

Book Review



Food Sovereignty in International Context: Discourse, Politics and Practice of Place

Edited by Amy Trauger, 2015, New York, Routledge, ISBN: 978-1-138-79008-7, Paperback pp. X+238, Price: Rs. 3274

This book is a collection of essays that contemplate various aspects of Food Sovereignty (FS), including its politics and praxis. This book clarifies that the key to achieving food sovereignty is giving producers and consumers more decision-making power in the food system. This will help reduce the adverse effects of capital and state control of food, like hunger and insecurity. This book also examines the socio-eco-political implications of securing a place for producers and consumers to exchange food. It is the translation of a global narrative of autonomy in the food system to a variety of spaces and places in which struggles for power and control in the food system are happening (p.2). This book aims to provide a variety of examples of how communities and organizations are taking on this challenge and the resistance and struggles they face in place-specific ways (p.10).

The book's thirteen chapters are divided into three parts: *Discourse, Politics, and Practice*, with an introduction by Amy Trauger, the editor. *Discourse* introduces food sovereignty by explaining its concepts and history. The second half, *Politics*, discusses food sovereignty's location and space issues with the government and the market for autonomy. *The Practice* examines local food sovereignty efforts, along with farmer-state-market relationships.

Amy Trauger's chapter *Putting food sovereignty in place* is an adapted version of the author's journal article, "*Towards a political geography of food sovereignty: transforming territory exchange and power in the liberal sovereign state*", published in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. The author emphasizes that food sovereignty demands rights for producers (also consumers) to have more decision-making power over their food systems. The chapter clearly articulated the discontent towards food security for undermining the livelihoods of small-holders globally and generating new inequities and disconnections between producers and consumers through a modernist industrial model of agriculture.

Part I, titled *Discourse*, consists of four chapters. The chapter *Where are the local communities? Food sovereignty discourse on international agrobiodiversity conservation strategies* is written by Claudio Brenni. This chapter exposes that some divergent understandings of food sovereignty have arisen because its narratives have been adopted by groups beyond small-scale farmers. Understanding who is included and excluded from a community will help to politically locate the local communities and get a better experience of the underlying boundaries assigned by researchers. The second chapter in this section, *Farmers, foodies and First Nations: Getting to food sovereignty in Canada?*, written by Annette Aurélie Desmarais and Hannah Wittman, examines how three distinct sectors – farmers, foodies and Indigenous peoples – use the food sovereignty discourse in Canada to engage in discussions about the issue. The authors elucidate that food sovereignty activism in Canada is increasingly focused on issues of access to and control over productive resources and how they are consumed.

Chapter four, titled *Food sovereignty in the global North: The application of a social justice framework for a common language and approach*, is authored by Alanna Higgins. This chapter examined the application of a social justice framework to the narratives and activism of food sovereignty. This chapter asserts that applying the social justice framework to the food sovereignty narrative challenges its key ideas and the development of long-lasting and systemic answers to some of its criticisms. The four filters of access, agency, advocacy, and solidarity action can help make a common language and approach. The final chapter in this section, titled *Framing food provisioning research in the UK: Whither food sovereignty?* is written by Carol Morris, Susanne Seymour and Adam Spencer. This chapter conceptualizes food sovereignty and security as distinctive food provisioning 'frames' to explore the nature and extent of research on food sovereignty in the UK (p.69).

The authors conclude that food sovereignty is viewed as a “sharp key” in the master framework of food security.

The second part starts with the chapter titled, *Food security, food sovereignty, and the nation-state: historicizing Norwegian farmland policy*. It is written by Heidi Vinge and describes the institutionalization of Norwegian agricultural policy in the context of a growing worldwide emphasis on food policy issues and corporate influence. It analyzed how Norway has moved from radical farmland politics to a neoliberal approach based on the principle of comparative advantage. The next chapter *Seed sovereignty as civil disobedience in northern India?* written by Amy Trauger, explores the idea of saving seeds as a form of civil disobedience because it means not buying improved varieties of seeds and working for food sovereignty, which is anti-corporate at its core. This chapter also focused on *Navdanya*, an organization that worked to open a space for critical political dialogues around seeds in India.

The eighth chapter in this volume, *Repositioning food sovereignty: between Ecuadorian nationalist and cosmopolitan politics*, is written by Alberto Arce, Stephen Sherwood and Myriam Paredes. By using Ecuador as a case study, this chapter analyzes the ability of a state to enclose, encapsulate or control people’s communication, networking and imagination, and further, the authors stress the need for creating a cosmopolitical agenda that will view food sovereignty as a fundamentally integrative, transnational experience. The next chapter, *Talking around it: food sovereignty as a unifying discourse in the Southern Alberta food system*, by Trina Filan, inspects the politics of food sovereignty in the city of Lethbridge (Canada). This chapter suggests the “appropriate use” of urban open spaces to allow and encourage publicly shared and accessible food. The author points out that discussion about food sovereignty can challenge the political and economic structures already in place, bring people together, and give them more power.

In the first chapter in the final part *Framing multiple food sovereignties: comparing the Nyéléni Declaration and the*

Local Food and Self-Governance Ordinance in Maine, Hilda E. Kurtz discusses the Local Food Self Governance Ordinances in the US state of Maine concerning the Nyéléni Declaration. It clearly explains how this Ordinance could promote self-reliance, the preservation of family farms, and local culinary traditions. Susie Jacobs, in the chapter, *Gender, food sovereignty and agrarian reforms*, claims that even in the food sovereignty perspective of peasant family farming, there are severe equity concerns. Despite women’s substantial and growing contribution to small-scale agriculture, their labor is unrecognized primarily and unpaid. Elisa Da Vià’s chapter, *Food sovereignty in the fields: seed exchange and participatory plant breeding of wheat landraces in Italy* explains how seed-swapping initiatives were used as a tool to challenge the European Union restriction on farm-saved seed. This chapter states that it is political organizing with its root in participatory research and innovation at the local level. The final chapter, titled *When global goes sweet, locals turn sour: Wine sovereignty in Switzerland*, is written by Melaine Laesslé. This swiss wine case study demonstrates how food sovereignty dynamics can be accounted for recovering control of local wine production by a highly innovative collective organization.

One of the strong points of this volume is its attempt to explore food sovereignty from a global north perspective, in contrast to the existing literature focusing on the Latin American conception of food sovereignty. However, a careful examination of the chapters reveals that the book needs to explain the cultural backdrop and the ecological goal of minimizing agriculture’s environmental impact, which is crucial to food sovereignty. Nevertheless, this edited book has filled the theoretical and empirical gap in the food sovereignty literature.

Abshana Jamal

Research Scholar, Doctoral Centre, Rajagiri College of
Social Sciences, Kalamassery, Kerala, India

Email id: abshanasaraf@gmail.com