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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT IN PALESTINE

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PHILIPP SALZMANN

**A Food Regime's Perspective on Palestine:
Neoliberalism and the Question of Land and Food Sovereignty
within the Context of Occupation**

ABSTRACT *The question of land and its strategic, socio-political and agricultural relevance within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be understood against the background of the dominant position of Israel as occupational power, heavily affecting the access to, and the control over natural resources. The subjects discussed within this article are intrinsically linked via the usage of the food regime approach as analytical tool, and the article's specific focus on land. An attempt is made to grasp the neoliberal restructuring of Palestine and its developments in the agricultural sector, paying particular attention to land grabbing. Neoliberalism aided the institutionalising and normalising of accumulation by dispossession in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), these being identified as a key feature of the corporate food regime, and leading to the marginalisation of rural communities and to depeasantisation. The crises of the food regime spurred food sovereignty movements all around the globe. While analysing the political demands and approaches of the concept of food sovereignty centered around natural resources, this article also explores why the concept offers various ideas for an alternative development in Palestine. This paper tries to show how specific dynamics observed by the food regime analytics can be helpful in contextualising developments within the oPt – ranging from neoliberal restructuring to the emergence of food sovereignty.*

KEYWORDS *food sovereignty, Palestine, food regime, land grabbing, neoliberalism, alternative development*

I. Introduction

The question of land and its strategic, socio-political and agricultural relevance within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be understood against the background of the dominant position of Israel as occupational power, heavily affecting the access to, and the control over natural resources.

Food and agricultural politics of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) have remained quite unexplored by food regime analysis. This article demonstrates that certain developments within the oPt can be contextualized by specific dynamics highlighted by food regime analytics. Ranging from neoliberal restructuring to the emergence of food sovereignty in Palestine, the key issues discussed within this paper are connected both by applying the food regime approach as well as by the article's specific focus on land. Palestine has a long history of popular struggles and resistance. This article explores why both the movement as well as the concept of food sovereignty provides various ideas for alternative development models in Palestine in opposition to neoliberalism.

Thus, the food regime approach serves as the theoretical superstructure of the article and will be introduced as a first step in section 2, paying particular attention to the neoliberal phase of the globalised food system, its dominant mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession, and inter-linked ramifications for peasants.

Section 3 tries to show why the food regime approach can also allow us to grasp the neoliberal restructuring of Palestine and its developments in the agricultural sector. As will be delineated, experiences from countries in the Global South regarding specific dynamics and dominant actors of neoliberal capitalism are similar to those in Palestine. Land grabbing will be introduced as a dispossession strategy within the corporate food regime, followed by a brief analysis of the question of land within the Israeli-Palestinian context.

From a food regime perspective, the food sovereignty movement can be historically and conceptually contextualised.

In section 4, the food sovereignty movement started by La Via Campesina will be discussed in respect of the Palestinian context as a counter-movement providing an anti-systemic political concept fundamentally questioning existing power and dominance relations, especially focusing on the access to, and the control over natural resources.

2. Food regime: As a contested arena and analytical tool

Based on political economy and ecology, as well as world system and regulation theory, the food regime concept focuses on food production and consumption within specific historical and globalised structures. Both by describing historical epochs/phases of capitalist agriculture, and by offering an analytical lens on global food systems, it tries to explain the functioning and reproduction of global capitalism (Holt-Giménez/Shattuck 2011: 110; McMichael 2004: 3). Thus, the food regime analysis is not about food by itself, rather about within which relations – geo-political, economic, social, cultural, ecological etc. – food is produced/ and consumed (McMichael 2009b). As will be shown in detail below, these relations are highly contested by different social forces and constitute the spaces of struggle of the food sovereignty movement.

The first identified food regime (1870-1930s) is characterised by the positioning of Great Britain as a global hegemon and its temporal setting as the global work bench (Holt-Giménez/ Shattuck 2011: 110; McMichael 2009a: 141). During the second food regime, also known as the food aid regime, lasting from the 1950s to the 1970s, the USA was able to establish itself as the dominant food exporter, with Europe not far behind, transforming food self-sustaining countries in the Global South into net food importers (McMichael 2009a: 143; Salzmänn 2014).

2.1 The corporate food regime

“The ‘corporate food regime’ (1980s–present) specifies a neoliberal project of agricultural liberalization (...).” (McMichael 2012: 682) Although characteristics of the previously mentioned food regimes can be found within the third in food regime, the market has clearly replaced the states in their organisational role. Nevertheless, the framework conditions for the markets were, and still are, provided by the dominant states. Accordingly, they reflect interstate imperial asymmetries. Historically grown (economic) inequalities between the states were institutionalised by the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Wallach/Woodall 2004: 193; McMichael 2009a: 149; McMichael 2009: 285).

Central to the specific forming and functioning of the food regimes is the concept of “accumulation by dispossession” – particularly so for the corporate food regime. Harvey (2005: 32) describes the concept as follows:

“By this [accumulation by dispossession] (added by the author) I mean the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated of as ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ during the rise of capitalism. These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations [...]; conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources) [...].”

As will be shown in section 3.2. Palestine is embedded in a particular condition. It is both dominated by Israeli economic policies as well as subordinated to the prescriptions of the driving actors of the corporate food regime (Samar 2000).

2.2 Long-term crisis of the corporate food regime

Whether the corporate food regime is already a stable regime of accumulation is contested within the literature (McMichael 2009b: 148). Currently, a transitional phase can be observed, in which indeed dominant developmental tendencies can be stated but haven’t yet led to the formation of a new stable regime. A transitional phase is always a period of crisis and fractions, as well as struggles between different social forces, such as social movements that point to the crises within the food system (McMichael 2009b: 146).

Throughout the last two decades, between 750 and 850 million people were permanently food insecure (Halberg et al. 2009: 95). At the same time, enough food existed in terms of proteins and calories to ensure worldwide food security (Halberg et al. 2009: 95; Holt- Giménez/Shattuck 2011: 111f.) Paradoxically, the most food insecure people on the planet are the ones who produce food – peasants represent 50% of the hungry people worldwide (FIAN International 2005: 5; Halberg et al. 2009: 95). Within this context, Olivier de Schutter, former UN special rapporteur on

the right to food, notes: “[T]hey are hungry not because there is too little food: they are hungry because they are marginalized economically (sic), and powerless politically.” (De Schutter 2011: 2).

One of the most crucial preconditions to achieve peasants’ food security is the access to, and the control over natural resources, particularly land. But it is exactly the access to, and the control over natural resources that is massively contested globally – this is particularly true when it comes to Palestine (as will be shown in section 3).

Looking at Palestine specifically, there are multifold reasons for its crisis-prone agricultural sector. Only a few will be highlighted here, while further below the question of land will be focused on in detail.

The Palestinian context cannot be analysed or understood without taking the occupational regime into account – notably when it comes to agriculture. Palestinian food insecurity stands at 33 percent and is therefore still a fundamental obstacle to overcome for a sound development throughout the West Bank (19 percent food insecurity) and Gaza Strip (57 percent food insecurity) (WFP 2015). Domestically, agriculture is almost neglected when it comes to the budget amount allocated by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to the sector. This is also reflected in the decline of agriculture’s contribution to the GDP – starting with the Oslo process, it dropped from around 13.3 percent in 1994 to 5.7 percent in 2008 (Abdelnour et al. 2012: 6).

From a food sovereignty perspective, the implications of the Israeli occupation regime are crucial in understanding the agrarian crisis throughout Palestine, and the associated food insecurity. The ongoing occupation caused the destruction of farming communities, land grabbing and expulsion of peasants, the inability to market Palestinian products, and the total control of the import and export of agricultural produce (UNCTAD 2015).

According to the neoliberal narrative that has been incorporated by the PNA, the market is the primary guarantor for food security (McMichael 2004: 12). The corporate food regime promotes the integration of social reproduction into the market. This dynamic, which can also be observed in Palestine, is dominantly framed as efficiency enlargements of the free market and turn out to be outright pauperisation processes for already marginalised people at the ‘bottom’ of the commodity chains – with peasants being predominantly affected (McMichael 2004: 12; Araghi 2003: 61).

“Food imports from Israel and Israeli settlements are widespread throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These imports are problematic, especially during peak harvesting seasons and when their quality is below export standards, as they are channeled into Palestinian markets and this undermines domestic producers, who find themselves unable to compete with such cheaper, and often subsidized, imports from Israel.” (UNCTAD 2015: 24)

The systematic fragmentation of the West Bank in Area A, B and C (discussed in detail in section 3.1.) – institutionalised and therefore normalised by the Oslo process – results in a massive concentration of natural resources in the hands of Israeli occupation authorities, separating farming communities from their lands (BADIL 2013). Israel withdrew its military from inside the Gaza Strip but retains its control of the borders, the air space and the access to the sea (BADIL 2013: 8f; Krieger 2014). The humanitarian situation in the Gaza strip is marked by extreme poverty, and severe shortages in medicine, food and housing. The wars on Gaza forced farmers and herders to abandon their lands, and paralysed the agricultural sector, bringing local food production to a halt (FAO 2014).

3. Land as contested resource within the food regime

The steadily expanding commodification of commons arising from capitalism’s expansionary dynamic, and the enclosure of non-capitalist territories linked to it, is currently manifested in a phenomenon called land grabbing – the purchase, lease or outright theft of large scale land areas by private, transnational or state actors. To comprehend developments in Palestine that could be contextualised within the current debate on land grabbing from a food regime perspective, this section first gives an historical overview (3.1.) of what could be called a chronology of statist land grabbing.

Particularly within the context of land grabbing, accumulation by dispossession materialises in the form of the commodification and privatisation of land via (neo-) colonial and imperial acquisition strategies of resources, as well as the associated displacing of land users, and the oppression of alternative and/or indigenous forms of production and consump-

tion. (Harvey 2005: 32; GRAIN 2008; De Schutter 2011). Section 3.2. discusses the neoliberalisation of Palestine from a food regime perspective, with a special focus on land and on the question of whether processes of accumulation by dispossession can be identified in Palestine as well.

3.1. The question of land within the Israeli-Palestinian context

The question of land within the Israeli-Palestinian context must be comprehended in terms of overlapping historical eras and contexts of Zionist settlement, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the ongoing occupation of Palestine – determinants that make a self-determined food and agricultural system impossible.

Land and planning laws, as well as military orders and emergency regulations, have always played a crucial role in the confiscation and acquisition of Palestinian-owned land, both within the State of Israel as well as in the oPt (Badil 2013: 9f.). As a consequence of the war in 1948, between 750,000 and 900,000 Palestinians were displaced – 55 to 66 percent of the total population at the time (BADIL 2013: 10).

Israel's legal tenure system, gradually established after 1948, secures the land taken from Palestinians in the long term, as it ensures exclusive use by Jews of most of "Israel Lands" (Mikarkih Yesrael) which amounts to approximately 92 percent of the land in Israel (BADIL 2004: 6). The destruction of Palestinian villages and the creation of so called "closed military areas", was, and still is, an important tool of Israel's land annexation. In the years following 1948, almost 80% of Palestinian towns and villages were destroyed. "The aim of declaring a village a 'closed military area' has been to prevent its inhabitants from returning, and thus lose actual possession of their lands." (BADIL 2004: 4)

The specific land policy approach developed by Israel since 1948 also determined the acquisition and allocation strategies employed within the oPt. 1967, Military Order No.2 was adopted after Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (BADIL 2014). This order "(...) isolated the West Bank region physically and legally by concentrating all powers and authorities belonging to the previous regime in the hands of the Israeli Military Governor (...)." (BADIL 2013: 5) In the same year, East Jerusalem was illegally annexed. The 1967 occupation enabled the expansion of the displacement of Palestinians within Israel into the oPt (BADIL 2013: 13).

As was mentioned in the previous section, the Oslo Accord followed the division of the West Bank into Areas A (PA has full control over civil and security matters; Israel controls movement across Area A's borders); B (PA responsible for civil matters and public order; Israel controls military functions; and C (full Israeli military and administrative control), corresponding respectively to about 17 percent, 23 percent and 60 percent of the total territory. Area C is the only contiguous territory, accounting for most of the West Bank's land, including strategic areas, most water reservoirs, and almost all of the fruitful Jordan Valley. Areas A and B are separated by Israeli military checkpoints and barriers into 227 non-contiguous islands (BADIL 2013: 6). The construction of the Israeli separation barrier started in 2002. Currently 85 percent of it is built on West Bank territory, heavily impeding access to resources and social services as well as rupturing social and family life (OCHA 2017). Because of the enlargement of settlements, military zones, and the separation barrier, Palestinians are deprived of access to 85 percent of the West Bank's grazing land (UNCTAD 2015: 16). This fragmentation process illustrates Israel's strategy of containment of the Palestinian population and is structured around the de-development of "Palestinian economies of the oPt [...] – through the dispossession of economic resources and rights [...]" (Taghdisi-Rad: 2014: 28).

Gasteyer et al. (2012) argue that the analysis of resource acquisition for pre- and post-state Zionist settlement purposes enriches perspectives on the character of dispossession strategies via resource grabbing in the Global South today. Many discursive intersections can be highlighted between land grabbing in Palestine and elsewhere, particularly when it comes to the legitimising endeavours of the driving actors. Deriving from the historic context of settler colonialism, Zionism used and uses specific modernist narratives that can also be found in current land grabbing cases: to empty the land of its indigenous population, the territory is characterised as unused and underdeveloped. This specific framing goes hand in hand with a dominant reading of production schemes of peasant (perceived as backward and unproductive) and industrial (perceived as modern and productive) farming (Cotula et al. 2009/Salzmänn 2014).

3.2. Neoliberal restructuring and land grabbing in Palestine

Land grabbing is a specific historical manifestation of power, dominance and exploitation relations, decisively determining who has access to, and control over natural resources (Borras/Franco 2010, 2010a; Brand/Wissen 2011; Engels/Dietz 2011: 400). In the following section the process of the neoliberalisation of Palestine will be discussed, paying particular attention to the dynamics, policies and actors identified by the food regime analysis as being central to the corporate food regime.

Oslo fostered the process of neoliberalisation within the Israeli-Palestinian context (Krieger 2014). The neoliberal paradigm heavily shaped both the policy approach of the PA as well as the development of Israel's occupation strategy, culminating in "sharing and outsourcing the costs of the occupation to local Palestinian and international institutions and actors" (Taghdisi-Rad: 2014: 29). As had been demonstrated by Krieger (2015: 127ff.), the World Bank was one of the main players involved in designing the guidelines for the economic restructuring of the oPt, adapting a neoliberal project to the local level ever since the beginning of Oslo.

Launched in 2008, the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), conceptually devised by the PA in close cooperation with institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, radically influenced the economy of the West Bank (Hanieh 2008).

The main external drivers of the PRDP are the same actors that pushed and enabled the structural adjustment programmes throughout peripheral countries since the 1980s, and which had a pivotal role in establishing a developmental paradigm centered around accumulation by dispossession (McMichael 2004: 11; McMichael 2009; Salzmänn 2014: 54ff.). In Palestine, the international finance institutions (IFIs) operate with the same developmental narratives and blueprints as had been showcased by food regime analysis regarding neoliberal restructuring programmes in other countries in the Global South, e.g. sub-Saharan African countries (see Salzmänn 2014). However, unlike many post-colonial nations, the PA's economy was designed from its very beginning in line with the policies and prescriptions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Samar 2000). Within the context of the PRDP, Palestinian grassroots organisations have described the IFIs as a *de facto* shadow government in the West Bank (Hanieh 2008). The Palestinian economy is thus both

massively shaped by the IFIs as well as dominated by Israel – these aspects make Palestine a unique case example on the one hand, and simultaneously comparable to other countries' experiences with neoliberalism on the other (Samar 2000).

“The PRDP development model aims at utilizing cheap Palestinian labour in industrial zones and parks, located at the edges of the patchwork of Palestinian territories in the West Bank. Under this vision, Israeli, Palestinian and regional capital will cooperate (under the banner of ‘peace’) within these industrial zones to take advantage of very low Palestinian relative wage costs.” (Hanieh 2008)

Many of the products produced will be exported to the US, the EU and the Gulf states. Workers within the zones do not fall under Palestinian and Israeli labour and wage laws, nor have the main trade unions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip been given permission to represent those workers (Hanieh 2008).

One of the PRDP's agricultural outlets is the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” (CPP), which aims to establish an export-oriented agro-industrial zone in the fertile areas of the Jordan Valley. The project resonates with many so-called growth corridors emerging from land grabbing within the current corporate food regime, with similar effects on peasants (Bergius 2016; Martin-Prével/Mousseau 2016; Krieger 2015: 163ff.). As a key agricultural area, the Jordan Valley was and still is highly contested, not least after the occupation of 1967. During the Oslo process most of its fruitful lands were turned into area C (BADIL 2013: 6).

McMichael points out that the “large-scale dispossession of peasant agriculture under conditions of a ‘corporate food regime’ provides a reserve labor force for export-processing [...]” (McMichael 2009: 281). Also referring to this dynamic, and considering the specific context of occupation, Hanieh (2008) argues that the CPP

“will turn the small-scale Palestinian farmers into day-labourers and sub-contractors to large agro-industry controlled by Israeli and regional capital. In other words, not only does the CPP consent to the occupation and expropriation of land that has taken place over the last 40 years in the Jordan Valley, it actually aims to integrate this occupation into the project itself.”

As the CPP shows, the PRDP aids the institutionalising and normalising of accumulation by dispossession, identified as a key feature of the corporate food regime (McMichael 2009: 286ff.; 2009b: 4), and clearly favours an agro-business model to a food system built on food sovereignty. The specific form of capitalist normalisation and stabilisation with respect to the advancing commodification of land directly lead to both the marginalisation of rural communities as well as to depeasantisation. Summarising the two previous sections, it could be stated that rural Palestine, peasant living, and the interconnected use of the land are massively transformed both by the occupational regime as well as by dominant actors within the corporate food regime.

4. From corporate food regime to food sovereignty?

Historically, counter-movements have always coincided with crisis-prone food regimes. Given the long-term crisis of the food regime, different forms of resistance and movements had been developed, demanding a reform of the system. However, according to McMichael, the already outlined multiple crisis of capitalism constitutes a historic moment where “a more holistic ontological alternative is meaningful.” (McMichael 2013: 20).

La Via Campesina has been at the forefront of the struggle against the WTO and its global implications and ramifications since its launch in 1995. The WTO embodies and enforces the commodification of food and agriculture, making food a commodity, a mere product to be bought and sold. Thereby, the WTO diametrically opposes the peasant movement’s notion of agriculture: “Agriculture is not only our livelihood, it is our life, our culture and our way of relating to Mother Nature.” (Nyéléni 2013).

The massive failure of the corporate food regime during recent decades contributed significantly to the creation of local, national and international social movements. The concept of food sovereignty, which was introduced in the run-up to the World Food Summit in 1996, can be seen as an anti-systemic reaction to the crises of the food regime (Holt-Giménez/Shattuck 2011). It was developed by La Via Campesina, which was founded in 1993 by representatives of marginalised groups within the food system, such as smallholders, landless, pastoralists, fisher folk etc. La Via Campesina

stands for a peasant-internationalism and could be viewed as a transnational (peasant) movement with 164 member organisations in 73 countries (Holt-Giménez 2009: 148; Bello 2010: 176).

4.1. Food Sovereignty as counter movement

Food sovereignty demands the right to self-determination over the way food is produced, distributed and consumed, and in so doing fundamentally questions the existing power relations, especially in relation to the access to and control over resources. The food sovereignty concept postulates a radical re-democratisation of the dominant food system, aiming at the “people’s self-government of the food system.” (Holt-Giménez 2009: 146).

Food sovereignty is not a finished concept but rather a procedural one. Additionally, the movement differs from place to place. Nevertheless, food sovereignty was collectively defined by the movement as follows:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. [...] Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.” (Nyéléni 2007: 9)

Politicising the food crisis makes visible its political-economic causes and therefore tackles (global) power and domination relations that exclude peasants and degrade them to objects of (rural) development. Within the capitalist agrarian narrative, peasants have been predominantly framed as a romantic relic of the past and therefore predestined to slowly disappear, absorbed in commercialised mega-farms as contract farmers. The usage of the term was, and still is, derogative. Although the conventional modernist development model – that was laid out in section 3.2. – is designed in opposition to small holder models, peasants are anything but gone. By redefining the meaning of the word ‘peasant’, La Via Campesina plays a large part in the renaissance of the word. Described through the concept of *re-peasantisation*, rural movements around the globe reclaim the term

‘peasant’ as a proud self-description. Desmarais (2008: 139) argues that the resurrection of the term ‘peasant’ as a highly politicised identity is an act of resistance in itself, and perhaps one of La Via Campesina’s most important accomplishments. Being a peasant implies

“a deep commitment to place, people deeply attached to a particular piece of land, people who are all part of a particular rural community, people whose mode of existence is under threat. This place-bound identity, that of ‘people of the land’, reflects the belief that they have the right to be on the land.” (Desmarais 2008: 140)

The very formation of subjectivity resulting in the new ‘peasantness’ that is also connected to the shared experiences of neoliberal rule and the collectively sensed necessity to fight it, represents a unifying force within the movement of food sovereignty:

“While micro-politics are the substance of movement, macro-politics constitute the social and world-historical frame, through which to situate, and develop, new subjectivities. By the same token, macro-politics are filtered through particular, or localized, experiences.” (McMichael 2008: 223)

4.2. Resistance and food sovereignty in Palestine

Palestine has a long history of popular struggles and resistance that materialised in different collective movements – the question of land had always been of utmost importance, politically and strategically. Against the background of the broader third world anti-imperial liberation struggles, the leftist Palestinian parties provided an emancipatory political worldview on which the people’s movement for liberation was based during the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, “[...] local theorizations of resistance by intellectuals and activists in the occupied territories, particularly the notion of *sumud muqawim* developed by Ibrahim Dakkak and the Arab Thought Forum” (Tabar 2015: 154) at that time created the specific ideological horizon. Bringing together *sumud* (steadfastness) and *muqawim* (resistance) the concept was developed “(...) as a critique of the PLO’s vision of ‘passive sumud’.”

Moving from defensive forms of survival to offensive modes of struggle not only meant “(..) confronting the colonial political apparatus, but expanding agriculture, reclaiming resources and creating a resisting economy that could sustain people and enable daily conquests in a cumulative struggle for liberation.” (Tabar 2015: 155)

The intention was to translate resistance into a daily praxis to give people autonomous power and to build independent economic structures. As with the demands of the food sovereignty movement, popular measures such as the call to return to the land during the throughout the 1970s and 1980s were based on the “[...] vision of development focused on building people’s economic self-sufficiency, with an emphasis on returning to the land, building agricultural development and attaining food self-sufficiency.” (Tabar 2015: 166)

Tabar (2015: 146) states that the “[...] signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 both signaled and brought with it the defeat of the liberation project and the oppositional radical consciousness that had defined the Palestinian struggle for decades”. The neoliberal restructuring of Palestine which was described in section 2 “[...] has worked to depoliticize politics and replace radical oppositional worldviews that seek to transform systems of domination.” (Tabar 2015: 145)

Since its formation, La Via Campesina has fought for a comprehensive land reform guaranteeing peasants control over the land they cultivate. Reclaiming the access to, and the control over, natural resources to establish practices for sustainable food, agriculture and ecological systems is fundamental to the struggle of the food sovereignty movement (La Via Campesina 2012). Consequently, resistance against land grabbing, materialised in different forms and on various levels, must be comprehended as a very effective uniting aspect of the movement.

The Palestinian Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) is the first member of La Via Campesina from the Middle East. The Union investigates the Israeli violations against Palestinian farmers and supports the affected people in strengthening their resilience on land, focusing on land reclamation and rehabilitation (La Via Campesina 2015). In 2014, many representatives of social and political movements, trade unions, and farmers’ organisations from Spain visited Palestine, in response to an appeal from La Via Campesina. Closely working together with the UAWC,

their mission was to monitor human rights violations in the region, especially regarding the rural majority. The research mission resulted in both the endeavor of La Via Campesina to strategically incorporate Palestinian partners in (international) campaigns, as well as taking up Palestinian struggles and fostering the cooperation with Palestinian organisations. The Spanish delegation also promotes the formal participation of La Via Campesina and its member organisations in the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanction (BDS) Campaign (La Via Campesina 2015a).

The implications on food sovereignty in Palestine resulting from the neoliberal project and the occupational regime that were highlighted in section 2 cannot be overestimated, making a “people’s self-government of the food system” (Holt-Giménez 2009: 146) impossible. Not least against the backdrop of an expanding corporate food regime, the UAWC urges that “the importance of the land as a core issue must be restored on the political agenda by the government, private sector and civil society.” (UAWC 2017) Analytically comprehending the multifaceted meaning of land within the Palestinian context, the UAWC pushes the linkage of the production values of the land with its national historical value and therefore demands that land must be the main political priority in the resistance against the occupation (UAWC 2017). The UAWC furthermore uses a wide range of strategies to strengthen food sovereignty in Palestine, including legal steps against Israeli land annexations, establishing seed banks and cooperatives, as well as reclaiming and rehabilitating agricultural land and water wells.¹

Given the inability of the corporate food regime to process its crises adequately, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011: 129) argue that the movements for food sovereignty and the political pressure will further increase. La Via Campesina’s strategy is to consolidate and strengthen local, national and regional organisations and to foster alliances between them built on solidarity. Given the great diversity of the actors involved, La Via Campesina operates within a field of constant tension and reaffirmation, attempting to uphold unifying aspects while trying not to ignore differences (Desmarais 2008: 141).

“La Via Campesina helps expand participating organizations’ visions and analysis of the shifts occurring in the agricultural sector around the world. By constructing spaces for internal debates it enables organizations to share local

experiences and knowledge, tactics, and visions for organizing in the countryside. Based on the daily reality of participating organizations, it then develops collective positions and strategies.” (Desmarais 2008: 141)

Ever since becoming a member of La Via Campesina in 2013, the UAWC formed a farmers’ committee to establish La Via Campesina-Palestine in order to further strengthen the food sovereignty movement in Palestine. The committee consists of 55 representatives of all agricultural sectors and commissions. As a result of the tireless work of UAWC, La Via Campesina-Palestine will be launched as the first office in Arab countries in the end of November 2017, representing a crucial step towards establishing food sovereignty (Melhem 2017).

5. Concluding remarks and outlook

The food sovereignty concept claims that feeding a nation’s people is an issue of sovereignty: it is about the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments. As this paper has shown, these demands are in fundamental opposition with the current food situation in Palestine, where large parts of the population, particularly peasants, are deprived of the access to land and water, and therefore of their right to self-determination. For this very reason, the food sovereignty concept seems to provide a fruitful approach, as it does not follow the path of normalisation of the existing situation, but represents a resistance strategy against the occupation regime and the neoliberal project. “[F]arming is a productive, meaningful, and multi-dimensional form of popular resistance through which Palestinians can demonstrate – to themselves and the world – the urgent need to reclaim lands, livelihoods, and freedom.” (Abdelnour et al. 2012)

A cornerstone of an alternative (agricultural) development model, according to food sovereignty, is the local communities’ access to, and control over natural resources, as well as social and political power.

“The goal of the movement is to effect change in the countryside, change that improves the livelihoods of people of the land, change that enhances local food

production for local consumption, change that opens democratic spaces and empowers ‘people of the land’ with a greater role and position in decision-making on issues affecting their daily lives.” (Desmarais 2008: 141)

As has been demonstrated in this article, the current corporate food regime can be seen as an important contested arena of different social forces. The ever more obvious malfunctions of the food regime will further spur resistance movements. People – both in the Global South as well as in the Global North – reclaim their voices within the neoliberal food regime, and live resistance in their everyday practices and struggles. The success and effectiveness of the movement will strongly depend on transnational solidarity and the alliances built – notably when it comes to Palestine.

This paper has shown that specific dynamics observed by the food regime approach can be helpful in contextualising developments within the oPt. Simultaneously, food regime analytics and the (scientific) debate on food sovereignty can learn a lot from the Palestinian case – this, however, was only briefly touched on by this article and could be the object of further research.

- 1 For further information on the UAWC’s strategies please read the interview I conducted with Hiba Al-Jibeih, International Advocacy Coordinator of the UAWC, in this Journal.

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ABSTRACT Die Landfrage und ihre strategische, soziopolitische und landwirtschaftliche Bedeutung im Zusammenhang mit dem Israel-Palästina-Konflikt kann nur vor dem Hintergrund der dominanten Position Israels als Okkupationsmacht und der damit einhergehenden Kontrolle des Zugangs zu natürlichen Ressourcen verstanden werden. Die im Beitrag diskutierten Themen sind im Wesentlichen über die Anwendung des Food-Regime-Ansatzes und den spezifischen Fokus auf Land analytisch verbunden. Es wird der Versuch unternommen, die neoliberale Restrukturierung Palästinas und ihre Folgen für den landwirtschaftlichen Sektor zu erfassen, wobei besonderes Augenmerk auf Vorgängen des Landraubs liegt. Der Neoliberalismus hat die Institutionalisierung und Normalisierung der Akkumulation durch Enteignung in den besetzten palästinensischen Gebieten vorangetrieben – ein Prozess, der als Schlüsselmerkmal des corporate food regime identifiziert werden kann und zur Marginalisierung ländlicher Gemeinden und zum Rückgang traditioneller bäuerlicher Ökonomie führt.

Die Krise des Nahrungsregimes beflügelte weltweit die Formierung von Bewegungen für Ernährungssouveränität. Über die Analyse der politischen Forderungen der Bewegungen und ihrer – auf natürliche Ressourcen fokussierten – Zugänge hinaus wird hier untersucht, inwiefern das Konzept der Ernährungssouveränität auch Ideen für ‚alternative Entwicklung‘ liefert. Der Beitrag zeigt, wie Erkenntnisse der Nahrungsregime-Analyse für Entwicklungen in den besetzten palästinensischen Gebieten übersetzt werden können und einen kontextuellen Rahmen bieten, der von neoliberaler Restrukturierung bis zur Herausbildung von Ernährungssouveränität reicht.

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