

Global governance/politics, climate justice & agrarian/social justice: linkages and challenges

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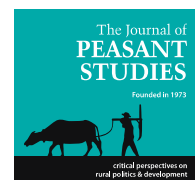
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Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility: Popular Politics and Global Governance

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Abstract

While the everyday lives of people on low and precarious incomes have been adjusting in different ways to higher food prices since the global price spikes of 2007-11, people in distinctly different settings are experiencing some common changes in their relationships to food. Relations to the production and consumption of food have become sharply commodified and customary norms and rights relating to food are under pressure. The critical challenge is for global governance, including human rights approaches, to protect the right to food against likely future volatility while promoting the vital functioning of local moral economies and popular political cultures to do with food, hunger and public action.

Drawing on primary research into the sociology of recent food shocks, this paper will explore patterns of change in everyday life since the global food price spikes / rises of the early 21st century, with a focus on the implications for the popular political culture and global governance of food.

The paper is based on longitudinal work in selected sites in low and lower middle-income countries between 2011 and 2015. We sought to get beneath the global picture of food economies and hunger and nutrition statistics, to build a fine-grained, actor-oriented account of the mechanisms (or causes) of change through repeated rounds of research into the lived experiences of price spikes and how they were changing individual, domestic, local and national food practices. The paper will provide evidence to show how and why relationships between people and food have become commodified and discuss the implications of a more market-based relationship to food for how well people are eating. It will set these findings against the functioning of the local moral economy, including a 'common sense' understanding of the right to food relating to protection during episodes of dearth, hunger or food quality risks, and to the corresponding obligations of communities, families, and public authorities to act.

1 Introduction and Background

This paper sets out findings about the lived experience of recent episodes of global economic adjustment, and discusses the implications for popular politics and global governance. We focus specifically on how people have adjusted to higher food prices in the wake of the food price spikes (or global food crisis) of 2008 and 2010-11. We then explore what that means for understandings of subsistence rights and responsibilities, as the moral economic foundations of popular politics in a rapidly globalizing system. We think our research offers a unique perspective into how the world food system has been changing, because our insights are drawn from an unusually wide range of lived experiences across the world, and because we have been privileged to witness the process of adjustment as it unfolded in people's lives, to hear their views about what those changes have meant, how they have accommodated them, what they have resisted, and how.

The new equilibrium of higher world food prices denotes advancing globalization in the world food system, or the incorporation of erstwhile partially excluded parts of the globe within the present food regime.¹ The period 2007-12 appears to have marked a particularly sharp uptick in the pace of integration, with painful and conflictual implications (as was clear from the numerous subsistence protests and 'food rebellions' during the period).² We have focused on understanding what these processes of change have meant in people's everyday lives, across a range of settings. Although our wider research findings cover other aspects of change, we focus here on how the changing imperatives of provisioning (among other factors) are driving changing conditions of work, and the knock-on effects for patterns of consumption under rapidly-changing market conditions. We find that both the productive and the consumption dimensions of provisioning show signs of widespread change. In both instances, we can characterize the changes as commodifying or commoditizing people's relationships to food. Adjustment to higher food prices (in the wake of a period of volatile global national and local food prices) has involved a deepening of dependence on commodity relations (or markets) for essential reproduction:³ people behave as though and believe they are more dependent on wage labour and cash incomes to secure the means for basic subsistence than in the recent past. Most also depend more on food markets at all stages of the system – for inputs, in the production processes, and buying more heavily processed, prepared and marketed food. These processes of commoditization are far from complete, and there are domains in which relations to food remain outside of the commodity net and domains of resistance or in which relations continue to escape commoditization.⁴ Nevertheless, these findings suggest that, writ large, the post-food crisis period has been one of a particularly rapid commodification of the food system affecting domains of life that have to date been at least partly separate from market conditions and relations.

We think our findings are significant for understanding the popular basis on which global food regimes rest. By this we mean that they point to broad areas of accommodation, in which substantial majorities of people adjust without significant increases in illbeing or dissatisfaction. They also expose likely fault lines that indicate adjustment is incurring great and enduring hardship or discontent among significant socioeconomic groups.

¹ Philip McMichael, "A Food Regime Genealogy," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 139–69, doi:10.1080/03066150902820354; Eric Holt Giménez and Annie Shattuck, "Food Crises, Food Regimes and Food Movements: Rumbblings of Reform or Tides of Transformation?," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 2011): 109–44, doi:10.1080/03066150.2010.538578.

² Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel, *Food Rebellions: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice* (Food First Books, 2012); Naomi Hossain et al., "Them Belly Full (But We Hungry): Food Rights Struggles in Bangladesh, India, Kenya," Synthesis report from the DFID-ESRC Food Riots and Food Rights project (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2014), <http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/them-belly-full-but-we-hungry-food-rights-struggles-in-bangladesh-india-kenya>.

³ following the definition of commoditisation by Harriet Friedmann, "Household Production and the National Economy: Concepts for the Analysis of Agrarian Formations," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 1980): 158–84, doi:10.1080/03066158008438099.

⁴ as argued about new modes of peasant production by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, "The Peasantries of the Twenty-First Century: The Commoditisation Debate Revisited," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 1–30, doi:10.1080/03066150903498721.

Our research is intentionally wide, set out across 23 rural, urban, peri-urban and ‘plantation’ / rural-industrial settings in 10 low and middle income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia), South and Southeast Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia and Vietnam), and Central and South America (Bolivia and Guatemala). This breadth was essential, we felt, to gain a sense of the extent to which any changes we were witnessing were global as distinct from local, idiosyncratic, national or regional. The research also aims for the depth necessary to make sense of complex processes of change. We draw on findings from three points in time, based on research visits in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (in some instances, drawing on research conducted as far back as early 2009), and attempt to triangulate the qualitative data gathered with national and other quantitative data and analysis, wherever possible.

Outline of the paper

Section 2 sets out the approach and methods used in the research. Section 3 presents findings about the changing relationship between people and food in these low- and middle-income country communities. It focuses first on how sharp rises in the cost of living have prompted changes in livelihood activity, and then on how consumption behavior has shifted, partly in response to changing patterns of work and family life. Section 4 discusses implications for understandings of the moral economy, rights to food and the basis for popular subsistence politics in this era of globalization. Section 5 concludes.

2 Approach and Methods

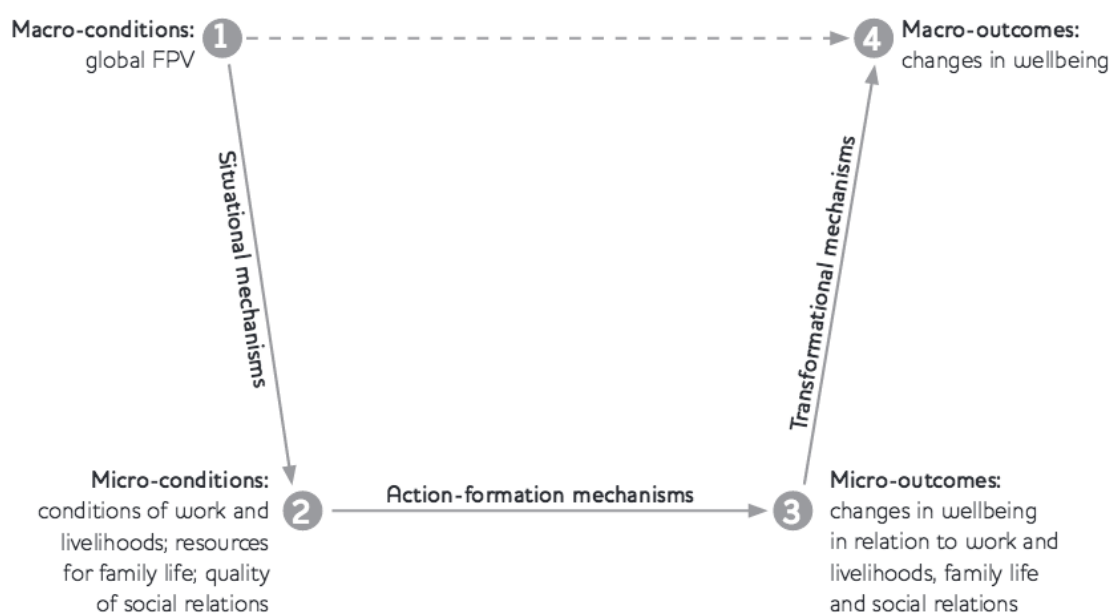
The research was designed to explore a) how high and unpredictable food prices (or food price volatility) affect wellbeing among people living on low or precarious incomes. To do this we studied: b) how rapid and unexpected food price changes, most commonly sudden and sustained rises, have affected the day-to-day work of keeping families fed and cared for in selected communities in low and middle income countries between 2012 and 2015; and c) the formal and informal resources and strategies that enable people to cope with or adapt to these changes, and so shape their resilience to these changes (or capacity to manage without long-term damage).

The project aimed to arrive at a clear and strong understanding of mechanisms through which people’s wellbeing was affected by food price volatility. We wanted to ensure these could apply across clearly defined contexts. To make this possible, the research design was for a relatively large and diverse data collection exercise, combining qualitative and quantitative, longitudinal, in-depth topical and multi-site data collection activities. The core involved repeat rounds of qualitative research in 23 communities across 10 countries, led by experienced researchers in each country. This was supported by quantitative data collection and attempts at qualitative-quantitative integrated analysis. This plural approach to data collection was adopted with the aim of building explanations of change that were both mid-range theoretically and empirically strong enough to apply to a range of contexts and variables, and not merely describe the locations in which the qualitative work was based.

We adopted a ‘mechanism-based approach’ drawing on the theoretical and methodological lessons of analytical sociology and middle range theory as a practical approach to explaining these complex social matters.⁵ By ‘mechanism-based explanations’ we mean reaching below the macro movements of food prices, to clarify in a careful, step-by-step way, how those movements change the conditions of local and individual wellbeing (see Figure below). This approach (see *Figure 1*) had us drill down from the high order global conditions of food price volatility (the main ‘situational mechanisms’) into the highly localised individual and contextual responses it stimulates (the ‘action-formation mechanisms’), and then build our understanding of the causes of change back up into a general understanding of how food price volatility was affecting wellbeing, through an understanding of how these mechanisms interact with and change each other (‘transformational mechanisms’).

⁵ Details are provided in Naomi Hossain, “From Global to Local and Back Again: Researching Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility,” *IDS Bulletin* 46, no. 6 (November 1, 2015): 8–19, doi:10.1111/1759-5436.12182.

Figure 1 Research components and the analytical framework



Ten countries were chosen from which to select case studies, based on national levels of undernourishment (according to FAO figures); where research teams were in situ; and where Oxfam offices asked to be involved to improve their understanding of food price volatility impacts.⁶ In each country, one urban or peri-urban location was selected, and at least one rural food-producing area. Eight sites were part of on-going crisis impact monitoring research since 2009, and in those, exposure to the global economy was also a selection factor. The sites contained a mix of well-off, low-income, and extremely poor people. Each community case study included background and context data collection, where possible from documentary sources; ten or more household case studies in each site, built up through interviews with different household members over the years; focus groups with different occupation and/or relevant social groups in each community; key informant interviews with local administrative officials, NGO, religious or community leaders, local business people, and politicians; and local price data collection by physically visiting markets. The community case studies were developed to fit local contexts, capacities, and traditions of the researchers undertaking the research. All, however, addressed the same research questions, and while the forms in which data were collected vary, a great deal of the data generated can be subjected to direct comparative analysis across the sites. Interviews with more than 400 household members and key informants were undertaken, in addition to around 100 FGDs and further local data collection activities. Each year, around 1,500 people participated in the research.⁷

The overall methodology helps us make sense of the changes in people's lives arising from global events and processes, not only at an individual but also at more aggregated scales, and in ways that uncover how interactions between processes of change yield uncharted developments that affect how people live. Because we start with individuals, we begin with a sense of feeling; of how it feels to be living at this time when the world is adjusting to a major shock in its food system. We can situate that feeling not only in time but also in space: we can say something about how it feels to be a young Cochabamban or an elderly woman in Nairobi or a rice farmer in Viet Nam at a time when food prices

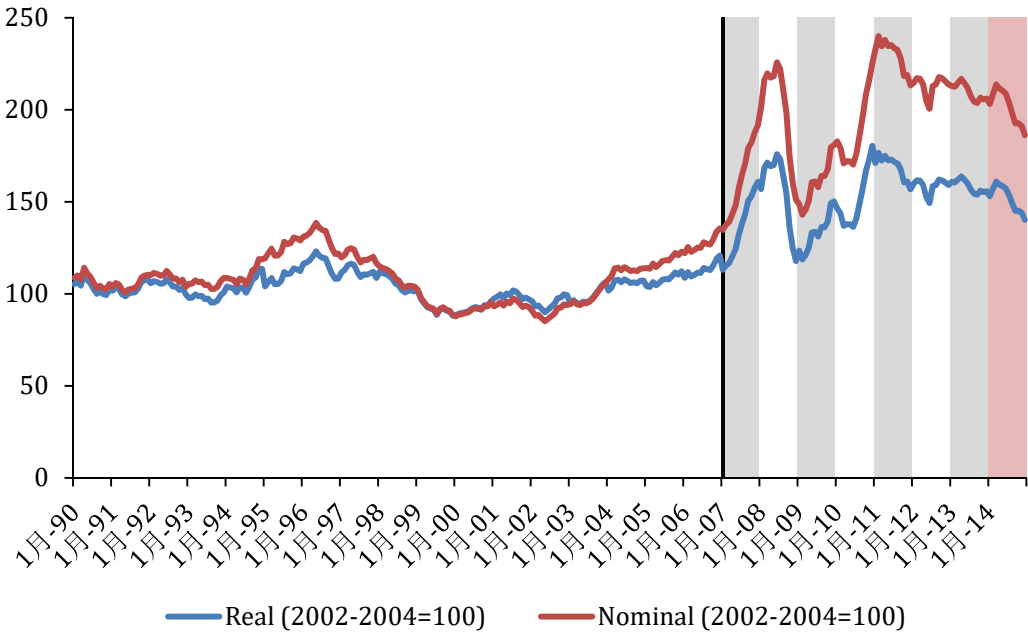
⁶ The project was a partnership with Oxfam GB, although the present paper has been written without Oxfam participation.

⁷ The qualitative data were transcribed or written up and translated (from 15 languages) in each country. Data management was coordinated across the countries, with common metadata labels issued to all the teams and the lead country researchers responsible for ensuring data are transcribed, translated, and labelled correctly. For the synthesis, the translated qualitative data were stored and coded in the data analysis software, NVivo 10s. Given the high costs of collecting, transcribing, translating, storing, and coding qualitative data, the emphasis has been on small amounts of high-quality data and on maximizing such alternative secondary sources that exist.

have spiked or plummeted, or are unpredictable. It is from those subjective assessments and experiential findings that we start to build a larger picture of people in a myriad of settings being affected by – and in turn affecting – the process of global economic adjustment. What is innovative here is that we build those individual changes up into a picture of global change that specifies not only what and how much, but also how and why people change their behaviour.

Not all the changes we see in the ways people are eating since the food price spikes of 2008 and 2010-11 reflect changing food prices directly, or even the associated conditions of producer uncertainty or the squeeze on consumption. However, it is possible to detect at least three broad mechanisms through which higher and more volatile food prices set the stage for changes in how people relate to food. First, absent other changes in the way people produce or consume, country-level food price changes or ‘situational mechanisms’ have left people on low or even average incomes at risk of hunger, even though the three years since the 2011 global food price peak have been years of relative stability and moderate declines from unprecedented highs in staple prices (see **Figure 2**). World and local food prices remain high in historical perspective, in nominal and in real terms. We can see how this plays out in households from **Figure 3** which shows that (according to WFP estimates) the rising cost of staples (compared to a baseline average of 2008-12) is likely to have had ‘severe’ impacts on the cost of the basic food basket in eight of the ten countries we study. This provides a quantitative picture of what people have been telling us: that people who were already spending significant proportions of their income or work effort on basic food consumption had to grow or earn substantially more, or else significantly change what and how they eat in order to feed themselves in this time of food price volatility.

Figure 2 World food prices 1990-2014



Source: 1 FAO Food price index

Figure 3 Cumulative impact of main staple food prices on cost of food basket since 2012

	2012 Q1	2012 Q2	2012 Q3	2012 Q4	2013 Q1	2013 Q2	2013 Q3	2013 Q4	2014 Q1	2014 Q2	2014 Q3	2014 Q4
BFA	42	49	45	45	36	9	0	2	2	3	-3	2
BGD	54	42	28	25	52	5	9	13	13	25	22	17
BOL	19	16	12	13	182	8	17	20	18	41	24	9
ETH	98	102	97	98	113	16	15	25	20	38	38	39
GTM	N/A	5	19	19	16	17	17	17	11	24	26	29
IDN	68	67	66	61	70	20	18	17	16	24	20	21
KEN	43	53	61	50	41	21	17	16	14	22	18	26
PAK	58	62	59	60	76	13	17	17	19	39	30	26
VNM										-4	11	-6
ZMB	12	19	26	27	67	13	19	14	16	35	34	17

No data	Low (< 25%)	High (50-75%)
	Moderate (25-50%)	Severe (> 75%)
	Low (< 0%)	High (5-10%)
	Moderate (0-5%)	Severe (> 10%)

Note 1: Qualitative assessment of category thresholds reclassified in 2013 Q1, prior thresholds have been adjusted for consistency.

Note 2: To take into account global structural changes resulting in volatile food prices, the baseline period changed as of 2013 Q2 from the 2003–07 five-year average to a moving period covering the previous five years of the same quarter (e.g. 2008 Q2 to 2012 Q2). However, available data for the baseline period does not always cover the whole five years. Pre-2013 Q2 values should not, therefore, be compared with those for 2013 Q2 onwards. Source: WFP (n.d.).

This leads us from the situational to action formational mechanisms: to what they did to stay fed, and the second broad tendency through which people have attempted to maintain levels and standards of provisioning. Here we focus on how people understand their changing conditions of work to be related to food price rises and volatilities. We avoid assuming that all changes in conditions of work are connected to cost of living rises, and note other important factors that are influencing those changes, such as new economic opportunities and constraints, official regulations and policies, and changing sociocultural norms. However, we are drawing directly on people’s explanations of how they have been coping with or adapting to changing costs of living. In other words, people interpret their current strategies around work as at least in part the effect of food price volatility, including consumer and producer input price rises.

Finally, we look at the transformational mechanisms and the net effects on social norms, institutions and practices of aggregate changes in social and economic behaviour, including how they interact with each other. Here we focus on how changing patterns of work in turn contribute to the development of new markets for packaged food and eating out. Taken together, these processes of change amount to a significantly higher level of commodification in the relationship between people and food than in the recent past, i.e. prior to the food price spikes of 2008 and 2010-11. A further transformation occurs in how this increasing commodification influences understandings of the moral economy and the right to food, shaping the basis for popular subsistence politics in this era of adjustment to globalization.

3 Changing Relations to Food

Changing Work Conditions

One of the advantages of the longitudinal approach is the ability to observe how people adjust to harsher new economic conditions over time, to see how individual work histories interact with local, national and even global economic conditions. Over the three (in some cases, six) years we have been researching these communities, we have seen people face moments of severe crisis as subsistence costs rose beyond their greatest fears, subsided and then shot up again. Each year since 2011, the sense of a crisis has receded overall, even though individuals and families continue to face periods of hardship. This does not mean that people are no longer squeezed, but that they are adapting to the situation. That process of adaptation has broadly featured a rising dependence on wage and cash incomes, but also of rising wages.

We have been able to observe that in contrast to the predicted pattern of economic development in which cities are the engines of change and growth and rural areas provide surplus labour, the past few years have seen rapid and significant economic diversification and growth in several agrarian communities, as they adjust to higher food and other commodity prices. By contrast, city folk appear

to be pursuing much the same livelihoods they were before the so-called food crisis, albeit facing more extreme pressures to earn more through wage employment or cash incomes. In several cases, urban migrants had been receiving food from their rural families to tide them over tough patches or returning to the country for periods of agricultural work. Nevertheless, this has not meant wider appreciation of agriculture as a livelihood option: for young people, in particular, the volatilities in producer prices over the past decade have confirmed that smallholder farming is not only inherently difficult, costly in terms of the inputs needed to earn a profit, but also highly unreliable when it comes to income, and inadequate when it comes to provisioning.⁸

In both rural and urban areas, wage rates (nominal incomes) had generally risen by the end of our period (2014), but incomes from informal sector self-employment (on which the majority of the urban poor subsist) were, if anything, even more precarious than in the past. In contrast to the invisible hand of the economics of inflation, wages adjust with something of a lag, and often with a struggle.⁹ A common refrain was variations on ‘we work to eat or live’: most working people at the lower end of the income scale felt that even when rising, wages barely covered subsistence costs, and wage rises did not keep pace with cost of living rises. In many households, there seemed to be a fairly constant search for new income opportunities, drawing more workers into the labour market.

Agricultural wage labour rates rose substantially year on year in agrarian communities in places where new technology had been introduced and where there was high seasonal demand during harvests. Landowners and larger farmers complained of not being able to get labourers, and about having to bid up wages and offer meals to secure workers at the crucial time. In Bangladesh, a new form of wage labour emerged with (high) fixed rate contracts involving groups of labourers. This new approach appears to raise productivity, as workers do an exhausting season of harvesting before returning to other work, such as transporting or factory work, once the season is over. New farm technology was noted in Dadu in Sindh in Pakistan, northeastern Naogaon and Khulna in southern Bangladesh, Cianjur in the rice-producing heart of Java in Indonesia, where harvesting was using more machinery than in the recent past, and in western Oromia in Ethiopia, where irrigation was the important new factor. But this also meant that agricultural labour demand was often available for shorter time periods, and had to be supplemented with other work. Men (and a growing number of women in the South Asian settings) were supplementing harvest labour with own-account farming, whether on leased or share-cropped land, and in particular with a complex and highly flexible pattern of seasonal and temporary migrations. In western Oromia, migrant workers’ wages and food demands were helping grow the new local restaurant trade, while labourers in Khulna were also spending their cash in cooked food outlets in Koyra market. But wages had not risen everywhere and for all sectors: in rural Chikwanda, in Zambia, maize producers had more bad years, and so piece work was in much demand. Some unscrupulous local farmers were said to have taken advantage of their plight, pushing wage down. But the more usual picture was one of robust growth in wage rates of as much as 50 per cent year on year, for particular sectors and seasons.

In Koyra, in southern Khulna, paddy production had re-started on a significant scale, five years after the 2009 Cyclone Aila had flooded fields leaving them too salinated to cultivate. Good rains and seasonal flooding had finally washed enough of the salt away for rice cultivation to recommence. But many former farmers had already left, migrating to Dhaka or other big cities to pull rickshaws or work in factories, investing in transport or shrimp or crab cultivation. Both in Khulna and in Naogaon, in the historically poor northeast, access to credit is increasingly necessary for agriculture. NGO micro-loans and government farmer support schemes were helping smallholders, but new patterns of production were noted, with small landowners commonly leasing their small plots to landless farmers, replacing older (and less formally fair) share-cropping arrangements. The return to the pre-cyclone mode of paddy production for own consumption was incomplete, and livelihoods had changed for good, it seemed.

⁸ Jennifer Leavy and Naomi Hossain, “Who Wants to Farm? Youth Aspirations, Opportunities and Rising Food Prices,” 2014, <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/3550/Wp439r.pdf?sequence=4>.

⁹ see also Steve Wiggins and S. Keats, “Rural Wages in Asia” (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2014).

Agricultural production for the market and on- and off-farm food processing activities also generated higher incomes or new opportunities in recent years. In drought-prone Lango Baya in Coastal Province in Kenya, western Oromia in Ethiopia and in Chikwanda in Zambia's Northern Province, irrigated vegetable production has produced some bumper years for those farmers with the capital to get started. Government programmes and NGOs had helped some with these initial investments. But there were bad years as well as good, including floods and bumper crops that felled prices. In Zambia, the poultry business had expanded particularly fast in the last couple of years, feeding nearby growing towns. People who had always been maize farmers there said they would move into poultry production if they could get the capital to do so.

In the Cochabamba valley in Bolivia, off-farm food processing continued to be an important part of the local economy. A dairy farmer and head of the local dairy coop noted that apart from milk for sale, no other agriculture was worth the effort. One vegetable packing plant showed the rapid turnover in workers, signaling the changing relationship to the land. In 2012, the young women workers we interviewed were mostly from indigenous communities, who had moved and taken up jobs because agriculture in their home communities no longer earned a living. One teenager had moved to stay with her aunts, saying they 'only produce potatoes' in her home village, whereas her aim was to get a farm and raise pigs. The next year, a new cohort of workers was present, all local girls in between school and other jobs, working as a stopgap until something better presented itself. They were mainly 'working to eat', they said. By the third year, another new cohort of young women had arrived. This time, the interview had to take place off premises, as the new manager was putting new pressures on workers to be more productive and manage their time better. But he was also, they noted, raising wages and giving them contracts.

One exception to the general pattern of rising agricultural wages was in the rubber sector in Banjar, in Kalimantan in Indonesia. Rubber prices were low, whether because of global prices dropping or because the quality of the rubber being produced in their region having declined was not clear. In this resource-rich area, people are accustomed to exposure to global economic volatilities, but in the past they have been able to substitute rubber tapping for mine work when prices were low. Government regulations on mining in the sector had put a stop to the activities of the local mine. Nonetheless, some men were heading off to do illegal gold and diamond mining in nearby provinces. Others took up petty trade or attempted to squeeze new food preparation businesses into a crowded market.

Not only were more people doing more kinds of wage work, more people, in particular more women, were said to be earning, in an effort to keep the family fed, clothed, schooled and socially engaged. Women were said to be trading more in vegetables and other agricultural produce in Burkina Faso and in Lango Baya in Kenya, and in Zambia, and doing more agricultural wage and other manual labour in rural Bangladesh and Pakistan. In rural Chuguexa Primero in the highlands in Guatemala, women had recently started to raise poultry and other small livestock, to supplement their incomes as market traders and tailors. Some husbands sought to deny this was happening, perhaps to protect their own status as breadwinners.¹⁰

But many of the earning opportunities available to women were either low income or precarious. In Cianjur and in Bekasi, women supplemented family incomes with small cooked food businesses. But both demand and input prices were said to be too unreliable for these to last long. People's accounts of their efforts to turn informal sector enterprises into lucrative businesses often told a common story: of a pioneer starting up a new activity that does well, only to be copied by others similarly desperate to earn a little extra, so that profits dip. Some informal enterprises with low- or no-costs to entry frequently see large numbers of entrants when times are tough. Charcoal burning was one example that was cited in Kenya and Zambia, and on which the authorities had clamped down because of forest destruction and environmental impacts.

Official regulation had other impacts on people's efforts to earn, particularly in relation to migration. Indonesian women had been banned from migrating to Saudi Arabia until 2013 after an Indonesian migrant worker had been beheaded there. Ethiopian women were also migrating to the Gulf for work

¹⁰ See also Alexandra Kelbert and Naomi Hossain, "Poor Man's Patriarchy: Gender Roles and Global Crises," *IDS Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (2014): 20–28.

in growing numbers. Guatemalans said more people were migrating north, including many who had gone to Canada for (legal) strawberry picking, and returned with good earnings. By contrast many of those who had gone illegally to the US, either never returned or did so without earnings. Some died on the dangerous journey north. Vietnamese men commonly migrate to Laos for work in the lean season at home. As the tourist industry recovered in Malindi in Kenya, more people were trying their luck in the restaurants and hotels along the coast; not all were lucky, but some young women were said to be making a living doing sex work. Everywhere we heard reports of seasonal and temporary migration having risen.

Some notable features of the changing conditions of work include the apparently growing significance of finance, communications technology and mobility. These are suggestive of integration within a more globalized economy, and of closer connections and higher velocities of economic activity. Capital or credit mattered not only to work but also for consumption smoothing. Several younger people mentioned needing mobile phones to hear about work, and the apparently low information costs with which many people move around their own countries for work suggest mobile technologies are making a difference to internal migration opportunities. Transport is a growing sector in its own right in rural areas – the growing number of *bodaboda* or motorcycle taxis in rural Kenya and Ethiopia was widely commented on. In Dadu, in rural Sindh, young men complain that the cost of travelling to seek work was sometimes prohibitive. The growing importance of mobility for basic subsistence may help to explain why fuel subsidies are so politically sensitive, and why fuel riots were also common during the food, fuel and financial crises of 2007-12.

Changing Food Cultures

Changing Diets

Talk of novel, strange and foreign foods, visible signs that packaged and processed foods were providing alternatives to customary items, and apparently rising fears about the health and nutrition effects of ‘bad’ and convenience foods prompted us to ask people how their food cultures were changing, why, and to what effect. We found the changes people identified were consistent with a rapid global nutrition transition away from cereal and plant-based foods towards fattier, more sugary, and in general more ‘Western’-style diets,¹¹ in line with the ‘stuffed and starved’ phenomenon associated with food globalisation and industrialisation.¹² We view these profound changes as ‘transformational mechanisms’, through which individual consumption behaviours interact with new modes of food production, supply and marketing to create food cultures with new norms and ideals. These emerging food cultures are significantly influenced by not only price, but also by the changes in work practices through which people attempt to maintain their levels and standards of food.

We found that the role of food as essential nourishment increasingly competes with the functions played by its newer marketed forms in offering choice and sensation, saving time, effort and cost, and creating status and identity. It seems counter-intuitive that people should be buying more of their food just at the time prices have risen, but this reflects the longer and more complex set of production and consumption changes set in train by / to which food price rises have contributed. People approach the problem of what to eat increasingly from the point of view of consumers seeking value, and that value may have many dimensions. Even among people who sometimes face the prospect of hunger, considerations of convenience, novelty, taste, safety, nutritional value, status and identity influence what is eaten. But this does not mean people play a powerful role in food markets by acting as agents that choose on the basis of free will: markets and (in particular) large corporations and markets powerfully constrain choices via supply, relative prices, aggressive marketing and food system regulations.

In all countries and most sites in this study, people spoke of ‘traditional’ foods in decline, due to changes in availability, cost and preparation time. In staple consumption, we hear of a move from

¹¹ Adam Drewnowski and Barry M. Popkin, “The Nutrition Transition: New Trends in the Global Diet,” *Nutrition Reviews* 55, no. 2 (February 1, 1997): 31–43, doi:10.1111/j.1753-4887.1997.tb01593.x.

¹² Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, 2 Rev Exp edition (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House, 2012).

relative diversity in grains (sorghum, millet, *teff*, quinoa) towards major monoculture crops of maize, rice or wheat (particularly in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Bolivia). Regional diversities in staple foods were also said to be declining. In Bolivia, children prefer wheat bread to *phiry* (a dish made with toasted flour). In Burkina Faso, people eat less *bikalgo*, a fermented condiment made from baobab seed, than before. In Guatemala, people prefer *hilachas*, *revolcado* (traditional tomato/tomatillo-based beef stew dishes) and beef and calves' broth - but instead buy cheaper and more widely available tacos, gringas, and burgers. In Ethiopia, young people in Addis Ababa said people are replacing *enjera* (fermented bread made from *teff* flour) with *dabo*, or wheat flour bread. By contrast, others from the south of the country are replacing their traditional foods such as *chuko*, barley preserved with butter and *torosho*, leavened corn bread with *enjera*, traditionally the food of the Amhara people and Addis Ababa.¹³ In cities with more developed food markets and consumer tastes, a second stage of change is a growing preference for more highly processed and packaged staples. For instance, in Bangladeshi and Indonesian communities children were said to be swapping rice for noodles or fried foods.

From women from farming households in rural Western Oromia in Ethiopia, we heard that *chechebsa* (a flatbread fried in clarified butter and the spice mix *berbere*), porridge and yogurt were being replaced with a highland dish, *shiro wat* (a pea stew, increasingly made with pre-packaged ingredients), biscuits and packed juices. Dairy, particularly butter, was being replaced in traditional dishes with processed vegetable oil of dubious quality. Older people connected changing food habits with changes in their local economy and society. In Bolivia, a retired miner in his seventies described how his family's diet had changed with what was available in the local market and their work patterns: traditional boiled maize (*mote*) and *api* (a maize-based drink) were being replaced with chocolate and coffee, while quinoa had all but disappeared, becoming 'very expensive' in the past two years. Despite nostalgia about 'the way we used to eat,' cuisines are not fixed in time or place. Strong drivers of change in food cultures in other societies have been economic development and global market integration.¹⁴ Imperial and colonial rulers have deliberately changed food systems,¹⁵ as have major conflicts and major food crises.¹⁶ Wheat was introduced into the staunchly rice-eating regions of Bengal as famine relief,¹⁷ and institutionalised through US food aid.¹⁸ Some attempts to change food cultures and create new markets have been deliberately introduced after food crises, such as that with genetically-modified grains to drought-stricken southern Africa during the 2002 food crisis.¹⁹ But as food historian Rachel Laudan points out, local foods were historically 'the lot of the poor', while the rich ate a more varied and palatable diet drawing on foods from elsewhere.²⁰ Today the situation is partially reversed, with the rich able to source 'food from somewhere', while the poor are becoming increasingly dependent on mass produced 'food from nowhere.'²¹

¹³ Changes in the reliance on *enjera* might reflect the extreme volatilities in the price of *teff* in the past. Similarly, we heard in previous years of research that Bolivian youth were rejecting *quinoa* in favour of processed imports, while adult women worried that it was less available than in the past. It may be significant that *teff* has recently been touted as 'the next superfood', after *quinoa*, as another protein- and nutrient-rich grain that can satisfy the demanding palates and plates of affluent diet-conscious Westerners Claire Provost and Elissa Jobson in Addis Ababa, "Move over Quinoa, Ethiopia's Teff Poised to Be next Big Super Grain," *The Guardian*, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jan/23/quinoa-ethiopia-teff-super-grain..>

¹⁴ for a sample, see Goody 1997; Mwangi et al. 2001; Raschke and Cheema 2008; McCann 2001)

¹⁵ see, for instance, Evan D. G. Fraser and Andrew Rimas, *Empires of Food: Feast, Famine, and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations* (Berkeley CA: Counterpoint, 2010).

¹⁶ Lizzie Collingham, *Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (Penguin, 2012)

¹⁷ J. R. K. Robson, "Commentary: Changing Food Habits in Developing Countries†," *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* 4, no. 4 (January 1976): 251–56, doi:10.1080/03670244.1976.9990436.

¹⁸ Ahmed, Haggblade, and Chowdhury 2000; Atwood et al. 2000

¹⁹ Noah Zerbe, "Feeding the Famine? American Food Aid and the GMO Debate in Southern Africa," *Food Policy* 29, no. 6 (December 2004): 593–608, doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2004.09.002. also Jennifer Clapp, *Hunger in the Balance: The New Politics of International Food Aid* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

²⁰ Rachel Laudan, "A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food," *Gastronomica* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 38, doi:10.1525/gfc.2001.1.1.36.

²¹ McMichael, P. (2009), 'A Food Regime Genealogy', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36 (1), 139–169; McMichael, P. (2009), 'A food regime analysis of the 'world food crisis'', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 26 (281);

Given local preferences and a biologically-founded suspicion of foreign fare, it is interesting how easily new influences and products appeared to have been absorbed. The influence of the post-war wave of global food system integration is plain on the varieties of staples (maize, wheat, rice). But earlier waves of internationalisation were also apparent, for instance in the popularity of *samosa* (pastry with savoury fillings, probably originating in Central Asia) in Bangladeshi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan and Zambia. Aji-no-moto® (a Japanese ‘umami seasoning’ of monosodium glutamate) was mentioned in Cochabamba, Bolivia and Dhaka, Bangladesh, and across Indonesia. Ingredients in customary meals might be cooked from imported onions or newly-grown cabbages, or oils pressed or fish sauces produced far from home. Everyday eating is already a fairly cosmopolitan matter. Many people are ambivalent about these changes because customary cuisines were seen to be healthful and nutritious (when affordable and available). In a focus group discussion of young Lusakans, one view was that fast food was the food of the rich, so that people had sick from eating burgers, pizzas and the like: *‘foods like chips and pizza are causing funny diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure. We say these are rich people’s diseases as poor people don’t get such diseases because they can’t afford such type of food.’*

Class, Gender and Generation

Unsurprisingly, disposable income is a key factor in what people buy. Some purchased food is cheaper, in money and time, than home-cooking. But quality can be very low, as retailers struggle to make profits. In Kami an urban neighbourhood of Cochabamba, Bolivia a schoolteacher argued that sausages are cheaper than meat on the bone. In a focus group discussion with retired miners in Guatemala, one man argued that while both rich and poor nowadays eat in the street, the rich sit down and the poor crouch, and the food safety office checks on the rich person’s restaurant and ignores the others. Many migrant workers and day labourers rely on cheap high calorie street food. Men in Kabwata in Lusaka in Zambia eat fritters as they are cheaper than bread and more filling; in Mukuru, an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya it is cheaper for people on their way to work to buy *mandazi*, deep fried doughnuts, than bread. For those living hand-to-mouth and who may lack the equipment to cook or the means for fuel, street food makes sense.

Relative price changes greatly influence whether of different socio-economic groups people eat out and what they buy. In Viet Nam, where street stalls and low-cost restaurants are common, poorer people are increasingly finding that they can do better at home. But buying processed food can be a sign of status and wealth. In urban Guatemala, having a ‘mega’ (3 litre bottle of soda) on your table shows that you are eating well (as in the TV advertisements, one respondent explained). Eating chicken is ‘prestigious’ in Kabwata, Zambia. And traditional foods may be looked down upon, as in Kami, in urban Cochabamba in Bolivia, where taking boiled or toasted grains to school may mean a child is looked down on.

When people talk about eating out they are mainly talking about men eating away from home. More male agricultural wage workers, non-farm labourers and market traders in rural areas, urban transport workers, security guards, factory workers, traders and farmers selling produce, construction workers and others find themselves away from home; doing strenuous labour, with cash in their pockets and with a growing range and number of restaurants and eateries. Many young men in urban areas have no kitchen facilities, and the cost and effort of cooking single meals far outweighs the ease of buying a simple dish of the local staple. In Mukuru, for example, *githeri*, a mix of maize kernels and kidney beans often with flavour enhancers from a packet, has long been popular, but of late sales have shot up. One *githeri* vendor was said to have increased her sales five-fold in the past year. It seems that there are more people with some cash in their pockets but without the ability to prepare palatable meals.

In many rural sites new outlets have sprung up to serve hungry working men. Farmers who go to market in Nessemtega might eat rice once they get there, after having eaten the traditional staple *Tô*, pounded millet or sorghum in a vegetable sauce, for their morning meal at home, or roasted and grilled meats when they go to town. In the rural Ethiopian community in western Oromia, rising agricultural wages have attracted a growing number of agricultural workers, to feed whom, new restaurants have appeared in the village over the past years. Business is brisk and the restaurants already serve the kinds of food once only found in towns.

One reason more men eat out, we hear, is that women have less time to cook for them at home than in the past. Most notable among the changes in women's consumption patterns is a growing tendency to buy readymade sauces or additives such as sauces and stock cubes. These are not staple foods, but they replace traditional spices and condiments, replacing the flavour of meat and other expensive ingredients. This shift was noticeable in Indonesia and increasingly the case in Burkina Faso, Kenya and in Guatemala. Other quick fixes include partly-prepared meals, particularly poultry and meat, and quick cook or instant noodles. Cost is crucial to women on low incomes and home preparation, though a strain, is often the cheapest way to feed the family. Women consume less and eat out less than men, either on the street or in restaurants, and generally demonstrate a more comprehensive understanding of the economics of meal preparation. This highlights the fact that cooking, a form of unpaid care, not only requires time and effort, but also knowledge and strategy.

It is with young people that we see the most profound changes. Children and young folk in all settings were said to be eating more snacks and replacing usual meals with fast foods, often highly processed and packaged products with concentrations of fat, sugars and additives marketed specifically to the young. While often mass-produced by large domestic or multinational corporations, in many places local producers also do a good trade in local delicacies. Not all of these are grotesquely unhealthy, but they all represent a loss of control for parents. Parents worry that they do not know what children are eating, about food safety and the longer-term nutrition implications. In several places, we were told how children tend to eat at odd times and the habit of eating together is being lost. Adult men thought that this meant fewer opportunities for teaching children social norms and discipline. In a focus group of rural Burkinabe men in their sixties, one explained that when children had to be at home to eat, parents could 'punish children when they were mistaken.' Now, he said, the children just go and eat out.

Unsurprisingly, snacking at school is a major feature of children's food habits. During breaks and after school, vendors appear to have a captive market. In Indonesia and Bangladesh, parents complain of having to provide pocket money so their children can keep up with their friends and buy snacks for the playground. In some cases, these amounts were non-negligible proportions of a family's daily spending. The big global brands as well as more local brands of drinks, chocolates and sweets, chips and fried preparations are almost universally popular with children. Television advertising and marketing at children are powerful factors, against which parents recognise their influence is limited. In communities like these, in which processed and purchased foods are relatively new, advertising to children can be very powerful. In many of these settings, giving children snacks is understandably seen as a sign of indulgence and affection.

The new ways in which many people, especially the young, are working and eating are indicative of transformed modes of wellbeing and of illbeing. Waged life is precarious, but offers possibilities. Growing towns are good places to sell produce, if local farmers can compete with foreign and supermarket foods. Packaged foods may be dangerous to health, but they are interesting and time saving. The people we have been talking to are profoundly ambivalent about these new modalities of life. Their ambivalence is both fed by and feeds their sense of the right and the good: the right thing to do and the right way to be treated in relation to food. It is to this question that we turn in the next section.

4 Moral Economies, Accommodation and Resistance

A Common Sense Understanding of the Right to Food

Each community with which we interacted allowed us a unique understanding of the meaning for them of a 'right to food'. Popular conceptions tended to reflect people's lived experience of hunger risks. More often than not their conception of a food right appears more as 'what is right' than as a constitutional legal notion. In each case it is a historically and culturally informed mix of human understanding, customary norm and religious belief. But it is also a politically informed characterization, related to communal and even familial politics. Its philosophical base might be

explained as an existential recognition of primordial being-in-the-world and being-with-others.²² Constructed on these existential foundations, it is not just sense, but a common sense.²³ Common sense 'is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race'.²⁴ Since most people now buy much more of their food than they did a decade ago, food may appear to be a market commodity that can be traded without moral hazard, but it still remains, in people's minds, a material to which they have a fundamental human right in an economic and political sense. The common sense position on a cultural right is less clear.

The versions of popular consciousness we found seldom challenged the distinction between natural rights, which emanate from humanness *per se*, and Human Rights, which exist only for those in political communities. They do, however, pose the question of what is a political community to which one can belong and from which rights emanate, and how should one overcome lack of participatory parity?²⁵ In discussions about the meaning of a right to food, often after expressing incredulity that it might be a legal reality, most people explained that the responsibility for making sure adequate and good quality food is provided lies with the householder and parent. They then added that where that provision is under stress, there are obligations from kin and neighbours, and also from authorities and elites. In most versions, these layers of responsibility are not sequential but simultaneous: at all times elites should be assuring the system makes food production and access possible for all of those over whom they have sway, and at all times a parent or adult should be doing the same for a child. In every different culture and polity the forms taken by these beliefs and expectations are specific. Where there is a legal right to food and a degree of systematic government response, as in India, the common sense right has a dimension of citizenship. Where there is no law, but there is provision by the state, as in Bangladesh, the belief is in providence and the moral responsibility obtained from providence. In many places the degree of dependence on the state for a right to good food, especially where price volatility has been strongest, generated a strong sense of irony – the state claims responsibility, fails to take it and yet cannot be held accountable for its failure.²⁶

The common sense understanding of a right to food erupts into moral economy claims at times of food crisis. When the behavior of elites or richer members of society fails to conform to what is often a set of unarticulated expectations from people who are hungry or at risk of it, the moral economy comes into view and politics of provision are provoked into reaction.²⁷ Though many popular conceptions of a moral economy may be based on apparently antiquated ideas of lords preventing extreme hardship among their peasants or of prices of staple foods being held steady by paternal governments, breaches can still fuel popular uprisings, grand shifts in political alignment or subtle but widespread subaltern resistance. Conversely, if the unspoken agreement between those at risk and those who are understood to have powers of provision is not breached, it is possible for the food system to change substantially with only occasional outbreaks of resistance and nostalgia.

²² This perspective comes from Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2008), tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. New York: Harper Perennial.

²³ Naomi Hossain, Dolf te Lintelo and Alexandra Wanjiku Kelbert (2015), *A Common Sense Approach to the Right to Food*. IDS Working Paper 458. Brighton: IDS.

²⁴ Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, tr. Elio Gianturco. Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1965.

²⁵ Lechte, J. and S. Newman (2015), *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights: Statelessness, Images, Violence*; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Fraser, N. (2011), 'Marketization, Social Protection, Emancipation: Toward a Neo-Polanyian Conception of Capitalist Crisis', in C.C.a.G. Derluigan (ed.), *Business as Usual: The Roots of the Global Financial Meltdown*; New York: New York University Press, 137–158.

²⁶ Hossain, te Lintelo and Kelbert (2015), *op cit*.

²⁷ Thompson, E.P. (1971) 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50.1: 76–136; Bohstedt, J. (2014) *Food Riots and the Politics of Provisions in World History*, <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/3922> (accessed 27 May 2015); Scott, J.C. (1977) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, London: Yale University Press; Edelman, M. (2005) 'Bringing the Moral Economy Back In... to the Study of 21st - Century Transnational Peasant Movements', *American Anthropologist* 107.3: 331–45; Hossain, N., and Kalita, D. (2014) 'Moral Economy in a Global Era: The Politics of Provisions during Contemporary Food Price Spikes', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1–17;

This insight is useful in interpreting what has happened in numerous parts of the world in the wake of food price volatility and price rises. We have shown above how the process of commodification of food appears to have taken a substantial leap forward, as people make adjustments to a price hikes within a changing economy. Our research indicates that people facing hunger or livelihood stress have turned increasingly to the market because, even as it is risky, it fits with their notions of what it means to fulfill their part in the struggle for a right to food. They have taken decisions about how to feed and generate wellbeing for themselves and their families, while also responding to their obligations that reflect both their moral beliefs and the opportunities available. The mechanisms of this shift are the decisions each person or household made as to how to raise money for living: finding work to enable them to pay rising costs of food, rent, utilities and social activities and obligations; while also investing in the future: paying, for example, for education or migration. Finding work is key – as we have seen, women have taken on more paid work outside the home, young men are increasing their mobility in search of work and status – to the moral sense of the role of work and investment in tackling the problem of a good life.

The market may be a new master, but it offers a possibility of emancipation too. For many people, especially the young, the move has afforded a degree of liberation from dependence on patronage or on rural assets whose earning potential has been in decline. It offers the prospect of being a provider for oneself and ones family worthy of being provided for in the current politics of provision.²⁸ While still being questioned by older people in many communities, it is a move that fits squarely within current global and national social and economic norms, as well as fitting with the current global food regime.²⁹ Young people are leaving small-scale agriculture.³⁰ Staying part of production and consumption systems that are neither market- nor profit-oriented is widely painted, not only by neoliberal adherents, but also by people on low incomes looking for wellbeing, as an unimpressive life choice. This is in no small part the result of the devaluation of such ways of life by governments, educational curricula, media and middle class discourses.³¹

The aftermath of the food price spikes coincided with an increased rate of migration towards paid work, in particular into rapidly growing, intensely populated informal settlements in many cities and towns in the countries studied.³² As we saw above, this move to the market while affording opportunities, has also thrown many people into a precarious position. The education they can afford is low quality, the jobs they can access are informal and insecure, their bodies and assets are uninsured, their social care is uncompensated and their networks of support are weaker. New urban residents are confronted with numerous barriers to accessing the resources needed to participate in the market on equitable terms. As we showed above, wages have responded, but for those at the base of the economic pyramid, never quite as fast as prices, nor keeping up with pressures to spend on a growing set of necessities in changing economies.

The choices people made were as much influenced by need as by opportunities and challenges arising from rapid urbanization and the globalisation of the food system.³³ Many specific changes in local food cultures –new markets in cooked food or loss of access to old staples, for instance – can be dated to the time of the food spikes. Those who continue to produce food must sell it in order to pay for agricultural inputs as well as a rising need for cash for life. The commodification of people's

²⁸ Bohstedt, J. (2014), 'Food Riots and the Politics of Provisions in World History', *IDS Working Papers*, 2014 (444), 1-31.

²⁹ McMichael (2009) *op cit.*

³⁰ Leavy and Hossain (2014) *op cit.*; White, B. (2012), 'Agriculture and the Generation Problem: Rural Youth, Employment and the Future of Farming', *IDS Bulletin*, 43 (6), 9-19.

³¹ See, for example, Scott-Villiers et al, (2015) Education and Resilience in Kenya's Arid Lands, Nairobi: UNICEF.

³² Use google maps to see, for example, the exponential expansion in informal settlements in Nairobi, and other cities, over the past decade.

³³ Clapp, J. (2009), 'Food Price Volatility and Vulnerability in the Global South: considering the global economic context', *Third World Quarterly*, 30 (6), 1183-1196; Clapp, J. (2014), 'Financialization, distance and global food politics', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41 (5), 797-814. Van Der Ploeg, J.D. (2015), 'Food Security Governance: Empowering Communities, Regulating Corporations', *Development*, 57 (2), 287. Van Der Ploeg, J.D. (2010), 'The Food Crisis, Industrialized Farming and the Imperial Regime', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10 (1), 98-106.

relationships to food while apparently emancipating their choice of what to eat, has in many ways circumscribed it. Basic foods have become homogenized. Despite the huge number of packaged and commercially processed foods that can be bought, the ingredients tend to be high in calories and salt and often low in micronutrients, while the diversity of staples has declined.³⁴ A similar process is reported with regard to protein-rich foods (growing access to cheap factory-farmed chicken, in particular), and oils (commercial vegetable oil preparations replacing traditional pressed oils from nuts and seeds). Seasonal and regional dishes, knowledge about food production and processing, customary recipes and cooking practices and with them cultural meaning, are all being lost.³⁵ Thus the moral economy as it relates to food culture and quality is in disarray: while there are advances in taste and convenience, there are often losses in nourishment, both physical and cultural.

Very few countries have unequivocally declared the right of citizens, or those under their protection, not to be hungry. A number have made significant and systematic advances in social protection including welfare and subsidy however. Most communities have some kind of programme or scheme affording occasional protection against hunger, but many are criticized as discriminatory, discretionary, demeaning, unreliable and divisive.³⁶ Between 2009 and 2014 we noted a visible increase in such schemes. Despite the scale of these changes the provision is neither systematic nor does it amount to an effective moral economy. Vernacular rights still remain important therefore, even as they appear to be decline with the rise of commodification. People express a general sense of insecurity in relation to hunger, despite a general picture of rising wages, falling global commodity prices and increased efforts at welfare. The moral economy in these locations is at a moment of visible transition and visceral negotiation, as it was in EP Thompson's 18th century Britain at the time of the internationalization of trade in wheat.

Accommodation and Resistance

While our data show that by and large the people we have been talking to do not regret the moves they have made in this process of adjustment, few have found easier lives or a greater sense of food rights. The stresses of a high cost of living and an uncertain future remain acute. Their ability to claim support from kin, neighbours, the village, the mosque or temple has reduced. However a widespread belief in the locus of responsibility as lying as much, *if not more*, with the individual, parent or householder, as with the social system of which she or he is a part, means that people have largely accepted that the market offers what it offers and they must survive within it. However consumers in our 23 sites also do not generally accept the market as separate from the state – people all over the world are struggling to make them subject to some kind of regulation.

There has been a reconfiguration of the tenets of the moral economy, particularly in urban areas, as people make claims on *governments*, rather than local elites, to make provisions against hunger and to hold the market to account – as protests like the Unga Revolution in Kenya, the right to food movement in India or bread riots in Mozambique have attested.³⁷ Direct claims on merchants and employers are also common, but they are made with implicit or explicit calls on the state to make good the right to resist and the right to a living wage or reasonably priced food. Formal sector workers have mobilized for pensions in Bolivia and Kenya or wage rises in Bangladesh and Indonesia. Female garment workers in Bangladesh have been particularly vociferous and effective in their claims. Agricultural workers in Bangladesh have found new approaches to collective bargaining with employers, while diary farmers in Bolivia have created more powerful co-operatives. With few

³⁴ Hossain, N., R. King, A.K. Kelbert, P. Scott-Villiers, and N. Chisholm (2015), 'Delicious, Disgusting, Dangerous: Eating in a Time of Food Price Volatility'; Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

³⁵ Olivet López, A.L. (2015), 'Life Around the Firewood Stove: The Impact of Price Volatility', *IDS Bulletin*, 46 (6), 98-104.

³⁶ King, R., A. Kelbert, N. Chisholm, and N. Hossain (2014), 'Help Yourself: Food Rights and Responsibilities: Year 2 findings from Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility'; Oxford and Brighton: Oxfam and Institute of Development Studies.

³⁷ Hossain, N.; de Brito, L.; Jahan, F.; Joshi, A.; Musembi, C.; Patnaik, B. and Sambo, M. *et al.* (2014) *Them Belly Full (But We Hungry): Food Rights Struggles in Bangladesh, India, Kenya*, synthesis report from the DFID-ESRC Food Riots and Food Rights project, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, www.ids.ac.uk/publication/them-belly-full-but-we-hungry-food-rights-struggles-in-bangladesh-india-kenya

exceptions people in all our 23 study sites now believe that it is the responsibility of the state to curb local speculation, tackle regulatory failures and expand the generosity, quality and responsiveness of social protection.³⁸

While people in many sites, particularly those in urban areas, were aware that the global food and fuel markets had effects on local prices, very few saw the global arena as a site of protest or control. Very few had any connection with a supra-national social movement. Rightly or wrongly, it was the national state that needed to be embarrassed, cajoled or threatened into action on food access. Many farmers and local grain merchants, for example farmers in Zambia living not far from the border with Tanzania, were well aware of differentials in prices of grains, and processes by which cheaper processed foods flood local markets. They saw it as the responsibility of their own government to reduce taxes, protect local producers or promote free trade. They were aware of both the inherent dilemmas in these demands and the degree of state mismanagement and misregulation of these international arrangements. While the price of oil or the behavior of multi-national agri-businesses was also widely understood as a factor in costs of food, fertilizer and transport, very few people were able to come up with a way in which its effects might be held to account except through the protections afforded by their own governments, or the failures thereof. Affecting the morality of global processes seems beyond the imagination of the ordinary person at risk of hunger, except through the mediation of their governments, which bear the responsibility for effective negotiation of their citizen's rights within a global regime. It is surprising to note also that among our respondents there was remarkably little reference to any possibility that powerful religious bodies might exert an influence that would make a difference at a global scale.

In a time of rapid commodification in the relationship between people and food, customary rights to food-related wellbeing face new challenges. In part the challenge stems from the willingness of people at risk of hunger to accept too great a portion of the burden of their own food rights. This is a position encouraged by governments and elites as a way of reducing their own responsibilities. It appears at first ironic that people have found it necessary and even attractive to move towards the market, when the market is the locus of the volatility that generated their most recent hunger and stress. It demands closer inspection. We propose that the move towards the market is also a move towards political significance. Abandoning the status of subsistence, which is sinking ever lower as a category of citizenship, the move to town is as much about becoming a political subject as it is about making a living. This political subjectivity is not, as our respondents made clear, about becoming a voter or a person who can influence political processes, but becoming people of weight and value. This move has both increased and decreased the precariousness of their position. They have become more vulnerable to food price volatility, they have lost the social protections once afforded by the local, but they have gained in significance and ability to press the state for realisation of a right to food.

5 Conclusions

The period 2007-12 has marked a sharp uptick in the pace of integration of local food regimes into a global market regime. Adjustment to higher food prices has involved a deepening of dependence on commodity relations for essential reproduction and production. While these processes of commoditization are not the whole story, our findings suggest that the post-food crisis period has helped usher in a new degree of market dependency and bound in domains of life that have to date been at least partly separate from market conditions and relations.

We have made reference to the profound effects of the volatility on individual households and communities, and noted to what they degree people have made changes that appear to be irreversible, or at least hard to reverse. These mechanisms by which old food cultures have been cast aside and new ones levered in combine to form the popular basis on which global food regimes currently rest.

It is already clear that the adjustment is ushering in a new period of enduring hardship and political discontent among significant socioeconomic groups. Much of the food they are now eating is not only 'food from nowhere', but it is also unaccountable food. The markets that low-income people are

³⁸ Hossain, N.; King, R. and Kelbert, A. (2013) *Squeezed: Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility, Year 1 Results*, Oxfam Research Reports, Oxford: Oxfam GB

joining offer poor protection and unequal terms of participation, and the political significance they may have been seeking turns out to be evanescent. Resistance is widespread, but not always obvious. It is most commonly found in the ways people bend the new food regime to their own local preferences and sense of what is right. The new moral economies among most people in most of the world are not only about 'food security,' as it is termed in international circles, but about *food and life sovereignty*. People apply this principle whether that food is self-grown, locally sourced or a commodity traded on international markets.

Local moral economies remain crucial in pressing governments and global bodies to act on what they would rather avoid. They offer logics for social movements, political populists, producers and consumers toward formal and informal public action. Our research demonstrates that people on low and precarious incomes believe that they have the right not only not to be hungry or eating food of much worse quality than that of others in their society, but also they must be able to work for it in a way that confers human, political, cultural and environmental dignity. They call on their national governments to draw clear lines of a moral economy. The challenge for global governance, including human rights approaches, is to make commitments to food rights unequivocal in their most profound sense of food and life sovereignty, even if this task is confused by a variety of different accommodations to the marketization of food.

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