

## Still searching for (food) sovereignty

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# **Still Searching for (Food) Sovereignty: Why are Radical Discourses only Partially Mobilised in the Independent Anglo-Caribbean?**

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## **Abstract**

The notion of 'food sovereignty' is often surprisingly absent in food and agricultural discourses in the Anglo-Caribbean, where over the past half century policy-making has aligned with conventional 'food security' approaches. This paper argues that, in addition to its contemporary entrenchment within a neoliberal environment, this is also due to the nature of 'sovereignty' itself in a region which has been shaped by a distinctive colonial, social and economic history. In order to demonstrate this, firstly, it makes the case for why, in the context of rising food imports and enduring structural legacies, food sovereignty matters in the Anglo-Caribbean. Secondly, it charts changes in the regional policy of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to show how, despite repeated calls to increase self-sufficiency, conventional neoliberal approaches to agricultural development and food security have predominated since the 1970s. Finally, it identifies and analyses limited instances where food sovereignty discourses have been mobilized, by farmers' groups and political actors, and interrogates the meaning of both 'internal' and 'external' sovereignty itself in this post-colonial context. It finds mobilisations of food sovereignty to be characterised by a repeated conflation of domestic food production with the concept's ideological principles as a political project, and a particular understanding of sovereignty that places an emphasis on 'the state' and 'the region' over 'the people'. This shows that the very nature of 'sovereignty' itself plays a critical role in both the translation of, and possibilities mobilising for 'food sovereignty' as a radical project as envisaged in the wider literature.

Keywords: Food sovereignty; food security; agriculture; Caribbean; sovereignty; neoliberalism.

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**1. Introduction**

The independent Anglo-Caribbean has, since the time of colonial conquest, been entrenched in inequitable relations of food production, distribution and consumption. Its contemporary food system is characterised by low levels of domestic production, increasing dependency on imports, nutritionally poor diets, non-communicable diseases, and vulnerability to fluctuations in international markets, climate change and natural disasters, which pose a number of challenges to policy-makers (Beckford and Rhiney, 2016; CARICOM, 2010). Given the increasing prominence of ‘food sovereignty’ as an intellectual, social and political movement globally, we might expect some of its key tenets to be more deeply embedded into agricultural policy-making and activism in this context. This is particularly so given that the region borders South and Central America, which has - at first glance - an analogous colonial history. It is also where the concept originates and has even been incorporated into state policy in several countries.

This article argues that, whilst food sovereignty has at times been mobilised by both farmers and politicians in the region, its broader application has remained surprisingly partial and limited. To explore this apparent disjuncture, the paper analyses how and why food sovereignty is articulated and invoked in particular ways. Doing so raises questions about the enduring colonial legacy of structural constraints that has been amplified by the increasing liberalisation of trade,

the distinctiveness of the peasant landscape, and how the limitations and possibilities for food sovereignty relate to the nature of both 'internal' and 'external' Caribbean sovereignty itself. It finds those partial mobilisations of food sovereignty to be often characterised by a conflation of domestic food production with the concept's ideological principles as a political project, and an understanding of sovereignty that places an emphasis on 'the state' and 'the region' over 'the people'.

This paper consequently argues that the well-recognised structural constraints that afflict the agrarian possibilities of many post-colonial societies play out in distinctive ways in this collection of small English-speaking Caribbean islands, but that this alone does not explain why food sovereignty is often only partially mobilised in the region. Indeed, the very nature of how Anglo-Caribbean 'sovereignty' itself is understood and practised potentially undermines possibilities for mobilising food sovereignty discourses as a radical project. Instead, even when they are mobilised, these supposedly radical ideas are often adopted in ways that implicitly work within the neoliberal economic and liberal state environment rather, than against it. This case is instructive for debates about how food sovereignty travels to different contexts as it shows that the actual conditions of political sovereignty, along with their construction over time, play a crucial role in both its invocation and the possibilities for change. These findings feed into debates that trouble the concept, its meaning and potential, and how its significance and deployment depend upon distinctive 'geohistories' (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010; Edelman 2014; Jarosz, 2014); the role of food sovereignty's sovereignty, the liberal sovereign state, and possibilities for democratic choice (Agarwal, 2014; Trauger 2014; Roman-Alcalá 2016); and the role the state and agrarian movements vis-à-vis international trade and self-sufficiency discourses (Burnett and Murphy, 2014; Clapp, 2017). These questions are pertinent for the Anglo-Caribbean, a group of nations, which, due to small size and structural constraints have historically had little power vis-à-vis the global economy.

The article begins by examining how debates concerning the meaning of food sovereignty's 'sovereignty' are complicated by the Caribbean post-colonial context. In the second section, it sets

out why food sovereignty matters in this group of nations in the context of rising food import bills and colonial legacies of structure and taste. It then analyses the regional policy environment since the 1970s by assessing agricultural policy in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the governance mechanism that sets the tone for policy in the region, and whose 15 members - with the exception of Haiti and Suriname - share a history of British colonial rule, governance and independence.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on analysis of interview data collected in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) between 2012-2016, parliamentary transcripts and regional newspaper articles, the paper then explores some of the ways in which food sovereignty discourses have been partially mobilised by farmers' groups and political actors. Finally, it analyses the nature of, and possibilities for food sovereignty in relation to post-colonial constructions of sovereignty itself. These components come together to show how distinctive colonial legacies have limited the development of some of the prerequisites for food sovereignty's 'internal' and 'external' sovereignty – particularly in terms of popular sovereignty of the people and political sovereignty of the state.

## **2. Sovereignty and Food Sovereignty in the Independent Anglo-Caribbean Context**

Interrogating the meaning of 'sovereignty' itself is crucial in the context of the Caribbean in order to understand the possibilities of moving towards meaningful 'food sovereignty' – defined as 'the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity' (La Vía Campesina, 1996: 1). In 2007, at Nyéléni, this definition was expanded to include reference to 'the right of peoples...to *define* their own food and agriculture

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<sup>1</sup> CARICOM was established in 1973 at the Treaty of Chaguaramas. It has 15 full member states: Barbados, Jamaica and T&T (its founders), plus Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname. It has 5 associate members (all British Overseas Territories) and 7 observer states. Membership provides a semblance of a shared framework and 'regional consciousness' (Thomas, 1988). It is also the forum where Heads of Government and Ministers of Agriculture come together to discuss policy, which they take back to their respective countries.

systems' (La Vía Campesina, 2007) [Emphasis added]. There, the movement outlined six key pillars of food sovereignty: food for people; valuing food providers; localising food systems; putting control locally; building knowledge and skills; and working with nature.<sup>2</sup> As definitions have expanded, political sovereignty has been seen to be a pre-requisite. For example, the Nyéléni (2007: 20) documents recognise that 'food sovereignty is only possible if it takes place at the same time as political sovereignty of peoples'. This is particularly important for the Caribbean, where, despite achieving formal independence in the 1960s, colonial legacies – socio-economic, cultural, and political – along with small size, location and vulnerability, continue to shape and constrain political realities.

Although food sovereignty is often most strongly associated with the international peasant movement, La Vía Campesina (LVC), scholars have argued that achieving it involves different actors functioning at different scales, from the local, national and supranational (Iles and Montenegro de Wit, 2015; Schiavoni, 2015; Leventon and Laudan, 2017). Now enshrined in the constitutions of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, its institutionalisation as state policy has raised questions about the nature of sovereignty itself, the necessity to redistribute power in order to facilitate transformation, and the nature of state-society relations across multiple scales (McKay and Nehring, 2013). The concept has also been shown to have roots in a 1983 Mexican government 'National Food Program' which sought 'to seek food sovereignty' both in terms of 'self-sufficiency' and 'national control over various aspects of the food chain' (Heath, 1985: 115 quoted in Edelman 2014). Therefore, questions about the role of the state in achieving it, and the nature of state-civil society relations in particular contexts, have become increasingly relevant to transformational possibilities, alongside questions about the role of the movement itself. As McKay and Nehring (2013: 2) argue, the state remains crucial as key force to: 'confront the

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<sup>2</sup> The Nyéléni definition has been critiqued for its contradictory position on trade and family farming - see Patel (2009) - nonetheless, it is fair to say that the broad tenets of food sovereignty remain fairly constant.

global food system'; 'dismantle unequal agrarian structures'; and 'recognize the autonomy of peoples and communities' to define and control their food and agricultural systems.

At independence in the Anglo-Caribbean, the new constitutions of all nations were handed to them by the British; they were not developed indigenously. Most independent ex-British colonies thus continue to operate through a Westminster-style two-party political system (Bishop, 2011; Girvan, 2015). Many Caribbean scholars have written in-depth about the persistence of a 'colonial mentality' (Fanon, 2004) and the 'validating elite', and have called for the need for 'independent thought' (Best, 1997) and 'sovereignty of the imagination' (Lamming, 2004). As Girvan (2015: 104) argues, the 'implanting of colonial ways of thinking into native elites' was one of the 'outstanding successes of British policy in the Caribbean'. For him, 'sovereignty means the capacity of a society and its citizens to think for themselves...it begins in the mind' (*ibid*). He argues that, rather than solely conflating sovereignty with the constitutional and juridical attributes of the state we need to re-define it in broader terms, such as 'the development of structures of peoples' empowerment at the local and community levels' (*ibid*). He goes on to suggest food sovereignty itself as an example of this. As Bogue (2004: xi) argues, despite anti- and post-colonial struggles, the political independence that emerged in the region was in fact rather 'limited' with 'hopes dashed'. This raises important questions about the extent of substantive sovereignty in this context.

In the Caribbean, only a few pockets of scholarship on food sovereignty can be found. In Haiti and the (non-sovereign) Turks and Caicos islands, Steckley (2016) and Paddock and Smith (2017) show how colonial legacies of race and dietary aspirations result in a preference for imported food over local food, which raises both challenges for food sovereignty and the role of trade. In Cuba, Gürcan (2014) shows the importance of both civil and international political society, and state-civil society partnerships at regional, national and local levels for achieving food sovereignty. Cuba and Haiti are, however, highly distinctive in terms of their size, their Spanish and French colonial histories, and the character of their peasantries, and therefore, do not carry obvious lessons for the experience of the considerably smaller Anglo-islands. In this regard, Weis

(2004) and Wilson (2016), on Jamaica and T&T respectively, suggest food and agricultural reforms based on neoliberal logics have done little to help the poor farmer or the environment. Less attention, though, is focused on the broader functioning of food sovereignty across the independent Anglo-Caribbean, a gap that this paper addresses.

Applying an analysis of 'sovereignty' in this post-colonial context, therefore, raises questions about the role of political sovereignty itself for broader debates in the literature about the meaning and potential of food sovereignty in different geopolitical contexts. Roman-Alcalá (2016: 1390) usefully distinguishes between what he calls the 'actually existing sovereignty' of the state and food sovereignty's "'aspirational sovereignty", a (changed) configuration of power that will ostensibly help bring FS [food sovereignty] into being'. These changes may vary from place to place due to diversity at the local, national and supranational level. He 'mobilises "sites" of sovereignty to describe spaces of decision making which share the meaning, possibilities and limits of FS at any scale' such as civil society (local), state governments (national) and the World Committee on Food Security, transnational corporations and LVC itself (supranational). These sites can be analysed according to their sovereignty components in terms of 'internal and external legitimacy'; capacity to 'make rules' and 'to enact those rules'; and 'territoriality' (*ibid*). In the Anglo-Caribbean, understanding the 'actually existing sovereignty' of the state – both political and economic – is critical to understanding the possibilities for 'aspirational sovereignty'.

In order to unravel the significance of food sovereignty's sovereignty in the Anglo-Caribbean, we need to consider the meaning of sovereignty itself and how this varies across different experiences of decolonisation and independence. It is a hotly debated concept, which has traditionally been defined as the possession of legal and constitutional authority, yet it has also increasingly come to be connected to power and control (Philpott, 2001). In International Relations (IR), understandings of sovereignty are based on two key dynamics: internal sovereignty, which 'refers to the existence of an authoritative decision making structure within a political entity' that is both 'legitimated and effective'; and external sovereignty, which 'refers to the autonomy or independence of a political entity and its associated authority structure from



external control or interference' (Krasner, 2007: 1). As Schiavoni (2015) argues, this poses pertinent questions for food sovereignty and potentially unravels some of the confusion surrounding who is 'the sovereign'. Thinking about food sovereignty in these terms, she suggests, helps us consider two of its key dimensions: the state's ability to control domestic food systems vis-à-vis the global economy as elaborated by McMichael (2014) and the domestic peasant- and activist-led political project that often operates independently of the state, as elaborated by Borras (2010).

In this sense, the question of *who* is the sovereign is also crucial to its enactment. In LVC's (1996) Rome statement, food sovereignty is defined as 'the right of each nation...'. Therefore, the 'sovereign' is effectively the 'nation-state'. However, in 2002, the definition by the People's Food Sovereignty Network refers to 'the rights of peoples...' (Patel 2009). Here, the sovereign move towards 'the people' rather than the 'nation'. In 2002, the International Planning Committee at Rome +5 similarly changed 'nation' to 'peoples, communities, and countries' (Edelman, 2014; Hospes, 2014). More recently, LVC's (2007) Nyéléni Declaration defines it as 'the right of peoples'. Therefore, agreement on *who* is the sovereign and what the implications of this are, can itself be subject to change. Sovereignty is consequently a crucial issue for the Anglo-Caribbean, both politically and economically. In this context, using it as an analytical tool helps to tease out some of the possibilities and tensions for both 'actually existing' and 'aspirational' (food) sovereignty. Drawing on Roman-Alcalá's framework, in terms of the former, a key question surrounds the degree to which 'internal' and 'external' sovereignty currently exist (both in terms of legitimacy and control). As for the latter, a key question surrounds the degree to which conditions exist that could result in a changed configuration of power.

### **3. Colonial Legacies and the Limitations of Food Security: Why Does Food Sovereignty Matter in the Anglo-Caribbean?**

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) (2015) *State of Food Insecurity in the CARICOM Caribbean* report found that the region continues to be challenged by international market vulnerability, climate change, natural disasters, and in particular, declining levels of domestic production and increased reliance on (often highly processed) imported foods high in fat, salt and sugar. Whilst CARICOM countries have made *some* progress in reducing undernourishment, food energy availability is 'increasingly derived from imports', something that is considered problematic for three reasons: 'food import dependence', 'loss of foreign exchange' and 'increased consumption of processed foods' (FAO, 2015: v). Although energy *availability* in all states, except Haiti, now surpasses the recommended energy guidelines of 2400 calories per capita per day, the move towards calorie-dense but nutritionally poor diets also means that CARICOM territories are amongst the world's most obese (FAO, 2015).<sup>3</sup> 'Food security' targets have therefore largely been met by opening up Caribbean markets to cheap imports (that are often subsidized in the originating country) rather than improving local production.

This escalating reliance on food imports continues, then, to be a pressing policy issue. In 2015, CARICOM imported 'in excess of US\$4 billion in food annually, an increase of 50 percent since 2000', a figure 'projected to increase to US \$8-10 billion by 2020 if current efforts are not successful in addressing this problem' (FAO, 2015: x). Moreover, five categories - 'processed foods', 'wheat', 'rice', 'meat' and 'maize' - accounted for approximately 25 percent of annual regional food imports (*ibid*). At least seven states imported over 80 percent of their food, and only three - Belize, Guyana and Haiti - (which have some of the biggest land masses and are also by far the poorest) produced more than 50 percent of what they consume.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, changes in global food supply and demand directly impact the price of food in Caribbean communities, increasing household food expenditure, thereby leaving them worse off in other areas (Walters and Jones, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Despite classification as mostly middle- to high-income countries, acute income inequality and

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<sup>3</sup> Haiti represents a particularly unique case, not only is it the only French speaking member state, but it is also accounts for 60 percent of CARICOM's 17.5 million population and an estimated 90 percent of its undernourished persons (FAO, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> In 2013, CARICOM imported 100 percent of its wheat and 58 percent of its milk (FAO, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Walters and Jones (2012) study was based on an analysis of FAOSTAT data from 1960 to 1990.

unemployment in the Anglo-Caribbean mean that poverty levels remain elevated, impacting negatively upon food *accessibility* and *utilisation*.<sup>6</sup> Fresh fruits and vegetables tend to be priced higher than imported processed foods, so poorer households are more likely to choose the latter (FAO, 2015).

The current shape of the food system is compounded by structural legacies of production and consumption. Since the days of the colonial plantation, levels of domestic and subsistence production were, and remain today, extremely low. The structuring of the sector in this way can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when European powers forcibly acquired and established extractive relationships with colonies. This was based on the transplantation of African slaves, and later indentured (predominantly Indian, but also Chinese and Portuguese) labourers, and plantation production systems, with the purpose of producing agricultural commodities for export to Europe (Best and Levitt, 2009). For half a millennium, Caribbean agriculture was geared solely towards international market integration and the mass production of cash crops for export, such as sugar, cocoa and bananas, and the importation of basic staple foods such as rice, flour and grains (Weis, 2007). Indigenous populations – and, with them, subsistence agriculture – were virtually eradicated, and replaced with monoculture agriculture for profit. The contemporary Caribbean remains deeply conditioned by these colonial legacies (Williams, 1944; Thomas, 1988).

Patterns of production and consumption that were essentially imposed upon it have also left a legacy of taste which can constrain possibilities for change (Lewis, 2004b; Wilson, 2013; Steckley, 2016). Planters focused on producing food for export rather than domestic consumption. Therefore, staples such as wheat, dairy, salted cod, pork and beef have been imported since early colonialism and are integral to local diets today. Independence did little to free domestic producers from the vagaries of the global food system, and instead increased the reliance upon imported,

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<sup>6</sup> Skewed income distributions in small countries can mask the real development situation. You only need a handful of very rich people to raise the mean GDP substantially.

processed, calorie-dense but nutritionally poor foods. As Wilson (2013: 107) finds, 'modern' food choices such as Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) often prevail over efforts to localise food. It is widely recognised that the Caribbean continues to operate in an environment in which such 'external forces still play a major role' (Beckford and Rhiney, 2016: xii). Both the colonial legacy and the small size of Anglo-Caribbean nations places them in a uniquely vulnerable position with regards to the impact of global trade imbalances and market changes. They consequently remain at the mercy of structural forces; intensifying trade liberalisation since the 1980s has caused only to compound this.

In sum, conventional 'food security' policy prescriptions have increased calorie availability, but negatively impacted on rising imports levels, nutritional quality, availability of affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, and the ability to produce local food for local consumption. In this context, the political agenda of 'food sovereignty' – i.e. 'the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity' (La Vía Campesina, 1996: 1) – carries significant weight. A key goal of 'food sovereignty' is to collectively resist economic growth-focused models of food security, industrialisation and agricultural globalisation. It therefore goes beyond the mainstream food security focus on *availability, accessibility, utilization and nutrition* to also include consideration of *where food comes from and how it is produced*, and extends to claim the rights of nations and peoples to define their own agriculture and food policies and systems (Desmarais, 2003). These additional considerations are particularly pertinent to the context of the Anglo-Caribbean: in the CARICOM policy environment, a tension has long existed between externally imposed 'food security' discourses that have become dominated by market-centrism and more radical indigenous 'self-sufficiency' discourses.

#### **4. CARICOM Food and Agricultural Policy Discourses Since the 1970s: Dominant Narratives of Liberalisation vs Self-Sufficiency?**

Since the 1970s, the Caribbean has undergone significant political and economic change, impacting

its approach to food and agriculture. This section substantiates the claim that, despite some attempts at alternative approaches, CARICOM policy-making has been dominated by neoliberal food and agricultural development discourses prevailing in global policy-making circles. Ultimately, it argues that this limits the possibilities of moving towards the six key pillars of food sovereignty: in particular, localising food production, valuing local producers and increasing levels of local control. Prior to the 1970s, agricultural policies were large-scale and export-orientated rather than aligned to domestic production. However, with most territories achieving independence in this era, and the establishment of CARICOM in 1973, policy took a strong turn towards domestic production for local consumption and food self-sufficiency. Globally, the 1970s were also characterised by the oil shocks of 1973, food price crises and global imbalances in supply and demand, which led to the emergence of the concept of 'food security' at the 1974 *World Food Conference*. With new nationalist agendas, a new regional outlook, and amidst an atmosphere of crisis, Caribbean governments saw the need for reorganising research and policy priorities to develop production of food crops for local consumption and non-traditional commodities for export (Axline, 1984). In this period, the CARICOM food import bill was already high for a region whose economies were still primarily agricultural, further stimulating action and the need for a regionally integrated approach geared towards the goal of greater sustainability (*ibid*).

It was in this context that CARICOM prepared its first regional agricultural policy, the *Regional Food Plan (RFP)* (1975), to address increasing concerns around satisfying basic needs, moving towards self-sufficiency and improving domestic production (Axline, 1984). Its main thrust was import substitution agriculture. Influenced by the theories of the *New World Group* - an intellectual movement of radical Caribbean thinkers active in the pre- and post-independence period of the 1960s and 1970s - it aimed to reduce foreign dependency by increasing local production and reducing imports via tariffs.<sup>7</sup> It also signified renewed acknowledgement of the

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<sup>7</sup> The group came together around visions of alternative development and regional integration, and included thinkers such as Kari-Levitt, Norman Girvan, George Beckford and George Lamming, and neo-Marxist thinkers such as Havelock Brewster and Clive Thomas.

importance of agriculture, with the establishment of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) in 1975, and the Caribbean Food Corporation (CFC) in 1976 as the plan's chief implementation agencies.<sup>8</sup> In 1976, its remit was broadened to include rural development issues, productivity, income redistribution, quality and health. However, the expected outcomes never materialised, apparently due to lack of political commitment and technical capacity, fiscal crises, and the declining ability to purchase imports (Axline, 1984; Kirton, 2003). It was also impacted by broader structural constraints. Multilateral trade instruments signed in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Lomé Convention (1975) and the Caribbean Basin Initiative (1982), worked in opposition to many of the proposed objectives of the RFP, by encouraging the expansion and strengthening of traditional extra-regional agricultural export sectors, and reinforcing metropolitan links inherited from colonialism.

Aggravating these tendencies, the Caribbean debt crisis of the 1970s led to the imposition of neoliberal economic restructuring in many CARICOM member states by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. In the late 1970s, Jamaica took IMF loans with tourism, export-processing and financial services becoming new priorities, whilst agriculture support programmes were dismantled and public lands were sold to encourage the development of commercial agro-export orientated farms (Weis, 2004). According to the World Bank (1982: 32) the overall objective was 'economic recovery and sustained growth through the adoption of an export orientated strategy that emphasizes the dynamic role of the private sector'. However, between 1961 and 2013, whilst the population of Jamaica increased by a factor of 1.64, imports of wheat increased by 1.92, vegetables by 4, fruits by 6.7, and poultry by a whopping 43 (FAOSTAT, 2013).<sup>9</sup> In 1988, faced with a collapse in oil prices and a large repayment to creditors, T&T also took a loan from the IMF (Levitt, 2005).<sup>10</sup> Prior to this, throughout the 1980s the government instituted a range of IMF-advised austerity measures, including devaluation, the lowering of wages,

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<sup>8</sup> Despite the continuing success of CARDI, the CFC never managed to function properly, and outcomes of increased local production and import substitution never materialised.

<sup>9</sup> USA poultry exports simultaneously increased by a factor of 36, from 4086 to 113,000 tonnes (FAO, 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada and Guyana also took loans.

a reduction in all agricultural subsidies (except milk) from TTD \$62 million in 1983 to TTD \$22 million in 1987 (USD 25.6 to 6.1 million), and the dismantling of protective systems, price controls and import restrictions (World Bank, 1989).<sup>11</sup> The liberalisation of exchange and import restrictions were therefore critical to both programmes. Yet these policies only deepened trade imbalances stemming from enduring post-colonial structures of production (Weis, 2007). By re-embedding the Caribbean food and agricultural sector in a neo-colonial global food economy and weakening sovereign sustainability, food insecurity only increased (Thomas-Hope and Jardine-Comrie, 2007).

Nonetheless, several more attempts were made to revive the RFP with the publication of *CARICOM Feeds Itself: A Regional Food and Nutrition Strategy* (1983) and the *Caribbean Community Programme for Agricultural Development (CCPAD)* (1989). However, each new reincarnation faced the same structural and institutional constraints, agriculture continued to decline, and the sector remained largely export-orientated, vertically integrated, and consumption continued to be import-dependent. With greater liberalisation of agricultural trade as a result of the WTO Uruguay Round, efforts were further eroded and constrained by the unfair competitive advantage of cheap subsidised imports from the north which out-competed local farmers (Rosset, 2006). With admission to the WTO in 1995, CARICOM responded with the *Regional Transformation Programme for Agriculture (RTP)* (1996). However, this focused 'narrowly on promoting enhanced productivity and competitiveness of identified commodities for regional and external markets' (FAO, 2013). CARICOM policy thus turned even more towards market and trade-focused narratives, becoming firmly rooted within the dominant global neoliberal turn.

Therefore, the problems of Caribbean dependency and decline have never been solved. Liberalisation has largely been negative for small-scale farmers, with the increased importation of 'cheap' food and deteriorating conditions and supports. Kendall and Petracco (2009: 6) argue that the major beneficiaries have 'been large producers/commercial farms; traders and middlemen;

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<sup>11</sup> USD conversions are based on official TTD / USD currency exchange rates for each year quoted. The devaluation of the TTD accounts for the much greater decline in subsidies in USD terms over time.

large companies and multi-national firms', whereas small farmers have benefited significantly less, if at all, facing increased unemployment and poverty.<sup>12</sup> For example, in the Windward Island nations, liberalisation eroded preferences and the quota system under which 'a relatively sustainable and socially efficient banana industry emerged and grew' and 'whose banana exports more than doubled from 1960 to 1990' (Fridell, 2013: 620). But with the end of preferences the number of banana farmers dropped from 27000 in 1992 to 4000 in 2009 (*ibid*). Banana farmers in the Eastern Caribbean were consequently dramatically worse off (Payne, 2006; Wilson and Jackson, 2016). The same is also true for sugar workers elsewhere (see: Richardson and Richardson-Ngwenya, 2013).

Since the 2007-08 food crisis, continued calls have been made to rethink the model of Caribbean agriculture. A proposed approach was set out in two key CARICOM documents: the *Liliendaal Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security* (LDAFS) (CARICOM, 2009), a political statement of commitment by the CARICOM Heads of Government; and the *Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy* (RFNSP) for the period 2011-2025 (CARICOM, 2010) which gives effect to that pledge.<sup>13</sup> Although not legally binding, these documents set the tone for policy development and implementation by Member States. The key focus is to diversify and increase the competitiveness of agriculture, to attend to its contribution to food security, environmental sustainability, employment, and a more equitable distribution of income, poverty reduction and health (Kendall and Petracco, 2009). Nonetheless, key messages emanating from both show that CARICOM's strategic approach continues to prioritise neoclassical approaches to trade and development, which benefit agri-business and other vertically integrated networks, rather than small-farmers and local producers. For example, the *Liliendaal Declaration* emphasises a renewed commitment to several market-centric objectives, such as: the transformation of the agricultural sector into an 'internationally competitive sector' and its contribution to 'sustained economic

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<sup>12</sup> According to Walters and Jones (2012), from the 1960s to 2009, the per capita value of Caribbean food production declined from \$300 to less than \$200 (significantly influencing rising import demand).

<sup>13</sup> These documents were followed by the *Regional Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (RFNSAP) (2012 - 2026)*.



development', the 'economic livelihood of entrepreneurs' and to 'food and nutrition security' (CARICOM, 2009: 1). Recognition of the importance of 'vulnerable rural groups such as indigenous and other tribal peoples, youth and women' is also couched in terms of bringing 'them into the economic mainstream' (*ibid*). Likewise, the emphasis on increasing 'internationally competitive, market-led production' and enabling a 'stronger agriculture private sector' are indicative of policy orientation (CARICOM, 2009: 2).

Similarly, the *RFNSP*, whilst committing to the improvement of local production, reinforces a strict adherence to the FAO's conceptualisation of 'food security'. It aims to achieve this by providing a 'comprehensive' and 'holistic' framework' to ensure: 'regional food production, processing, distribution, marketing, trade, and food safety and [sic] agricultural public health system is capable of providing safe, adequate, nutritious and affordable food for the region's inhabitants' (CARICOM, 2010, 4). The *RFNSP*, therefore, continues to represent an externally imposed food and agricultural development strategy, and is strongly aligned to market-centric policy solutions. What is also stark in the *RFSNP*, as well as the policies which preceded it, is that there is little explicit discussion about what approach to agriculture should be taken - the *who* and *how*. It alludes to both public-private partnerships and incentives for small farmers, however, as Claxton (2012) finds, it exclusively advocates conventional agricultural practices as the solution to food security. Moreover, it conforms to the World Bank's model of 'value chain' farming, potentially reproducing both 'the corporate food regime' and its 'associated climate risks', and neglects to address the 'climate change adaptation and mitigation potential of agroecological practices' (Wilson, 2016: 2).

What this analysis of the regional policy environment shows is that, although calls for improving domestic production and self-sufficiency – which align with some, but not all of the core tenets of food sovereignty - have been key motifs of CARICOM policies for feeding its nations, the ebbs and flows of Caribbean food and agriculture have been more strongly impacted by global trends towards liberalisation. A plethora of policy activity, and renewed calls for agricultural development, food security and poverty alleviation, have in reality been followed by a combined lack of political will, interest and investment. Policies have remained firmly within a market-based

approach to food security, focused largely on increasing market value. The result has been that 'food security' has become synonymous with the increased importation of 'cheap food', much of which is highly processed, mass-produced and subsidised in country of origin. By and large, since the independence era, despite the rallying cries of politicians and farmers, regional policy has moved continually away from the goal of challenging fundamental structural constraints: as such, the prospect of increasing self-sufficiency and local production for local consumption remains elusive, despite the resources that have been committed to it.

## **5. Food Sovereignty in the Anglo-Caribbean: Partial Mobilisations and Distinctive Peasant Landscapes**

Although conventional discourses dominate, this section explores examples of where food sovereignty discourses *have* been mobilised, albeit partially, in the Caribbean. Using LVC membership as a proxy, and looking across its contemporary geographical dispersal, it is apparent that formal food sovereignty organising has been far more prevalent in Latin America and the Hispanophone Caribbean than in the independent, Anglo-Caribbean. In 2013, LVC had 164 membership organisations, spread across 73 countries, and just over half resided in the Americas.<sup>14</sup> In North America, Mexico, Canada and the United States all have member bodies (7 in total). In South America, almost every country has members (40 in total), apart from the three that are generally considered 'Caribbean' territories (Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana). Similarly, in Central America (which has 26 members), all seven non-Caribbean region countries - Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras - have member organisations, whilst Belize, the only Caribbean (and Anglo) nation does not. This implies a revealing demarcation: in the island Caribbean itself (which has 13 members), all three Hispanophone

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<sup>14</sup> LVC members are predominantly a mix of producer organizations, farmer and farm worker unions, and farmer cooperatives. Although, there is a distinction between LVC as an organization and food sovereignty as a concept, membership is a useful proxy of organized activity.

countries – Cuba, Dominican Republic (DR) and Puerto Rico – have members, as does Haiti. However, the majority of Anglo nations - Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, and T&T – do not. The ones that do – Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) – are represented under the umbrella of the Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA).

So, what makes WINFA distinctive? WINFA was established in 1987 as an umbrella group for farmers' associations in the Windward Isles: the Grenada Cane Farmers Association (GCFA); the National Farmers' Unions of SVG and St Lucia; and the WINFA Dominica branch (IICA, 1992). The organisation's key role is lobbying to support the livelihoods of small-scale banana farmers and the promotion of Fairtrade bananas which are sold in British and European supermarkets (*ibid*). Interestingly, as part of this agenda, a WINFA delegation attended the 1992 Congress of the Nicaraguan National Union of Agriculturalists and Livestock Producers, Managua, where the declaration laid the foundation for the establishment of LVC the following year in Mons, Belgium (Desmarais, 2002, 2007; Kopka, 2013).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the concept of 'food sovereignty' can be seen to have been diffused through Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) regional farmer-group gatherings. The headquarters of WINFA is also based in SVG which is part of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America–Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP), founded by Venezuela and Cuba in 2004 and consequently has connections with more socialist-leaning nations in the wider hemisphere. Indeed, in 2008, at the ALBA-TCP "Food for Life" Presidential Summit on Food Sovereignty and Security', SVG agreed to '25 actions and common positions consonant with food sovereignty' (Muhr, 2013: 130).<sup>16</sup> Eleven other LAC Heads of State also discussed integrating food sovereignty into their regional strategies (Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012), but none were Anglo-Caribbean nations.

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<sup>15</sup> Seven other farmers' organizations attended from Central America, Europe, Canada and the USA (Desmarais, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Additionally, in 2012, the regional LAC Parliament Forum (PARLATINO) approved a model law on the right to food, food security and food sovereignty. However, despite the inclusion of Caribbean in its title, the forum is composed of almost entirely Latin American states.

Nonetheless, diffusion of food sovereignty principles can be found amongst some farmers' groups in the Anglo region. For example, one of the key drivers of the GCFA, founded in the 1980s, was to transform Grenada's sugarcane sector through the refinement of traditional intercropping techniques and collective labour methods of their forbearers, thereby enacting 'a repeasantization of a kind' (Kopka, 2013: 15). However, the GCFA experienced many constraints (*ibid*). Internally, tourist development, natural disasters (two hurricanes) and government pressure to commercialise small farms and cuts in supports to small and subsistence farmers hampered progress. Externally, constraints ranged from the aforementioned 'persistent hold of export-orientated plantation agriculture on the island's economy' to the 'pressures of neoliberal governance and international debt' (Kopka, 2013: 14). Although the GCFA positively impacted local production, contributed to food independence, and improved the status and well-being of small farmers, Kopka (2013: 339) found that – 'preoccupied with the growth of the organization and members' survival' it failed to develop a strong voice in national discussions about agriculture, the importance of small farming and food sovereignty. As one official commented, 'the highly integrative GCFA model was simply not a commercial project' (Kopka, 2013: 340). Therefore, whilst farmers' groups mobilised towards food sovereignty, official government policy prioritised the development of medium-to-large commercial farms over small and subsistence farmers.

The tension between supporting small farmers and promoting large commercial farm projects is controversial in many Caribbean nations. In Trinidad, food and agricultural policies, despite encompassing incentives programmes for all farmers, have persistently focused on the attempted institution of commercial 'mega-farms' through public-private partnerships (MFPLMA, 2011). Furthermore, small farmers face multiple barriers to accessing incentives, such as administrative red-tape, corruption, prejudice, hidden agendas and the necessity to have upfront capital to purchase goods prior to receiving subsidy payments (Thompson, 2017).<sup>17</sup> In 2007, a group of representatives from various local farmers' organisations presented to CARICOM an

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<sup>17</sup> Confidential interviews: small-farmers, Trinidad, 2012-2014.

'Agricultural Manifesto' framed by the principles of food sovereignty, calling for 'bottom-up solutions' and 'participation' over 'consultation'. Yet it was largely ignored by local government officials.<sup>18</sup> According to one Senior Representative from the local branch of the FAO, 'the reality of the matter comes down to trade policy' and 'political will' (*ibid*).<sup>19</sup>

In Trinidad, the discourse of food sovereignty has, though, crept into the narratives of some policy-makers and politicians, where it is most frequently mobilised narrowly to draw attention to the imperative of increasing local production, rather than its wider political and ideological principles. The first mention of it in Parliament, in 2005, by the then Prime Minister and leader of the People's National Movement, Patrick Manning, outlined the government's strategy 'to improve food security and food sovereignty' through 'development of strategic agricultural subsectors', 'a sustainable rural development agenda', 'youth involvement' and 'competitiveness in export and domestic markets' (Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005: 62). The 'revitalisation' and 'modernisation' of the domestic agricultural sector were seen to be critical to the 'mission' of achieving developed country status by 2020. Here, food sovereignty was reductively mobilised to emphasise local production, but little else. In 2012, the Minister of Food Production (of the subsequent People's Partnership Government), Jairam Seemungal, moved closer to its core tenets when he called for 'shifting the dialogue' away from the goal of 'food security' towards the 'more all-embracing' and 'higher and laudable' objective of 'food sovereignty' in order to 'underpin the twin objective of diversification of the economy and insulating us from the exploitation of international food suppliers' (Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012: 938). However, in reality, the Trinidadian state made few successful moves with regards to addressing the asymmetries of trade facing it, or the wider region, vis-à-vis the global market. Moreover, national food production policies continued to emphasise heavily the development of large commercial farms.

Arguably, in some senses food sovereignty has entered the Caribbean as a development discourse as well as a grassroots movement. After a regional meeting of CARICOM Agricultural

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<sup>18</sup> Confidential interview: local farmers' organization convenor, Trinidad, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Confidential interview: FAO official, Trinidad, 2014.

Ministers in Grenada, one newspaper headline read: 'Food Sovereignty Replaces Food Security as Major Caribbean Theme' (Antigua Observer, 2010). However, the emphasis often continues to be placed on increasing local food production without equal emphasis paid to the necessary conditions and power imbalances that need to be addressed in order to move towards a position where nations and peoples might be able to define their local food and agriculture policy and to participate in decision-making. As the Director of the Trinidad-based Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) commented at the same meeting: 'When we talk of sovereignty, it is about the ability of the region to produce food for itself' (*Jamaican Gleaner*, November 7, 2010). Therefore, as has been found elsewhere, rhetorically questions of democracy and justice are often absent (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005), as are questions of international trade (Paddock and Smith, 2017). This can pose difficulties for small-island nations, as food sovereignty discourses tend to lean towards an anti-international trade stance and a preference for local markets (Burnett and Murphy, 2014).

The limited existence of strong contemporary subaltern social and peasant movements in the Anglo-Caribbean, both nationally and regionally, also limits mobilisation. While many Latin American countries have a strong pre-colonial indigenous peasant presence, in the Caribbean the indigenous inhabitants were all but wiped out by colonial invaders. As Altieri and Toledo (2011) point out, Mexico has a long history of rural community organising and indigenous agrarian knowledge, whilst countries such as Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador also have strong indigenous rural movements which are the driving force of change and anti-neoliberal sentiment. They further suggest that in 'the Latin American context, Mexico is in agrarian terms a unique country', with the revolution of 1910-1917 bringing 'the first agrarian reform on the continent, leaving in the hands of the peasant and indigenous communities a great part of the land, forests and native germplasm' (Altieri and Toledo, 2011: 604). This has had a lasting impact on the organisation of Mexico's agrarian landscape today, where, notwithstanding privatisation in the 1990s, land is largely socially owned, equitably distributed and community organized (*ibid*). Similarly, in Cuba, Wilson (2017) finds the development of alternative food networks to be a case of 'exceptionalism' in the Caribbean due to its unique history that saw plantation society arrive late onto an already-agrarian

society, and also its changing post-revolutionary relations with the Soviet Union and the United States. The conditions in which alternative food sovereignty movements emerge are, therefore, culturally, socially and politically specific. In many ways, Mexico and Cuba, both had *the* social and political foundations that food sovereignty requires.

Yet much of the Anglo-Caribbean lacks indigenous farmer movements with long historical roots. Most of the islands are far smaller than Cuba or Haiti, and in many cases they have populations of less than 150,000. Moreover, as Mintz (1989) argued, the peasantry is a '*reconstituted*' one, having begun life other than as peasants and emerging from diverse experiences on the margins of European colonial enterprise – as squatters, early yeomen, proto-peasantry, deserters or runaways. Unlike in Asia, Europe and Africa, there was no 'pre-capitalist' peasantry (Best and Levitt 2009).<sup>20</sup> Instead, domestically-focused agriculture did not fully emerge until after the abolition of slavery. Colonial policies also attempted to prevent its growth, by restricting access to land and perpetuating elite (i.e. plantocracy) wealth accumulation (Besson, 2003). This legacy still plays out today, with land distribution characterised by inequitable ownership and control, insecurity of tenure, high levels of state ownership, little progress in terms of land reform (Toppin-Allahar, 2013) and a peasantry which is often viewed as individualistic in nature (Beckford, 1972). For example, in Trinidad, farmers are still seen to 'work independently' and tend to organize to 'work together in their own interests' (Theodore, 2007: 11).<sup>21</sup> As Bernstein (2014) and Edelman (2014) have argued, one problem with food sovereignty is the assumption of a homogenous peasantry, a point that the Anglo-Caribbean's uniqueness reinforces. Due to its distinct history, it not only lacks a strong peasant movement, but also struggles against colonial legacies of unequal land distribution and individualism which can work against the forming of cooperatives, thereby perpetuating the problem.

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<sup>20</sup> We must also acknowledge the existence of the 'proto-peasantry' and some indigenous groups alongside slavery (Mintz, 1989; Besson, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> The Farmers' Coordinating Council commented that they believe 'this is an organizational issue rather than an ideological, challenge' (Theodore, 2007: 11).

In sum, although food sovereignty discourses have been adopted by some farmers' groups and politicians, the focus is often a re-emphasis on local food production and self-sufficiency rather than the more democratic ideals of the right to define local food and agricultural systems and to challenge the inequities of international trade. Moreover, in political discourse, food sovereignty is often mobilised as an addendum to food security, rather than as a political project in itself. Although important, this necessarily reduces food sovereignty to little more than decreasing import bills and obscures its more radical and core underlying political and ideological principles.

## **6. Still Searching? Caribbean Sovereignties and Possibilities for Transformation**

So, what are the possibilities for what Roman-Alcalá calls 'aspirational' food sovereignty in the Anglo-Caribbean? In order to answer this question, we must understand the actually existing sovereignty of the independent Caribbean state, both political and economic, and its internal and external dynamics. The region offers a unique case study in this regard, particularly in terms of its colonial legacy.

To grasp the distinctiveness of Anglo-Caribbean notions of sovereignty, it is useful to consider alternatives. Sovereignty is both a contested, ideological concept that has been developed in particular geographical and historical contexts, and is subject to change over time (Conversi, 2016). In Britain, 'internal' sovereignty has generally been seen to belong to a particular institution (Parliament) whereas in Spain and other continental European countries it is seen to belong to a specific collectivity (the people or the nation) (Witte, 1995). This is in part because continental 'popular sovereignty' influenced, and was influenced by, the American (1765-1783) and French (1789-1798) revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and, in the case of the US, the revolutionaries who rejected the sovereignty of the British parliament (*ibid*). For obvious reasons, the British did not favour this new notion of popular sovereignty and continued to invest national identity in symbols such as the monarch and the church, and their related institutions.



This can still be seen in the Anglo-Caribbean, with power residing in the state and the government rather than 'the people', and it has pertinent consequences for modes of governance and the enactment of sovereignty. These differences are also compounded by divergent paths of independence and decolonisation, which throughout LAC were largely demarcated by colonial nationality. The Haitian Revolution of 1791 was swiftly followed by the Latin American wars of independence, whereby most of Hispanic Latin America secured liberation by the 1820s, followed by the DR in 1844 and Cuba in 1901 (Oostindie and Klinkers, 2003). In South America, the only countries not to secure independence at this time were non-Hispanic and sparsely settled: Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Moreover, British Caribbean nations did not achieve independence until the 1960s, and for some islands not until the 1980s. Independence therefore came much later. These histories have arguably left a markedly different understanding of sovereignty in the Anglo-Caribbean compared to Latin America and the non-Anglophone Caribbean.

So, what do we mean when we talk of 'internal' sovereignty in the Anglo-Caribbean? Arguably, it is understood to reside not in the people, but the state, and, in the small territories, even just with dominant leaders (Singham, 1968). As Bishop and Payne (2010: 10) argue, Anglo-Caribbean island states suffer from problems of both statehood and sovereignty, in that they 'continue to sustain an enduring conceptualization of sovereignty which is both narrow and considered to be the sole preserve of national leaderships'. Caribbean leaders therefore continue to hold onto an elite conception of personal sovereignty (Gilbert-Roberts, 2013). Furthermore, the Westminster two-party model continues to dominate; the consequence of this is that meaningful political participation is limited. This differs substantially to the experiments in participatory democracy taking place across Latin America (Girvan, 2015), including most obviously and crucially, in its agrarian movements. Therefore, the possibilities for 'the people' to play a role in the decision-making processes of aspirational food sovereignty are arguably currently more limited, or at least certainly more challenging, in the Anglo-Caribbean than elsewhere.

As we have seen, 'external' sovereignty – in terms of political and economic autonomy from external control or interference – has always been limited in Caribbean nations. As Lamming

argues (2004: 12) 'independence' had 'not yet won the right to sovereignty': from 1938 onwards the 'transnational corporation assumed a novel dominance in all regional affairs' with 'domestic policy' 'determined by international lending agencies'. For Lamming (2004: vii) the 'deeply cherished ideals of independence, freedom of thought, of speech and of association, and sovereignty itself are threatened with slaughter on the altar of the market'. Lewis (2004a: 321) similarly argues that 'even when formal political independence occurred... the political sovereignty was rendered null and void, in large part by the economic sovereignty exercised by the metropolitan business forces'. External sovereignty has been further eroded by strong pro-market and pro-free trade politics, coupled with the European Commission's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) which opened up Caribbean markets to EU exports (Bishop et al., 2012). The decline and neglect of agriculture in the Caribbean has therefore been magnified by these processes, along with a general lack of power vis-à-vis the global food economy. Now that preferential trade has been eroded, global trade rules and regulations defined primarily by the US and EU have limited the ability of small Caribbean producers to compete. In this sense, the kind of meaningful sovereignty that would enable 'local decisions' to be made independently of the 'dictates of global capital in accordance with domestic requirements' (Lewis, 2012: 4) remains one of the key challenges facing the region today.

There also exists a strong tension between national and regional understandings of sovereignty in the independent Anglo-Caribbean, with it mobilised nationally by local actors within each territory, and regionally at the CARICOM level, with the two often coming into conflict. Responses to challenges and vulnerabilities, such as food security and food sovereignty, are often framed as requiring regional action (Lowitt et al., 2016). Therefore, the question of who is the sovereign extends not just from 'the nation' to 'the people' but also to concerns of regionalism. As Girvan (2015: 105) puts it, 'the concept of "shared sovereignty" is on the table': 'sharing *selected* attributes of constitutional sovereignty with regional partners so as to enhance the substantive sovereignty of each'. He sees this as particularly important for issues such as food, security, climate change, and negotiations with external donors (*ibid*). Although these concerns have been little

applied to the issue of food sovereignty specifically, questions of regionalism and sovereignty have long been central to the Caribbean project of independence and the development of regional governance mechanisms, such as CARICOM (Bishop and Payne 2010; Gilbert-Roberts 2013).

With regards to the question of food sovereignty's sovereignty in the independent Anglo-Caribbean, three of the six pillars arguably resonate most: valuing food producers, localising food systems and putting control locally.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, we might ask, in terms of these, to what extent could food sovereignty be fully realised in this context? Food and agricultural policy continues to be externally supported and funded by international development institutions, such as the EU, FAO and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Furthermore, the success of mobilisations of regional sovereignty are limited by diversity between CARICOM member states with regards to agricultural priorities and agendas. For example, whereas more industrialised nations such as T&T favour voluntary regulation regarding issues such as biosafety, Eastern Caribbean nations that supply niche organic products to the EU favour more comprehensive regulation and legislation. These diverging experiences and interests – which bedevil all areas of policy – have fundamentally limited the Caribbean project of regionalism since the short-lived Federation of the West Indies (1958-1962) that aimed to politically unite the ex-colonies of Britain collapsed (Payne, 2008). Girvan (2015) has thus argued that new creative thinking is needed to transcend the form of regionalism represented by CARICOM, combined with the transformation of democracy away from the 'shackles of Westminsterism' towards popular participation. Both would give more form to the possibilities for aspirational food sovereignty in the region, and more power to small island states vis-à-vis the global economy. Internally, citizens would have more say, as both producers and consumers, over the shape of food and agricultural policy.

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to ignore the importance of food that is healthy and culturally appropriate, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the building knowledge and skills, however, due to limits of space it is beyond the current scope of this paper.

## 7. Conclusion

This article interrogated the distinctive social, historical, political and economic location of the independent Anglo-Caribbean and has explored why 'food sovereignty' has been articulated in often partial and distinctive ways. Although the food crises of the 1970s and 2007-08 raised renewed national and regional calls to improve 'self-sufficiency' and 'domestic food production', food and agricultural related policy-making has continued to be dominated by externally imposed development discourses and market-centric 'food security' approaches, shaped further by the Caribbean's externally propelled and asymmetric integration into global networks of production, distribution and consumption. Moreover, the principles of 'food sovereignty' have not always travelled easily to the particular context of the Anglo-Caribbean. Despite mobilisation by some farmers' groups, distinctive legacies of state-farmer relations and enduring structural constraints have meant that this is weaker than elsewhere in the wider LAC region. When mobilised at the political level, food sovereignty has often been appropriated as a political discourse to draw attention to the call to increase local food production, rather than as a political project in itself grounded in the struggle for peasant rights and participation in decision-making. This means that calls for food sovereignty have often been adopted in ways that work within the neoliberal economic and liberal state environment, rather than against it, and the right of 'the people' to decide is depoliticised in this context.

As Clive Thomas (1988: 346) argued some years ago, the Caribbean 'has always been a battle ground of world views'. Its societies and economies have been conditioned by centuries of colonialism focused on agricultural production for export, and the generation of profits which accrue externally. The contemporary food system continues to reflect this legacy and historically its international market integration has been almost exclusively propelled from the outside. Moreover, it remains dominated by global distribution networks of transporters, traders and retailers with roots in the US and Europe (and now increasingly South America and Asia). The legacy of the plantation economy system also means that the development of the peasantry in the Anglo-Caribbean has been a relatively contemporary phenomenon compared to the rest of the

world, emerging from the specific conditions of and the abolition of slavery. This means that, in stark contrast to the emergence of radical subaltern movements in South and Central America, the conditions for the development of a strong agrarian movement are lacking, but as this paper has argued these structural legacies alone do not explain why food sovereignty discourses play out as they do.

Indeed, by applying a wider analysis of 'sovereignty' to the case of the independent nations of the Anglo-Caribbean, this paper has produced insights into how the actual conditions of both 'internal' and 'external' sovereignty frame the ways in which the concept has been translated locally and, in turn, circumscribe possibilities for change. In terms of 'external' sovereignty, the independent states of the English-speaking Caribbean have little power vis-à-vis the global political economy, and have long been entrenched in an environment of trade liberalisation and rising imports, despite repeated (unsuccessful) calls to improve local production and self-sufficiency. Anglo-Caribbean states also have a unique conceptualisation of 'internal' sovereignty, influenced by a distinctive British colonial history that conceptualises sovereign power as in the hands of 'the state' and its leaders rather than 'the people'. This differs dramatically from states in South and Central America which centre 'the people' to conceptions of sovereignty. Therefore, although it is true that most states globally are entrenched in a neoliberal environment, the political principles of 'food sovereignty' are limited more dramatically in these small island nations due to a peculiarly British conception of sovereignty. Moreover, combined with a lack of strong agrarian movements, this significantly limits the possibilities for mobilisation as a political project. In other words, the required prerequisites of both 'internal' and 'external' political sovereignty in this case are diminished.

This matters for wider debates in the geographies of food and food sovereignty literatures, because it shows how global norms around food sovereignty are mediated differently by British colonial history, geo-politics and culture, and do not always travel as well as we might think, *even when* people in those cultures invoke them. It draws attention to the need for further research on how the conditions of political sovereignty itself impact upon the translation of the concept and

possibilities for transformation supposedly embodied in food sovereignty discourses. Trauger (2014) has made a similar argument, reflecting (in the US context) that the primacy of the market to liberal sovereignty runs counter to, and therefore mutes, the radical aims of food sovereignty. As we have seen, this certainly happens in the Anglo-Caribbean too. But what is different is that local invocations of food sovereignty, limited and partial as they may be, also often end up reproducing narrow agricultural discourses stripped of their radical potential, because of distinctive local conceptions of sovereignty more broadly. This raises questions of how food sovereignty movements can adapt to work in environments where due to small size, structural constraints and the power vested in the state, the possibilities for food movement organising are even more limited. Future research in this area, to return to Roman-Alcalá's (2016) framing, could therefore explore the 'actually existing' and 'aspirational' conditions of internal authoritative, legitimate and effective decision-making structures within political entities and the external conditions of independent control and influence.

This case study also matters to wider debates in the development literature on food and agricultural policy-making at the national, regional and global level. The Anglo-Caribbean case brings into sharp view how implementing food security policies has worked hand in hand with policies that further liberalised trade to deliver 'cheap food', which, while improving availability, have further eroded substantive food sovereignty and domestic production, with the unexpected consequence of creating new dietary related issues, such as an increased prevalence of obesity and diabetes. The global policy shift from a focus on 'agriculture' to one on 'food' in the 1970s represented both a signal and symptom of these changes. Without broader checks and balances in the global food system it is difficult to see how distinctive small-island regions such as the Anglo-Caribbean can easily overcome these challenges: while the tenets of food sovereignty that relate to local food production and control have found limited resonance against immense structural constraints, matters of trade, participation in decision-making, and the focus on culturally appropriate food choices do not map easily onto this terrain.

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