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## **Relationalities and Convergences in Food Security Narratives: Towards A Place-Based Approach**

### **Introduction: identifying the food security gaps**

Global food systems display multiple forms of socio-economic and environmental vulnerability – as evidenced by persistent trends of food price volatility, rising malnutrition, social unrest and loss of biodiversity. These well-documented dynamics are signaling the inadequacy of conventional food security approaches (Lang and Barling 2012; Sonnino et al. 2014a). For critics, the main problem has been their polarization around oppositional narratives (e.g., efficiency vs. sufficiency, bio-economy vs. eco-economy) and obsolete dichotomies (e.g., production vs. consumption, rural vs. urban) that are unable to capture the systemic and evolutionary nature of the global food crisis (Lang 2010; Misselhorn et al. 2012). As Candel (2014, 597) argues, food security is a complex, ambiguous, contested and persistent (in a word, “wicked”) problem that involves multiple sectors, actors and activities at multiple scales and across multiple policy domains. As such, it should be framed and addressed by taking into account a wide range of knowledges – what Funtowicz and Ravetz (2003) call, in their theorization of “post-normal science”, a “plurality of legitimate perspectives”.

In this paper, we aim to progress a more integrated conceptual framework on food security through a focus on its discursive agendas. Several scholars have argued that different definitions and interpretations of “food security” are far more than

semantic disputes. As Jarosz (2011) shows, it is ultimately through different food security discourses that global institutions have subordinated individuals in the global South (i.e., their purchasing power) to the global modalities of power (i.e., free market strategies of poverty alleviation) located in the global North. Discourses, in short, set the targets of policy intervention (see also Wittman, 2011). As such, they have material and socio-economic implications for people's wellbeing. Quoting Nally (2014), discourses *on* food security produce social realities; hence, they deserve as much research attention as the socio-economic and political dynamics *of* food security.

Emerging calls for a refined food security agenda are concentrating on two main issues. First, there is a need to blur the boundaries between different geographical narratives (Hopma and Woods 2014, 781) and re-orient debates around their *relationality*, which, according to Jarosz (2014, 179), "must be [...] sought across scales and privileged over the oppositional stance". Second, food security as an outcome is deemed to be dependent upon the *convergence* of different interests across different policy arenas. As Garnett and Godfray (2012, 49) state: "a system of food production that is socially or ethically unacceptable to a large fraction of the population will lack 'continuability', or resilience, however ecologically attuned it may be". The same applies, it has been added, to any fair and socially acceptable food system that is rooted in processes of environmental degradation (Sonnino et al. 2014a, 183). It is then crucial to ensure that food security strategies facilitate an integration of technical, environmental, social and political interests around collective goals. The social and spatial processes of generation of public

and social legitimacy and consent that this entails raise critical questions, especially around food security governance.

To address the need for an enhanced relationality between food security discourses and for a more collective integration of their different interests, in this paper we ask: How, and to what extent, can different narratives on food security and their postulates be embedded into a more comprehensive and integrated theoretical framework? Can their different governance foci converge to create a context that fosters closer connections between food system activities and collaborative relations among its actors? Can a redefined and more elaborated place-based approach be employed to achieve more integrative goals around a convergent conceptualization of food security?

To address these questions, we critically review different narratives that have been deployed to frame the food security problem and identify potential solutions. These narratives were identified through a survey that was conducted (in English) with 44 European experts on food security from different backgrounds (civil society organisations, the private sector and the public sector). Respondents were asked to identify threats to global food security as well as the most neglected factors in relevant debates. Answers to these open-ended questions provided a rich set of qualitative data that were analyzed to uncover the different narratives underpinning participants' responses. Key words that experts utilized in direct association with "food security" (i.e., 'productivism', 'food sovereignty', 'livelihood security framework', 'right to food', 'community food security' and 'food democracy') provided the focus for an in-depth review of academic literature

(mostly published in the last 5 years) and of policy documents that were explicitly mentioned by respondents.

Our analysis focuses in particular on the governance frameworks embedded in different narratives – i.e., the role attributed to different food system actors, their views of rights and responsibility, and the scales, sites and types of interactions that are prioritized to achieve food security outcomes. In the second part of the paper, such frameworks provide the basis for the development of a more integrated and engaged place-making approach to food security based upon three key conceptual parameters: embedded re-localisation; translocalism and the role of flows in and between food places; and progressive place-making. As we conclude, the adoption of a conceptually deepened place-based approach to food security creates a platform for the development of a multi-scalar perspective that can build far more complexity into generalized frameworks and aggregated debates.

### **From productivism to collective consumption: a critical review of food security approaches**

The different narratives that have shaped the interpretation of “food security” throughout the post-war period have been subjected to several academic analyses. The assumption behind these efforts is that food security is a “consensus frame” – or, as Mooney and Hunt (2009) explain, a term that finds broad acceptance and consent but it is used to make different or even divergent claims. Rooted in the cultures of different institutional and non-institutional actors, such claims have

important policy implications: they shape discourses and paradigms that influence the ways in which food security is approached, policy options are identified and, ultimately, power and resources are distributed (Lang and Barling 2012).

Most academic accounts of changes that have taken place in the conceptualization of food security have positioned the analysis toward aggregate levels of interpretation. Scholars have concentrated on the influence of different food security framings on the evolution of policy discourses, both globally (Candel et al. 2014) and nationally – in countries as diverse as Italy (Brunori et al. 2013), the USA (Hinrichs 2013), the UK (Kirwan and Maye 2013) and New Zealand (Rosin 2013). Related to this, the literature has emphasized the relationship between discourses and scales of food security interventions (Jarosz 2011; Hopma and Woods 2014) – in a word, governance. Researchers agree that governance plays a crucial role as both a potential driver of food security crises and as a solution to them (Candel 2014). Poor decision-making, conflict, weak institutional capacity, limited coordination and resource scarcity can harm governments' ability to respond to contingent food security crises (Boyd and Wang 2011; Pereira and Ruysenaar 2012) and, more structurally, to address their natural and socio-economic drivers. Scholars agree that food security requires a “good” governance context characterized by policy coherence, institutional coordination and inclusiveness (Drimie and Ruysenaar 2010). However, with few exceptions (for example, Pereira and Ruysenaar 2012; Sonnino et al. 2014b), the discussion on how such a context can be created and maintained has taken place at an abstract and generic level, leading to “a rather narrow, normative and simplistic view of

governance within a large proportion of the food security community” (Candel 2014, 596).

To begin to develop a new theoretical and policy agenda around food security, we examine the governance frameworks that are embedded in different narratives – identified through an in-depth analysis of the responses provided to an online survey by European experts on food security, which were triangulated with data from a critical review of both academic and policy literature, as explained earlier. Our analysis focuses on four issues that we consider crucial to identify those frameworks: the actors included in (or excluded from) the governance arenas (e.g., public and private sector, large and small food producers, individual or collective consumers); the type of responsibility allocated to them (the active or passive role that different narratives envision for different food system actors); the scales and sites of intervention identified in each narrative (e.g., individual, household, community, local, national or global levels); and the kind of interactions occurring within and outside the food system (which involve agriculture, trade, socio-economic and infrastructural development, science and the environment) that are prioritized to realize collective goals. Based on these elements, our discussion highlights the relevance of an alternative focus on place – the “meso-level” where global drives for self-sufficiency in food provisioning become connected to (or disconnected from) individual survival strategies.

*Food security and the productivist framework*

Early conceptualizations of food security were informed by a “productivist” frame that has persisted until today. Based on the basic idea that solutions to food insecurity must be found primarily at the supply end of the food chain, this frame emerged in the early post-war period out of FAO’s emphasis on “increasing food production, particularly in the developing countries, stabilizing food supplies, using the food surpluses of developed countries constructively and creatively, creating world and national food reserves, stimulating world agricultural trade [and] negotiating international commodity agreements” (Shaw 2007, 283).

These fundamental elements of the productivist narrative did not emerge simultaneously, nor have they received the same level of attention over time. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the emphasis was on achieving national self-sufficiency (especially in cereals production) and using the surplus produced to establish food reserves for times of national shortfall and to supply developing countries. In the 1980s, it became increasingly evident that this approach had failed to deliver global food security outcomes. Indeed, the growth in the import of cereals had displaced local food economies in many developing countries, where, as a result, famine continued to persist. This realization, coupled with Sen’s (1981) influential theory on entitlement and access, began to shift the prevailing focus from self-sufficiency in food to the wider economic context. As Jarosz (2011, 125) recalls, during the 1980s food security came to be defined “in terms of the lack of purchasing power – the inability of states and individuals to purchase the food they need, rather than an issue of food supply”.

It is at this stage that the discourse on food security bifurcated into two competing narratives. The attention for the individual's ability to secure food generated the emergence of a "livelihood security" model that, as we will explain, has uncovered the complexity of demand strategies employed by poor and vulnerable households. A focus on the State level, by contrast, began to embed food security into a wider neo-liberal agenda that framed hunger as a technical problem that must be addressed through increased productivity and the liberalization of trade. In Nally's words (2011, 39), "under free-trade principles the fecundity of the soil, transportation networks, husbandry practices, and above all, the efficient functioning of the market, gradually displace the 'obsessive fear' that dominate the 'anti-scarcity' structures of the mercantile period".

From a governance perspective, the main novelty introduced by this neo-productivist framework is a more global scalar perspective. Food security is now framed as both a national and a global problem. Wealthier countries need to produce more food both for domestic consumption and for supplying developing countries. As stated, for example, by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA 2008, 28), "one of the most important contributions that the UK can make to global, and their own, food security is having a thriving and productive agriculture sector – that is, exploiting natural advantages in domestic food production to meet rising demand elsewhere".

In the context of today's grand challenges (climate change, rising population and the environmental vulnerability of the global food economy), science continues to be extolled for its potential to mitigate food shortages (see, for example, Royal

Society 2009). However, in contrast with older frameworks, this neo-productivist approach does not rely upon a universalistic and modernistic interpretation of scientific knowledge. A generalized concern about the efficiency of food production in a global context of growing competition over resources has reinforced the idea that the main challenge of the coming decades is “how to expand agricultural output massively without increasing by much the amount of land used” (Nature, 2010: 531). In this context, the attention has turned towards the potential of traditional agro-ecological practices to reduce environmental impact. Under the so-called “sustainable intensification” paradigm, there is an effort to bridge agro-industrial and agro-ecological knowledge (Pretty et al. 2011, 10). Small and artisanal producers have thus entered the food security governance arena. However, their relationships with other food system actors and with the wider socio-economic context continue to be neglected (FAO 2004; Freibauer et al. 2011). The prevailing neo-liberal discourse still presents “global markets, agrarian biotechnologies and multinational corporate initiatives as the structural preconditions for alleviating world hunger” (Nally 2011, 49). We see then, in the productivist framing, a strong set of governance relationships between particular styles of science and neo-liberal conceptions of market-led governance that contrasts strongly with other framings that prioritize, in different ways, citizens’ right to food.

#### *Food sovereignty as an alternative productionist framework*

In many ways, the concept of food sovereignty has been developed in opposition to the central tenets of neo-liberal productivism. Whereas the latter is closely associated with technocratic development discourses, aligned with trans-national

agribusiness, the former is embedded in Marxist political economy and peasant studies approaches that prioritize the analysis of power relations and the impacts of capitalism upon agriculture, the environment, poverty and hunger. In this respect, food sovereignty maintains a relational focus on the functioning of the global food system, but, in contrast with productivism, it sees globalization as the cause of (rather than the solution to) food insecurity, which is fundamentally framed as an outcome of unequal global trade relations.

As originally defined by the global agrarian movement *La Via Campesina* (1996), food sovereignty is “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity”. In relation to food security, this definition introduces two main novelties. First, the use of the term “right” entails a rejection of the idea of food as a tradeable commodity proposed by earlier conceptualizations. Second, reference to “cultural and productive diversity” breaks away from the allocation of responsibility for food security to national governments to include “the people of a nation, and particularly those involved in the production of food” (Hopma and Woods 2014, 778). The emphasis on environmental diversity is a celebration of agro-ecological principles (Edelman 2014), which aligns food sovereignty with recent neo-productivist frameworks. However, in contrast with sustainable intensification, food sovereignty rejects the primacy of the application of Western science and technology to food production to advance a “sustainable family farm-based production” model (Jarosz 2014 173-174).

Another important difference with neo-productivism is food sovereignty's more recent effort to include consumption in its narrative. The 2007 Declaration of Nyéléni has indeed redefined food sovereignty as “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 system” (Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007). In practice, however, food sovereignty narratives continue to prioritize domestic agriculture (Clapp 2014), raising significant challenges for countries that do not have sufficient resources to produce food or that, as in the case of Canada, include indigenous communities that traditionally do not engage with farming (Grey and Patel 2015) and, consequently, reject “agriculture-centric” perspectives on food sovereignty (Desmarais and Wittman 2014).

More generally, it has been pointed out that the food sovereignty discourse can be co-opted. In the global North, where the percentage of peasant population is low, for example, food sovereignty tends to be reframed in terms of consumer choice and local control (Hopma and Woods 2014, 780) – a narrative that downplays the central message about food insecurity as a product of the social injustices of the neo-liberal agri-food system.

Despite these weaknesses, from a governance perspective there is one fundamental component of the food sovereignty framework that can contribute to develop a conceptual relationality and policy convergence among food security approaches: its emphasis on the context-dependent nature of food security, which becomes rooted in important ideas of global justice. In this respect, food

sovereignty distinguishes itself for its capacity to situate food security in a multi-level governance system where local struggles become connected with national and international dynamics. As Iles and de Wit (2015, 494) state, “understood in terms of relational scale, food sovereignty becomes as much a practice of creating connectivity as of creating autonomy”.

#### *The livelihood security framework*

In the 1980s, the persistence of hunger in the global South, which Sen (1981) began to theorize in terms of entitlement and access, originated a new “livelihood security” model that shifted the focus from the State to the individual, and from self-sufficiency to poverty alleviation – in other words, from the “natural” causes of hunger to its wider political and socio-economic context (Dilley and Boudreau 2001; Valdivia and Gilles 2011).

As defined by Ellis (2000, 10), the term ‘livelihood’ refers to “the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household”. For the proponents of this approach, livelihood sustainability (in all of its specificity) is central to an individual’s ability to secure food (Davies et al. 2001; Lindenberg 2002). Based on this holistic understanding of the contextual experiences of poor people, the livelihood security framework “links poverty and food insecurity with issues related to social capital, empowerment and participation” (Hussein 2004, 2). Under this approach, the central issue is not how much food is available or physically accessible, but *what people can procure* (i.e., the capabilities and rights that shape access to food

(Dreze and Sen, 1991)) – an issue that calls into question a range of institutional processes embedded in a matrix of formal and informal organizations (Scoones, 1998). In this respect, the livelihood security approach sits at the opposite end of the spectrum from productivism. Whereas the latter prioritizes intervention on food supply, this model focuses on demand and distribution. Productivism supports a global governance system, large-scale agricultural intervention and trade liberalization. The livelihood security framework, by contrast, brings into focus the micro-level of poor households and small-scale food producers -- particularly rural women (Jarosz 2011, 121).

As stated by MacMillan and Dowler (2011, 14), “the fundamental problem in food insecurity globally is the ability of small producers as well as the increasing urban populations to be able to sustain reasonable livelihoods”. There is a strong criticism here of the productivist tendency to privilege technological solutions and market objectives at the neglect of social and environmental outcomes (Lang 2010). As advocated by the IAASTAD’s report (2009), and in line with neo-productivist and food sovereignty narratives, supporting the revitalization of traditional knowledge is crucial to improve food security.

As Hussein (2004) summarizes, livelihood security narratives have several features that distinguish them from productivist discourses: they appreciate diversity; they prioritize holistic analyses; they account for both macro- and micro- level factors; and they emphasize the impacts of political, institutional and vulnerability contexts upon individuals’ abilities. In this respect, there are significant similarities with food sovereignty narratives that propose place-based

conceptions of rights (Wittman, 2011, 92) and envision “democratic ownership of food resources and policies at all scales, and not merely the local level or even the nation-state” (Weiler et al. 2014, 2).

The greatest merit of the livelihood security framework from a governance perspective is its focus on the “access “ dimension of food security. As FAO (2012) recognizes, this has ‘added value’ to the conventional policy approach by expanding the perspective “from a narrow focus on agriculture towards a range of interventions that support diversified agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods strategies”. Through its emphasis on “improving access of the poor to resources and markets” (FAO 2012, 3), the livelihood approach recognizes that “the eradication of food insecurity” requires ensuring “sustainable rural livelihoods and more equitable access to resources” (FAO 2012, 4).

Narrow framings of food insecurity as lack of individual purchasing power are problematic. As Jarosz (2011) maintains, the individualization of hunger shifts the analytic focus away from the structurally unequal relations of production and consumption that discourses such as food sovereignty have uncovered. Crucially, food here returns to be seen as a commodity, rather than as a human right; the emphasis is on the acquisition of capital (through integration into the global market), rather than on the political, economic and social constraints that reproduce poverty across scales.

*Enlarging the livelihood framework: from the right to food to community food security*

Various conceptual frameworks have been elaborated, over time, to refine the livelihood security approach. Among these, the concept of “Right to Food” has been used to reaffirm the centrality of individual entitlement to nutritious food. As defined by the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, this is “the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensure a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear” (de Schutter 2014, 6).

Clearly, at the heart of this notion is the individual (“the consumer”) – his/her dignity as a human being and his/her status as rights-holder. As Shaw (2007, 360) explains, the Right to Food framework elevates food security from an optional privilege to a due entitlement, not only in theory but “as a matter of international law”. This implies that “people all around the world should perceive their food and nutrition security as a human right that can be claimed, defended and protected” (FAO 2011). In this respect, the Right to Food is similar to the food sovereignty narrative, which also emphasizes the right of peoples to define their own food production, distribution and regulation systems. However, some argue that food sovereignty’s subversive tendencies can hamper the application of its legal objectives (Hopma and Woods 2014, 779). As Patel (2009: 668) explains, “in blowing apart the notion that the state has a paramount authority, by pointing to the multivalent hierarchies of power and control that exist within the world food system, food sovereignty paradoxically displaces one sovereign, but remains

silent about others”. With the Right to Food approach, by contrast, the State takes center stage in the food security governance arena -- as a guarantor.

Recently, the notion of Right to Food has been expanded to include the right to access production resources (land, seeds and water) as well as benefits accruing from an inclusive, participatory and bottom-up approach to decision-making (Jarosz 2014). As de Schutter (2014) specifies, the Right to Food entails five requirements: targeting vulnerable food-insecure groups; improving accessibility; ensuring adequacy of diets; environmental sustainability; and guaranteeing participation, accountability, empowerment and coherence in policy-making. What is missing from this discussion is a focus on the relationships between capability and access – the extent to which local human, cultural, economic and environmental resources can actually be mobilized to maximize benefits from enhanced access to nutritious food.

The Right to Food approach has brought an important legalistic dimension into the food security debate, which has provided the foundations for the elaboration of alternative narratives that aim to scale up issues of entitlement, access and distribution from the individual to the collective level. Notions of “food democracy” and “food citizenship”, in particular, have been instrumental in shifting the focus of the debate in this direction.

The concept of “food democracy”, developed by Lang (2005) in the mid-1990s as a response to the increasing corporate control of the food system, “ideally means that all members of an agro-food system have equal and effective opportunities

for participation in shaping that system, as well as knowledge about the relevant alternative ways of designing and operating the system” (Hassanein 2003, 83). According to Johnston (2008, 525-526), food democracy is essentially the capacity to defetishize: “it is a matter of making the social relations of food production, distribution and consumption transparent and open to political contestation and transformation”. The central tenets here are collective action and “meaningful participation” (Hassanein 2008) – the capacity to become knowledgeable about food, share ideas with others, and acquire an orientation toward the collective good. As with food sovereignty, the focus is “not towards the institutions that enshrine, enforce and police rights, but toward the people who are meant to hold them” (Patel 2007, 92). In this respect, food democracy, like food sovereignty, is a call for a “right to a right” – a “mass re-politicization of food politics” (Patel 2007, 91).

The importance of participation has been further stressed by the concept of “food citizenship”, which was introduced in the late 1990s as part of the initial work of the Toronto Food Policy Council (Renting et al. 2013). At the heart of this notion is the idea of “both belonging and participating at all levels of relationships, from the intimacy of breastfeeding to the discussions at the World Trade Organization” (Welsh and MacRae 1998, 241). By and large, however, the nature of this participation has remained unscrutinized. No effort has been made to broaden the conception of citizenship beyond scale and beyond a potentially passive, hierarchical and territorial relationship between individuals and the State. The adoption of a more place-based approach such as “agrarian citizenship” (Wittman 2009a and 2009b) would be useful to uncover the relations that all members of

society have with the food system and understand who is excluded from the benefits of belonging and participating in its activities.

Through their emphasis on collective rights and entitlements, food democracy and food citizenship reaffirm the centrality of 'productive' social justice (Waterstone, 2009) in food security. At the same time, however, these narratives lend themselves to criticism for neglecting the role and capacity of food producers and for relying on contested concepts, such as "democracy", which acquire meaning only in each and every specific context.

One of the frameworks that has most thoroughly addressed (and built on) the context-based nature of food security is "community food security", which emerged in the USA to define "a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Hamm and Bellows 2003, 37). The focus on the latter makes this concept similar to "food democracy" and "food citizenship", but community food security distinguishes itself for a more specific emphasis on re-localization. In general, advocates of community food security "envision food systems that are decentralized, environmentally-sound over a long time-frame, supportive of collective rather than only individual needs, effective in assuring equitable food access, and created by democratic decision-making" (Anderson and Cook 1999, 141). In this sense, community food security is an important potential bridge between narratives that focus on the national level (such as productivism and food sovereignty) and narratives that prioritize the household or the individual level as units of analysis

and intervention sites (such as livelihood security, the right-to-food, food democracy and food citizenship).

Community food security's emphasis on self-reliance and "on the food environment as the source of food insecurity and the place where changes need to happen to achieve food security" (Anderson 2013, 117) are promising elements to progress a research agenda that captures and addresses the place-dependent nature of food insecurity. In practice, however, this narrative tends to emphasize market-based solutions (such as farmers' markets), rather than factors that generate inequities (Weiler et al., 2014), such as racism (Slocum, 2006). Theoretically, as Anderson and Cook (1999, 141) identified, much work still needs to be done to articulate a clear framework around the concept of community food security – its unit of analysis (i.e., the boundaries of "community"); its relationships with individual, household and national food security; the indicators through which it can be evaluated; its determinants; and the main stages in the process towards it. The "community capitals framework", with its focus on the role of (and interactions between) natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built capitals in creating and supporting sustainable communities (Flora and Flora 2006), could be an important starting point to address these weaknesses and enhance relationality between "community food security" and "livelihood security" narratives.

### **Related and convergent food security narratives? An analysis**

In the early post-war period, food security narratives were firmly rooted and situated in the global North. Under the self-sufficiency and productivist approaches, three key actors were invested with the responsibility of solving the problem: large agricultural producers from industrialized countries, who were in the position of adopting the technology and “miracle crops” of the Green Revolution; their national governments, which had the responsibility of devising policies that incentivized food production – either individually (as in the case of the Farm Bill in the USA) or collectively (as with the Common Agricultural Policy in Europe); and transnational corporations, which were in charge of bringing “development through food” (FAO 1983, 7) to the global South while seeking applications (and associated markets) for their chemical innovations (Daniel 2005). In this governance framework, the focus is on the interaction between conventional food producers and their agrarian environment, mediated by the application of Western science, which is considered to be the only truly meaningful and relevant type of knowledge. Policy convergence is confined to agriculture and international trade, which is meant to develop markets for transnational corporations and bring the productivity gains of industrialized agriculture to developing countries.

Over time, and particularly with the emergence of the “sustainable intensification” approach, the productivist governance framework has been enlarged to include also small farmers (especially those from the global South) and their traditional agro-ecological practices. At a time of growing competition over land, “successful projects of sustainable intensification by definition fit solutions to local needs and contexts” (Pretty et al. 2011, 10). The latter, however, continue to be defined on

the basis of food production. There is little consideration for the roles and responsibilities of other food system actors and, more generally, for the trade offs between costs and benefits associated with sustainable intensification initiatives (Freibauer et al. 2011).

The food sovereignty discourse has firmly re-affirmed the need to include small farmers in the decision-making and governance processes. In this case, the argument is not based just on ecological reasons (i.e., farmers' knowledge of local environments and sustainable agricultural practices). Advocates of food sovereignty consider small farmers as the main victims of an unequal global agri-food system. Addressing food insecurity, then, means, first and foremost, empowering peasants –providing them with new rights that, as Claeys (2012, 847) explains, emphasize their collective claims, target the various levels where food and agricultural issues ought to be deliberated and provide the tools to fight neoliberalism in agriculture.

Seeing food as a human right also implies bringing consumer-citizens into the discourse on food security – i.e., integrating the focus on the interaction between food producers and their agrarian environment with a consideration for the relationship (or lack of) between suppliers and those, at the other end of the food chain (the consumers), who are “entitled” to food. The framing of food as a human right (collective, rather than necessarily individual) also has significant governance repercussions, since it entails state action to empower consumer-citizens with those rights. Policy convergence here becomes a key ingredient of effective food security approaches. As Margulis (2013, 59) states, the Right to

Food “defines the obligation of States to ensure that access to food is not diminished by other policies (particularly for the most vulnerable)”.

Historically, the emphasis on access and entitlement traces back to the livelihood security framework, which developed in opposition to neo-liberalised productivism, attempting to shift the emphasis from supply to demand and the wider socio-economic context that constrains the distribution of food. For the proponents of this approach, there is a need to find convergences between economic development, poverty alleviation and food security policies – a type of focus that identifies the micro-level of poor households as the main area for intervention.

From a governance perspective, the main limitation of this approach is its neglect of the horizontal and vertical “meso-level” dynamics and relationships that connect (or separate) international and national policies and household survival strategies (Sonnino 2016). This gap is probably the main factor responsible for the “individualization” of hunger -- that is, its interpretation in terms of lack of individual purchasing power. As mentioned earlier, the livelihood security approach has been appropriated for re-instating a neo-liberal and commodified view of food as a tradeable commodity, rather than as a human right.

Notions of food democracy, food citizenship and community food security have contributed to progress more place-based conceptions of shared food rights. However, so far these different framings have remained too fragmented and limited in seeking out alternative governance mechanisms that can assist the

widening allocation of food rights. Their key achievement has been the scaling up of consumption issues from the individual to the collective level. Notwithstanding the problems associated with the identification of the boundaries of this collectivity (and, hence, with the scale of policy interventions), conceptual frameworks built around the notions of food democracy, food citizenship and community food security have introduced an innovative focus on civil society. As Candel (2014) argues, involving civil society in the governance of food security is vital to identify local problems and response gaps, enhance public support for food security interventions, and build capacity between different government agencies, policy sectors and governance scales – in a word, convergence.

### **The role of “place” as an active food mediator: developing a conceptual framework**

Geographers have long been emphasizing the relevance of a relational approach to scale in research on the politics of space and place. Quoting Massey, Jackson et al. (2009, 20) argue that the conventional tendency to distinguish between global forces and local places misses out on “the mutual constitution of sometimes distant places” – or, in other words, that interplay between global and local dynamics that produces and shapes all processes of place-making (see also Escobar 2001). These geographical arguments provide three key parameters for developing a multi-dimensional place-based approach to food security.

- (i) Embedded relocalization: horizontal and vertical dimensions

In agri-food studies, the “relational turn” (Boggs and Rantisi 2003) has translated into a focus on re-localization as an active socio-economic and political process – in Sonnino and Marsden’s (2006, 16) words, “a contested geography of embedded processes”. Rather ironically, however, macro-level debates on food security have often avoided this kind of grounded theorization. Thus far, they have tended to rely upon spatially aggregated and quantum arguments around demand and supply factors, without embedding (and indeed grounding) their narratives in the real and diversely assembled places in which food production, processing and consumption practices (always) occur. In this sense, we have to begin to recognize that all food practices are indeed local, but some are more local than others. It is important to examine how ‘shorter’ networks and ‘chains’ can reduce food security vulnerabilities and enhance resilience, but also how longer chains and networks can be “replaced” and re-designed so as to re-calibrate the power relations within them. The question is how different food initiatives can create (by active horizontal and vertical network and governance building) a transformative basis for wider changes in food system and sovereignty dynamics (see Constance et al 2015). What is needed is a comparative spatial approach to food security and vulnerability that moves far beyond oppositional scalar discourses and brings into focus the different constellations of actors, activities and sectors of intervention.

Efforts to enhance relationalities and convergences between different food security narratives should then start with the recognition of embedded places as key and active meso-level mediators. For example, exploratory analyses have uncovered the emergence of municipal governments as new inter-scalar policy actors – as “active geographers” operating, at different scales, to reconfigure the

relationships between food producers and consumers and between urban and rural areas (Marsden and Sonnino, 2012; Sonnino 2016).

More generally, it needs to be recognized that notions of rights, assets, participation and citizenship, which lie at the heart of food security debates, are essentially (vertically and horizontally) embedded place-based constructions, and that they imply a spatially re-organised set of relationalities and politics associated with food access, consumption and production. From a governance perspective, the question then becomes how, and through which different (urban and rural) places, these domains, traditionally regarded as separate, are actively brought together; place, which once established the infrastructures for such domains to sustain themselves, now provides the potential mediator for their integration.

(ii) Embedded Translocalization and the role of flows in and between food places

A second critical element in progressing a place-based understanding of the diversity of food security conditions is constituted by the flows of knowledge, materials, capitals and people that take place in and between food systems. Research on corporate forms of food globalization conducted during the 1990s (see Goodman and Watts 1997) has not been replenished with the analysis of the more diverse trans-local networks that are now interchanging foods (and related knowledges) across different parts of the globe. Sustainable food city networks (such as the one established through the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in 2015)

and trans-national peasant movements (such as *La Via Campesina*) are key examples of these more diverse social movements, which are transcending scales and places through creating connections between them.

A critical and more embedded place-making approach to food security needs to embrace the complexities and contingencies involved in virtual and physical food related flows, which can be very empowering -- both within and across places. Whereas established notions of food security such as productivism and sustainable intensification have largely been seen as national phenomena, food security innovations today operate across and between scales and traditional jurisdictions. This challenges existing and formal systems of governance, and creates new spaces and places of possibility for producers and consumers to re-connect outside formal private interests or governmental regulatory conditions.

(iii) Constructing, progressing and reassembling food places

A third conceptual building block for a more engaged place-based approach to food security is the critical integration of three key dynamic features of place-making: social construction; progressive (re-)assembling; and fluidity.

First, understanding *place as a social construction* (Harvey 1993; Escobar 2001) raises important questions around the vulnerability to food insecurity and its alleviation. What types of social processes (and associated power-laden relationships) lead to specific combinations of materiality, practices and meanings that produce food (in)security? And, once identified, how could these processes

be reorganized across and through places? Addressing these questions will progress debates on the wider and more emancipating role of science and innovation (the backbone of productionist discourses) in delivering food security. In addition to highlighting the relevance of context-specific perceptions and practices, a focus on place-based social processes uncovers the power relationships (from lobbying and state-subsidized technologies to the symbolic values embedded in Western imaginaries of progress) that affect the current use of science and technology. Building on Cuellar-Padilla and Calle-Collado's argument (2011), we argue that a "place as a social construction" perspective can contribute to the development of a more post-normal and plural "science with people" approach that recombines democracy, knowledge and action to deliver food security outcomes. We are beginning to see this approach unfolding amongst some of the recent participatory plant breeding exchanges in agro-ecology (Ceccarelli 2014; Marsden and Farioli 2015), where the protection and enhancement of traditional plant and seed varieties is linked directly to farmers' spatial knowledges and sovereignty. Place-based knowledge and farmers' collective ability to experiment and act on the basis of that knowledge are emerging as key mediators between local food sovereignty and broader concerns over biodiversity, health and food security.

Second, a *progressive sense of place* (Massey 1991 and 1993) offers an exploratory prism to theorize the convergence of forces operating at different and multi-level scales in food security debates. A progressive sense of place blurs and recombines the boundaries between exogenous and endogenous forces. Place becomes the locus where forces operating at different scales coalesce – where the private

sphere (e.g., breastfeeding and cooking) and the public sphere (e.g., direct involvement and available spaces for action under different regulatory regimes) both acquire a politically meaningful role in relation to food security. A progressive sense of place fosters an inclusive and more collective political sensitivity – a global or indeed trans-local sense of citizenship that counteracts defensive or exclusionary tendencies. The question about who is included in *and* excluded from food security interventions (and how the boundaries between these become transgressed) is crucial here.

A progressive sense of place does not suggest or imply a retreat to a kind of defensive localism or parochialism in the process of converging the concerns of food sovereignty, livelihood security and community food security. As we are beginning to see with the formation of trans-local urban food policy networks (see Constance et al. 2014; Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015; Blay-Palmer et al. 2016), the reordering and redefinition of food rights, governance and assets in one place are leading to cross-overs of learning and reflexivity in others. Place-based progress in re-assembling food access and citizenship is clearly embedded in, and driven by, context-dependent concerns for food security; but it also can link to wider ‘translocal assemblages’ – composites of place-based social movements that exchange ideas, knowledges, practices, materials and resources (McFarlane 2009; see also Levkoe and Wakefield 2014). Translocal assemblages are far from being just geometrical connections between nodes in networks. With their own materialist histories, the labour and knowledges required to produce them, and their capacity to exceed the connections between groups or places, translocal assemblages have relational depth. For instance, they can cut across redundant

state jurisdictions, like those associated with rural and urban municipalities, creating networked relationalities between food consumption and production. A progressive sense of place in the context of new formations of food governance transcends conventional scalar categories and, at the same time, it is significantly more than another spatial category, output or resultant formation; it is a combinative and potentially translocal site for doing, performing, experimenting and practicing.

Third, the consideration of food *places as fluid* and in a constant process of becoming (Pred 1984) is useful in revealing and then reconstructing the structurally unequal relationships in the food system. As discussed, discourses that focus on the individual capacity to access food (such as livelihood security and the Right to Food) tend to neglect structural and place-based inequalities. Yet, these have profound spatial consequences for the incidence and reproduction of food and health insecurities associated, for instance, with under-nutrition and obesity (Nelson et al., 2013).

At the same time, a “place as becoming” perspective shifts the analytic focus towards networks of actors – actors in context or actor-spaces (Murdoch and Marsden 1995). Such actor-oriented focus can open up important possibilities for creating more pluralistic discursive frameworks and nurturing the capacity to construct more food-secure places. By harnessing and recognizing their social and political ability to act, cities and regions can begin to re-connect food systems to wider sets of public goods, through, for example, sustainable food procurement policies and investment in new local and translocal food infrastructures. This

requires food planning to be part-and-parcel of spatial and strategic planning -- a process that can empower wider coalitions of interests and actors around food democracy.

### **Conclusions: Towards a Place-Based Approach to Food Security**

The last two hundred years of industrialization and urbanization have promoted, at least in advanced economies, the active and artificial ‘flattening’ of food geographies, such that, for a long period, we had the ‘luxury’ of hiding or disguising the significant externalities and inherent diversities associated with the industrial food regime (Moore 2011; Marsden and Morley 2014). Resource depletion, climate change and the proliferation of a range of interrelated food insecurities in both industrialized and developing countries are forcing us to re-interrogate this restricted food geography -- just at a time when more segments of society are also growing conscious of its distortions and vulnerabilities. Globally as well as locally, it is increasingly recognized that we can no longer afford a modernisation project based upon a geographically ‘flattened’ intensive food system. Recent reactions to the food security crises have tended to be too fragmented, relying upon (at best) restricted and aggregated geographical conceptions. We now need to recalibrate or even re-create the relationships between the natural and the metabolic with regard to food.

In this paper, we have begun to address this challenge by outlining the contours of a more integrated and multi-dimensional “place-based” approach to food security. It is indeed *in and across places* that food actors come together, absorb

and exercise their right to food (in terms of both production and consumption). Far from being just a necessary but passive (or 'flattened') ecological and economic backdrop to the creation of effective convergences, relational place-making actively balances and re-balances the critical factors that legitimate the relative social acceptability or unacceptability of specific constellations of food production and consumption.

Conceptually, this provides one significant answer to Garnett and Godfrey's (2012, 49) challenge mentioned in the introduction, whereby the sustainability of food security is directly dependent upon its social, public and ethical acceptability (indeed, its place-based legitimacy). Through the various strands of the different narratives analysed in this paper, we can witness the growing centrality of food governance concerns as critical structuring mechanisms within which to frame new food geographies. In this context, a rejuvenated emphasis upon more integrated place-based and reflexive governance architectures will be needed to 'solve' the deepening food security vulnerabilities faced by significant proportions of the world's population. Far from simplifying this challenge, a place-based approach engages with the complex multi-actor, multi-level and reflexive political and social structures that support the emergence of distinct food security trajectories in a highly contested and unequal foodscape. This inevitably posits practical and analytical challenges (e.g., case study delimitation, mapping relationality and power).

From a more theoretical perspective, an important step forward is a critical reflection on the nature and potentialities of place as "not a thing, but a way of

seeing and focusing – an entry point” (Gibson-Graham 2002, 32). As we have argued, place is first and foremost a theoretical lens that offers the conceptual advantage of building far more complexity and diversity into generalized and aggregated food security debates; it is a stage for more reflexive food governance -- an active and progressive canvass for reassembling resources and human efficiencies around more effective production-consumption relations. A progressive sense of place as a socially constructed and fluid entity is a key starting point to develop a more integrated multi-scalar perspective that recognizes food security as a complex “polycentric” governance arena where different actors, knowledges and interests can converge to develop collective visions.

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