

Solidarities from below in the making of emancipatory rural politics: Insights from food sovereignty struggles in the Basque Country

Rita Calvário, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Joseba Azkarraga

Abstract

The post-2008 economic crisis catalysed the (re-)emergence of radical politics, but not necessarily in a progressive direction. Resistance to austerity and neo-liberal globalisation came from both the left and populist, far-right spectrum of politics. Right-wing populism, expressed by regressive and exclusionary nationalist/gender/race politics is on the rise; in some countries, it has a strong rural constituency, as was evident by recent elections in Europe and the US. How are rural social movements in some places contributing to block the emergence and proliferation of these forces? How does food sovereignty help to build an emancipatory rural politics antagonistic to right-wing populism? This paper addresses these questions by looking at food sovereignty struggles in the Basque Country. We ground our analysis on how EHNE-Bizkaia, a *Vía Campesina* member organisation from the Basque Country, conceptualises and practices food sovereignty. Inspired by Massey's 'politics of place beyond place' and Featherstone's work on left politics and solidarity, we shed light on the ways in which this organisation mobilises food sovereignty to establish political bonds between those marginalised by neo-liberalism, helping to construct political identities and enact forms of subaltern agency that challenge uneven power relations and geographies. We argue that 'solidarity from below' is key in building an emancipatory rural politics rooted in class-based alliances, intersectionality, and internationalism. The paper provides theoretical and empirical insights on what constitutes an emancipatory politics of food sovereignty that has the potential to act as a counterforce the emergence and expansion of exclusionary nationalist oppositions to neo-liberal globalisation.

Authors' short-bios

Rita Calvário currently is a postdoc researcher in the project JUSTFOOD—From Alternative Food Networks to Environmental Justice at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra. She holds a PhD in Political Ecology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, where she was a Marie Curie Early Stage Research Fellow in the project ENTITLE—European Network of Political Ecology. She is particularly interested in rural social movements, alternative food economies, food sovereignty, and emancipatory politics.

Annette Aurélie Desmarais is Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty at the University of Manitoba in Canada. She is the author of *La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants* (2007), and co-editor of *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community* (2010), *Food Sovereignty in Canada: Creating Just and Sustainable Food Systems* (2011), and *Public Policies for Food Sovereignty: Social Movements and the State* (2017)

Joseba Azkarraga Etxagibel is PhD in Sociology. He lives in the Basque Country and teaches in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). His main research interests have focused on analyzing the social and solidarity economy. He received the Basque Social Reality Research Award from the Basque Government for his research on the Mondragon cooperatives.