. I am now one of them. (Interview, Ierissos, November 11, 2014).

The violent police intervention and state coercion had a hand in directing the movement's strategy towards establishing alliances with other local struggles against large-scale projects in the country. More than addressing violence per se, through alliance-building the movement has reinforced the legitimacy of its struggle and amplified its scope and capacity to influence the decision-making procedures affecting their lives. The participants in the SOS Halkidiki movement became acutely aware that their struggle was not isolated but part of a larger opposition against an anti-democratic development pattern. Therefore, the movement established solidarity relations and joined forces with struggles such as the water anti-privatization initiatives in Thessaloniki and Pilio (Central Greece), the anti-mining movements in Kilkis (North-West Greece) and Thrace (North-East Greece), the movement against large scale landfills in Keratea (nearby Athens) and the initiatives against renewable energy industrial projects in Crete (Southern Greece). Furthermore, they have organized protests jointly with significant international socio-environmental movements of the same period such as the NO TAV initiative against the construction of high speed railway in northern Italy or the Rosia Montana movement against gold extraction operations in Romania. The movement has also gained increasing international recognition, media attention and the support of international NGOs including Amnesty International and Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO), who described the mining project as one of "police repression, criminalization of the local community and environmental degradation" (Hartlief et al., 2015, 16). Vasilis, a 42 year-old teacher, explains:

> Originally we started this fight to protect our land and environment against a

greedy company. It quickly became more than that. We now also have to challenge a state that promotes austerity as the only possible way to get out of the crisis. (Interview, Ierissos, November 11, 2014).

Panagiotis, a 67 year-old pensioner, signals the synergies between SOS Halkidiki and other anti-austerity struggles:

> We are not alone. We have the support of several movements all over Greece, such as the water anti-privatization movement in Thessaloniki or the movement for the creation of the Metropolitan Park in Helliniko, Athens. They are not alone either. We support them. During our last demonstration in Athens we delivered medicines to several social clinics and pharmacies [part of the solidarity movement]. We fight all together. (Interview, Megali Panagia, November 13, 2014).

SOS Halkidiki implicitly sought to create "subaltern geographies of connection" (Featherstone, 2013, 80) with several anti-austerity struggles all over the country and abroad in order to constitute strong alliances and expand their struggle. Solidarity-making is embedded in a philosophy of praxis that empowers participants to critically approach and actively struggle against an undemocratic and violent development pattern that overlooks social needs and local practices. In the process, they go beyond particularist and limited local interests and bring forward alternative ideas and practices of land use, local development, and society-environment relations. Thus the SOS-Halkidiki struggle goes beyond a simple standoff between the forces of 'development' and environmental- local protection concerns. It is an active and ongoing challenge to hegemonic ideas and practices of austerity-driven development patterns, undertaken through day-to-day political involvement, activity and praxis in ways that transform one's everyday life and one's subjectivity (see e.g. Velicu and Kaika, 2015 on this subject). The social movement itself and the alliance-building with other movements give content to the "dynamic geographies of subaltern political activity and the generative character of political struggle" (Featherstone, 2013, 66). Geographies of solidarity are therefore constructed not merely on ideological terrain but on spatial practices, identities, exchange of knowledge and experiences, and subaltern alternative politics.

5. Conclusion

In analyzing grassroots conflicts under crisis in Greece, this article sheds light on how struggles over the environment can become the focal point around which austerity as the hegemonic response to crisis can be contested. Drawing on a Gramscian political ecology approach, we explore the ways in which alternative ideas and practices around 'food' and 'land uses' are developed on the terrain of everyday life to contest and politicize austerity, mobilize the subaltern, generate practices of solidarity-making, new forms of self-organization and learning processes self-government. Both cases under study actively and consciously set in motion a philosophy of praxis for forging an alternative hegemony, albeit in a disorganized and fragmented way.

As we have shown, the class politics of austerity in Greece has been a catalyst of conflicts around 'food' and 'land uses'. In dealing with these conflicts, activists of the X-M and SOS Halkidiki have shown the ability to move beyond a reaction to the social and environmental hardship of crisis towards a 'universal' praxis. The X-M is more than a response to the immediate economic interests of farmers and consumers in face of greedy traders. Through 'food', the X-M seek to politicize and mobilize the subaltern against the politics of austerity, while setting forth processes of experimentation and learning from below, showing how things can be organized differently beyond the limits of existing forms of social and political power. These processes are based on generative practices of solidarity-making between different social groupings, presupposing the mutual transformation of individuals and groups. Starting from protests in favor of its particular and local interests, SOS Halkidiki soon transcended these and sought broader alliances with other movements struggling against large-scale projects related to austerity-driven neoliberal patterns of development. In this process, the movement engaged in elaborating alternatives to move away from hegemonic models of growth so as to denaturalize the neoliberal austerity agenda. The forceful imposition of the project combined with the violence faced by anti-austerity protesters, transformed identities and created bonds and convergences between participants and diverse struggles. In sum, both projects mobilize alternative ways of understanding and using nature for advancing contestations to the class politics of austerity. In doing so, they go beyond resistance to austerity per se to engage in struggles that aspire to achieve broader social and political change.

By mobilizing a Gramscian political ecology approach that links 'nature' and 'philosophy of praxis' we have provided a lens through which to examine the relationship between performativity and questions of subject-formation. From a Gramscian perspective, these relationships are non-linear and complex, depend on conscious and active political intervention, and must necessarily concern political objectives and outcomes—which are directly linked with issues of agency, strategy and struggle for social and political power.

This paper also offers empirical material that enriches the debate over questions of political strategy under the crisis of late neoliberalism. As our two case studies show, a politics that mobilizes alternative ways of understanding and using nature on the terrain of everyday life provides pathways for forging an alternative hegemony that approaches issues of social and political power in and across places, spaces and scales. More research is needed on resistance and movements that mobilize this type of politics to understand its strengths and its limitations in different geographical settings and political conjunctures.

Discussion. Building Emancipatory Strategies, Producing Political Subjects

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the importance that the development of alternative economies can have for advancing struggles over hegemony. I have shown their role in building emancipatory strategies directed to extending social struggle and confronting the capital-state nexus, and in politicizing and mobilizing subjects of subaltern classes in 'practical-critical' activity; I have also highlighted some of the challenges faced in the process.

Alternative economies are commonly depicted in the literature as a product of the will of individuals or groups, or as a spontaneous and cumulative reaction to an impact, be it crisis or neoliberalism more generally. Their fate is to transform the world, either gradually or through the clash of models. On the other hand, critics usually see them as a product of neoliberalism, or even capitalism. They are condemned thus to co-optation and marginality, or they just embody neoliberal forms, practices, and subjectivities. In this thesis, I have charted an alternative explanation for why and how alternative economies emerge and develop, as well as provided a different lens through which to understand their transformative potential. These questions were investigated by looking at alternative food economies in the current context of economic crisis. I have focused on 'food' and 'crisis' because food poverty is on the rise, and the countryside is still seen by many as a place of refuge; the rise of food provision alternatives may thus be a possibility for people seeking to respond to their reproduction needs. In order to gain a deep comprehension of real-life events embedded in context, research was based on two case-studies: the case of new agroecological 'peasants' in the Basque Country, and that of solidarity supply-chains in Greece.

1. Overview of main arguments, key-findings, and theoretical implications

Inspired by Bensaïd's view of politics as the art of strategy, I have argued in Chapter 2 that paying attention to the particular conjunctures and activist strategies in which

alternative (food) economies develop is necessary to fully understand why and how they emerge and develop. Rather than departing from assumptions on the spontaneous, cumulative and transformative—or marginal, neoliberal and a-political character—of alternatives, I call for a better understanding of the activist strategies in which alternatives take part, as well as to their horizon of struggle, to the way they deal with structural barriers, and to their ability to respond to the openings and closings of any given moment in particular conjunctures. Here, I have also argued that 'transformative' projects are those which integrate alternative economies in a strategy to expand social struggles, build social and political alliances, and confront the capital-state nexus, thus going beyond a politics of 'cracks'.

My research in the Basque Country and Greece shows that alternative food economies there are not just an outcome of crisis, and their expansion is not a given. More important than focusing on their limits within capitalism, however, is to understand how alternative projects deal with barriers. In the Basque Country, an already existing movement of small-farmers for food sovereignty facilitates the move of non-farmers to land and agroecology. In Greece, a grassroots solidarity food network was born out of anti-austerity mass mobilizations and the speculative behavior of merchants within the crisis. Specific conjunctures shape the activists' objectives, strategies and practices in each case. Food sovereignty and repeasantization are central to small farmers' struggles in the Basque Country; 'solidarity' is key to contesting the class politics of austerity in Greece. Despite their specificities, both projects are (always tentatively and potentially) transformative as they insert alternative economies in a strategy that seeks transformative change through a politics of oppositional collective action and confrontation with state power. In fact, developing alternative economies on the ground is crucial to their aims of building social mobilization for challenging (and transforming) the state. This link, however, is not automatic. How are these relations built and what opportunities and challenges do they face?

Chapter 3 approaches these questions by looking at food sovereignty struggles. In agrifood research, a food sovereignty approach is depicted as offering a non-linear pathway towards transformative change. The development of alternatives is seen as a reaction to the (food) crisis—that is, a response to the neoliberal restructuring of the agrifood system and the marginalization it is causing in both the countryside and the city. But, in order to advance transformative change, the alternative movements need to

engage in oppositional collective action and to challenge the state. While the literature on alternative food economies and food sovereignty however, other than calls for engaging with 'activism' (Di Masso et al., 2014), there is little investigation on how developing practical alternatives relates to emancipatory strategies seeking to radically transform the agrifood system—and, necessarily, society (Magdoff et al., 2000; Patel, 2009; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011).

The food sovereignty project is based on proposing alternative models—agroecology, solidarity supply-chains, localization—but scholars emphasize differently their importance in advancing the emancipatory goals of food sovereignty. A major tension exists in the literature and among activists between approaches that understand food sovereignty as 'of the state' and those that consider it 'of the peoples/communities' (Shattuck et al., 2015). Generally, scholars agree that each approach has limits and that some combination between them is necessary. Some say that state intervention is necessary, but also that it is also necessary to re-shape democracy and institutions (Patel, 2009; McMichael, 2009). Others contend that the state is part of the problem and change must come by reshaping power in everyday life. Yet, they recognize difficulties involved in attempting to scale-up and achieve structural change without state action (Trauger, 2014). A relational understanding of sovereignty helps to bridge the gap by highlighting that political practice must and often does engage in and across the multiple scales, spaces, and places where power is located and contested (Shattuck et al., 2015). It is correct to highlight that 'local specificities' shape real struggles (ibid.). The question remains, however, of how a politics of everyday life relates to building social and political contestations. The point is not to devise a 'one size fits all' strategy towards food sovereignty, but to understand what we can learn from real struggles and how learnings can travel (with due translation) to other contexts.

The important work of Vergara-Camus (2014) on the MST in Brazil and Zapatistas in Mexico is perhaps one of the few attempts to address this question. He moves beyond approaches that focus on autonomy of local communities or on gaining access to state power, to argue that securing access to land, controlling a territory, and exercising power through creating autonomous structures 'allows these movements to generate a politicized grassroots membership that can be mobilized to confront the state' (ibid., 298). These are features shared with many other Latin American social movements, for which 'the control of space and the development of popular structures of power' have

been important 'in the rise of successful political organization and mobilization against the implementation of neoliberal policies (ibid., 296). But peasant movements, he argues, are better equipped for this as a result of their ability to partially avoid the market and rely on non-capitalist social relations. The lack of this advantage by other social classes, he concludes, makes it harder to radicalize and mobilize them, and limits the possibility of alliance-building. In the context of the global North, however, where the commoditization of the countryside and social life is so prevalent—but also where social inequalities are perhaps less drastic and violent—securing space and own structures of power may be difficult to pursue for movements or even counter-productive. More importantly, this approach offers few prospects of advancing struggles over hegemony. Rather than a focus on autonomy from the market or the state as a necessary condition for empowering, politicizing and mobilizing the popular classes to confront the state, this thesis suggests to pay attention to the constitution of autonomous forms of political practice, in which alternatives *may* play a role (as they do for the MST and Zapatistas). Moreover, however radical a movement may be, its goal of radically changing the world is perhaps condemned to failure if it fails to assume a hegemonic role—that is, to speak to popular classes and unite them around a common political project. This thesis has mobilized Gramsci's political theory—particularly his notion of 'philosophy of praxis'—in order to illuminate the articulation between a politics of everyday life, ideological struggle, alliance-building, and political agency (i.e. politicization and mobilization of subjects). Here, Gramsci's idea of politics as translation is relevant (Kipfer and Hart, 2013).

I have argued in Chapter 3 that, in analyzing food struggles from a Gramscian perspective, we should focus on how the emancipatory project of food sovereignty is translated into everyday life. In this way, we can unpack how a praxis of translation contributes to fostering critical thought (de-naturalizing 'common sense'), to forging a hegemonic conception of the world (raising 'good sense'), and to politicizing, mobilizing, and creating 'unity in diversity' among the subaltern. As detailed there, Gramsci provides insights on how to build an emancipatory political project. This requires elaborating a project that incorporates the concerns of popular classes; a praxis that translates this project into the everyday life of the subaltern so that they internalize it; this can only happen through their self-organization and mobilization, and the capacity to critically learn from struggles and everyday life.

My research with EHNE-Bizkaia has shown that food sovereignty emerged from the daily needs and struggles of small farmers in the Basque Country. Small farmers realized that their difficulties were not only due to capital's domain over the economy and policy-making, but also that conventional models of production and trade served capital's interests and were thus part of the problem. Advancing alternatives on the ground such as agroecological production, solidarity supply-chains, and localization (that is, repeasantization) was a practical means through which to rejuvenate an increasingly abandoned and aged agriculture, while combining the interests of small farmers with those of consumers (quality food at low prices), the youth (desire of agrarian lifestyles), and other social groups (such as local commerce or environmentalists). More than a problem-solving orientation or a win-win solution, however, by integrating the 'clash of models' into its ideology, program, and praxis, EHNE-Bizkaia sought to de-naturalize agribusiness in popular views, while working to foster alternatives and create a popular will (that gets mobilized) for food sovereignty. This has implied a politics of everyday life that works against and within the contours of popular culture; for instance, by demystifying much of the social prejudice against 'peasants', while critically learning from past knowledge and practices without essentializing the 'peasant'. It has also meant to move from a discourse centered on 'agriculture' to focus on 'food'—to go beyond the narrow corporate-economic interests of small farmers, and to deal with broader social questions on what, how, why, who, and for whom to produce. In (de)constructing meaning and moving towards a more 'universal' plane, EHNE-Bizkaia seeks to re-work solidarities between 'peasants' and workers, the countryside and the city. In order to scale-up and scale-out food sovereignty ideas and practices, and overcome particularism and fragmentation, it adopted a social movement approach. Alternative food economies are to converge into a social movement fighting for food sovereignty based on strategic alliances with other social and political forces. Much of this effort of convergence is done through local struggles, which also informs the union's political demands and confrontation with institutions. All of this however needs critical and active subjects; this is at the center of Gramsci's approach to politics.

Research with new agroecological 'peasants' supported by EHNE-Bizkaia has shown that, although they have internalized food sovereignty goals in their views and productive projects, they can hardly be considered activists. Difficulties to access land,

secure economic viability, and the long working-hours to make alternative models viable may help to explain why they find it hard to overcome the local and the particular and to get more involved in political activity of a more universal nature. Vergara-Camus's (2014) thesis may be correct. But to pursue land occupations on a territorial context mainly composed of small private proprietors, makes little strategic sense. Similarly, it would be problematic to seek to control space and create structures of popular power through armed protection; or to fall back into subsistence schemes, which would imply a retreat into the particular and little engagement with the needs of popular classes. As this author correctly points out, movements' strategies depend on particular historical-geographical trajectories of capitalist development and state formation. 'What is to be done', then, in contexts where the commodification of social relations is hard to resist or negotiate? In Chapter 3, I call for recognizing the potential difficulties faced by people involved in alternative models such as agroecological producers, wherever they are located, instead of simply highlighting their ability to resist. For instance, Karriem (2013) explains how the integration of agroecology in MST's ideology and practice has contributed to moving its struggle to a 'universal' plane and developing critical thought among its membership, but leaves unexplored which difficulties, contradictions and tensions are faced by agroecological producers. In making this call, I also point to the need of finding practical ways to ease people's everyday life, with an eye to releasing time for political activity; alternative models should be based on the needs of the subaltern, not in showing that 'nowtopias' are possible. In this regard, the issue of working-time—which links with that of technology and economic relations—deserves more reflection among scholars and activists concerned with radical social change. Efforts to develop alternatives must therefore (and perhaps often do) focus on providing the subaltern with the material and subjective conditions that would enable them to become political actors. This was the last point investigated by this thesis: the political ecology of building social and political contestations: how do struggles over the environment—and, particularly, around 'food'—informs a subaltern politics of hegemony?

In Chapter 4, I have argued that mobilizing alternative ideas and practices over 'food' on the terrain of popular culture and everyday life can be highly important in building broader social and political contestations, and in forging an alternative hegemony for challenging elite power. Drawing once again on Gramsci's notion of philosophy of

praxis, I have argued that this involves a political practice rooted in the messy practices. Such a political practice is aimed to transform subjectivities and engage the subaltern in political activity (a self-reinforcement process); generate solidarity-making among subaltern; and potentiate self-organization and learning processes of self-government.

My research with 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in crisis-ridden Greece has extended Arampatzi (2016) findings on 'urban solidarity spaces' in the same context. As she points out, 'solidarity from below' offers a counter-austerity narrative that aims to empower the disempowered in face of growing xenophobic, charity and philanthropic ideas and practices. The 'social / solidarity economy' provides an alternative paradigm to austerity, not without processes of negotiating differences among activists. I add to these findings by showing that, through 'food', activists seek to politicize and mobilize the popular classes against the politics of austerity, while advancing processes of experimentation and learning from below on how things can be organized differently beyond the limits of bourgeois forms of social and political power. These processes are based on generative practices of solidarity-building among different social groupings. The no-middlemen actions thus promote alternative ways of understanding and using nature, in order to contest the class politics of austerity. In doing so, they go beyond a politics of resistance to austerity *per se* to engage in struggles that aspire to achieve broader social and political change. While resisting austerity supported the prospects of a radical left government (in January 2015, SYRIZA won the national elections), activists had ambitions to contribute to a radical shift in the economy, social relations, and state power (which wore off rapidly with SYRIZA's surrender to the neoliberal austerity agenda). These ambitions derived from an awareness that radical change could not come from above, but had to be initiated and conducted from below.

For the activists of no-middlemen distributions, tackling social reproduction needs was a strategic step towards activating subjects and advancing counter-austerity ideas and practices. Through 'food', activists sought to construct a 'politics of hope' that created the material and subjective conditions for engaging the subaltern into political activity. Efforts of politicization were made through directly incorporating anti-austerity discourses and actions within distributions, but also by shaping the way that distributions and groups were organized. These groups aimed to denaturalize austerity, charity and exclusionary ideas and practices, while elaborating a 'superior conception of

life' and of how things can be organized differently. They did so through enacting an idea of 'solidarity' and through practices of solidarity-building among different subalter groups on the ground. Through a politics rooted in the messy practices of making a living, the no-middlemen distributions thus set forth autonomous forms of political practice that went beyond an immediate response to farmers and consumers problems in face of greedy traders in the context of crisis.

In the case of Greece, no-middlemen distributions were more than just conflicts over access to food. Similarly, rural movements in the Basque Country did not simply struggle for the livelihoods of small farmers. In both, alternative ways of understanding and using 'food' were mobilized with the goal of politicizing and mobilizing popular classes towards broader social and political ambitions. In Greece, to contest the class politics of austerity; in the Basque Country to advance food sovereignty. Both of these particular goals are entangled with the broader ambition to radically transform the social relations in the agrifood system and society more generally. These goals were interrelated; they co-determined each other.

The findings of these two case-studies highlight that environmental conflicts lead to contestations from below that go beyond 'moral economies' and 'everyday resistance' approaches. In order to better understand contestations from the perspective of the marginalized, I suggest that political ecology studies pay more attention to the interconnection of political, spatial, and ecological strategies. This can help to illuminate why and how contestations take place in the ground outside cause-effect explanations. My findings also reveal that environmental struggles are not just about struggles over access to resources and livelihoods. These can involve struggles to achieve broader social and political goals in given conjunctures. In Greece, tackling the social effects of crisis and constructing a 'politics of hope' through solidarity food distributions was crucial to advance counter-austerity contestations, while shaping debates on possible futures in a post-austerity society. In the Basque Country, repeasantization was strategic for rejuvenating agriculture and building a popular-collective will fighting for food sovereignty in the free Basque territory. A Gramscian political ecology approach is useful for unpacking these intricate relationships. It places emphasis on the intersection of 'politics' with 'space' and 'nature', and pays attention to the co-determination of everyday life, ideology, alliance-building, and subjectivity and subject-formation.

2. Limitations and avenues for future research

This thesis has presented an alternative explanation for why and how alternative economies develop in given conjunctures, and has shed light on how movements promoting economies advance emancipatory strategies and deal with questions of political agency, despite contradictions and challenges. This resulted from grounded, situated research on new agroecological 'peasants' in the Basque Country and 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece.

The analysis of these two case-studies has limitations. There is no probably single, right answer to such general, open questions. Much probably however, there is no single, right answer to them. In this thesis I sought to provide a "theoretical comprehension of actually existing practices… rather than normatively prescribing their necessary forms from above" (Thomas, 2009a, 33), as much existing research on alternative economies seems to do. This is not to claim theoretical neutrality, as such a thing is impossible. As Gramsci would argue, there is no knowledge outside ideologies; all knowledge is a product of social relations (Thomas, 2009, 101). Drawing on readings of Bensaïd's and Gramsci's political theory, combined with a political ecology approach, I attempted to go beyond approaches that emphasize capital's or agency's over-determinations, to "focus on the diverse terms, practices and spatialities through which neoliberalism has been brought into contestation" (Featherstone, 2015, 15). As a result, I have provided a richer portrait of alternative economies beyond one-sided 'celebration' or 'skepticism', as well as important theoretical insights into how to analyze them and consider their transformative potential, highlighting relevant normative implications.

Theoretically, the main limitation of this study is that, while I deal with issues of political strategy, social mobilization, and subjectivity and subject-formation, I do not always engage with the academic fields or theories that usually debate these topics. One reason for this is that I introduce an 'environmental' dimension and follow a political ecology approach. As a result, I approach these issues from the perspective of alternative food economies in times of crisis. In doing so, I contribute to debates on these broader topics from another vantage point, while adding to the literature directly related with alternative (food) economies.

The choice to draw on Bensaïd and Gramsci may also be questioned. As mentioned

above, this choice is an attempt to move beyond deterministic and voluntaristic readings of social and political dynamics. Both authors are critical of utopian 'prophecies' and 'metaphysics'. For instance, Bensaïd (2009, 175; own translation) develops at length a critique of diverse "contemporary utopias", which in his view result from, and adds to, the "weakness in the potential of political emancipation". Contrary to utopias, he argues, "a political strategy consists in having a goal (not a vision), in looking at a distance while not believing one is already there" (ibid., 351; own translation). In regard to Marx's critique of utopian socialists, he sustains that this critique "is not a refusal of social experiments *per se*", but a "fight against the illusion that, through their gradual and incremental expansion, they can gain space from capital's domination without dealing with the question of the state" (ibid. 181; own translation). This is precisely the point of departure of this thesis. In situating alternative economies in Bensaïd's and Gramsci's overall theory of 'politics', I seek to better understand their contribution to transformative politics beyond the mirror utopias of 'changing the world without taking power' and of 'taking power without changing the world'.

In looking particularly at 'food', I attempt to introduce 'nature' into the debate. That is, to understand how environmental conflicts and contestations take part in 'politics'. For Bensaïd (2002), society and nature are not separated; therefore, class struggle and environmental struggle must engage in productive interrelationships. Besides allusions to the necessity of engendering modalities of mutual transformation between plural forces, with no hierarchy of primary and secondary antagonism, however, he is vague on how generative practices of convergence may be constructed. The engagement with Loftus's (2013, 179) argument that, in Gramsci, "nature must be situated within the overall philosophy of praxis" provides pathways for addressing this question, while shedding light on issues of political agency. I hope than in the process, I have remained faithful to the spirit of both Bensaïd's and Gramsci's thought (although in this thesis I felt at times that I was overstretching their insights).

Other limitations circumscribe this study. Important questions arose during and after fieldwork that were not investigated, either due to practical reasons, or to maintain my focus on the research topics. In Greece, 'solidarity' is part of people's struggle to respond to their immediate needs, but also to initiate deeper processes of social transformation. The surrender of SYRIZA's government to the austerity agenda presents new challenges for activists and political strategy. In the Basque Country, a long history

of conflict over self-determination shapes local actors' politics and their understandings of sovereignty. These issues pose important theoretical and practical questions regarding how we understand the categories of territory, scale, and 'multiple sovereignties', as well as about the 'nature' of the state. All of these open questions offer relevant avenues for future research.

2.1. Territory, scale, and 'multiple sovereignties'

As mentioned in Chapter 2, issues of place, space and scale are important for the two case-studies examined in this thesis. For EHNE-Bizkaia, 'food sovereignty' is an ambition for the territory of Euskal Herria (the free Basque Country). Thereby, it must be seen—and is clearly assumed as such—as part of the broader goal of self-determination. As the organization Food First (2013) writes, "In Euskal Herria, the struggle for food sovereignty is embedded in a broader struggle for political and cultural autonomy, drawing on a long history of Basque resistance against fascism and state-sponsored repression".

The connection between farmer struggles, Basque identity and territorial claims, and alternative economies is not unique to Biscay, or the Spanish Basque Country (at the time of the fieldwork, similar approaches were starting to be developed by other EHNE's or left municipalities, such as Donostia). Also in the French Basque Country one finds a very similar trajectory. Itçaina and Gomez (2015) describe how the small farmers' union Euskal Herriko laborarien batasuna (ELB), since the late 1990s, started linking small-scale farming problems to environmental and consumer issues through short food circuits and agoecology, which allowed 'the small farmers' movement to establish alliances beyond the sector with consumer and environmentalist movements, social economy activists, regionalists. These closer links have culminated in a specific politicization of the agricultural question' (ibid., 480). They demonstrate the close relationships between ELB and the regionalist-nationalist political left, which is also suggested by the cross-border partnerships that often take place between ELB and EHNE (even though they also make it clear that both are autonomous structures).

This type of connection also is not new; the struggle for the institutionalization of the Basque territory has for long been linked to the promotion of an (alternative) model of

economic development—the large Mondragon cooperative being the most well-known example. The difference is that, today, the emphasis is not just on workers' control, but also on production models that address broader environmental and social concerns.

The case of the Basque Country poses important questions for further research. There, small farmers' struggles and the quest for 'food sovereignty' are connected with broader territorial and political claims. Issues of identity, culture and memory are relevant for understanding efforts centered on the local, and the ways in which these relate with the territory in and across place, space, and scale. The 'state' is a complex issue in a 'nation' without a state. In dealing with issues of land access for new farmers, or promoting agroecology, movements confront mostly municipal and regional governments, not the Spanish state. Which 'state' is to be turned toward the food sovereignty project? At the same time, Basque 'peoples/communities' are reclaiming alternative economic and democratic forms of organization on the ground. What kind of democracy and institutions are envisioned in this process, and how do they go beyond the modern 'nation-state'? A critical understanding of how local actors are dealing with these questions on the ground may give important insights into the intricate relationships between 'multiple and competing sovereignties'. A relational understanding of sovereignty might help to uncover much of these dynamics (Shattuck et al., 2015), as long as it is attentive to the mutual relationships between sovereignty 'of the state' and 'of peoples/communities' in and across place, space, and scale. Bensaïd's (2002, 2009) notions of 'strategic temporality' and 'strategic spatiality' can inform a theoretical framework through which to comprehend these dynamics. For him (2009, 245; own translation), 'all political strategy requires the articulation of differentiated temporalities and spatialities, each with its determinacies'. Put differently, politics must have the capacity to act in a plurality of spaces, taking into account their co-determination and sliding scales and temporalities.

2.2. The 'nature' of the state

In Greece, contestations of the class politics of austerity are developed in and across place, space, and scale. For instance, austerity may be identified as a global phenomenon. The European Union as one of its main promoters, together with the 'Troika' and powerful economies like Germany. The Euro may be seen as structurally

problematic. Also, solidarity calls may be made internationally. Solidarity spaces and practices may expand locally and contribute to shape a general spirit of solidarity. However, the 'national' is always a point of convergence. In the end, governments are the responsible for implementing austerity and sustaining its ideological rhetoric, and contestations are directed towards the state.

As Porta and Mattoni (2014) sustain, a main difference of anti-austerity mobilizations with the alter-globalization movement is precisely the shift of focus to national sovereignty. For Antentas (2013), this shift included a concern with questions of political power, contrary to previous illusions of 'changing the world without taking power'.

These dynamics perhaps were clearer in Greece than in any other country. The wave of social mobilizations between 2009 and 2012 provoked "the rapid loss of moral and political credibility for the bipolar Greek political system" (Hadjimichalis, 2013, 128). For Kouvelakis (2011, 24), this expressed a "crisis of hegemony or general crisis of the state" in which the traditional relations of political representation broke and conditions for political radicalization emerged. The electoral rise of the left was the political translation of social dynamics, which culminated in the victory of SYRIZA in the national elections of January 2015. This however, rapidly turned into its surrender to the politics of austerity, which left no prospects for a state-backed re-conversion of the economy along solidarity lines in which grassroots initiatives could be active participants in a restructuring from below, including a transformation of the state. Was SYRIZA's surrender to 'Troika' inevitable? Were movements living in the illusion that a state-backed restructuring from below was possible? Is politics again limited to a politics at a distance from the state? This brings the important question of the 'nature' of the state, with inevitable implications for social movements and political strategy. For obvious reasons, this is also a relevant questions for food sovereignty scholars and their attempts to illuminate on the role and limits of the state in advancing the 'radical egalitarian' ambition of food sovereignty.

In this regard, I suggest that perhaps a combination of authors can be of use. Gramsci's concept of the 'integral state' and his apprehensions of the devices of hegemony may be useful to understand the extent of bourgeois power. As Thomas (2009, 137) best explains, "with this concept, Gramsci attempted to analyze the mutual interpenetration

and reinforcement of 'political society' and 'civil society'… within a unified (and indivisible state-form). According to this concept, the state (in its integral form) was not to be limited to the machinery of government and legal institutions (the 'state' understood in a limited sense). Rather, the concept of the integral state was intended as a dialectical unity of the moments upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes. Such hegemony is guaranteed, however, 'in the last instance', by capturing of the legal monopoly of violence embodied in the institutions of political society". Foucault gives insights on the biopolitical functions of the state, and how it creates 'productive' and disciplined individuals. Poulantzas provides more nuanced view of the state, which is seen as a particular condensation of the balance of class forces, and thus a terrain of struggle crossed by social antagonism. To avoid a reformist approach to the question of power (of the possibility of changes from within the state), for Gramsci, according to Thomas (2009, 194; emphasis in the original), "there must be an attempt to forge 'political hegemony' also *before* seizing state power or domination in political society—for, without such an attempt to transform leadership in civil society into a political hegemony or into the nascent forms of a new political society, civil hegemony will be disaggregated and subordinated to the existing 'idea' of the social 'body', that is, the existing political hegemony of the ruling class".

3. General conclusions

In this thesis, I have drawn on Bensaïd's and Gramsci's approaches to radical politics in order to examine new agroecological 'peasants' in the Basque Country and 'no-middlemen' solidarity food distributions in Greece. I have sought to advance an alternative explanation of why and how alternative food economies emerge and develop in the crisis context. I have shown that, rather than being just a response to immediate needs, or about expanding difference within a 'politics of possibilities', or incrementing autonomous spaces at a distance from the state, alternative food economies can be the outcome of activist strategies within the contingencies of struggle and its rhythms in particular conjunctures. The analysis of the two case-studies has shown these embrace a prefigurative politics that is not outside strategy or a strategy in itself, but part of a broader struggle that aims to politicize politics, expand social conflict and mobilization,

and challenge and transform the state, within an emancipatory horizon.

The two cases examined in this thesis illustrate how this is done in 'actually existing practices'. In both cases, alternative food economies have emerged from the needs and struggles of the subaltern; and express a politics of everyday life for scaling-up and out their ambitions. Through alternative food economies, activist projects seek to advance ideological struggles, generate practices of solidarity-building among the subaltern, and to render people politically conscious and active. In the Basque Country, denaturalizing hegemonic ideas and practices regarding agribusiness, and normalizing 'peasant' alternatives, is a key focus of EHNE-Bizkaia's strategy of building alliances and a large social movement fighting for food sovereignty in Euskal Herria. In Greece, tackling famers' difficulties and food insecurity through 'solidarity' is a strategic step towards advancing counter-austerity ideas and practices to engage people in 'practical-critical' activity.

By developing alternative food economies as an integral part of a strategy to build food sovereignty or to contest the class politics of austerity, both projects translate broader political and collective goals into people's everyday life, while seeking to build a political and collective project from below so that the subaltern become 'agents of their own history'. This is about a politics that works to transform subjectivities and form subjects engaged in 'practical-critical' activity, in a process akin to Gramsci's philosophy of praxis and his "instantiation of the individual as the elementary 'cell' of hegemonic struggle" (Thomas, 2009, 375). In both the cases studied, the mobilization of alternative food economies is crucial for addressing questions of political agency, though not without contradictions and challenges.

Whereas alternative food economies may provide opportunities to politicize politics, create spaces of politicization and self-organization of the subaltern, and generate learning processes on how society-nature relations can be organized differently, they also face challenges, as they are not outside (because there is no outside to) capitalism. There is no way out of this contradiction. To acknowledge that incrementally expanding alternatives are limited from above—by the market, and the state—does not mean that they should be rejected *tout court*. Instead, it calls for a better understanding of how 'actually existing practices' are shaped by and handle those contradictions in seeking to advance social struggles.

Rather than looking at alternative economies from a 'celebratory', 'skeptical', or 'speculative' lens, I have sought to engage with the ways in which 'food' and the 'crisis' are being articulated and politicized. This allows for an assessment of the ways in which activist efforts to develop alternatives on the ground strive to provide the material and subjective conditions for the subaltern to become the 'agents of their own history'. The significance of such efforts is that they can contribute to advance struggles over hegemony. Furthermore, I have suggested that political projects can be constituted by mobilizing alternative ways of understanding and using 'nature' within a politics rooted in the messy practices of making a living, in which responding to the social reproduction needs of the subaltern and enacting a 'politics of hope' may play an important (if not decisive) role.

This thesis has contributed to existing literatures in four main ways. First, I have provided an alternative theoretical lens through which to examine why and how alternative (food) economies emerge and develop, and to assess their transformative potential. I have argued that a closer attention to the particular conjunctures in which they are situated, as well to their activist strategies is necessary to address these questions. Furthermore, I have claimed that projects can be considered 'transformative' when they integrate alternative economies in a strategy to politicize politics, expand social struggles, build non-instrumental alliances, and confront the capital-state nexus— thus going beyond a politics of 'cracks'. Second, I have suggested that a Gramscian political ecology approach is of much relevance to the study of food sovereignty struggles. This approach follows a relational understanding of sovereignty, which overcomes 'of the state' and 'of the peoples/communities' binary formulations, in order to examine the ways that the translation of food sovereignty into everyday life informs ideological struggles, alliance-building, and the politicization and social mobilization of the subaltern. Third, I have extended a Gramscian political ecology understanding of 'politics'. I have argued that a 'politics rooted in the messy practices of making a living' must focus in providing the subaltern the material and subjective conditions to engage subjects in political activity. Here, I have stressed the importance of a politics that tackles social reproduction needs and builds a 'politics of hope' is relevant, including the development of alternative (food) economies. Finally, I have highlighted that environmental conflicts and struggles may involve broader social and political goals, beyond concerns over access to resources and the environment or securing livelihoods.

This, I argue, might not only be a product of the process of contestation, but a driving force of the struggle itself. All of these factors highlight how struggles are interconnected and the productive relationships that can be established between them.

As regards social and political activism, in this thesis I have demonstrated that tackling reproduction needs and building a 'politics of hope' through the development of alternative (food) economies may be important in the building of emancipatory strategies, and in the production of political subjects. This implies, however, avoiding the social illusion that it is possible to change the world through their incremental expansion, without addressing the question of the state. Rather, it is important for movements to navigate the contradictions inherent in political activity. 'Cracks' should be occupied by left politics; otherwise neoliberal or exclusionary imaginaries and practices will fill them in. This politics must go beyond the goal of building anti-powers or counter-powers at a distance from the state, towards advancing struggles over hegemony.

My answer to my initial question—are alternative economies and practices just about resilience, social innovation, resistance, prefigurative politics, localism, anti-statism, or anti-politics?—is clearly negative. Likewise, alternative economies are not our last hope for reshaping self-organization, build (individualized) collective action, or incrementally change the world. Alternative economies also do not signal the eclipse of politics and political strategy. In this thesis, I have sought to show that alternative economies express both possibilities and challenges for a transformative politics, as long this politics is conceived as a way through which to construct a hegemonic project and push forward its concretization in an integral sense. This implies to refuse both the social illusion of 'changing the world without taking power', as well as the political illusion of changing the world from within the state.

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