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Food sovereignty and property in Cuba and the United States

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ABSTRACT

Food sovereignty promotes agroecological farming methods and the reduction of food insecurity through changing political relations between people, land and food policy. Market orientations to land and private property in liberal democracies restrict access to food, and thus for food sovereigntists, reframing the social relationship to land through property is key to making food more available. This paper examines the case of usufruct land rights in Cuba as a framework for reworking land rights. We identify key limitations that impair producer autonomy, suggesting how different orientations toward property present unique problems and potential solutions towards the goal of food sovereignty.

KEYWORDS

Usufruct; Cuba; property; food sovereignty; land

Introduction

Scholars of and activists for food sovereignty argue that food security grows from the ability of individual farmers (or peasant collectives and farmer cooperatives) to produce food under conditions of their choosing (Nyéléni 2007; Patel 2009; Pimbert 2009, van der Ploeg 2008). In this paper, we refer to this as ‘producer autonomy,’ which remains elusive for many, but is characterized by adequate access to arable land within reasonable reach of quality markets and the socio-economic conditions that make an agrarian livelihood possible (i.e. access to appropriate technology, adequate healthcare, avoidance of debt). We argue that the first of these, access to land, is foundational to achieving producer autonomy. Whether it is Indigenous claims to land or access to land for new farmers, land is necessary to produce the food that makes healthy societies possible. We assert that the modern liberal state – with its regimes of private property rights – poses significant barriers to access to land and therefore also producer autonomy *and* food sovereignty. We further argue that Cuba, absent of a totalizing system of privatization, operating under a hybrid of capitalist and socialist forms and with a greater sense of land as common property and a means to feed its people, may be instructive for food sovereignty scholars and activists in guiding social change to achieve food sovereignty.

Cuba, with a multiplicity of economic forms and structures, or what Gibson-Graham (2006) call ‘economic diversity’, including agricultural cooperatives, usufruct land use, and international tourism as well as global leadership in the *La Vía Campesina* food

sovereignty movement, offers a strong alternative to neoliberal capitalism (Graddy-Lovelace 2018; Enríquez 2000). Through its innovative process of trial and error with respect to access to land, producer autonomy and the social relations that undergird property, Cuba has emerged as a leader with respect to food sovereignty and an example from which other countries might learn.

The Cuban experience demonstrates an expanded economic imaginary and different political economic structures that combine socialist and capitalist conventions regarding property. We argue that hybrid forms of property enable both producer autonomy through access to land and that guaranteed state markets, in addition to capitalist markets, ensure a degree of economic diversity. Such hybrid forms of property and market can provide lessons for food sovereignty in other contexts, even those with a long history of privatization and racialized exclusion. This necessarily requires the reconfiguring of land as a commodity as well as changing the social relationships that undergird and reinforce notions of property in liberal economic contexts. Such reforms require a state that is willing to adapt and innovate according to the needs of its producers in a way that protects them from the extremes of capitalist markets. Incorporating and examining both socialist and capitalist conventions, i.e. usufruct and private enterprise, requires an expanded economic imaginary (Gibson-Graham 2006), problematizing the traditional hegemony of capitalism.

This paper focuses on property, considering the ways in which hybridized property relations in Cuba enlarge the economic imaginary and suggest new openings, particularly for producer autonomy, for achieving food sovereignty. We first elaborate on food sovereignty as a social movement for equity and democracy in the food system, the contradictions that private property holds for food sovereignty and how the state structures access to food through mechanisms of property. We then examine Cuba's historic relationship between property and food production and examine more recent attempts at expanding food sovereignty through policy tools such as usufruct land access and government decentralization – moving towards greater producer autonomy as the state shifts from top-down control to bottom-up decision-making. Having initiated a process of market-based economic reforms and decentralization of its socialist system, Cuba provides a useful example of how hybrid systems might function. Cuba is a compelling case for consideration, not because it has achieved food sovereignty, but because it has responded to multiple food crises with innovations within its food system, resulting in a uniquely hybrid approach of state-based governance and support, use rights to land, and subsequent economic reforms, demonstrating the compatibility of coexisting socialist and capitalist forms.

Property, social relations and food sovereignty

The meanings of food sovereignty are contested and context-specific (Naylor 2019) but at its heart, food sovereignty is both a struggle for political rights from the nation-state and for material resources to produce food. The food sovereignty movement aims to build ecologically-based production models, develop post-capitalist politics of exchange, democratize decision-making in the food system, and reconnect food producers with food consumers (Nyéléni 2007). As articulated in the Nyéléni Declaration of 2007, the food sovereignty agenda includes working toward economic multiplicity, supporting

local markets in addition to international trade, sharing territories and land, and agro-ecological production models. In effect, the Nyéléni Declaration prefigures an alternative to capitalist production and property regimes for sustainable agriculture as we know them (Gibson-Graham 2006). Property regimes emerge from control over land (Peluso and Lund 2011) and in the United States, property is premised upon a specific racialized exclusion that is state-led and sanctioned.

The history of land and property in the United States and other liberal, settler states often begins with a retelling of the dispossession of Indigenous people. Nichols (2020) writes that property had to be invented as a tool of genocide and removal, thus creating a social relationship to land that had not existed prior to settler occupation. Property is a function of white settler sovereignty over territory, rendering land a fungible commodity through white possession under the authority of the settler state. White supremacy is fundamental to the operation of the nation-state and frames and justifies its economic relations, in particular with respect to land and property. Moreton-Robinson (2015) argues that, 'private ownership of property, both tangible and intangible, operated through mechanisms of the new nation-state in its regulation of the population and especially through law' (49), and thus remakes land into a white possession, not to be held by Indigenous and/or people of color.

Private property rights developed in the wake of colonial possession of Indigenous lands as a new white subject emerged between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This subject was granted the right by the state 'to assert "this is mine"' which normalized 'behavior that one has proprietary rights that are part of normative behavior, rules of interaction and social engagement' (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 50). As Blomley (2016) explains,

Property organizes the world for us, assigning resources to owners, apportioning rights and duties, constituting markets, organizing concepts of citizenship and political identity, and grounding dissent and protest ... Property provides both a rationale for dispossession and a ground for its opposition. Its ends are varied and diverse, including personal survival, human flourishing, economic efficiency, privacy and propriety. (593–594)

That property rights were solely granted to a certain class of white men underscores the white supremacy in these normative assumptions that persist today in various forms. Harris (1993) writes that 'American law has a property interest in whiteness' (1713) and that both whiteness and property share 'a conceptual nucleus of the right to exclude' (1714). The benefits of property continue to overwhelmingly accrue to white, male property owners, who dominate agricultural production and who continue to realize profits through government subsidy and the commodification of food.

According to Sikor and Lund (2009), property is 'part of a larger picture of access to resources' (1) for both individuals and the state. Property shapes how those productive resources are used, changed and distributed, whether through the commons, usufruct, private property, land grabs, or nationalization of resources. Sikor and Lund argue that 'struggles over property are as much about the scope and constitution of authority as about access to resources' (2). Blomley (2016) writes that the ideological dimension of authority, through property, matters to those who have access or use it, and often becomes normative, even when not codified by law. Property is thus a set of social relations grounded in state authority that normalizes various forms of political, social

and economic interactions, including those related to land and food production, which are difficult to change.

Cultural and historical understandings of property as it relates to territory are key to understanding the relationship between land and food sovereignty. According to Elden (2010), territory is a political technology used by the state for particular strategic ends, including allocation of land to individuals through private property laws. Blomley (2016) argues that 'property of whatever form depends on the state for recognition and formalization' (595). Lubbock (2020) asserts that 'property does not merely sit in a territory; rather, property is a territory by virtue of how it is governed politically' (293) and that 'the cooperative organisation of socioproductive territory' (292) is a key condition of achieving food sovereignty. In short, the way territory is structured by the state into property through law influences the social and economic relationships of the food system and thereby access to food.

Private property and food sovereignty

Advocates for food sovereignty assert that private property relations determine how food circulates in an economy, with disastrous results for peasant farmers, Indigenous people and the poor when land and food become commodities (Nyéléni 2007). Agroecological producers in liberal contexts such as the United States must buy land, which is increasingly cost-prohibitive and often out of reach for new and beginning farmers who may lack access to capital (Wittman, Dennis, and Pritchard 2017). New, small-scale farmers have no guaranteed markets or prices, lack insurance against crop failure and go without basic welfare protections such as health care or insurance. This leaves most small-scale farmers in a precarious position, with family members often working off-farm to subsidize the farm through waged work (Lobao and Meyer 2001). The requirement to purchase land or otherwise access land with capital as a foundational commodity for food production puts producers in untenable positions to pursue innovations, lower prices or make the products more affordable, ultimately undermining producer autonomy.

Given that capitalism and liberal states have been mutually constituted in the project of modernity (Polanyi 1944; Patel and McMichael 2009; Barkan 2013), appeals to the liberal state for food sovereignty-informed rights that would supersede rights to private property or patents is paradoxical. Under U.S. law, corporate rights, the right of the liberal state to govern, and the primacy of private property all support a regime of rights and power in favor of capital. The state's right to govern trumps the rights of local communities to govern, particularly with respect to exchange of capital, such as land. The development of local economies that the Nyéléni delegates advocate for would require access to affordable land, and thus risks failure by 'capture' in the legal apparatus of the liberal sovereign state that requires the sale and exchange of property to guarantee the right to produce food. Additionally, the appeal for expanded rights for farmers to control productive resources is clear in food sovereignty discourse, but very little is said about who or what could guarantee such rights (Patel 2009; Schanbacher 2010).

Land is both a productive resource and a social context for economic transformation and has the potential to expand economic diversity through human orientations toward it (Peluso and Lund 2011). Historically, in many liberal economic contexts,

dispossession of Indigenous people, enclosure, and privatization of productive resources position land as a staging area for capital accumulation (Van der Ploeg 2008). In socialist contexts, land is often nationalized through decolonization or land reform, and redistributed to peasants through collectives or cooperatives, limiting the capacity for private capital to accumulate. Both approaches to territorializing capital for agriculture in the form of land have their advantages and limitations for economic diversity and producer autonomy, which are central planks in the food sovereignty platform.

Small-scale producers have innovated to some degree within the United States via land trusts, farm incubators and other land-access models, but as these make up a very small percentage of the total number of farms producing food the orientation toward private property remains hegemonic as does the dominance of white men (Wekerle and Classens 2015). At the same time, over the twentieth century land has been consolidated into the hands of fewer and fewer people. Thus, the availability of suitable plots of land and the financial barriers to entry and obstacles to practice prevent the production of enough food through agro-ecological methods to meet the demand for it (Sterk 2018). Food scholars and activists in liberal states like the United States critique sustainability movements for generating a two-class food system in which the wealthy enjoy healthier food, while the poor continue to experience food insecurity (Agyeman and McEntee 2014). In the wake of these critiques, food sovereignty scholars urge a recasting of the relationship of producers to land and markets (Borras Jr et al. 2015). Inspirational examples exist in the United States, such as Indigenous groups who secure access to land for community purposes of growing food, fishing or harvesting (Daigle 2019; Kamal et al. 2015), the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, and Soulfire Farm (Penniman 2018), whose members directly challenge capitalism and white supremacy with their work.

These activists have long been practicing what Gibson-Graham (2006) call 'economic diversity', or an economy characterized by a multiple economic forms and structures, through which the food system is reconfigured. The goals of such restructuring are economic and social survival, the distribution of capital generated beyond the cost of production, and sustaining land as part of the commons. Food sovereignty social movements can be characterized as 'autonomous food systems' (Pimbert 2009), or spaces that allow for the generation of use values following the triple-bottom line of equity, justice, and sustainability, rather than exchange values. We argue that 'producer autonomy' is central to both economic diversity and autonomous food systems. Farmers will not be able to make decisions about surplus and the commons, nor will they be able to survive on use-values alone under the conditions of 'overbearing capitalism' (Graddy-Lovelace 2018, 58) that overtly structure land rents and market access.

Toward this end, in the United States, urban gardening programs in cities seek to link landless people with unused land, and land trusts and incubator farms have emerged to improve access to land for farmers in close proximity to markets and communities in need of food security. The modest scale of these efforts is insufficient to confront the problems of aging farmers, the transfer of land to international holdings and the lack of access to land for new and beginning farmers (Nickerson et al. 2012). While the current is strong against those who wish to make change within the contemporary system of land, property and food production, Shattuck, Schiavoni and Van Gelder (2015) note that 'places of seeming contradiction may be where the greatest insights are to be found' (430). Food sovereignty, as political sovereignty, provides some key orientations toward property

and productive resources in liberal states and more systemic change calls for a reconfiguration of the social relationship to property. Understanding the complexities involved in the evolution of Cuba's diverse property and market configurations provides a nuanced example of alternate property regimes and their relation to the goal of food sovereignty. We begin with a historical focus on how Cuba arrived at its current hybrid property manifestations (private and usufruct property holdings with strong cooperative elements) and then shift to more recent economic reforms meant to increase food production and satisfy diverse market demands.

Evolution of Cuba's social conceptions of property

Private property in Cuba was understood as an individual right under Spanish colonial rule and during its republican period after independence (1902–1958). Conceptions of property shifted to a primarily socialist conception of collective land ownership under Soviet influence (1961–1989), and eventually to its current mix of collective and individual private property as a result of market-based post-Soviet reforms (2011–present). Property reforms in the 1960s and later efforts to decentralize its institutions and governance while maintaining control of land via usufruct speak to how property is territorialized in the name of alternative social relations.

In the early years of the Cuban Revolution (1959–1963), agricultural land was converted to either private small-holdings or collectivized state farms. Almost 60 percent of Cuba's agricultural land (six of ten million hectares) changed hands as a result of the First and Second Agricultural Reforms of 1959 and 1963 (O'Connor 1968). The First Agrarian Reform Act of May 1959 was a land redistribution law that transferred property from large landholders to the landless tenant farmers who lived on and worked the land. *Latifundios* (estates of 402 hectares or more, with a few exceptions) were eliminated and the property was divided among those working the land (Wright 2009). Previously landless tenants, subtenants, sharecroppers, squatters, and agricultural laborers were automatically given title to the plots they had been cultivating, becoming *de facto* landowners when rents were abolished and large private landholders lost their right to the land (Alvarez 2004; Gonzalez 2003; Wright 2009). In what would be the only transfer of private land ownership under the revolutionary government, more than 115,000 small farmers obtained or retained title to small plots of land. These private landholders were encouraged to join cooperatives, which provided economic integration into local communities, including access to housing, education, social security and other social benefits they had not previously experienced as landless farmworkers (Funes et al. 2002).

In 1963, the Second Agrarian Reform Act limited the size of landholdings to five *caballerías* (67.1 hectares) and transferred the rest of the land into state control. While the first reform affected foreign companies and large domestic *latifundistas*, the second impacted those domestic farmers with estates larger than five *caballerías* (Alvarez 2004). Some large landowners held on to their remaining property by dividing it into smaller farms amongst close family members (Wright 2009). Many more fled the country. By the end of the Second Agrarian Reform, more than 20 percent of Cuba's arable land was owned by more than 160,000 small farmers. The Cuban state encouraged small producers to form cooperatives to facilitate mechanized and large-scale production methods, and the free market was replaced with a central plan.

The remaining majority of private agricultural land – previously large sugar cane estates and cattle ranches – was nationalized and converted first into large, state-managed ‘People’s Farms’ (Wright 2009). As large property owners were dispossessed and largely left the country, a collectivized norm of property relations took hold. These large state farms first adopted Soviet-style modern mechanized farming and were worked by former agricultural wage earners, whose standard of living improved dramatically through guaranteed year-round employment, housing, and other social benefits. Large-scale monoculture systems predominated – what Cuban scholars refer to as the ‘chemicalization’ and ‘tractorization’ of agriculture (Pérez and Vázquez 2002). Decades later, the Soviet Union’s collapse and the rapid demise of Cuba’s Soviet-subsidized industrial agriculture in the early 1990s led to a restructuring in the management of many of these large state farms to a cooperative structure.

Privately owned land in Cuba, while dominated by white men, is deeply cooperative in its agricultural production, and cooperatives are a key unit of analysis and identity in Cuba’s agricultural sector. Two types of cooperatives emerged in the 1960s and 1970s that are still prominent in Cuban agriculture today. Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCS) formed in the 1960s and involve private farmers independently working their farms while collectively receiving credit and services from state agencies (Bono and Finn 2017). CCS have increased in number and prominence, from 10 percent of all arable land in 1988 to 36 percent in 2016 (Fernandez et al. 2018b). A second type of cooperative, Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPA) were formed in the 1970s by farmers who joined their individual plots and pooled resources, transforming their individual property into collective property. In 1993, the government implemented a top-down conversion of enormous state farms into a new type of cooperative, the smaller Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC) (Koont 2004). Expansive, government-managed state farms were broken down into smaller production units and parceled out to former state farm workers who then leased and worked the land collectively through usufruct. UBPCs thus became the third of three distinct forms of agricultural cooperative structures that are present in Cuba today. The amount of land managed cooperatively in the non-state sector has increased dramatically, from just 18 percent in 1988 (just before the collapse of the Soviet bloc) to 69 percent in 2016, reflecting the substantial transfer of land from state-managed to privately and cooperatively managed under usufruct in the non-state sector (Fernandez et al. 2018b).¹

The revolutionary process of reallocating land to the landless poor who had worked it resulted in a more collective sense of property not necessarily tied to specific territories. After the initial process of land reform that redistributed land from large private estates to smallholders, collectivized socialist property became the social and legal norm. *All* property redistributed under the Revolutionary government fell under collective property laws: i.e. tenants were given apartments and homes that were paid off under 30-year leases, but without possession of the underlying land, which is the property of the Cuban state. In the creation of UBPCs, the state redistributed former collectivized state farmland to individual producers, repeating earlier patterns of reallocating land to

¹In 2016, 31 percent of arable land was managed by state entities and 69 percent by non-state entities (farmers belonging to cooperatives, on private or usufruct land). Of the non-state cultivators, 52 percent were part of CCS cooperatives, 35 percent UBPC cooperatives, and 13 percent CPA cooperatives.

landless poor – this time under usufruct – thus reinforcing a sense of property that is not tied to specific territories.

Usufruct land tenure agreements in Cuba

Unlike other poor countries, Cuba's central agricultural problem is underutilized public land rather than a lack of access to private land (Enríquez 2003; Fernandez et al. 2018b). Land access through usufruct, or access through use, is the Cuban state's primary incentive to attract would-be farmers to rural areas in a country characterized by its urban and aging population. The ongoing land tenure reforms, intended to distribute idle land to new producers, shift the *management* but not the *ownership* of agricultural land. Land ownership (public versus private) has remained largely unchanged since the 1959 and 1963 agrarian reforms – 78.7 percent of agricultural land remains under state control.

Much as strategic state planning through the provision of necessary technical and structural support during the agroecological transformation of Cuban agriculture was key to orchestrating the conversion of farming methods (Rosset and Benjamin 1994), strategic implementation of usufruct has been key to agricultural reforms since 2008. Utilization of usufruct as a land distribution scheme allows the Cuban state to retain regulatory and economic control of private food production while emphasizing the social goals of collectively increasing the production of quality food for local communities. Usufruct land distribution ensures a support system for farmers through government institutions and programs, including low-priced inputs and services and a guaranteed market to sell their product (albeit at low prices).

The implementation of usufruct as a policy tool designed to increase local food production began with the UBPC land tenure changes of 1993, were broadened in 2008 under Raul Castro's economic reforms, deepened and adjusted as part of the Guidelines (*Linamientos*) reforms in 2011, and strengthened once again most recently as part of the adoption of a new constitution in 2019. The first widespread implementation of usufruct was in the formation of UBPC cooperatives to address the problem of idle, uncultivated land (*tierra ociosa*). Faced with problems of underutilized farmland, rising food prices and a persistent dependence on imported food, Raúl Castro's government introduced another series of agricultural reforms almost fifteen years later aimed at increasing agricultural productivity by recruiting landless Cubans and encouraging existing farmers to increase food production. Small-scale production was prioritized due to the demonstrated increases in production on the part of small-scale private and cooperative farmers since the 1990 reforms (Fernandez et al. 2018b).

Starting in 2008, three ever-more expansive agrarian reform laws were enacted to transfer more idle state-owned lands to cooperatives and private farmers (Fernandez et al. 2018b; Graddy-Lovelace 2018). Under Decree-Law 259 (2008) and Decree-Law 300 (2012), designed to recruit more Cubans into farming through transferring land in usufruct, landless citizens could acquire up to 1 *caballería* (13.42 hectares) of land and existing farmers could obtain additional land, extending their farms up to 67.1 hectares (the limit imposed by the 1963 agricultural reform law). Decree-Law 358 (2018) was an even more extensive attempt to encourage a 'back to the land' movement, introducing changes that addressed shortcomings and restrictions in the previous decree-laws. The iterative

changes in later decree-laws adjusted the terms of usufruct by (1) extending the term of usufruct to 20 years for individuals (extendable for a further 20 years) and from 25 years to indefinite for non-individuals (i.e. legal entities such as cooperatives), and (2) doubling the amount of land that could be granted in usufruct from 1 *caballería* (13.42 hectares) to 2 *caballerías* (26.84 hectares). Decree-Law 358 also allowed homes to be built on leased land and addressed the problem of limited access to inputs and services by allowing producers to associate with state farms or cooperatives to gain access to their services and equipment. For example, an individual who does not own farming equipment can contract a tractor to plow land, a bulldozer to clear land, or to establish a well or irrigation system. Individuals can also buy inputs (i.e. seeds, equipment) through these associations.

Although reliable data on Cuban agriculture is difficult to obtain (Mesa-Lago and González-Corzo 2020), existing data indicates that the usufruct model has aided farmers in accessing land for agro-ecological food production, encouraged Cuban farmers to work cooperatively, and enabled the Cuban state to provide minimum levels of food security to its population. In the ten years from 2008 to 2018, the Cuban government had turned over more than 2.1 million hectares of agricultural land in usufruct to 244,851 applicants, with ample land remaining to distribute (Rodríguez Guerrero 2018).

Through usufruct, the Cuban government has made land readily available at no cost, however, major barriers remain to incentivize farmers to cultivate the land and ultimately achieve food sovereignty through increased food production (Fernandez et al. 2018b; Graddy-Lovelace 2018; Mesa-Lago and González-Corzo 2020). The next section identifies the principle challenges that remain for increasing food production while keeping food prices affordable.

Challenges to expanding and diversifying markets

The political goal of achieving food sovereignty in Cuba has been the underlying motivation for more recent economic restructuring and loosening regulations towards providing greater producer autonomy and access to inputs/infrastructure and markets, including access to land and technical assistance. Decades before assuming the presidency, Raúl Castro initiated a 'National Food Program' through the Cuban armed forces that promoted local self-reliance in food production, self-provisioning gardens at boarding schools, hospitals, factories, etc. to produce food for their own consumption. Once president in 2008, Raúl Castro's broad *lineamientos* policy reforms were meant to bolster domestic food production while promoting economic growth across multiple sectors and increasing employment. The challenge for the socialist Cuban state is to create the right balance of market mechanisms and entrepreneurial incentives while maintaining an ethos of equality and restricting foreign control that has historically been achieved through central planning and economic regulation.

Cuban scholars have identified changes beyond making land available that need to be made within the socialist system to allow producers to increase food production, such as access to inputs, greater efficiency in food distribution and diversified markets (Nova González and Gonzalez-Corzo 2015; Nova González and Figueroa Alfonso 2018). Though Cuban farmers have access to land and guaranteed markets/prices, they lack access to *diverse* markets and need appropriate technology and policies that will further prevent food waste, as detailed below. In addition to internal critiques calling for more extensive

regulatory reforms, we also recognize the extensive external restrictions imposed by the nearly six-decade old U.S. embargo that blocks or limits many proposed or imagined innovations.

A major barrier to increased food production in Cuba is the lack of inputs, such as machinery, specialized tools, and seeds, which are currently only available through the state. While subsequent reforms to the 2008 Decree-Law 259 allowed greater infrastructure investment (i.e. building houses, barns, warehouses, processing facilities), there are few public or private resources available to implement such investments. Key supplies such as irrigation systems, greenhouses, harvesting and processing equipment, crates and boxes to transport crops, or trucks for transport are available in very limited quantities to well-connected farmers (through foreign projects, via cooperatives) or are simply not available. Most funding for agricultural improvement projects in Cuba is available through external funding, which is directed to cooperatives and then individual farms through ANAP (Cuban Small Farmer Association). Successful farmers have been able to convert to agroecological systems and increase production through adding wells, irrigation systems, netting, greenhouses, tools, etc. made available through foreign funding. Agricultural policy introduced in late 2018 aimed to increase farmers' access to agricultural services through permitting individual farmers to directly contract services (i.e. tractors, specialized equipment) from adjacent state farms. Readily available access to farming equipment and/or financing and credit remains a major limiting factor, as the agricultural sector lacks both domestic and external investment (Thiemann and Spoor 2019).

Food distribution is yet another example of how the government restricts the market in the name of social equality but whose bureaucratic mechanisms limit increased food production and lead to significant food waste. Though targeted for future reform, Cuban citizens continue to receive a monthly food ration (through a *libreta*/ration book) at very low, subsidized prices. These products are not sufficient to fulfil monthly household needs but are an important safety net for families and provide some food security. Some subsidized food is also available through state-run markets. From the perspective of local food producers in Cuba, the state-run distribution enterprise, Acopio, is both an important mechanism for food security and a burden and hassle, as problems with fuel and transportation create inefficiencies in picking up food in time before it goes to waste. After free-market farmer's markets were reopened in 1994, farmers were able to sell their extra products directly to consumers at higher prices after meeting their quotas with Acopio. However, escalating prices at the farmer's markets make food sold there inaccessible to many Cubans; and problems of storage and distribution leads to significant wasting of food (Fernandez et al. 2018b, 5). A 2017 report attributed Cuba's food waste to obsolete equipment, poor transportation and storage systems, and insufficient processing during the initial harvest phases (OnCuba 2017).

Finally, increased direct access to markets is necessary to incentivize and facilitate increased production. Policy changes in 2011 and 2013 that diversified permissible forms of sale gave producers more autonomy in decision-making. This was done by allowing cooperatives and individual producers to sell directly to restaurants and hotels and expanding opportunities for direct sales of produce through roadside kiosks and small mobile food carts (*carretillas*). Nova González and Figueroa Alfonso (2018) argue that bolder adjustments along the lines proposed above would lead to an increase in food production once producers are able to fully make their own decisions and market

mechanisms can be used to increase efficiency and improve distribution. While policies have been implemented to address specific problems (i.e. Acopio payments and diversified markets), a broader and more systematic approach that relies on market mechanisms is needed to increase food production and availability. In spite of recent changes, Cuban markets remain tightly regulated. A balance must be struck between government regulation of food distribution and incentivizing production without undermining equality and affordability.

The U.S. embargo on Cuba and the extensive restrictions it imposes on Cuban food systems also continues to slow progress toward Cuban food sovereignty and deepen current food scarcity. The current fuel shortage in Cuba, which hinders farmers from moving produce to markets in cities and across the country, is exacerbated by constraints on Venezuelan imports and the U.S. tightening of sanctions under the Trump administration. While Cuba needs foreign direct investment to help with dilapidated infrastructure, tightened US sanctions (under Title III of the Helms-Burton Act passed by Congress in 1996) scare off foreign investors with the threat of prosecution. The U.S. economic embargo on the free exchange of U.S. and Cuban goods remains firmly in place, and under the Trump administration, any Obama-era moves towards reconciliation and trust-building vanished. Even while the United States pursued a political 'reconciliation' in 2015–2016, the U.S. government's underlying hostility towards and distrust of Cuba's socialist political economy continued to threaten Cuban autonomy.

Implications of hybrid property and diversified markets for producer autonomy

Cuba can inform us on food sovereignty because it is not wedded to a single set of land and property relations nor economic models. Several strategies exist at once – the incorporation of usufruct rights into the mix does not mean eliminating private property rights and extending producer's markets through a process of decentralization does not mean eliminating state support. Cuba has learned from its own history and is thus progressively (and in a progressive manner) decentralizing the government in an attempt to make the existing socialist system more efficient and productive, while striving to keep food affordable.² The case of Cuban usufruct land access illuminates how property structures the possibilities for food sovereignty, where challenges remain, and what can be learned for working toward food sovereignty in capitalist contexts, such as the United States.

The process of state reallocation of land to individual producers at different times throughout the Revolution resulted in a collective sense of property that is not necessarily tied to specific territories. Usufructuary land arrangements, expanded since their initial role in recovering from the severe economic crisis of the early 1990s, have played a central role in Cuba's socialist central planning. Rather than a large-scale privatization of idle land, the government has opted to lease state land in usufruct, free of charge, to encourage increased food production on the island. The changed land management

²Controlling the cost of food is another consistent challenge. Given low average salaries in Cuba, the rising cost of food is an issue the government continually seeks to address. After free-market policies resulted in price spikes in agricultural goods in farmers markets, the Cuban government in turn implemented several price ceilings on certain products (i.e. pork, onions) and has attempted various measures to restrict reselling on the part of middlemen. Cubans also rely on the informal market and gifts, where social relations with neighbors and relatives play a large role (Bono and Finn 2017).

regime (from state-run to cooperatively-run control of land, held cooperatively or individually in usufruct) is a means of implementing a socialist approach that encourages cooperative methods of management and finance and prevents individual wealth accumulation. This approach has tried to both increase food security as well as provide an economically sustainable basis for food production domestically. And yet, in spite of the widespread availability of food and its comparatively low cost, the goal of producing enough food domestically remains elusive.

The costs and benefits of usufruct under a socialist system versus private landholding in a capitalist system are evident in Cuba. Most producers (in state and non-state sectors) are not free to sell their land, are restricted in what they can grow, are required to sell to the government at set prices and to purchase equipment through state entities, which are bureaucratic and slow. Centrally planned agriculture invites bureaucracy and inefficiencies. State interventions and micromanagement, manifested in excessive paperwork and required permissions, delay producer initiatives and innovations. They impede farmers and their cooperatives from accessing, for example, necessary equipment for refrigeration or transportation of their produce (Graddy-Lovelace 2018). These limitations are offset, however, by the benefits of higher than average incomes, free healthcare and education, food security, low-priced inputs and services, no debt, and the ability of private farmers to lease their land to the state (for which they receive a monthly check). Though varying over time and slowed by bureaucracy, private farmers also receive free crop insurance, agricultural extension, guaranteed markets, subsidies, and access to additional land to lease under usufruct at no charge (Graddy-Lovelace 2018).

Cuban farmers may access land through usufruct, but lack access to basic technologies, such as irrigation or row covers, for which they often rely on international development assistance. Cuban farmers have guaranteed and often subsidized markets and price floors but must also provide a large percentage of their yield to the government. With socialized health care and other supports, farmers are often financially more well off than other Cubans but have few options to make value-added products and lose much of their fruit and vegetable crops to waste. Cuban farmers, in short, confront the contradictions of both capitalism and socialism.

Initiated by the economic crisis of the 1990s, the Cuban government has now prioritized decentralization (as an improvement to, not a rebuke of, the socialist system) and promoted the distribution of land that had gone idle (through lease, not private land ownership) towards its goals of increased domestic food production. From a decades-long focus on centralization, planning and industrial efficiencies of scale, Cuban policy makers have come to embrace the idea of small-scale, diversified agriculture for most of its domestic food production (Altieri and Funes-Monzote 2012).

The objective of decentralization is to reduce bureaucracy by separating business from state functions, thereby making goods and public service provision more efficient (Nova González and Figueroa Alfonso 2018). Government institutions, universities, and research and technical support institutes have embraced this more decentralized development model. For example, Cuba's Ministry of Agriculture was completely restructured by eliminating the former Provincial and Municipal Agriculture Delegations and creating local Agriculture Offices as part of the provincial and municipal administrations. This restructuring and other decentralization initiatives promote horizontal relations and economic collaboration among local producers, giving diverse local agricultural production entities the

opportunity 'to expand their functions and participate more directly in the social environment where they operate' (Nova González and Figueroa Alfonso 2018, 10).

Lessons for food sovereignty in the United States and Cuba

Usufruct land arrangements, together with cooperative food production and state distribution, are key to socialist central planning in Cuba. Rather than a large-scale privatization of idle land, the Cuban government opted to lease state land in usufruct, free of charge, to encourage increased food production on the island. The changed land management regime (state-run to cooperatively-run control of land held cooperatively or individually in usufruct) encourages cooperative methods of management and finance and prevents individual wealth accumulation. Drawing on Blomley's distinction between territory and property, we argue that property in Cuba is seen as a social means of food production rather than a mark of status or wealth through personal ownership of land. In Cuba, land allows producers to work cooperatively and contribute to wider social goods such as food security, despite being hampered by government restrictions.

The Cuban case illustrates that land redistribution works to guarantee farmers access to land; however, it must also be supported by a diversity of markets that include appropriate technologies for transport, storage, processing and distribution. Without affordable access to technology, food goes to waste and production cannot be increased, thus limiting national scale food security. Cuban experiments with diversifying markets indicate that deregulation is accompanied by an associated increase in food prices, which is antithetical to food sovereignty aims. In the U.S. context, wealth generated through accumulation, private property and private enterprise drives both the development of high-end markets for small-scale producers, but also food insecurity and economic inequality in the wider population. While technology may be more accessible and affordable, small-scale farmers in the United States also lack capital for making technological improvements required by food safety policy. In both places, governance through the mechanisms of property presents both challenges and opportunities for food sovereignty. What would a blended system of private property and usufruct land access look like? What kinds of policies would be required and how might it change food security outcomes and food sovereignty prospects in both places?

First and foremost, a food sovereignty approach to these problems would require changing the way the state structures the social relations of property. The accumulation and transfer of assets, although not necessarily land, is central to the long-term well-being of individuals and families. Cuba recently legalized the separation of homes from land, so that a house may be passed to future generations, while the land remains in usufruct lease. Access to land through usufruct is the basis for affordable food, especially for the poorest consumers. Second, new forms of state regulation over space, perhaps in the form of 'partial' or 'variegated sovereignty' (Patel 2009; Trauger 2017) could take the form of multiple authorities over production and exchange. Cuban scholars Nova González and Gonzalez-Corzo (2015) advocate for a 'strong but not antagonistic state, with the capacity to adapt and innovate, particularly on the regulatory front' (192). Farmers and advocates for food sovereignty in both the United States and Cuba advocate for policy iterations and social change that give producers more flexibility, connect local producers to consumers, decrease the dominance

of white male land access and ultimately increase food production in an environmentally sound way.

While critics tend to focus on the bureaucratic restrictions and delays caused by central planning, prosperous Cuban producers have found great success through constant pursuit of innovation and creative solutions rather than a focus on state limitations. Well-known examples such as Fernando Funes Mozote's Finca Marta, the UBPC Viviero Alamar, and other successful cooperatives across the island have gained international renown through their abundant, high quality produce. They employ local workers, serve as educational beacons, and generate profit as they fulfil their contract with the government distributor and direct their surplus directly to 5-star hotels and restaurants. While these stories of success are heartening, they follow in the path of the US alternative food movement in many ways and (re)create two-class food systems. Food sovereignty luminaries, such as Malik Yakini or Winona LaDuke in the United States, work against this trend, through community gardening and land recovery, thus reconfiguring economic forms of exchange and the social relationship to land. We argue that the access to land in Cuba through usufruct allows for a multiplicity of market forms to emerge, as well as lowering barriers to entry for farmers, ensuring more producer autonomy. The kind of social change in the relationship to property that food sovereignty leaders practice in the US and which farmers enjoy in Cuba is instructive for the path forward for food sovereignty in the US. The Cuban case illustrates that hybrid forms of property allow for capitalist and socialist forms to coexist. In the face of consolidation and financialization in the agricultural sector, future policy ambitions at the federal level may incorporate new orientations toward land and property to achieve its aims and expanding land access to more than white men.

Conclusion

In the context of the United States, land has been historically territorialized as private property, benefiting primarily white and male landowners who dominate agricultural production. Racial minorities have been denied access to land in various ways for centuries, underscoring the white supremacist foundations of the U.S. property regime. Food insecurity abounds within these communities as well, highlighting the need for alternative food production models that provide safe, nutritious food to all in ways that are culturally appropriate and affordable. Food sovereignty activists assert that this is achievable only through ideological and political changes to the current system. This paper focused on the social relations undergirding property to suggest social change pathways that undermine the supremacy of private property in the United States, using the example of usufruct land access in Cuba for inspiration.

The complexity and innovation of the Cuban state is under-recognized in the United States. A growing number of U.S. scholars are collaborating with Cuban scholars to illuminate recent changes in Cuban agriculture as part of the larger restructuring of the Cuban economy (i.e. Fernandez et al. 2018a). The politics of innovation around agro-ecology in Cuba is best seen as one that enables us to employ Gibson-Graham's (2006) directive to 'render[ing] visible and intelligible the diverse and proliferating practices that the preoccupation with capitalism has obscured' (Gibson-Graham 2006, x). Cuba's socialist agricultural model continues to evolve, expanding and decentralizing the non-state sector in a cautious, gradual and regulated manner that protects labor, health and safety standards,

and limits the accumulation and transfer of assets. Such reforms require a state that is willing to adapt and innovate according to the needs of its producers in a way that protects them from the extremes of capitalist markets. Integrating capitalist and socialist forms requires an expanded economic imagination, one that builds on socialism and destabilizes the supremacy of capitalism.

Food sovereignty scholars and activists have long asserted that the restructuring of the social relations around land are foundational to food sovereignty. In this paper, we present the examples of Cuba and the United States to put some empirical flesh on the bones of food sovereignty narratives and encourage consideration of the implications of how property is territorialized by the state in both countries. In the case of Cuba, producers have access to land but are limited in their markets and access to technology. In the case of the United States, state authorized private property relations hinder producer autonomy and generate inequalities in terms of access to land. A food sovereignty approach would require new forms of state regulation over space in the form of policy iterations that give producers more autonomy with regard to how they access land, connect with consumers, and ultimately produce food in an environmentally sound way.

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