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EDIBLE ENTANGLEMENTS: TOWARD A THEO-POLITICS OF FOOD

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	vi
Chapter 1. The Concept of Sovereignty in Political Theology	1
Chapter 2. Food Drives: Global Food Trade and the Sovereign State	60
Chapter 3. Sovereignty and Precarity in the Global Food System	101
Chapter 4. Producing the Bodies of the Body Politic	151
Chapter 5. Political Ecology: Deciding Upon the Exception in an Exceptional Climate	200
Chapter 6. Toward a Tehomic Political Theology of Food	245
CONCLUSION	294
BIBLIOGRAPHY	303

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Rhetorical Disjunctures

97

ABSTRACT

This dissertation circumambulates two central themes: How do political and economic structures—particularly those involved in production and distribution of food—shape the materialization of bodies in ways that perpetuate the cycle of poverty? And what is the relationship between those structures and concepts that could rightly be called religious or theological? These questions are socially pressing, as obesity and starvation are increasing globally. Ominously, the global food system is noted to be simultaneously causative of and vulnerable to global climate instability, and projected food shortages consequent to climate change are likely to affect the poor disproportionately. Food scholars attribute obesity, starvation, and climate consequences of the global food system to the same cause: the concentration of power in the hands of transnational agricultural corporations and multilateral trade organizations operating conjointly as what some refer to as the “corporate food regime.” The movement that has arisen as the major challenger to this regime is entitled the “food sovereignty movement,” underscoring the numerous proclamations, enactments, and contestations over sovereignty rampant in global food politics.

Though the notion of sovereignty is central to the discursive field of political theology, its theoretical insights have not yet been applied to the contestations over sovereignty arising in global food politics. Political theologians frequently engage the concept of sovereignty developed by Carl Schmitt in his 1922 *Political Theology*, a formulation of sovereignty perceived by many as indelibly inscribed onto the nation-state. While theorists on both ends of the political spectrum share Schmitt’s disdain for liberal democracy, his nationalist proclivities are generally endorsed by conservative political theorists, and soundly denounced by those on the left in favor of radically democratic approaches. Global food politics operate simultaneously in several registers: individual, national, transnational, and ecological.

This dissertation takes a transdisciplinary approach to the analysis of sovereignty in each of these registers. It employs Giorgio Agamben’s political philosophy to elucidate vulnerability in the national and transnational registers; Jane Bennett’s vibrant materiality and Karen Barad’s agential realism to describe the social production of classed bodies in the individual and national registers; and Bruno Latour’s political ecology and science studies to assess sovereignty in the ecological register. In each dimension, top-down sovereignty will be shown to destabilize around one of several fault lines: its claims to unity, the suspension of law, or the failure to provide security. Schmittian sovereignty also succumbs to theological critique, as the secularization of orthodox theological models is called into question. Catherine Keller’s theology of becoming and Paulina Ochoa Espejo’s “the people as process” are invoked for their capacity simultaneously to reject Schmittian, absolute sovereignty reframing political theology so as to support the material, ethical, and political demands of the food sovereignty movement.

Introduction

The present study stages a transdisciplinary conversation between a variety of scholars—anthropologists, ethicists, theologians, sociologists, agriculturalists, and activists—testifying to the transdisciplinary nature of the subject at hand: food itself. Food, and the lack thereof; how best to grow it; how best to distribute it; how best to eat it; how best to think about it in order to grow, distribute and eat it properly in the context of climate change. Central to the present inquiry is this observation expressed by Raj Patel:

Today when we produce more food than ever before more than one in seven people on Earth are hungry. The hunger of one billion happens at the same time as another historical first: They are outnumbered by the one and a half billion people on this planet who are overweight. Global hunger and obesity are symptoms of the same problem.¹

The present study concurs with Patel's insistence that both hunger and obesity are symptoms of a larger problem: the configuration of the global food system. Drawing the connections between obesity, hunger, agriculture, theology, politics and economics requires transcending traditional academic disciplinary boundaries. Remaining bounded by academic disciplines obscures the interactions of multiple social structures connecting phenomena that might otherwise seem to be disconnected by gaps in geographic and social location.

The transdisciplinarity of this conversation signals the ways in which food both establishes and transgresses all manner of boundaries. Food produced in one circumscribed agricultural territory crosses national boundaries *en route* to a grocery store shelf. The digestion of food consumed composes one bounded organism through dissolution of another. Cultural food practices mark a specific time-space location, yet foodways have historically transformed

¹ (Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* 2012) 9

the signification of those time-space markers, as potatoes and chiles from the New World insert themselves as a staple ingredient in Indian cuisine, or tomatoes in Italian cuisine.² Food also crosses the boundaries between the symbolic and the actual. In the cultural-symbolic dimension, food embodies ethereal concepts such as purity, impurity, salvation and healing. In the ecological-material dimension food is a commodity to be produced, distributed, bought and sold and at the same time it lives as participant in ecosystems. Even more intriguing, the concept of national sovereignty—the central theme of this dissertation—emerged in the context of the global spice trade in order to establish the right of governing body to rule over a bounded territory for the purposes of conducting and profiting from that trade. Yet ironically the concept of national sovereignty now has reached its own crisis point due in part to transnational corporate trade in food.³ What are we to make of food's unruly dynamism?

Planting the Seeds

The seeds for this dissertation were planted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during which time I completed medical school and residency on Chicago's Near West Side. As a young physician, I learned the importance of good nutrition for proper neural development. For example, inadequate maternal intake of folate during pregnancy raises the likelihood of spina bifida in the developing fetus, a condition in which the developing neural tube fails to close.⁴ I could only speculate about the more subtle impact of malnutrition on my patients, most of whom received welfare and food stamps, and many of whom lived in the most dangerous of Chicago's high rise public housing complexes. I also learned about the deleterious consequences of lead

² (Ray and Srinivas 2012)

³ (Ray and Srinivas 2012) 38.

⁴ Since this discovery was made in the late 1980s folate has been added to most cereal and bread products to reduce the likelihood of spina bifida.

exposure on the developing brain, and that poverty was a risk factor for lead exposure. It seemed to me that my patients might have been hobbled coming out of the gate by poor nutrition and toxic exposures during crucial years of neural development. What role, I wondered, do poor nutrition and environmental toxicity play in the cycle of poverty?

My concerns in this regard were not mirrored in the world around me. Admittedly, as a busy medical student I was only peripherally aware of the political discourse surrounding welfare reform in the early 1990s, but much of what I heard on the radio during my morning commute seemed to imply that every American had the same opportunities for success if only they would apply themselves. The Christian voices most amplified in the media concerned themselves with homosexuality, assuring that creationism made it into school curriculum, and preventing governments from interfering with free markets. They were, in short, more concerned with providing school prayer than school lunches.

Having taken an introductory biblical studies class as an undergrad, I was aware of the numerous biblical injunctions to feed the poor, whereas I couldn't recall any injunctions insisting that we implement prayer in public schools or support free market capitalism. The political agenda of the Christian Right seemed to be disconnected from what I knew of Christian scripture. Furthermore, it seemed to me that if the United States of America were *really* a Christian nation, as those folks insisted, then its economic organization would reflect more concern for the disenfranchised and less resentment of them. Something seemed *off* to me. Was it possible, I wondered, that more or less secular concerns found purchase in religious communities and masqueraded as Christian dogma? At any rate, a competing worldview not entirely consistent with the economic messages of the Bible—yet somehow consistent with other tenets dear to the Christian Right—certainly seemed operative.

While these loudly conservative Christian voices drew support for what I would come to call “neoliberal economics” from the Abrahamic traditions, I encountered the bible to contain both justification *and challenge* for their perspective. These concerns plagued me throughout my fifteen year medical career, largely serving the poor in public mental health facilities. But even after establishing a private practice, I noted that social forces seemed to bear heavily upon the well-being of my clients, although in different ways. Puzzled by what I was observing, I returned to graduate school on a vague quest to study the nexus of religion, worldview, gender and ecology. In truth, I sought a ready-made explanation that had thus far eluded me, some key point that had been overlooked in my medical school training. What I discovered instead was a mosaic of theological and philosophical perspectives that illuminate one or another aspect of this interconnection, including process philosophy, new materialisms, feminist theory, and progressive theologies.

It was the discursive field of political theology, above all, that invigorated and clarified the “armchair” observations I made about this nexus as a practicing physician. Writers in this field hail from both secular and religious orientations, and concern themselves with the appearance of theological concepts in the political arena. As we shall see in later chapters, the contemporary discourse often engages the work of Carl Schmitt, who famously declared that “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”⁵

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.

The Theological and the Political

An apt frame for my inquiry is found in Mark Lewis Taylor's *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*.⁶ Similar to Taylor, the present dissertation does not constitute an intervention in "Guild Theology," which concerns itself with "doctrinal loci" (5). Rather it concerns itself with the imbrications of "the political" and "the theological," where "the political" refers to "certain mode[s] of organizing the human practices that structure social interaction" (5). According to Taylor, these practices are "pervaded by agonistic tension and strife" (5). There is conflict, to be sure. But this conflict need not necessarily give rise to aggression. Possibly the conflicts, the conundrums, might be navigated in a way that opens new possibilities for mutual flourishing. Agonism, in Taylor's account, emerges as the result of "the ways social orders are fragilely dependent upon and in tension with orders of nature, to the ways different social groups interact with one another" (6). In its emphasis on modes of organizing agricultural, social and economic systems, this dissertation can be said to address "the political" as described by Taylor.

Taylor names "the theological" as a "dimension of the political" (5). In particular, "the theological is a discourse that discerns and critically reflects upon the motions of power" in a politics characterized by conflict, albeit conflict that holds the potential for positive resolution. He defends his use of the term theological to refer to this discourse on three points. First, "the theological" identifies a mode of discourse "deployed by nontheologians" (11) that nonetheless borrows concepts from guild Theology. Second, he argues that "there is no antitheological anti-space" (11) not already "shaped and stamped by [Guild] Theology and its practices in the West" (11). And third, etymologically the word "theological" can be expanded to encompass not only a

⁶ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

god, but multiple gods and even “more elusively, a revered presence” (11). Taylor notes that what his book “foregrounds as “the theological,” then, emerges within and from such agonistic sites of imposed suffering. . . It envisions a liberatory and different way through the weight of the world” (xii). While Taylor uses the word “weight” to connote burden, particularly of suffering, in the present case the word does double duty: the matter of concern will be *both* the measurable weight of particular human bodies, and also the burden of suffering born by those bodies as consequence of their position within a transnational global food system.

Taylor argues that the “post” markers of posttheological and postsecular “are signs of crisis and transition in the understanding of Theology and of religious expression in contemporary, especially Western, societies.”⁷ This crisis signals dissatisfaction with both religious and secular attempts to solve what are increasingly observed to be recurring abuses of power both large and small. While some have argued that that formal religion was the most problematic ingredient in human social arrangements, the past century would seem to me to have proven that injustice can carry on quite nicely without it.⁸

In Taylor’s terms, the present dissertation could be said to concern itself with “the theological” in its critical analysis of ongoing injustices in food politics, calling attention to the “motions of power” that perpetuate them. Although it carries distinctive theological implications, this dissertation does not constitute a constructive theological intervention into Guild Theology.

⁷ Taylor, *On the Weight of the World*, xv. The present work understands this crisis as a dim recognition that the political can never be fully purged of the theological—or vice versa—because both concepts are entangled with what might be referred to as “worldviews” or “paradigms”—basic understanding of how the world works and what it means to be human. These worldviews shape how we view the world, and how; they tell us what it means to be human on a planet teeming with other sorts of humans; and consequently, they lend shape to the sorts of political arrangements we are likely to find acceptable. Because both “political structures” and “religious traditions” have existed for millennia, we can get into a sort of chicken/egg dilemma trying to decipher which elements of a worldview have an “authentically” religious origin, and which have an equally “authentic” secular origin. Similar worldviews circulate in both spheres, and have for quite some time.

⁸ In fact the Peace of Westphalia presumed that religious differences are the cause of conflict; in signing the agreement the monarchs agreed to restrict their doctrinal influence to a territorially bounded region. The twentieth century, with its growth of atheist authoritarian regimes such as Stalinist Russia and Communist China, has demonstrated that religion alone was not to blame for violent conflict.

But why use the word “theological,” if I do not intend such an intervention? Again, I turn to Taylor to frame my approach: “even those who reject [guild Theology] must work in the ruins of its failure” (11), particularly since the remains of theological concepts persist even within secular theories (although, as I will argue, often improperly applied).

One such failure, I contend, is the classical notion of sovereignty as envisioned by guild Theologians, particularly in its secularized versions endorsed by Schmitt.⁹ One tenet of this model that Taylor in particular finds problematic is its projection of a transcendent outside as the locus of sovereignty. “The sovereign located outside and beyond is taken as necessary to guard against the sovereignties of self, or of nation and other collective forms.”¹⁰ The political concept of sovereignty has superimposed the image of a transcendent, sovereign God upon a human “sovereign” figure, with a similar hope of preservation of identity. As Bruno Latour notes, environmental politics are no exception; even this allegedly secular politics resorts to using “nature” as a transcendent that becomes sovereign.¹¹

Taylor turns to Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of “transimmanence” as a gesture that acknowledges both the immanent and also the beyond, without envisioning that beyond as necessarily also above (128). Transimmanence represents a “transitive move that is a being within” rather than an ascendance above (148). According to Taylor, we cannot transcend our immanence by trying to climb above it, but only by moving more deeply into it. The distinctiveness of this approach, according to Taylor, is that the theological uses methodological

⁹ More problematic from a theological, rather than political, perspective is the problem of theodicy. For example, as will be discussed in later chapters the failure of the transcendent God to halt the brutality unleashed during the First World War decidedly scarred political theorist Carl Schmitt. But an exhaustive account of theodicy is well beyond the scope of the present study.

¹⁰ (Taylor 2011) 30.

¹¹ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12, 200.

approaches not typically employed by Guild Theology; “it is: transdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, intercultural and countercolonial” (3-2).

To be sure, the “transitive move that is a being within” cannot be left *out* of a study of food—what could be more “within” than the food we eat? Indeed the very process of eating calls into question whether one in fact possesses boundaries so clearly delineated as to permit one to remain within them. For what appear at first glance to be firm boundaries reveal themselves to be porous sites of interchange, and the “surface” appearance is always in the (re)making.¹²

Taylor’s use of Nancy’s transimmanence bears some resemblance to the worldview animating this dissertation insofar as it signals that reality does not consist primarily of externally related objects but rather of internally related subjects whose intrinsic relatedness continually casts them both within and beyond themselves. The worldview inspiring this dissertation is informed by biological sciences and quantum physics. It presumes life on earth to be characterized by dynamically entangled becoming, in which no boundaries—including between human and nonhuman, or even between life and death, can be definitively settled once and for all. Consequently, decisions both large and small must be made and remade on a repetitive basis. This worldview finds expression in the theoretical positions of process philosophy, new

¹² As evidence of the consistent remaking of the bodies boundaries, allow me to mention two biological phenomena. First, I will mention the very short lifespan of epithelial cells—the cells forming both the skin and the inner lining of the intestine. These cells live only a matter of days, typically three to five, after which time they are sloughed off and a new layers of cells emerges to the surface. Yet only in the case of medical emergencies does it occur that dead skin falls off without another layer present to take its place. The ongoing replication of cells maintains a relatively intact surface despite frequent loss of skin cells. Second, I will describe the acute version of a condition known as “disseminated intravascular coagulation.” This condition is a clotting abnormality occurring at the end stage of other illnesses such as cardiogenic shock or heat stroke. In this condition, numerous tiny blood clots form throughout the vascular system, depleting the body’s clotting factors. As a result, there are no clotting factors available to repair the many microscopic wounds that the body typically repairs without one’s awareness. Subsequently, bleeding may occur from such obvious sites as the site of yesterday’s blood draw, but also from the nose, mouth, and ears as well. What this demonstrates is that tiny ruptures occur on multiple surfaces of our bodies many times a day, but due to the remaking of our bodily boundaries by our clotting system, we are typically unaware of these threats to bodily integrity. *Peters, K.A., et al . “Disseminated intravascular coagulopathy: manifestations after a routine dental extraction.” in Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod. 2005 Apr;99(4):419-23.*

materialisms, and science studies which constitute some of the transdisciplinarity of the present project.

Motions of Power in the Global Food System

The full title of Taylor's volume, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* raises another question: What about the weightiness of the world? Taylor describes this weight as perception of the inescapability of participation in the system that differentially visits harm and privilege on those within in it. He argues that this sensibility cannot be "dismissed as guilt over freedoms, opportunities, or entitlements that I and some may have, which others do not" (37). He goes on to say that the "weight felt" can be regarded as an awareness of the "connection intrinsic to shared humanity being disrupted" (37). By this account, the weight of each of the emaciated bodies of the nearly seven million people who die of starvation every year is rather heavy—indeed may in fact be heavier than the bodies of the eight million people suffering from obesity, although in truth our global food system can be said to be serving neither bodies very well. But drawing upon Taylor's verbiage, "motions of power" have much to do with who starves, who becomes obese, and who retains a slender, well-nourished figure.

Tracking these motions of power requires traversing the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology, political theory and economics. According to economist Raj Patel in *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, at the root of the problem with the global food system are precisely the "motions of power" with which Taylor is concerned. According to Patel, as the result of neoliberal economic policies, power has become concentrated in very few hands. These hands mediate between—and thus separate—food growers from food consumers such that both good growers and food consumers are disempowered in the global food system.

For example, in the US, there are three million farm operators, and 300 million consumers, and only 7,563 wholesalers of farm goods.¹³ More shocking, though, is the fact that “transnational agricultural corporations control forty per cent of world trade in food, with twenty companies controlling the world coffee trade, six controlling seventy per cent of wheat trade, and one controlling ninety-eight per cent of packaged tea.”¹⁴ With this extreme amount of buying and selling power, they are able to create a market and dictate prices in a way that subverts any effort at a truly “free” market.

Transnational corporations are the driving force behind agricultural practices reliant upon large output of capital, large-scale farms, intensive irrigation, and heavy utilization of petroleum-based pesticides and fertilizers. At present, the global food system is responsible for anywhere from nine to thirty-three percent of the world carbon emissions, as well as significant amounts of pollution from pesticide, fertilizer, and livestock waste runoff.¹⁵ It is also endangering free access to fresh water, as the intensive irrigation required is draining aquifers. This resulting situation is further characterized by unjust treatment of farm workers, inhumane treatment of animals, and dramatically unjust distribution of food.

William Schanbacher examines the politics of the food system crisis as a conflict between those utilizing the conceptual frame of “food security” and those utilizing the conceptual frame of “food sovereignty.” The group using what Schanbacher has identified as the “food security” frame is comprised of multilateral organizations such as the International

¹³ Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (Melville House, 2012), 12-13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108

¹⁵ Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, *Ethical Eating Study Guide*, (Boston: UUA, 2012): 16. See also: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Livestock's Long Shadow*. Executive Summary, Rome: FAO, 2006; and FAO Livestock, Environment and Development website: <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/lead/lead.html>. The differences in calculations are dependent upon how broadly one defines our agricultural practices. For example, the EPA only includes carbon emitted on the actual farm, whereas the UUA's figure cites studies that include transportation and refrigerated storage elsewhere in the supply chain.

Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, all of whom operate under a neoliberal economic paradigm promoting trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation of national industry, and the opening of economic markets.¹⁶ They have enforced debt structures upon poor nations requiring that they run balanced books, eliminate tariffs on foreign goods and supports for domestic farmers, and eliminate governmental food subsidies for the poor of these nations, interventions which combined to reduce the local market for food producers and access to food for the poor.¹⁷ These economic changes also forced the transition to capital and resources intensive cash crops, driving smallholders and subsistence farmers out of business and off their land.¹⁸ These efforts at “food security” have failed the developing nations they were ostensibly designed to help.

Those deploying the frame of “food sovereignty,” according to Schanbacher, emphasize the importance of facilitating relationships between farmers in a given region, and between farmers and those who consume their products. Those supporting food sovereignty fight for the rights of farmers to determine which crops they will grow and which methods they will use, and also fight for fair treatment of farm laborers and women’s rights as well. They encourage smaller farms reliant upon agro-ecological methods as opposed to technological methods. Examples include the Fair Trade movement, the Slow Food Movement, the Campesino movement, and the Brazilian Landless Farmers Movement. Patel and Schanbacher agree that these movements are helpful for those who participate, but are constantly threatened by the powerful entities compelling the spread of transnational global capitalism.

¹⁶ William D. Schanbacher, *The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict between Food Security and Food Sovereignty*. (Denver: Praeger Security International, 2010) viii. Patel adheres to the food sovereignty frame.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹⁸ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 95-6.

The weightiness of food politics is measurable in several registers simultaneously—national, transnational, individual, and ecological—and it may seem more reasonable in some regards to tackle only one of these registers for the sake of simplicity. And indeed, much scholarship takes precisely that approach. Nonetheless, what this dissertation endeavors to do is to interrogate how the concept of sovereignty traffics in in food politics within each of these registers, and how, simultaneously, the concept of sovereignty comes undone within each of them.

This dissertation aims toward a political theology of food that supports the radically democratic agenda of the food sovereignty movement. Although proponents of this movement do not enact or endorse a Schmittian-type version of sovereignty nonetheless they demand nation-state sovereignty for the developing nations in which the peasant farmers live. The food sovereignty movement, in its demand for national sovereignty could potentially run afoul of the radical political theologians who eschew sovereignty but might otherwise support this movement. I want to challenge the legitimacy of a Schmittian version of top-down, absolute sovereignty while yet preserving the potential for national sovereignty as called for by the food sovereignty movement as a result of their collective, radically democratic decision-making process. This requires reading with and against political theologians who disdain the sovereignty of the nation-state and with it the guild Theology conceptualization of a sovereign divine as somehow inherently and solely “bad.”

Chapter Outline

Chapter one will establish a conceptual understanding of sovereignty as it appears in the context of Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology* in which he specifically names sovereignty as a theological concept. Walter Benjamin has emerged as a significant interlocutor of Schmitt’s, and

although they wrote in the 1920s, their debate has been energetically resumed by contemporary political theologians. They are at least mentioned by several of my interlocutors, so a solid understanding of each of their positions and points of contention will pave the way for a detailed critique of both of their positions in later chapters. Additionally, as will become clearer in chapter two, despite the deep divisions between Schmitt and Benjamin, the food sovereignty movement could potentially draw support from political theologians favoring either one—at least to a limited degree. The radically democratic processes and lack of formal rules resonate with left-leaning political theologians who tend to favor Benjamin’s approach, while the food sovereignty movement’s call for a nation-state would alienate those same theorists. Can a Schmittian-type sovereignty be called into question while yet validating the demands of the food sovereignty movement for a nation-state?

The second chapter will elaborate upon the motions of power in the global food trade by drawing upon the concept of food regimes and rhetorical framing. The concept of food regimes was developed by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael, and describes settled structures and practices in global food systems. They refer to the current regime as the corporate food regime. Following Madeleine Fairbairn, an analysis of political frames in global food politics will examine the basic model of reality animating the rhetorical framing of both the corporate food regime and the food sovereignty movement, which has arisen in opposition to the corporate food regime. I will argue in this chapter that economic renditions of Schmittian sovereignty are carried out by the corporate food regime under the political frame of “food security,” artfully sidestepping—or presuming?—the question of their right to the sovereign decision while yet never overtly claiming to possess sovereignty. Further, I will argue that a disjuncture between the

political frames and systemic practices of the food sovereignty movement is at least partially responsible for its enigmatic claims to sovereignty.

Chapter three will argue that the social injustices inherent in our contemporary global food system are due precisely to the enactment of sovereignty on the part of the corporate food regime.¹⁹ This will involve an application of Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* and state of exception to the context of food politics, constituting a new approach to analyzing the problematic dynamics of the global food system. This analysis will argue that despite the sovereign's promise to provide security, enactments of sovereignty can, and frequently do, increase vulnerability. Jacques Derrida's critique of Agamben will shift the site of inquiry from the political to the ethical. An examination of Judith Butler's ethic of non-violence as a response to precarity in the global food system closes the chapter.

The materialization of human bodies in the context of the global food system will be theorized in chapter four. Feminist ethics, new materialist methodologies, and scientific data from nutritional research will contribute to my account of the social production of malnourished, starving, and obese bodies through the workings of an oppressive food system. The bodies thus produced are then intercalated into social hierarchies in ways that reinforce and legitimate the original oppression.²⁰

Not only does the vibrant materiality of food mark the vulnerability of the human body but it also marks the vulnerability of food itself. Chapter five enumerates the environmental impact of the corporate food regime, and also its vulnerability in the face of climate change.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) and *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 will inform this section.

²⁰ Bennett's vibrant materiality emphasizes the effect that food has on human behavior. Barad's agential realism is founded upon the notion that "the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with independently determinate boundaries and properties but rather what Bohr terms 'phenomena'" (33). According to Barad, these phenomena "intra-act" such that, for example in the case of food, neither the dinner nor the diner are considered "distinct in an absolute sense" but are "only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement" (33). Each will, through their intra-action, shape what the other becomes.

Bruno Latour's *Politics of Nature* surfaces as a challenge to the concept of Schmittian sovereignty in the context of global climate instability, a situation likely to elicit an increasing instantiation of "sovereign" interventions.

In the final chapter, Catherine Keller's political theology and theology of becoming will be integrated with Paulina Ochoa-Espejo's popular sovereignty and both will be interrogated for their resilience in the face of climate catastrophes and their ability to protect the interests of those in the food system most likely to become *homo sacer* in the corporate food regime. This political theology situates itself in a relational ontology on a planet characterized more by a dynamic "becoming" than by "being" in a static sense. Although arguing against a top-down sovereignty, this chapter will nonetheless legitimate the demand for national sovereignty on the part of those in the food sovereignty movement while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of Schmittian sovereignty.

On a planet currently facing catastrophic climate change due in large part to high-input agricultural practices, does it make sense to permit the continued unification of the global agricultural system into this highly mechanized and notably destructive set of practices? Such unification of agricultural practice is endorsed not only by the undeclared "sovereignty" of multilateral agencies and transnational corporations. It is also implicitly supported by the disavowed integration of secularized orthodox theological concepts into secular thought. This dissertation intends to question such unification on theological, political, and ecological bases and to call attention to the threat that such unification poses in the context of climate change.

Chapter 1

The Concept of Sovereignty in Political Theology

Introduction

The political significance of the food sovereignty movement emerges when this movement is analyzed in the historical trajectory of sovereignty as a political concept. Historian and political theorist Daniele Conversi undertakes just such an analysis. He begins his account of the concept of sovereignty with the Peace of Westphalia, which established territorial boundaries within which a given monarch could legitimately rule without interference.¹ The territorially bounded nature of sovereignty carried forward as monarchical rule gave way to the nation-state, and the (presumably unified) will of the people was implemented to buttress the legitimacy of the sovereign ruler (486-7). Conversi flashes forward to our current era, which he characterizes as “post-sovereign,” as the contemporary transnational economic situation has differentially fortified the sovereignty of certain nation-states while eroding that of others.

Thus situated in its historical context, food sovereignty appears as “the most significant incarnation of the historical notion of sovereignty” according to Conversi (485). The significance of this movement is attributed in no small part to the dual nature of the claims to sovereignty: “While sovereignty [in the food sovereignty movement] still concerns the state's right to adopt and shape food policies, the subject has moved from the state to small-scale producers mobilizing, with or without the state, to defend their

¹ Daniele Conversi, "Sovereignty in a Changing World: From Westphalia to Food Sovereignty" *Globalizations* 13, no. 4 (2016): 485.

models of production and reproduction” (485). In other words, the food sovereignty movement deploys the term sovereignty in a new register that simultaneously fortifies, relies upon, and calls into question the sovereignty of the state itself.²

Conversi opens his historical contextualization of the food sovereignty movement by arguing that “the link between sovereignty and food sovereignty has scarcely been theorized across human and social science disciplines” (485). And indeed, with the notable exception of three articles the 2015 issue of *Globalizations*, including Conversi’s, no such theorization has taken place. The “historical notion of sovereignty” is derived from theological concepts, according to theorists in the field of political theology (485). Yet Conversi situates food sovereignty within the broader historical trajectory of sovereignty as a purely secular concept, altogether ignoring the religious motifs animating the concept of sovereignty itself. Similarly, the discourse of political theology has yet to grapple with the concept of sovereignty as it appears in food politics or to wrestle with the central role of global food trade as a driver of geopolitics. This dissertation constitutes an effort to bridge that gap.

For the purposes of this dissertation the focus will be on two primary eras: an interwar Germany between 1918 and 1939 and a post-9/11 United States. Two prominent theorists emerged in interwar Germany whose conceptualizations of sovereignty and politics continue to shape contemporary discourse: German jurist Carl Schmitt and literary critic Walter Benjamin. The post-9/11 U.S. discourse addresses transnational global capitalism, a driving force in the politics of food no less than in other political questions. The first part of this chapter will elaborate upon the finer points of contention

² Conversi does not overtly note the similarity between the operations of food sovereignty in this regard and also the operations of transnational economic and political systems that have resulted in the transition to a “post-sovereign” era.

between Schmitt and Benjamin during the interwar period, as these points largely inform the contemporary (post-9/11) conversation.³ The second part of this chapter will introduce the reader to two contemporary political theologians whose political theology bears resonance with the radical politics practiced by those in the food sovereignty movement, Catherine Keller and Clayton Crockett. Analysis of the theoretical contributions of these important thinkers provides a framework within which to assess contrasting and paradoxical deployments of the concept of sovereignty in food politics set forth in later chapters.

Part I: Interwar Germany

Carl Schmitt's Political Theology

Carl Schmitt's political theology, in particular his concept of sovereignty, are widely engaged in the academic discourse in political theology. Although Schmitt is by no means an uncontroversial figure, his theory holds something of fascination for anti-liberal thinkers from every position of the political spectrum, from radical liberals to far-right conservatives.⁴ As radical political theologian Clayton Crockett remarks, "On the right, Carl Schmitt's concept of the political conjoins perfectly with the neoconservative

³ See for example: Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," *Cardozo Law Review*, 1990: 920-1045; Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Nestor Miguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key*, (London: SCM Press, 2009); and "Power and Israel in Martin Buber's Critique of Carl Schmitt's Political Theology." In *Judaism, Liberalism & Political Theology*, by Randi Rashkover and Martin Kavka, 155-177. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. Schmitt has been more directly engaged as resource, although not without reservations, by Michael Northcott in his *Political Theology of Climate Change*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013). A detailed analysis of Northcott's work is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but suffice to say that his emphasis on smaller local communities is much appreciated, although not unambivalently so.

⁴ Examples of left-leaning political thinkers who engage Carl Schmitt include the authors mentioned in the above note, along with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) Neoconservatives influenced by Schmitt include political analyst William Kristol, "architect of the war in Iraq" and conservative political analyst for the New York Times David Brooks. See William Kristol "What to Do About Iraq," the *Weekly Standard*, January 21, 2002 and David Brooks "A Return to National Greatness: A Manifesto for a Lost Creed," the *Weekly Standard*, March 3, 1997.

ideology of domination. On the left, it is Schmitt's analysis of the crisis of liberalism that is seen as prescient, even if his embrace of fascism is roundly rejected."⁵ Implicit in Schmitt's analysis of the crisis of liberalism is what might be perceived as his critique of attempts to establish a legitimate sovereignty without the benefit of a transcendent divine. His embrace of domination, and ultimately fascism, constituted an effort to reinstate a source of transcendence.

Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* first appeared in March 1922, and by Schmitt's own account remained unchanged at the time of its second publication twelve years later.⁶ In his preface to the second edition, written in 1934, Schmitt identifies his primary contention was with "liberal normativeness and its kind of 'constitutional state'" (1). Schmitt mentions the German Weimar period (1919-1933) as his example of normativism. This normativist version of juristic thinking does not ground itself in "natural right or the law of reason" but merely in "factually 'valid' norms" (3). In other words, in Schmitt's opinion the legislators of that period did little more than authorize behaviors and attitudes that were already norms, rather than evaluate the morality, ethics, or rationale behind the particular norms themselves. The Weimar period was characterized by Schmitt as "a deteriorated and self-contradictory normativism... a degenerate decisionism, blind to the law, clinging to the 'normative power of the factual' and not to a genuine decision" (3). As a consequence of

⁵ Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 49.

⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1985) 1.

its failure to cling to “a genuine decision,” it “was no match for any serious problem concerning state and constitution” (3).⁷

By contrast, Schmitt argues for a decisionist foundation for law—and politics—which for Schmitt demands a sovereign. Schmitt opens *Political Theology* by declaring that the “sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (5). The exception, according to Schmitt, constitutes an exceptional emergency that poses an “extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like” (6). Since the exception appears as an *unpredictable* emergency which can never be fully encompassed by the general norms, the decision as to whether or not an exception exists cannot be codified into any constitution or law. Since it poses an *existential* threat to the state, it demands a *decisive* response. When such an event occurs, it often happens that many interested parties believe they know the proper response, yet are in disagreement. Schmitt asserts that “sovereignty (and thus the state itself) resides in deciding this controversy, that is, in determining what constitutes public order and security” and having the authority to suspend law in response to the threat to order and security posed by the exception (9).

For example, generally Americans are protected from random searches by the fourth amendment, which prohibits searches of person or property without probable cause. Yet when boarding an aircraft in the United States, all persons are subject to

⁷ It is challenging to pinpoint the precise threats to which Schmitt perceived the government incapable of responding, and he does not identify specific examples himself. To some degree Schmitt’s assessment of the Weimar Republic might be regarded as rooted in Schmitt’s nationalist tendencies. The Weimar Republic formed in the context of a significant defeat in World War I and a domestic revolution influenced by Bolshevism abroad. The Weimar Constitution was a valiant attempt to unify a culturally, economically, and politically diverse Germany in the form of a parliamentary democracy. Dissatisfaction arose shortly after the constitution was signed, as those on the right perceived democracy to be a “foreign import,” and the Versailles Treaty made economic growth next to impossible in post-war Germany. Thus, the Weimar Republic never achieved a state of legitimacy. Please see Ruth B. Henig, 2002. *The Weimar Republic 1919-1933*. London: Routledge, 2002. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 27, 2016).

search of their personal belongings, and even a highly intimate pat down. This is not in violation of the fourth amendment, however, because in 1973 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals determined that existential threat posed by armed civilians entering aircraft warranted a suspension of the constitutional amendment in this situation.⁸ This is a situation-specific suspension of law, demonstrating the exercise of a restricted, rather than absolute, judicial sovereignty in this case. Schmitt's point is that if no one in a nation possesses authority to suspend the laws of that nation in response to such an existential threat, the nation will succumb to the threat.

The example above regarding airport searches involves a relatively isolated suspension of law in response to a more or less circumscribed threat. In response to more ominous existential threats, according to Schmitt, the decision upon the exception and the appropriate response can only be martialled by a sovereign with unlimited authority. This unlimited authority is what distinguishes an exception from the example given above: "what characterizes an exception is principally unlimited authority," in particular the unlimited authority of the sovereign (12). This unlimited, absolute authority is necessary because the sovereign is "he who must decide whether the constitution needs to be suspended in its entirety" (7). In other words, the decision upon the exception is a decision to suspend the law entirely, a decision that can only be rendered by a sovereign who is above the law. Thus, Schmitt insists that the only proof that a valid state exists is that in such a state exists one capable of determining when to suspend the laws of that very state—in order to maintain the security of the state itself. In Schmitt's opinion, "all

⁸ Open Jurist. *United States vs. Davis*. n.d. <http://openjurist.org/482/f2d/893/united-states-v-davis>

tendencies of modern constitutional development point toward eliminating the sovereign in this sense.”⁹

Based on Schmitt’s decisionist rendition of sovereignty, implicit in the avoidance of the decision is a negation of sovereignty and hence a depoliticization. As should be obvious from Schmitt’s definition of both the sovereign and the exception, theories of state that do away with the sovereign or in any way limit the ability to decide upon the exception risk the very existence of the state because they undermine the ability to respond to the existential threat posed by the exception. More specifically, according to Schmitt, “if the individual states no longer have the power to declare the exception...then they no longer enjoy the status of states.”¹⁰ Schmitt is clearly suggesting that constitutional governments lacking identifiable sovereigns are unable to effectively respond to unexpected threats by suspending the law and are thus not truly sovereign.

History has proven Schmitt wrong in this regard. For example, even in Schmitt’s own context of interwar Germany the endorsement of Hitler’s unlimited authority to suspend the German constitution—in other words his sovereignty—did not catalyze the development of lasting stability for the German state. But despite this obvious fallacy, there are some theorists—both academic and armchair—who insist that the concept of the nation state is intrinsically bound to a Schmittian-type sovereignty. Their convictions in this regard lead them to wholeheartedly endorse strong executive actions, should the theorist in question be conservative-leaning and perceive the state to be in jeopardy. Or,

⁹ Schmitt, *Political Theology* p. 7. Unlimited authority is decidedly what “checks and balances” are designed to prohibit. Incidentally, the decision on the exception is related to the friend/enemy distinction (Strong, xvi) in that the criminal “friend” necessitates the force of law, whereas the presence of the enemy warrants its suspension altogether. The friend enemy distinction is, for Schmitt, “the criterion for the political and for a political theology,” Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1970), 122.

¹⁰ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 11.

should the theorist be left-leaning and find nothing more terrifying than absolute authority, they are more inclined to dismiss the importance of the state altogether, finding the concept of the nation-state to be hopelessly intertwined with oppression.

But if Schmitt has so clearly been disproven by history, why even bother engaging Schmitt at all? The recent trend toward nationalism—both in Europe and the United States—is associated with the dominance of leaders exhibiting a rendition of sovereignty reminiscent of Schmitt, for example, Donald Trump.¹¹ This trend has been attributed to the rise in immigration, which has in turn resulted in conjunction with transnational global capitalism. Reacting to what they perceive as an erosion of their “way of life”—their national identity and the advantages it brings—many turn to nationalism, and particularly “ethno-nationalism” to shore up the boundaries of their nation states and ward off the existential threat posed by immigration.

What is less often highlighted in media coverage of immigration is the degree to which climate change and environmental degradation contributes to the underlying unease triggering the rise in nationalism. For example, the aforementioned immigration results in part from climate change. While the more immediate cause is conflict, it is widely noted, as we shall see in chapter five, that these conflicts are increased in prevalence due to climate change induced drought, conflicts over access to grazable or arable land, and the food shortages that follow. What I hope to demonstrate in the coming chapters is that climate change induced disasters will bring about—indeed, already *are* bringing about—demands for an absolute, Schmittian type sovereignty capable of keeping the existential threat in abeyance. Yet, paradoxically the existential threat—both

¹¹ The Economist, “League of Nationalists,” in *The Economist* November 19, 2016: <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21710276-all-around-world-nationalists-are-gaining-ground-why-league-nationalists>.

due to climate change and also other causes—is increased when such unlimited authority as Schmitt calls for is enacted.

Although this dissertation is finally nearing its completion as Trump takes office and his Schmittian tendencies are everywhere evidenced, even if not named as such, it was not written in response to Trump or Trumpism. Indeed, Trump’s candidacy was not even in its infancy at the inception of this project toward the beginning of 2013. Instead this dissertation was inspired by reading Christian Parenti’s *Tropic of Chaos*, which had been a bit like the proverbial “writing on the wall.”¹²

The collapse to nationalist tendencies was predictable, despite the historical failure of nationalism in the last world war, on the basis of the geopolitical impacts climate change Parenti documented, as well as predictions for future climate-driven changes. Even at this very early state of manifestations of climate change we are witnessing regional drought, food shortages, and eruptions of violent conflict so widespread as to warrant the descriptor “geopolitical instability.”¹³ In the face of this rising instability, critical masses of people are banding together in support of a dominant leader perceived as capable of assuring “national security.” These are indeed ominous developments, and we are still early in the climate change game.

Thus, while Schmitt’s *Political Theology* is easily critiqued, it is less easily eradicated as a fantasied solution to political chaos. Schmitt identifies features of liberal democracy held to be problematic by both conservatives and progressives—albeit for

¹² Christian Parenti. *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*, New York: Nation Books, 2011.

¹³ Gregory R. Copely, “The Big Picture Take on Geopolitical Instability,” in *Time* January 14, 2016: <http://time.com/4180507/geopolitics-big-picture/>. Admittedly, Copely does not trace the root causes of this instability to climate change, but rather addresses the “surface manifestations” of heightened conflict. My point is that the conflict can be traced to climate change issues, and also is so widespread (so early on) as to qualify as “geopolitical instability.”

different reasons. He names—and one might even say endorses—the visceral urgency for security that leads people to grant unlimited authority to a dominant leader. Theorists both right and left who insist that an unlimited sovereignty reminiscent of Schmitt’s is inimically welded to the concept of a viable nation-state may be mistaken. His critics on the left have identified the processes by which this version of sovereignty becomes itself an existential threat countering the claims of those on the right that a strong, unilateral sovereign is a guarantor of a sovereign state. But yet those on the left, such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and others may be equally mistaken when they suggest that doing away with the nation state will free us from the tyranny of the sovereign. Perhaps something akin to a “strategic sovereignty” based upon an iterative model of “people as process” might strike the balance required. But before launching into such a proposition, which will be undertaken in chapter six, much more analysis of Schmittian/unilateral/top-down/absolute sovereignty—particularly its theological and metaphysical dimensions—in the context of global food politics on a planet in peril.

The Unity of the Sovereign

Throughout his *Political Theology* Schmitt refers to the sovereign as “he.”

Schmitt’s use of the singular masculine personal pronoun could be read as the personification of a legislative body, such as a congress or parliament, as this “he” who is sovereign. According to George Schwab, writing the introduction to *Political Theology*, “although Schmitt was prepared to accept modern constitutional developments, he was determined to reinstate the personal element in sovereignty and make it indivisible once

more.”¹⁴ Schwab goes on to say, more precisely, that the sovereign is “the popularly elected president.”¹⁵ Thus according to Schwab, Schmitt envisions the sovereign as a single human being, and not a legislative body. What is particularly relevant to arguments to be raised in later chapters of this dissertation is the fact that the sovereign is alleged to be an *individual* person characterized by unity whose decisions thereby confer unity and stability upon a collective in need of unification and stabilization.

Schwab’s summary opinion as to Schmitt’s image of the sovereign as a single person is by itself unconvincing in its insistence that Schmitt envisioned the sovereign as a sole individual. But perhaps Schmitt’s own words on the topic might be more persuasive, if yet more challenging to unravel. Schmitt states that if the capacity to decide upon an exception “is not hampered in some way by checks and balances, as is the case in a liberal constitution, then it is clear who the sovereign is.”¹⁶ Perhaps he means to say that the system of checks and balances renders precise points of decision invisible, but that collectively the bodies that “check and balance” one another’s power constitute a sovereign decision-making body. But Schmitt says that “The essence of liberalism is negotiation... in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended forever in an everlasting discussion.”¹⁷ It is as if he is saying that the point of legislative assemblies is to *avoid* the decision, and thus to avoid sovereignty insofar as sovereignty *requires* a decision based upon Schmitt’s earlier definition. So perhaps what he really means to say is that the group as a whole is never the decision-maker, despite superficial

¹⁴ George Schwab, "Introduction," In *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, by Carl Schmitt, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) xlii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

appearances to the contrary; behind the scenes lies an individual decider—by Schmitt’s definition, a single individual enacting sovereignty. While the precise identity of the sovereign is obscured by the checks and balances, the sovereign remains nonetheless an individual decider.¹⁸

Additionally, against supporters of an association theory of the state—who might be said to argue for a sort of popular sovereignty or assemblage theory that expresses the “will of the people”—Schmitt is clear: “If the state is pushed into playing the role of a mere proclaiming herald, then it can no longer be sovereign.”¹⁹ He identifies such a “community, based on associations and constituted from below” as failing to account for the fact that legal concepts, in their “general universality,” inevitably require a decision in order to judge “a concrete fact concretely.” And such a normative concept of law as association theory merely designates “how decisions should be made, not who should decide” (and quite possibly Schmitt might say the same of popular sovereignty as well) (24-33). While these populist or assemblage-like forms of structures theorize a process for decision-making, Schmitt—following Hobbes—declares that “what matters for the reality of legal life is who decides” (34). In other words, collective decision-making is no substitute for the sovereign; ultimately it is an individual who must decide for the state, if the state can be said to be sovereign.

¹⁸ Reminiscent of Douglas Adams’ line in *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, “The President of the Universe holds no real power. His sole purpose is to take attention away from where power actually exists.” Although for Schmitt this would be more true of a parliament than of a president.

¹⁹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 25.

Schmitt's Reliance upon a Transcendent God

Schmitt contends that his version of sovereignty is modeled on a theological concept of God. To begin with, he maintains that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts“ (36). He argues that this is not only “because of their historical development...but also because of their systematic structure“ (36). By this he means that “the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology” (36). This is of such central importance to political theory that “only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state in the last centuries” (36).

At this point it seems prudent to note that Schmitt's concept of immanence and transcendences is not identical to the usage of those terms as metaphysical signifiers in theology or philosophy. For Schmitt, there is a structural analogy between God as transcendent to the material world and the sovereign as transcendent to the state such that while from a metaphysical perspective the sovereign is also immanent with regards to the material, creaturely world, from the perspective of the state the sovereign can be regarded as transcendent. For Schmitt, the immanent domain of the physical world is a locus of problems in need of solutions that can only arrive from the transcendent sphere. Similarly, the state itself is perceived as an immanent domain in need of stabilization that can only be guaranteed by a sovereign who is himself unbound by the laws that determine the boundaries of the state itself by way of analogy.

Schmitt goes on to say that “The metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be

appropriate as a form of political organization” (46)²⁰ Despite its trend toward secularity, the same holds true for the modern constitutional state as well:

The idea of the modern constitutional state triumphed together with deism, a theology and metaphysics that banished the miracle from the world. This theology and metaphysics rejected not only the transgression of the laws of nature through an exception brought about by direct intervention, as is found in the idea of a miracle, but also the sovereign’s direct intervention in a valid legal order. The rationalism of the Enlightenment rejected the exception in every form.²¹

It is possible that he intends this as critique of those who would rush to endorse a form of government solely because it conforms to their metaphysical image of the world. This dissertation will most definitely argue against absolute sovereignty on the basis that it is dissonant with the metaphysical image of the world as disclosed by science studies, so this is an important point to address at this juncture. On the one hand, if we have learned nothing from the historical trajectory of science and metaphysical images, we have learned that we are almost certainly incorrect on one or another aspect of the metaphysical image we currently hold. But to reject empirical evidence of how things (seem to) work in the material world when making important decisions seems foolhardy, not faithful. An Arabic proverb says it best: trust God, and tie your camel. Faith is not at

²⁰ The metaphysical dualism inspiring Schmitt’s analogy will be critiqued throughout the dissertation, albeit most often obliquely. Furthermore, Schmitt’s failure to recognize that the sovereign is not *in fact* transcendent to the immanent plane renders him vulnerable to critique from religious-minded thinkers such as Karl Barth (to be discussed in Chapter 6) and Martin Buber, along with Walter Benjamin (discussed below).

²¹ Schmitt, *Political Theology* p. 37. Here it is important to mention that Schmitt to some degree follows in the footsteps of his teacher Max Weber. The degree to which Schmitt follows in Weber’s footsteps versus upends Weber’s thesis is hotly contested. There are some who use Schmitt’s connection to Weber to style Weber as a proto-fascist, and on the other are those who perceive Schmitt’s thesis to be a rejection of Weber altogether. Integrating both perspectives are those who affirm that Schmitt performed a double maneuver by which he solidified his legitimacy on the basis of his ties to Weber, then proceeded to dismantle Weber’s liberalism once his authority had been established. See: Kjell Engelbrekt, “What Carl Schmitt Picked Up in Weber’s Seminar: A Historical Controversy Revisited,” *The European Legacy* 14 no. 6 (2009) p. 667-684; Pedro T. Magalhaes, A Contingent Affinity: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and the Challenge of Modern Politics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77 no. 2 (2016) 283-304.

odds with practical decision-making. Political arrangements, social structures, and decisions on the exception are nothing if not practical matters.

Schmitt is suggesting that when empirical reality (in the form of what might be called modern science) failed to bear evidence that “miracles” occur, the modern constitutional state rejected the idea of miracles, and the exception right along with it. But despite this rejection of the exception, which Schmitt equates with decision-making and hence with sovereignty, Schmitt contends that nonetheless a decision-making power lurks beneath the surface: “there appears a huge cloak-and-dagger drama, in which the state acts in many disguises but always as the same invisible person” (38) Schmitt likens this to a *deus ex machina*.

But yet it remains unclear precisely why Schmitt insists on the exception, and upon the “transcendence” of both God and sovereign upon which to base his political theology. Perhaps clues may be found in a related essay, *The Age of Neutralization and Depoliticization*. Written in 1929, Schmitt argued that the “central domain” of concern evidenced a secularization of theological concepts throughout four stages beginning in the sixteenth century. Schmitt refers to these domains as the theological, the metaphysical, the humanitarian-moral, and the economic. Schmitt is clear that there is no decisive break between these epochs, and that these do not represent any sort of progression or regression. He asserts that these domains represent

the fact that in these four centuries of European history the intellectual vanguard changed, that its convictions and arguments continued to change, as did the content of its intellectual interests, the basis of its actions, the secret of its political success, and the willingness of the great masses to be impressed by certain suggestions.²²

²² Carl Schmitt, “The Age of Secularization and Depoliticization,” 1929, 83: https://www.academia.edu/2396740/Carl_Schmitt_author_George_Schwab_Translator_-_Concept_of_the_Political_1st_edition_-University_of_Chicago_Press_1996_.pdf.

The central domains described by Schmitt constitute something along the lines of a framework or set of priorities within which political discourse finds its relevance.

The significance of these domains for the general populace is that these domains lend specific content to what are otherwise ambiguous concepts. For example, in the context of the eighteenth century, which Schmitt aligns with the humanitarian-moral age, the ambiguous notion of progress “meant above all progress in culture, self-determination, and education: *moral* perfection” (86). All problems and solutions are calculated in the terms provided by the central domain. Provided the issues related to the central domain are “in order, everything else is ‘provided’ by definition” (86). He goes on to say that “above all the *state* also derives its reality and power from the respective central domain, because the decisive disputes of friend-enemy groupings are also determined by it” (87). Furthermore, according to Schmitt, the same state cannot entertain two different formulations of the same domain: in an economic epoch “one and the same state cannot accommodate two contradictory economic systems” (88). Schmitt also contends that a state that does not “claim to understand and direct” relations based upon the central domain of the epoch “must declare itself neutral with respect to political questions and decisions and thereby renounce its claim to rule” (88).

Schmitt considered the intellectual shift from theology to “natural” science to be “the strongest and most consequential” of all epochal shifts. This is because at the core of this epoch is the “striving for a neutral domain” which Schmitt perceives to be a reaction to the enormous conflicts which characterized the theological domain with its monarchical system of rule (89). As Schmitt states:

Theology, the former central domain, was abandoned because it was controversial, in favor of another—neutral—domain. The former central domain became neutralized in that it ceased to be the central domain. On the basis of the new central domain, one hoped to find minimum agreement and common premises allowing for the possibility of security, clarity, prudence, and peace (89).

Schmitt argues that in the early part of the twentieth century, there existed “widespread contemporary belief” that the much sought-after neutral ground had at last been found in technology (90). Schmitt, writing in the first half of the twentieth century, observed that “the twentieth century began as the age not only of technology but of a religious belief in technology” (85). Thus it would appear as though the twentieth century heralded a new epoch. This turns out to be problematic, for Schmitt, because “neither a political question nor a political answer can be derived from purely technical principles and perspectives” (92).

Although this new epoch is neutral, it is not spiritless: “it is the belief in an activistic metaphysics—belief in unlimited power and the domination of man over nature, even over human nature; the belief in the unlimited ‘receding of natural boundaries,’ in the unlimited possibilities for change and prosperity” (94). Thus, Schmitt opines, the spirit of technicity might “be called fantastic and satanic, but not simply dead, spiritless, or mechanized soullessness” (95). This technicity is, according to Schmitt, a “torpid religion” to which “great masses of industrialized peoples” adhere because of subconscious belief that “the absolute depoliticization sought after four centuries can be found here, and that universal peace begins here” (95).

The final paragraphs of this essay leave a sense of incompleteness, of arguments alluded to but not announced, and conclusions hinted at but not driven home. I will try to piece together what I believe Schmitt is saying, because I perceive it as exceedingly

relevant to Schmitt's overall concern with sovereignty in general. First, Schmitt names the fact that technology per se is not an unambiguous good: it is "equally available to both [peace and war]" (95). Next he asserts that "nothing changes by speaking in the name of...peace" and goes on to say that "the most terrible war is pursued only in the name of peace, the most terrible oppression only in the name of freedom, and the most terrible inhumanity only in the name of humanity" (95). Schmitt is difficult to dismiss in this lucid moment, identifying the tragic dimension of political life and anticipating a noteworthy concern of postsecular theorists in this observation.

Schmitt then insists that we must:

recognize the pluralism of spiritual life and know that the central domain of spiritual existence cannot be a neutral domain...life struggles not with death, spirit not with spiritlessness; spirit struggles with spirit, life with life, and out of the power of an integral understanding of this arises the order of human things(96).

What spirits are struggling with other spirits in this scenario? Schmitt is suggesting that the "spirit of technicity" is at odds with some other spiritual value system, never named. He is adamant that the "neutral ground" sought as a corrective to political conflict can neither eliminate conflict nor assure a moral outcome. But he takes his argument even further.

He does not come out and *say* that neutrality per se is satanic or evil, but he leads us there by what is referred to in mathematics as the transitive property: if "a" equals "b" and "b" equals "c" then "a" equals "c." As we saw above, Schmitt argued that neutrality accompanies technicity. Technicity, in Schmitt's reading, is evil, for how else might we read his assertion that technicity is "Satanic?" Thus, presumptions of neutrality may also be said to be evil. He suggests that, despite its claims to provide peace, in fact the greatest

of all atrocities will be committed in the context of the technological domain *because* it is neutral, and therefore the system itself promotes no means of valuation and thus no boundaries for human behavior—moral or otherwise. Lacking an internal moral framework, technology, technicity, and neutrality with them, abandons us to the wilderness of a dog-eat-dog world. If technicity is the central domain, the new world order proves to be terrifying indeed.

According to Tracy B. Strong, in his Forward to *Political Theology*, “The point of the analysis of the centrality of the exception for sovereignty is precisely to restore, in a democratic age, the element of transcendence that had been there in the sixteenth and even the seventeenth centuries...Failing that, the triumph of non-political, inhuman technologizing will be inevitable.”²³ By virtue of Schmitt’s own assertion that all modern concepts of the state are secularized theological concepts, and his equation of neutral technicity with evil, he can be said to reenact what we shall see is a longstanding drama between a transcendent good and an immanent (or, Schmitt might say, technological) evil.

However, as described in the following chapter, enactments of a unilateral, Schmittian-type sovereignty on the part of those who set global food policy (World Trade Org, International Monetary Fund, World Bank) are no guarantee against “inhuman technologizing” that deploys ever more technologically intense agricultural methods with inhumane results. Thus the reason for starting off with much time and attention devoted to engaging Schmitt’s political theology and his theory of secularization. Schmitt’s concerns about potentially deadly deployments of technology, depoliticization of

²³ Tracy B. Strong, "Forward: The Sovereign and the Exception: Carl Schmitt, Politics, Theology, and Leadership," in *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, by Carl Schmitt, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) xxv.

contemporary life, and the need to respond decisively to chaotic events are not unique to him. These same concerns emerge in the context of environmental activism in general and the food movement in particular. But Schmitt's solutions to these problems will nonetheless fail to satisfy the moral and ethical demands of those movements. These moral and ethical demands arise in the context of an altogether different metaphysics that does not so easily link transcendent/good and immanent/evil, as will be described in detail in the subsequent chapters.

Before going into further detail on the metaphysical and moral disputes contra Schmitt, it must be noted that Schmitt insists that resurrecting the concept of sovereignty is vital to preservation of "the political." For example, Strong observes, if "the political is in danger of disappearing as a human form of life, this can only be because sovereignty as Schmitt understands it is increasingly not a constituent part of our present world."²⁴ This dissertation will take strong objection to Schmitt's argument that the elimination of his version of sovereignty amounts to depoliticization.

Resonant with Taylor's concept of transimmanence described in the introduction, the concept of "the political" is not exhausted by, nor even best represented by, decisions upon the exception that shore up the boundaries of the state, as Schmitt seems to imply. Surely "the political" describes the social arrangements *internal to the state* as well. Food activists would also argue quite the opposite of Schmitt's assertion; they would argue that enactments of transcendent sovereignty are short-circuiting political processes. Thus, Schmitt's insistence on a single, centralized (and therefore transcendent) sovereign could be said to constitute an undermining, rather than a restoration of, the political.

²⁴ Ibid., xxii.

Furthermore, the chaotic events likely to occur in the context of climate change will take the form of environmental disasters and also inter-national conflicts. Environmental disasters are regional events arguably requiring the distribution of sovereignty (decision-making authority) to address them; a centralized sovereign may impair the restoration of order in those events. For example, after Superstorm Sandy the grassroots organization Occupy Sandy demonstrated the way in which grassroots efforts can be more efficient at providing disaster relief to impoverished areas notably underserved by top-down approaches to disaster relief.²⁵ This last argument against Schmitt's insistence that the preservation of the political is contingent upon his model of sovereignty will be explored in greater detail in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

Theologically Problematic Concepts Embedded in Schmitt's Theory

But even more important to this dissertation than questions about unity and ability to restore order are the metaphysically, theologically problematic concepts that underlie Schmitt's grafting of monarchically structured sovereignty to the democratic process. On the one hand it could be said that Schmitt's personal experience of World War I in some sense diminished his estimation of God's importance vis a vis the purpose of the state., For example, George Schwab, translator of *Political Theology*, asserts that before World War I, Schmitt believed that the Catholic church was the moral determinant of right, and although the church preceded the state in importance, the purpose of the state was to realize the aims of the church. After the war Schmitt "perceived the role of the state as

²⁵ Alan Feuer, "Occupy Sandy: A Movement Moves to Relief," *The New York Times* (November 9, 2012): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/nyregion/where-fema-fell-short-occupy-sandy-was-there.html>.

the securing of conditions under which citizens could pursue their private wills.”²⁶ This is a decidedly more limited role for both state and God. Yet Schmitt insists on God’s importance in his very formulation of political theology.

What is this about? Is his turn to this traditional, Hobbesian sovereignty the cynical move of someone who has given up on God? And now, since he has given up on an actual God to bring order to earth instead insists upon following a sovereign leader who will behave in a manner very much Godlike? Strong cites Schmitt’s own account of his Catholic faith being “dis-placed” and “de-totalized, and goes on to say that “while Catholicism was always to remain important to Schmitt...[his] ties to his various traditions are negative and are not replaced by a liberal faith in progress.”²⁷ In other words, according to Strong, Schmitt lost faith in his Catholic theology but did not gain an equal faith in liberal political progress.

Schmitt believes that a metaphysical kernel lies at the heart of all political theories, and in the technological domain he has glimpsed a metaphysical kernel with no moral statement whatsoever, a metaphysical kernel that does not assure security. Elsewhere he says that “In political reality there is no irresistible highest or greatest power that operates according to the certainty of natural law.”²⁸ On the one hand, if technology is based upon natural law, nothing could be more certain—or at least certainly predictable (according to Schmitt’s understanding of natural law, which differs with the one presented in this dissertation, to be described at length in later chapters). But this would imply that, on the other hand, if technology does not carry an implicit moral code then *neither does natural law*.

²⁶ Schwab, “Forward,” xxxviii.

²⁷ Ibid., xxix-xxx.

²⁸ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 18.

As Strong names it the problem Schmitt struggles with, is how to fortify the political through re-enchantment:

Schmitt, who had been a student of Max Weber, accepts the idea of the demagification” or ‘disenchantment’ of the world. To say that all concepts in modern state theory are secularized theological concepts is not to want to restore to those concepts a theological dimension, but it is to point to the fact that what has been lost since the sixteenth (“theological”) century has amounted to a hollowing-out of political concepts. They thus no longer have, as it were, the force and strength that they had earlier, and they are unable to resist the dynamics of technology.²⁹

Schmitt’s assessment that the immanent, neutral plane gave rise to an evil technicity has already been described in detail above. In response to his fears of this evil, Schmitt emphasizes the exception, thus restoring transcendence to a position of centrality in his political theology.³⁰

Yet Schmitt attempts to undo the political hollowness without addressing the problematic theological concepts that have been operative all along. He fails to question whether alternatives concepts of God might prove more compelling, more enchanting to a modern audience in a way that might “challenge the dynamics of technology” by producing a moral framework to guide its deployment. And for that, he can be forgiven. For one thing, he is not a trained theologian. For another, he is disappointed in the transcendent God as a restraint on human behavior during World War I, and does not observe evidence of a moral framework in the immanent domain. Furthermore, he holds

²⁹ Strong, *Forward*, xxv.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Indeed, “fears of evil” often generate or amplify desires for a transcendent sovereign capable of restoring order and providing safety. This seems to be evidenced by the general trend toward escalating nationalisms observed in world politics of the moment.

“the belief that man is basically dangerous and that his primary goal is physical security” so he “opted for a strong state that would ensure order, peace, and stability.”³¹

For Schmitt, national stability becomes something of a moral good in itself. On the one hand this is ironic given his anxieties about the lack of moral valuation characteristic of the immanent domain and technicity with it. But on the other hand, because the transcendent God has been dismissed as a guarantor of order, the sovereign is permitted to fulfill not only the vacancy left behind when God is cast out from this role but also to fulfill the need for moral valuation in the immanent domain. Whereas at one point the religious may have believed that obedience to God would assure stability because God promotes moral goods, now Schmitt insists that obedience to the sovereign leader is itself a moral good because the sovereign promotes stability.

But Schmitt does not identify his desire for order, peace, and stability as themselves imbued with theological concepts. I would like to suggest that this desire itself can be read as the remnant of not only a theological doctrine of God, but also of a theological *narrative* prevalent in the West. In *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, Carolyn Merchant identifies this narrative as the Recovery of Eden story, which she argues is “the mainstream narrative of Western culture.”³² According to this narrative, Eden represents the once-pristine world in which humans are imagined to have originated, a world now lost due to human error. The trajectory of Western culture, according to Merchant, has been aiming at the recovery of this lost Eden, which I contend is parallel to Schmitt’s desire for “order, peace, and stability.” I would suggest that his

³¹ Ibid., xlix-l.

³² Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

high valuation of order, peace and stability is resonant with religious narratives of both an originary Eden and its eschatological restoration.

For Merchant, there are two versions of this narrative which differ regarding the source of redemption. In one version, “humanity can be redeemed through Christianity”³³ and in the other “the way upward could be found through science, technology, capitalist development, and a new vision of the modern state.”³⁴ Schmitt’s assessment of technology seems to be that the second narrative leads us down a blind alley. And according to Strong, Schmitt “notes, as had Hobbes, that there is in Christianity a dangerous tendency to introduce rebellion into the political realm.”³⁵ Subsequently, Schmitt backtracks to a secularized concept of God—but in this case humanity will be redeemed—secured—not through Christ or Christian practice, but through the sovereign, configured not as God made flesh but as flesh made God through the bestowal of absolute sovereignty upon a human political leader.

The recovery narrative identified by Carolyn Merchant represents not only a desire to return to our imagined paradisiacal origins, but also an *eschatological* vision of the future very much consonant with the Christian tradition. The restoration of creation is very much intrinsic to images of the New Jerusalem as depicted in the Book of Revelation.³⁶ Indeed, contemporary interpretations of The Book of Revelation which for the text as the promise of a renewed Eden, such as those by Harry O. Meier and Barbara Rossing.³⁷ Thus one begins to hear polyphonic resonances between the backwards-

³³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴ Ibid., 63.

³⁵ Strong, *Forward*, xxxii.

³⁶ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil*, (Westminster John Knox Press; Louisville 2008) footnote 33, 370.

³⁷ See for example: Harry O. Maier, “There’s a New World Coming! Reading the Apocalypse in the Shadow of the Canadian Rockies,” in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, by Norman C Habel and

looking attempt to recover a lost Eden and the forward-looking hope for the eschatologically promised establishment of a New Jerusalem as these images oscillate throughout the historical trajectory Merchant surveys.

The implicit eschatology of the recovery narrative Merchant identifies, and its involvement of not only human political structures but also the arrangement of human/non-human relationships contingent upon those structures, becomes important in the critique of political theological concepts of sovereignty put forth in this dissertation. Political theology, and sovereignty in particular, are often cast with a messianic hue. And the messianism implicit in both concepts has been no less responsible for the phenomena Merchant observes than has the desire to retreat to a lost Eden. In fact, the assurance that a lasting order can be finally achieved is what prompts Schmitt to endorse absolute sovereignty. But before moving further critique the messianism implicit in the concept of absolute sovereignty, a critique which will unfold throughout the remaining chapters, let us turn to the conception of sovereignty put forth by Walter Benjamin, a contemporary of Schmitt's whose work is also commonly cited by political theorists and theologians of the twenty-first century.³⁸

Walter Benjamin's Critique of Sovereignty

Walter Benjamin was a German Jewish literary theorist and philosopher, and contemporary of Carl Schmitt's. Disillusioned with liberal politics, Benjamin aligned himself with the Marxist cause. Benjamin's initial foray into political theology was a

Vicky Balabanski, (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) and Barbara Rossing, "For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically," in *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, by David Rhoads, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

³⁸ Please refer to note 3 for examples.

1921 essay “Critique of Violence,” penned in support of the proletarian strike of 1920.

Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida both argue that Carl Schmitt likely wrote *Political Theology* in response to the depiction of sovereignty proposed in Benjamin’s essay.³⁹

It is likely that both men greatly influenced one another’s work. In fact, Marc de Wilde argues that “the political theologies of Benjamin and Schmitt...developed in the course of their dialogue, in which both authors respond to each other’s criticism by changing and correcting their own positions in significant ways.”⁴⁰ The two men rarely communicated directly, conducting their dialogue by means of academic publications, in which they also seldom cited one another. Yet evidence exists that the two were in communication.

For example, in 1930 Benjamin sent a copy of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* to Carl Schmitt along with a letter reading as follows:

You will very quickly recognize how much my book is indebted to you for its presentation of the doctrine of sovereignty in the seventeenth century. Perhaps I may say, in addition, that I have also derived from you later works, especially *Die Diktatur*, a confirmation of my modes of research in the philosophy of art from yours in the philosophy of the state.⁴¹

Although Benjamin expresses his indebtedness to Schmitt, this should not be construed as in any way suggesting that Benjamin endorsed the type of unilateral, top-down sovereignty endorsed by Schmitt. Since the mid-1980s, careful research has demonstrated that “although Benjamin had borrowed Schmitt’s concepts, he injected them into new contexts in which their original meanings were challenged and opposed.”⁴² These careful

³⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 52-53; Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law,” *Cardozo Law Review*, 1990: 920-1045.

⁴⁰ Marc de Wilde, “Meeting Opposites: The Political Theologies of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, no. 4 (2011): 363.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 365.

distinctions are vitally important in light of Benjamin's Jewishness and Schmitt's eventual affiliation with the Nazi Party.

Both Schmitt and Benjamin held liberalism and parliamentary democracy to be problematic forms of governance, but they approached the dilemmas thus posed from different vantage points: Benjamin from the far left socialist perspective, and Schmitt from the extreme right.⁴³ Also, both men perceived the political sphere to be haunted by theological concepts that had been secularized and thus neutralized. But precisely due to their secularization and neutralization, these theological concepts could not be publicly discussed *as* theological concepts. As a corollary to their understanding of the political as haunted by the theological, both men construed sovereignty as a messianic project, at least initially.⁴⁴ However, according to de Wilde, in the metaphoric resonances of Benjamin the proletariat revolutionary general strike of 1918 was the messianic moment, whereas in Schmitt's case the messianic metaphor was to be found in the image of the sovereign as transcendent figure "capable of creating a completely restored order."⁴⁵

One preliminary point, raised by Derrida, is important to note in beginning, as keeping it in mind while reading excerpts from "Critique of Violence" raises one's awareness to the resonances and dissonances between Benjamin and Schmitt:

Zur Kritik der Gewalt: "translated in French as "Critique de la violence" and in English as "Critique of Violence." But these two translations, while not altogether *injuste* (and so not altogether violent), are very active interpretations that don't do justice to the fact that *Gewalt* also signifies, for Germans, legitimate power, authority, public force. *Gesetzgebende Gewalt* is legislative power, *geistliche Gewalt* the spiritual power of the

⁴³ Ibidl, 363-5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 365; James R. Martel, *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 47; Derrida "Force of Law,"979. De Wilde argues that after 1933 Schmitt abandons the messianic vision in favor of a vision of the sovereign as parallel to Paul's *katechon*.

⁴⁵ deWilde, "Meeting Opposites," 374.

church, *Staatsgewalt* the authority or power of the state. *Gewalt*, then, is both violence and legitimate power, justified authority.⁴⁶

In other words, it is not merely the use of violence which Benjamin calls into question, but the state itself, a position diametrically opposed to Schmitt's desire to shore up the state as a means to assuring stability. Thus, despite sharing anti-liberal sentiments and theological motivations, the two men position themselves differently *vis a vis* the state.

Benjamin indicates that he endeavors to critique violence with an emphasis on means, in order to "discriminate within the sphere of means themselves, without regard for the ends they serve." Benjamin argues that to critique violence in light of the ends served merely illuminates appropriate instances in which violence as a principle may be applied.⁴⁷ He wishes instead to question violence *on principle*. He notes that the state attempts to subdue violence among its citizenry by settling disputes through law (280). But the state, he believes, does not wish to hold a monopoly on violence because violence is morally wrong *per se*, but rather because extra-state violence poses an existential threat to the legal system itself (280).

The particular non-state violence Benjamin wishes to interrogate is the revolutionary general strike. He notes that the "right to strike conceded to labor is certainly not a right to exercise violence but, rather, to escape from a violence indirectly exercised by the employer" (281). The state would object to a revolutionary general strike, arguing that this revolutionary purpose exceeds the intentions of the legal

⁴⁶ Derrida. "Force of Law" 927.

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," In *Selected Writings*, by Edmund Jephcott, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 277-300.

protection bestowed upon striking laborers.⁴⁸ However, it is only if the workers exercise this right “in order to overthrow the legal system that has conferred” the right to strike, the general strike “may be called violent” (282). The passive violence of the general strike is that which “the state fears above all else, [that] function of violence which it is the object of this study to identify as the only secure foundation for its critique” (282). According to Benjamin this secure foundation is, as we shall see, divine violence.

But prior to describing divine violence Benjamin elucidates two contrasting but related concepts of violence as means. Of violence as means Benjamin states “If, therefore, conclusions can be drawn from military violence, as being primordial and paradigmatic of all violence used for natural ends, there is inherent in all such violence a lawmaking character.” (283). It is for this reason that the state desires a monopoly on violence; it *really* desires a monopoly on lawmaking. Benjamin goes on to declare that “all violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates it forfeits all validity” (287). Thus for Benjamin lawmaking is not the only use of violence as means; violence can also be deployed in order to preserve the law as well.

Furthermore, “lawmaking is power making, and to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence. Justice is the principle of all divine end making, power the principle of all mythical law making” (295). Thus, the law is inherently violent and unjust, not least because it lacks the “divine” qualifier but because “ends that are for one situation are just, universally acceptable and valid, are so for no other situation, no matter how similar it may be in other respects” (294). In other words, as we saw with Schmitt

⁴⁸ (Benjamin, Critique of Violence 1999) 282 “state will call this...an abuse, since the right to strike was not ‘so intended.’”

earlier, laws are general and their application is particular; applications of laws in situations to which they are not suited render them unjust. For both Schmitt and Benjamin, this is no small problem.

But whereas for Schmitt this problem is solved by implementing his concept of the sovereign—modeled on God—as we shall see Benjamin had already solved this problem by setting up the sovereign’s *opposition* to God. Benjamin refers to both law-making and law-preserving violence together as “mythical violence,” through which the mythical foundations of lawmaking violence are laid bare: “Far from inaugurating a purer sphere, the mythical manifestation of immediate violence shows itself fundamentally identical with all legal violence” (296). Benjamin further distinguishes mythic violence from divine violence in a passage worthy of quoting at length, as similar themes will reappear later in this dissertation:

If mythical violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythical violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood...For blood is the symbol of mere life...[and]...Mythical violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake, divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice, the second accepts it (296).

Not only has Benjamin already in 1921 declared the making and reinforcing of the boundaries of state to be mythological rather than divine in origin, he has also introduced a theme that will be taken up by Giorgio Agamben—that of mere life.

But one must also read the above with caution. Certainly, Benjamin conceives of the *possibility* that divine violence might happen via human action—and the revolutionary general strike may present just such an instance. But while that abstract possibility is certain, the identification of any particular concrete instantiation is less so:

“For only mythical violence, not divine, will be recognizable as such with certainty...because the expiatory power of violence is not visible to men” (300). We cannot, therefore, legitimate revolutionary efforts to overthrow unjust laws by claiming *their* divine origins any more than we can substantiate our support of the sovereign on the grounds of his divinity. Divine approval of either option is not immediately forthcoming. It is this uncertainty, and the subsequent weight of responsibility, that Benjamin leaves us to grapple with.

Whether or not one concurs with Agamben, Derrida, and their followers that Schmitt wrote *Political Theology* in response to Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence,” more direct evidence leads us to conclude that Benjamin’s 1928 publication *The Origin of German Tragic Drama [Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels]* was a response, and perhaps a rebuttal, to Schmitt’s *Political Theology*.⁴⁹ In fact, Benjamin uses direct quotations of Schmitt’s *Political Theology*:

If one wishes to explain how 'the lively awareness of the significance of the state of emergency, which is dominant in the natural law of the seventeenth century' disappears in the following century, it is not therefore enough simply to refer to the greater political stability of the eighteenth century (66).

In the passage quoted above, Benjamin is quoting Schmitt directly regarding the “lively awareness of the significance of the state of emergency,” and proceeds to just as directly disagree with him. Whereas Schmitt indicates that this “disappearance” of “lively awareness” occurred “when a relatively lasting order was established,”⁵⁰ Benjamin frankly finds the establishment of a lasting order to be an explanation for the significance

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated by John Osborne (New York, Verso 1998).

⁵⁰ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 14.

of the state of emergency in the seventeenth century, and suggests that a sounder conclusion requires the examination of additional facts.

If such frank disagreement is noted in his engagement with Schmitt, in what way, then can Benjamin be said to be indebted to him? According to Samuel Weber, the debt owed was related to “a certain *methodological extremism*” found in the work of both men, insofar as both took as their subject of inquiry the limit case—the state of exception.⁵¹ Further, Benjamin and Schmitt agree that “the modern doctrine of sovereignty originates in the Counter-Reformation’s ‘ideal of a complete stabilization’ and longing for an ‘ecclesiastical and political restoration.’”⁵² But Benjamin’s task in *Trauerspiel* is to demonstrate how the German baroque dramatists were critiquing the modern doctrine of sovereignty at its inception⁵³: “Whereas the modern concept of sovereignty amounts to a supreme executive power on the part of the prince, the Baroque concept emerges from a discussion of the state of emergency, and makes it the most important function of the prince to avert this.”⁵⁴ Whereas philosopher and Benjamin scholar Samuel Weber finds this to be a “slight but decisive modification of [Schmitt’s] theory,” I find this transformation to be more significant.⁵⁵ First, because of the remainder of Benjamin’s engagement with sovereignty as portrayed by his selection of German baroque dramatists, which will be outlined below; but more importantly because the modification is *decisive*—the very criterion for sovereignty as defined by Schmitt.

⁵¹ Samuel Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt,” *Diacritics* 22, no. 3/4 (1992): 7, emphasis in the original.

⁵² de Wilde, “Meeting Opposites,” 372.

⁵³ The Counter-Reformation dates from roughly the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries; the German Baroque from the mid- to late-sixteenth until the mid-eighteenth centuries.

⁵⁴ Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 65.

⁵⁵ Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision,” 12.

Thus it is as if Benjamin has wrested the sovereignty to decide upon the very question of sovereignty *away* from Schmitt.

Although both seem to agree that the Counter-Reformation, in conjunction with theological ideations, led to the formulation of a modern sovereignty rather similar to Schmitt's, Benjamin indicates a shift in the underlying theology as the Baroque develops. Whereas the Counter-Reformation gave rise to the "demand for a principdom whose constitutional position guarantees the continuity of the community, flourishing in feats of arms and in the sciences, in the arts and in its Church," the Baroque knows no such hopes for an earthly realization of the eschatological vision "by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end."⁵⁶ In other words, it is not at all the case the Christian theology has been universally held to promise a realized eschatology that might bolster Schmitt's secularized sovereign under the pretense that some long-promised lasting world order is finally at hand.

Schmitt cannot have failed to notice that the implicit theology of his own work had been obliquely critiqued. De Wilde observes that after 1933 Schmitt shifts from portraying the sovereign as "capable of creating a completely restored order" to the image of the *katechon*, the one who restrains the Antichrist; nonetheless his underlying political theology remained unchanged.⁵⁷ The sovereign, although demoted from messianic figure to *katechon*, nonetheless serves the significant function of restraining evil.

In literary works referred to by Benjamin as "baroque Byzantinism" Benjamin observes that "The prince appears here not only as the hero of an antique triumph but he

⁵⁶ Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 65-66.

⁵⁷ de Wilde, "Meeting Opposites," 374, 377.

is at the same time directly associated with divine beings, served and celebrated by them: thus he is himself deified” (67). By contrast, “in the *Trauerspiel* monarch and martyr do not shake off their immanence (67). Benjamin further elaborates that the monarch encompasses the role of both the martyr and the tyrant, corresponding respectively to the “very good” or the “very bad” (69). Of the monarch and the martyr Benjamin says:

Seen in ideological terms they are strictly complementary. In the baroque the tyrant and the martyr are but the two faces of the monarch...The theory of sovereignty which takes as its example the special cases in which dictatorial powers are unfolded, positively demands the completion of the image of the sovereign, as tyrant (69).

Samuel Weber, philosopher and renown Benjamin scholar, asserts—and I agree—that “with the split of the sovereign into tyrant and martyr, what is dislocated is not just the unity of *a* character, but the unity of *character as such*.”⁵⁸ For Weber, “this dislocation is of particular importance for baroque theater...it is precisely this consistency and unity that are undermined together with the status of the sovereign.”⁵⁹ Weber’s emphasizes the manner in which disunity of character undermines sovereignty. This emphasis on character—the distinctive moral and personalities of an individual—is particularly relevant to the question of global food politics. Not infrequently do philosophical and religious teachings insist that character co-arises with food and body, a question taken up in chapter four.⁶⁰ Subsequently, disunity is an inescapable aspect of creatureliness even for those deemed “sovereign.”

⁵⁸ Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision,” 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ In which Nietzsche and Thoreau will serve as two voices in a longer and broader conversation than space constraints will permit extensive exploration. This perspective is not unique to the Jewish tradition, with its well-known insistence on kosher dietary law as condition of sanctity. The connection between character and diet is also intertwined with Hindu and Buddhist vegetarianism as well; see R. S. Khare, *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, (State University of New York Press, 1992).

Benjamin notes that the *Trauerspiel* features an antithesis between the incapacity of the tyrant to rule, in contrast to his *power* to do so. The incapacity of the sovereign:

can be illuminated only against the background of the theory of sovereignty. This is the indecisiveness of the tyrant. The prince, who is responsible for making the decision to proclaim the state of emergency, reveals, at the first opportunity, that he is almost incapable of making a decision.⁶¹

Thus, Wilde argues, Benjamin depicts the sovereign not as “he who decides the exception” but rather as “he who proves unable to decide when faced with the eschatological vision of a continuing catastrophe.”⁶² This incapacity is due to the fact that “their actions are not determined by thought, but by changing physical impulses”⁶³ In other words, the sovereign’s rational function cannot be said to be any more under control than that of their subjects; they are liable to the same vicissitudes of fleshly life.

Because of their shared humanity, the sovereign and his royal subjects alike are found morally accountable for the sovereign’s failures:

The enduring fascination of the downfall of the tyrant is rooted in the conflict between the impotence and depravity of his person, on the one hand, and, on the other, the extent to which the age was convinced of the sacrosanct power of his role. It was therefore quite impossible to derive an easy moral satisfaction...from the tyrant’s end. For if the tyrant falls, not simply in his own name, as an individual, but as ruler and in the name of mankind and history, then his fall has the quality of a judgment, in which the subject too is implicated (72).

This passage calls attention, much as do the concluding passages of “Critique of Violence,” to the responsibility of those who follow the sovereign decree: the subject of the sovereign decree is implicated in the judgment against the sovereign. Because this

⁶¹ Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 70-1.

⁶² de Wilde, “Meeting Opposites,” 374.

⁶³ Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 71.

decree cannot be known ahead of time—or, for Benjamin *ever*—to be of divine origin, anyone who obeys the sovereign decision is responsible for deciding to obey.

The wild hope motivating leading many to endorse a dictatorial sovereign is the “utopian goal” of replacing “the unpredictability of historical accident with the iron constitution of the laws of nature” (74). We will say much more about the political function of the construct of nature—including the construct which would lead one to believe that natural law has an “iron constitution” in the first place—in later chapters. But for now it is enough to know that secularization did nothing to relieve this hope, it merely “denied them a religious fulfilment, demanding of them, or imposing upon them, a secular solution instead” (79).

The disappearance of messianic eschatology has already been mentioned. But despite this disappearance, in the context of Baroque drama “the conflicts of a state of creation without grace are resolved, by a kind of playful reduction, within the sphere of the court, whose king proves to be a secularized redemptive power” (81). But yet, the king nonetheless does not function as messiah, despite his capacity to redeem. Because the hoped for restoration is to come about on the earthly plane by means of a human being, the sovereign’s redemptive power is necessarily limited: “However highly he is enthroned over his subject and state, his status is confined to the world of creation: he is the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature” (85). Despite possessing some capacity to bring about improvement, the king falls far short of bringing about a lasting, final order.

Benjamin observes that “the redemption of mankind” did not cease to be a concern of the increasingly secularized Baroque. In the increasingly secularized hope for restoration of the world by means of political rebellion two shifts occurred. The first is

that the vision of “redemption” expanded “to immeasurable proportions.” The second was that rebellion against power structures almost by necessity spared the church.

Heresy, the mediaeval road of revolt, was barred: in part precisely because of the vigour with which Christianity asserted its authority, but primarily because the ardour of a new secular will could not come anywhere near to expressing itself in the heterodox nuances of doctrine and conduct. Since therefore neither rebellion nor submission was practicable in religious terms, all the energy of the age was concentrated on a complete revolution of the content of life, while orthodox ecclesiastical forms were preserved (79).

The secularization of eschatological visions inflated them beyond all reason, yet denied them religious fulfillment. Secular language, lacking the subtlety of religious discourse, subsequently deprived “men ...[of] all real means of self-expression.”⁶⁴

What I understand Benjamin to be saying here is that the baroque passion for political rebellion could not express itself through the nuanced means of heretical or heterodox theological discourse. Thus, it could not grapple with potential theological inadequacies or corruptions of ecclesiastical forms; all this passion could do was reject the church and rebel against secular authority. This would, by necessity, leave unexamined the expectations for “the redemption of mankind” which must have, in part, informed this passion for political rebellion. My additional supposition would be that the theology implicit not only in the hope for redemption but also in the understanding of power structures were thus left unexamined. It would seem that Benjamin argues that the secularization of the eschatological hope for redemption and stability leads *secular politics* to rely upon—if not demand—a sort of *religious orthodoxy*.

⁶⁴ Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 79. Benjamin neglects to mention the irony, in that their access to heterodox nuance was clipped at least in part by their own reactions against the Protestant Reformation. Had these “Baroque byzantinists” freed themselves from the grip of the Catholic Church’s Counter-Reformation by studying the theological critiques central to the Protestant Reformation’s rejection of ecclesial power structures, they may have unearthed a significant resource for theological critique not only of the ecclesial forms spared by the Counter-Reformation, but also the eschatological hopes embedded in their political rebellion.

If Benjamin is correct then hybridizations such as “political theology,” “public theology” and “secular theology” appear as potent discursive methods for enhancing the capacity for theorization of “heterodox nuances of doctrine and conduct” in the *saeculum* in our own era. This potency is not expressed in public proclamations of doctrinally correct theology, but in the exposing the reliance of the *saeculum* upon unconsciously assimilated orthodox theologies that, especially because they are not recognized as theological in origin, limit the ability of political discourse to grapple with subtleties and paradoxical realities—particularly around issues of food and ecology, as I will argue in later chapters.

Although, as already suggested above, Schmitt heard Benjamin’s critique of his eschatology implicit in *Trauerspiel*, and afterwards depicted his sovereign as *katechon* and not messiah, he did not seem to fully understand the magnitude of Benjamin’s point, nor did he seem to make the connection to Benjamin’s earlier “Critique of Violence.” In *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin had argued that the sovereign’s duties to restore order outstripped his actual capacity to do so, “leading to indecision and despair on the part of the sovereign.” In a 1956 work, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, Schmitt contends that “instead of falling prey to indecision and despair, the sovereign turns out to be capable of transforming a ‘desperate moment of catastrophe and crisis’ into a powerful myth that supports his claims to power.”⁶⁵ Wilde states that Schmitt critiqued Benjamin “for having underestimated the power of myth: although Benjamin was right to relate the doctrine of sovereignty to the vision of a permanent catastrophe he did not acknowledge the power of myth that made this vision instrumental to the sovereign’s claims to legitimacy and

⁶⁵ de Wilde, “Meeting of Opposites,” 376.

power.”⁶⁶ Thus while Benjamin had hoped to reveal this sort of strong, unilateral sovereignty as a precursor to unending chaos, the mythology that props up sovereignty draws sustenance precisely from the chaos.

What Schmitt, and Wilde, seem to overlook is that even Schmitt’s own revised concept of sovereign-as-*katechon* functions *only* as a myth. Thus, any violence perpetrated by the sovereign would be mythical, and thus cannot be figured as divine by Benjamin’s definition. Argue as Schmitt might that “the state of exception was necessary to protect the existing legal order,” the mythological basis of sovereign legitimacy underscored Benjamin’s point that sovereignty “was mobilized instead to legalize an essentially unrestricted and lawless violence.”⁶⁷ Schmitt’s acceptance of myth as foundation for sovereign authority stems from his desire to “justify the continuing violence in light of a future event, that is, the end-time that, announced by a period of anarchy and lawlessness, is to be restrained at all costs.”⁶⁸ Consequently, Schmitt portrays the “suffering of past generations as a meaningful episode in the history of salvation.”⁶⁹ In response to Benjamin’s critique, Schmitt moves to the image of the *katechon*, or restraining force, as envisioned in Paul’s writing. The state, in this configuration, is merely responding to the lawlessness and violence of these end times, and is staving off the looming catastrophe of the revelation of the antichrist. In doing so, Schmitt misses the point that Benjamin’s perspective is completely the opposite: “the worst is already taking place, not despite but because of the willingness to accept state

⁶⁶ Ibid.,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 377.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 378.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

violence as a temporary measure.”⁷⁰ Or, perhaps more to the point, the state itself might *be* the antichrist.

In other words, Schmitt’s fears of ultimate disaster lead him to rationalize intense suffering caused by unjust power systems in the *now* moment that was his life. In light of his affiliation with the Nazi party, this is not inconsequential. Schmitt joined the Nazi party shortly after Hitler took power, led by his own concept of sovereignty and messianic hopes to support Hitler’s assumption of power. But the state of exception decided upon by Hitler did not bring about the promised stability, despite having killed approximately eleven million people between 1941 and 1945 (an average of two and three quarters million per year).⁷¹ In the end, Germany was defeated and divided and was to remain so for nearly fifty years. Reliance upon myth as a foundation for political power proved ineffective as inducing *real* stability.

Benjamin, by contrast, was unsupportive of state power. He suggests that the workers’ strike was motivated by a desire to “escape from a violence indirectly exercised.” Thus it would seem that Benjamin was guided by a hope for redemption founded upon a desire to protect the vulnerable, a desire theologically moored in Jewish tradition.⁷² The desire to protect the vulnerable from an indirectly applied violence is also a motivating concern of this dissertation. Currently, over seven and a half million people

⁷⁰ Ibid. 378.

⁷¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Documenting Numbers of Victims of the Holocaust and Nazi Persecution*, n.d. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008193>.

⁷² Jacob Taubes identifies Benjamin’s political thought as Pauline while simultaneously reading Paul within the historical trajectory of traditional Jewish thought in *The Political Theology of Paul*. In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben follows much of Taubes’ reading, drawing a somewhat more direct connection between Benjamin and Paul, and omitted the historical contextualization present in Taubes. Brian Britt disrupts Agamben’s easy linkage taking great pains to once again situate Benjamin’s thought within the broader historical trajectory of Jewish tradition in “The Schmittian Messiah in Agamben’s *The Time That Remains*,” *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2010) 262-287.

die of starvation annually.⁷³ The political narrative implies that these deaths are in some sense necessary, in order to assure economic order; feeding them for free would wreak economic havoc. We are told that ever more industrialized agricultural methods, including GMO crops, will ultimately feed us all. But the impact of these farming methods on the planet—and the resultant consequences to the already oppressed—are not examined in this equation. Nor, for that matter, is the assumption that food is a commodity that can legitimately be withheld from someone without financial means to purchase it. Their destruction counts at best—if it counts at all—as a necessary loss on the road to a final restoration. In other words, we are fed a version of Schmitt's *katechon* theory: the enactment of these destructive practices on the part of sovereign forces is necessary in order to prevent even worse destruction from occurring.

The connections between the vulnerability of the starving and enactments of Schmittian-type sovereignty will be examined in the third chapter. Should the structures upholding the global food system be readable conceptually as buttressed by a unilateral sovereignty accompanied by an “exception,” or suspension of law, it is my hope to lay bare their mythological underpinnings. Hope of shifting global food politics toward a more sustainable and just model might emerge if these practices become more clearly legible as promoted by mythological faith in an exceptional figure to resolve existential threats. But for now, suffice to say, the validity of political and economic structures that perceive such death and destruction to be necessary should at least be called into question. Particularly if these structures promise a predictably dismal future.

⁷³ World Hunger Education Service, *2015 World Hunger and Poverty Facts*, (May 10, 2015): <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

Part II: Post-9/11 United States

In an edited volume, the product of a collaborative effort of the Center for the Study of World Religions at the Divinity School of Harvard University and the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam, Hent de Vries notes that the once-lively academic debates about political theology of the interwar period had quieted to mere murmurs in academic circles.⁷⁴ However, in the years following the September 11, 1991 attacks on the World Trade Center, the concept of political theology has once again become a “relevant focus of interest” in academic circles. The decades-long quiescence of this conversation and its subsequent reinvigoration contribute to the gap in the present review of political theology.

But in the present, but yet later, context we must ask what forces contribute to the reinvigoration of the concept of political theology in the wake of the 9/11 attacks? Put succinctly, the legitimacy of sovereignty and the nation-state are widely held to be called into question in the aftermath of the attacks.⁷⁵ But unlike Schmitt’s assessment of the interwar period, deVries asserts that in the twenty-first century, today “the most burning political issues are not so much directly but indirectly...related to the “theological.””⁷⁶ The much less direct relationship between the political and the theological are in large part due to the forces of secularism and pluralism operative in Western society. Subsequently, the crisis of legitimacy currently plaguing the nation-state and the concept

⁷⁴ Noteworthy for their contributions during this quiescent period are: Dorothy Soelle, *Political Theology*, (New York: Fortress Press, 1974); John Cobb, *Process Theology as Political Theology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); and Jurgen Moltman, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Process Theology as Political Theology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), xi.

⁷⁶ Hent de Vries, "Introduction: Before, Around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, by Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 7.

of sovereignty are receiving more detailed analysis than Schmitt was able (or motivated) to provide.

Catherine Keller: Counter-Apocalyptic Politics

Theologian Catherine Keller is among those producing detailed analyses of the political implications of theological thought. By her own account, Keller stages a “series of theopolitical investigations” in *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys*,” which she seems to suggest are simultaneously too narrowly focused on “a particular historical moment” and too loosely structured to be read as “a comprehensive political theology or a systematic study of messianic imperialism.”⁷⁷ The particular historical moment addressed by her work is the moment of postmodern empire in a post-9/11 America. This empire seeks a “globalization of the economy,” which is “inherently transnational and comfortable with a pagan cosmopolitanism,” and also seeks “global domination” which is “inherently unilateralist, inspired by a nationalist warrior-messianism” (x). Further, she interrogates the apocalyptic spirit implicit within the national response to 9/11, a response simultaneously political and religious. Against this national response, which can be read as somewhat Schmittian in flavor, she cautions that messianic imperialism cannot assure the triumph of the American Empire.

We can certainly take Keller at her word, here. She does not intend to write a systematic political theology—at least not in *God and Power*. But she *does* stage a deconstruction of the messianic and apocalyptic narratives drawn from Revelation—narratives which I contend undergird many other political theologies in some form or

⁷⁷ Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) xi.

fashion. In doing so, she does not leave us with mere wreckage. She leaves us with a vision, not of endings but of re-beginnings.

Keller begins her hermeneutic approach to Revelation by inviting us to read “the text as a dream and read the dream as our own” (68). The hermeneutic she seeks is

a theological hermeneutic of relations, that is of indeterminacy— influenced by the model of quantum theory, in which the relation of observer and observed evinces an uncontrollable and irreducible mutuality. This hermeneutical indeterminacy admits at once its kinship to deconstruction. That is, it presumes that the rhetorical constructs of Revelation reveal much more about its writers and readers than about any One sitting on a throne (70).

This hermeneutic resonates well with the approach taken in chapter four of this dissertation, in which Karen Barad’s agential realism, derived from quantum theory, serves as a hermeneutic device for understanding the social dimension to materialization of classed bodies.

The kinship between hermeneutical indeterminacy and deconstruction gives Keller license to “read the text through one or two Derridian eyes, but then also, inevitably and at the same time, to read Derrida through the eyes of this text” (71). This hermeneutic does not give one license to read the text however one likes, however. She encourages all who read the text to eschew partial readings that select the hope and diminish the damnation, because the text fails to resolve the bitter struggles even in the end, even despite damnation. For example, Keller cautions liberation theologians who read Revelation “against the grain of the text” to “make their ambivalence clear” suggesting they “had better thus relativize the authority of its author to the moral claims of variously oppressed publics” (74). She cautions that we cannot simply *make* the text say what we want. But more significantly, we cannot simply *undo* the text: “the

apocalypse reinscribes that which it opposes; the anti-apocalyptic stances reinscribe the apocalypse” (87). In other words, efforts to undo the text merely recapitulate its problematic aspects.

Keller’s deconstruction of the text of Revelation engages Derrida’s messianic thought, rather than his political thought.⁷⁸ But then, his political thought ends in a messianic democracy to come, so perhaps... little distinction? And, as Keller herself notes, there are those who read Derrida as indebted to “the messianism of Walter Benjamin,” a messianism which, as already described, shapes his political theology. Critical to countering the potential toxicity of a unilateral sovereign, she notes the four beasts of the apocalypse traditionally correspond to the four gospels. She does so while suggesting that our salvation may come through this steadfast retention of plurality—the defiance of the logic of the One.⁷⁹ The commitment to a hermeneutic of uncertainty does not commit her to indecision, she notes; she will “decide in favor of the multiple and in favor of some pluralities more than others” (91). This plurality immediately undoes the singularity of “the sovereign.”

After reading Derrida on the apocalypse, she notes the way in which anti-apocalypticism itself becomes apocalypticism, and even deconstruction itself can become an apocalypticism: “the ultimate, final strategy of unmasking.” It is this finality itself

⁷⁸ In *God and Power*, Keller draws upon her extensive deconstructive reading of the Book of Revelation and its apocalypse detailed in *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997) for both her use of concepts such as antiapocalypse and counterapocalypse, as well as her integration of Derridian messianism.

⁷⁹ Keller does not refer to Schmitt in the text under consideration in this section. However, she is more recently directly engaging his work, particularly in her forthcoming “Toward a Political Theology of the Earth,” in her forthcoming *Intercarnations: Exercises in Theological Possibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). Further, although the logic of the One is not a focal point of the present dissertation, the concept of indivisibility (i.e. unity) is central to sovereignty. For example, see Derrida, *Rogues*, xiv. Also, please refer to the above argumentation that Schmitt intended a single (male) person as sovereign, and Benjamin’s subsequent critique of Schmittian sovereignty by demonstrating the sovereign’s lack of unity of character.

which Keller hopes to elude in her final chapter, in which she turns back to the beginning:

We may read the world itself as *genesis*, a great poem of becoming. Let us then seek clues for our *theopolitics*—for the way change is initiated, the way a beginning is made—in the *theopolitics* of creation (136).

This is a decisive break with the general trajectory of the discourse in political theology, which primarily concerns itself with ends. And if seeking ends—whether in terms of the lasting order of a final conclusion (Keller’s concern here) or in terms of morally valid ends that justify violence (the focus of Benjamin’s critique in “Critique of Violence”)—brings us inevitably to disastrous disappointment in the power of apocalyptic fantasy to materialize as paradise, then perhaps contaminating our vision of a finally purified social order with the messy chaos of beginnings might hold more promise. All the more so because due to “the inescapably reciprocal character of the continuum of relations, the warrior messiah” who comes to clean up the sinful, fallen world “ends up making his own bloody mess,” Keller insists, using terminology evocative of Benjamin’s description of mythic violence (139). Significantly, seeking purified endings only brings more chaos.

But in order for Genesis to generate more fecund theopolitics, first its purity must also be contaminated with chaos—and Keller’s point is that the purity of Genesis has always already been contaminated with chaos, right there in the first two verses of Genesis. This chaos was “swept under the carpet of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*” (138). This “creation from nothing” was conjured as

a way to preserve divine omnipotence. This submersion of chaos both reflected and fueled what Keller terms *tehomophobia*, or fear of chaos.

This *tehomophobia* in turn fuels politically oppressive regimes in the name of order. She turns to Hobbes, whom she notes serves as resource for “the present regime”—that being the post-9/11 years of the Bush administration, during which *God and Power* was written. As did Schmitt after him, Hobbes believed that “however much destruction the state sovereignty inflicts, it is always superior to the alternative, defined, of course, as chaos or the war of all against all” (142). Hobbes argues that only Leviathan can protect against chaos, but Keller notes that this image of Leviathan “does not at all correspond to its biblical antecedent” (142). In scriptural texts, Leviathan *is* the chaos monster, not the guarantor of order. She illuminates Hobbes’ willingness to endorse the monstrous under the pretense that it will result in order:

In Hobbes’s twisted exegesis of Job we glimpse the (il)logic of theopolitics: an all-powerful order is always preferable to ‘chaos,’ even if the order proves to *be* the very monster of chaos!...So if the ideal state *is* the Leviathan, redefined as the violent imposition of order, then no wonder the destructive chaos produces, for example, by the United States in Iraq can be scripted as the creation of order, since order after all is the most violent monster (142).

Although she nowhere cites Schmitt, the above critique of Hobbes further erodes the ground on which Schmitt stands. For Schmitt draws support for his political vision from Hobbes, above all. And if any regime draws support for their tactics via “successful advocacy” of Hobbesian “violent imposition of order,” perhaps we had best note the Schmittian connection to both Hobbes and fascism.

Fascism elicits powerful resistance to its totalizing brutality. Ultimately the fascist regime will fall—either consequent to internal rebellion, military defeat or some

combination of the two—leaving survivors to grapple with the chaos that remains. But even though empires new and old may leave wreckage in their aftermath, we need not fear (too much). While Hobbes may have viewed Leviathan as consonant with the “violent imposition of order,” this is not true of the author of Job: “Job’s Leviathan suggests neither the terrorizing hegemony of a state nor the terrorist extremities of resistance” (142). Fortunately, luring complexity out of chaos is God’s specialty as evidenced by Job’s depiction of God in the whirlwind—a figure representative for Keller of “the turbulent emergence of complexity at the edge of chaos” (144). This is a God who arguably created Leviathan not as adversary, but as something of a playmate.⁸⁰

The Western vision of Leviathan and chaos are presented by Keller as “projects of a primal relation, an originative connection to the chaos” (145). Although this connection has been suppressed or feared for millennia, Keller invites us to, “in a risky and ultimately creative sense,” embrace it. This embrace is described by Keller as *tehomophilia*. Keller observes that the reading of Genesis is troubled anew by readings of old—readings such as eleventh century French rabbi Rashi’s, in which the “linear order” of the process of creation is syntactically broken up. Once this linearity is disrupted, “the entire process of creation reads as *co-creation*” (145). We are invited back to this originary moment, to some degree present in all moments:

Then feel again the intimate vibration of God the Spirit upon the face of the deep: not as polytheistic regression, but as a *theopolitical* repudiation of the Marduk style of imperial Order. Might *tehom* signify an unrealized depth of reality, an infinite *theopoetic* potentiality that may become good or evil in its actualizations but is the ‘stuff’ from which all things come (145)?

⁸⁰ Here linked to Keller’s statement that “the rabbis have emphasized certain ambiguity of the Hebrew: verse 26 [of Psalm 104] can be translated ‘Leviathan that you formed to sport *with* you.’” page 145

This observation that creation emerges from the depths prompts Keller to ask a very important question: "Can a "tehomie theology help our culture outgrow the violent certainties and messianic innocence of its 'simple faith'?" (147). Here, although she does not cite Benjamin, her remarks are resonant with his closing remarks in "Critique of Violence." We are never certain, until after the fact, but yet we remain responsible.

Both Keller and Benjamin argue that we cannot be certain and must outgrow the need for certainty. Keller takes this a step further: we are connected to one another, despite our differences. Our differences are not read as "cuts" or absolute distinctions; they are read as the folding together of "differential relations" (148). Cuts and folds and differential relations will resurface elsewhere in this dissertation, in our engagements with Barad's agential realism and Latour's political ecology.

Keller concludes that "a constructive theology of becoming sustains a political theology of love," and is subsequently noteworthy as one of the few political theorists not to rest on the messianic, but rather on the creative. What she might mean by "political theology of love" is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explicate. Perhaps one might draw inferences from the age-old equation of food with love, and sketch one's theopolitics of food as an extension of a political theology of love. But that is not the direction this dissertation will take.

This dissertation is focused upon a politics of food in light of food's materiality, and as such recognizes the reliance of food upon ecosystems—creation, if you will. And given that creation emerges from chaos, and chaos results from an excess of order, one

might wonder if instead of, or alongside, a linear narrative of “recovery” of Eden—a narrative which implicitly buys into the apocalyptic as salvific and necessary—one might begin to think of (re)creation from chaos, keeping in mind that creation will always use, and thus contain a trace of, the chaos inherent in the old forms. What might happen if we purge ourselves of purity while yet shouldering the weight of the world? Might we want to reimagine the political task—in which we are all of us engaged at all times—as that of continual re-creation of the world rather than the search for a final solution that will stabilize conditions once and for all?

Clayton Crockett: Radical Political Theology

If Keller’s *God and Power* can be said to approach political theology from a theological perspective—that is to say, a perspective arising from her commitment to a particular community and a particular text, Clayton Crockett’s *Radical Political Theology* can be said to approach political theology from an atheological perspective—that is to say, a perspective arising from his commitment to at least *passing* as an atheist.⁸¹ His is, in his own words, a “radical theological” approach, emerging from the death of God theologies and attached to the academy, but detached from ecclesiastical or pastoral commitments (10-11). The death of God, he notes, results from the recognition of “God’s complicity” in human projects which “often produce immoral and brutal results,” and subsequently can be understood as “the result of a genuine theological yearning for God, not simply a cynical and self-serving pronouncement” (14).

⁸¹ Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) 16.

In the wake of the death of God, three possibilities remain. The first is to “discard theology as a viable mode of intelligible discourse,” due to its lack of credible referent, but Crockett finds no other intellectual discourse with a more credible referent capable of addressing discuss ultimacy.⁸² The second would be to “resurrect the God who is dead, to restore God as an object of belief” but the death of God renders this more of a denial than a reality (15). The third option is to “substitute for God other names in a complex metaphorical or dialectical interplay of meanings and significations,” such that one can “quite rightly pass for an atheist” (16). Crockett opts for the third, and suggests that such passing for an atheist allows him to stage, “in the course of a radical political theology, pragmatic interventions into contemporary theoretical thinking about the intersections of religion and politics” (16).

Crockett self-consciously recognizes that even secular political theory cannot be purged of theological concepts, such that “we cannot fully separate or distinguish political philosophy from political theology” (2). The political philosophical concept Crockett investigates is freedom, which he insists does not exist in any absolute sense. But according to Crockett the perennial quest for freedom lays bare the myriad ways in which our lives are bound by material, biological, and sociopolitical factors. Yet freedom exists as potentiality, and it is precisely this freedom as potentiality that Crockett sees as “the theological problem of our time” (22). This freedom “takes the form of potentiality in Agamben, the virtual in Deleuze, and potentia as constituting power in Negri...Radical theology’s epistemological and political task is to think freedom” (22). To that end, in full awareness of the mutual contamination of theological and political constructs, Crockett argues that “sovereign power must be seen as political and theological at the

⁸² Ibid., 15; Crockett dismisses philosophy, ethics and morals as equally lacking a credible referent.

same time and must be countered theologically and politically” (23). In recognizing this mutual contamination and subsequent two-pronged task, his project is resonant with my own intent.

In his desire to undermine Schmittian sovereignty, Crockett’s project is also resonant with the efforts of food activists, as we shall see. However, I fear his efforts might simultaneously pose a *challenge* to those same food activists despite the fact that both Crockett and these food activists ultimately call for a radical democracy. In his urge to “resist positive sovereign power in both political and theological terms” Crockett insists that “sovereignty, if it can still be called sovereign, will be seen as the ‘power not to,’ the ability to resist exercising positive power” (45). While on the one hand this could make sense for food activists demanding food sovereignty insofar as they desire the “power not to” engage in agribusiness as usual. But on the other hand, this seems to subtly contrast their claim for the freedom to farm agroecologically. And what I mean to say here is that it is not enough to claim that a legitimate sovereignty is the “power not to do,” we must insist legitimate sovereignty might also be configured as *the power to do otherwise*.

By careful argumentation, Crockett demonstrates that popular sovereignty is theoretically derivative of “absolute, monarchical sovereignty because it is the unitary will of the people that is sovereign, not the individual whims of the multitude” (46). The people, with presumably unitary will, is represented by a single agent, who is thus considered—at least by Hobbes, as Crockett demonstrates—*the* sovereign.⁸³

⁸³ As will become evident in chapter six, Crockett is not alone in identifying a crucial unity to the concept of sovereignty even when it is applied to democracies—at least in theory. In reality, it is commonly recognized that some degree of disunity exists at least insofar as more than one candidate received votes. This may reflect the challenges of applying a theory to a concrete reality, in which event there is seldom a

Subsequently, for Crockett, “democracy is a step in the direction of multiplicity, but in its classical liberal form it is entangled in a univocal sovereignty, the popular sovereignty of a general will or a united state(s) or people” (55). However, this version of sovereignty is first of all different from the sovereign as “he who decides upon the exception,” and second of all presumes greater unity of “the people” than can be actually verified. But at any rate, these claims to sovereignty, Crockett suggests, all rest upon the sovereignty of God which Crockett argues “is intrinsically connected to the oneness of God” (47). Thus, Crockett wants to “think God as other than sovereign...other than as one” (49).

But Crockett’s challenge to popular sovereignty by demonstrating its derivation from “absolute, monarchical sovereignty” pales in comparison to the effacement of popular sovereignty in today’s political landscape, in which political power is “mediated and mediatized in complex ways that render the will of the people impotent and irrelevant to the will of corporations” (46). Thus, sovereignty has been wrested from “the people”—whether or not they had any right to claim such sovereignty in the first place—and “can be seen as divided between a more naked military force and more subtle sovereign wealth, or money” (46). But if sovereignty is reliant upon unification, how are we to understand *this* division? Although Crockett does not address that particular question, he does seek to undermine both of these abusive powers. He clarifies the inappropriateness of merely substituting these abusive powers with another power—whether the power of the people or any other. Instead, “a radical political theology...calls into question all power, including that of God” (47).

one hundred percent overlap. Yet it is important to note that this presumption of unity is implicit in political theories of sovereignty as will be described in more detail in chapter six.

In later portions of his book, it becomes clear that Crockett is not opposed to democracy as such, but is decidedly troubled by *liberal* democracy, much like Schmitt. Unlike Schmitt, Crockett hopes to construct a political theology supportive of radical democracy, a democracy independent of claims to sovereignty, a democracy that does not rely upon the notions of a nation. This does not quite yet create an opening into which the food sovereignty movement can move. And it may turn out that despite the profoundly engaged and inclusive methodology of the democratic approach used by the food sovereignty movement, this movement is overly reliant upon problematic conservative and/or liberal concepts to expect theoretical support from Crockett's new materialist radical political theology. But let us press onward to inquire of Crockett how this proposed radical democracy may differ from liberal democracy.

One of the most notable points of convergence between Crockett and the implicit philosophy of the food sovereignty movement emerges from Crockett's engagement of Spinoza as read by Antonio Negri. In short, this reading reveals that some element of Spinoza's concept of democracy remains "anomalous, unassimilable, or 'savage' to the modern liberal state...because for Spinoza this power operates more directly via the *potentia* of the multitude than indirectly through parliamentary councils."⁸⁴ *Potentia* can be read as a distributed, immanent power possessed and exercised by "the people," as contrasted to *Potestas*, or the concentrated, transcendent power of the sovereign. Swerving democracy in a more radical, less liberal direction evocative of Spinoza's "savage" democracy, Crockett advocates the addition of three concepts: governmentality,

⁸⁴ Clayton Crockett and Jeffrey W Robbins, *Religion, Politics, and the Earth: The New Materialism*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). 98.

equality, plasticity, as construed by Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, and Catherine Malabou, respectively.

The concept of governmentality introduced by Foucault, along with his concept of “‘counter-conducts’ against the state” allows Crockett to envision governmental forms and decisions not as final but as provisional, insofar as the governmental forms are no longer perceived as “indefinite.”⁸⁵ This governmentality requires an ongoing “counter-conduct or counter-governmentality that serves radical democratic action and takes a religious or quasireligious form, whether or not it has a determinate religious content” (102).

To this is added Rancière’s concept of equality which wrests the power to govern from “the sovereign power of the majority or the population” and redistributes it to “anyone at all” (103). Equality, for Crockett, becomes a religious and specifically eschatological “presupposition” that assures “a religious right of indefinite revolt against inequality in the name of God, or justice, or freedom, or whatever other name is invoked” to rob the populace of its power (104).

And finally, Malabou’s plasticity, a concept derived conceptually from the phenomenon referred to as neuroplasticity—a term referring to the manner in which neurons change their forms and their connections over time in response to firing patterns. This neuroplasticity calls attention to the non-determined elements of our biology and thus our futurity. This non-determination implies freedom, including freedom of form. Furthermore, Crockett notes that Malabou overtly draws a connection between neuroplasticity and “politics and names it in a radically decentralized and democratic way” (105). He clarifies that “human society is plastic not *because* human brains are

⁸⁵ Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, 102.

neuroplastic, but human plasticity is our social brain, our ability to think and act” (106). This capacity becomes vitally important in the context of socioeconomic inequalities, climate change, and resource scarcity. It is Crockett’s hope that social plasticity might prevent “the struggle for diminishing resources” from “transmut[ing] liberal capitalism into something more akin to fascism” through a commitment to “material equality and willing[ness] to experiment with new forms of governmentality” (106-107).

Crockett might be disinclined to lend support to the food sovereignty movement, which operates via the radically democratic processes he and other political theologians support, on the basis of its call for increased *national* sovereignty, a concept to which many progressive political theologians and political theorists are opposed.⁸⁶ But perhaps Crockett’s perspective is more nuanced. For example, he makes the following, somewhat enigmatic, statement:

The modern nation-state is the locus of representative liberal democracy; to think democracy radically, we must think and practice democracy beyond or without the state as its precondition. This does not mean that states do not or will not continue to exist, but democracy cannot be shackled to the state (104).

Perhaps what Crockett intends here is for the democratic process itself to result in decisions which the sovereign authority of the state might find objectionable. This might provide precisely the opening into which the food sovereignty movement can insert its form of radical democracy that demands action on the part of their national “sovereign” leaders, and demands recognition of their nation’s legitimate claims to self-determination in the eyes of international decision-making bodies.

⁸⁶ Crockett is troubled by popular sovereignty (46), democratic sovereignty (48), and asserts that “sovereignty, like God, does not exist” (76).

In *Religion, Politics, and the Earth: The New Materialism* coauthored with Jeffrey W. Robbins, Crockett and Robbins define “the task of politics from the perspective of the New Materialism” as that of doing “politics from the perspective of no authority, no power, no norm to which we can appeal beyond the self-governing rule that we are all in this together, that it is our very togetherness that is the basis of politics per se.”⁸⁷ According to them, any concept that seeks to deny this “represents a threat of violence against us all.” Subsequently, “a new materialist politics,” in conjunction with Crockett’s radical political theology, “would be people taking the power that is already theirs. It is the dream of democracy whereby the people might decide our own destiny.”⁸⁸ I will argue, with the assistance of Bruno Latour in later chapters, that in order to take this power, “the people” must become not only more politically engaged, but more ecologically and scientifically informed.

Conclusion

The political significance of the food sovereignty movement is elucidated by situating this movement in the historical trajectory of the concept of sovereignty. The significance of this concept itself is greatly clarified by recognition of its theological undertones, as the concept relies heavily upon secularized theological concepts such that the political and the theological cannot be neatly distinguished. Liberal democracy has been problematic both as construct and lived reality by thinkers both right and left, exemplified by Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin respectively. But while these thinkers concur that liberal democracy poses significant dangers, they starkly disagree as to how those weaknesses can be remedied.

⁸⁷ Crockett and Robbins, *Religion, Politics, and the Earth*, 53.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Carl Schmitt's response was to reinforce the sovereign as a sole decision-maker capable of restoring and preserving the unity of the state, enacting a secularized version of an orthodox theology.⁸⁹ But an orthodox theological concept cannot necessarily be transposed onto a human sovereign, a point to which Benjamin alludes in his deconstruction of Schmittian sovereignty. Benjamin asserts that sovereign power is mythological and therefore illegitimate. He also argues that the sovereign is incapable of deciding, and when faced with the forces of nature the result is a permanent state of exception. These points of contention will be central to the exploration of food politics in the context of climate change.

The conversation initiated by Schmitt and Benjamin in the 1920s and 30s has been reawakened in the aftermath of the 9/11 bombings. Catherine Keller gestures towards a political theology of love with an orientation toward re-beginnings. This holds promise as societies must grapple with degraded ecosystems. Clayton Crockett's radical political theology demonstrates some of the critiques currently leveled at not only Schmittian sovereignty, but also popular sovereignty. Problematically, these critiques are potentially applicable to the demands of the food sovereignty movement. These critiques would apply because the movement demands sovereignty for their respective nation states, a political form closely aligned with the concept of sovereignty. At this juncture, a closer examination of the motions of power and the relationship of these motions of power to the concept of Schmittian sovereignty is in order.

⁸⁹ This version of a figure external to a given order, authorized to suspend the rules of that order so as to assure preservation in the face of an existential threat will be referred to as "strong sovereignty," "unilateral," "top-down," "absolute," or "Schmittian sovereignty" throughout this dissertation to distinguish it from the type of sovereignty espoused by the food sovereignty movement or the type of nonsovereign sovereignty described by Crockett.

Chapter 2

Food Drives: Global Food Trade and the Sovereign State

Introduction

While naturally there is a distinction between theory and activism, theories seek enactment and the paradoxical enactments of sovereignty currently observed in food politics seek theoretical explanation. As philosopher Alfred North Whitehead observed, “the true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation.”¹ The present chapter could be considered a landing of the plane, touching down in the fields of agricultural production and distribution to more acutely observe the politics of food in light of the discourse on sovereignty by political theologians. The transition from theory to reality is a messy one; there is no neatly paved landing strip permitting a smooth landing. Touchdown is bumpy; theoretical abstractions do not neatly map onto specific realities and initial contact can be jarring.

Thus this chapter traces motions of power as revealed by decision-making in transnational global food politics relative to the concept of sovereignty and its many inconsistencies. This tracing shall occur by spiraling through several historical perspectives on the entanglements between food trade and national sovereignty. Each successive loop will bring us closer to our contemporary context and increase in detail and specificity. Particular emphasis will be placed on resonances and dissonances with a unilateral, top-down sovereignty as described in the previous chapter. The primary

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality, 3rd Edition*, (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 5.

emphasis of the present chapter will be upon situating the contemporary discursive frames of “food security” and “food sovereignty” within the historical trajectory of transnational global food trade and examining their rhetorical usage and political-economic enactments of the concept of sovereignty.

Distinguishing between rhetorical framing and political enactments reveals the paradoxical nature of the contemporary landscape of food politics. For example, the language of “security” is clearly the focal point of the “food security” frame, and sovereignty is nowhere mentioned. Further, this frame is endorsed by nations known for their commitment to democratic processes, such as the United States. But yet the enactment of this frame, as explicated by the notion of “food regimes” popularized by Philip McMichael and Harriet Friedmann, occurs in the context of what they refer to as the “corporate food regime.” This regime demonstrates an inclination toward a version of Schmittian sovereignty that has become displaced onto transnational agencies and corporations and enacted economically rather than militarily.²

By contrast, the “food sovereignty” frame is attached to the concept of a sovereign nation-state capable of protecting the rights and freedoms of those in the “food sovereignty” movement. Yet the processes by which this movement organizes are radically democratic, inclusive of voices that are typically unheard by those operating in the “food security” frame: landless peasants and women. Their commitment to radically inclusive democratic processes would find support from liberal and progressive political theologians, but their reliance upon a nation-state to protect their rights would be challenged by these same thinkers.

² And here it is important to note that the multilateral agencies and corporations are not formed democratically and do not function in a transparent manner nor are they generally accountable to a public.

Global food trade predates the development of the nation-state, and international food trade predates the emergence of the food security frame or what might be considered the food sovereignty counterframe. Thus, this chapter will begin to examine the imbrication of food politics with nation-state politics beginning in the early modern period, before the rise of the nation-state, and continue through the present time using the concept of “food regimes” as articulated by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael. These regimes become attached to particular rhetorical frames. These frames receive fuller attention in the midsection of this chapter, as will the models of reality that inform them.

Food Regimes and the Sovereign State

Postcolonial anthropologist Akhil Gupta’s essay “A Different History of the Present: The movement of crops, cuisines, and globalization” questions why the role of food and foodstuffs in globalization remains underappreciated in scholarly discourse. Gupta asserts that the concept of national sovereignty “was formulated in an historical context in which rule over colonial territories and the division of such lands was already a subject of some concern to European states.”³ Central to these concerns was the trade in spices such as cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and sugar and beverages such as tea and coffee. Gupta argues that “without understanding the conflicts over spices (including sugar), one cannot understand global geopolitics” of the period from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, “nor can one appreciate the rich history of global connections before the rise of

³ (Gupta 2012) 39

the sovereign states.”⁴ It is not surprising that the centuries-long transition from medieval monarchies to sovereign nation-states was accompanied by theologically-tinged political mythmaking intended to support the concept of national sovereignty.⁵ What *is* surprising is that the role of global food trade remains to this day unexplored in the discursive field of political theology.

According to Gupta, food trade continues to shape geopolitics. He persuasively argues that historically food trade gave rise to the need to establish legitimate rule of bounded territories, and thus the sovereign nation. By contrast, in the current geopolitical landscape food is integrally interwoven into the globalization processes that have opened a gap “between the territorially expansive reorganization of capital on a global scale and the nationally limited character of state regulation and of labor organization.”⁶ In other words, whereas at one time trade in food products was a driving force behind the development of sovereign nations and the traditional (Schmittian) model of sovereignty upon which nation states depend, at present the concept of national sovereignty poses a threat to global food trade. At the outset, the concept of territorial boundaries fostered consolidation of power over global agricultural processes, at present such boundaries pose an obstacle to such consolidation. Thus, global food trade at present no longer drives the formation of the nation-state but rather undermines the legitimacy of the nation-states already formed.

⁴ (Gupta 2012) 38

⁵ Kantorowicz, Ernst. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Kantorowicz wrote his study in large part as response to Carl Schmitt, despite not directly addressing Schmitt's work according to Victoria Kahn, “Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies*.” *Representations*. (Spring 2009):77-101

⁶ Akhil Gupta, "A Different History of the Present: The Movement of Crops, Cuisines, and Globalization," in *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia*, by Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 35.

This is because, as Gupta argues, “globalization is best seen not as a set of flows, but pathways for transactions or exchanges that depend on the reconfiguration of existing structural and social conditions” (32). These pathways, in which food has always figured prominently, “ensure that flows are highly unequal and asymmetrical” (32). Gupta remarks that “only in a few nation-states in the First and Second Worlds was the sovereign, territorial state and the provisioning of social welfare a convincing fiction to the majority of their populations” (34). Could it be that this chasm between “convincing fiction” and “unconvincing fiction” is what separates the Global North political theology discourse on sovereignty and the nation state from the demands of the peasant farmers of the Global South who are demanding not the (further) dismemberment of their nation state, but rather the fortification of its legal boundaries?⁷

Despite Gupta’s critiques of the “fiction” of national sovereignty—and the critiques of national sovereignty leveled by radical political theologians—one wonders whether there could be a kernel of truth underneath the fiction of national sovereignty, a kernel that threatens to gum up the gears of an ever more totalizing form of sovereignty. Could it be that whereas at one time the asymmetry of these flows was predicated upon the concept of national sovereignty, such asymmetry now relies upon the dissolution of this concept? In other words, is there some way in which the concept of national

⁷ The Global North-Global South terminology is something of a blunt instrument, an overgeneralization concealing numerous identifiers of social location not the least of which is the fact that there are members of the “Global South” inhabiting the geographic territories of the “Global North.” In no way is my use of this terminology to be confused with a statement that such a binary generality of identity in fact observable. It is merely a shorthand for a cluster of social location markers generally “recognizable” in academic discourse. In fact, it is a shorthand that surfaces routinely in food studies literature. Yet it must be emphasized that “Global North” is more accurately a terminology of status, rather than geographic location. There are those from the geographic “Global South” currently living in the Global North, such as undocumented farm laborers from Latin America. Furthermore, there are those whose life circumstances are more akin to those we typically imagine prevail in the Global South. For example, on the Navajo reservation, vast numbers of people live without running water or electricity, conditions we do not typically associate with the United States as a Global North country.

sovereignty simultaneously props up lethal totalitarian regimes yet *also* provides a stop-gap measure against an even *more* totalizing, absolute global sovereignty? And further, could it be the case that social location vis a vis the “Global North/Global South divide” underlies the different perspectives on sovereignty held by radical political theologians and those in the food sovereignty movement? Let us press on, and see what answers emerge to these questions.

The concept of “food regimes” detailed in a 1989 article by Harriet Friedman and Philip McMichael facilitates the exploration of the interrelationships between global food trade and geopolitical developments. The concept of a “food regime” as they describe it refers to “the political and economic structures that undergird successive periods of stability within the world food system.”⁸ Rather than portray food regimes as monoliths Friedman and McMichael pry open the internal inconsistencies which ultimately “produce crisis, transformation, and transition.”⁹ One might conjecture that these internal inconsistencies represent the tensions between the various “globalizations” to which Gupta referred in his essay, discussed above. However, it should be noted that their analysis does not reach quite as far back into history as does Gupta’s. Whereas Gupta addresses the monarchical era prior to the development of states, Friedman and McMichael’s analysis begins in the mid-nineteenth century when nation-state development was already proceeding via colonialism.¹⁰

⁸ Madeleine Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance: International Food Regimes and the Roots of Food Sovereignty,” in *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community*, by Hanna Wittman, Annette Aurelie Desmarais and Nettie Wiebe (Oakland: Food First Books, 2010) 15.

⁹ Philip McMichael, “A food regime genealogy.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2009): 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

The first regime identified by Friedmann and McMichael begins approximately 1870 and lasts until just prior to World War I.¹¹ They refer to this regime alternately as the “colonial-diasporic”¹² or “British hegemonic.”¹³ The interwar period was not characterized by a regime, as policies and practices never reached that degree of consolidation. The next regime to consolidate does so in the 1940s and 1950s, and is referred to as “the surplus regime,”¹⁴ or the “post-war regime,”¹⁵ and is associated with U.S. hegemony.¹⁶ These first two regimes occur during the period of time in which the nation-states were developing and consolidating. The postwar regime was disrupted by food crisis of 1972 giving rise to our current regime, which is referred to as the “corporate food regime.”¹⁷ The concept of the food regime underscores “the pivotal role of food in global political-economy.” and corresponds to the development of globalization elsewhere noted by Gupta.¹⁸

According to McMichael, the British hegemonic food regime was based upon the import of colonial tropical foods as well as staple foods from settler colonies to Europe in order to provide the European industrial classes with cheap food.¹⁹ This effectively "re-divided the world economy into vertical power blocs, subordinating agricultural

¹¹ The end date for this first regime varies, and is contingent upon whether one considers the instability to be internal to the regime or to mark a transitional period. The regime concept continues to evolve in its depiction of these periods.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³ Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance,” 18.

¹⁴ Harriet Friedmann, “International Political Economy of Food: A Global Crisis,” *New Left Review*, no. 197 (Jan/Feb 1993): 32

¹⁵ Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance,” 18.

¹⁶ McMichael, “Food Regime Geneology,” 146.

¹⁷ Philip McMichael, “Global development and the corporate food regime,” *Symposium on New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development*, (Trondheim: XI World Congress of Rural Sociology, 2004): 1

¹⁸ McMichael, “Food Regime Geneology,” 140.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

hinterland to industrial metropole.”²⁰ This exemplifies the asymmetrical flow mentioned by Gupta: centralized economic power drew resources from subordinate colonies with disproportionately low investment of resources flowing toward these colonies.

In the United States, this period witnessed the seamless integration of a national agricultural system with the industrial sectors consuming the agricultural products, allowing for a great deal of self-sufficiency. This model of integrated development characterized by internal relations of production and consumption of agricultural products came to represent the developmental model of the postwar era.²¹ During this era, temporally correlated with the postwar food regime, “U.S. grain exports, often in the form of food aid, underwrote the completion of the state system in the previously colonized regions.”²² Thus, during this period the transformation of former colonies into independent nations relationships between sectors internal to each economy were restructured.²³

This postwar food regime was operated by unspoken rules which simultaneously replicated and buttressed shifting balances in international power, the motions of which resulted in "a stable pattern of production and power that lasted for two and a half decades."²⁴ During this period, national regulation was prioritized, authorizing both "import controls and export subsidies" resulting in perpetual surpluses of agricultural products. Subsequently, surplus commodities were used as a tool to "restructure international trade and production in one state's favour" (31). Thus, agriculture became

²⁰ Harriet Friedmann, and Philip McMichael, "Agriculture and the State System: The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to the present," *Sociologia Ruralis* XXIX, no. 2 (1989): 98.

²¹ See Friedmann and McMichael, "Agriculture and the State System," and Friedmann, "International Political Economy of Food."

²² Friedman and McMichael, "Agriculture and the State System," 94.

²³ *Ibid.*, 98

²⁴ Friedmann, "International Political Economy of Food," 31.

not only "central to the world economy" but central to international relations as well. Eventually, "food aid...came...to express intense international conflicts" (32). As we will see, while at one time food aid consolidated international relations, it presently serves to force developing nations to adopt neoliberal economic policies that perpetuate asymmetrical flows of power.

The postwar regime began to falter in the early 1970s, when explosive demand coupled with a precipitous decline in production led to a food crisis. Compounding the problem, the food shortage occurred simultaneously to financial and oil crisis (31). At that time developing nations had become caught in a trap: they'd become dependent upon cheap imported food, and they were losing revenue on export crops, particularly when high-fructose corn syrup and corn oils replaced sugar and palm oils.²⁵ In the wake of a grain deal between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. that removed vast quantities of grain from the international market food prices tripled between 1972 and 1974.²⁶ An oil crisis occurred at the same time, driving oil prices to triple as well. Developing nations found themselves facing severe food shortages. Borrowing money on the international market, rather than directly addressing the deeper issue of dependence on imported food, helped these nations remain afloat through the food shortage. However, when the world economic situation deteriorated in the 1980s, these countries faced situations in which these debts became due and they were forced to agree to International Monetary Fund and World Bank conditions imposed upon them in various structural adjustment programs (SAPs) (25).

²⁵ William D. Schanbacher, *The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict between Food Security and Food Sovereignty*. (Denver: Praeger Security International, 2010), 20.

²⁶ Schanbacher, *The Politics of Food*" 20.

Simultaneous to these processes in developing nations, it has become the case that “American agriculture increasingly [supplies] not final consumers...but inputs to corporations manufacturing and distributing foods internationally”²⁷ Since the 1970s, the restructuring of agriculture in the U.S. and abroad has primarily occurred “in response to the demand by transnational agro-food corporations for inputs to manufacturing and distribution networks,” rather than in response to national interest. Although these corporations are largely U.S. led, their rise in power and the policies underwritten by transnational corporations has seriously “undercut the independent capacities of states to regulate domestic production and trade”²⁸ a development which “casts doubts on the very idea of nations as an organizing principle of the world economy.”²⁹

What the perspective of food regimes clarifies is the profound entanglement of global food trade with the consolidation of the nation state system, and also with the current “crisis of representation” attributed to that system. This is because global trade in food has underwritten two paradoxical developments over the past century and a half. On the one hand, global trade in food is closely associated with the “culmination of the colonial organization...and the rise of the nation-state system” throughout the British hegemonic and postwar regimes (95). On the other hand, the corporate food regime has heralded the “completion of the state system through decolonization and its simultaneous weakening through the transnational restructuring of agricultural sectors by agro-food capitals” (95). Thus, it certainly seems that whereas at one time asymmetrical flows power and capital were predicated upon the concept of national sovereignty, such asymmetry now relies upon the dissolution of this concept.

²⁷ Friedmann and McMichael, “Agriculture and the State System,” 111.

²⁸ Friedmann, “International Political Economy of Food,” 94.

²⁹ Friedmann and McMichael, “Agriculture and the State System,” 111.

The trajectory of the first set of processes—toward the consolidation of nation states—would by definition seem to closely align motions of power in food politics with deployments of Schmittian sovereignty. It is more challenging to connect these motions of power with deployments of sovereignty in the context of weakening state sovereignty; who, in this scenario, is the sovereign? Demonstrating that such deployments in fact occur despite no obvious claim to such sovereignty will be my task below, in conjunction with the task of demonstrating that the motions of power in secular food politics are animated by theological remnants. But these arguments become more compelling and comprehensible when political frame buttressing the corporate food regime and food sovereignty movement are considered.

Political Frames: Rhetorical Strategy and Expression of Worldview

The work of sociologist Madeleine Fairbairn will assist in this endeavor. Fairbairn conjoins Friedmann and McMichael's concept of food regimes, with the concept of "framing" as described by Robert Benford and David Snow's to describe the deployment of language and ideas on the part of social movements in order to "mobilize support for their efforts."³⁰ Collectively, the concepts of "regime" and "frame" encompass both the practices and the worldview involved in the food movements. The concepts of both regime and frame are necessary in order to sketch a more complete portrait of not only which agricultural and distributive practices are promoted by the movements discussed in the present work, but the understanding of nature—both human and nonhuman—that animates their discourse.

³⁰ Fairbairn, "Framing Resistance," 15.

In our current, “corporate” regime, using Friedmann and McMichael’s terminology, the food security frame dominates the current political and economic landscape. This frame endorses the “capital-intensive, large-scale, highly mechanized agriculture with monocultures of crops and extensive use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, with intensive animal husbandry” deployed within the corporate food regime.³¹ In this chapter “the corporate food regime” and “the food security frame” will be used interchangeably to refer to this constellation of political and economic structures, ideological commitments, and rhetorical strategies.

According to Madeleine Fairbairn, the food security frame “first entered into the official discourse in the report of the World Food Conference of 1974...hosted by the [Food and Agriculture Organization] FAO in Rome.”³² The conference culminated in a call for International Undertaking on World Food Security, which, she argues, “was conceptualized in the corridors of global power; thus while it attempts to remedy a faulty system, it does so without questioning the dominant political-economic wisdom” (22). Initially this discourse was “rooted in the ideology of the failing postwar food regime” and relied upon powerful nation-states to provide food security for their citizens. However, as the postwar regime collapsed, “new structures and ideologies would soon emerge,” transforming the conceptual underpinnings of the rhetorical frame” (23).

This dramatic transformation in the food security frame occurred in the 1980s in the wake of Amartya Sen’s 1981 *Poverty and Famines*, which demonstrated that economic ability to purchase food was a more significant factor in access to food than the

³¹ Curtis E. Beus, and Riley Dunlap, "Conventional versus Alternative Agriculture: The Paradigmatic Roots of the Debate," *Rural Sociology* (1990): 594.

³² Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance,” 22.

physical availability of food on a local or national level.³³ Sen's analysis demonstrated that national plenitude or shortage of food did not affect all groups of people within that nation equally. Instead, differential access to food within a nation reflected different "commanding powers over food" experienced by different groups. The commanding powers were found to be economic in nature, and "lack of purchasing power" rendered one vulnerable to food shortage individually regardless of global food production or national food availability.³⁴

Sen's analysis, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics, shifted the understanding of food security to one that emphasized "individual access" over "national-level availability."³⁵ Despite Sen's clear statement that "firm believers in the market are often disappointed by the failure of the market to deliver much" in the way of food to the hungry, Fairbairn observes that neoliberal market economics were endorsed by the food security frame as a means of improving individual economic status and subsequent access to food.³⁶ Consequently, the food security frame "strongly reflects the neoliberal discourse and structure of the globalization project and nascent corporate food regime."³⁷ Thus the food security frame shifted from one in which nations were responsible for food security to one in which individual consumers became responsible for their own food security.

Although in many ways Fairbairn marks the shift toward emphasis on individual access to food as "an advance in the definition and measurement of food security" it

³³ Fairbairn, "Framing Resistance," 24; Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³⁴ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 43 and 161.

³⁵ Fairbairn, "Framing Resistance," 24.

³⁶ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 160; Fairbairn "Framing Resistance," 24.

³⁷ Fairbairn, "Framing Resistance," 24.

nonetheless frames food security in terms of “micro-economic choices facing individuals in a free market, rather than the policy choices facing governments.”³⁸ What Fairbairn finds to be “the most striking manifestation of neoliberal logic within the household food security frame” is the effortless transformation of “the need for individual purchasing power...into a call for liberal trade policies.” She goes on to state that while Sen himself advocated “a combination of both market and public action to improve household food security” proponents of the food security frame vigorously assert that household incomes can only be adequately increased by the economic growth they insist results only from free markets.³⁹

Several frames have arisen to contest this frame, such as the food sustainability frame, the food sovereignty frame and the food justice frame. The frame of food sustainability is so poorly defined as to render it useful to proponents of the most radically polarized movements, food security and food sovereignty, yet in each instance it signifies something different.⁴⁰ Sustainable agriculture, by definition, aims to provide necessary food for the present generation without obstructing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.⁴¹ Problematically, sustainability is configured differently by agencies such as the World Bank, where it is conceived in primarily economic terms, than it is by those in the environmental movement, who are primarily oriented toward ecological principles.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁰ Eric Holt-Giminez, *Campesino a Campesino: Voices from Latin America's Farmer to Famer Movement for Sustainable Agriculture*, (Oakland: Food First Books, 2006) xv.

⁴¹ Holt-Giminez, *Campesino a Campesino*, xv.

⁴² The aforementioned (economic and ecological) represent two of the three pillars of sustainability. The third is social sustainability.

Holt-Giminez argues that “*sustainability* in and of itself is primarily a political and social concept—a normative framework within which to make decisions.” He goes on to suggest that the superficial consensus that sustainability is critically important to agricultural decision-making thus masks profound contestations over decision-making authority between institutions, agencies, businesses, countries, villages and families with disparate stakes in the outcome.⁴³ But because these areas of contestation are masked and the term glosses over the distinctive positions of various parties, food sustainability is losing traction as a mobilizing discourse.

The frame of food justice levels critiques at the differential access to adequate nutrition based upon issues such as race and class, while relying upon agricultural techniques developed within the food sovereignty movement to creating equal access to nutritious food.⁴⁴ According to Teresa M. Mares, the discursive frame of food justice draws inspiration from the movements for local food security while placing greater emphasis on the structural racism and classism that inflect access to healthy food and control of the land on which food is produced.⁴⁵ Yet Mares is troubled by the discursive strategies of some food justice proponents that rest upon notions of citizenship, arguing that such strategies presuppose a nation-state capable of guaranteeing citizenship rights. Omitted from much of this food justice discourse are the limitations of the concept of citizen itself, which she argues is a significant omission in the Global North as many who grow our food are stakeholders in agricultural processes but lack the protections afforded

⁴³ Holt-Giminez, *Campesino a Campesino* vvi.

⁴⁴ Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, Sustainability*, (Boston: MIT Press, 2011), 12.

⁴⁵ Teresa M. Mares, "Engaging Latino Immigrants in Seattle Food Activism through Urban Agriculture," in *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy, and Economy*, by Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 35.

to citizens by virtue of their immigration status, and are thus subject to rape, violence and other abuses.⁴⁶

Finally, the food sovereignty frame, with its emphasis on smaller, low-input farms and a radically democratic approach to agricultural decision making, appears to be attracting much attention as the leading rival to the food security frame and is named by Fairbairn as the first counter-frame with potential to undermine the corporate food regime.⁴⁷ This frame argues that the needs of food producers should take precedence over those of transnational agricultural corporations in agricultural decision-making.⁴⁸

The food sovereignty movement emerged in 1996, when the international peasant farmer's movement Via Campesina "launched a global call for *food sovereignty*" in protest against food security frame and the corporate food regime.⁴⁹ Food sovereignty, simply defined, "is the ability of countries and communities to control their own food supplies: to have a say in what is produced and under what conditions, and to have a say in what is imported and exported."⁵⁰ Thus, while food security is the frame of the global elite, food sovereignty is "the first frame created by the oppressed rather than the powerful in the world food systems" and is thus "unique in attempting to demolish the regime within which it arose and to construct an entirely new one in its place."⁵¹ But most significantly, "the movement is unique among current agrifood activism in the

⁴⁶ Mares, "Engaging Latino Immigrants," 35. Mares' comments are in reference to scholarship by Gerda Wekerle and Charles Levkoe. Wekerle argues that the "engaged citizenry" resulting from food justice organizing should be of interest to urban planners. Levkoe insists that the food justice movement can transform consumers into citizens.

⁴⁷ Fairbairn, "Framing Resistance," 27.

⁴⁸ Mares, "Engaging Latino Immigrants," 35.

⁴⁹ Eric Holt-Giminez, , and Raj Patel, *Food Rebellions! Crisi and the Hunger for Justice*, (Oakland: Food First Books, 2009), 2.

⁵⁰ Avery Cohn, et al. *Agroecology and the Struggle for Food Sovereignty in the Americas*, (New Haven: Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 2006), 20.

⁵¹ Fairbairn, "Framing Resistance," 27, 16.

extent to which it casts off the language of neoliberalism and creates a viable discursive alternative.”⁵² As we will see below, the discursive frame of the food sovereignty movement may reveal a radically different world view from that motivating the corporate regime/food security frame.

The “regime” advocated and enacted by proponents of the food sovereignty movement is negotiated at the grassroots level rather than among the political elites.⁵³ The agricultural methods typically deployed are variously described as low-input sustainable agriculture or agroecological methods. Agroecological methods are precisely tailored to the ecological milieu of the farm, with consideration for soil health, water, and native flora and fauna. In the *Campesino a Campesino* movement, operating under a food sovereignty frame, these methods are taught by farmers themselves in small group workshops.⁵⁴ The pedagogical methodology, although still a site of contestation, generally uses “demonstrations, games, and group activities...to teach a series of agroecological themes (small-scale experimentation, diversity-stability, fertility, integrated pest management, etc.)” (84). Rather than establishing hierarchical systems of training in which imported technology is taught by an expert, farmers are encouraged to experiment in their own fields so that “agroecosystem-specific knowledge for agricultural development” is produced “in situ” (89).

Because it rejects the globalization project and the corporate food regime, food sovereignty “can be seen as ‘counterframe’ to food security—an alternative schema for understanding the corporate food regime that is conditioned by the very different

⁵² Ibid., 16.

⁵³ Regime is in quotation marks, because the political and economic practices advocated by the food sovereignty movement lack the structure or authority characteristic of regimes.

⁵⁴ Holt Gimenez, *Campesino a Campesino*.

experience and interests of their framers.”⁵⁵ Rather than targeting corporations, food sovereignty proponents target political bodies, thus calling the transnational corporate structure itself into question. Its potential to undermine the corporate food regime emanates from the fact that its frame and the practices endorsed are not easily appropriated by the corporate food regime or the food security frame.

For example, the corporate food regime, and the food security frame which it employs, selectively appropriate “certain activist demands” as use “privately enforced quality standards...to mollify privileged consumers with new products that promise higher quality or more ethical production.”⁵⁶ Thus, according to Fairbairn, any food movement which relies heavily upon boycotts or consumer power at the expense of policy changes implicitly reinforces the power of corporate industrial agriculture. These market-based activist techniques mimic fundamental anthropological assumption of the food security frame—the assumption that humans are primarily economic agents making individual decisions in isolation from larger contexts.

For example, such interventions as shopping at farmer’s markets or CSA’s and coops, or switching to vegetarian/vegan/organic diets rely upon individual consumer choice to impact the market. These efforts leave completely untouched the larger systemic structures of the market itself, and offer at best a weak challenge to the global dominance of transnational corporate agriculture.⁵⁷ They are also tinged with a deterministic, mechanistic cosmological view that ignores the importance of grazers for

⁵⁵ Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance,” 27.

⁵⁶ Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance,” 18. This appropriation of activist demands is the most insidious feature of the food security frame/corporate food regime. Take for example McDonald’s engagement with environmental issues: he wants to feed the hungry while responding to environmental degradation and the frame of food security offers the illusion of being able to do both while still doing business as usual despite the fact that business as usual is a causative factor in both problems.

⁵⁷ Wenonah Hauter, *The Battle Over the Future of Food and Farming in America* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 3-4.

the health of the soil in which plants grow, fails to address the impact of monoculture crops on wildlife, and in some cases imagines that decreasing meat consumption will deterministically release more grain for human consumption.⁵⁸ While such consumer choices reduce one's personal carbon footprint, they do not necessarily result in large scale transition to low-input, low-emissions farming nor do they alone determine whether grain is released to feed the hungry.

Food sovereignty eschews those types of market-based strategies, challenging food security at its core—by questioning “the micro-economic assumptions upon which it is predicated.”⁵⁹ Its advocates deploy the language of solidarity, and reject the commodification of food, asserting that food bears “worth beyond its economic value” (27). The food sovereignty movement places great value upon things typically unaccounted for in the corporate food regime, such as traditional knowledge, culture and biodiversity. The food sovereignty movement further insists that the value of food cannot be calculated apart from the traditional knowledge, biodiversity and cultural practices with which the production and consumption of food are integrally connected. According to Fairbairn, the mere emergence of a resistance movement with such a powerful discursive appeal as food sovereignty could signal the failure of the corporate food regime to consolidate. She notes that the failure to consolidate may be due to flaws surpassing merely the inability to alleviate hunger. These flaws include “social injustice,

⁵⁸ Lierre Keith, *The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability*, (Crescent City: Flashpoint Press, 2009), 8, 108. See also Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, New York: Penguin Press 2006 section on Joel Salatin's farm. For an example of the position being critiqued (directly by Lierre and indirectly by Pollan) see Roberta Kalechofsky, *Vegetarian Judaism: A Guide for Everyone*, Marblehead: Micah Publications, 1998, especially pages 166-182. While Kalechofsky's criticisms of a meat-based diet are sound, the food shortage in 2008 demonstrates that diversion of grain for the production of fuel additives can interfere with grain availability as much if not more than feeding grain to cattle.

⁵⁹ Fairbairn, “Framing Resistance,” 27.

environmental degradation and the loss of traditional knowledge,” flaws which are “repeatedly named and denounced within the food sovereignty frame” (26). These rather obvious flaws may be the cause of the proliferation of scholarly writing on the food crisis in the past decade.⁶⁰ Further, the wide range of problems wrought by these flaws has promoted the use of the food sovereignty frame by food activists concerned with food justice and sustainability.

Models of Reality

What underlies the appeal of these frames to a given constituency? Why do some find the food security frame so compelling while others find the food sovereignty frame so inspiring? I would suggest that these frames resonate with different worldviews. The differences between the food security frame and the food sovereignty frame reflect differences in implicit cosmological and anthropological assumptions. These cosmological and anthropological formulations bear some resemblances to theological doctrines of creation and anthropology. These worldviews in turn shape the paradigm of humanity implicit within each of the respective frames and the regimes they support, conjuring different constructs of human-human interactions and different beliefs about the relationship between humans and their environment.

Theologian John Cobb refers to these formulations as “basic models of reality” (209). Cobb identifies two primary and opposing models of reality: the mechanical model and the ecological model. Broadly speaking the mechanistic model configures the world as comprised of atomic, self-contained individuals characterized by external relations

⁶⁰ Carole Counihan, and Penny Van Esterik, *Food and Culture: A Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

(210). Cobb asserts that nationalist thinking is characterized by such a worldview, and thus favors the mechanistic approach to agriculture. He further notes that while this model gave rise to the successes of modern science, “with the smashing of the atom, this doctrine has lost its plausibility (211). In contrast to the mechanistic model, the ecological model postulates that “nothing is completely self-contained. Everything is what it is by virtue of its relation to other things” (211).⁶¹ Subsequently, changes in one dimension of the system have consequences in other dimensions as well. In this model, the merits of a particular agricultural intervention are not weighed in terms of immediate or isolated effects, such as increased crop yields. Rather, interventions are assessed in terms of interactive or delayed effects such as changes in soil condition over time.

It is precisely the mechanistic model and its associated—albeit implicit—anthropological assumptions which ethicist William Schanbacher argues lead to problematic policies on the part of food security proponents. Schanbacher claims that the food security model operates under the rubric of neoliberal economic theory. Schanbacher draws on Cobb’s earlier work in arguing that the food security frame implicitly regards “humans as *homo economicus*—beings guided principally by individuality, the pursuit of single-minded self-interest, competition and profiteering.”⁶² This persistent competition envisioned by this model carries within its folds notions of struggle, opposition and war—in other words, persistent existential threat. Such contention amplifies the need to make the friend-enemy distinction so crucial for Schmitt’s understanding of sovereignty even if neither sovereignty nor such distinctions are explicitly invoked.

⁶¹ As I will argue in a later chapter on the materialization of bodies in the context of the global food system, these relationships are characterized by interiority as well as externality.

⁶² Schanbacher, *Food Politics*, 119.

According to Curtis Beus and Riley Dunlap, the cosmological and anthropological assumptions implicit in distinct worldviews bear heavily upon agricultural decision-making.⁶³ Beus and Dunlap's 1990 study analyzed the published written argumentation of six supporters of conventional agriculture in comparison with six supporters of alternative agriculture, all of whom are involved in the academic study of agriculture, or were responsible for setting federal agricultural policy, or both.⁶⁴ Beus and Dunlap discover a significant correlation between agricultural practice and specific worldview. They, like Schanbacher, draw upon the work of John Cobb in referring to these as "models of reality," but also draw heavily upon the work of Thomas Kuhn in referring to these as "paradigms."

They distinguish between paradigms within which conventional and alternative agriculturalists operate, naming them the Dominant Social Paradigm and the New Environmental Paradigm respectively. The Dominant Social Paradigm envisions humans as involved in competitive relations with others—human and non-human alike. The goal is domination of one's adversaries and exploitation of situations to one's benefit. Specializing in monoculture crops is seen as advantageous in meeting those goals (591). Thus, those operating from this worldview favor "conventional agriculture" which "has been defined as 'capital-intensive, large-scale, highly mechanized agriculture with monocultures of crops and extensive use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, with intensive animal husbandry'" (594).

⁶³ Beus and Dunlap, "Conventional versus Alternative Agriculture."

⁶⁴ The conventional agriculturalists studied were former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, Marion Clawson, Earl O. Heady, Hiram Drache, Wheeler McMillan, and Jamie Whitten. The alternative agriculturalists were William Aiken, Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, C. Dean Freudenberger, Gene Logsdon, and Robert Rodale.

By contrast, the New Environmental Paradigm envisions humans in community with each other and capable of harmonious relations with nonhumans as well. While Beus and Dunlap note the tremendous diversity of agricultural practices of those adhering to this world view, they note that small farms, crop diversity and self-restraint are perceived as advantageous in strengthening community and increasing harmonious relations between human communities and between human and nonhuman as well (591). This paradigm corresponds to that of the Food Sovereignty movement no less than that of other alternative food movements.

Each group makes different predictions about the future of either continuing conventional procedures or switching to alternative ones which Beus and Dunlap argue “are due to methodological problems [in the research upon which predictions are based], faulty inferences and the political sensitivity of the debate” (597). As their article was written well over twenty years ago, it is possible that some of the methodological problems and faulty inferences of the debate have been rectified. However, the debate remains no less politically sensitive. Updated data and theory will be brought to bear upon these debates in the coming chapters, but first the debate itself must be clarified.

Conventional agriculturalists, corresponding to those in the “corporate food regime,” view “the growing concentration of power and control in the agricultural industry... as just part of the natural evolution of the industry” (600). They espouse similar views of the increasingly complex food processing and distribution pathways as well. Conventionalists are unconcerned about the staggering debt incurred by farmers, whereas alternativists argue that such debt becomes unsustainable (603). “A common theme of conventional agriculturalists is that society will benefit as the number of farmers

declines, since those who are released from the task of food production can then produce other goods and services that improve the quality of life” (604). Furthermore, conventionalists view the decline of rural communities as the cost of “agricultural progress” and inevitably conjoined to “the increasing affluence of the American people” (605). Thus, the decline of rural communities and the increase in consumerism that has arisen in the wake of industrialized agricultural practices are seen as cause for celebration rather than concern (608).

By contrast, “alternative agriculturalists...see this trend in an entirely different light” (600). They link their push toward decentralization of control over agriculture to their concerns about justice. Additionally, the alternative agriculturalists see the concentration of wealth, land and power emerging under the auspices of “conventional agriculture” as undermining democratic political processes and trending toward plutocracy instead.⁶⁵ Some of these alternative agriculturalists bring religious values of land stewardship to bear on their arguments, and asserting that the land does not get proper care in large-scale industrial farms.⁶⁶ Further, many alternative agriculturalists denounce materialism on principle, viewing the push for ever-increasing production as a consequence of materialism (609).

But Beus and Dunlap argue that “perhaps no other element of the current agricultural debate is as fundamental as the issue of how humans should relate to their

⁶⁵ In the nineteenth century farmers constituted approximately seventy percent of the American labor force, compared to only two percent today. See tables and charts available at Max Roser (2016) – ‘Agricultural Employment’. *Published online at OurWorldInData.org*. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/agricultural-employment/> [Online Resource]. See also Debra Spielmaker, and Mark Lacy, "Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture," *Agriculture in the Classroom*. June 12, 2006. https://www.agclassroom.org/gan/timeline/17_18.htm; and Roberto A. Ferdman, "The decline of the American family farm in one chart," *The Washington Post*. September 16, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/09/16/the-decline-of-the-small-american-family-farm-in-one-chart/?utm_term=.ee058583d464.

⁶⁶ Beus and Dunlap, “onventional versus Alternative Agriculture,” 602.

natural environment” (605). They note that “conventional agriculturalists frequently use the analogy of war in their discussions of agriculture and its relationship to the environment.”⁶⁷ This contrasts sharply with the view alternative agriculturalists, who perceive an adversarial relationship with nature to be counter-productive (606).

Beus and Dunlap note that adherents of conventional agriculture (again, corresponding to the corporate food regime) bring their competitive worldview to the debate between high input versus low-input sustainable agriculture (LISA). The conventionalists refer to LISA supporters as “worthless opponents” and smear their integrity (610). Beus and Dunlap note that “any degree of institutionalization of low-input agriculture...is a direct threat to agribusiness industries,” yet they argue that what is at stake is not only agribusiness but an entire worldview (610).

As evidence of this “worldview” they introduce a quote from a conventional agricultural publication, in which the author declares that “the only sustainable agriculture is profitable agriculture” (610). Beus and Dunlap attribute “the substitution of economic for ecological sustainability” to “a fundamentally different view of agriculture [on the part of conventionalists] than that held by the alternative agricultural proponents of LISA” (610). In other words, the economic focus of the conventionalists/corporate regime is merely one element in a complex worldview shaped primarily by a framework of competitive, mechanistic relationships.

The following chapters will call into question the claims of the conventionalists that the consolidation of power in agricultural decision-making is inevitable or even preferable. At this juncture, it is sufficient to note the correspondence of rhetorical frames and agricultural practices with distinctive worldviews. Also significant is the implication

⁶⁷ (Beus and Dunlap 1990) 606

of theological concepts embedded within these worldviews. For example, many in the alternative food movement support their claims on the basis of their religious convictions that they must be good stewards of the land. And many environmentalists have pointed out that the Bible sanctions dominion over nature, lending support to the conventionalists on the other end of the spectrum.⁶⁸ Thus, the worldviews shaping agricultural dispositions are, much as we see with Schmitt's version of sovereignty, theologically tinged.

Illuminating Sovereignty in the Corporate Food Regime

Thus far we have distinguished between the dominant model of agriculture (the "corporate regime" operating under a "food security" frame) and the food sovereignty movement by comparing their rhetorical frames, making use of the concept of food regimes, and interpreting the underlying worldviews operative in each movement. But I have thus far said little as to how either movement relates to "the sovereign" as envisioned by Schmitt. The remainder of this chapter will elucidate these relationships.

It is against the pervasive existential threat of starvation that the food security frame promises protection. The food security frame has legitimated the deployment of the corporate food regime as the intervention of choice into the problem of world hunger. As remarked upon above, in our engagement with Fairbairn, this tactic flourished in the aftermath of Amartya Sen's *Poverty and Famines* which demonstrated that the primary cause of starvation was not inadequate supply of food, but inadequate economic capacity to purchase the food available. Global organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture

⁶⁸ Mary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 20. (Tirosch-Samuelson 2005) 373-5 finds this to be an inaccurate reading of scripture, but notes that it is nonetheless often referenced.

Organization and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, in conjunction with the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, intervened through various policies and trade arrangements. According to Schanbacher, the common theme of these interventions is “the focus on alleviating poverty through developmental growth” in general and upon “agricultural reform, trade, and technological progress” (such as the Green Revolution) in particular.

The debt crisis in the mid-1980s provided the “state of exception” that permitted multilateral trade organizations [the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization] to impose structural adjustment programs on developing nations in a manner that suspended certain economic and agricultural laws in those nations. In some cases, this permitted the entry of transnational corporations into the agricultural sector of developing nations. For example, the IMF and World Bank insisted that Mexico privatize their state-controlled National Company of Popular Subsistence. When U.S.-based Cargill entered the Mexican corn market local mill and factory owners were hard hit as production was transitioned to larger producers.⁶⁹ Furthermore, large transnational corporations like Cargill can manipulate market prices with little consideration of how price fluctuations will impact access to food.

Some, such as Conversi, identify Exxon, Microsoft, McDonald’s, Monsanto and other transnational corporations as the new sovereigns. Conversi observes that “their sovereign decisions are taken outside any form of democratic consultation, thus projecting a vision of remote or hidden forces dominating each single nation and individual.”⁷⁰ But immediately after referring to their maneuvers as enactments of

⁶⁹ Schanbacher, *Food Politics*, 43

⁷⁰ Conversi, “Sovereignty in a Changing World,” 488.

sovereignty, he goes on to assert that transnational corporations are on the verge of precipitating “the implosion of the very notion of sovereignty.”⁷¹ While I would concur that they are on the verge of imploding the concept of the nation-state, I would disagree that they are on the verge of imploding the concept of sovereignty as envisioned by Schmitt.

I would argue quite the opposite: the transnational corporations and multilaterals are enacting Schmittian sovereignty par excellence, albeit an economic version of Schmittian sovereignty disarticulated from the nation-state. The suspension of the laws in developing nations subjected to SAPs in reaction to an exceptional situation constitutes a decision upon the exception. From a Schmittian perspective, the sovereign is “he who decides upon the exception;” in this case, the multilaterals in conjunction with transnational corporations. Despite Schmitt’s insistence that the sovereign be a single individual, I nonetheless content that they are acting as a solitary sovereign insofar as they exhibit a unity of economic purpose. The impositions of SAPs on these developing nations thus simultaneously undermined the sovereignty of these developing nations while establishing the sovereignty of the multilaterals. This usurpation of state sovereignty does not free us from the dangers of the sovereign, to be explicated in depth in chapter 2, but rather heightens the risk of tyranny given the scope of power these global sovereigns possess.

In response to the debt crisis, the World Bank, for example, pressed developing countries to adopt agricultural policies it contended would fully integrate developing nations into the world economy—an economy perceived by the World Bank as inevitable in the natural course of human evolution—while also maximizing agricultural

⁷¹ Ibid.

productivity.⁷² The adjustments they enforced have shifted the focus away from provision of staples for domestic consumption and toward cash crops with high value in the international market (15).⁷³ Further, these adjustments involve land reform that favors the consolidation of land in the hands of those deemed most productive—as measured in terms of cash crops—which will not only assure that the land is held by the “most productive users” but also will “facilitate exit [of the rural poor] from agriculture” (15).

Contemporaneous with policies resulting in the shift of agricultural focus from locally consumed produce to cash crops valued by the international market were the implementation of austerity measures. These measures limited, among other things, the monies that developing nations could direct toward food subsidy programs for the poor. This was particularly problematic as the retooling of agricultural practices resulted in rising prices of staple goods in developing nations, and reduced purchasing power of their neediest citizens.

The International Monetary Fund, the “financial arm of the global governance triad,” insists that poor and developing nations adopt its trade liberalization policies in exchange for financial assistance (17-20). The IMF argues that these policies are required in order to assure economic prosperity through full integration into the global capitalist economy. The IMF discourages any policies which it perceives might distort trade, such as export subsidies, tariffs, or any other type of ‘special and differential treatment.’ But while developing nations are not permitted to subsidize their farmers under these structural adjustments, wealthier nations have continued to do so. These subsidies are

⁷² Schanbacher, *Food Politics*, 16.

⁷³ The transformations in the agricultural systems of developing nations combined to create a “consumer base” for the agricultural inputs (fertilizer, pesticides, and heavy equipment, for example) supplied by transnational corporations such as Monsanto, Cargill, Caterpillar, etc.

primarily granted to large agribusinesses, and with the aid of these subsidies they are enabled to dump surplus agricultural goods into foreign markets at prices below the cost of production, a practice quite damaging to peasant farmers.

Economically, these maneuvers were disastrous. In Mexico, for example, implementation of structural adjustment programs resulted in the decrease of “real wages...by forty-one percent between 1982 and 1988...the unemployment rate rose to twenty percent” and over half of the country was forced below the poverty line (41). From the perspective of food accessibility, these measures also brought about negative consequences. The implementation of austerity measures reduced spending on the poor by six per cent, during a time when food prices were escalating rapidly due to the success of Mexican products on the foreign market (56). Because of the massive debt incurred by farmers as they were forced to adopt technological farming practices, many farmers lost their land and ultimately become laborers on land they used to own.⁷⁴ Further compounding the problem, industrial wages fell by ten percent as farmers migrated to the cities in search of jobs.⁷⁵

It must be remembered that the “exit from agriculture” on the part of these peasant farmers was planned, at least on the part of the World Bank, IMF and WTO. Unfortunately, however, the farmers were not able to find employment in urban centers either. They had transitioned from subsistence poverty to abject poverty through the imposition of trade liberalization policies. The processes involved in this oppression of farmers and peasants are so remarkably similar from country to country, that farmers of one nation feel kinship with those of others. Thus, the efforts to reduce the existential

⁷⁴ Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, (Melville House, 2012), 62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

threat of poverty—and the lack of economic access to food that accompanies poverty—had the net effect of worsening the problems they were supposed to alleviate.

The lives of the rural poor—and indeed, as their increasing dislocation to urban areas suggests even the lives of the urban poor—are rendered increasingly precarious in the face of these policies. Naturally, faced with dispossession of their land and a life of abject poverty, peasant farmers worldwide have started to protest these measures. Even to protest comes at a high price as “peasant groups around the world are targeted, often with impunity, by local and national forces, both public and private.”⁷⁶ For example, while “at least 1,425 rural workers, leaders and activists have been assassinated” in Brazil over the past two decades, “only 79 recorded cases have ever been brought to trial.”⁷⁷ As I will argue in the next chapter, Agamben’s theoretical concept of *homo sacer* and its relation to enactments of sovereignty helps us to identify these deaths as consequences of the enactments of sovereignty on the part of these multilateral organizations.

Thus, we see that the food security frame endorsed by these agencies correlates to specific neoliberal economic and corporate agricultural interventions. Further, we note that although these multilateral agencies do not tout their sovereignty as such when implementing these policies, they do capitalize on states of exception in order to consolidate their power and push their global economic agenda forward. In the process, these enactments of sovereignty produce heightened vulnerability and precarity as one might predict based upon the philosophical engagements of such thinkers as Judith Butler and Giorgio. This will find explication in the following chapter.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

How is Food Sovereignty “Sovereign”?

Given the dominance of the corporate food regime internationally, referring to it *as* a regime is appropriate. However, the food sovereignty movement lacks the cohesion or power of a regime, so we must acknowledge that the “regime” language is unsuitable. Nonetheless, the food sovereignty movement engages in decision-making and agricultural practices that serve as points of comparison with the corporate food regime. Sociologist Christina Schiavoni observes that sovereignty emerged in the context of a “perceived weakening of state control over domestic food systems” in the wake of encroachments upon state sovereignty by multilateral agencies and transnational corporations driven by a neoliberal economic agenda.⁷⁸ Their efforts to restore domestic control over food production and distribution lead them to demand that multilateral agencies and transnational corporations recognize the sovereignty of their respective nations.

Ironically, despite the rhetorical reliance upon the concept of sovereignty and the demand that transnational corporations respect the sovereignty of their respective nation-states, the practices of those utilizing the food sovereignty frame do not align with the type of sovereignty espoused by Schmitt. Internal to their respective nations, farmers committed to the practices of the food sovereignty movement operate via loosely structured communal councils. While participants must operate according to a set of general principles animating the movement as a whole, there are no formal rules or

⁷⁸ Christina M. Schiavoni, "Competing Sovereignties, Contested Processes: Insights from the Venezuelan Food Sovereignty Experiment," *Globalizations* 12, no. 4 (2015): 467

policies in place.⁷⁹ And agricultural methods are developed by the farmers themselves, tailored to their unique geographical location.

For example, *El Movimiento Campesino a Campesino* [MCAC or Farmer to Farmer Movement] encourages participation in local farmer-organized workshops where “farmers from local and regional areas participate in agricultural experimentation and share knowledge of successful agricultural techniques.”⁸⁰ Subsequently culture and agriculture are “formed and reshaped in a mutual cultural praxis” of endogenous production of knowledge rather than through the adoption of external practices (68). Through these information pathways, farmers can receive information on “the potential pitfalls and dangers of genetically modified foods, such as how health risks are still under dispute, how genetically modified foods require more capital and chemical intensive inputs, and how genetically modified seeds reduce biodiversity” (69). Significantly, this “endogenous production of knowledge” results in highly specific knowledge regarding growing patterns in precise geographic locations. As we will see in Chapter 5, this specificity becomes increasingly important in the face of climate change.

The MST [Brazil’s landless farmer’s movement] promotes “practices such as local production for local consumption, agroecology, and sustainable development,” thus embodying “an alternative to current economic concepts of globalization” (74). Schanbacher argues that “the food sovereignty movement holds a critical and strategic position in terms of theorizing policy implementation for issues of hunger and malnutrition” (74). Food sovereignty asserts that alleviating hunger and malnutrition “can

⁷⁹ This could be seen as an enactment of resistance to unjust laws in consonant with the general worker’s strike Benjamin defended in his *Critique of Violence*.

⁸⁰ Schanbacher, *Food Politics*,” 68

be accomplished through agroecological methods that provide the potential for achieving sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation” (75).

One rather significant reason that practices endorsed by those using the food sovereignty frame hold greater potential for alleviating these problems is that their decision-making practices are more inclusive. In other words, rather than focusing exclusively on what might be seen as distributive justice, or the equitable distribution of goods, the food sovereignty movement emphasizes what might be seen as procedural justice, or the use of fair processes in order to grant all participants access to decision-making power.

The importance of women in agricultural production cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, “rural women” notably “produce half of the world’s food, and are the main producers of staple crops” making them “responsible for family food security” and food security on a global level as well (60). The food sovereignty movement includes women in the decision-making process as key stakeholders in agricultural processes, testifying to its procedural justice at least as far as women are concerned. By contrast, according to Marilee Karl and Rocio Alorda many food policies advocated by multilateral agencies operating under the food security frame “are biased toward men, and promote what some feminists perceive as a patriarchal paradigm.”⁸¹ Although over the past decade these agencies have started to increase support for smallholder farms, women are inadequately represented in decision-making bodies—despite the fact that they do most of the production work on smallholder farms in developing nations (15). Instead of pursuing

⁸¹ Marilee Karl, and Rocio Alorda, "Inseparable: The Crucial Role of Women in Food Security Revisited," *Women in Action*, 1 (2009): 15.

development as usual, Karl and Alorda advocate that multilaterals and other development agencies utilize a food sovereignty approach to redress these problems.

While most agencies operating under the model of food security promote increased production, Karl and Alorda note that the cause of hunger is “very much a problem of unequal access to food” (9) rather than inadequate production of foodstuff. Yet the multilateral agencies operating under the framework of food security cannot quite get at the root cause of this unequal access under the security frame alone because of the implicit assumptions about decision-making, family structure and gender. For example, it has been demonstrated that giving men more money for cash crops does not necessarily increase family wealth or improve the family’s access to food, especially for female family members (12). They call for “equitable participation of women in decision-making and policy-making” (14). The attainment of food security, they note, requires the integration of some tenets of the food sovereignty model—such as the right to self-determination—into the food security model (9).

Esperanza Santo and Margie Lacanilao describe the success of a process similar to that promoted by Karl and Alorda.⁸² Sarilaya, an ecological farming project in the Philippines, is managed by women who function as "capacity-builders and community organizers," (449) and also as informal agricultural researchers. Nineteen families have participated in this project over an eight year period of time. Despite the patriarchal nature of the culture in the Imelda Valley, where the project took place, the women in these families successfully garnered leadership roles in their families and their communities with dramatically positive results (449). Soil was revitalized, crop yields

⁸² Esperanza "Pangging" A. Santos, and Margie Lacanilao, "Women Contributing to Food Sovereignty through Sustainable Agriculture." *Kasarinian: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*, 26.1 (2011).

increased, and runoff from pesticides and fertilizers ceased. In each case, net incomes increased due to decreased expenditures on inputs. This increased income relieved women's burdens overall, including sometimes the burden of maintaining a paying job alongside their unpaid agrarian labor.

This recognition of women's importance under the food sovereignty frame underscores Schanbacher's argument that the food sovereignty movement "should not be understood as a sort of bygone cultural era of simple, pure living."⁸³ a charge leveled by some feminist critics against the "agrarian vision" most often touted as a solution to the global food problem.⁸⁴

Problematically, however, many in this movement insist upon shoring up the boundaries of their respective nation states as a means to reinforce their efforts at self-determination. It must be noted that their insistence on establishing functional boundaries for their respective nations is rooted in a desire to thwart the efforts of transnational agribusinesses to privatize ecological resources within these nations.⁸⁵ Additionally, in appealing to the United Nations the food sovereignty movement utilizes rights language.⁸⁶ Problematically, as we shall see in the next chapter, the very concept of rights is entangled with the notion of the nation-state and citizenry and thus carries particular

⁸³ Schanbacher, *Food Politics*, 75.

⁸⁴ Erin McKenna, "Feminism and Farming: A Response to Paul Thompson's the Agrarian Vision," *J. Agric Environ Ethics* 25 (2012): 529-534.

⁸⁵ See for example articles such as "[La Via Campesina Europe in solidarity with Colombian farmers](#)" demanding that peace agreements signed by their national governments are respected by all parties. But while they join with their national governments in opposing transnational corporations, they simultaneously work transnationally with peasants from many countries in bringing their needs to the attention of the United Nations and other development agencies—thus undermining the ability of any "sovereign" to decide on their behalf. "[La Via Campesina Europe in solidarity with Colombian farmers](#)" (October 7, 2016): <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27>.

⁸⁶ "La Via Campesina and allies push for the Declaration on Peasants' Rights in Geneva." viacampesina.org. September 23, 2016): <https://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/human-rights-mainmenu-40/peasants-right-resources/2146-la-via-campesina-and-allies-push-for-the-declaration-on-peasants-rights-in-geneva>.

vulnerabilities in its deployment. Thus, although their denunciation of neoliberal economics and transnational corporations might align well with the liberal discourse in political theology, the desire for a stronger nation-state to protect their interests from external threats posed by transnational corporations puts them at odds with many far left thinkers who generally reject strong sovereignty—and the nation-state along with it.

Rhetorical Disjunctures

At the root of the paradoxical appearance and enactments of Schmittian sovereignty in contemporary food politics is a disjuncture between the rhetorical framing and political, economic, and agricultural enactments of both the dominant model of agriculture and the food sovereignty movement. While the dominant model does not engage the concept of sovereignty, Schmittian or otherwise, nonetheless it endorses an economic version of sovereignty as enacted by multilateral trade organizations and transnational corporations. On the other hand, the food sovereignty movement relies heavily upon the concept of sovereignty, and in particular demands that the sovereignty of their nations be recognized, yet agricultural, political, and economic decision-making proceed in a profoundly democratic and non-sovereign—at least from a Schmittian perspective—manner. The following table may help to clarify the distinctions between the food sovereignty movement and what is variously referred to as conventional agriculture, industrial agriculture, the corporate food regime, transnational agribusiness (to mention only a few of its monikers).

	Schmittian (unilateral) Sovereign	Food Security Frame/ Corporate Food Regime	Food Sovereignty Movement
Rhetorical claim to sovereignty?	Yes	No	Yes
Rhetorical reliance upon nation-state configuration?	Yes	No; operates trans- nationally	Yes
Enactment of "state of exception?"	Yes, in response to military threat	Yes, on an economic basis	No
Enacted decision- making process	Unilateral, hierarchically imposed upon constituents	Unilateral, hierarchically imposed upon constituents	Radically inclusive and democratic
Enacted relationship to national laws	National laws, in particular the constitution, are suspended due to state of exception	Economic laws suspended due to economic "state of exception."	Calls for strengthening national law

Table 2.1 Rhetorical Disjunctures

What accounts for these rhetorical disjunctures? Schiavoni argues that sovereignty in the food sovereignty movement is challenging to define because two competing versions of sovereignty are simultaneously operative.⁸⁷ She names the contradiction as that between contradiction between external sovereignty and external sovereignty. External sovereignty implies the reciprocal agreement between governments of different nations as described in the Peace of Westphalia. The competing internal sovereignty establishes sovereignty on the basis of popular will. The simultaneous operation of both external and internal sovereignties has challenged scholars attempting to identify “the sovereign” in food sovereignty.

To some degree, this can be read as a conflict between the autarchic sovereignty denounced by progressive and radical political theologians such as Clayton Crockett

⁸⁷ Schiavoni, “Competing Sovereignties,” 467.

(externally) and the radical democracy they would prefer to see in its place (internally). I would submit that the rhetorical disjunctures demonstrated on the chart above result in no small measure from the competing sovereignties identified by Schiavoni. The vision “external sovereignty” operative in the food sovereignty movement accounts for their rhetorical reliance claim to sovereignty. Yet the “internal sovereignty” operates via a (radically) democratic approach.

But if this is the case, then how can one account for the disjunctures in the corporate food regime? Is it possible that the corporate food regime suffers from its own competing sovereignties, mirror images of those encountered in the food sovereignty movement? On the one hand, they make no rhetorical claim to sovereignty, and if pressed would likely assert themselves to be defenders of democracy. Yet they function as sovereigns, unilaterally imposing their will upon constituent nations in order to maintain a neoliberal economic order.

Conclusion

How do the political contestations over economics and agriculture relate to Schmittian sovereignty and Benjaminian resistance? As I hope I have demonstrated, corporate industrial interventions can be read as deployments of Schmittian sovereignty, albeit displaced from the nation-state to transnational corporations and multilateral agencies, and enacted through economic and development policy that suspend the economic laws and development policies of developing nations through structural adjustment programs, rather than declarations of war. These corporations and agencies place heavy emphasis on technicity and economy over ecological principles. Their

agenda is legitimated, in their eyes and the eyes of many, by the need to protect humans from the threat of starvation, or, in Schmittian terms, in order to eliminate the existential threat posed by lack of access to food.

The appeal of the “food security” frame is that it promises adequate access to food, both for those in the Global North and the Global South. Problematically, it has been unable to deliver on that promise; over seven million people per year die of starvation. To the credit of the food system, the raw number of people dying of starvation has remained steady for a number of years, while the total population of the world continues to climb. Thus, from the perspective of percentages this frame and its enactments seem to be at least modestly successful. However, the neoliberal economic system operates within a mechanistic worldview that empirical scientific studies are currently revealing to be inaccurate. In the face of climate change, this inaccuracy could prove disastrous. Most tragically, its short term gains may be nearing their end, as drought in Africa and the violent conflict in its wake put twenty million people at risk of starvation by August of 2017.⁸⁸

By contrast, the food sovereignty movement demands a version of national sovereignty that undercuts the legitimacy of “the sovereign” (as described by Schmitt) in their insistence on the inclusion of a variety of voices in the decision-making process. In particular, they insist on the voices typically marginalized from the decision-making process of the World Bank, WTO, and IMF: landless peasants and women smallholders. This radical inclusivity potentially mitigates the abjection produced by enactments of Schmittian sovereignty, as we shall see in the next chapter.

⁸⁸ Tom Miles, “Four famines mean 20 million people may starve in the next six months,” *Reuters.com*. February 16, 2017): <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-famine-idUSKBN15V0ZO>.

While the radically democratic decision-making processes and ecological worldview of those in the “food sovereignty” movement might find support of liberal and progressive political theologians, their reliance upon the concept of national sovereignty puts them at odds with those same theorists. As we have seen in the previous chapter, those who reject the concept of national sovereignty similarly reject—or at least call into serious question—concepts of popular sovereignty that might lend this movement legitimacy.

In no small measure, the urgency to support the food sovereignty movement arises from an examination of the risks of proceeding with conventional agriculture—both those already occurring and those predicted to occur in the future. At the same time, it must be stressed the present work does not call for an abrupt cessation of conventional agriculture. Such an approach would be not only quixotic but foolhardy, as an estimated three billion people rely upon food produced by conventional, high-input means.⁸⁹ Yet conventional agriculture, pressed into the service of a neoliberal economic agenda by the corporate food regime utilizing the rhetoric of food security, is proving to undermine the very security it promises. Unsustainable by definition means it cannot continue. Therefore the present work hopes add to the growing body of literature, such as the many sources cited in this chapter, calling for the limitation of conventional agricultural practices and gradual transition to other, less ecologically damaging, methods.

⁸⁹ Dan Barber, *The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).

Chapter 3

Sovereignty and Precarity in the Global Food System

Introduction

In the previous chapter I connected motions of power in contemporary food politics with deployments of a Schmittian-type sovereignty on the part of those in the corporate food regime, operating under the rhetorical frame of “food security.” The renditions of this particular form of sovereignty are economic in nature in a manner not explicitly theorized by Schmitt himself. I argued that economic deployments of sovereignty do occur despite the lack of any rhetoric staking a claim to sovereignty. That these deployments occur within a political frame of “food security” is no surprise once we recognize that Carl Schmitt’s formulation of sovereignty is rooted in the conviction that the sovereign can assure security in the face of an existential threat. However, what I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that in the case of food politics, if not all politics, such deployments of sovereignty amplify existential risks on a broad scale, despite claims to the contrary.

In this chapter I will draw largely upon the work of Giorgio Agamben to demonstrate the ways in which these enactments of sovereignty on the part of multilaterals heighten vulnerability for millions of people worldwide. In light of the interaction between agricultural processes and climate change, ultimately the unfettered operations of the corporate food regime pose a risk to us all (which I will discuss at length in a later chapter). I will begin this chapter by exploring those concepts engaged by Agamben which elucidate the manner in which present (and future) vulnerability in

the global food system is amplified by economic renditions of sovereignty on the part of actors in the corporate food regime. Those concepts are *homo sacer*; *the distinction between “the people” and “the People;”* and *the state of exception*. I will then address the criticisms of Agamben, both that of Jacques Derrida as well as my own. In thinking with and beyond Agamben regarding issues of food politics, the nation-state, sovereignty and multilaterals, I will draw upon Judith Butler’s assertion that a less violent politics might arise once “an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community.”¹

Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben’s argument extends Schmitt’s assertion that “the sovereign is he who decides upon the exception,” using language distinct from Schmitt’s, and language that holds specific advantages for the present dissertation. Agamben clarifies the manner in which enactments of top-down sovereignty render even people allegedly under the protection of the sovereign rather vulnerable. While Schmitt acknowledges that dictatorship is a risk of his version of sovereignty, he leaves the consequences of this dictatorship to the imagination. Agamben, by contrast, fixates on it.

For Agamben, the consequence of sovereignty is represented by the figure of *homo sacer*, or “sacred man.” Agamben devoted an entire volume to exploration of this figure, which he seeks to portray as “bare life,” akin to his reading of the ancient Greek *zoë*, which he reads as “simple natural life.” This figure represents for Agamben the

¹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, (New York: Verso, 2004), xii.

status of one whose life has been disqualified, as it were, and now exists as merely “bare life” through exclusion from the law as a consequence of the sovereign decision on the exception.

Ultimately, the sovereign has the ability to cast absolutely anyone outside the law, and *homo sacer* is at the mercy of absolutely everyone. Thus, to the sovereign every other is potentially *homo sacer* and to *homo sacer*, as one who has been excluded from protection by the sovereign, every other is sovereign.² Agamben’s ultimate contention is that in the context of a liberal democracy given over to a prolonged—or permanent—state of exception, everyone is susceptible to becoming—and in fact *does* become—*homo sacer*. In other words, when sovereignty devolves to a dictatorship through the machinations of a permanent state of exception, the consequence is precisely the profound existential threat that sovereignty was to have prevented all along.

Much of Agamben’s argument leans on a hypothesized originary distinction between *zoë* (bare life, corresponding to *homo sacer*) and *bios* (qualified or properly formed life) made by ancient Greek philosophers. In making this case, he draws from Foucault, who noted that “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question.”³ Agamben argues that neither Plato nor Aristotle would have used the word *zoë* to refer to such qualified lives as the lives of philosopher (*bios theoretikos*) or the properly political life (*bios politikos*) using the term *zoë*, which he claimed lacks the capacity to convey a properly qualified life (1). Derrida is one of several who raise the contention that this

² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 84.

³ Michel Foucault *La volonté de savoir*. as quoted in Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

reading of Aristotle is inaccurate, and his critique of Agamben will be detailed below.

But for now suffice to say that Agamben makes this distinction pivotal in his theory at the outset; this distinction is, nonetheless, less pivotal for the purposes of the present inquiry.

The deployment of political techniques to create bare life is referred by Foucault to as biopolitics or biopower. Agamben also notes that Foucault argued that “the entry of *zoë* into the sphere of the *polis*—the politicization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought” (4). Agamben goes on to say that “One of the most persistent features of Foucault’s work is its decisive abandonment of the traditional approach to the problem of power, which is based on the juridico-institutional modes...in favor of an unprejudiced analysis of the concrete ways in which power penetrates subjects’ very bodies and forms of life” (5). It is indeed bodies with which this dissertation is concerned.

Agamben is inspired to “analyze the link binding bare life to sovereign power” (65) by Walter Benjamin’s mention of ‘mere life’ in *Critique of Violence*.⁴ To begin with, Agamben lauds Benjamin’s insight that lawmaking is “necessarily and intimately bound up with” violence, quoting Benjamin at length:

For the function of violence in lawmaking is twofold, in the sense that lawmaking pursues as its end, with violence as the means, what is to be established as law, but at the moment of instatement does not dismiss violence; rather, at this very moment of lawmaking, it specifically establishes as law not an end unalloyed by violence, but one necessarily and intimately bound to it.⁵

⁴ Benjamin says *Bloße Leben* which Agamben translates as bare life, others translate as mere life.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," In *Selected Writings*, by Edmund Jephcott, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 295, as quoted in Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 65.

Agamben appears to adopt without question Benjamin's assertion that law is intimately and necessarily bound to violence.

Agamben goes on to say that "it is not by chance" that Benjamin shortly thereafter evokes the concept of *bloße Leben*. Agamben translates this phrase as "bare life" but Edmond Jephcott and others translate instead as mere life. The importance of this distinction becomes clearer when assessing Derrida's critique of Agamben. Benjamin mentions *bloße Leben* in a passage declaring that "blood is the symbol of mere life" and that "mythical violence"—the violence of sovereign lawmaking and law preserving—"is bloody power over mere life for its own sake, divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living."⁶ However, although Benjamin does insist that legal violence is perpetrated against "mere life," as previously indicated, he decidedly does not find "mere life" to be sacred. In fact, he takes great pains to argue *against* the sacredness of life, ultimately concluding that "however sacred man is...there is no sacredness in his condition, in his bodily life vulnerable to injury by his fellow men."⁷ Benjamin goes on to suggest that "it might well be worthwhile to track down the origin of the dogma of the sacredness of life."⁸

Agamben perceives himself as "develop[ing] these suggestions."⁹ So it is somewhat ironic that Agamben's "bare life" becomes synonymous with *homo sacer*, or sacred man. That is because Agamben's search for the "dogma of the sacredness of life" excavates the figure of *homo sacer* in the historical record. As defined by archaic Roman law, according to Agamben, *homo sacer* represents one who, having been judged guilty

⁶ Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 297.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 299

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 65-6.

of a crime, can be killed with impunity, but cannot be sacrificed (71). The sheer vulnerability of this figure, as Agamben sees it, results from having been excluded from “both human and divine law” by virtue of the decision of the plebiscite, and his sacredness consists of the “*unpunishability of his killing and the ban on his sacrifice*” (73). Because Benjamin has already connected “mere life” with lawmaking violence, Agamben perceives the figure of *homo sacer*—a man rendered “sacred” through legal decision—to map onto Benjamin’s “mere” life. In forging a connection between *homo sacer* and bare life, Agamben applies the “sacred” qualifier to the man so named in precisely the manner already rejected by Benjamin.¹⁰

The exclusion of *homo sacer* from “both human and divine law” takes the form of the “ban,” according to Agamben, which is “the essential structure of sovereign power.”¹¹ Agamben makes a somewhat tortuous argument here, but ultimately finds parallels between *homo sacer* and the bandit who, having been banished, or expelled as a wrongdoer, is now vulnerable to harm from anyone. Like Schmitt before him, Agamben borrows heavily from Hobbes in his construction of sovereign power. He quotes Hobbes, who argued that “the Subjects did not give the Sovereign” the right to punish, but “onely in laying down theirs, strengthened him to use his own...for the preservation of them all” (104). Banishment is, for Agamben, the punishment par excellence. He describes the power to ban as “the power of delivering something over to itself” (109). Thus the ban is tantamount to a refusal to preserve the one who has been banned.

Agamben argues that ban connects the sovereign to *homo sacer*, in part because it renders both sovereign and *homo sacer* outside the law. The sovereign is under no

¹⁰ Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 297.

¹¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 111.

obligation to obey the law, and *homo sacer* no longer falls under the auspices of legal protection. Agamben goes on to say that “what has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and at the same time consigned to the mercy of the one who abandons it (110). Thus the ban implicitly connects the sovereign with *homo sacer* not only by a shared “extra-legal” position, but also by virtue of the fact that the act of banishment itself determines who is sovereign and who is *homo sacer*.

Agamben insists that “the originary political relation is marked by this zone of indistinction in which the life of the exile...borders on the life of *homo sacer*” (110) by which I think he means to say that the condition of “banishment” is not so much about a physical banishment from a geographic territory, but rather a situation in which the sovereign has banished an individual from the auspices of sovereign, legal protection provided by the legal system over which the sovereign presides. Agamben makes a plea for his reader to “recognize this structure of the ban in...the public spaces in which we still live,” insisting that “*in the city, the banishment of sacred life is more internal than every interiority and more external than every extraneousness*” (111). Agamben wishes to call attention to the manner in which banishment no longer necessarily results in literal exile or geographic dislocation, but rather is a state in which “citizens can be said, in a specific but extremely real sense, to appear virtually as *homies sacri*” in the context of modern biopolitics because they have been cast outside the sphere of sovereign protection (111).

Insofar as the hallmark of Agamben’s *homo sacer* is profound vulnerability, his sacredness directly contradicts Benjamin’s assertion that whatever is sacred about life it is certainly not the bodily condition of vulnerability. Nonetheless, for several reasons, I

believe Agamben's *homo sacer* offers an intriguing focal point for the examination of precarity in our current situation of transnational global corporate empire. First, Agamben tracks the history of the concept of the sacredness of life through the concept of *homo sacer*, and the implications of his inquiry connect this concept to the state monopoly on violence, another concern of Benjamin's. Second, Agamben provides a lens through which the malnourished can be seen to have been banned (without explicit declaration), or cast outside the auspices of sovereign protection. Third, Agamben's inquiry into the relationship between loss of recognizable citizenship and *homo sacer* merits thoughtful consideration as climate change, in conjunction with political responses to its impact, is already producing millions of refugees who have lost their citizenship and face radical vulnerability as a consequence.

To my first point, what Agamben accomplishes effectively, in my opinion, is articulating the linkage between the state monopoly on violence and the "dogma of the sacredness of life," both concerns of Benjamin. Benjamin notes that despite claims that "all life is sacred," which in the colloquial sense is used to convey the conviction that life is inviolable such that all killing is immoral, in practice people behave as if some lives are more sacred (inviolable) than others.¹² Agamben begins to untangle this conundrum by first demonstrating that "sacred" held a different connotation in antiquity than it does in our colloquial understanding. While today we may think that the term sacred means inviolable, Agamben explains that *sacer* maybe have initially referred to a person or object that had been "removed from the *profanum*," but has since become "overburdened with contradictory meanings" such that its use is subject to slippage.¹³

¹² Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 298.

¹³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 79-80.

I would suggest that one of the contradictions that has burdened the concept of sacrality arises in conjunction with the sovereign decision. Thinking with Agamben, I would propose that to say that “all life is sacred” is to say that all life acquires its *social value* in relation to the sovereign. Similarly, life loses its social value when subjected to the sovereign ban. This is because while the sovereign ban casts both the sovereign and *homo sacer* outside of the *profanum*, the impact of removal from the *profanum* functions as a binary opposition for each.

For example, using Agamben’s preferred circumstance of Nazi Germany, the life of the sovereign, that being Adolf Hitler, was of infinitely greater value than the lives of the millions of *homines sacri* slaughtered under his regime (notably Jews, though millions of others as well). And to draw forth another, more contemporary example, although the institution of the American presidency does not fit the description of a Schmittian sovereign, nonetheless we would have to acknowledge that his life is considered of such great value that he is heavily guarded by Secret Service at all times. By contrast, the lives of African American prostitutes are of such low value to the state system that their murders are scarcely worth investigating.¹⁴

I would further suggest, and will spend the greater part of this and the next chapter exploring how first of all, the sovereign ban does not arise exclusively in the form of a simple binary “in or out” position in contemporary society. That is to say, the protection offered to individual bodies varies in a graded and proportional fashion based upon identifiable markers of those bodies, markers such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality creating a gradation of oppressions that feminist scholars will recognize as “intersectionality.” What we might think of as social status or socioeconomic class in

¹⁴ See for example the documentary “Tales of the Grim Sleeper” by Nick Broomfield.

some way represents a gradient on a spectrum of relationship with sovereign power, with protection on one end and the sovereign ban on the other. As social animals humans subconsciously and perpetually are able to “read” where a person is in relationship to sovereign protection and treat them accordingly. While there are numerous exceptions to the general trend, the trend is that the further from sovereign protection (i.e. the lower the social status), the slower are social response to preserve or restore bodily well-being.

While Agamben does not say it in quite this way, I would suggest that sovereign power is not only the power to suspend the constitution, as was the “exception” with which Schmitt concerned himself, but the power to determine the one to whom the law no longer applies in the sense of assuring legal protection of rights. No longer can that person’s killing be considered illegal because they are no longer under the law. An example would be the case of extrajudicial killings of black men during routine traffic stops denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement. But neither can that person’s death be acknowledged as a sort of “sacrifice” that serves the stability of a given social order (as for example a soldier’s death in the line of duty might be regarded).

Agamben’s overarching concern is that “sacredness is a line of flight still present in contemporary politics,” and that it is increasingly “coinciding with the biological life itself of citizens.”¹⁵ Here he specifically means sacred in the sense of “removed from the *profanum*” as opposed to the sense of “closer to God” with which we often imbue the term sacred in its contemporary use. And furthermore, I read him as insisting that the legal order constitutes the *profanum*. Agamben is suggesting that we are all at immanent risk of a banishment that may never be explicitly declared as such and subsequently “we are all virtually *homines sacri* (115). He observes that today we are confronted with “a

¹⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 114-115.

life that as such is exposed to a violence without precedent precisely in the most profane and banal ways” (114). He identifies traffic fatalities as an example of this “profane and banal” violence.

I would argue that among the profane and banal sorts of violence perpetrated is the malnourishment perpetrated in the food system due to the enactments of top-down sovereignty on the part of multilateral agencies and transnational corporations already discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁶ I submit that the malnourished—both starving and obese—have been banned, excluded, or “delivered over to [their] own separateness,” in that their preservation is not ensured by the sovereign powers. Their bodily integrity no longer falls within state law to protect and subsequently the malnourished can be killed by the withholding, by means of corporate and economic policies and practices, of adequate and safe nutrition. In part, these bodies are excluded from legal protection through structural adjustment programs which impose austerity measures on already impoverished developing countries. These measures prohibit the distribution of food subsidies to the poor, while other provisions of the structural adjustment programs simultaneously assure that local food prices increase.¹⁷ The starving cannot be fed for free, as that would wreak havoc upon the economic system that perceives of food as

¹⁶ Another example could be air pollution. A 2012 study at Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimated twenty-one thousand premature deaths occurred due to air pollution in California alone (Chu 2013). As a point of comparison, based on 2014 statistics compiled by the Center for Disease Control, (the closest year available) only cancer and heart disease surpassed air pollution as causes of death. Whereas air pollution killed twenty-one thousand, less than two thousand died as the result of homicide.

¹⁷ Food prices increase under austerity measures as developing nations must agree to transition to cash crops, as opposed to subsistence crops, in order to generate income to repay their loans. They are also required to privatize state agricultural systems, with the result that major corporations assume control of foodways. Problematically, these corporations “manipulate supply and demand for profit-making purposes,” resulting in lower wages paid to farm laborers, and higher food prices at the grocery according to Schanbacher (43). Furthermore, according to Raj Patel, farmers and consumers also suffer because, having transitioned to cash crops farmers no longer provide produce for local sale. Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World’s Food System*, New York: Melville House Publishing, 2012.

nothing more than mere commodity. Yet deaths resulting from these policies are not considered to be either murder or sacrifice.

Austerity measures are imposed in the service of a neoliberal economic “law” that has as its central promise the delivery of perpetually increasing abundance for all people. The malnourished, however, have been banned, excluded, or excepted from this economic law. They will not experience the promised abundance. As Benjamin and Agamben insist, all lawmaking and law preserving involve violence, and for the malnourished this violence will take the form of persistent hunger, nutritionally related diseases, and premature death and will never be acknowledged as violence per se. As we will discuss in chapter four, where we will engage the thinking of Margaret Urban Walker, these bodies are also excluded from state protections in part through what she refers to as “privatization,” in our case privatization of food choices, which as we have already seen in chapter two are not entirely private.

As we shall see in chapter four, privatization of suffering as described by Margaret Urban Walker echoes Agamben’s warning that:

one and the same affirmation of bare life leads, in bourgeois democracy, to a primacy of the private over the public and of individual liberties over collective obligations and yet becomes, in totalitarian states, the decisive political criterion and the exemplary realm of sovereign decisions (122).

We in the United States may feel some relief at living in a “free democracy” rather than a totalitarian state, and therefore free of concern about becoming *homines sacre*. But Agamben goes on to note the lightning speed at which parliamentary democracies were transformed “into totalitarian states” at the outset of World War II, and just as speedily transformed back again at the war’s conclusion. Thus, even for Americans, an affirmation of bare life—in conjunction with our cultural proclivities toward individualism—paves

the way for all manner of privatization. As we shall see, that privatization above all serves the ends of oppressive regimes by shielding from view both their specific abuses and their toxic effects on those they oppress. Thus privatization, I contend, is a form of internal banishment, the banishment Agamben alluded to earlier when he said that “*in the city, the banishment of sacred life is more internal than every interiority and more external than every extraneousness*”¹⁸

“The People,” “the people,” and Human Rights

Agamben argues persistently and effectively that “bare life” is what is at stake in the political and is furthermore always at risk in the nation-state. Agamben calls attention to motions of power operative as instantiations of Schmittian sovereignty in democratic nation-states that potentially threaten their citizens with a widespread radical vulnerability. That the vulnerability threatened by instantiations of Schmittian sovereignty is widespread should, I contend, trigger equally widespread concern about global food politics. Significantly, Agamben calls attention to fragility of the concept of “human rights” that rely upon citizenship for their protection: “In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state.”¹⁹ This is because rights require a guarantor.²⁰

Agamben argues that refugees reveal the myth undergirding the concept of “inalienable rights” that substantiated the revolutionary movements that formed the nation state centuries ago. These rights were simultaneously declared “indefeasible rights

¹⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 111.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁰ Raj Patel, “What does food sovereignty look like?” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 668.

of man” arising as a consequence of birth, but yet were conferred exclusively upon citizens.²¹ So while these rights were considered to be the inalienable rights of all humans as a condition of birth, the nation only protected those rights of its own citizens. This brought about two additional problems. The first was the problem of defining the boundaries of a nation, when populations and cultures had always historically been fluid. The second was the problem of legitimating the restriction of rights in certain cases, such as women and slaves. Consequently, the sovereign ban—the exception, so to speak—was (at least partially) codified into law. The arrival of the refugee immediately calls into question the very notion of inalienable rights as these rights which are allegedly due to all humanity come into direct conflict with the bounded nature of the nation-state and the interests of its citizens. Subsequently, for Agamben, refugees “put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis” by “bringing to light the difference between birth and nation” (131). In other words, the refugee reveals that the rights to which a nation perceives all human beings are entitled are not necessarily afforded to human beings from another nation.

In the context of our present conversation concerning food politics, the contingency of rights upon citizenship is exceedingly problematic as we consider the conjunction of a fragile global food system and a fragile planetary ecology that has already resulted in millions of refugees, either directly from climate-related events or indirectly as the result of displacement due to violent conflict (itself partially driven by climate change). The refugee crisis is expected to worsen dramatically as temperatures (and sea levels) continue to rise dislocating millions of people living in coastal areas and desertification renders arable land—and food—increasingly scarce. Agamben remarks:

²¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 126-130.

What is essential is that, every time refugees represent not individual cases but—as happens more and more often today—a mass phenomenon, both these [multinational] organizations [such as the U.N.] and individual states prove themselves, despite their solemn invocations of the ‘sacred and inalienable’ rights of man, absolutely incapable of resolving the problem and even of confronting it directly (133).

This should give us all pause as we consider the potential for cruelty and suffering as climate change progresses. The recent Syrian refugee crisis may be but a foretaste of what is to come. Moreover, in its reliance upon “rights” language, the food sovereignty movement (and even the food justice movement) also fails to confront this problem directly.

While gesturing toward an ominous future, though not apparently one inflected with concerns about climate change, Agamben argues that interwar Germany serves as an historical example of an instance in which bare life became synonymous with the political. Agamben warns that our democracies are at risk of transforming into fascist totalitarian regimes if we remain wedded to the concept of the nation-state. He argues that the juridico-political structure of the camp is “born...out of a state of exception and martial law” (167), and furthermore when “the state of exception begins to become the rule” (169).

Not only was the camp a zone of exception, in which normal law did not apply, but any Jew entering the camp had already been declared a non-citizen—*homo sacer*, one to whom the protections of the law no longer applied. Agamben insists that the most useful inquiries into the Holocaust are not how such atrocities could be committed against human beings but rather an inquiry into “the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a

crime” (171). The atrocities committed in Nazi Germany were all perfectly legal according to German law at the time.

More pressing than concerns about historical events that do not constitute a site for intervention is Agamben’s chilling insistence that Nazi Germany was the prototype for contemporary politics. Nazi fascism arose in large part thanks to a conundrum at the heart of the nation-state itself. Agamben attributes this flaw to the notion of “the People as a whole political body.” The concept of “the People” animated the revolutionary process that culminated in the development of democratic nation-states. The process of nation-state formation was to have united all people within a national boundary and assured their rights. Yet despite the emergence of democratic nation-states, there exists within each nation a subcategory Agamben refers to as “the people,” in contrast to “the People”. “The people” represent a “fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies” (177). “The People” have failed to encompass “the people.”

He insists that after the French Revolution, founded upon the inalienable rights of man and driven by the ideal of including all citizens in the sovereign body of “the People,” the persistence of “the people”—excluded from politics—becomes “an embarrassing presence, and misery and exclusion appear for the first time as an altogether intolerable scandal” (179). The failure to integrate all people into the new political order appears as scandal because it begs the question: if the nation-state is founded upon the inalienable rights of man, how can one explain the numerous exclusions integral to its political machinations? On precisely what basis have “the people” been excluded from “the People?”

Agamben asserts that the urge of National Socialists to purify the German state is exemplary of the urge to seal this split between “the people” who have been excluded and “the People” of a nation by permanently and radically eliminating “the people that is excluded.” Jews in Nazi Germany represent for Agamben “the living symbol of the people and of the bare life that modernity necessarily creates within itself, but whose presence it can no longer tolerate in any way” (179). Such efforts, he insists, are doomed to failure as every instantiation of the People as unified body immediately conjures the manifestation of bare life.

I would suggest that efforts toward a global economy driven by the unholy union between democracy and neoliberal capitalism will find itself in a similar position. While Agamben might find the nation-state to be lapsing toward totalitarianism at present, I find myself at least equally concerned with the dissolution of the nation-state into an even more totalizing transnational corporatocracy, *especially* in light of Agamben’s critique of the nation-state and its legal fictions.²² For if the nation-state cannot integrate everyone into its system despite its territorial and cultural circumscription, how much more likely is the process of economic globalization to fail given the grand scope of its project—particularly if this project is not so much the result of organic sociality as it is the result of enactments of economic renditions of supra-national sovereignty? And if the allergy of the nation-state to what it cannot integrate leads to the death camp, how much more likely is a death camp to arise when the process of globalization fails to integrate everyone into its economic vision? The peasant farmers who resist the imposition of high-input

²² Yet I must also insist that retreating into a staunchly nationalist position does not necessarily provide shelter from a transnational corporatocracy, especially if nationalist rhetoric is leveraged in the service of neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, my concerns about abusive “supersovereignty” do not diminish my concerns about absolute sovereignty enacted at the level of the nation-state.

corporate agricultural practices and protest trade agreements that dispossess them of their land constitute, if nothing else, “the people” who cannot be integrated into the global neoliberal economic system. As such, much like the Jews in Nazi Germany, they become *homines sacri*—the bare life created by the transnational corporatocracy that gives the lie to its pretensions at universalism and thus cannot be tolerated in any way.

“The People,” “the people,” and Global Food Politics

Although I have already touched upon the relevance of *homo sacer* to contemporary food politics I would like to circulate back to some of these points as the explanatory power of Agamben’s *homo sacer* in food politics is further illuminated by Agamben’s distinction between “the People” and “the people.” I would like to deepen the analysis of how the concept of *homo sacer* clarifies the ways in which exclusion from politics legitimates the withholding of nutritious food, and how nutritional deprivation in turn legitimates further exclusion from politics. Further, I would like to provide a brief description of how Agamben helps us to understand how the killing of Brazilian food activists can be of such little consequence that over a thousand of these assassinations have gone uninvestigated.

When over seven million people die of starvation every year on a planet that produces sufficient calories to feed everyone, we must ask ourselves the same question of our food system that Agamben asks of the camp: how have political, economic, and agricultural laws been structured so as to render inflicting death by starvation anything other than criminal? In the context of food politics, these needy and excluded bodies, “de facto, if not de jure, excluded from politics” (176), correspond to the bodies of the

malnourished, both starving and obese. Because they have been excluded from politics, they become people from whom nutritious food can be withheld without consequence.

If they are obese, they are presumed to be deficient decision-makers thus we need not concern ourselves with the systemic causes of their obesity. If they are starving to death, they signify a degree of abjection and hopelessness that obscures the actors involved their suffering such that it is unclear who should be punished for what everyone already knows is not a crime.²³ As I will argue at length in chapter four, the physical habitus that develops from the withholding of nutritious food—whether that habitus be obese or emaciated—further legitimates their exclusion from politics.

These malnourished bodies, both starving and obese, can be read as members of what Agamben has already defined as “the people,” the suffering masses perpetually excluded from politics—or at the very least excluded from high-level decisions regarding what sorts of food, if any, should be accessible to them. Many of these people are rural smallholders and peasants from developing nations who are suffering precisely because they have not been integrated into the international political body and also because the efforts to integrate them into the global economic system have failed. Others of these people are more or less average citizens of developed nations whose access to nutritional food has been restricted by the near-monopoly that transnational agribusiness holds over the global food system as described in Chapter 2. If failure to integrate “the people” drives the march toward a totalitarian regime because the excluded nations and classes pose a threat to the systems that have excluded them, might we instead prefer to work

²³ Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200.

toward agricultural policies that do not have such integration as their driving force—as do the current policies of the corporate food regime?

But indirect death through nutritional deprivation is not the only way in which *homo sacer* can be killed with impunity within the global food system. The killing can take a more direct approach. This is exemplified in food politics by the killing of food activists in particular but also by the killing of environmental activists in general. The two are connected because environmental activists are in part motivated by the desire to preserve access to arable land and traditional food sources. These activists are, by and large, peasants (“the people”), unassimilable into the global economy and the corporate food regime (“the People”). Any meaningful activism on transnational food politics must grapple with the harsh realities of the failure of the global economy to integrate these activists, and the very real risks such failure poses to the activists themselves.

Raj Patel notes that “in taking a stand against the illegal appropriation of their land, or even in merely raising their voices against the injustices they face, peasant groups across the world are targeted, often with impunity, by local and national forces, both public and private.”²⁴ He provides specific examples, such as the Korean farmer who died after being bludgeoned by police during a protest and the persistent potential violence faced Brazilian peasants from both public and private sector sources. He goes on to say that “over the past two decades and according only to official source, at least 1,425 rural workers, leaders and activists have been assassinated there. And yet only 79 recorded cases have ever been brought to trial.”²⁵ Does the fact that so few of these

²⁴ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

assassinations is brought to trial imply that they are not regarded as crimes worthy of prosecution?

One might wonder whether other, more benign explanations exist for this judicial inaction in response to the assassination of food activists. However, when describing the assassination of food activists in Chiapas, Jonathan Fox notes that “the use of repression against peasant movements in Mexico has long been justified by the accusation of a revolutionary political challenge to the state.”²⁶ But while there were indeed revolution-minded political organizations in the region, food councils were careful to steer clear of involvement with their activities. The farmers were not interested in overthrowing the government, nor were they seeking handouts or subsidies, only fair prices that include the cost of land, labor, and growing. Yet despite their resistance to politicization, Fox goes on to say that “any networking at all among food councils was perceived by higher-level managers as a threat. Subsequently, higher-level officials conducted “purges” dismantling “most of the autonomous regional consumer mobilization” in the region.²⁷

In the case of Chiapas, farmers and consumers alike were perceived as threatening to the “free-market” system when they formed effective food councils. Their refusal to integrate into the global economy was perceived as a threat to the absolute sovereignty enacted on the part of those in the corporate food regime. Since their demands undermine the sovereignty enacted by multilaterals and agribusiness, their protest results in their being cast out from protection of the law—they are rendered (albeit informally) *homo sacer*. Subsequently, they can be killed but not murdered; these deaths are seldom investigated and, as the numbers show, even less often prosecuted. But we should not

²⁶ Jonathan Fox, *Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization*. Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1993) 179

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

mistakenly believe that this situation is restricted to Mexico or to the 1990's. Raj Patel notes that "the processes involved in this oppression of farmers and peasants is so remarkably similar from country to country, that farmers of one nation feel kinship with those of others."²⁸ And these murders continue to this day: Berta Cáceres, Nelson García and most pointedly, Jose Angel Flores, president of the Unified Campesinos Movement of the Aguan Valley are three such examples in Honduras in 2016 alone.²⁹

The State of Exception in Food Politics

Along with the concept of *homo sacer* and his distinction between "the People" and "the people" Agamben has also written about another theory that informs the present treatment of food politics in the context of climate change: that of the state of exception. Agamben quotes Walter Benjamin as saying that "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history that corresponds to this fact. Then we will have the production of the real state of exception before us as a task"³⁰ While the aforementioned quote on the state of exception appears in the book *Homo Sacer*, this political phenomenon receives fuller attention in a volume of its own: *State of Exception*.

In this volume, Agamben attempts to set forth a theory of the state of exception since he believes that the suspension of the law is the means by which bare life is captured in the juridico-political order. Subsequently, "a theory of the state of exception is the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and, at the same

²⁸ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 47.

²⁹ Nina Lakhani, "Fellow Honduran activist Nelson García murdered days after Berta Cáceres," *The Guardian* March 16, 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/16/berta-caceres-nelson-garcia-murdered-copinh-fellow-activist>; Nika Knight, "Leader of Honduran Campesino Movement Assassinated," *Common Dreams* October 19, 2016 <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/10/19/leader-honduran-campesino-movement-assassinated>.

³⁰ Walter Benjamin as quoted in Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 54-55.

time, abandons the living to law.”³¹ This becomes particularly important since in his view the “voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones” since the Third Reich (2). As already alluded to, this state of exception has similarly been operative in food politics, legitimating the usurpation of a developing nation’s sovereignty by multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO, although in the case of food politics the emergency has been economic rather than military.

Agamben is concerned here with modern totalitarianism, which he defines as “the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (2). The trajectory from democracy to totalitarian regime follows a predictable pattern: the state of exception begins as a constitutional dictatorship and over time becomes an unconstitutional dictatorship. He notes that some theorists attempt to defend the state of exception, but cannot “overcome the forces” that transform the constitutional dictatorship into an unconstitutional dictatorship. Problematically, all theories of the state of exception “remain prisoner in the vicious circle in which the emergency measures they seek to justify in the name of defending the democratic constitution are the same ones that lead to its ruin” (8). Democracy, it would seem, suffers from an autoimmune disorder.³²

Agamben provides an exhaustive history of the state of exception, most of which is outside the scope of the present dissertation. However, one paragraph deserves our

³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1.

³² Derrida, *Rogues*, 37.

attention. He notes that most of the countries at war in World War I enacted a state of exception that lasted the duration of the war. During this state of exception:

Many of the laws passed were, in truth, pure and simple delegations of legislative power to the executive, such as the [French] law of February 10, 1918, which granted the government an *all but absolute power to regulate by decree the production and trade of foodstuffs*...Predictably, the expansion of the executive's powers into the legislative sphere continued after the end of hostilities, and it is significant that military emergency now ceded its place to economic emergency.³³

I wish to call attention to the use of the state of exception to usurp power over agricultural production and distribution. While on the one hand this mention of food could call into question my earlier contention that the concept of sovereignty remains undertheorized in food politics and that the politics of food remains undertheorized in political theology, this would perhaps be better viewed as the exception that proves the rule. This brief mention of food is all that Agamben has to say on the matter. And, save three articles in a recent issue of *Globalizations*, no other writers have “considered systematically food sovereignty...by connecting it to the political durability of the broader concept of sovereignty.” Nor for that matter, has anyone traced the motions of power in the context of food politics in terms of enactments of Schmittian sovereignty.³⁴

Nonetheless, as we see from Agamben's quote, the state of exception legitimates the usurpation of power over agricultural production and distribution during war time. And as we further see in this quote, over time *economic* necessity eventually comes to legitimate the state of exception in lieu of military necessity. While one might argue that the enactments of sovereignty in the food system on the part of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO do not occur in the context of the state of exception in

³³ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 13; emphasis mine.

³⁴ Conversi, “Sovereignty in a Changing World.”

any particular nation, and further that they profess to circumvent violent conflict, the fact remains that they impose a state of exception upon developing nations which suspends the agricultural and social welfare policies of these nations, in effect usurping their national sovereignty in the process. Such a suspension of law is, I argue, an enactment of Schmittian sovereignty par excellence, even or especially if it is enacted by an external agency.³⁵

Perhaps none of this would be so concerning if these enactments of sovereignty in fact resulted in the security and quality of life they claim to provide. Instead, Agamben argues, “today’s democratico-capitalist project of eliminating the poor classes through development not only reproduces within itself the people that is excluded but also transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life.”³⁶ Agamben’s argument can be dismissed as purely theoretical and abstract. However, Raj Patel’s historical review of the food system enfleshes Agamben’s theoretical argument with concrete examples that are less easily ignore. For instance, Patel shows that recently, because of the massive debt incurred due to forced transition to technological farming,

³⁵ What I am calling an “economic rendition of Schmittian sovereignty” others might refer to as a hijacking. In order to understand these agencies’ behaviors as enactments of “sovereignty” it is necessary to disarticulate “the sovereign” from “the nation-state.” In other words, it is not necessary that “the sovereign” be a state actor. My argument rests upon Schmitt’s definition of “the sovereign” as “he who decides upon the exception,” and per Agamben that the sovereign is himself outside the law. Similarly, the multilateral agencies are also “outside the law” of these developing nations, and despite their lack of “official” position within the legal structure of the nations have nonetheless “decided upon the exception.” Harkening back to Schmitt’s assertion that all secular concepts of the state are secularized theological concepts, this further remove of multilateral agencies from any official state role is not at all problematic. In fact, from a “secularized theological” perspective multilaterals are more thoroughly “transcendent” to the state order than would be a sovereign who at other times fulfills functions within the state. Thus “multilaterals as sovereign” more closely resembles the figure of a transcendent God than does the powerful nation-state leader Schmitt envisioned,

³⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 180.

many farmers across the globe lose their land and ultimately become laborers on land they used to own.³⁷

Patel dates the onset of the modern world food system to the onset of enclosure in England in the fifteenth century, a process which resulted in massive dispossession and migration.³⁸ This in turn drove colonization as “agricultural commercialization in Europe [drove] smallholders off the land.”³⁹ These smallholders subsequently relocated to colonized territories in order to attempt to regain their landed status. However, none of this resulted in food security for “the people.” Patel cites a “1878 study published in the prestigious *Journal of the Statistical Society* that contrasted thirty-one serious famines in 120 years of British rule against only seventeen recorded famines in the entire previous two millennia” as evidence of the lack of efficacy of these highly technological farming methods.⁴⁰

There is widespread belief that technological farming reduces famine, and incorporating developing nations into the capitalist economy will improve their access to food. The three billion people currently dependent upon high-input agricultural products and fact that the number of hungry people is holding steady despite increases in populations attest to the legitimacy of this belief. And many act as if a centralized sovereign authority acting in the guise of multilateral agencies and transnational corporations can assure its just distribution most effectively. The booming international trade in agricultural products would testify to the integrity of the infrastructure involved,

³⁷ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 62.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

if not the efficacy of the economics. Yet these beliefs are not unequivocally supported by the facts.

For example, on the one hand the share of calorie-deprived people has decreased from twenty-three percent in 1990 to just under thirteen percent in 2015.⁴¹ Yet, as I will argue in the following chapter, the corporate food regime also drives the obesity epidemic—currently affecting thirty-nine percent of adults worldwide, or 2.1 billion people—in part because the food produced is deficient in micronutrients.⁴² So in terms of overall morbidity due to nutrition-related illnesses, clearly the reduction in malnourishment has been more than offset by other metabolic disorders.⁴³ But despite the overall progress at reducing hunger, "in many countries that have failed to reach the international hunger targets, natural and human-induced disasters or political instability have resulted in protracted crises with increased vulnerability and food insecurity of larger parts of the population."⁴⁴ Quite relevant to the later chapter on climate change, these countries are largely in middle Africa, a region hard hit by climate change-induced drought. Research points to climate change as a contributory factor in the eruption of the violent conflicts that produce famine.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The State of Food Security of the World*. New York: United Nations, 2015.

⁴² Based on World Health Organization's "Obesity and Overweight Fact Sheet," updated June 2016. This resource notes that obesity has more than doubled since 1980, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>.

⁴³ In particular, by "metabolic syndrome," which is the constellation of obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes that currently affects nearly 25% of adults worldwide, according to the International Diabetes Foundation. <http://www.idf.org/metabolic-syndrome>.

⁴⁴ FAO State of Food Security of the World 2015. This report also strongly advocates for increased support of smallholders as a means of improving agricultural productivity and reducing hunger in developing nations.

⁴⁵ Richard Black "Climate 'is a major cause' of conflict in Africa," *BBC News*, (November 24, 2009) and David Bellio, "Can Climate Change Cause Conflict? Recent History Suggests So," *Scientific American*. November 23, 2009 make a solid case for the connection, while Amy Westervelt, "Does climate change really cause conflict?" makes a careful distinction that climate change exacerbates conflict, and cannot be

Contrary to the claims of those using the political frame of food security to legitimate their actions, further instantiations of sovereignty on the part of multilateral trade agencies and transnational agricultural corporations in our global food system are more likely to result in food *insecurity* than food security. This is in part because, as Agamben demonstrates, every enactment of Schmittian sovereignty makes a cut that excludes someone as *homo sacer*. But even more compelling, as I will demonstrate in chapter five, these enactments of sovereignty compel the burning of fossil fuels and the implementation of high-carbon output agriculture, both of which are driving climate change. In turn, climate instability is already beginning to threaten global stability in general, and food production in particular.

Critiques and Limitations of Agamben's Theories

I have thus far argued that Giorgio Agamben's figure of *homo sacer* provides a powerful theoretical model of bodily vulnerability produced within and by transnational food politics. Because the enactments of sovereignty on the part of multilaterals are largely obscured from view, and because food decisions are largely considered "private" matters, it is easy to miss the causative connections between the decisions made by the agencies and the impact on individual human bodies. Agamben's *homo sacer* (and other theories) facilitates the identification of the motions of power in the food system that result in both oppression of peasant farmers and widespread malnutrition globally. But while I perceive Agamben's theories to be immensely helpful, this is not to say that the concept of *homo sacer* or the state of exception can be applied seamlessly to the situation we face in food politics.

said to be the root cause. Thus, as the State Department announced some time ago, climate change might best be regarded as a threat multiplier rather than singular cause. Yet its role should not be minimized.

For example, critics of Agamben, such as Derrida, contend that in developing his theory of *homo sacer* as a consequence of sovereignty Agamben stages his own enactment of sovereignty. Derrida rebukes Agamben for attributing the theme of the werewolf to Hobbes, overlooking prior mentions of wolves by “Plautus and a few other precedents.” The claim that “he is the first to know who came first” is, for Derrida, the hallmark of “the sovereign, if there is such a thing” (*The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 1*, 2008, p. 92). But it is not only Agamben’s claim to be first, and hence his enactment of sovereignty, which draws Derrida’s ire.

Derrida also rails against Agamben, and Foucault before him, for claiming some originary and lasting distinction between *zoë* and *bios*. According to Derrida, “all of Agamben’s demonstrative strategy, here and elsewhere, puts its money on a distinction or a radical, clear, univocal exclusion, among the Greeks and in Aristotle in particular, between bare life (*zoë*), common to all living beings...and life qualified as individual or group life (*bios*).”⁴⁶ Agamben, remember, seeks to distinguish bare life from qualified life in order to argue that in the modern era “the species and the individual as a simple living body become what is at stake in a society’s political strategies.”⁴⁷ Agamben argues that in the days of the ancient Greeks “simple natural life,” or *zoë* was “excluded from the *polis*,” whereas now bare life (*zoë*) has become the focal point of the political in the modern era.⁴⁸

For Derrida, Agamben’s insistence that some original distinction between *zoë* and *bios* has subsequently been rendered ambiguous undermines the integrity of Agamben’s

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign Volume I*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 316

⁴⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

theory, because “this distinction is never so clear and secure.”⁴⁹ Thus, according to Derrida, there is nothing “modern or new” about the zone of indistinction between *zoë* and *bios* that Agamben, and Foucault before him, claim has been introduced in the modern period.⁵⁰ Derrida quotes Agamben’s own acknowledgement that the inclusion of *zoë* in the *polis* is nothing new in order to support this critique, in fact quotes it twice in the span of two pages. Agamben writes: “What characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of *zoë* in the *polis*—which is, in itself, absolutely ancient.”⁵¹ Thus, despite Agamben’s original claim to originality, even he recognizes that the phenomenon which he will describe is in fact quite ancient.

I do not perceive the novelty of these concepts, rather than Agamben’s treatment of them, to be crucial to the explanation of the production of starving, vulnerable bodies in our contemporary food politics. As I have spilled much ink to articulate, Agamben’s *homo sacer* illuminates the linkage between deployments of sovereignty and profound vulnerability in global food politics. However, I am unconvinced that what *homo sacer* represents is a zone of indistinction. Instead, I perceive *homo sacer* to represent the person who does not enjoy the legal protections offered by a sovereign power in the context of a legal system. In other words, *homo sacer* possesses little social or extrinsic value in the context of that legal system. Furthermore, the lack of extrinsic value within that system is read as lack of intrinsic value by those within it.⁵² What is more essential to my thesis than proving or disproving any “zone of indistinction” is the sense in which

⁴⁹ Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, 316.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9, quoted in its entirety in Derrida *Beast and Sovereign*, 316; portions also quoted on page 315.

⁵² Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 136-144.

homo sacer clarifies what is at stake when unilateral sovereignty is invoked or implemented.

While Derrida argues that “bio-power or zoo-power are not new” he concedes that “there are incredible novelties in bio-power.”⁵³ And to be sure, Derrida is dismissive of neither Agamben nor Foucault, despite his arguments against their claims that biopower is a specifically modern development. He argues that the questions they raise “compel us...to reconsider...a way...of articulating a logic and a rhetoric onto a thinking of history or the event” (332). Derrida calls for the relinquishment of the “idea of a decisive and founding event” (333). Against this founding event, Derrida argues:

There is neither simple diachronic succession nor simple synchronic simultaneity here (or that there is both at once), that there is neither continuity of passage nor interruption or mere caesura, that the motifs of the passage of what passes and comes to pass in history belong neither to a solid foundation nor to a founding decision (333).

Derrida concludes that there is no single founding decision, no originary ground and no lack of ground, but “*more than one* ground, more than one solid, and more than one single threshold” (333).⁵⁴

At this juncture, I must acknowledge that while my own argument in this dissertation emphasizes the sovereign decisions of multilateral agencies as the major contributing factor to problematic food politics at present, this is not to suggest that the formation of these agencies was *the founding event* in our problematic food system. Derrida is correct: there is no single founding decision and no single founding decision-maker. Yet this lack of foundational event or singular threshold need not thwart efforts to

⁵³Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, 330.

⁵⁴ Certainly, this lack of diachronic succession or clear threshold is evident when reading Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael’s theories of food regimes as described in the previous chapter. Occasionally their writing is characterized by a lack of clarity that I believe reflects this lack of clear threshold between regimes to which Derrida can be seen as gesturing.

shift motions of power toward more socially just and ecologically sustainable trajectories. Instead, the multiplicity of causative factors pries open myriad viable passages to a more sustainable, just and abundant food politics (as I will discuss in further detail in the final chapter).

Criticisms of Agamben's *homo sacer* notwithstanding, his theory of *homo sacer* calls attention to the effects of sovereign power in a way that facilitates inquiry into the food system as a site for the implementation of biopower. For example, whereas the bodies of the starving would appear to indicate that our agricultural system does not produce enough food, on a planet that produces sufficient calories to feed every single person a 2100kcal/day diet we must reach for some other explanation for the seven and a half million deaths per year by starvation since clearly food is available.⁵⁵ I propose that, with the assistance of Agamben, the bodies of the starving—and perhaps even the bodies of landless peasants and the obese—can be read as versions of *homo sacer* insofar as these bodies are formed as a consequence of enactments of an economic rendition of absolute sovereignty.

This is not to suggest that these models of sovereignty were not enacted with similar disastrous (for some) results prior to the development of multilaterals. Certainly famine and starvation have been experienced for millennia and it is the human desire to avoid such circumstances that in part leads us to view the policies enacted by multilaterals as potential solutions. My task here is rather to call attention—perhaps not in an entirely new way, but merely in another way—to the manner in which the sovereign decisions of multilaterals perpetuate and potentially increase precarity in the food system

⁵⁵ Hunger Notes. *2013 World Hunger and Poverty Facts*. May 7, 2010.
<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>.

such that people starve to death on a planet with plenty of food to feed them, and with, ostensibly, sufficient distribution pathways to ensure that food produced elsewhere could in fact reach those who need it. And I am further suggesting that Agamben's *homo sacer* helps to at least partially explain this problematic outcome in a way that might facilitate a new kind of political approach to these problems.

However, I find his vision of a new potential political approach troubling. He concludes *State of Exception* by declaring that:

To show law in its nonrelation to life and life in its nonrelation to law means to open a space between them for human action, which once claimed for itself the name of 'politics.' ...the only truly political action, however, is that which severs the nexus between violence and law. And only beginning from the space thus opened will it be possible to pose the question of a possible use of law after the deactivation of the device that, in the state of exception, tied it to life.⁵⁶

The opening of this space would not deliver us to "a lost original state" but one which would permit the alignment of word and "human praxis that the powers of law and myth had sought to capture in the state of exception."⁵⁷ Something about this vision does not square with my reading of the conversation between Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt—a conversation to which Agamben devotes an entire chapter. To begin with, the notion that there would be only *one* "truly political action" or *one* space that could be opened within which uses of law could be rendered nontoxic is problematic. Suggestions such as this seem to play right into Schmitt's hand, which it seems elsewhere Agamben would prefer to avoid.

But more importantly, it seems to me that Benjamin would disagree that it was only the state of exception that tied the law to life and therefore violence. Nor would he

⁵⁶ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 88.

⁵⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 88.

agree that there is a way to sever the nexus between violence and law in such a way that would preserve law. Benjamin perceived law to be violent in its establishment and application, and not merely violent in its suspension. This is because for Benjamin, law is an attempt to decide universally, once and for all, what can only be decided upon in its singularity.⁵⁸ And even if Benjamin were to agree that the “nexus” could be severed, he would certainly not agree that we could ever be certain that such a feat has been accomplished.

Let us review how Agamben reads Benjamin in the chapter he devotes to the conversation between Benjamin and Schmitt. Agamben argues that “the aim of Benjamin’s essay is to ensure the possibility of a violence...that lies absolutely ‘outside’ and ‘beyond’ the law and that, as such, could shatter the dialectic between lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence. Benjamin calls this other figure of violence “pure” or “divine,” and, in the human sphere, “revolutionary.”⁵⁹ Agamben goes on to say that that “while Schmitt attempts every time to reinscribe violence within a juridical context, Benjamin responds to this gesture by seeking every time to assure it—as pure violence—an existence outside of the law.”⁶⁰ Agamben concludes the chapter by insisting that “one day humanity will play with law” in such a way as to free it from its “canonical use” so as to “allow us to arrive at that justice” that Benjamin envisions.

I would agree with Agamben that Benjamin sought the shattering of the “dialectic between lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence,” but I would disagree that

⁵⁸ Benjamin, *Critique of Violence* 294. Benjamin decries the “stubborn prevailing habit of conceiving those just ends as ends of a possible law, that is, not only as generally valid...but also as capable of generalization, which, as could be shown, contradicts the nature of justice. For ends that for one situation are just, universally acceptable and valid, are so for no other situation no matter how similar it may be in other respects.”

⁵⁹ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

Benjamin wanted to assure the existence of a pure violence outside the law in such a way as to validate violent means for the purposes of revolutionary ends. Benjamin is clear: “All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving.”⁶¹ This applies to revolutionary movements in pursuit of justice just as certainly as it applies to unjust legal systems. Any revolution that perceives itself as righteously pursuing justice through violent means will only result in the renewed instantiation of a violent law.

Benjamin’s insistence that any violence which can be inscribed within a juridical context is mythological, then, is not merely an assurance that some form of violence exists outside the law. It is, rather, a claim that all laws are founded on myth rather than reality. As such can they never be said to be divinely ordained, regardless of how closely our “political organization” corresponds to our “metaphysical image.”⁶² And here Derrida’s reading on Benjamin will clarify an important reason to resist the law, or *droit*, when it threatens to make *homo sacer* of us all:

Blood is the symbol of life, he says. In making blood flow, the mythological violence of *droit* is exercised in its own favor against life pure and simple biological life. In contrast, purely divine violence is exercised on all life, but to the profit or in favor of the living.”⁶³

But even here Derrida cautions us: “to think at this point that we have...correctly interpreted the meaning, the *vouloir-dire* of Benjamin’s text, by opposing in a decidable way the decidability of divine, revolutionary, historical, anti-state, anti-juridical violence on the one side and on the other the undecidability of the mythic violence of state *droit*,

⁶¹ Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 287.

⁶² “The metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization.” Schmitt Pol, *Political Theology*, 46.

⁶³ Derrida, “Force of Law.”

would still be to decide to quickly and not to understand the power of this text.”⁶⁴ The text simultaneously provokes and resists efforts at its interpretation.

At this point Derrida calls our attention to the fact that at the conclusion of *Critique of Violence*, Benjamin speaks of the existence of violence outside the law only in the conditional: “but *if* the existence of violence outside the law...is assured.”⁶⁵ Such a fact is far from certain, even at the conclusion of the essay. Derrida goes on to reinforce Benjamin’s conclusion by insisting that “the *decision* on this subject, the determinant decision, the one that permits us to know or to recognize such a pure and revolutionary violence *as such*, is a *decision not accessible to man*. Here we must deal with a whole other undecidability.”⁶⁶ A theologian might recognize this “whole other undecidability” as an apophatic allusion.

Consequently, it would seem that Benjamin calls not so much for a violence unalloyed to law, or the disruption of the lawmaking/law-preserving dialectic but instead cautions that the quest for justice must proceed with humility, must not rely upon violence—and possibly not even the law—as its means, and above all does not promote bloodshed—the hallmark of mythological violence. So where Agamben insists that “the only truly political action, however, is that which severs the nexus between violence and law,”⁶⁷ I would argue—alongside Benjamin and Derrida— that the only truly political action is that which acknowledges the irreducibility of justice to law. The living call of justice often demands the formulation, activation, and application of just laws—laws which restrain unilateral sovereignty is in large part what we seek in a sustainable food

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1033.

⁶⁵ Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 300; emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ Derrida, “Force of Law,” 1033.

⁶⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 88.

politics. But because the call toward justice *is* living and therefore dynamic, justice cannot be regarded as a condition achieved but rather as actions taken. Consequently, justice cannot finally be assured *solely* by legal formulations. But because principles of equity, integrity and decency cannot be reduced to the law itself, the truly political act will express those principles even if—or especially if—they are deemed “illegal” under the auspices of a tyrannical sovereign.⁶⁸

Judith Butler and an Ethics of Nonviolence

It is at this juncture that I would like to entertain the question posed by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* as to “what form political reflection and deliberation ought to take if we take injurability and aggression as two points of departure for political life.”⁶⁹ While her inquiry was prompted by the terrorist attack on 9/11, I find many of her themes applicable to a politics of food, as well. Her sense of vulnerability was heightened by those attacks because they exposed her “fundamental dependency on anonymous others” that “no security measures will foreclose” (xii). What I am arguing for in this chapter is that we directly and unswervingly address food politics through the twin lenses of injurability and

⁶⁸ Such as, for example, the many people who concealed Jews from Nazi persecution. And here I am reminded of the eschatological vision depicted in Jeremiah 31:33 “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Previously, in Jeremiah 7:5-6 God has accused the Israelites of behaving unjustly toward one another, oppressing the widow, orphan and alien and shedding innocent blood. Redemption transforms the emotional nature such that external, fixed, written, law will be unnecessary. Each person will “do justice” (Hosea, this time!)—immediately enacting equity in each moment. Justice appears here as an action verb, rather than static condition. This will not do away with Torah, or Jewish instruction. Rather, it permits the expression of Torah’s creative aim without the need for punitive restriction, because the emotional nature has been transformed in such a way as to always support the creative aim of Torah, especially if Torah is read in the manner of the ancients and mystics in Jewish tradition who perceived it as the blueprint for creation that preexisted creation itself. What we have of written and oral Torah represents but a portion of divine intentions for creation. A fuller explication of this vision is far beyond the scope of this dissertation, but yet it is worth mentioning in conjunction with the severing of justice and law.

⁶⁹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xii.

aggression, in full recognition of our own radical contingency upon and situatedness within food systems.

Butler was prompted to ponder these questions in response to mourning, both personal and national, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. While the present engagement is not motivated by the psychology of mourning, it nonetheless finds resonances with Butler's concerns about corporeal vulnerability: we are *because* we eat, and the fact that we eat renders us both vulnerable to and connected with myriad unseen others around the planet. Butler argues that "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed" (21). As I have been arguing in this chapter, part of the way in which we are "constituted politically" is precisely in relation to our "social vulnerability." In the following chapter I will argue that we are also constituted corporeally in part by this same vulnerability, a vulnerability which is communicated by the text—and sociality—of our bodies.

But at this juncture it seems important to recognize that the vulnerability represented by *homo sacer* is something we all wish to avoid. The promise of aligning ourselves with (Schmittian) sovereign power is that we can avoid that fate, especially for those of us who are well-fed. However, such invulnerability is an illusion: the sovereign may be the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature himself and therefore vulnerable, right along with the rest of us. What we are all fundamentally and irrevocably dependent upon is an ecosystem which will provide us with food.

The dominant methods of food production currently being promoted by the multilaterals who operate under the "food security" frame—which, remember, implicitly

function as a Schmittian-type, absolute sovereign—are responsible for up to thirty percent of greenhouse gas emissions,⁷⁰ put control over seeds in the hands of transnational corporations, and rely heavily upon monoculture crops which are inherently vulnerable for their lack of diversity. What these agencies do is promise security, permitting them to concentrate vast amounts of wealth and power in the hands of a few, while exposing the many to overwhelming long term risk. And, as will be discussed in chapter 5, accelerating rise in planetary temperatures means that risks faced by our global food system are no longer so long term, but are already occurring.

We cannot avoid vulnerability; it is the human condition. We must source our food politics not from a fear of vulnerability or a desire to erase it, but from an acceptance that to be alive is to be vulnerable. Judith Butler asserts that “common human vulnerability...emerges with life itself” and goes on to say that it is a condition “with which we cannot argue.”⁷¹ But despite the fact that vulnerability is an inevitable condition, Butler does not suggest that we consign those who suffer a disproportionate share of it to their fate. Instead, she demands a “world in which bodily vulnerability is protected without therefore being eradicated.”⁷² Given that “impingement is inevitable” it is necessary to distinguish between inevitable vulnerability, and that which results from reversible social conditions.⁷³

⁷⁰ The precise percentage of greenhouse gases accounted for by agricultural production and distribution are hotly contested. Estimates range from 9% by the EPA to approximately 33% by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, reported on in *Nature* by Natasha Gilbert. The EPA figure does not include any factors external to the farm, such as transportation of food across vast distances or storage and packaging of food, in its calculations of the agricultural contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, The CGIAR includes some of those collateral sources of greenhouse gas emission.

⁷¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷³ Judith Butler, *Giving and Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 200), 107.

We may be thousands of miles away from those who produce our food, but because we are mutually entangled in the global food system, we are bound by a common fate. As Butler says, “If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the ‘we’ is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social condition of our very formation”⁷⁴ We are not isolated from those landless peasants crying out for justice, pleading for a patch of land and the right to farm it in such a way as to protect and restore a fragile ecosystem. They are on the front lines of a struggle we will all face eventually if we do not wrestle with the problems in our food system now. Butler asks, “is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference?” (27). The differences are myriad: different languages, different vocations, different social classes and relations to power, different countries, and different hemispheres. But yet there is a shared vulnerability in our dependence upon viable ecosystems in which food can be produced.

Butler goes on to insist that such a relational community imaginary is not merely a “descriptive or historical fact” but is also “an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence” (27). In a country in which fewer than two percent of the population farms, we must acknowledge our interdependence with those who produce food; we could not live without them. Or at least, could not live as we do. By virtue of this interdependence, Butler asserts, it is “incumbent on us to consider the place of violence in

⁷⁴ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 23.

any such relation, for violence is always an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another” (27).

Butler begins her ethic of nonviolence by asserting that “what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other’s address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will” (130). Thus, according to Butler, moral authority arises in the context of “the demand that comes from elsewhere, sometimes a nameless elsewhere, by which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us” (130). This moral demand is conveyed by “the face” (132). Responding to this face requires recognizing “the precariousness of life itself,” Butler suggests (134).

But despite the moral claim made by the other, and the moral authority thus conferred, the face of the other does not offer a “prescription that might be linguistically formulated and followed” (131). Nonetheless, she quotes Levinas in suggesting that “the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill” (131). In the absence of a prescription for enacting our moral obligation, it is our responsibility to determine what actions we must take to prevent the unnecessary death of the Other.

Butler reads Levinas as insisting that exposing oneself to the “vulnerability of the face” is tantamount to calling into question one’s own claims to existence. Butler asserts that within the domain of Levinasian ethics, “the Other’s right to exist has primacy over [one’s] own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other” (132) The dialectic between one’s survival instinct and one’s ethical prohibition against killing the Other gives rise to “fear for one’s own

survival” on the one hand, and “anxiety about hurting the Other,” on the other. Butler goes on to say that “these two impulses are at war with each other, like siblings fighting. But they are at war with each other in order *not* to be at war, and this seems to be the point” (137). The temptation to violence in “self-defense” simply marks an irreducible physical vulnerability; it does not legitimate aggression” (101).

Butler’s ethic of nonviolence begins with the war between the impulse for one’s own survival and the ethical prohibition against killing the Other. In the context of food politics, the ethic of nonviolence comes about as we demand for our own access to nutritious food while simultaneously protecting the welfare of those who produce it. The transnational corporate food system treats this as an either/or proposition—either we have access to nutritional food at the expense of migrant workers and landless peasants and the very earth itself, or we will not have access to nutritional food. To the contrary, I argue the reverse: either we figure out how to gain access to nutritional food while protecting migrant workers, landless peasants and the very earth itself, or we will lose access to nutritional food. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, we are already losing it.

It is not so easy, however, to simply “copy and paste” Butler’s ethic of nonviolence onto our contemporary food politics. The challenge results from Butler’s entry-point for ethical concern. Butler’s essay grapples with humanization as “we approach it through the figure of the face (140). The address that morally obligates us comes, we are told, through the face itself. Yet we seldom if ever are face to face with the Others who produce our food. Or the nonhuman Others who become our food. And even more problematically, the animate and inanimate others that nurture our food—such as pollinators, earthworms, soil, sunlight and water—have no face at all. How then can they

address us? And even if they were to address us, can we really be held morally accountable to this multitude?

To at least the first of these questions, Butler provides at least a partial answer. First, she describes how the face can also be “found in the back and the neck,” in the way that “these bodily parts...are said to cry and to sob and to scream, as if they were a face” (133). Thus, it is the agony communicated by the face, and not the face per se that makes the address. It is what is communicated by the face, what the face that represents, that makes the moral demands, rather than the face itself. This potential for joy and suffering cannot ever be adequately represented, can never be reduced to the face that speaks on its behalf. About this Butler is clear: “there is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give” (144). Might we seek another representation in lieu of the face?

The irreducibility of the potential for joy and suffering, of the moral demand posed by the Other, leaves open the possibility that another representation of suffering could be the “face” through which the ethical claim is conveyed. We may never encounter our food growers or the animals we consume “face to face,” but we may yet encounter images of their suffering faces. We may never meet a Guatemalan coffee grower personally, but we may meet someone who has and who can affirm for us that Fair Trade certification is meaningful—and in particular means a fair wage and better working conditions for those who grow our coffee. These images and intermediaries can effectively convey the moral demands and ethical claims inherent, yet typically concealed, within our food system.

But perhaps another object or practice could come to “represent,” as it were, the ethical demand that is represented by the face itself: graphic representations of increasing temperatures, decreasing rainfall and reduced crop yields could communicate the suffering of the earth, for example. The sight of my hand reaching for a bright red tomato could hold me morally accountable to the migrant farm worker who picked it. The suffering animal represented by the meat on my plate could call forth moral outrage at the inhumanity of industrial farming.⁷⁵ Or, more broadly, any food on my plate can serve as a reminder that I cannot live without food, and so nor can I live without the innumerable people, creatures, ecosystems, and conditions who conspired to bring the food to my plate.

But despite the fact that the face is in some sense only representative of moral accountability, and “not exclusively a human face,” which would seem to leave the aforementioned options open, Butler nonetheless maintains that the face remains “a condition for humanization” (141). Are we then free of moral accountability within the global food system if we are never “face to face” with the suffering produced, or if the suffering body is not a human body? Not necessarily. What the face represents, in other words, continues to exist whether it has been humanized or not. We are always morally accountable, even if we fail to recognize the representation for what it is: a demand that we respond to the suffering of the Other.

⁷⁵ In a 2009 interview with Pierpaolo Antonello and Roberto Farneti entitled “Antigone’s Claim: A Conversation with Judith Butler,” published in *Theory & Event*, vol 12 issue 1 2009, Butler states “If humans actually share a condition of precariousness, not only just with one another, but also with animals, and with the environment, then this constitutive feature of who we “are” undoes the very conceit of anthropocentrism. In this sense, I want to propose ‘precarious life’ as a non-anthropocentric framework for considering what makes life valuable.” Thus, raising the issue of animal suffering does not seem to be beyond the scope of her concerns.

Humanization is a social phenomenon, and while the face may be a condition for humanization, the face can also be used to dehumanize.⁷⁶ The dehumanization to which Butler refers occurs through “the media’s evacuation of the human through the image.” She insists that we understand media manipulation of the image within the context of the process through which “normative schemes of intelligibility establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life what will be a grievable death” (146). One tactic through which the normative scheme operates is “precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death” (147). This method Butler refers to as “radical effacement,” and her description of the results of radical effacement call to mind Agamben’s *homo sacer*. Radical effacement establishes conditions through which the radically effaced are rendered killable, because in the absence of an image “no murder has, therefore, ever taken place” (147). No crime has been committed, no one sacrificed.

The radical effacement of pollinators, earthworms, waterways, refugees, migrant workers, landless peasants, the rural poor and inner city slum dwellers, and farm animals is not accidental. Butler declares that “politics—and power—work in part through regulating what can appear, what can be heard” (147). While Butler insists that “these schemas of intelligibility are tacitly and forcefully mandated by those corporations that monopolize control over the mainstream media with strong interests in maintaining US military power” (147) I contend that maintaining control over the global food system is a similarly strong interest they hold. But we remain morally accountable to those who suffer as a result of the global food system in which we participate, even if those Others have been dehumanized. And, more to the point, we remain inescapably entangled

⁷⁶ (Butler 2004) 141

with—often dependent upon—these Others for our own survival. We permit their effacement at our peril.

But that only begs the second question: can we really be held morally accountable to this multitude? The transnational character of the contemporary food system flings far and wide this interdependence, brings the lives of faceless, nameless others to bear in the very cells of our bodies. Our lives are profoundly intertwined with people whose faces we will never see. Some of these people endure abusive labor practices in order to produce our food; still others are murdered for their efforts to preserve the land upon which it is produced. Seldom, if ever, do we see their faces or hear their names. And there are so many, even if we are to restrict our moral accountability to the human. To add the potential ethical claims of the nonhuman to this results in an incalculable demand to which we are incapable of responding.

To try to respond to every other, according to Butler, “can only result in a situation of radical irresponsibility” (170). We simply cannot respond to every single entity with whom—which which?—we are entangled without becoming radically irresponsible. So to which others do we respond? I will wrestle with this dilemma in greater detail in the final chapter. But for now let me simply say that the limited ability to meet a seemingly unlimited demand does not, in itself, excuse complete inaction. Some form of responsible action is required, and that form will vary based upon one’s situatedness within the global food system. For now it is enough to know that the transnational global food system can be characterized as violent. While this system may lead us to a sort of zero sum thinking that promotes the idea that we can be safe while

others suffer, instead the recognition of mutual vulnerability is a potential starting point for a nonviolent food politics.

Enactments of absolute sovereignty are legitimated on the condition of existential threat. In light of Butler's observation that vulnerability is a persistent feature of life and therefore inescapable, it becomes clearer why the Schmittian sovereign devolves into a dictator, and why the state of exception becomes permanent. If vulnerability is a feature of our very existence, then existential threats cannot be eliminated, merely postponed. We might, then, read absolute sovereignty as one political response to the fact of human vulnerability, albeit one with serious potential to increase rather than decrease vulnerability over time. Butler's ethic of nonviolence offers another approach to food politics that seeks to minimize yet not eradicate vulnerability. This political ethic derives the strength of its commitment from the recognition of interdependence and contingency.

Political deliberation informed by Butler's approach opens the possibility of severing the nexus between justice and law. Liberated from the conceit that any political structure is capable of eradicating vulnerability, it does not promise absolutely secure or just *ends* for which violent *means* might be used. Butler concludes her essay with a call to "create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform." The politics she envisions is not predicated upon integration into a unified "People," but is instead invested in a process of elaborating differences. Further, the process involves a personal, situation-specific moral accountability to one who suffers rather than the clumsy application of a general statute to a specific situation. This sidesteps the concern of both Schmitt and Benjamin that laws are excessively general

whereas their application is specific (294). The mismatch between general legal ends and specific situations was what bound law to violence, according to Benjamin. Thus, Butler's ethic of nonviolence promotes a situation-specific responsiveness potentially capable of severing the nexus of justice and law.

Conclusion

Agamben's theories of *homo sacer*, the people and the People, and state of exception shed light on risks inherent in the deployments of sovereignty on the part of multilateral trade organizations and transnational corporations. While on the one hand the sovereign assures the rule of law, on the other hand, the sovereign possesses the power to suspend the law in total (as in the state of exception) or in part (as in banishment). The figure of one who has been expelled from under the protective auspices of the law is referred to by Agamben as *homo sacer*, he who can be killed with impunity, but not sacrificed. No manner of bodily harm that may befall *homo sacer* can be considered a legal violation. Agamben refers to Jews in Hitler's Germany to illustrate the profound vulnerability, and extra-legal status, of *homo sacer*. Should the sovereign transform into a dictator, everyone is at risk of becoming *homo sacer*.

Schmitt recognizes that the sovereign is at risk of devolution to dictatorship in instances in which the state faces an existential threat, and Agamben elucidates the radical vulnerability produced in the wake of the devolution to dictatorship. Agamben extends Schmitt's concerns about the potential for "the sovereign" to become a dictator by arguing that such devolution is inevitable in a liberal democracy. In large part this is because liberal democracies are susceptible to perceiving these unassimilable elements as

existential threats, resulting in the transformation of a “real, or military, state of siege to a fictitious, or political, one.”⁷⁷ Consequently, the state of exception becomes permanent.

In contemporary food politics, transnational corporations and multilateral agencies enact an economic rendition of Schmittian sovereignty. The seven million people who die of starvation annually and the nearly two hundred environmental and food activist who are assassinated annually can be viewed as *homines sacri*, those who can be killed with impunity but not sacrificed.⁷⁸ In the light of Agamben’s *homo sacer* these deaths are read as direct consequences of the aforementioned sovereign operations.

Agamben undertakes his analysis of “bare life” based upon his reading of Benjamin, and subsequently seeks a way to sever “the nexus between violence and law.”⁷⁹ This does not square with my reading of Benjamin, whom I would suggest did not perceive the nexus to be severable. Judith Butler’s ethic of nonviolence, with its acknowledgement of ineradicable vulnerability and its emphasis on moral accountability to an Other who suffers, begins to respond to the living dynamism of the urge toward justice because it calls for a situation-specific justice that settled law on its own cannot obtain. Notably, Butler’s democratic vision does not demand unification into a People, but rather invokes the elaboration of differences. Thus, the fact that “the people” will remain distinct—and that there are likely to be many “peoples”—enriches democracy rather than threatening it.

⁷⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception* 5

⁷⁸ The total for 2015 was 185, according to Oliver Holmes, Environmental activist murders set record as 2015 became deadliest year. *The Guardian*. (June, 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/20/environmental-activist-murders-global-witness-report>. In 2014 the total was at least 116, with the suspicion that the estimate was low according to Lizzie Dearden, “Environmental activists being killed in record number,” *The Independent* (April 20, 2015).

⁷⁹ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 88.

The ethical disposition suggested by Butler is something of a corrective to the radical precarity faced by *homo sacer*. And, I would suggest, her acknowledgement that vulnerability is ineradicable is perhaps the most profoundly important fact to acknowledge in any consideration of food politics in the context of climate change. Despite the strides made to reduce hunger by the corporate food regime, the agricultural methods they espouse drive climate change which poses a significant threat to global agriculture over the next fifty years. Our food system is vulnerable, and as a result, so are we.

The vulnerabilities produced by our food system are not experienced the same way by different people, however. In the Global South, vulnerability appears as malnourishment, death by starvation, or the killing of food activists. In the Global North, vulnerability appears as metabolic syndrome and the obesity epidemic. How can the corporate food regime produce such disparate forms of vulnerability? The explanation will be sought in the next chapter, as new materialisms are integrated into the analysis of the materialization of human bodies.

Chapter 4

Producing the Bodies of the Body Politic

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that deployments of strong, Schmittian, or absolute sovereignty amplify existential risks on a broad scale, despite the claim of “the sovereign” to act only in the service of eradicating existential threats. I further argued that vulnerabilities produced by our food system are not experienced the same way by people in different social locations. In the Global South, this vulnerability appears as malnourishment, death by starvation, or the killing of food activists. In the Global North, vulnerability more often appears as the obesity epidemic. And it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that in consequent to mass migration and dramatically unequal wealth in all nations, Global South and Global North become, more or less, markers of relative privilege that cannot be strictly said to correspond to geography in an absolutely reliable way.¹

While I argued for the resonance between vulnerability in the global food system and Agamben’s “*homo sacer*,” I nonetheless asserted that at least one distinction would be that in the case of food politics the “ban” experienced by the vulnerable is not a simple either/or situation. In other words, it is not the case that either one receives full protection from the sovereign or one receives no protections from the sovereign. Instead, I would argue that for most people living within the regime of a strong, Schmittian-type sovereignty, exposure to both the benefits of sovereign protection and the vulnerability of *homo sacer* status occurs in a gradient fashion.

¹ Please see footnote 7 in chapter two for information on the usage of Global South/Global North in this dissertation.

I recognize that my reading requires kneading greater elasticity into the concept than either Roman law or Agamben intended. Agamben in particular, and Schmitt before him, sought to interrogate the limit case. Schmitt argued, for instance, that “the rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything.” Schmitt insisted that the exception—and in particular the state of exception brought about due to existential threat to the state—illustrated the profoundest truths of the state itself. And for Agamben, the exceptional limit case of the death camps are taken as “the biopolitical paradigm of the modern.”² Both theorists found the extremes to be valuable for their capacity to illuminate more moderate realities.

The application of Agamben’s *homo sacer* in the previous chapter lingered extensively on the extremes of murdered food activists and the death by starvation of over seven million people. Both of these sets of concerns arise primarily in developing nations. My task in this chapter is to illuminate the more subtle gradations of *homo sacer* as they appear in developed nations, for example as obesity. I will argue that the body materializes as an effect of class, gender and race structures such that the body itself becomes a marker for social status. In turn, the body thus marked intercalates with systems of social power such that habitus becomes *justification for* perpetuating the social system that produces it.

Thus, *homo sacer* will be seen to have at least two appearances in our global food system: the obese/relatively poor, especially in affluent nations, and the emaciated/abjectly poor, particularly in developing nations. Certainly, there are more than just these two. And the purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate that *homo sacer* can indeed take on various appearances, some of which obscure the precarity of the one

² In fact the title of Part III of Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, pages 119-179.

so marked. Raj Patel insists that both first world obesity and developing world hunger are produced as the result of the concentration of agricultural decision-making power into very few hands.³ Not coincidentally, Patel names these power-brokers as transnational corporations which have benefited from the economic deployments of sovereignty on the part of multilaterals, previously described. A new materialist approach to the body will demonstrate how a single cause can produce such radically different outcomes as the habitus of the Global North obese/relatively poor and that of the Global South emaciated/abjectly poor.⁴

The new materialist approaches of Jane Bennett's "vibrant materiality" and Karen Barad's agential realism will be integrated with nutritional science studies in order provide a theoretical framework within which to demonstrate that bodies materialize as classed by virtue of their intra-actions with food in the context of social structures of power and privilege. Margaret Urban Walker's analysis of "necessary identities" will provide a feminist ethic that sheds light on the ways that sovereignty and precarity are differentially distributed to bodies thus materialized. This analysis will deepen our understanding of the social production of subtle gradations of *homo sacer*.

³ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 12-13.

⁴ The distinction between affluent and developing nations is occasionally referred to as a Global North/Global South distinction. This distinction is drawn upon an overgeneralization. One must always keep in the line of sight the reality that a range of socioeconomic situations exists in every nation. And the mass migration accompanying globalization has brought the Global South into the Global North, and visa versa. Nonetheless, in undertaking the application of new materialisms to food politics, I will align the obese/relatively poor with the Global North and the emaciated/abjectly poor with the Global South. I take this approach because typically obesity is a problem in affluent nations rather than developing nations.

The Materialization of Human Bodies in the Global Food System

The vibrant materiality of food

At the outset, Jane Bennett announces that the political intentions inspiring her publication of *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* is to “encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things.”⁵ Bennett wonders aloud, “How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?”⁶ She goes on to argue for a politics “devoted to... a cultivated discernment of the web of agentic capacities.”⁷ Bennett intends her political ecologies to cultivate a politics that take a fuller account of the interconnected networks of complex systems that condition “human life on earth.” Only a politics that takes a full accounting of complex interconnections holds some potential for moving society toward more ecologically sustainable decision-making regarding production and distribution of food.

Thus, food is among the lively things whose agency Bennett hopes to elucidate. It is through increased awareness of edible matter as actant that Bennett hopes to bring about “a more ecologically sustainable public” (40). Bennett devotes a chapter of *Vibrant Matter* to food, building a “case for food as a participant” in the assemblage she

⁵Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) vii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 38. Political solutions are envisioned as necessary because our food system problems are political problems insofar as the arrangement of the *polis* exerts tremendous influence on and through systems of food production and distribution. Contemporary political systems favor the “economy” at the expense of “ecology.” We live in a house divided: the *nomos*/law by which the *polis* is arranged within our *oikos* (earth home) is incongruent with the *logos*/wisdom by which the *oikos* perpetually recreates itself. This *oikos* is comprised of multitudes of nonhuman and even inorganic (subjects and) agencies involved in complexly interacting systems. To live unsustainably is to dismiss the *logos* of the material world, a world with which we are engaged in “mutual transformations” (Bennett, 49) through intimate daily interactions we call “eating” by virtue of this very same *logos*. Here I am thinking of *logos* as wisdom in the 1st century *logos* theology of Philo, as described by Daniel Boyarin, in “The Jewish Life of the Logos: Logos Theology in Pre- and Pararabbinic Judaism.” In *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Univ. of Penn. Press, 2004), 89-127. In particular, see p. 113-4 where Boyarin states that God’s Word “was the same as his wisdom” and through wisdom/word, God created the world.

refers to as “American consumption,” of which the obesity epidemic is symptomatic (39). Convinced that “an image of inert matter helps animate our current practice of aggressively wasteful and planet-endangering consumption” (51). Bennett wagers that were we to experience materiality “as a lively force with agentic capacity” then a greater passion for ecological sustainability might animate public life (51). She begins this chapter in the following way:

It is not controversial to say that trash, gadgets, electricity, and fire are relevant to politics, or to say that though such things do not qualify as political stakeholders, they form the milieu of human action or serve as means or impediments to it. But do the categories of context, tool, and constraint capture the full range of powers possessed by nonhuman bodies? (39).

The final question in this passage seems to suggest that she is about to sketch a version of food as more than mere backdrop. But will she go so far as to suggest that food is a “political stakeholder”? Or will she mark a third path, between stakeholder and mere context within which stakes are determined?

She goes on to say that she “will treat food as conative bodies vying alongside and within another complex body” (39). This choice of verb—‘vies’—conveys the sense of contestation over superiority between us and our food. This contestation for superiority, then, suggests that food might after all be considered a political stakeholder, with interests it pursues. She notes the way that “some foods, say potato chips” seem to trigger a mindless hand-to-mouth motion, seeming “to call forth, or provoke and stoke, the manual labor” (40). At the very least, “the I is not necessarily the most decisive operator” in our engagements with food (40). If the vibrant materiality of food elicits

human behavior, the sovereign self upon which any claim to sovereignty is based is called into question.

Bennett's case for the participation of food in the assemblage she has named "American consumption" rests on two foundations. One is the scientific study of "the effects of dietary fat on human moods and cognitive dispositions," and the other is "the robust nineteenth century discussions of the moral and political efficacy of diet" (39-40). She cites scientific studies which have shown omega-3 fatty acids to decrease violence, increase attention span, and improve mood.⁸ She emphasizes that this effect "ought not to be imagined as a mechanical causality," but is rather more likely the result of "an emergent causality" that she stresses is nonlinear in character (41-42). For Bennett, the problem of obesity would subsequently require an analysis of:

not only the large humans and their economic-cultural prosthesis (agribusiness, snack-food vending machines, insulin injections, bariatric surgery, serving sizes, systems of food marketing and distribution, microwave ovens) but also the strivings and trajectories of fats as they weaken or enhance the power of human wills habits, and ideas (43).

Here again, her choice of verb—"strivings"—of fats subtly insinuates that fats desire to be consumed, or that their strivings for inclusion in the human corpus has some role to play in how we have structured our food system.

The second major source of support for Bennett's assertions about the agency of food comes from the writings of Thoreau and Nietzsche on the "moral and political efficacy of diet" (43-47). That is to say, Thoreau and Nietzsche concern themselves with the ways in which the foods we ingest form our moral character. These writers, similar to the authors of recent studies of psychological effects of dietary fats, "discern a productive

⁸ Ibid., 41.

power intrinsic to foodstuff, which enables edible matter to coarsen or refine the imagination or render a disposition more or less liable to resentment, depression, hyperactivity, dull-wittedness or violence” (49). Bennett mobilizes both Nietzsche and Thoreau to support her contention that the food we eat has the “power to resist or obstruct human projects, but it also includes the more active power to affect and create effects.”⁹ Subsequently, “eating appears as a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurry: my meal both is and is not mine; you both are and are not what you eat” (49). The food you eat *becomes* you, but you become a different “you” in your interaction with the food you eat.

Bennett argues that food is an actant, “operative in the moods, cognitive dispositions, and moral sensibilities that we bring to bear as we engage the questions of what to eat, how to get it, and when to stop” (51). She sets up her argument by first noting that “the assemblage in which persons and fats are participants is perhaps better figured as a nonlinear system” (42). This then, leads her to “focus one’s attention away from individuals and onto actants in assemblages,” with a particular emphasis upon food as an actant (42).

In order to better understand at least some of the actants involved in the “nonlinear system” within which “persons and fats are participants” I would like in this chapter to take the line of inquiry Bennett initiates, and swerve with it in precisely the direction she does not wish to go: toward the economic-cultural prosthetic. In bracketing the economic-cultural prosthesis, Bennett mutes attention to the political dimension of food, which seems counter to her desires to “animate a more ecologically sustainable public.” Aside from her introduction to the Slow Food movement, Bennett confines

⁹ Ibid., 49

herself to describing the impact of food upon an individual with only a hint, via Nietzsche, that the action of food upon an individual may be altered by other features of the individual's social setting.

For example, perhaps the material-discursive practices through which the *polis* produces and consumes food—in other words, politics of food—already diminish the general awareness of the material agency of food that Bennett is trying to help us see. Could it be that nineteenth century writers Bennett cited were more likely to acknowledge the materiality of food than contemporary authors because in the nineteenth century farmers constituted approximately seventy percent of the American labor force, compared to only two percent today?¹⁰

I would argue that there is a correlation, and that the lack of recognition of the material reality of food is itself symptomatic of our “economic-cultural prosthesis”—material practices which paradoxically correlate with the divorce of the conceptual from the material. Most of us don't grow our own food, we seldom encounter our food in the form of vibrant, living beings; instead we encounter it as dead matter on a store shelf. Thus, we imagine that food comes from the grocery store not from fertile soil; bacon comes in a tidy rectangular plastic package, not from the bloody, once-living flesh of a pig. It is possible that the corporate agri-businesses endemic to this economic-cultural prosthesis drives the eating of low-nutrient, high calorie food by manipulating the “strivings and trajectories of fats,” although the rewarding neurological response of the brain to the fat in the chips doubtless assists the prosthesis. Yet, harkening back to my

¹⁰ In the nineteenth century farmers constituted approximately seventy percent of the American labor force, compared to only two percent today. See tables and charts available at Max Roser (2016) – ‘Agricultural Employment’. *Published online at OurWorldInData.org*. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/agricultural-employment/> [Online Resource]. See also Spielmaker and Lacy, “Growing a Nation,” and Ferdman, “Decline of the American Family Farm in One Chart.”

earlier concern about carving a space for political agency, between the political and economic forces of transnational global capitalism and the material influences of food upon the brain, the average consumer might rightly perceive their individual agency to be eclipsed by these very powerful decision-makers.

And I know that this is precisely the conclusion Bennett is trying to avoid: the conclusion that the “economic-cultural prosthesis” has total control in our food systems. She is trying to get us to acknowledge the effect of food upon our individual bodies and thus on our politics. What I would like to do is to drive her point home through sustained attention to the economic-cultural prosthesis as a field of bodily becoming. I want to pick up more explicitly the thread of the economic-cultural, and illustrate how it is always already not only shapes the intra-action between the eater and the eaten, but is also itself shaped by the iterative performances of the “economic cultural prosthesis.”

Without an approach to food that accounts for the contributions of its social context to the nonlinearity of the systems in which food is consumed—in other words, without accounting for its economic-cultural dimensions—I fear a lapse to individualist engagements with food. After all, what could seem more a matter of personal choice than the food we consume?¹¹ I would therefore like to supplement Bennett’s work by reading her vibrant materialism through Karen Barad’s agential realism in a way that calls attention to the economic-cultural prosthesis as sets of interrelated material-discursive

¹¹ Vibrating in the periphery of my awareness are psychological/psychiatric engagements with eating as a control issue, as for example in the case of anorexics and infants. Contestations over what food gets into “my” mouth (if any) are very much about autonomy and control. I am hoping to straddle the edge here between on the one hand recognizing the social dimension of food, in the face of which we could perceive ourselves to be powerless, and on the other hand recognizing and reclaiming our collective power to shift the social dimension—shifts which are always happening and perhaps could happen in a way that brings about greater flourishing for all.

practices that participate in the iterative intra-actions between humans and the edibles they consume.

An agential realist accounting of food

In applying Karen Barad's agential realism to the topic of global food politics, I must confess that I do so despite the fact that Barad does not address her concept of agential realism on quite the same scale that Bennett engages her concept of vibrant materialism. Barad after all derives her theoretical approach from the quantum theory. But, as Barad herself notes, "quantum mechanics is thought to be the correct theory of nature that applies at all scales."¹² Additionally, the eighth chapter of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* consists of an application of her methodology to social issues such as the configuration of power in a jute mill (226-230). So there is some justification for reading Barad on a larger social, political scale despite the derivation of her theory from quantum physics. Admittedly, however, this scale does to some degree bypass the level of the individual, which is where Bennett's engagement with food lingers.

Nonetheless, Bennett intends a politics to arise from her engagement, and it is on this point that I find Barad's methodology helpful in demonstrating how political decisions about foodways shape the materialization of bodies. Barad's methodology provides sophisticated tools with which to examine what Bennett refers to as the "economic-cultural prosthesis." But Bennett's "economic cultural prosthesis" would need to be recast in Baradian terms. In the terminology of Barad's theoretical system, the "economic cultural prosthesis" of the global food system might be better described as the

¹² Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 85. Barad uses italics frequently. All italicized quotes are replicated as they appear in the original text.

“material-discursive practices” through which humans and food reiteratively “intra-act.” The phrase “intra-active material-discursive practices” to describe the “economic cultural prosthesis” signals the way in which eaters and foodways transform one another over time. Neither one is static.

As alluded to previously, Barad’s agential realism is theoretically moored in her knowledge of experimental quantum physics. In experimental quantum physics, diffraction patterns emerge on a detection screen after electrons or photons are passed through a diffraction grating. The diffraction grating and detection screen are both parts of the experimental apparatus involved in quantum experiments intended to determine the nature of light: is it wave or particle? Although we commonly take light to be a wave, the true answer to that question depends on the circumstances under which light is studied. The determination of the light’s behavior is made in the intra-action between light and the apparatus itself. Construct the apparatus in one way, light behaves as a wave; construct the apparatus differently and it behaves as a particle. The apparatus enacts what Barad refers to as an “agential cut” that shapes the behavior of light such that it materializes differently. Barad notes that the same is true of what we take to be solid, particulate matter: “under some circumstances, matter...exhibits wavelike behavior” (83).

Barad’s agential realism attends to diffraction patterns. Succinctly, diffraction patterns are the result of overlapping waves such as, for example, the pattern that would emerge on the surface of a pond if two stones were dropped into it from slightly different locations. The intra-action between the waves creates a diffraction pattern:

When the crest of one wave overlaps with the crest of another, the resultant waveform is larger than the individual component waves. On the other hand, if the crest of one waves overlaps with the trough of another, the disturbances partly or in some cases completely cancel one another

out, resulting in an area of relative calm...this way of combining effects is called *superposition* (76).

Superposition, as we shall see, might be one way to conceptualize the nonlinearity in the effects of food upon the human body that Bennett notes in *Vibrant Matter*.

Because materialization at the quantum level—wave or particle—is influenced by the apparatus in which it occurs, and because “quantum mechanics is thought to be “the correct theory of nature that applies at all scales,” (85) the aim of Barad’s agential realism is to make a difference by “taking responsibility for the fact that our practices matter; the world is materialized differently though different practices.” (89). For Barad, “Realism, then, is not about representations of an independent reality but about the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within and as part of the world” (37). Thus, material-discursive practices parallel the experimental apparatuses that enact the sort of agential cuts that co-determine the behavior of light in quantum experiments.

According to the relational ontology of agential realism, “things” do not preexist their intra-active becoming in the context of apparatuses. Agential realism holds that “the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather *phenomena*” (139). These phenomena, similar to diffraction patterns, are “produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production, where *apparatuses are not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices—specific material (re)configurings of the world—which come to matter*” (139). The practices in which we engage, whether directed by informal social custom or formal legislation, shape the

materiality of our bodies and simultaneously we shape the customs and legal systems within which we interact.

Barad's argument is directed toward social constructivists who ignore the materiality of the body, and even to some degree against Butler (although not a social constructivist) whom she says "fails to recognize matter's dynamism" (64). She asks the important question: "If biological forces are in some sense always already historical ones, could it be that there is also some important sense in which historical forces are always already biological?" (65). She seeks an "account of the body's historicity in which its very materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power," without which matter's passivity is merely reinscribed (65). Thus Barad insists that "Any robust theory of the materialization of bodies would necessarily take account of *how the body's materiality* (including, for example, its anatomy and physiology) and *other material forces as well* (including nonhuman ones) *actively matter to the processes of materialization*" (65). It is hoped that this chapter is a beginning gesture toward a theory of the materialization of bodies that accounts for not only the body's materiality, but also the materiality of the global food system in the context of other social structures.

Barad describes materialization as "*an iteratively intra-active process of mattering whereby phenomena (bodies) are sedimented out and actively re(con)figured through the intra-action of multiple material-discursive apparatuses. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity*" (210).¹³ According to agential realism, "apparatuses provide the conditions for the possibility of determinate boundaries and properties of "objects" within phenomena, where "*phenomena*" are the

¹³ It is important to note that throughout the text, Barad will use the terms "material-discursive practices" and "apparatuses" interchangeably, and I continue that pattern.

ontological inseparability of objects and apparatuses” (128). Significantly, “Apparatuses are not Kantian conceptual frameworks; they are physical arrangements. And phenomena do not refer merely to perception of the human mind; rather, phenomena are real physical entities or beings (though not fixed and separately delineated things)” (129). Material-discursive practices literally shape material reality at a very fundamental level, and material reality itself would be different in the context of different practices.

Barad makes clear that apparatuses are not to be understood as merely pieces of laboratory equipment with determinate boundaries: “Apparatuses are not static laboratory setups but a dynamic set of open-ended practices, iteratively refined and reconfigured” (167). Not only are apparatuses not static laboratory set ups, they are “material-discursive practices that are inextricable from the bodies that are produced and through which power works its productive effects.” (230). The dynamic quality of apparatuses applies not only to laboratory setups, but also to the human social and political landscape, appearances of calcification notwithstanding. Apparatuses as material-discursive practices are iteratively reconfigured. Change is possible. In fact, it is inevitable.

One must be mindful that Barad here includes matter itself as something that is iteratively reconfigured. She insists that:

Matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of different differences (137).

This passage, in short, nicely summarizes what I hope to demonstrate in this chapter.

Bodies materialize differently based upon their social location—the material-discursive

apparatus—in which they become. The different differences that materialize significantly shape the iterative becoming of bodies.

The materialization of all bodies, including human bodies, occurs by virtue of “the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity” which is “true not only of the surface or contours of the body but also of the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very “atoms” of its beings” (153). Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena. Although Barad does not engage the food system or nutritional studies, she does note that:

Surely it is the case—even when the focus is restricted to the materiality of ‘human’ bodies...that there are ‘natural,’ not merely ‘social,’ forces that matter. Indeed there is a host of material-discursive forces—including ones that get labeled “social,” “cultural,” “psychic,” “economic,” “natural,” “physical,” “biological,” “geopolitical,” and “geological”—that may be important to particular (entangled) processes of materialization (66).

Bodies and the food they consume intra-act in the context of apparatuses—material-discursive practices—which iteratively materialize the body. These intra-actions are causal, although not in a deterministic sense. In agential realism, both “absolute freedom and strict determinism” are rejected (129). Thus, we are describing possibilities and probabilities, rather than one-to-one correspondences between nutrition or food and a particular bodily materialization, accounting to some degree for the nonlinearity in food’s agentic capacity noted earlier by Bennett.

Despite the social, cultural, and psychic nature of these material-discursive forces, Barad emphasizes that agential realism is not about how linguistics mysteriously affects bodies. Rather agential-realism describes “the dynamics of intra-activity in its materiality: material apparatuses produce material phenomena through specific causal

intra-actions, where “material” is always already material-discursive—*that is what it means to matter*” (153). In my engagement with nutritional studies, below, I emphasize the materialization of human bodies. I do so knowing that, as Barad argues “Theories that focus exclusively on the materialization of human bodies miss the crucial point that the very practices by which the boundaries of the human and nonhuman are drawn are always already implicated in particular materializations” (153). While eating, by its very nature undoes those boundaries, eating too is “already implicated in particular materializations.” Subsequently, some of these “particular materializations” will also receive scrutiny.

My analysis of the intra-actions between human bodies and food takes an anthropocentric approach in order to map the effects of different material-discursive practices upon the materialization of the human body. As we will see, the apparatuses involved go well beyond individual eaters and their particular meals. Although Patel can describe a “global food system” that connects these various material-discursive practices, we will see that this global food system is itself not a monolith. Different diffraction patterns arise in the context of different apparatuses “through which power works its productive effects” (230). Subsequently, the materialization of raced, classed, and gendered bodies marks “the effects of difference”—difference in power, difference in privilege that result in different access to and metabolism of food. Hopefully this Baradian engagement with nutritional studies will “highlight, exhibit, and make evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world” in a way that further elucidates what is at stake in the global food system (73).

The assumption here is that the intra-actions between human and food do not happen in a vacuum divorced from broader cultural practices—even the chip that stokes the hand-to-mouth gesture will only do so in the context of certain cultural practices—and it is these practices that perpetuate unsustainable engagements with planetary systems. Perhaps, much like the cigar that Barad mentions in the Stern-Gerlach formulation, food is a “‘nodal point,’ as it were—of the workings of other apparatuses, including class, nationalism, economics, and gender, all of which are a part of this...apparatus” (167). Our encounters with food are always already shaped by apparatuses—material-discursive practices—which exert tremendous influence over what type and how much food is available to choose from in the first place. Our bodies become detection screens upon which the differential intra-actions between these apparatuses and the food we eat are marked. Apparatuses leave marks on bodies (176).

When we begin to examine the “phenomenon” of the differential materialization of bodies resulting from complex intra-actions with foodways and social structures, we will be faced with an almost impossible task. Distinguishing the effects of one material-discursive apparatus from another is indeed daunting. The human body is profoundly dynamic, as is our rapidly shifting global food system. It is possible that at the level of dynamism that characterizes the materialization of bodies, material-discursive apparatuses themselves are characterized by a type of superposition. Subsequently, some apparatuses may amplify the effect of others, while attenuating the effects of still others.¹⁴

The superposition of various material-discursive apparatuses creates undulating gradients as opposed to either clearly demarcated distinctions or linear gradients.

¹⁴ This may relate to what is signified in feminist scholarship by the term “intersectionality.”

Impossible though the task of parsing these material-discursive apparatuses might be, it is nonetheless important. Barad herself notes that “Significantly, taking full account of the nature of material-discursive constraints and exclusions is important for understanding the materialization of bodies as well as the nature of abjection” (212). An exhaustive account of the constraints and exclusions in the global food system is well beyond the scope of this dissertation or any other single volume, in light of its complexity. Yet the nature of abjection in the context of the global food system nonetheless becomes more readily visible as a consequence of absolute sovereignty as we undertake even a partial accounting of constraints and exclusions in the global food system.

From an agential realist perspective, “*apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering*; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (148). In this intra-active process of becoming, “‘marks are left on bodies’: bodies differentially materialize as particular patterns of the world as a result of the specific cuts and reconfigurings that are enacted” (176). Abjection is no mere theoretical concern. The body of the emaciated/abjectly poor is decidedly marked, and all the more so for having intra-acted with an apparatus that has excluded it from mattering.

But what about the bodies of the obese/relatively poor? In what way can they be said to have been excluded from mattering? They have clearly not been altogether excluded from the global food system in the same tragic sense as have been the abjectly poor. Their exclusion is harder to identify. I would suggest that they have been excluded from mattering not by virtue of having been altogether banned, as it were, from the global food system. Rather, their capacity to make choice has been significantly attenuated.

As food activist Raj Patel writes, “food always exists *somewhere*, in space and time... *Where* we live and work shapes *what* and *how* we eat and drink.”¹⁵ Patel goes on to note that poor neighborhoods are “likely to have four times fewer supermarkets than rich ones,” and he cites studies demonstrating that poor people, given the opportunity to choose fresh fruits and vegetables do in fact choose them over their unhealthy rivals, lipid strivings notwithstanding.¹⁶ The obese/relatively poor are not merely at the mercy of the agency of food, but also at the mercy of a complex food system that does not have their best interest in mind.

So the issue might not be first of all that the average consumer does not understand the agency of *food*, as Bennett fears, but that the average consumer is alienated from his or her *own* agency in shaping the food system:

If the quality of food we eat is shaped by work and play, by the neighbourhoods we live in, the jobs we can get and the time we spend travelling between them, then we might want to consider poor diets as a symptom of a systemic lack of control over our space and lives.¹⁷

It is this precise lack of control based upon material conditions of daily life that concerns me *because* I agree with Bennett that food is “operative in the moods, cognitive dispositions, and moral sensibilities that we bring to bear as we engage the questions of what to eat, how to get it, and when to stop.”¹⁸

How can a person possibly be expected to make good food choices if bad food is their only choice? Then, having already ingested the bad food that is the only choice, how can that food not affect their “moods, cognitive dispositions, and moral

¹⁵ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 266.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 51.

sensibilities?” And it is with this in mind that I would proceed to apply Barad’s agential realism in a way that closes the gap between the agency of food and contemporary food politics in a gesture that maintains a sense of agency for human individuals while elucidating the collective, political dimension of the food system as a set of material-discursive practices through which the bodies of the body politic iteratively materialize.

Nutrition science

In response to Bennett’s assertion that the science of diet would subsequently require an analysis of “not only the large humans and their economic-cultural prosthesis...but also the strivings and trajectories of fats as they weaken or enhance the power of human wills habits, and ideas”¹⁹ and Barad’s call for a more “robust theory of the materialization of bodies,”²⁰ I turn to the science of nutrition. Fortunately, the science of diet is beginning to tell us something about the trajectories of fats and other nutrients (although perhaps not the strivings), and even something about how fats intra-act with the brain in the context of material-discursive practices.

I have already mentioned that *homo sacer* may have (at least) two appearances in the context of our global food system, one being the “obese/relatively poor” of the Global North and the other being the “emaciated/abjectly poor” of the Global South. An examination of “obese/relatively poor” appearance is useful insofar as it describes a phenomenon encountered with increasing regularity in the Global North. It is also a phenomenon which tends to elicit victim-blaming rather than a search for root causes in our food system. Furthermore, it provides a fascinating glimpse into both the vibrant

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 65.

materiality of food as well as an agential realist accounting of the materialization of bodies.²¹

Bennett notes that food affects behavior—in the case of chips, the chips themselves seem to call forth their own eating. And the romanticists she cites both link food consumption to morality, although in different ways. In order to have any direct effect upon the brain, where I am presuming the seat of morality, experience of affect, and impetus for physical movement reside, the molecules ingested must have an affinity for a particular receptor. They must interlock with a specific portion of the receptor that will in turn either amplify or attenuate intracellular chemical cascades resulting in subsequent modification of cell firing or gene expression.²² There must also be a relative paucity of other molecules with affinities for that receptor, so that the receptor is available for binding.

Research has demonstrated that the dopamine system is particularly responsive to food. This is significant, because the neurotransmitter dopamine is highly implicated in addictive disorders. Dopamine is the uplifting neurotransmitter associated with the brain's reward circuits. As “the principal neurotransmitter of *motivated action*, in the sense of physical and psychological movement toward ‘pleasure’ or away from ‘pain’,”

²¹ At this juncture I must remark again that Global South and Global North fail as geographic markers, since wealth is unevenly distributed in both affluent and developing countries. Thus, there are those in affluent nations who are calorie-deprived and those in developing nations who are obese. The primary reason for using Global South/Global North terminology is two-fold. The first reason is straightforward: because it is the most common descriptor used in food studies to distinguish between affluent and developing nations. The second reason is more complicated and related to the first. In the literature that refers to Global North and Global South, the implication is that the Global North holds all the power and is oppressive. However, even those in the admittedly privileged “Global North” are not alike in the degree to which they benefit. Over one third of adults in the United States are suffering from the machinations of the corporate food regime, as I am about to demonstrate. It is my hope that recognition of our shared vulnerability might shift our investment, resituate our assessment of what is at stake in our food system, and facilitate solidarity with those in the food sovereignty movement who, as it turns out, live in both the Global North and the Global South.

²² In some cases, repeated stimulation of a receptor results in modification of gene expression, producing longer lasting neurological effects.

its release tends to increase the likelihood that any behavior triggering its release will be repeated.²³ Say, as in Bennett's example, eating a potato chip.

Any behavior that stimulates the dopamine system is likely to be repeated, often against one's better judgment—as in the case of addictions. That is because dopamine stimulates especially powerful feelings associated with pleasure and reward, which in turn render the brain more likely to repeat the pleasurable behavior. While all people experience dopamine release when they eat palatable, non-nutritious foods—say potato chips for example—obese people experience a pattern of dopamine release more akin to the pattern characteristic in other addictive disorders.²⁴ Much as is the case in someone who becomes addicted to methamphetamine—also a potent stimulator of the dopamine system—someone who has eaten a potato chip is highly likely to eat at least one more under the influence of the dopamine system. So Bennett is right in saying that the eating of chips calls forth its own manual labor—by virtue of its intra-action with the dopamine system. Potato chips are so damn *rewarding*!

Complicating this even further, merely *anticipating* eating the potato chips also stimulates dopamine response.²⁵ While one might debate whether the anticipation of the chip is a thought ("I will soon eat a chip) or an emotion (somatic sense of desire about to be fulfilled) the fact remains: something as ephemeral as anticipation is nonetheless associated with material effects in the brain. The fact that the *thought itself* creates an observable material effect on the brain, no actual potato chip required, supports my contention that any discussion of the vibrant materiality of food that intends to affect food

²³ L. Pani, A. Porcella, and G.L. Gessa, "The role of stress in the pathophysiology of the dopaminergic system," in *Molecular Psychiatry*, (2000 5:1): 14, emphasis theirs.

²⁴ Ashley N Gearhardt, et al. "Neural Correlates of Food Addiction," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2011.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

politics must include the material-discursive practices within which food consumption occurs. This is not because these practices are discursive or intellectual in nature such that thought itself is the key to this materialization, but rather because “‘material’ is always already material-discursive—*that is what it means to matter.*”²⁶

The finding that eating non-nutritive food (i.e. junk food) provokes dopamine release raises multiple questions. What if non-nutritious food is more likely to initiate an addictive disorder in the already marginalized *because* they are marginalized? For example, perhaps their lives entail greater hardships and fewer rewards, and so fewer competing triggers of dopamine release? Or, if thoughts alone can result in material changes in the brain, can the advertising gimmicks deployed by the “economic-cultural prosthesis” already be shaping brains in such a way as to render them more likely to cooperate with the “strivings of fats?” In short, what if one contributing factor to the nonlinearity of dietary effects that Bennett notes is one’s exposure to and position within the “economic-cultural prosthesis?”

Again, the science of diet provides a cluster of clues that allow us to begin to sketch answers to these questions. These answers suggest that a variety of social and economic material-discursive practices inflect the intra-actions between humans and their food—strengthening the argument that food is both a political issue and a political actant. First, let us dispense with one easily answered question: does advertising render our brains more susceptible to the strivings of fats? Well, it certainly shapes our taste buds. A 2007 double-blind study of school-aged children demonstrated that they preferred the taste of food that came wrapped in packaging of familiar brands over the taste of the exact same food in generic packaging. So, yes, in a way the advertising gimmicks are

²⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 153.

working—and so early in our lives that we can scarcely notice.²⁷ Or, in Baradian terms, the material-discursive practices of the food system iteratively shape intra-actions between humans and the food we eat by creating affective resonances and manufacturing desires that amplify wave patterns trending toward the increased eating of particular foods, thus impacting the materialization of the human body.

Next, let us engage the demographics of obesity, because this is where the science of nutrition bears heavily upon Bennett's assertion that food has a nonlinear effect upon the body, and perhaps illustrates how Barad's "superposition" of socio-economic factors impinges upon the materialization of bodies. A 2010 report by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that over one third of Americans were obese. Of particular importance is the demographic breakdown of this obesity epidemic based on race, gender, education and income.²⁸ For men, generally speaking, wealth and obesity tended to correlate, with higher rates of obesity among higher income groups. This was particularly true for Mexican American and non-Hispanic black males who experienced the highest obesity at the highest income levels, whereas for non-Hispanic whites, obesity rates were highest in the middle income group. For women, there is an inverse correlation between income and obesity. Women in the lowest income groups exhibited obesity at a rate ranging from forty to fifty-four percent, as compared to twenty-seven to thirty-four percent for those in the highest income levels.²⁹ For white males and all females, there was an inverse correlation between education level and obesity.³⁰ This was not the case

²⁷ Thomas Robinson, N., Dina L. G. Borzekowski, Donna Matheson, and Helena Kraemer, "Effects of Fast Food Branding on Young Children's Taste Preferences," in *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 161 (No. 8 August 2007) :792.

²⁸ Center for Disease Control, *Obesity and Socioeconomic Status*, (2010), 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4

³⁰ *Ibid.*

for non-white males, who experienced increasing rates of obesity with increasing academic achievement.

Attempts to explain the nuanced differences in this demographic detail by means of “linear” explanations are confounded. For example, one might conjecture that affluence directly correlates with obesity due to increased availability of calories. But that doesn’t explain why the wealthiest group of white males has a *lower* rate of obesity than the middle income group, nor does it explain why the wealthiest women are *least* likely to be obese. One might surmise that increasing educational levels provides greater opportunity to learn about proper nutrition, and so therefore higher education leads to *less* obesity. That might explain why, for white men and all women, increasing academic achievement decreases obesity levels. But it doesn’t explain why African Americans and Hispanic Americans with college degrees experience the highest rates of obesity among their racial and ethnic counterparts. These linear explanations do not quite explain all of the data.

I would like to use this study in a similar fashion to the function Barad assigns to diffraction apparatuses: “diffraction apparatuses measure the effects of difference, even more profoundly they highlight, exhibit, and make evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world.”³¹ When viewed as a diffraction apparatus, the demographic study cited above could be read as illustrating that income and education intra-act with race and gender in a way that significantly impacts the materialization of bodies. These factors do not deterministically cause obesity, to be sure. But the apparatuses which mark such social differences as income, education, race, and

³¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 73.

gender also contribute to differential materialization of the human body—including the foods it calls forth and how it metabolizes them.

The demographic study of obesity constitutes what could be understood in Baradian terms as an effort to distinguish one apparatus from another, to enact, as it were, an agential cut which will permit examination of a portion of the sociocultural food apparatus within which bodies are materialized. In addition to the agential cuts previously made regarding race, gender, and class, none of which alone explain the findings, I would like to explore one additional possibility. Perhaps the influence of a less observable factor is superimposed upon the influence of race, gender, education and income. I would like to explore the possibility that stress influences metabolism in ways that differentially affect the intra-action between that subset of people and the food they eat. The diffraction patterns resulting from the superposition of stress with the other more readily identifiable markers may reveal something about the nature of the apparatuses within which bodies are materialized.

Returning momentarily to our discussion of dopamine, it turns out that stress affects the dopamine system in some intriguing ways. Pani et al. conducted a thorough review of research on the effect of stress on the dopamine system.³² These studies, conducted primarily on rats, found that stress alters dopaminergic systems in a way that renders stressed rats more susceptible to addictive disorders.³³ Remembering that a study previously mentioned concluded that food functioned addictively in the obese, it is at

³² Pani, Porcella, and Gessa, “The role of stress.”

³³ *Ibid.*, 18-19. These particular types of studies are conducted on rats instead of humans for ethical reasons (one would not “intentionally” stress a human in this way, and even if one did, one would not then dissect the human’s brain for further analysis) and also for scientific reasons (human exposure to stress cannot be “controlled” in the same way as rat stress can be controlled). The results are considered to be, although not directly translatable to humans, at least informative of likely processes occurring in the human brain.

least plausible to suggest that stress may play some role in shaping the intra-action between race, gender, class and food in the ongoing process of materialization of bodies.

And, in keeping with Bennett's nonlinearity and Barad's intra-activity, Pani et al. also found that not all stressors are created equal. Some stressors are relatively easy for the rat to shrug off without a dopamine-hitch, and others significantly impact the rat—sometimes permanently. Furthermore, not all of the stressors had to be directly applied—merely being in the presence of a stressed rat could trigger similar responses in a non-stressed rat. In other words, some stressors can be viewed as apparatuses which leave permanent marks on bodies, marks which in turn create ripple effects on other bodies, and also influence the bodies' intra-actions with food.

This begins to sketch food as intra-active within extremely complex, material-discursive practices. It is not just that food can co-opt decision-making around food and create addictive patterns of neurological firing and subsequent behavior. But some brains in some situations are more susceptible to these effects because they are encountering stressful situations, either directly or vicariously through their social entanglements with others.

In a review article, Peek and Chrousos note that stress results in increased cortisol levels, which in turn results in increased fat storage, excessive production of insulin, and ultimately insulin resistance and diabetes.³⁴ Of additional concern, increased cortisol also results in abdominal obesity, the most likely type of obesity to result in cardiovascular events.³⁵ Reviewing the literature on stress, cortisol and obesity leads them to conclude that "The complex interactions of the stress axis upon...the adipose tissue, suggest that

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Peeke, P.M., and G.P. Chrousos. "Hypercortisolism and Obesity." *Annals of New York Academy of Science*, (1995 Dec 29); 771.

chronic stress, whether psychological and/or physical, exerts an intense effect upon body composition, which, in turn, significantly affects the longevity and survival of the organism.”³⁶ A more recent review article facilitates the connection between race, class, gender and stress: “Studies examining the relationship between social position, psychological stress, dietary behaviors, and obesity risk present extensive evidence that lower social position is associated with higher stress, poorer diet quality, and higher body weight.”³⁷ Mindful that *homo sacer* names the lowest of all possible social positions, this last bit seems to suggest that the closer one’s social position is to *homo sacer*, as opposed to “the sovereign,” the more likely one is to become obese (provided sufficient calories are accessible).

What about food that has been stripped of its agency? Could “missing agents” in food contribute to the obesity epidemic in the United States? Could it be that we cannot “regulate” our own weight and that we rely upon nutrients in food to regulate it with us? What I’m getting at here is the potential that the nutrient content of food produced in the United States may have a material effect on our body not only by the nutrients present in the food, but also by the *absence of nutrients*. Dr. Donald Davis at University of Texas conducted a nutritional analysis of food produced at the end of the last century to archived records of the nutritional content of food established in the 1950’s. What he found was that, taken as a whole (rather than on a food-by-food basis), “six out of thirteen nutrients showed apparently reliable declines between 1999 and 1950.”³⁸ He

³⁶ Ibid., 665.

³⁷ Carla J. Moore MPH, RD, Solveig A. Cunningham, PhD, MSc, “Social Position, Psychological Stress, and Obesity: a Systematic Review,” in *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, vol 112 Issue 4 , (04/2012): 525.

³⁸ University of Texas. *University of Texas News*, (December 1, 2004): http://www.utexas.edu/news/2004/12/01/nr_chemistry/.

attributes this decline to the selection of cultivars that are higher yield, pest resistant, and/or adaptable to a wide variety of climates, based upon the “emerging evidence [that] suggests that when you select for yield, crops grow bigger and faster, but they don’t necessarily have the ability to make or uptake nutrients at the same, faster rate.”³⁹ While conventional agriculture has excelled at producing adequate calories, the nutritional content of those calories has not kept pace.

Further compounding the problematic selection of cultivars is the problematic application of phosphorous-containing fertilizers. As it turns out, phosphorous competes with other micronutrients for its spot in the plant matter, resulting in a decrease of twenty to fifty-five percent in other minerals.⁴⁰ According to Martin Poole, writing for *Scientific American*, soil depletion can be added to the list of reasons our food is less nutritious than it used to be. Last, but probably not least, nutrients, as it turns out, are typically fragile creatures. They cannot withstand the multiple processes involved in the global food system. All of this processing, and the natural aging process that occurs in the time it takes to ship our apples from Chile, depletes our food of its already-diminished nutritional content.⁴¹ It is not only *we* who are intra-actively becoming in the context of our global food system, but our food is also intra-actively becoming—and it is becoming less nutritious.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Cheryl Long, "Industrial Farming is Giving Us Less Nutritious Food," *Mother Earth News* (June/July 2009): <http://www.motherearthnews.com/nature-and-environment/nutritional-content-zmaz09jjzraw.aspx#axzz3124Fj5lk>.

⁴¹ Martin Poole, "Dirt Poor: Have Fruits and Vegetables Become Less Nutritious," *Scientific American*. (April 27, 2011): <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/soil-depletion-and-nutrition-loss/> (accessed May 6, 2014). This article also highlights that the difference between one apple and another is not necessarily visibly perceptible. One reason “food” intra-acts with human bodies differently at different times is that the meals differ quite significantly in their molecular composition, even when by all accounts the ingredients are the same.

But how does the intra-active becoming of (less nutritious) food link to obesity? A review article by Michael Via suggests that at the very least, micronutrient deficiency worsens the medical complications caused by obesity. In particular, deficiencies in vitamin D, chromium, vitamin C, biotin, and thiamine all “have the potential to impair glucose metabolism and cause insulin resistance.”⁴² Some of this, to be sure, is the result of choosing fewer fruits and vegetables—so it is the result of “poor dietary choices,” or perhaps the result of food addiction triggered by the eating of non-nutritive foods, which in turn might be facilitated by food advertising. But according to physician Mark Hyman, our nutrient-depleted foods leave our bodies craving more nutrients—which is precisely what our food lacks.⁴³ We continue to eat an abundance of food because our material flesh in its wisdom knows that food is the best place to seek nutrients. But those nutrients are no longer in our food because of the material-discursive practices of the corporate food regime. Could it be that one of the stressors to which many bodies—obese and otherwise—are currently responding is chronic low grade malnutrition as a result of their participation in these material-discursive practices (to which this dissertation collectively refers as transnational corporate agriculture)?

The effects of material-discursive practices on the materialization of bodies are not restricted to easily observable physical metrics, but extend to the materialization of the nervous system in a way that subtly (yet durably) impacts cognitive development. Ruth Morley and Alan Lucas undertake a review of research into the effects of early childhood nutrition on cognitive development, including their own research. They begin

⁴² Michael Via, "The Malnutrition of Obesity: Micronutrient Deficiencies that Promote Diabetes," in *Endocrinology* (2012) 4.

⁴³ Mark Hyman, M.D., "How Malnutrition Causes Obesity," in *Huffington Post* (March 3, 2012): http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-mark-hyman/malnutrition-obesity_b_1324760.html.

with animal studies, by far easier to “control” because it is less ethically disturbing to restrict variables such as food and affection from a developing rat pup than it is from a human infant. Morley and Lucas note that the effects of poor nutrition on later performance measures have been well documented. Cumulatively, these studies show that “disadvantage for undernourished animals was significantly more likely if the period of undernutrition included gestation. Interestingly, the advantage was most often seen in male animals.”⁴⁴ This raises particular concerns for the effects of prenatal nutrition.

As an illustration of the many components of a potential apparatus within which food is eaten, if the undernourished rats are patted, the “later behavioural deficits” are “ameliorated” (125). Also, diminished performance was found to correlate with “a permanent reduction in brain iron and dopamine D₂ receptor site concentration” (125-126). Taken as a whole, the results of this study demonstrate that the materialization of malnourished brains was *different* in different social circumstances, such as being patted or the timing of deprivation. These differences were in turn associated with permanent alternation in neurobiological markers and led to different behavioral outcomes. These findings account for the nonlinearity of food noted by Bennett, and in Baradian terms reflect the ways that different material-discursive practices leave different marks on bodies.

Studying nutritional deprivation in humans is confounded by the many “variables” that cannot be accounted for in the experimental apparatus. Although one can never be certain that it is nutrition per se that causes the effect one observes in these studies, “in many, though not all, studies, poor nutritional status has been associated with

⁴⁴Ruth Morley and Alan Lucas, “Nutrition and Cognitive Development,” in *British Medical Bulletin* 53 (1), (1997): 124.

lower cognitive or attainment scores” (125). In one study in Guatemala, nutritional supplementation during pregnancy was shown to have a beneficial effect lasting into adolescence, based on measures of school achievement. Numerous studies have also used sibling controls, and about half of the time these studies demonstrate benefits of improved nutrition on children’s cognitive abilities.⁴⁵ The marks left on the bodies of these developing children affected their minds in lasting ways. Lasting impairment in cognitive abilities doubtless poses a significant obstacle to gainful employment.

Bennett’s concept of vibrant materiality in conjunction with Barad’s concepts of superposition and material-discursive practices help us to understand our participation in the global food system and its diffractive materialization in our flesh.⁴⁶ As we see from careful reflection upon the demographic data, there is not a simple linear correlation between sex and obesity, or race and obesity, or income and obesity. These different social contexts can be read as Baradian apparatuses within which food intra-acts with human bodies, sometimes in ways that attenuate nutrient waves, and—less often—in ways that amplify them. The demographic data regarding the obesity epidemic could be read as a diffraction pattern marking the agential cuts enacted by the apparatuses. These demographic diffraction patterns tell us how the socially constructed concepts like class, race, and gender become materialized in and as human bodies.

The superposition of the stress-induced dopaminergic drive to consume more food with the metabolic effects of stress—its stimulation of the cortisol system—serve to

⁴⁵ This study, in fact, gets precisely at the concerns that nagged at me during my medical training: how can we collectively and conscionably fail to assure that all children receive truly adequate nutrition and simultaneously expect these children to work their way out of poverty?

⁴⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 71-80. I am using here the concept of superposition, as applied to the material-discursive practices of agriculture and eating as these diffraction patterns are materialized in human flesh.

amplify the impact of the calories consumed. The material-discursive practices through which we iteratively become—many of which are not directly related to food—materialize bodies in nonlinear and indeterminate ways. The body does not precede its engagement in these apparatuses or its engagement with food; it materializes through iterative intra-actions with food in the context of myriad material-discursive practices. That social position is specifically mentioned as a contributing factor to obesity (by Moore and Cunningham) highlights Barad’s wisdom in insisting that: “Crucial to understanding the workings of power is an understanding of the nature of power in the fullness of its materiality” (66). The apparatuses of power within which humans are intercalated participate intra-actively in the materialization of human bodies marked by social position—Moore and Cunningham’s term—or, in the terms of this dissertation, marked by sovereignty and precarity, and perhaps even marked as *homo sacer*.

These material-discursive practices, as Barad says of all apparatuses, leave marks on bodies. They do so in indeterminate, intra-active ways, to be certain. While I would certainly not argue that the bodies of the poor are immediately distinguishable from those of the wealthy completely independently of other factors such as grooming, fashion, geographic location and other markers, what I hope I have at least accomplished is to account for the differential materialization of human bodies in relation to the apparatuses of race, gender and class in which those bodies are situated. But above all, reading nutritional studies through Barad’s agential realism reveals the extent to which the social apparatuses of power do not measure pre-existing human beings, whether fit, obese or malnourished. These apparatuses *materialize* them:

“phenomena are differential patterns of mattering (“diffraction patterns”)
produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-

discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production, where *apparatuses are not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices—specific material (re)configurings of the world—which come to matter*” (140).

In the following section I will argue that material-discursive apparatuses use the physical appearance of the bodies they have created to determine the relative worth of the bodies in a way that further reinforces the socioeconomic status of bodies thus materialized and serves to prop up what would otherwise be evident as unjust systems of power operating in the politics of food.

Socially Produced Necessary Identities

I hope to demonstrate that the “obese/relatively poor” and the “emaciated/abjectly poor” are identities that are the products *of* a particular social order, and in turn are necessary *to* that order. I will establish this through application of Margaret Urban Walker’s concept of necessary identities. Walker’s “necessary identities” bears resonances to Agamben’s *homo sacer*. While unlike *homo sacer* one with a “necessary identity” is not subject to the sovereign ban, nonetheless a necessary identity signifies socially subordinate role, and a profound degree of bodily vulnerability. Furthermore, Walker clarifies Agamben’s observation that within the modern city *homo sacer* has become “*more internal than every interiority and more external than every extraneousness.*”⁴⁷ Walker accomplishes this by aptly the manner in which machinations of oppressive power regimes numb our awareness to the injustices they commit.

Walker’s theory is also worth elaborating upon because it reveals something about the “motions of power” in a given social system—in the present case, the global

⁴⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 111.

food system—and about how those “motions of power” inflect the materialization of bodies. The “motions of power” are shown to operate via four primary mechanisms, to be discussed below. This exposition will clarify the iterative process whereby, in Baradian terms, the marks that a material-discursive apparatus leaves on bodies are retroactively utilized to legitimate not only the marks on the bodies, but also to legitimate the material-discursive apparatus that marked the bodies.

I will first need to argue that (malnourished) bodies mark social class in such a way as to produce “obese/relatively poor” and “emaciated/abjectly poor” as two interrelated “necessary identities.” Walker defines “necessary identity” as:

A social role or status that is inevitably or comfortably well fitted to the people whose social position it is, because of some naturally occurring feature of those people. The idea that there are necessary identities is the view that some are born for (rather born to) and naturally suited (rather than more or less forcibly fitted) to certain social roles or stations.⁴⁸

Walker bases her work largely on the theories espoused in *Shame and Necessity* by Bernard Williams in which he examined the ethics surrounding slavery in Greek antiquity (161-3). Williams argues that, Aristotle notwithstanding, ancient Greeks were aware that one was not “naturally suited” to the role of slave but rather cast into it by “the demands of what was seen as social and economic necessity” (162). It was not “natural” for anyone in particular, based upon his or her individual nature, to be a slave. But rather “the role of slave was necessary to a kind of social order, and to that extent someone... ‘had’ to be a slave” (163). Although by his account slavery was regarded a

⁴⁸ Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 162.

“contingent and brutal disaster for its victims” concerns of justice were overshadowed by the perceived social and economic necessity of this arrangement.⁴⁹

In what way can an identity be said to be necessary, and to whom? Necessary identities “are not necessary for the ones who bear them, but for others who need to legitimate the ways they treat the bearers or to foreclose examination of those ways (165). These identities are necessary to a kind of social order, and serve to maintain that order more or less without question. Walker asserts that the idea that someone in particular is born for, rather than to, a social role is perpetuated “by inducing in or requiring of people certain physical or behavioral traits as marks of a social role, and then using those marks in turn to justify those people’s assignment to it” (163). Walker uses the example of Theognis’s observations that a slave’s stooped posture demonstrates their natural fit for the role of slave to demonstrate the way in which coercing someone into a social role produces bodily effects that are then used to retroactively legitimate having forced them into that role in the first place. This retroactive legitimation occludes examination of the social structures that define the context for the body’s becoming.

These identities are not “naturally” occurring. No one is “born for” the necessary identity (of slave, woman, or, as I will argue, “poor”) into which they have been pressed; some degree of coercion is required. Walker stresses that there is a difference between “evidence of coercion into and within a social role, and the coercers having to acknowledge that evidence and admit what it is evidence for” (165). When we overlook the role of coercion in establishment and maintenance of roles we overlook the constructed and necessary nature of those roles in maintenance of a system of power

⁴⁹ Bernard Williams as quoted in Walker Walker, *Moral Understandings*, 162-163. Williams is arguing that ancient Greeks did not imagine that some people were naturally better suited to be slaves in the same way that American slave owners did in the early 1800’s.

(171). Slavery was known to be “unnatural” because it was recognized, then as now, that no one entered into slavery voluntarily (166).

It is not always the case that coercion is recognized in the creation and maintenance of necessary identities (71). In fact, “the more obvious the coercion required to sustain an identity...the less necessary that identity (for those people) appears” (176). Similarly, the more obvious the coercion, the more obvious is the injustice of the social structures necessitating such coercion. Thus, the more *necessary* a social role is in the maintenance of a social structure, the greater the effort must be to *conceal* the violence needed to fit someone into that role.

There is “no one fact,” that explains a given society’s inability to tell that an identity is socially constructed, Walker says. Instead, “the relevant facts are about relations of power and resistance, address and response, expression and recognition *between* people or groups” (177). Social identities represent “interpersonally significant positions, standings, or roles characterized by powers and prerogatives, responsibilities, and exposure to expectations and claims” (178). Because of the social power (or lack thereof) encoded into these bodily markers, Walker urges us to “look for the apparent necessity of identities, then, in many facts about who has recognized power over whom, how the power is expected to be exercised” (178). Who has power over whom in the global food system? Whose claims are regarded as authoritative? Who is marginalized?

Walker states that necessary identities “are roles necessitated by institutions taken as given, but these institutions are constituents of one among possible ways of life” (169). She articulates artfully that these identities “identify people for certain activities or treatments,” and determine moral relationships and power dynamics between people

based on easily (usually visibly) recognizable signifiers (180). In a move resonant with Barad's agential realism, Walker thus declares that "marks of identity are only, as it were, the signifiers of possible modes of interaction, responsibilities, and treatments" (181). To render her assertion more "Baradian," perhaps we could rephrase this as "marks of identity are materializations of possible modes of intra-actions within apparatuses of bodily production."

What is it that precludes our immediate recognition of coercion into social roles in the first place? Walker cites four mechanisms through which this violence is concealed:

These identities need to be *naturalized, privatized, or normalized*, in some combination. Those who bear the identities must be *epistemically marginalized or unauthorized*, so that the setup in which identities are naturalized, privatized, and normalized cannot be contradicted or contested by them. In the 'ideal' case, it cannot even be pointed out (177).

To be certain, as Walker herself notes, there is no ideal case in which the coercion required to maintain necessary identities can remain completely hidden indefinitely. For Walker this is because "identities are parts of a functioning social order in which identified and identifiers are ongoing participants" (177). From an agential realist perspective, one might say that everything is involved in intra-active processes of becoming—including identities and apparatuses themselves.⁵⁰ It is the iterative nature of all materializations that allow us to glimpse the apparatus, and it is this iterative nature of becoming that opens the potential for real change.

These four mechanisms—naturalization, privatization, normalization and marginalization—merit more attention since understanding Walker's meaning opens new avenues of inquiry into the modus operandi of food politics. I will first define each of

⁵⁰ Barad herself makes this point regarding experimental apparatuses; *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 146.

these terms as used by Walker, and then apply each of these to the necessary identity of “obese/relatively poor.” I maintain this emphasis on the “obese/relatively poor” in part because the data to support this analysis is more plentiful than data regarding the emaciated/abjectly poor. Nonetheless, as should by now be clear, the “obese/relatively poor” and the “emaciated/abjectly poor” are socially produced by the same global food system, and parallel processes are presumed to be operative in both cases.

According to Walker naturalization of identities:

“involves producing and sustaining appearances of the spontaneous inevitability of certain places for certain people... Since nothing denaturalizes a situation quicker than evidence of coercion into [identities], the most effective implementation of naturalized identities is making them conditions of birth, ceasing at death.”⁵¹

Privatization occurs when coercive interactions between the ruler and the ruled are shielded either literally behind closed doors, or when “customs, moral understandings, or laws... declare certain interactions outside legitimate or acceptable scrutiny, reaction, or public comment by others, even if those interactions take place in plain sight, or in places not private in the former sense” (181). Naturalizing and privatizing pose effective barriers to identification of coercive practices, minimizing the protest that such coercion might otherwise arouse. According to Walker, naturalizing and privatizing “aim to keep some people and what happens to them outside the view of some authoritative community of mutual moral accounting” (181).

Practices that naturalize and privatize coercive dominance can be shored up by practices that *normalize* coercive dominance. “Certain patterns of behavior and relations are normalized when there are effective norms pertaining to them, but the norms *presume*

⁵¹ Walker, *Moral Understandings*, 180.

these relations and patterns to exist as a threshold of application for the norms.”⁵² Walker is not arguing that social norms per se are bad; she recognizes their inevitability.

However, norms become problematic “when the regulative function of [these] norms tends to conceal their constitutive roles: when what norms tell us to do given the assumed conditions tends to deflect attention from why these conditions are assumed to obtain and whether they need or should obtain” (182). As we shall see, this is everywhere operative in food politics. Subsequently, Walker’s remarks about feminist protest apply to food politics as well: “Those who rebel against what ‘everyone’ accepts appear as irrational freaks, malcontents, complainers, unstable deviants, or dangerous elements out of control” (182). While the food movement is gaining momentum, it is far from the mainstream. And how many people roll their eyes when obese people dare to hold McDonald’s accountable for the fact that their food drives obesity?

Marginalization entails the assignment to certain identities a “reduced, circumscribed, or discredited status as knowers and claimers” (183). Before they can begin to protest their mistreatment they are discredited: “Some people are ‘known’ going in to be liable to irrational discontents, manipulative complaints, incompetent assessments, childish exaggerations, dangerous willfulness, malicious ingratitude, wily deceit, or plain stupidity” (183). Walker refers to this as being *epistemically unauthorized*. Stripping someone of epistemic authority is a particularly effective means of enforcing necessary identity, because the process of epistemically marginalizing someone also removes their ability to authoritatively comment on their own experience. Walker states:

⁵² (Walker 2007) 181

It is not just that their views don't count; given what those people are, their views can't count. Women cry, manipulate and complain. Slaves lie and run. Servants loaf and steal. Laborers are stupid. Natives are childish. No identity is so necessary as one that successfully precludes its bearer's confuting it. *All the better if the means of enforcement of the identity actually induce or require in its bearers behavior that makes it impossible to deny.*⁵³

And what behaviors would the poor and/or obese need to deny in a capitalist economy? Stupidity, sloth, infirmity and impulsivity to name but a few.⁵⁴

In researching discrimination against the obese, Deborah Carr and Michael Friedman note that "Research conducted over the past forty years shows that obese persons are viewed as...responsible for their weight due to some character flaw or "blemish," such as laziness, gluttony, or a lack of self-control."⁵⁵ Their study controlled for the discriminatory effects of other apparatuses of social power such as gender, race and class yet still found that very obese persons were forty to fifty percent more likely to experience "daily discrimination...major discrimination, work-related discrimination [and] health-care related discrimination" when compared to normal weight individuals (249-252). Carr and Friedman use language resonant with Walker's in noting that obesity is a "'discredited' personal attribute" (253). This suggests that the reason for the discrimination is that obese people have been in some sense epistemically unauthorized.

⁵³ Walker, *Moral Understandings*, 183 emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ And in the case of the obese/relatively poor, gluttony would be added to this list. As we have seen in earlier in this chapter, however, our food system drives gluttony through its impact on neural dopamine systems and its poor nutritional content. These are the direct effects on the body; this says nothing about the situation of many people working multiple jobs who pick up fast food at a drive-thru between jobs.

⁵⁵ Deborah Carr and Michael A Friedman, "Is Obesity Stigmatizing? Body Weight, Perceived Discrimination and Psychological Well-Being in the United States," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46 (September 2005): 245.

And indeed, Obesity Society notes that beginning in childhood, overweight children are perceived as being mean and stupid by their peers.⁵⁶

Major discrimination in the study by Carr and Friedman is defined as having been discouraged by a teacher or advisor from pursuing aspirations for higher education, denied a scholarship, or denied an apartment rental; workplace discrimination included being passed over for promotions. Carr and Friedman found that obesity is “inversely related to socioeconomic status”—a much stronger support for my claim that “obese/relatively poor” is a necessary identity than the demographic data from the CDC cited earlier—and that obese persons were less likely than normal weight persons to work at professional occupations.⁵⁷ Those who *do* work in professional occupations encounter even more workplace discrimination than obese *non*professionals. Could it be that they are perceived as somehow “out of place” because their physical appearance identifies them as “obese/relatively poor,” automatically disqualifying them from professional employment with its middle-to-upper class connotations?

Obese people are perceived as less intelligent, and that perception leads people to advise them *not* to pursue further education, thus increasing the likelihood that they will achieve less academically. This lack of encouragement has the effect of *creating* the obese as less credible “knowers” rather than finding them to be that way in the first place. Workplace discrimination—being passed over for jobs and promotions—perpetuates the association of obese with lower social class, thus welding—at least in the U.S.—obesity to relative poverty through social processes resonant with Walker’s descriptions of necessary identities. Fat people become viewed as inevitably stupid and poor.

⁵⁶ Obesity Society. "Obesity, Bias and Stigmatization." *Obesity Society*. n.d. <http://www.obesity.org/obesity/resources/facts-about-obesity/bias-stigmatization>

⁵⁷ Carr and Friedmann, “Is Obesity Stigmatizing?,” 251.

The workplace discrimination encountered by the obese on the basis of this necessary identity is an example of the privatization of the coercion of fat people into subordinate roles so as to obscure both the fact that they are *not* naturally fitted to the role of obese/relatively poor *as well as* the unjust social order requiring someone to be fitted to the role in the first place. For example, in the case of obesity, Carr and Friedman note that the perception of obese people as lacking self-control is a cause of workplace discrimination. Certainly, people with extremely poor self-control should not be permitted to mismanage businesses and the like. And some researchers, such as Stephen O’Rahilly and I. Sadaf Farooqi, *have* suggested that the obese suffer from a neurobehavioral disorder which diminishes their self-control regarding food intake.⁵⁸

But in the case of obesity, the “regulative function” of the norm prohibiting people with impulse control problems from assuming leadership roles “deflect(s) attention from why these conditions are assumed to obtain and whether they need or should obtain” as regards obese people.⁵⁹ What *are* the conditions under which this lack of control over food intake obtains? O’Rahilly and Farooqi, while arguing that obesity is a neurobehavioral disorder, *also* argue that not only is this genetically inherited as a dysregulation of satiety and appetite, this genetic inheritance itself is only problematic in certain, particular situations, in which food is excessively plentiful, cheap and aggressively commercially promoted.⁶⁰

O’Rahilly and Farooqi cite several longitudinal studies of obesity and socioeconomic status, establishing a case for the assertion that “in highly developed

⁵⁸ Stephen O’Rahilly and I. Sadaf Farooqi, “Human Obesity: A Heritable Neurobehavioral Disorder That Is Highly Sensitive to Environmental Conditions,” *Diabetes* 57 (2008): 2905-2910.

⁵⁹ Walker, *Moral Understandings*, 182.

⁶⁰ O’Rahilly and Farooqi, “Human Obesity,” 2907.

societies, obesity may be a *cause* of economic disadvantage rather than simply a consequence.”⁶¹ The economic disadvantage creates obese *as* relatively poor (although clearly not abjectly poor), binding the two together almost seamlessly. The obese body materializes as an effect of class, gender and race structures such that obesity itself becomes a marker for social status. The body thus marked intercalates with systems of social power such that physical habitus becomes justification *for* perpetuating the social system that produces it: it is acceptable to discriminate against fat people. O’Rahilly and Farooqi go on to note the obese are subjected to “a reaction that might be more understandable if directed at people parking inappropriately in disabled parking spaces or serially cheating on their spouses,” further illustrating the epistemic marginalization and dubious morality of obese/relatively poor people.

Unfortunately, O’Rahilly and Farooqi, in arguing for the genetic heritability of obesity would seem to undermine my contention that social factors contextualize the materialization of obesity. They do not address fabricated desire or diminishing nutritional content of food or the way in which low social status (already a problem for the obese) can itself lead to obesity, instead focusing on the heritability of obesity. But heritability of obesity *does* describe how obesity becomes naturalized. Naturalization is the process of creating the appearance of “spontaneous inevitability of certain places for certain people,” the purpose of which is to conceal the force involved in fitting them to their identity. And, “since nothing denaturalizes a situation quicker than evidence of coercion into [identities], the most effective implementation of naturalized identities is making them conditions of birth, ceasing at death.”⁶² Walker’s treatment of naturalization

⁶¹ Ibid., 2908; emphasis mine.

⁶² Walker, *Moral Understandings*, 180.

explains the utility of discrimination based upon readily observable genetic markers for propping up unjust systems.

The genetic heritability of a tendency toward obesity serves to obscure the factors in the food system that drive the production of obese bodies in much the same way that, for example, genetic heritability of African ancestry obscures the socioeconomic factors driving much of the cycle of poverty experienced by African Americans. In the case of obesity, In the case of poverty among African Americans, racial discrimination in employment results in inadequate access to health care and increased incidence in chronic illness, which in turn results in decreased capacity for productive work. This is read as “laziness” and used to retroactively justify racist hiring practices. In the case of obesity, factors such as extreme amounts of commercial advertising of unhealthy foods directed toward young children, food deserts in low income areas, and diminishing nutritional content of food—drive the body toward addictive eating patterns and obesity, which are read as poor self-control. For both African American and obese children, the lack of academic encouragement can lead to diminished school performance, later read as inferior intellect.

Obscuring the workings of power is *precisely* the point of naturalization of a necessary identity. If we can blame obese people for their own obesity we never have to look at the abuses of power rampant within the food system itself.⁶³

While I’ve been focused on obesity as both product and determinant of socioeconomic class, it must be remembered that it is but one of at least two class markers in a transnational global food system characterized by iniquity, the other

⁶³ And in light of the vitriol directed at the obese, it seems we may *also* be (unconsciously) blaming them for eating all of the calories of which the “emaciated/abjectly poor” have been deprived.

significant marker addressed in this dissertation being emaciation of which I have thus far said little. My contention is that both are class markers insofar as they signal class-based malnourishment in a transnational food system that provides empty calories to those in the Global North, and inadequate calories to those in the Global South. An examination of “obese/relatively poor” as a necessary identity is useful insofar as it describes a phenomenon encountered with increasing regularity in the Global North, and one in particular which tends to elicit victim-blaming rather than a search for root causes in our food system. It also illuminates the ways in which the food system is failing us in the Global North in a way that may mobilize a more robust response to the situation.

One might conjecture that images of emaciated/abjectly poor people of the Global South would lead to identification of our food system as problematic, and would further lead to a desire to hold those in power accountable for their decisions. But quite the opposite occurs. Walker asserts that visual depictions of the abjectly poor instead serve to conceal the machinations of power structures responsible for their starvation in much the same way that I’ve argued regarding obese/relatively poor people in the Global North. Their lack of control over their hunger is obvious by their obvious suffering. Yet the parties responsible for their suffering are concealed.

In words reminiscent of Agamben’s *homo sacer*, Walker likens the images of ‘starving Africa’ to those of the Jewish victims of Nazi atrocities. Of the camp inmates, Walker declares their emaciated form to be “the production of a body signifying one ‘already dead,’ beyond hope, care or relief, and yet frightening, even repellent, in its not-quite-deadness” (200). She sees a connection between these victims of Nazi horror and those seven million who starve to death annually, albeit with a twist:

While images of starvation have evoked outpourings of concern and money, the effects of the repetitive imagery occlude the actors, African, European, and American, and the histories and political complicities that figure in the explanations of why these particular actual people are starving or dying at this particular place and time. At least the concentration camp imagery unambiguously signals a specifically moral monstrosity, not only the obscene fate of victims but the culpability of a particular set of perpetrators (200).

By implication, the mass of emaciated Africans obscures the culpability and the identities of the perpetrators.

What both the obese/relatively poor and emaciated/abjectly poor necessary identities achieve is a distraction from the (systemic) actors and actions involved in coercing *these* particular people into states of malnutrition in the first place. And this, I argue, is the most convincing reason, based on Walker's definition, for viewing "poor person" as a necessary identity in both its "obese/relatively poor" and its "emaciated/abjectly poor" incarnations: necessary identities serve to obscure the lines of power propping up unjust social arrangements, making these arrangements appear natural and inevitable.

Walker states that "identities are necessary to make treatments of some people look 'matter of course' where those treatments would be extraordinary for some other people, especially for those delivering the treatment" (178). Imagine a member of the World Trade Organization subjected to starvation conditions, or steered (by a combination of marketing campaigns and limited access to fresh food) toward high calorie, nutrient-deficient food. It is unthinkable. Yet decisions made by the WTO, IMF, and World Bank impose "austerity measures" on those in developing nations, measures which assure that many people in those nations will suffer extreme malnutrition and even

starve to death. These policies further protect agribusinesses in their growing and marketing of nutrient-deficient food to children. Meanwhile these decisions appear nothing if not ‘matter of course.’

The bodies of those upon whom this treatment is imposed materialize in the context of various social apparatuses to produce various, recognizable physical forms that are subsequently coerced into particular social roles on the combined basis of appearance and social class, a phenomenon which Walker has defined “necessary identities.” In Walker’s scheme, “necessary identities” always refers to the identities given to the marginalized, corresponding to some degree to Agamben’s *homo sacer*. *Homo sacer*, in the global food system, is always a member of the poorer class. The poor, whether relatively or abjectly poor, are not consulted about structural adjustment programs, agricultural policies, or the legitimacy of perceiving nutritious food as a commodity rather than a necessity or right. Having been epistemically and in some cases morally discredited, they can hardly be permitted to make such important decisions. They are simply consigned to continued obesity or starvation due to their position within a rather sharply stratified global economy.

Conversely, those seated on the International Monetary Fund board are the well-fed elite of the elite. Thus it appears that whether or not one gets a seat at the decision-making table depends upon whether or not one has had a seat at the dining table. But the reverse is also true: whether or not one has had a seat at a dining table replete with the right amount of nutritious calories depends upon whether or not one has already had a seat at the decision-making table. Thus, not only is there no essential quality that legitimates why some people suffer obesity or starvation—it is just bad luck within a

social system that has thus far accepted such “bad luck” as inevitable—there is no essential quality that legitimates the sovereignty of those seated on boards of multinationals and agribusinesses. Their bodies and brains are just as vulnerable to the vibrant materiality of food as those of the poor and disenfranchised. Their bodies and brains intra-actively materialize in the context of social apparatuses of power, just as those of the obese and emaciated.

All human bodies are subject to radical contingency and dynamic flux of material flows of power and privilege—especially as they flow in and as the transnational global food system. The traditional sovereign, being creaturely, is subject to the vibrant materiality of food and is therefore no less socially produced than are those subject to his decisions. How, then, can his credibility as sovereign be maintained?

Chapter 5

Deciding Upon the Exception in an Exceptional Climate: Political Ecology and the “Metaphysical Image of [Our] Epoch”

Introduction

As described in the previous chapter, food materializes intra-actively with human bodies in a way that produces the “classed” bodies of *homo sacer*. Food itself is simultaneously transformed by human agricultural practices that produce it, through the implementation of such procedures as the selection of less nutrient-dense cultivars or intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides that diminish quality topsoil. In the previous chapter, these intra-actions were the focal point of an examination of the vibrant materiality of food as it inflects the materialization of human bodies. The vibrant materiality of food not only intra-actively materializes the human body, as described in the previous chapter. It also renders food vulnerable to ecological changes wrought by human action while at the same time food production is a cause of ecological changes.

That food is vulnerable to ecological changes, then, signals the need to analyze yet another layer of entanglement in considering a theopolitics of food: the entanglement of nature and politics. Noting the entanglement between human political systems and nonhuman ecological systems, Bruno Latour asserts that “politics does not fall neatly on one side of a divide and nature on the other.”¹ He goes on to say that the relationship between ‘politics’ and nature has historically been leveraged to “limit, reform, establish, short-circuit, or enlighten public life.” Thus, he argues, the political and the natural constitute “a single issue that arises for all *collectives*” (1).

¹ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004): 1.

This commingling of “nature” and “politics” takes on added significance in the theo-politics of food. The intra-action between human systems and nonhuman ecological systems jeopardizes agricultural production. This intra-action calls into question the capacity of the sovereign to fulfill the promise of protecting the public from existential threats. This is particularly true when the sovereign dismisses the relevance of particular threats in the course of short-circuiting public life—such as when climate science is dismissed at very high levels of government.

What I hope to accomplish in this chapter is to call into question the legitimacy of claims to Schmittian-type sovereignty, and also the wisdom of permitting such claims to proceed unchallenged, in the context of food politics on a planet in peril. I will begin by reviewing the intra-actions between agricultural practices and planetary climate change, in order to contextualize the ecological challenges to not only absolute sovereignty, but also transnational global capitalism. These challenges will involve, among other things, the high potential for shocking blows to agricultural production. The remainder of the chapter will apply Latour’s political ecology as set forth in *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences Back into Democracy* to the question of any absolute sovereign, demonstrating the utility of more inclusive agricultural decision-making.

The Intra-Active Becoming of Agriculture and Climate

The Effect of Agriculture on the Climate Change

Some of the decisions to be made involve which agricultural methods to promote and support. This becomes critically important, because not only is food vulnerable to ecological changes, it is causative of them. Agricultural methods exert a tremendous

influence on ecological systems. As we saw in the last chapter, the nutritional content of food has diminished over the past fifty years as industrial agricultural methods reliant upon monocultures and heavy inputs of pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers deplete the soil of nutrients. But the impact of this particular economic-cultural prosthesis goes far beyond a single human body or even the depletion of soil nutrients.

For example, “vast amounts of manure and urine from confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) leak from lagoons into groundwater and streams,” giving rise to oceanic dead zones, in which “bottom dwelling sea life cannot live.”² Fertilizers from crops and residual nutrients in animal waste promote the flourishing of algae, known as algal blooms. When algal blooms die off, they sink to the bottom and decompose. Decomposition of the algae consumes all of the oxygen in the water immediately over the decaying algae. The lack of oxygen, in conjunction with other toxins emitted in the decomposition process, can kill marine life unfortunate enough to swim into the area.

Runoff from cattle farms in the central region of the United States resulted in a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico measuring “eight thousand five hundred square miles, the size of New Jersey” and causing the extinction of several species native to that area.³ While some dead zones have been decreased in size thanks to environmental regulations, the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico has been worsened by increased corn production in the Midwest, spurred on by the federal government.⁴ Although a plethora of other

² Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, *Ethical Eating Study Guide*, (Boston: UUA, 2012): 16. See also: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Livestock's Long Shadow*. Executive Summary, Rome: FAO, 2006; and FAO Livestock, Environment and Development website: <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/lead/lead.html>

³ UUA, *Ethical Eating*, 16.

⁴ Scheer, Roddy, and Doug Moss. "What Causes Ocean "Dead Zones?"" *Scientific American*. n.d. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ocean-dead-zones/>.

industrial chemicals are also poisoning marine life, agricultural runoff is a significantly destructive force.⁵

Not only does waste runoff from high-intensity monoculture crops and CAFOs result in oceanic dead zones, but cattle farming and irrigation are draining our watersheds, as “farm animals alone consume 2.3 billion gallons of water daily.”⁶ In the Punjab region of India, the use of GMO seeds—largely touted as drought-resistant—required such extensive irrigation that groundwater levels dropped “at over a foot a year in some areas” and the resulting salt deposits in the soil rendered vast swaths of land unusable.⁷

Last, but certainly not least important, “food production and distribution contribute dramatically to greenhouse gases,”⁸ and in turn, “climate change has negatively impacted wheat and maize yields for many regions.”⁹ The precise percentage of greenhouse gases accounted for by agricultural production and distribution are hotly contested. Estimates range from nine percent reported by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to approximately 33% by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).¹⁰ What accounts for this vast discrepancy? For one thing, the EPA figure does not include any factors external to the farm, such as

⁵⁵ Alan Sielen, "The Devolution of the Seas: The Consequences of Oceanic Destruction," *Foreign Affairs*. (December 2013): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/global-commons/2013-10-15/devolution-seas>.

⁶ UUA, *Ethical Eating*, 17.

⁷ Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*, 125.

⁸ UUA, *Ethical Eating*, 16.

⁹ C.B. Field, V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.), "2014: Summary for policy makers., In *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, by C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 5.

¹⁰ United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Draft Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2015," *EPA.gov* (February 15, 2017): 5-1 and Natasha Gilbert, "One-third of our greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture," *Nature* (October 31, 2012): <http://www.nature.com/news/one-third-of-our-greenhouse-gas-emissions-come-from-agriculture-1.11708>.

transportation of food across vast distances, refrigerated storage, or processing and packaging of food, in its calculations of the agricultural contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Nor does it account for emissions of carbon due to land use changes, such as conversion of forest to farm land. Nor the energy used on-farm. These sources of carbon emissions are all attributed to other sectors. The CGIAR, on the other hand, includes some of those collateral sources of greenhouse gas emission. Thus, the calculation of greenhouse gas emissions attributable to the global food system is complicated by the fact that what happens on an actual farm but one scene in a larger picture.

Thus it is clear that agriculture, even when we are speaking strictly about what happens directly on farms, account for at least ten percent of greenhouse gas emissions. That figure rises as to a high of thirty-three percent when collateral processes such as transportation, processing and storage. And this is to say nothing of the methane released as nearly one-third of the food in the United States decomposes in landfills, having gone uneaten.¹¹ We are told that high-input agricultural methods are necessary in order to produce adequate food for a growing population. It is a matter of warding off the existential threat posed by famine. But yet climate change poses threats on another register entirely, and the claims of any sovereign to assure stability in the face of those threats are dubious, if not duplicitous.

The Effect of Climate Change on Agriculture

The 2014 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identifies several themes relevant to the capacity of the sovereign to decide at all,

¹¹ United States Department of Agriculture. *Foodwaste FAQs*. n.d. <https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm>.

especially when multilateral trade organizations and transnational corporations are acting as sovereign. First, predicting specific risks relative to climate change is fraught with uncertainty in part because factors influencing the outcome are themselves currently in formation. Second, the risks posed by climate change vary from region to region, affected by both relatively stable factors such as geography and also by potentially dynamic factors, such as socioeconomic patterns. And last, despite these variables, it is highly likely that food production, distribution and price stability will be adversely affected by increasing global temperatures.¹²

The IPCC's 2014 report notes that "climate change involves complex interactions and changing likelihoods of diverse impacts" (3). New to this report, as compared to former years, is an emphasis on risk. Risk was highlighted in order to support decision making around the factors which will ultimately impact the resilience of human communities and ecosystems in the face of a progressively warming planet. The authors note that "people and societies may perceive or rank risks and potential benefits differently, given diverse values and goals" (3). In other words, not only are some risks incalculable because the factors that could potentially influence the outcome have not been fully formed, but also because the assessment of risk cannot be determined by science alone. Rather, "diverse values and goals" shape risk assessment as much as the sheer facts. This is a notion that will reappear in later discussions of Latour, but for now note the relevance of both "fact" and "value" in risk assessment.

¹² Field et al., "Summary for Policy Makers," 18. The future economic impact of climate change would seem to provoke some sort of "advance planning" response on the part of transnational corporations. But they are, at this point, legally mandated to act solely in their shareholders' immediate best interest. The profits of future shareholders—or indeed anyone else—thirty years from now are off-limits in this calculation.

The IPCC has gained significant knowledge since the previous reports, in part because the effects of climate change are already beginning to appear. For example, “water quality and quantity have been affected,” and numerous species “have shifted their geographic ranges, seasonal activities, migratory patterns, abundances, and species interactions” (3). But it is not known what mitigation efforts might be undertaken in the near or distant future. Correspondingly, significant weather events have led the IPCC to observe a significant and widespread under-preparedness for climate-induced disasters such as droughts, floods, heat waves, wildfires, cyclones and other storms (6). The adaptive response to climate change is proceeding at different levels of government in different locales—in one geographic region responses are at the national level whereas in another region adaptive efforts occur at the municipal level. These regional differences are reflective of specific risks faced due to geographic particularities of the community responding, yet the unevenness of the efforts renders prediction about the impact of climate change fraught with uncertainty (7).

Yet, while uncertainty is the result of not knowing which mitigation efforts will be undertaken and also not knowing precisely where or when a particular climate-related problem will arise, this uncertainty is not expected to resolve as these decisions are made and changes implemented. About the persistence of uncertainty the IPCC is quite clear: “Responding to climate-related risks involves decision making in a changing world, with continuing uncertainty about the severity and timing of climate-change impacts and with limits to the effectiveness of adaptation” (8). Thus, we are well past the point at which any sovereign could be relied upon to ward off the existential threat posed by climate

change. There is simply no restoring certainty in the present context, and no amount of sovereign decision-making will fix that.

While at one time many were in denial that climate change was real and also human caused, it is increasingly common now to hear that we are “past the point of no return.” The IPCC, to some degree, concurs with that dire sentiment. They assert that in the near term we will receive little immediate benefit from reduction of carbon emissions in terms of cooling the planet. In that regard, we are indeed past the point of no return. However, in terms of reducing risk to human and nonhuman communities, they argue that the “societal response is the major factor in risk reduction” (10). Consequently, although the planet is likely to get hotter over the next thirty years, the risks enumerated below *could* be mitigated if societal factors—in Baradian terms, material-discursive practices—were altered in such a way as to improve resilience. But while the planet will inevitably become warmer over the next thirty years, there is some potential that we could prevent or curb planetary temperature rise beyond that point. And in fact, the behavioral changes we make right now to curb emissions—or not—is the most significant factor in determining planetary warming beyond 2050 (10). For many of us, this requires deep commitment to a future we will not live to see, even if all goes well.

Adding to the complexity of future projections is the fact that the “relative importance of development and climate change varies by sector, region, and time period” (11). Ironically, the IPCC claims to be highly confident about this radical uncertainty regarding particular risks; they are *really sure* that there is no way to be sure. It is impossible to tell where in particular disaster is likely to strike, or how bad things will get once it does. Yet this degree of uncertainty should not shut down deliberation or the

search for new socioeconomic arrangements. In fact, as I will argue alongside Latour shortly, prematurely concluding the debate poses perhaps the greatest of all risks during times of uncertainty.

The plethora of “interacting social, economic, and cultural factors, which have been incompletely considered to date,” that is to say material-discursive practices, will all play some role in contributing to or mitigating risk. The IPCC pinpoints these factors as:

Wealth and its distribution across society, demographics, migration, access to technology and information, employment patterns, the quality of adaptive responses, societal values, governance structures, and institutions to resolve conflicts. International dimensions such as trade and relations among states are also important for understanding the risks of climate change at regional scales.

And decision-making should, they argue, take full account of as much data as possible.

They suggest that “forms of evidence include, for example, empirical observations, experimental results, *process-based understanding*, statistical approaches, and simulation and descriptive models” (11).¹³ One would hope that “empirical observations” rendered during agricultural experiments conducted by peasant farmers might be included in the data set of these discussions.

In the context of this uncertainty, the IPCC recommends “*Iterative risk management ...[as] a useful framework for decision making in complex situations characterized by large potential consequences, persistent uncertainties, long timeframes, potential for learning, and multiple climatic and non-climatic influences changing over time*” (9).¹⁴ As opposed to narrowing in on the most likely outcomes, they recommend “assessment of the widest possible range of potential impacts, including low-probability

¹³ Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Emphasis mine.

outcomes with large consequences” as central to the capacity to conduct the risk/benefit analysis necessary to ascertain the most advantageous risk management plans.

Additionally, they caution against thinking we have either understood or addressed the problems once and for all; continued monitoring and learning are essential for effective adaptation (9).

Because of change is likely to be a persistent feature and specific risks remain to some degree incalculable, no singular sovereign decision seems likely to offer significant safeguards from the existential threat posed by climate change. Decisions will need to be made and remade as circumstances shift and data is accumulated. No amount of sovereign decision-making can restore predictability to the current and near-future climate situation. There are too many factors to control, thus the existential threat can never, in this case, be removed. Any declaration of a state of exception contingent upon broad resolution of the threats posed by climate change would likely prove to be so long term as to be effectively permanent.

Furthermore, although unencumbered by democratic bureaucracy, it is possible that that the type of centralized decision-making typified by the Schmittian sovereign may amplify vulnerability, for many, because less able (or willing) to adapt to or account for local and regional threats. As has been explicated in previous chapters, decision-making of the unilateral sovereign tends to marshal widespread resources for deployment on behalf of those proximal to the seat of power. This could prove highly deleterious for locales far from decision-making centers. Some regions and cultures constitute what the IPCC refers to as “unique and threatened systems” (12). Furthermore, risks are differentially distributed in part due to “multidimensional inequalities” including

“socioeconomic status” (6) and also “because of regionally differentiated climate change impacts on crop production in particular” (12). Material-discursive practices, apparatuses of intra-active becoming, vary from place to place creating a variety of diffraction patterns in the context of climate change.

For example, human security is threatened as climate change is likely to “increase the displacement of people.” This is particularly troubling in light of the discussion in chapter 3, in which it was argued that refugee (or any other non-citizen) status renders people particularly vulnerable. Although massive dislocations are likely to occur, the “complex, multi-causal nature” of migration reduces the ability to predict which countries or regions will be most affected by this trend. The IPCC noted the risk of “violent conflicts in the form of civil war and inter-group violence” will likely increase as arable land and potable water become scarce. Additionally, “some transboundary impacts” to ecosystems “have the potential to increase rivalry among states.” Subsequently, “territorial integrity” will be threatened (20). Indeed, as will be discussed below, such disruptions are already well underway.

The IPCC concludes that “risks will vary through time across regions and populations, dependent on myriad factors including the extent of adaptation and mitigation” (20). The IPCC appeals to “intergovernmental institutions...to...manage many of these rivalries” (20). In other words, they call for something akin to a transcendent (intergovernmental) supersovereign figure capable of managing conflict between two rival states.¹⁵ While on the one hand it is hard to imagine the survival instinct *not* giving rise to all out warfare in the absence of a mediator, on the other hand

¹⁵ While this figure would not be metaphysically “transcendent,” because still earthly, it would nonetheless be structurally transcendent as regards the state.

this reliance upon a transcendent figure bears resonances with the sovereign as described by Schmitt. Subsequently, such a supersovereign poses its own set of risks, and if the scale of risks is directly related to the scale of sovereignty, these risks would prove perhaps not worth taking.¹⁶

But what about the present and projected effects of climate change on food? The IPCC is highly confident that with progressively warming temperatures there will be “Risk of food insecurity and the breakdown of food systems linked to warming, drought, flooding, and precipitation variability and extremes, particularly for poorer populations in urban and rural settings” (13). Some of these changes are already occurring. In recent years “climate change has negatively affected wheat and maize yields for many regions and in the global aggregate” (5). In fact, 2011 was the first year in decades that crop yields were reduced, a decline attributed to climate change.

Despite the claims of some that warmer temperatures and increased atmospheric carbon will benefit crop yields, numerous studies including results from numerous geographic locations and crop varieties demonstrate that climate change affects crop yields negatively more often than positively (4). Additionally, fisheries are threatened due to reductions in marine biodiversity and migration of marine species seeking more suitable habitats, both of which are in part caused by the production and distribution of food, as discussed above (17). These findings are particularly alarming because despite the fact that we have thus far been producing sufficient food to feed every person over two thousand calories per day, due to political and economic structures over seven

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida alludes to the dangers of this approach when he says “Universal democracy, beyond the nation-state and beyond citizenship, calls in fact for a supersovereignty that cannot but betray it;” *Rogues*, 101.

million people per year starve to death.¹⁷ As food production decreases, this problem can only be expected to worsen.

How much will food production drop, and when? This is yet another area of tremendous uncertainty. Projections for the near-term (2030-2049) vary dependent upon which crops, regions, and adaptation scenarios are calculated. About ten percent of those projections predict yield increases of ten percent, whereas another ten percent predict yield losses of over twenty percent when compared with the end of the last century. Long term predictions are fraught with even greater difficulty, as much is contingent upon our decisions to reduce emissions now.

While the specifics remain incalculable, the final conclusion of the IPCC was that:

Climate change is projected to progressively increase inter-annual variability of crop yields in many regions. These projected impacts will occur in the context of rapidly rising crop demand.¹⁸ All aspects of food security are potentially affected by climate change, including food access, utilization, and price stability (19).

In short, it is quite likely that food security will be undermined by climate change. While currently the emphasis is on integrating rural workers into the global economy in order to increase their purchasing power, in the future there may well be less food for them to purchase. Perhaps their security would be better ensured by promoting smallholders after

¹⁷ The United Nations World Food Programme attests that sufficient calories are produced worldwide to feed everyone, yet 1 in 9 face hunger on a daily basis. One in three is malnourished. See (World Food Programme n.d.). Based on data from Oxfam, UNICEF, and the World Food Programme, Poverty.com reports that 21,000 people die every day from hunger, amounting to over 7.6 million people per year. According to a recent Reuters report, famine in four areas of Africa puts twenty million people at risk of starvation within the next six months; Miles, "Four Famines."

¹⁸ Field et al., "Summary for Policy Makers," 18.

all? And indeed, the Food and Agriculture Organization is increasingly advocating for this approach.¹⁹

Thus I have used the 2014 of the IPCC to support claims that risk assessment in the face of climate change is complicated by both epistemic uncertainty and also indeterminacy. By epistemic uncertainty I mean that we don't yet have a comprehensive understanding of which factors will influence the trajectory of climate change. And by indeterminacy I use it in the sense that Karen Barad uses it: some factors that will participate in the iterative becoming of our climate situation have yet to be materialized. Second, the risks posed by climate change are regionally and temporally variable on the basis of both geographic and societal factors. And last, despite these variables, food production, distribution and price stability are jeopardized by increasing global temperatures.

Taken as a whole, the uncertainty and indeterminacy introduced by climate change render sovereignty a risky proposition, calls for a global supersovereign capable of refereeing international conflicts notwithstanding. This is particularly true in light of the fact that the unacknowledged global sovereigns of the multilateral trade agencies and transnational corporations are enforcing agricultural practices that worsen climate change. That this occurs under the political frame of "food security" is all the more ironic when the impact of climate change on food is deliberated. Yet, multilaterals—or at least the IMF—seem to be awakening to the threats posed by the imposition of their neoliberal agenda.

The Environmental Fact Sheet published by the International Monetary Fund suggests that "broad-based charges on greenhouse gases, such as a carbon tax, are the

¹⁹ FAO *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, 2015.

most effective instruments for encouraging cleaner fuels and less energy use.”²⁰ This change, if implemented in the short run, could improve the trajectory of climate change in the latter half of the century, even if it does not substantially improve the experience over the coming thirty years. They go on to suggest that such taxation could also “deal much more effectively with broader environmental and related problems that can be a significant drag on economic growth, such as the health and productivity impacts of poor air quality.” The authors of this report express the sentiment that post-Paris Climate agreement is an “opportune time” for reform, and need not wait for international agreement.²¹ The multilaterals are beginning to feel the economic pinch resulting from decades of ecological irresponsibility, it would seem.

A staff discussion paper published by the IMF in the wake of the Paris agreements suggests the use of fiscal policies to address carbon pollution, based on their economic assessment that:

At the heart of the climate change problem is an externality: firms and households are not charged for the environmental consequences of their greenhouse gases from fossil fuels and other sources. This means that establishing a proper charge on emissions—that is, removing the implicit subsidy from the failure to charge for environmental costs—has a central role.²²

These implicit subsidies and externalities have been the concern of environmentalists for quite some time. While the insistence on eliminating these implicit subsidies would seem to cast the IMF on the side of environmentalists who have been calling for such things for years, the discussion paper begins with a disclaimer asserting that this discussion paper

²⁰ International Monetary Fund, *IMF Factsheet: Climate, Environment, and the IMF*, (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2016).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Mai Farid, Michael Keen, Michael Papaioannou, Ian Parry, Catherine Pattillo, and Anna Ter-Martirosyan, *After Paris: Fiscal, Macroeconomic, and Financial Implications of Climate Change*, Staff Discussion Notes, (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2016): 5.

does not necessarily reflect the *official* position of the IMF. As a staff discussion paper then, it signals nothing about the official commitment of the IMF as regards economic policy in the context of climate change.

The authors of this discussion paper further recommend improved practices for assessing and disclosing the carbon footprints of various corporations and bolstering regulatory oversight as beneficial for development of “resilient institutions and well-functioning financial markets” (6). The authors concern themselves with projections of “significant market impacts, with output losses through effects on climate-sensitive sectors (for example, agriculture, forestry, coastal real estate, tourism)” (8). As did the IPCC, these authors note considerable regional variation in vulnerability to climate change impacts. Areas at greatest risk are “regions with lower per capita income and higher initial temperatures, which could aptly describe much of the Global South (8). And perhaps it is concern for “the market” more so than for people or ecosystems that drives these suggestions. But then again, they also argue for “substantial carbon pricing” in order to reduce “premature deaths from air pollution”—probably about as “touchy-feely” as it is acceptable to appear in an IMF publication of any kind— so perhaps such a conclusion might be excessively cynical.

But while it may seem excessively cynical to assume that financial motivations are the preoccupation of staff at the IMF, we might be cautioned against extending such generosity to the entire corporate regime. Naomi Klein observes a pattern in which “extreme shocks” such as natural catastrophes and violent conflicts are “exploited” by “corporate interests” in an effort to push a policy agenda that appropriates wealth on behalf of a small elite “by lifting regulations, cutting social spending, and forcing large-

scale privatizations of the public sphere.” Not only that, but these crises “have also been the excuse for extreme crackdowns on civil liberties and chilling human rights violations.”²³ Klein goes on to say that “there are plenty of signs that climate change will be no exception” to this trend. Rather, Klein argues, climate catastrophes “will once again be seized upon to hand over yet more resources to the 1 percent” (8). Recent political events in the United States suggest that even the much milder “shock” of suboptimal economic growth is being leveraged to dismantle environmental protections and all manner of federal regulatory oversight.²⁴

Climate “Shocks” and the Sovereign Exception

Building on her earlier work, *Shock Doctrine*, Klein hopes to prepare groundwork that will enable “People’s Shock, a blow from below,” that would embolden a “muscular mass movement” with the capacity to transform the status quo and engender more socially and economically just policies on a wide scale.²⁵ She believes that the threat posed by climate change might promote the dispersion of power rather than its concentration, thus radically expanding the commons (10). She favors inclusive societal processes that might, perhaps, prove more adaptive in the face of climate change than our current social, political, and economic structures are proving to be.

Klein disagrees that “tough and binding” legislation on climate change has not been enacted because the task is too daunting. She cites the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as evidence that broad-scale cooperation has in fact been possible

²³ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2014): 8.

²⁴ For example, despite relatively low unemployment rates, President Trump has declared that “regulatory oversight is killing jobs.” Subsequently, he has ordered that a task force be formed in order to recommend regulations for repeal or modification. See Toluse Olorunnipa, “Trump Signs Executive Order to Impose Additional Layer of Oversight on Regulations,” *Bloomberg News* (February 24, 2017).

²⁵ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 8, 10.

over the past several decades (16). The WTO is “an intricate global system that regulates the flow of goods and services around the planet, under which the rules are clear and violations are harshly punished” (16). While environmentalists were focused on climate change, the political focus was on economic development that benefitted the few at the expense of the many, while claiming to do precisely the opposite through “trickle down” economics. There was a widespread lack of political will to address the looming disaster posed by climate change, whereas heroic effort was exerted on behalf of the neoliberal economic agenda driving greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, “we need not be spectators in all this: politicians aren’t the only ones with the power to declare a crisis. Mass movements of regular people can declare one too” (7). If the declaration of a crisis is read as a “deciding on the exception,” Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty, what she is calling for bears family resemblance to popular sovereignty.

Klein argues against those who insist that human nature is too self-serving to sacrifice for the sake of climate change. The fact that “we sacrifice our pensions, our hard-won labor rights” in order to prop up an economic system that fails us is evidence that we are capable of sacrifice (18). The problem, she claims, is that “we have not done the things that are necessary to lower emissions because those things fundamentally conflict with deregulated capitalism, the reigning ideology for the entire period we have been struggling to find a way out of this crisis” (18). These changes, while beneficial to “the vast majority” nonetheless threaten “an elite minority presently controlling “our economy, our political process, and most of our major media outlets” (18). She refers to neoliberal capitalism as “market fundamentalism,” and observes that this attitude is

publicly embraced with such fervor that suggestions to make “the most direct and obvious climate responses seem politically heretical” (19).

In the context of this dissertation, her use of the word “heretical” underscores the value of political theology as it clarifies the manner in which formerly theological concepts traffic in the secular political arena. As will be discussed later, these concepts, in part because they have been secularized, have been adopted in their most orthodox formulations. Furthermore, because they have been sanitized of their theological origins, they are not accessible to critique as religious dogma. Rather, they are presupposed as fact. It is in part to pry loose the theological concepts and expose them to critique that this dissertation has been undertaken.

After observing that reductions in greenhouse gas emissions have only ever accompanied by “economic collapse or deep depressions,” Klein goes on to say that “our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life (21).²⁶ What is needed to avoid widespread ecosystem collapse, she insists, is a reduction in consumption of resources. Unfortunately, neoliberal capitalism “demands...unfettered expansion” (21). However, Klein argues, “only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it’s not the laws of nature” (21).²⁷ If we adhere to our economic doctrine at the expense of planetary ecosystems, we will run afoul of those laws and environmental crises will no doubt result.

²⁶ Klein is not alone in naming neoliberal capitalism as the major barrier to effective climate action, incidentally, but a fuller explication of the rationale behind this thought is beyond the scope of the present project.

²⁷ Despite my agreement with her underlying sentiment that the nonhuman material world constitutes what might be referred to as “stubborn facts” that are resistant to human efforts to shape them according to our desires, the notion that nature has “laws” is a subject of ongoing debate.

Problematically, environmental crises often serve as provocations for enactments of a strong, if not quite Schmittian, sovereignty.²⁸ Given that hurricanes and superstorms, droughts and failing crops pose an existential threat to numerous individuals—not to mention the state—the legitimacy of these enactments of strong sovereignty appears self-evident in response to catastrophic events. The capacity of the state to maintain, or at least very quickly restore, order and security in the face of these climate-related existential threats may be criticized as woefully inadequate or deplorably racist, articles demanding that the nation-state “stand down” altogether during these crises are lacking.²⁹ If anything, in the wake of these crises, what is called for is a more robust, efficient, and socially just response on the part of the nation-state. In other words, environmental crises can serve to consolidate the power of the sovereign state, or at least to curtail resistance to its maneuvers insofar as these crises tend to deepen the desire for a strongly protective nation-state.

Simultaneously, however, climate change promises an ecological instability so profound that no amount of sovereignty seems likely to restore order or ensure security. For example, the inability of some states to provide food to their people has, even as recently as 2008, destabilized nations, in part contributing to the uprisings of the Arab Spring.³⁰ And, as we shall demonstrate, some of the difficulties with food production

²⁸ States of emergency declared in the wake of natural disasters are one example, although these are not always accompanied by a suspension of constitutional rights.

²⁹ For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, in our own country. Or, in the case of the Arab Spring, the inability of governments to feed their people resulted in the demand for a regime change.

³⁰ See for example: Dalia Mortada, “Let them eat baklava: Today’s policies are recipes for instability in the Middle East,” *The Economist* (March 17, 2012); “Did Food Prices Spur the Arab Spring?,” *PBS NewsHour* (September 7, 2011); Rami Zurayk, “Use your loaf: why food prices were crucial in the Arab Spring” *The Guardian Saturday July 16, 2011*; and Sarah Johnston and Jeffrey Mazo “Global Warming and the Arab Spring.” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* (April-May 2011): 11-17. Incidentally, the ongoing Syrian conflict is related to the lack of arable land in several of these sources.

over the past two decades are a direct result of environmental changes secondary to climate change—to which we have already noted high intensity agricultural methods contribute. Yet, despite the fact that these agricultural methods worsen climate change, we are told that worsening climate demands that these methods are not only pursued, but imposed on developing nations.³¹ The decisions of these sovereigns, in other words, are driving us toward ever greater existential threats, rather than away from them. These existential threats subsequently induce greater necessity for strong sovereignty.

I am certainly not suggesting that the nation-state abdicate its role in emergency responses. Nor am I suggesting that any entity whatsoever is intentionally driving climate change in order to consolidate power. I am merely demonstrating that climate-related catastrophes provoke demand for—and enactments of—strong sovereignty.

Simultaneously I am calling awareness to the fact that economic renditions of absolute sovereignty on the part of the corporate regime (multilaterals, transnational corporations) contribute significantly to the worsening climate situation. In other words, we are increasingly reliant upon the sovereignty of the nation-state to protect us from the

³¹ These methods are imposed via the structural adjustment programs, as indicated in chapter 4. Efforts are being made to impose these methods on consumers, as well, for example by legislative efforts to ban explicit labeling of GMO products, which would effectively prohibit consumers from choosing non-GMO foods. Furthermore, scientists are being pitted against environmentalists, accusing environmentalists who oppose GMO foods of depriving the poor in developing nations of adequate nutrition on the basis of their opposition to GMO foods. See Niraj Chokshi, “Stop Bashing G.M.O. Foods, More Than 100 Nobel Laureates Say,” in *The New York Times* (June 30, 2016). But despite being declared “safe” and environmentally advantageous, as already mentioned, some, such as Raj Patel, argue that GMO crops require inordinate amounts of irrigation, depleting water tables and are thus not altogether environmentally advantageous. Lending substance to this claim, in June of 2012 the Union of Concerned Scientists reported that “USDA analysis of data supplied by Monsanto show that DroughtGard produces only modest results, and only under moderate drought conditions at that.” Incidentally, during a recent visit to the Museum of Science and Industry I viewed an exhibit on GMO’s. This exhibit asserted that GMO crops were better able to recover after a four to five day drought than non-GMO plants. Drought conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa have persisted much longer than four to five days.

sovereignty of the corporate regime.³² Perhaps in this regard, we in the Global North can find some common ground with peasant farmers of the Global North, whose recognition of this dynamic gave rise to the food sovereignty movement over two decades ago.

As we shall see, there are many ecological truths which multiply daily. There is no such thing as a “global ecosystem” per se. There are multiple intra-acting, intersecting ecosystems which exert differing pressures and constraints on one another. To some degree, the problem is one of epistemic uncertainty: we simply do not know how ecosystems will affect one another because we do not have sufficient knowledge of climate science and the impact of climate on various living organisms. For example, there is speculation that increased atmospheric CO₂ will act as an airborne fertilizer for certain crops as concentrations increase and temperatures rise, but this remains a theoretical possibility, and far from certain.³³

However, to an even greater degree we face *indeterminacy*. Indeterminacy does not amount to “facts out there to be known that we do not yet know” and it goes well beyond the mere unpredictability of chaotic systems. It implies a far more radical degree of unknowing. Indeterminacy means we cannot predict because the factors upon which we might base a prediction have not yet materialized. In much the same way as light behaves as either particle or wave contingent upon the apparatus, the behavior of ecological systems will depend largely upon the intra-action of numerous apparatuses,

³² At one time those of us in the Global North operated under the fiction that these sovereignties were distinct and that the sovereignty of our nation-state could protect us from the corporate regime, while the two have been conflated in the eyes of the Global South for quite some time. The awakening of many Americans to the degree of control exercised over our government by the corporate regime, I would suggest, underlies both the crisis of sovereignty on the left and the calls for nationalism on the right. See *Gangs of America* for an exhaustive account of how corporations have undermined Democracy beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.

³³ William R Cline, “Global Warming and Agriculture,” *Finance and Development* (International Monetary Fund) 45, no. 1 (March 2008).

both social and material. These apparatuses themselves have yet to be developed. Subsequently, scientists struggle to determine precisely how harmful the impacts of climate change will be because some of the factors that will impact the outcome are still in formation. Forthcoming decisions will most certainly shape perhaps not only long term climate change, but also the resiliency of human societies.

Taken together, indeterminacy and epistemic uncertainty cast doubt on the ability of the sovereign to make sound decisions upon the exception in the exceptional climate we face now, and likely well into the future. Furthermore, extreme weather events, droughts, crop failures and massive dislocation resulting from climate instability certainly pose an existential threat, and these events are likely to occur so frequently as to become unexceptional. As we have already discussed, Agamben contends that this is the fate of the nation state under the Schmittian sovereign. But even more importantly, as even International Monetary Fund publications attest, these weather events will occur in specific locations, requiring regional decision-making responses, as opposed to the centralized type of decision-making favored by the corporate regime.

In other words, the materializing bodies affected by the economic-cultural prosthesis and its material-discursive practices are not only *human* bodies, as explicated in the previous chapter, but also bodies of land, bodies of water, and bodies of plants and animals dependent upon these ecological systems. These bodies of land, water and ecosystem in turn affect the production of distribution of food, and the bodies of humans as well. Politics—the arrangement of the *polis*—not only affects and reflects the relations between groups of humans, but also between humans and the natural world around them. Thus we see, as Latour suggests, that we do not have “politics” on one side and “nature”

on the other. There is no easy distinction between facts and values in a world of intra-active becoming. The values of a society shape the material-discursive practices of that society—the apparatuses within which bodies materialize. The bodies thus materialized constitute the “facts” that inflect value formation in a series of iterative becomings. Thus a theopolitics of food must grapple with political ecology, particular on a planet endangered by climate change in no small measure brought about by agricultural practices.

Bruno Latour’s Political Ecology

Intro to Latour:

According to Bruno Latour, politics is so thoroughly entangled with nature that it is impossible to avoid engagement in political ecology. As already mentioned above, Latour argues that in fact the division between nature and politics was established in large part in order to “limit, reform, establish, short-circuit, or enlighten public life.”³⁴ Subsequently we must tackle the questions of political ecology, either “*surreptitiously*, by *distinguishing* between questions of nature and questions of politics, or *explicitly*, by treating those two sets of questions as a single issue that arises for all *collectives*” (1). In other words, both politics and nature must be open for deliberation as we attempt to forge a common life. There can be no appeal to any transcendent entity—whether divine or natural—that can “miraculously simplify the problems of common life” in the way that Schmitt had hoped the sovereign could do (89).

Latour’s *Politics and Nature* is a theoretical piece, occasionally dipping into, yet never plumbing, the depths of any particular issue. Its utility for the present work is not

³⁴ Latour, *Political Ecology*, 1.

that it offers a political ecology of food that can easily be applied to a political theology of food. Rather, its utility lies in its nondualist framework and its explication of multiple concepts that clarify the risks inherent in the problematic maneuvers previously mentioned in the context of food politics. The particular ideas that will be described below include Latour's nondualist metaphysics; the collective as a process of composing a good common world; the role of speech, speech prostheses, and spokespersons; and the externalities that haunt the collective.³⁵ Finally, Latour reapportions the tasks involved in composing the good common world in such a way that clearly illuminates a potential role for peasant farmers (and religious scholars), creating a theoretical framework which supports their inclusion in global food decision-making.

Nondualist Metaphysics: Neutralizing Agent or Invigorating Force?

Latour denounces a dualistic metaphysics of nature which he claims serves to short-circuit politics, and he identifies three varieties of dualism operative in our contemporary political and economic order. The first is the “‘cold and hard’ nature of primary qualities,” in which nature has been composed once and for all, yet the facts of nature remain inaccessible. Instead, mere representations of the facts are accessible, and only experts can determine the accuracy or validity of the representations. The second is what Latour refers to as the “warm and green nature” of *Naturpolitik* which professes to renew public life in its relation to nature, but has not yet abandoned the metaphysics of nature that curtails public life. The third metaphysic is the ‘red and bloody’ nature of political economics.” This metaphysic adopts a neo-Darwinian, “survival of the fittest”

³⁵ This by no means exhausts its utility; it merely reflects the most salient aspects of his theory for the present dissertation.

perspective which envisions human economics to be founded upon a nature which is “red in tooth and claw” (245). Collectively, these metaphysics are subject to the same critique.

Each of these three metaphysics of nature operates basically under a rubric of Cartesian dualism capable of neatly distinguishing subject from objects, facts from values. This division renders “nature” to be both indisputable fact and mute object, fully comprehensible, but only by elite experts who can reliably mediate the relationship between politics and nature. In this way, nature serves as transcendent authority bolstering nefarious political agendas.³⁶ The ecological crises we now face in the context of climate change are historically important not because they result in “new concern with nature but, on the contrary” because they make evident “the impossibility of continuing to imagine politics on one side and, on the other, a nature that would serve politics simultaneously as a standard, a foil, a reserve, a resource, and a public dumping ground” (58). We must, in light of climate change, address the natural world as a political issue.

Latour knows, however, that while these crises make evident the political entanglements with nature, they have not “immediately undermined [the old] metaphysics of nature. On the contrary, their theorists have tried hard not only to save modernist nature, but also to extend its lease, by offering it a more important role in short-circuiting public life” (128-9) He contends that in order to overcome these toxic, and some might say archaic, metaphysical constructs, it will be necessary to engage in metaphysics once again. He encourages experimental metaphysics, described as “an active search for what makes up the common world” (242). Latour’s metaphysics does

³⁶ For example, Latour insists that militant ecology “claims to defend nature for nature’s sake—and not as a substitute for human egotism—but in every instance, the mission it has assigned itself is carried out by humans and is justified by the well-being, the pleasure, or the good conscience of a small number of carefully selected humans—usually American, male, rich, educated, and white” (20).

not presume to address matters of fact, but instead addresses matters of concern—a distinction that will be clarified below. This metaphysics concerns itself with procedure, and promotes learning from experience.

Latour insists that the concept of “nature,” as distinct from politics, must be abandoned because it neutralizes the political. “Nature” has served as the “transcendent figure” that settles all debate. Latour is concerned that the concept of “nature,” when severed from the political, has most often been used “to abort politics,” a concern shared by oppressed minorities and people in developing nations who fear, rightly, that climate catastrophes will rob them of what little capacity for self-determination they currently enjoy. Thus, Latour’s experimental metaphysics and his political ecology open a debate—not only between rich and poor, North and South, left and right but between human and nonhuman—about our common world (130).

As is the case with Schmitt before him, Latour is driven by concerns about the neutralization of the political. However, his concern differs sharply from Schmitt’s. Schmitt wanted a *stronger* sovereign supported by a transcendent authority to settle debates in order to invigorate a certain type of politics released from the drudgery of endless conversation. By contrast, Latour worries that the political is neutralized when debate is short-circuited, conversations curtailed, and “nature” is invoked as a source of transcendent (and mysterious) power that props up sovereignty. Latour takes great pains to demonstrate, using Plato’s cave analogy, how dualistic metaphysics proposes “nature” to be composed of already established “facts” accessible exclusively to a team of (authorized) experts who determine what counts as fact.

According to the cave analogy, the plebiscites are not authorized to determine what counts as fact; they have only disputable opinions about indisputable nature. The experts, possessing exclusive access to the facts, have already rendered the relevant decisions about “nature” in a manner similar to a Schmittian sovereign. Latour is not content to let the sovereign decide, and neither, he argues, is anyone else: “None of these members of the collective wants to have an ‘opinion’ that is personal and disputable ‘about’ an indisputable and universal nature. *They all want to decide about the common world in which they live*”(130).³⁷ It is perhaps this desire to decide about the common world that inspires dreams of democracy.

Although there is no evidence that Latour is familiar with Margaret Urban Walker’s concept of epistemic authority, nonetheless it would seem they share a concern that granting epistemic authority—the authority to decide what counts as truth—to an elite few poses a threat to the constituents of the good common world. Perhaps, though, this should not be surprising since Latour notes that his “political ecology proposes to do for nature what feminism undertook to do and is still undertaking to do for man: wipe out the ancient self-evidence with which it was taken a bit too hastily as if it were all there is.” Meanwhile, Walker’s feminist ethics articulates how epistemic authority functions to create the appearance of self-evidence (49).³⁸

What is particularly interesting about Latour’s approach is that it begins to pry loose the tight-fisted grip that the sovereign has on epistemic authority. But he is not content—or perhaps not concerned?—with simply distributing authority to

³⁷ Emphasis mine.

³⁸ I am using a translated copy and do not have access to the original French. Thus it is not clear to me whether he really did use the word “man” to refer to all of humanity—problematic for feminists and therefore ironic in this context—or whether this was a translator’s decision.

disenfranchised humans. Rather, he seeks to forge an opening through which the nonhuman can actively participate in the political process of composing a good common world. Thus, Latour seeks distribution of decision-making powers that will in some way permit participation of the nonhuman. For this he needs to reconfigure “nature” in order to bring it into the political order. This differs significantly from the employment of the concept of nature in the writing of either Schmitt or Benjamin.

For Schmitt, nature figures primarily as spatial territory, the appropriation of which constitutes the initial stages of formation of a legal and economic order.³⁹ While this spatial territory was at one time restricted to land, over time the concept of this spatial territory has expanded to include portions of sea and sky as well.⁴⁰ Although jurisprudence plays its part, for Schmitt the boundaries of these spaces are to some degree established by “divine providence,” as these boundaries are established quite frequently through armed conflict and the vagaries of fate.⁴¹ Here again we see that for Schmitt the transcendent God is the template for the human sovereign, capable of standing outside of creation, arranging a hierarchy of value, founding an order.

Having no intrinsic value, nature functions as something of a vacuous space within which the sovereigns of competing legal and economic orders can be said to vie for domination. Thus, neither Schmitt nor the sovereign need concern himself with nature as such. Nature, in Schmitt’s *Nomos of the Earth*, figures more as prop than character. There is little need to wrestle with the recalcitrant nature of nature, its surprising capacity to facilitate or thwart human endeavors, its inability to remain within the bounded

³⁹ Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, translated by G. L. Ulmen, (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2003): 80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 329; divine providence is Schmitt’s term, not mine.

territories established by the sovereign. Once the boundaries are established through “divine providence,” the natural world itself is malleable at the hands of the sovereign.

In contrast to Schmitt, Benjamin *does* address nature as such. But instead of being a source of transcendent authority propping up the sovereign, or even a container over which the sovereign rules, it figures instead as an exteriority that undoes the sovereign.

According to Samuel Weber, Benjamin’s *Trauerspiel* establishes that:

The German Baroque theater ‘flees’ wildly to nature...only to discover that there is no grace or consolation to be had there, either. The undoing of the sovereign is the fact that in a creation left entirely to its own devices, without any other place to go, the state of exception has become the rule.⁴²

Benjamin demonstrates that the Baroque views nature as a locus of profound uncertainty in the context of which the sovereign proves incapable of establishing order. The resulting *disorder* masquerades as a permanent state of exception. Thus, whereas for Schmitt nature could be said to be nothing more than context within which politics occurs as sovereignty is consolidated, for Benjamin nature is the chaos that undoes the sovereign.

Latour’s thesis is resonant with Benjamin’s illustration of the way that nature undoes Schmitt’s version of sovereignty, yet quite dissonant with Schmitt’s assertion that loss of sovereignty is equivalent to the loss of politics. In fact, it is precisely uncertainty—including uncertainty about sovereignty itself—that Latour contends bestows upon political ecology its great utility:

Political ecology has never claimed to serve nature for nature’s own good, for it is absolutely incapable of defining the common good of a dehumanized nature. It does much better than defend nature (either for its own sake or for the good of future humans). It *suspends* our certainties concerning the sovereign good of humans and things, ends and means.⁴³

⁴² Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision,” 14.

⁴³ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 12. Emphasis in the original

In other words, resonant with Benjamin's depiction of the relationship between nature and the sovereign as described above, Latour insists that certainties—and thus the certainty of sovereignty—must be suspended in the context of political ecology.⁴⁴

This does not mean for Latour, as it does for Schmitt, the end of the political. Nor does it entail a permanent state of exception. Instead, for Latour the abolition of certainty, and sovereignty with it, is the *beginning* of the political order, albeit a very different political order than that envisioned by Schmitt. Any “certainties” are the destination of a political order, rather than its origin, and all “certainties” serve more as working hypotheses, remaining open to reformulation in the face of new data. For Latour, nothing about whatever we might call “nature” is certain enough to serve as mere backdrop and it certainly is no respecter of territorial markers on maps. It cannot, in other words, legitimate the sovereign. But neither does “nature” necessitate a permanent state of exception, as Benjamin suggests in *Trauerspiel*.

Collectives of Speaking Actors

What is this political order envisioned by Latour? First of all, Latour's political order is no longer founded upon the distinction between experiencing subject and inert object. It is even less reliant upon “nature” to serve as a source of stability preventing the “irremediable breakup of the social and human world” (59). And while Latour's political ecology explicitly names the “progressive composition of the common world” as its task, it does not perceive the open-ended and iterative nature of this composition to justify a permanent state of exception (59). It is simply not the case that all rules must be suspended until security can be established. Rather, procedural rules must be

⁴⁴ Ibid., 121, 133, 164, 200.

implemented in order to collectively determine the boundaries of the good common world.

Latour uses the term collective to refer to both the group whose members compose a common world and to the procedure by which this common world is composed.⁴⁵ Abiding by due process, the collective establishes the boundaries of its common world by means of conversation, rather than combat. Latour insists that the collective is “an assembly of beings *capable of speaking*” (62). He further insists that whereas in a liberal democracy discussion substituted for violence, now discussion must also “replace *both* silence and the not discussable” (62). The nonhuman, for Latour, must be invited to participate in the conversation:

Democracy can only be conceived if it can freely traverse the now-dismantled border between sciences and politics...to limit the discussion to humans, their interests, their subjectivities and their rights, will appear as strange a few years from now as having denied the right to vote of slaves, poor people, or women (69).

But the question remains: how can the nonhuman be said to participate in a conversation?

The first step Latour takes toward articulating the roles and functions of members of the collective is to dispense with subject-object dualism. This is essential, he tells us because actors, more than subjects and objects, can “bring themselves together in the same space” and compose a common world (73). Replacing this distinction is the concept of actors, or he says, in order to “rid the word of any trace of anthropomorphism, *actants* (75). What characterizes actors and qualifies them for participation in the conversation is “quite simply, that *they modify other actors through a series of trials that can be listed thanks to some experimental protocol*. This is the minimal, secular, nonpolemical

⁴⁵ (Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* 2004) 38 and 238

definition of an actor” (75). In Baradian terms, actors are intra-actively entangled with other actors in the context of material-discursive apparatuses, and we know this because marks are left on bodies

While the above might provide a minimal definition of actor, Latour is not content to stop there. He goes on to say that:

Actors are defined above all as obstacles, scandals, as what suspends mastery, as what gets in the way of domination, as what interrupts the closure and the composition of the collective... The notion of *recalcitrance* offers the most appropriate approach to defining their action (80).

This elaboration on the concept of actors needs additional clarification in order to demonstrate its full usefulness, which I will attempt below. In particular, the notion of an actor as interrupting closure, in conjunction with the concept of externalities to the collective will nicely reframe how we might view the previously identified problems in our current global food system.

Thus far we have actors (or actants) acting—affecting one another, thwarting the pretense of mastery and preventing the closure of the collective. But how can they be said to speak?⁴⁶ Latour insists that the collective is “an assembly of beings *capable of speaking*” (62). He further insists that whereas in a liberal democracy discussion substituted for violence, now it must also “replace *both* silence and the not discussable” (62). But how can mute nonhumans participate in this conversation?

Latour resolves the dilemma of mute nonhumans by permitting scientists the role of spokespersons. The fact that they are cast in this role does not, however, grant them either epistemic or moral authority. In fact Latour cautions that we must always “*entertain serious but not definitive doubts* about their capacity to speak in the names of

⁴⁶ I can't help but think of Spivak at this juncture.

those they represent” (64-65). Thus, scientists and policymakers may perform as spokespersons for a variety of others—“landscapes, chemical-industry lobbies, South Sea plankton, Indonesian forests, the United States economy, nongovernmental organizations or elected governments”—but the accuracy and integrity of their performance can never be presumed (65).

Recalling Walker, one wonders at this point if Latour has fully eliminated the problem of epistemic authority and the speech it authorizes. For example, Latour might clarify the way in which the nonhuman can “speak” by means of an interpreter who has conducted an experiment that serves as speech prosthesis, but he does not quite clarify why it is that some humans who are physiologically able to speak for themselves nonetheless cannot make themselves heard. More to the point, Latour repeatedly speaks of those able to conduct experiments that serve as “speech prostheses” as “lab coats,” rather than “overalls.” But in the context of the Food Sovereignty movement, farmers are the ones conducting experiments, and field test after field test demonstrate higher yield, improved soil conditions, and reduced water consumption when the agroecological methods they promote are utilized.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, their results are discredited as agricultural policies are written.

What is lacking from Latour’s approach, however, is an explicit pathway that allows disenfranchised humans entry into this conversation aside from casting a mere vote. What ultimately this dissertation endeavors to support is not only expanding the authority to vote within the global food system, but expanding the authority to determine how the issues are framed and which issues make their way

⁴⁷ As reported by Holt-Giminez in *Campesino a Campesino* and by Santos and Lakanilao in “Women Contributing to Food Security.”

to the ballot to begin with. But a closer examination of Latour's theory may yet provide an opening for the participation of marginalized humans and nonhumans alike.

By referring to "scientists" as "lab coats" he implicitly endorses the notion of expert scientists, setting aside the concept that the experiments are being conducted and results interpreted by innumerable people who are not typically recognized as scientists. For example, the farmers of the *Campesino a Campesino* movement routinely conduct field experiments in order to optimize yields, yet the term "lab coats" does not quite conjure an image of a peasant farmer. Nonetheless, I do not believe that he intends to further marginalize peasant farmers. Instead, I perceive the concept of spokesperson to provide a necessary opening wedge allowing the results of their experiments entry as evidence. We can no more presume that they speak for nature (rather than their own interests) any more than we presume that the CEO of Monsanto speaks for nature (rather than Monsanto's interest). But we can at least permit the entry of multiple sets of data into our deliberations, which will of course complicate the questions of what food to grow and how to grow it.

This complication, as it turns out, simultaneously signals an ending and a beginning which are entangled with Latour's reading of "facts" as both unification and complication. Latour understands facts to represent on the one hand *unification* or of the ability of certain actors to be understood as part of "collective life" and on the other hand *complication* or "the existence of surprising actors that intervene to modify, by a series of unanticipated events, the list of mediators that up to then made up the habits of the

members of the collective.”⁴⁸ These complications, in other words, pose a threat to the political order—the good common world as it has already been composed by the collective.

A Schmittian sovereign may thus declare an emergent complication to be an enemy of the state, implementing a state of exception intended to fortify the boundaries of the political order and once again banish the complication. From Latour’s perspective, however *premature closure* poses an even greater threat to the collective than does the complication that such closure hopes to eliminate. We cannot free ourselves from the *risks* represented by a complication by quickly banishing the *complication* from our midst. In fact, a previous premature closure of the collective likely resulted in the expulsion of the complicating externality which now demands reconsideration. Only by refraining from premature simplification and insisting instead upon perplexity can one be assured that “our interlocutors, by limiting in advance the list of states of the world, do not hide the risks that put our well-regulated existences in danger.”⁴⁹ Existential threats to collective well-being cannot necessarily be eliminated by means of the sovereign ban or the state of exception. Nor, for that matter, can the risks of climate change be eliminated by removing all reference to them from government websites.

Four New Functions

In order to avoid premature closure of the collective, and with it the danger that externalities will return to haunt the collective, Latour proposes four new political requirements. These four requirements (perplexity, consultation, hierarchization, and institution) are Latour’s suggested replacement for the former dualism between “fact”

⁴⁹ Latour, *Political Ecology*, 65.

(presumed to be neutral and established by a transcendent sovereign) and “values” (presumed to be a matter of somewhat arbitrary opinion). The purpose formerly fulfilled by “facts” is distributed to the requirements for perplexity and institution. The function of values has been distributed to the requirements of consultation and hierarchization. These four roles have been reassembled into two new “powers of representation”: the “power to take into account” and the “power to arrange in rank order.”

The “power to take into account” consists of the requirements for perplexity and consultation: we must admit numerous propositions for consideration (perplexity) and we must assure that “the number of voices participating in the conversation is not arbitrarily short-circuited” (consultation) (109). The “power to arrange in rank order” consists of hierarchization and institution (109, 243). Hierarchization refers to the assignment of the new propositions a legitimate place in the collective, and institution ends the debate. It is only once all four requirements are met that the collective is closed, if only temporarily.

The “power to take into account,” as a whole, bears some resemblance to efforts made in the previous chapter to define apparatuses and read diffraction patterns, both theoretically as Barad articulates her agential realism and practically in our application of her theory to the question of social production of classed bodies in the global food system. Latour’s “power to take into account,” in its demand for perplexity and consultation, asks us to make a series of agential cuts so as to have a broader array of both apparatuses and materializations to study. This avoids premature closure of the deliberation that might occur if we satisfied ourselves with examining a restricted data set, and it at least gestures toward consulting the myriad materializing bodies involved in the collective.

The “power to arrange in rank order” answers the question “What order must be found for the common world formed by the set of new and old propositions?” (110). This set of processes must meet the requirements of hierarchization and institution. Hierarchization requires us to assign a “legitimate place” to the members of the collective (109). The requirement of “institution” means that the proposition must come to be regarded as “legitimate...at the heart of collective life” (109). In other words, the power to arrange in order requires the integration of value in the composition of new facts.

To demonstrate how perplexity and consultation might apply to the politics of food, it could be argued that the industrial agriculturalists have prematurely simplified the “number of propositions to be taken into account in the discussion” (109). Thus, they have failed to consider specific and significant threats posed by what they presume to be external to the conversation and have not met the requirement for perplexity.⁵⁰ The voices of those in the food sovereignty movement can be perceived as spokespersons or speech prostheses for specific ecosystems which constitute at least some of the externalities banished from consideration by the transnational industrial food system. Not only have the farmers themselves been banished from consideration, but similarly disregarded has been the integrity of ecosystems with which these farmers are well-familiar. And in turn, these ecosystems may speak of complications that pose a threat to the global food system as a whole.⁵¹

We are exposed to inordinate risks by the transnational corporations and multilaterals who push high-input agricultural methods to the exclusion of all others

⁵⁰ This is evident even in how the carbon footprint of our food system is officially calculated based upon what happens on the farm in isolation from either the rest of the supply chain or in ecosystems subjected to damaging runoff from farm waste.

⁵¹ For example, all of the environmental threats described in the first section of this chapter.

because they have prematurely closed the debate without due consideration of the risks inherent in doing so. Of these, Latour might say that they have met “in secret to unify prematurely what is” (106). And of the food sovereignty movement and those they represent, Latour might view them as “those who demonstrate publicly that they wish to add their grain of salt to the discussion, in order to compose the Republic*(106). Only by insisting that all voices be brought to the decision-making table can we assure that “the number of voices that participate in the articulation of propositions is not arbitrarily short-circuited.”⁵² In that way we will meet Latour’s requirement for consultation.

Externalities

Despite the fact that Latour operates from a nondualist philosophy, he is well aware that “the collective still has an outside” (123). This outside consists of excluded entities, regarded as insignificant by the collective; “beings that the collectivity has decided to do without, for which it has refused to take responsibility” (124). These externalities take many forms: “humans...animal species, research programs, concepts, any of the rejected propositions” (124). These externalities may have been dismissed by the collective, but they have not been eliminated from existence. Latour cautions:

Nothing proves that these externalized entities will always remain *outside* the collective...So what are the entities that have been set aside going to do? They are *going to put the collective in danger*, always provided that the power to take into account is sensitive and alert enough. What is excluded by the power to put in order...can come back to haunt the power to take into account (125).

Latour refers to this haunting by the externalities as their “appeal” or their demand to be taken into account. This of course requires another iteration of the collective composition of the good common world. “The outside is no longer fixed no longer inert” in that it

⁵² (Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* 2004) 109

cannot be said to be comprised of immutable essences, unfeeling objects, or divine assurances. Instead, it “has been the object of an explicit procedure of externalization” (125).⁵³ It has been banned, as it were.

Externalities are of increasing concern in the context of environmentalism in general and climate change in particular. Many problematic features of transnational global agricultural practices could be summarized into this one overarching theme: failure to account for externalities. The term “externalities” refers to any cost not included in the financial accounting process. Some externalized costs are quantifiable, such as the subsidized fossil fuels required to fertilize crops, and farm subsidies to prevent farmers from losing money when prices fall due to overproduction. But they are omitted from the ledger because the entire point of the subsidy is to create the appearance of profitability.

Other externalities are incalculable, such as the carbon emitted in the agricultural process; decimation of pollinators by insecticides; depletion of water tables secondary to excessive irrigation required to sustain these methods; and contamination of waterways with fertilizer runoff and livestock waste.⁵⁴ The cost of food produced by conventional methods is artificially reduced by the failure to account for these externalities. As externalities, by Latour’s definition of the term, these are components of our “good common world” for which the transnational global food system can be said to have

⁵³ While it is this outside that still for Latour is the stopgap against a merely arbitrary determination as to who and what can be included in the collective, it is no source of divine authorization of the sovereign decision. It exists, in Baradian terms, not as “absolute exteriority” but rather as “exteriority within phenomena.” Agential cuts established by the collective may lead the portrait of these externalities as irrelevant, but nonetheless the collective and the agents externalized by it remain perpetually engaged in “iterative intra-activity.”

⁵⁴ In the presence of strict regulations insisting that air, land and waterways were restored to their original condition, it might be easier to quantify the “non-quantifiable” externalities. Such regulation would force the need to calculate the cost of the damage done: what materials, and how many hours of labor over what period of time would be required to restore the ecosystem?

“refused to take responsibility” (124). Political debate regarding issues such as carbon taxes, cap and trade agreements and so forth represent a growing awareness that what has thus far been “externalized” in these sovereign decisions is, as Latour notes, putting the collective in danger.

Debates over carbon taxes and the like reflect a growing awareness that the collective has been put in danger by failure to account for these externalities. There is growing recognition of failure on the part of transnational agricultural corporations and multilateral agencies to take responsibility for the well-being of bodies of land, water and air upon which the bodies of humans depend. While the elaboration of this point is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Latour argues that the “economization of relations” could provide one means of accounting for—of quantifying and thus assuming responsibility for—the impact to these externalized bodies.

Questions of economics aside, the fact that the damage to these externalized bodies threatens the well-being of many millions of human bodies does raise questions as to the security provided by multilateral and transnational corporate entities enacting a Schmittian version of sovereignty within the context of the Food Security Frame. Using Latour’s model of four requirements (consultation, perplexity, hierarchization, and institutionalization) distributed to two powers (the power to take into account, the power to arrange in rank order), it might be said that the sovereign enactments on the parts of these agents *instituted* particular agricultural practices into the global collective without adequately addressing the other three tasks. I would argue that these enactments of sovereignty rested upon failure to account for environmental damage caused by high-input agriculture. This failure arose from an overly simplistic understanding of ecosystem

dynamics and a premature closure of the debate—failures in perplexity and consultation, respectively. Furthermore, these decisions were generally rendered behind closed doors, rather than democratically, and thus failed to meet the requirement for publicity characteristic of Latour's hierarchization.

Taken as a whole, the reemergence of these externalities in such a widely menacing form as global climate change does not necessarily indicate that all high-input methods should be immediately abandoned. But the threats posed by these practices do suggest that the institution of these methods should not be further pursued to the exclusion of other methods such as those promoted by the food sovereignty movement. Instead, peasant farmers might be consulted as spokespersons for the soil, plants, animals and people with whom they interact. The results of their small-scale experiments could be admitted to the conversation as vitally important data that might shed light on how to collect at least some of these externalities into a good common world.

This would mean, harkening back to Walker's *Moral Understanding*, granting these landless peasants epistemic authority despite the necessary identities that have been pressed into their flesh. But it also might mean *hearing* the many spokespersons—environmental scientists, food scientists, theorists, and activists—as representing members of the collective who are expressing the simple fact that we cannot create a good common world by proceeding with business as usual because *business as usual is not good for them*, or indeed, for any of us.

Based on Latour's presentation it could almost appear as if the good common world is a work in progress, but that nonetheless it is yet composed of fixed entities. The lines between the inside and outside of the collective may be drawn through due process,

and the drawing of the line may affect the *goodness* of the common life within the collective, but it is not obvious that the closure of the collective fundamentally alters the *materialization of bodies* on either side of the line, at least as Latour's theory reads.

Integrating Latour's political ecology with agential realism adds texture to the concept of "closure of the collective." Read through agential realism, the closure of the collective becomes visible as an agential cut that inevitably shapes the *materialization* of bodies both internal and external to the collective. Nothing is to say that the agential cut will necessarily influence materialization for the better, on either side of the boundary. In some cases, this agential cut may entail the extinction of an agent that has been externalized from the collective.

It is not always the case that mutual entanglement entails mutual dependence. Some entities, while entangled, could possibly do quite nicely without each other. For example, some species of bacteria are harmful to humans but capable of living in another host so we can do without one another. But in cases where mutual entanglement signals mutual dependency, such that the entities cannot do without each other whatsoever, the extrusion of an entire class of agents from the collective poses significant risk to the collective. And, as with many other factors related to ecosystems, the complexity of relationships is such that we often cannot know in advance which entities are vital for survival of the collective. In other words, the problem is not that externalities might reappear demanding inclusion in the collective, but that they might disappear altogether. We might create a world in which something that we have externalized from our

collective, but upon which we depend, perishes and its extinction jeopardizes our survival as well. Bees, for example.⁵⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the practices of the corporate food regime contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change resulting from greenhouse gas emissions ultimately jeopardizes food security. Thus, despite operating under the rhetorical frame of food security, this regime nonetheless threatens food security by driving greenhouse gas emissions. This chapter has also argued against the deployment of unilateral, top-down sovereignty in food politics on the basis that such deployments are unlikely to achieve security in light of the perpetual uncertainty promised by climate change.

Both global food agricultural policy and climate change are largely driven by economic concerns via enactments of an economic version of Schmittian sovereignty on the part of multilateral trade agencies and transnational corporations. These agencies have demonstrated lackluster efforts to reduce the causes of climate change as such reductions threaten the well-being of the elite, yet climate change is the primary threat to global food supply at present. Additionally, the effects of climate change are likely to manifest differently in different regions —floods in one locale, drought in another—calling for a

⁵⁵ Nigel E. Raine and Richard J. Gill, “Tasteless pesticides affect bees in the field,” In *Nature*, (May 7, 2015): 38-40; Helen Thompson and Pieter Oomen, Editors, “Hazards of pesticides to bees.” 11th International Symposium of the ICP BR Bee Protection Group, Wageningen (The Netherlands), (November 2-4, 2011); “Pesticides and Bees: EFSA Finalises New Guidance, World Food Regulation Review.” Jul 2013 p. 5-6. In Whiteheadian terms, one might surmise that the problem with pesticide use is the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” We do not think of pollinators as pests, so have been delayed in realizing that they might be harmed by pesticides

more widely distributed ability to respond in regionally appropriate ways to these catastrophes—or, put another way, a dispersion of (sovereign) decision-making capacity.

If Schmitt was correct in his assertion that “the metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization,”⁵⁶ then it seems that the Schmittian sovereign can no longer be said to be compatible with the current metaphysical image of our epoch as disclosed through science studies. It appears that our metaphysical image no longer depicts a static condition in which unilateral control as an assurance of security plays any meaningful role. Influence is bi-directional and iterative, and any semblance of control is at best temporary. The evidence-based recommendations of the IPCC call for “iterative, process-based” decision-making, as does Latour’s political ecology. Must we then discard the theological dimension of political theology altogether? Is such a thing even possible, given the extensive history of entanglement? Or might other theological models better suit the metaphysical image of our epoch?

⁵⁶ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 46.

Chapter 6: Toward a Tehomic Political Theology of Food

Introduction

As noted in chapter one, Carl Schmitt declared that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”¹ In his formulation of sovereignty, he favored orthodox theological models, relying heavily on God’s transcendent nature in his political theology. From Schmitt’s perspective, it was God’s transcendence, more than any other divine quality, which could legitimate and model sovereign political decision-making. In Schmitt’s eyes, only a very strong sovereign modeled on a transcendent God was capable of assuring order. He feared secularization because according to his analysis the immanent plane provided no source of valuation, no safeguard against brutality, and therefore no assurance of order.

Yet under the strong sovereignty of Hitler, whom Schmitt himself supported for many years, brutality found unprecedented expression. In fact, Hitler’s death camps are the exact example to which Agamben when illustrating the dangers of sovereignty in a liberal democracy. What are we to make of the fact that Schmittian, top-down sovereignty can be shown to devolve to a brutal totalitarianism? On the one hand, Schmittian sovereignty could be contested by claims that a *human* sovereign can never achieve that which has been guaranteed by the *divine* sovereign at the closure of time. And to some degree, Benjamin’s critique of Schmitt’s sovereign could be summarized in a single passage: he is “the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature.”² By this

¹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

² Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 85.

argument, divine sovereignty—however defined—cannot underwrite human sovereignty, thus severing the analogical relationship between divine and human.

However, Schmitt also observed that “the metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization.”³ In other words, human civilizations seek to organize politically in a manner that to some degree parallels what they perceive to be the nature of reality, according to Schmitt. As argued in the previous two chapters, it would appear that not only is the Schmittian sovereign profoundly incapable of protecting us from the existential threat posed by climate change, this model of sovereignty is also incompatible with the current “metaphysical image” of the contemporary epoch as disclosed through the sciences. In other words, the model of divine sovereignty upon which Schmitt based his description of “the sovereign” no longer squares with the world as experienced directly or revealed through scientific exploration.

It has become *de rigueur* for the academic and scientific communities to shun metaphysics. Nonetheless the previous two chapters have argued that a metaphysical image is both implicit within and disclosed by science studies. *The metaphysical image of our epoch as disclosed by science studies is iterative and process-oriented—as the IPCC suggests decision-making in the context of climate change must be. It is also at least to some degree immanent, intra-active, and relational.*

Even Schmitt knew that transcendence was incompatible with the “metaphysical understanding” of the epoch as evident by his own observations that “Conceptions of transcendence will no longer be credible to most educated people, who will settle for either a more or less clear immanence-pantheism or a positivist indifference toward any

³ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 46.

metaphysics” (50). Yet Schmitt disavowed immanent constructions of the divine—typified best, in his opinion, by Hegel—because, in his opinion, they heralded the death of politics because they constituted an effort to avoid “the exacting moral decision” (65).⁴ Thus, in formulating his concept of sovereignty, Schmitt rejected theological models consonant with the immanent metaphysics of the epoch that perhaps it could be said we share with him. Instead, he returned to orthodox theologies relying heavily upon the concept of a transcendent God.

To be sure, there is a distinction between metaphysics and theology, and there is no universal agreement upon either metaphysical images or theological models. Nonetheless, Schmitt’s reliance upon secularized orthodox theological models of God raises a twin set of theological questions regardless of whether one embraces the metaphysical image conjured by science studies. The first is whether orthodox theologies necessarily support models of sovereignty consonant with Schmitt’s as their only or most logical response. The second is whether immanent theologies are in fact incapable of guiding moral valuation, as Schmitt feared. If it could be argued *either* that a transcendent sovereign does not, in fact, legitimate the enactment of human sovereignty *or* that an immanent divine can yet provide a framework within which “the exacting moral decision” can be made, the next question would be: what sorts of politics might be

⁴ Insofar as it retains the concept of God, the immanence philosophy, which found its greatest systematic architect in Hegel, draws God into the world and permits law and the state to emanate from the immanence of the objective. But among the most extreme radicals, a consequent atheism began to prevail.” 50 “Today nothing is more modern than the onslaught against the political. American financiers, industrial technicians, Marxist socialists, and anarchic syndicalist revolutionaries unite in demanding that the biased rule of politics over unbiased economic management be done away with. There must no longer be political problems, only organizational-technical and economic-sociological tasks...the core of the political idea, the exacting moral decision, is evaded in both” (65).

enacted that would be resonant with the metaphysical image of our epoch in the absence of a model of divine, Schmittian sovereignty transferable to the human context?

The first section of this chapter will examine Schmitt's theological presuppositions more closely. Exploration of Karl Barth's neo-orthodox Christian theology will sever the easy link between divine power and human authority. Analysis of the process theology of Catherine Keller will interrogate whether divine immanence might undergird a more potent moral framework for a political theology of food than Schmitt supposed.⁵ The second section of this chapter will contemplate the compatibility of Paulina Ochoa Espejo's construction of popular sovereignty with an immanent theology. When applied to the question of food politics and perhaps modified somewhat, this political theory calls attention to the ways in which all of us as the "eating public" participate in "people moments" with each forkful of food we eat, and perhaps serves as a practical model for implementation of a political theology of food. But can it avoid the appeals to ipseity upon which sovereignty—even of the popular variety is founded? And does it provide ample room for dissenting voices without banishing them to the status of *homo sacer*?

⁵ Pantheism straddles the line between a fully transcendent theology and a fully immanent theology. God is perceived as intimately within all things in material reality, as indicated by the "pan," which gestures toward the "all things" in which God can be found. But the "en" distinguishes the pantheist position from the pantheist position which views God as more or less identical with material reality. Theologian Stephen Bede Scharper's *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment*, (New York: Continuum, 1997) provides a lovely ecotheological formulation much in keeping with the theme of this present work. For example, he identifies he names concerns for social justice alongside concerns for the nonhuman world independent from humans as simultaneous concerns, and he draws upon process theology (including Keller's) in his formulation. However, the anthro-harmonic approach he develops situates humans in a mutual dialectic of becoming with the rest of the creation. However, because Keller is something of a primary source for Scharper, her work was engaged directly.

Theological Critiques of Schmittian Sovereignty

Karl Barth, a theologian and contemporary of Schmitt's, was affected by World War I in much the same manner as Schmitt. Disillusioned with liberal theology, he too sought refuge in (neo)-orthodox theological constructs that emphasized God's transcendent sovereignty.⁶ Barth's "word of divine sovereignty and transcendence" startled theologians of his day with its prohibition against confusing "its own aspirations and achievements," with divine will.⁷ Barth's theological stance was "directed first against the dominant liberalism, which saw the divine in immanent continuity with the 'best' and the 'highest' in man's spirit and culture, so that talking about God did indeed become, as Barth was later to comment so caustically, 'talking about man in a loud voice.'"⁸ But Barth's polemic was also directed against those who effaced the boundary between immanence and transcendence. The calamity that was World War I had eroded "confidence in the essential divineness" of the "aspirations and achievements" of humanity rendered in divine terms for both Schmitt and Barth. But despite this shared concern, Barth's neo-orthodox version of God's transcendent sovereignty did not underwrite human sovereignty as it did for Schmitt.

According to philosopher E. L. Allen, Barth contended that "god never passes over to the human side, he always remains transcendent, majestic, unique." Furthermore, God alone possesses sovereignty, defined as "unfettered self-determination."⁹ Barth's assertion of God's transcendence was "a vehement...reaction from the tendency to

⁶ Will Herberg, "Introduction: The Social Philosophy of Karl Bart" in *Community, State and Church: Three Essays*, by Karl Bart, (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-6.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Edgar Leonard Allen, *The Sovereignty of God and the word of God: a Guide to the Thought of Karl Barth*, (New York: New York Philosophical Library, 1951): 17.

merge him with the evolutionary process.”¹⁰ According to Allen, Barth viewed divine authority as no “mere fiat of power to which we perforce submit.” Rather, Barth insisted that “God has a claim upon us from which we can never escape, solely because all that we have and are is from him.”¹¹ Thus, all humans are in an utterly dependent relationship with a divinity who provides the conditions for our very lives. None of us escape this dependency. Yet we see that Barth’s concept of God’s transcendence is not mobilized in support of human sovereignty, but rather verges on becoming something of an antidote to it, as divine sovereignty is not transferable to the human sphere.

But how are humans—particularly the Christians to whom Barth addressed himself—to relate to the state? According to Barth, Christians must be obedient to the government per biblical precepts.¹² However, the Christian attitude “cannot possibly consist of an attitude of abstract and absolute elasticity towards the intentions and undertakings of the State, simply because,” according to Barth’s reading of scripture, “the possibility may arise that the power of the State, on its side, may become guilty of Opposition to the Lord of lords” (138). In other words, the state cannot be assumed to be acting in a godly manner, let alone on God’s behalf.

The state cannot be presumed to be godly, but that does not put the church at odds with the state in all cases. Barth insists that the church must support the state so long as it serves the purpose of “the limiting and the preserving of man by the quest for and the establishment of law” (172). The law established by the state would presumably be law supportive of Barth’s understanding of divine law. But “the church will never be found on the side of anarchy or tyranny” (172). When the state fails to establish laws protective

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 42.

¹² Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 137.

of human dignity, or in Barth's words when the state "perverts" its authority (God-given, as suggested by Barth's interpretation of scripture), the church *must* criticize it.

Not only is the call to obedience limited, in Barth's view, so is the call to critique. He goes on to say that "the Church will not in all circumstances withdraw from and oppose what may be practically a dictatorship, that is, a partial and temporary limitation of these freedoms, but it will certainly withdraw from and oppose any out-and-out dictatorship such as the totalitarian State" (179). In more Schmittian terms, a Christian is not obliged to protest any and all states of exception, but must protest once the state of exception has become permanent and the sovereign has transformed into a dictator. It would seem that even Barth recognizes that something akin to a temporary state of exception might be necessary.

Although Barth is aware that "no State can exist without the sanction of power," he nonetheless discerns that "the power of the good State differs from that of the bad State" (177). In particular, according to Barth, the good state aligns itself with the power that "flows and serves the law," rather than the anarchic power that misshapes or breaks the law. While on the surface of things it may appear that Barth would side with Schmitt and against Benjamin for the latter's "anarchist" leanings, closer consideration suggests that he might not align with either of their thinking very well. While on the one hand anarchic power may break the law, a permanent exception renders law impotent. It seems unlikely, in other words, that a "good state" can endure a "state of exception," in which the law has been suspended, for very long without transforming itself into a bad state that has misshapen or broken the law by suspending it.

Barth strives to stake a nuanced position, encouraging Christians to support international understanding and cooperation. He strives for peace in accordance with his reading of scripture and Christian tradition. But he is clear: the Church “can never stand for absolute peace, for peace at any price” (178). Yet peace must not be sought at the price of the “abolition of the lawful State and the practical denial of the divine ordinance” (178). Indeed, the state of exception may be, for Barth, too high a price to pay for peace, since in the state of exception the law no longer applies. Thus, a Barthian version of orthodox theology cannot be said to support Schmitt’s version of sovereignty.

Initially, Barth did not set out to critique the political order *as* a political order. His intention was to oppose the intrusion of the political order into the workings of the Church. Barth stood in opposition to the “‘German Christian’ ideology, which closely identified ‘Germanism’ with Christianity and saw in the Nazi revolution an act of divine redemption and a source of divine revelation.”¹³ These concerns prompted Barth to participate in drafting the Barmen Declaration. Barth also opposed the installation of Nazi church leaders, and eventually, when the Church was instructed to expel Jews Barth rejected the anti-Semitism as a “rejection of the grace of God.”¹⁴

But throughout this early period Barth viewed this essentially as an intra-church struggle. He was not concerned with executive overreach in the secular State, but instead was concerned about the intrusion of the secular State into church affairs. Barth had no “thought of challenging the Nazi state as a legitimate state.”¹⁵ When required, as a professor at Bonn, to pledge loyalty to Hitler, Barth wanted to qualify this with a statement of his higher loyalty to God. The government refused to accept second-string

¹³ Herberg, “Introduction,” 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

position in Barth's loyalties, and dismissed Barth from his post.¹⁶ Transformed by this expulsion, Barth became impatient with a Church that remained silent in the face of "the millions of the unjustly persecuted"¹⁷

Barth, in a letter to American Christians penned after his expulsion to Switzerland, wrote that:

When [the Church preaches] about the sole sovereignty of Jesus Christ...[it is] actually preaching, through a simple, strict interpretation of the Biblical texts (and, as a rule, without naming persons and things specifically) against Hitler, Mussolini, and Japan; against anti-Semitism, idolization of the state, oppressive and intimidating methods, militarism, against all the lies and injustice of National-socialism and Fascism in its European and its Asiatic forms, and thus [it] will naturally (and without 'dragging politics into the pulpit') speak on behalf of the righteous state and also for an honestly determined conduct of the war.¹⁸

Even though Barth falls short of precisely defining the point at which what is "practically a dictatorship" has become an "out-and-out dictatorship," he is nonetheless clear that the sovereignty of God cannot unproblematically be invoked to legitimize a human sovereign. This is especially true when the definition of "the sovereign" is contingent, as Schmitt's is, upon the suspension of law, thus transforming that "good" state to a "bad" state in Barth's opinion.

Barth at least gestures toward a relational ontology in which "human freedom is not realized in the solitary detachment of an individual in isolation from his fellow men...I am a man only in relation to my fellow men."¹⁹ The understanding of human togetherness is based in part on an *imago dei* depicting God as being not only for himself but for us: "god's freedom is essentially not freedom from, but freedom to and for" (72).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1946),77.

This is because for Barth, “God’s freedom is not merely unlimited possibility or formal majesty and omnipotence, that is to say empty, naked sovereignty” (71). Likewise, the freedom of man is similarly limited. To believe otherwise is to endorse “the false freedom of sin, reducing man to a prisoner” (71). These limitations are, to be sure, hardly minor and go a long way toward undermining the pretenses of any human to absolute power.

Barth goes even further than simply denying one human absolute power over another. He denies humans in general absolute power over nonhumans as well. This is because Barth did not construe the nonhuman world as inconsequential, as Schmitt seemed to. Rather, Barth insisted that “God was not and is not bound to choose and to decide Himself for man alone and to show His loving-kindness to him alone” (73). Not only does Barth not believe that the nonhuman world is of no importance to God, he is willing to entertain the thought that it might be more important than the human world: “The thought of any insignificant being outside the human cosmos being far more worthy of divine attention than man is deeply edifying and should not be lightly dismissed” (73). The possibility that nonhuman creatures may be of greater importance than humans in the eyes of God certainly humbles anthropocentric arrogance, perhaps Barth’s intention here.

So we see that although Schmitt claims to ground his political concept of the sovereign in orthodox theology, this same theology can simultaneously be a source of critique of absolute or top-down sovereignty. This is not surprising if one recalls that what is true of God from a religious perspective is not necessarily therefore true of humans. Secularizing an orthodox theology is a fundamentally flawed maneuver; a

person of faith might even consider it idolatry.²⁰ While this goes a long way toward delegitimizing the Schmittian sovereign, it does not provide a robust theological vision to underwrite the alternative political vision we seek in the context of climate change.

Naturally we cannot expect Barth to address our contemporary ecological situation given that climate change was not even a topic of conversation in his era. But even if we sought to adapt his theological position to something more ecologically enlightened, so to speak, it would not prove to be a theological model within which Bruno Latour's political ecology could find its theological moorings. If, as Schmitt suggests, all significant theories of the state are secularized theological concepts, we would find that Barth's theology would fail to support this more ecologically inspired politics. This shortcoming arrives in the form of a certain determinism that robs humans of the responsibility for social structures that Barth elsewhere gives them. For Barth, the value of humanity "is a matter of God's sovereign togetherness with man, a togetherness grounded in Him and determined, delimited, and ordered through him alone." Human agency, let alone the agency of the nonhuman, is rather curtailed in this theological vision.

Despite the deterministic tenor of this passage, elsewhere it is clear that Barth does not advocate passivity in the face of social ills. Barth was not alone in vacillating between endorsing God's omnipotence and recognizing human responsibility. Negotiating this Scylla and Charybdis of theodicy is familiar terrain for theologians of the Abrahamic traditions. Ethical monotheism reinforces a strong sense of personal accountability for one's behavior, both ritually and socially. Yet, the images of God

²⁰ James R. Martel, *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 77.

frequently portrayed in sacred text and other traditional sources depict a deity ultimately in control of the final outcome.

Nonetheless, this image of God's power as deterministic is at odds with the iterative and intra-active becoming disclosed by science studies. Furthermore, as Will Herberg argues, despite Barth's apparent rejection of the concept of the state as an "order of preservation," nevertheless the state bears this primary resonance in Barth's work. Barth's implicit yet disavowed endorsement of the state as an order of preservation may be due to his perception that chaos is diametrically opposed to God's goodness.²¹ Thus, Barth does not lead us far enough away from Schmitt's dangerous version of sovereignty to reject it, nor nearly enough toward something at least akin to Latour's political ecology.

But significantly, Barth raises substantial challenges to Schmitt's version of sovereignty—and indeed to any attempt to legitimate "the sovereign" on a theological basis—and does so from within a framework that endorses a more or less orthodox version of a sovereign God. This, I believe, is rather compelling at this political juncture. President Trump's rhetoric bears certain resemblances to the nationalism implicit within Schmitt's version of sovereignty. His strategic deployment of religious language likely accounts for the fact that Evangelical Christians voted for him in overwhelming numbers.²² Illuminating the ways in which this version of sovereignty is fundamentally at odds with the Christian framework guiding their decision-making could possibly create some cognitive dissonance between their thus-far unexamined faith in the president and

²¹ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: a theology of becoming*, (New York: Routledge, 2003). 86.

²² Exit polls reported by Pew research reported that eighty-one percent of Evangelical Christians voted in favor of Trump; Gregory A. Smith and Jessica Martinez, "How the faithful voted: A preliminary 2016 analysis," *Pewresearch.org*, (November 10, 2016): <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

their unshakable faith in god. Those who find orthodox theologies compelling may find their resistance to unjust power fortified by this Barthian critique of top-down sovereignty.

What about those of us for whom the orthodox depiction of God does not capture the whole picture? Must we restrict ourselves to orthodox constructions of God's sovereignty that are at odds with the metaphysical image of our epoch in order to challenge Schmitt's formulation of sovereignty? Must we embrace his premise of a transcendent God in order to challenge Schmitt in his own terms? Or might other models of divinity more consonant with the metaphysical image of an iterative, process-oriented, intra-active and relational model of reality be teased from traditional sources? More importantly, if we abandon this orthodox or neo-orthodox doctrine of God, must we jettison morality along with it, as Schmitt implies?

The re-creative creativity of a non-sovereign God as re-starting point for political theology

What I would like to argue at this juncture is that a panentheist theology, such as that explicated in Catherine Keller's *Face of the Deep: a theology of becoming*, and her other works, is well suited to the metaphysical image of the current epoch as disclosed by science studies—that being a more immanent, iterative metaphysics—than is an orthodox, highly transcendent theology. This is a godsend for those of us who weary of the “science vs. religion” debate, finding them both indispensable. Fortuitously, Keller's panentheist theology also retains a framework for morally sound decision-making.

While not claiming to be an ethicist, process theologian Catherine Keller is driven by ethical concerns about “the chaos of suffering that bursts from the margins,” suffering which permeates multiple issues such as “ecology, economics, race, gender, sex.”²³ The suffering at the margins, she suggests, is integrally linked to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, by virtue of the corresponding tendency to project “chaos and nothingness onto the non-Christian or sub Christian Others” (xvii). Ultimately, “the nothingness” intolerable within this theological framework, “invariably returns with the face of the feared chaos—to be nihilated all the more violently” (xvi). Echoes of Latour’s externalities and Agamben’s *homo sacer*—as not only he who cannot be sacrificed, but also as he who cannot be integrated—are just barely audible in this “nothingness” that threatens orderly existence.

Face of the Deep “continues a *deconstruction* of the paradigm and presumption of linear time: the bottom line of origin, the straight line of salvation history, the violent end of the line of time itself” initiated in others of her constructive engagements with Christian tradition (xvii). Doing away with this linear narrative allows the theme of “re-creation from chaos” to emerge in her readings of traditional texts (xix). This beginning again will not plant itself in “a unifying order” but will instead instigate “multiple movements of creativity” (xvii). Her theology thus becomes “a *tehomitic* theology.” Replacing the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, Keller conjures a *creatio ex profundis*—a creation from the depths present in the opening lines of Genesis. This is no simple matter of declaring chaos “good,” but rather a matter of recognizing chaos to constitute a deep “matrix of possibilities,” at least some of which might be good. This requires a disposition she identifies as *tehomophilia*, the ability to embrace the complex, chaotic,

²³ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, xvi.

messiness of life—even though not entirely safe, and decidedly frightening—as brimming with creative potencies.

Barth is, coincidentally, one of Keller's interlocutors. Barth, she argues, recognizes that the text of Genesis 1 suggests that *something* was present before creation, although he stops short of embracing the primeval chaos. Neither Keller nor Barth is satisfied with either acceptance of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* on the one hand or endorsement of the *tehom* as existing independently of God on the other. In this they agree: a third option is needed, yet the task of constructing this third possibility is daunting (86).

Both are committed to relational approaches “in which difference is not swallowed up by the self, but enhanced” (87). Yet despite their mutual investment in relational theologies, ultimately their constructive maneuvers are diametrically opposed. Keller finds two particular claims of Barth's objectionable. First, she objects to Barth's claim that “by asserting God's dominance, faith breaks the idols of human dominance” (98). It is simply not enough, in Keller's opinion, that God be declared the *only* dominant figure, particularly because of Barth's own espousal of *analogia relationis*. She argues that “Theologies of analogy have this right: since we will use anthropomorphic God-talk, we should at least use the best possible images. Would this not require of us metaphors arising from non-hierarchical, democratizing visions of sociality, not metaphors of totalizing economic and political order?” (98). Not only are we inclined to talk about man in a loud voice when talking about God, as Barth earlier denounced, but we are also inclined to talk about God in almost as loud a voice when talking about humans.

If we are to draw analogies between god-like qualities and our own behaviors as creatures made in the image of God, we had better think twice about the portraits of God we render. For Keller, Barth's neo-orthodox construction of God's unidirectional power becomes the model upon which notions of "empowered humans" base their behavior, albeit over Barth's objections. Of particular concern in the present dissertation, Barth's disavowal of human sovereignty on the basis that it is *human* and not divine vacates the seat of power in earthy, material reality. This vacancy draws in nefarious pretenders to God's throne—as we see with critiques of the Schmittian sovereign.

Keller goes on to argue that Barth's apologetics also suggest "that a violent context justifies the demonization of chaos" (98) which she finds surprising. She goes on to confess that she "would have thought that his protest against National Socialism would have sharpened his suspicion of the high value of order" (98). But even more problematically Barth erects "an ineradicable boundary" that "cuts against the possibility of a true interdependence" between God and humanity (98). According to Keller, Barth envisions a deity who "remains unconditioned" and unidirectionally controlling of the outcome of worldly affairs" (99) and is unsuitable for her theology of becoming. Keller's pantheism is no orthodox theology, and promises to cut a trap door under the throne of the Schmittian sovereign as no one, not even God, is above being affected by others.

Of her theomic theology Keller insists: "This is not a matter of coming full circle—another dream of closure—but of narrating the recapitulatory, iterative dynamic of becoming itself." This aversion to closure reveals itself in her earlier work, *Apocalypse Now and Then: a feminist guide to the end of the world*. In *Apocalypse Now and Then*,

Keller took great pains to demonstrate the almost self-fulfilling nature of apocalyptic prophecies (89). Of particular relevance to the present study, she observes that:

Expectations seek, after all, to realize themselves. The religious habit of imagining the world out of existence would not seem to be irrelevant to the material habits of world-waste running our civilization; in right-wing religious anti-environmentalism, for instance, the expectancy that Our Father will make us a shiny new world when this one breaks explicitly correlates with a willingness to dump this one.²⁴

In Keller's deft analysis, anti-apocalypticism disclosed itself as no solution, as each "anti-apocalypse showed itself repeatedly as cryptoapocalypse." Keller concluded her volume with hope for "the development of a counter-apocalypse—itsself not immune from occasional alternation between outsized ideas and skeptical deflations" but yet capable of sublating its eschatology to a pneumatology (276). She urges us to remember our "Apocalypse's own nonlinear medium" that that we might "ease history back into a helical timefulness, a rhythm akin to the spiral nebula, the shifting seasons, the entrainment of relations" (275). The nonlinearity of the Book of Revelation may provide an open-endedness, despite the static depiction of the New Jerusalem with which it closes.

Keller's turn toward Genesis and a theology of becoming might signal yet another loop in the spiral, but never a closure of the circle and certainly no closure of time. Recalling the "recovery narrative" Carolyn Merchant described in *Reinventing Eden*, the refusal to close the circle neatly sidesteps the drive to restore a lost Eden which Merchant named as ecologically problematic. Keller does not seek to restore a lost Eden, but rather to evoke a new creation from the chaos of the present moment.

²⁴ Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 2.

What makes a theology of becoming so compelling for the current project is integrally connected to this spiral toward beginning, away from ending. Particularly in light of her own critique of apocalypticism and anti-apocalypticism, it would seem that political theologies tinted with shades of messianism or apocalypticism are likely to propel us toward precisely an end—and many political theologies possess a messianic streak.²⁵ All of the “endings” toward which both apocalyptic and anti-apocalyptic movement have propelled their followers have concluded not with a final ending. Oh, yes, wreckage, to be sure. But not *The End*. Human life, even the lives of those endorsing apocalyptic platforms, continued on despite the catastrophe. And new life was fabricated from this waste.

In our own scenario of climate change, while on the one hand an end is near on the other we cannot be certain how final the end will be, when, or for whom. Someone—someone human—may very well be left to eke out an existence in the aftermath. But more compellingly, we are already living *after* “the end”—as Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature* already declared in 1989. Writing in 2016 this end is already apparent: the very long era of predictably seasonable weather is over. We are living *after* the Green Revolution could legitimately promise us even more abundant harvests next year. Debate continues as to whether we have hit peak oil; therefore we may also be already living *after* the era of easily accessible crude oil, as well.²⁶

²⁵ For example, Crockett; Miguez, Rieger and Sung; and also Jurgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) and Michael S. Northcott *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

²⁶ Nafeez Ahmed, “Former BP Geologist: Peak oil is here and it will ‘break economies,’” in *The Guardian* (December 23, 2015) ; contrast with Russel Gold. “Why Peak Oil Predictions Haven’t Come True,” in *Wall Street Journal*, (September 2014). The Association for the Study of Peak Oil notes in its July 2016 blog entry that “Oil production is not falling as fast as predicted.” Note that the last source does *not* say production is not falling at all—just not as quickly as anticipated.

Keller argues that "eschatology is discourse about the collective encounter at the edge where and when the life of the creation has its chance at renewal—that is, it is about the present."²⁷ If we are already living after the end, as I suggest above, we must be living into yet another beginning—ripe for a theology of becoming. Of her engagement with the opening lines of Genesis Keller insists:

The Jewish delinearization of the time of creation opens up space for a biblical theology of creation, in which the chaos is neither nothing nor evil; in which to create is not to master the formless but to solicit its virtual forms. Such solicitation, when expressed as divine speech, may sound less like a command than a seduction.²⁸

Is Keller suggesting that God *seduces* chaos into a dynamic creation? If so, God's seductive utterances receive a passionate response from creation:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork
Day to day makes utterance,
and night to night speaks out.
there is no speech, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard;
their voice goes out through all the earth
their words to the end of the world.
He placed in them a tent for the sun,
who is like a groom coming forth from the chamber.²⁹

Who was the sun making love to all night? This daybreak eroticism may be more than mere coincidence, arising in as it does the context of a tradition which envisions the relationship between Israel and God to be a marriage. It is much easier, then, to imagine God's generative speech as seductive indeed.

In biblical tradition, not only does God speak the world into being—a truly generative act—but several psalms describe the created world as also speaking or singing

²⁷ Catherine Keller, "Eschatology, Ecology, and a Green Ecumenacy," in *Ecotheology* 2(1997): 85 .

²⁸ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 115.

²⁹ Psalm 19, JPS translation; divine speech also figures in Psalm 50, creaturely speech of nonhumans also in Psalms 96, 97, 98 and 148; and God's responds to the speech of creatures "by awesome deeds" in Psalm 65.

in response. Evident in the above psalm is the fact that the nonhuman world never ceases speaking, yet it does not speak in human words. This divine speech and creation's response resonate with Latour's concept of the powers of speech and speech prosthesis. Presumably, the speech of nonhuman creation is audible to the God of the psalmist, if not to the average earthling of the twenty-first century. No doubt this God hears the groaning of a creation too long ignored by human sovereigns.

Keller does not necessarily envision a God who literally "hears," yet she nonetheless envisions a God who is affected by the material world. There is no sheltering God's omnipotence at the expense of God's relatedness. Keller's panentheist God remains vulnerable. In this vision, "creator and creature create, effect, each other; not from a prior nothing but from their shared preconditions."³⁰ But if we are not to understand God as the unmoved mover, or capable of acting unilaterally to assure a just outcome, how then can we understand God? Inspired by process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, Keller asks whether we "might reserve the term 'God' ... for a principle of limitation by which the possible becomes actual?" (238). This God would operate within the "bottomless ground of creativity" but yet not be identical with it.

Keller finds resonance with the term apophatic panentheism, in which the "'en' designates an active indeterminacy, a commingling of unpredictable and yet recapitulatory, self-organizing relations. The 'en' asserts the difference of divine and cosmic, but at the same time makes it impossible to draw the line" (219). And, more importantly, the "en" prevents anyone from reading history as necessarily the unfolding of God's immutable will. While God is within all things and all things are within God, this—crucially—does not mean that God is in control of all things.

³⁰ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 218.

At this point Keller's constructive maneuvers become resonant with the metaphysics of our epoch, not surprising since she remains conversant with a wide body of science studies, such as chaos and quantum theories. Influenced by the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead, whose metaphysics intentionally integrated early quantum theory, this is to be expected. There is commingling, indeterminacy, and a God present on the immanent plane—no unidirectional force, no transcendent guarantor of justice. One might suggest that Keller has stealthily crafted a theology espousing the (at least partial) immanence of the divine, yet retaining a transcendent source of valuation—even if it does not retain a transcendent guarantee of order. Yet, possibly the “comingling” will reveal an ethical framework despite Schmitt's insistence that immanence is devoid of a system of valuation.

But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves. From where in tradition does Keller retrieve the notion of a God entangled with creation? In part, she mines the text of Job, but is keen to note that she is not reading “into the book of Job a systematic process panentheism,” which would be, in her words, anachronistic (140). The text is best read, she insists, as parody. But nonetheless, she lingers on Job's testimony that he can now “see God with his eyes” (Job 42:6). But yet Keller observes that “there is no trace, no beard or backside, of a personal God who might be thus ‘seen.’ What Job ‘sees’ in the vision of God is only the creatures.” Keller postulates that “to ‘see’ God is to see the creation,” and speculates that the creation might be metaphorically readable as the body of God, as McFague elsewhere argues. This is but one example of a textual tradition articulating a divine dwelling in intimate proximity to creation, both affecting and affected by it, but not identical to it.

Rabbi Arthur Green echoes Keller's notion that the material world may be something in the way of God's self-expression. Green clarifies that when he refers to God he means "the inner force of existence itself."³¹ He goes on to describe this God as "constantly evolving life energy," and the billions of years' history of the universe as "a *meaningful* process."³² The endorsement of the universe as God's body, as perhaps purposeful divine self-expression, is simultaneously offensive to atheists and orthodox theists alike. Atheists because they are allergic to the very word God, and theists because it seems to reduce God to the material universe. But Keller insists that rereading the material world as the body of God need not "reduce Elohim to an impersonal force of nature."³³ Rather, it could carve an opening through which we could peer into a decidedly different concept of "divine 'purposes'"—and of nature— which would then come to "suggest the purposefulness of a universe that against all statistical odds yields laws that work, rules of space, time, speed, and cohesion through which life continues to complicate itself and emerge undaunted."³⁴ This purposefulness does not take the form of a unilateral imposition of force, but as invitation to create beauty and order at the knife edge of chaos.

Drawing from the Christian tradition Keller argues that faith can never be reduced to assenting to propositional statements such as creeds. Neither does faith express itself as passive waiting. Instead, "in a world of open-ended indeterminacy... faith will approximate courage" (139). We must be the ones to "bear the fruit, use the talent, heal

³¹ Arthur Green, *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010): 18.

³² Green, *Radical Judaism*, 20. See also: Alfred North Whitehead, "*Religion in the Making* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 100: "The purpose of God is the attainment of value in the temporal world."

³³ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 139.

³⁴ Keller, *Face* 139

the sick, feed the hungry” (214). She notes that “Those who follow this activating gospel have been variously suspected of Judaizing, gnosticism, Arianism, Pelagianism, atheism, socialism, or feminism” (214). But despite these heretical monikers, the notion that humans are responsible for one another and the earth we live on—that God alone does not determine the outcome—has a long history in the tradition. But while Keller advocates active responses to the suffering of the world, she assures us that this “do-it-yourself message...has little to do with the self-sufficiency of a lonely ego” (214). Such efforts at self-containment would, in Keller’s formulation, block “the originary flow,” truly sinful from the perspective of a theology of becoming.

But most people do not think systemically when they consider the question of sin. Instead, they ponder more private wrongs. According to Keller, this is not accidental: “God’s omnipotence was accordingly shored up to replace human responsibility for the world, while Christian morality was left to monitor bodily openings and effluvia” (214). In other words, whereas for Schmitt the doctrine of God’s sovereignty legitimates human political sovereignty, for Keller it places a boulder over the mouth of “the ocean of springs,” in the process vacating much of the substance of religious life, “blocking out, keeping outside our finite bodies, the very one to whom we cry” (215).

The notion of divine sovereignty disables us from rising to our responsibility to shape social structures in such a way that promotes lives of dignity and worth for human and nonhuman alike. There is little need for us to assume personal responsibility if God is ultimately responsible for the outcome. Keller goes on to say that “the logic of omnipotence lays upon naked suffering the added burden of godforsakenness” (215). Not that Keller believes they have *literally* been godforsaken. But the logic of omnipotence

implies that all events are under God's control, so one cannot help but surmise that the abject have been forsaken by God.

But the seven million people per year to die of starvation because they don't have money to purchase food have not been forsaken by God. They have been forsaken by people acting within social and economic structures. The decisions of people operating within these structures clearly become visible as a blockage of the originary flow of the force of life when an analysis of their suffering is infused with the insights from Keller's theology of becoming. Their deaths also become legible as a diminishment of the good that those who die of starvation could have experienced and contributed to the world. Animals in concentrated animal feed organizations who require massive doses of antibiotics because they are kept in such close quarters have not been forsaken by God. Nor have marine creatures killed as a consequence fertilizer runoff from factory farms. All of these beings have been forsaken by people operating within material-discursive apparatuses that block the originary flow of life in numerous ways.

Keller suggests that accepting responsibility for the planet is enfolded into the role of humanity as envisioned in Genesis. Part and parcel of this responsibility is that we develop "an economy and ecology serving the 'good' of all other species" (222). Given the anti-oppression concerns surfacing as early as her introduction and reappearing throughout her text, no doubt Keller would prefer these economies and ecologies to also serve the good of more members of the human species as well, although here she is speaking specifically against an "unconstrained birthrate" (222). But what applies to the birthrate is equally applicable to the economy as a whole:

In its participation in an illimitable universe, a tehomic ecology underscores 'the inescapability of limits.' An endless becoming does not

signify the unlimited expansion of any entity. Becoming unfolds within the constraining and sustaining context enfolding any individual—perhaps even a divine one. Yet limit functions not as container but as skin, permeable membrane, elemental body of mud water, air and fire. The endless becoming of the All takes place within a within: that of the milieu of milieus, in which no cost of ‘growth’ can be concealed (225-6).

If growth of the human species must be limited, that is presumably because the growth of the economies and ecologies that provide for their needs must similarly be limited. And it must be recalled that the bodies of the starving and obese, and the bodies of water, land and sky together suffer for the benefit of the capitalist promise of an ever-expanding economy.

Thus we see that this vision of an immanently invested divinity does not rob the religious world of an ethical framework. “But the change of divine subject changes the subject of ethics: it *becomes* us” (140). We must right our own moral wrongs, correct our own systemic injustices, cease and desist from our own oppressive practices. To rely upon divine intervention is to relinquish moral accountability for the earth and for each other. Implicit in Keller’s disavowal of divine omnipotence and assertion of human responsibility is an ethics of care, mindful of our persistent commingling with the world around us. When selfish actions diminish the creative potential of ecosystems and other peoples, an ethical violation has been committed.

In order to more fully explicate the ethical implications of Keller’s apophatic panentheist theology of becoming, we will need to weave in the “*apophatic*” more tightly at this juncture. Keller’s most recent book, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, explores the apophatic with the rigor applied to panentheist becoming in *Face of the Deep*. She defines the apophatic as “speech as the most *knowing*,

indeed erudite, sort of nonknowing.”³⁵ Cusa, in particular, felt himself drawn into this learned unknowing when confronted with the tendency of truths to “undo each other.” Cusa referred to this class of opposing truths as *coincidentia oppositorum*. Keller’s genealogy of the apophatic tradition stretches as far back as the Jewish Philo of Alexandria, and winds through the texts of Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Nicolas of Cusa. Yet throughout the entirety of the text, Keller remains “haunted by [the image]” of Cusa’s articulation of a God that “enfolds (*complicans*) and unfolds (*explicans*) the boundless manifold of the universe,” Keller carries this vision through her own engagement with the apophatic tradition.

Keller is concerned throughout *Cloud of the Impossible* to develop an expansive ethics “that exceeds concern for the ones near and like us.” She is inspired to stage this encounter between “a deconstructive apophasis and a prophetic relationalism” because it brings us to the edge of the unknown, where we nonetheless know that we remain inseparable from many Others. The ethical demand arises in this context of inseparable entanglement. Furthermore, this staging allows the oscillation between affirmation and negation, enfolding and unfolding, distinction and entanglement, that highlights “the very fold between our nonknowing and our nonseparability.” This fold, Keller hopes, may begin to “appear as possibility itself,” a possibility that fertilizes fecund becomings and planetary solidarity.

In the interest of illuminating the material dimension of our inseparability, Keller “examines certain layered explications—scientific, philosophical, and poetic—by which our ontological entanglement comes to matter” (9). Keller finds that, working perhaps

³⁵ Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, (New York : Columbia University Press, 2015), 2.

from an opposite end of the spectrum, “scientists become engrossed in questions that deposit them at the outer edge of those ‘limits of decidability’—right on the cloudy threshold of theology” (131). She notes that the “key problem for physics itself” is posed by precisely the same “classicism of a separable objectivism” which has similarly haunted theology. Keller does not hope to find proof of God in the *coincidentia oppositorum* that physics as a whole faces in the context of the clashing truths of classical and quantum physics. However, she *does* anticipate being rewarded with “material evidence of a universe so apophatically entangled as to escape the rival classicisms that pit science and theology against each other” (132). The rivalry may be abandoned, but the conundrums remain.

Keller reads in the theory of quantum nonseparability, a term describing the fact that subatomic particles have been shown to affect one another across great distances, confirmation that each of us is deeply entangled with innumerable others. The apophatic implication of quantum nonseparability consists in this: we can never fully know the scope or magnitude of our relational entanglements (147 and 2). The dark cloud of unknowing hovering over this relational field does not represent evil, no more than does the darkness hovering over the face of the deep in Genesis, Keller assures us. Rather, the dark cloud of unknowing hovering over this relational field signals “the deep variegations of nonknowing that it may do ill to ignore or to manipulate” (7).³⁶ This sounds a note of caution to those who would fancy themselves capable of solving social problems once and for all.

³⁶ These “deep variegations” of relationality may bear upon what is at stake in the closure of the commons. As was suggested in the previous chapter, we remain inseparable from what is on the other side of the closure, and perhaps dependent upon it despite our failure to recognize this dependence.

In her engagement of Barad's agential realism (in conjunction with other quantum theories) Keller observes that "an agential cut does not cut the bond of entanglement but, we might say, makes decisions...*within* it" (151). In other words, as we decide the outer boundary of the collective, in good Latourian fashion, we must be mindful that the boundary itself is fiction. The collective remains entangled with whatever it has attempted to extrude. This decision is made within a matrix of becoming from which we can never extricate ourselves *or* banish any other Other. We remain entangled with, if inseparably distinct from, a panoply of beings.

Yet Keller insists that this "crowd of others do not become therefore void of ethical significance," merely because we do not know them—or even, borrowing from Butler, because we do not know ourselves (217). But this unknowing need not paralyze us. Rather, Keller insists, "the subject mindful of its unknowing *minds* the world afresh. It minds, it is bothered by, the deformations of powers and knowledge, it minds oppressions. For it recognizes also the signs and eligibilities of its own largest life" (230). The subject mindful of unknowing, then, entertains the distinct possibility that her own life been diminished by the casting of some Other in to the role of *homo sacer*.

The capacity to love across differences, to act on behalf of not only ourselves of the myriad others with whom we are entangled constitutes a political strategy. It does not constitute a guarantee of security, as "a theology of becoming" must "negotiate its solidities, its solidarities, within the flux." These negotiations are not undertaken with hope of a final security, nor with fear of disorder, but rather in the spirit of "responsible, flexible, and therefore steadfast forms of self-organization" (216). In this political love, Keller observes, "we gain the courage of our connections" (216).

And we will need both steadfast forms of self-organization and courage in order to persist in creating a good common world as climate catastrophes loom and food scarcity threatens for reasons other than merely economic.³⁷ Which is where a *tehomophilic* theology of becoming might just inspire not self-fulfilling apocalypticism, but constructive reimaginings of human social structures that intra-act creatively with the nonhuman in more sustainable ways. Birthing new ways of being may be daunting. As Keller testifies, “any beginning partakes of the irreducible” (227).³⁸ But task of beginning again is nothing new. It could even be construed as a holy task.

In Keller’s apophatic panentheist theology of becoming we find a theological model that simultaneously draws from traditional theological resources and is yet compatible with the metaphysical image of our epoch as revealed by science studies. This model does not posit an all-powerful God, nor does it lend credence to human enactments of Schmittian sovereignty. Furthermore, Keller’s apophatic panentheism recommends caution as the Latourian collective sets about its task of creating the good common world. In fact, Keller’s apophatic panentheism, perceiving the implications of quantum nonseparability, heightens awareness that no Other can ever be finally eliminated from the collective. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it provides a model for creation in the context of chaos. And, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, chaos is likely to emerge with increasing frequency on a quickly warming planet. But what political

³⁷ Numerous authors noting the ominous projections for life on Earth in the context of radical climate disruption promote transformations of social relations and consumption patterns, broadly speaking. See Jared Diamond, *Collapse*, Dianne Dumanoski, *End of the Long Summer*, Michael T. Klare *The Race for What’s Left: The Global Scramble for the World’s Last Resources*; Naomi Klein *This Changes Everything*, David Korten, *The Great Turning*, Bill McKibben *Deep Economy*

³⁸ Reading Keller, it occurs to me that problem with the law that Benjamin observes—it is too general, needs to be applied to individual cases, and eventually no longer applies at all—could in some way be circumvented if we viewed laws as provisional and iterative (which is what they are), rather than permanent.

models might prove consonant with this theological model, and with the process-oriented, metaphysical image of our epoch?

The People as Process

Democracy is commonly upheld as a bulwark against the sort of totalitarian or fascist regimes into which absolute sovereignty can be said to devolve. Because it draws strength from a multiplicity, presumably, it thwarts the consolidation of power that leads to authoritarianism. Yet both liberal democracy and the popular sovereignty upon which it is said to be based are critiqued from both the right and left ends of the political spectrum. Schmitt, it will be recalled, perceived both liberal democracy and versions of popular sovereignty as utterly lacking both sovereignty and the capacity to maintain order in the face of a crisis.

But what are the problematic components inherent within the concept of popular sovereignty when viewed from the progressive or radical end of the political spectrum? Recalling Clayton Crockett's argument, the problem with popular sovereignty is its derivation from monarchical sovereignty, as evidenced by the notion that "it is the unitary will of the people that is sovereign, not the individual whims of the multitude."³⁹ The concerns animating Crockett's opposition to popular sovereignty are its proximity to other problematic constructions of sovereignty: its tendency to rely upon a unity that contrasts with "the multiplicity of nature" and its potential misuse of power.⁴⁰ Despite this potential misuse of power, Crockett laments the eclipsing of the will of the people by "political power" that has been "mediated in complex ways" permitting either "naked

³⁹ Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-47 "A radical political theology does not simply replace one power with another but calls into question all power"

military force” or “a more subtle sovereign wealth “to become the more potent political decision-makers (46).

Crockett equates popular sovereignty with democratic sovereignty, which he finds unpalatable because of its connection to the nation state: “on the one hand, democracy is a state-form, a figure of sovereignty or power” (104). He questions whether democratic sovereignty might be unthinkable without the nation-state: “democratic sovereignty is tied to the nation-state and perhaps cannot be thought without the state” (48). The tight linkage between democratic sovereignty and the concept of the nation-state is problematic for Crockett in part because “the state’s legitimacy and authority is being called into question” (48). More specifically, it is sovereignty itself that is being called into question, and Crockett hopes to conjure a radical democracy unburdened by this concept.

Crockett cites Derrida’s contention that all states are rogue state as evidence of this contestation. He goes on to argue that the crisis of both democracy and the nation-state are the result of their reliance upon liberalism, an ideology which is itself in crisis. In what can be seen as a prophetic moment, Crockett observes that two approaches to the crisis of liberalism confront us in our contemporary political climate:

One can either abandon democracy in abandoning liberalism and embrace a Machiavellian neoconservatism where (American) might makes right, or one can try to recuperate or restore a vital tradition of democracy (93-94).

It appears that with our recent election we have generally opted for the former, although the latter may emerge as an upshot of the myriad discontents with the new administration. Crockett is pessimistic about the potentiality for restoring liberal democracy due to the neoliberal economic agenda with which it has become nearly synonymous. Crockett turns

to the notion of radical democracy to denote a democracy disarticulated from liberalism, neoliberal economics, and ultimately sovereign power.

Crockett's theorization of radical democracy disarticulated from sovereignty bears some resonances with Keller's theology of becoming, and also with the metaphysical image of our epoch. But Crockett stops short of legitimizing a nation state. The state in its current form is welded to neoliberal economics, and thus hostile efforts to create a truly equal society (104). Yet a legitimate nation-state is a demand of many in the food sovereignty movement. Thus we must press on to see if others can grapple with Crockett's valid critiques in a way that *might* support this vital movement.

Political theorist Paulina Ochoa Espejo shares Crockett's concern about the theoretical linkage of "unitary will" with the concept of popular sovereignty, but due to its potential for misuses of power. Rather, her concern emanates from the possibility that the theoretical requirement for a "unitary will" in order to legitimize popular sovereignty might unduly restrict the power of the people:

The traditional conception of the people is problematic because it holds that only a unified popular will legitimizes the foundation of a state. Hence it has to show that a given people is or was unified in order to prove that a state is legitimate. Yet the conception cannot point to any instance of this unification because the populace changes constantly.⁴¹

The notion of popular sovereignty falls to the same critiques laid out in earlier chapters, namely, the sovereign cannot be shown to be characterized by unity. Thus, if such unification is impossible to demonstrate in the case of a single individual, then how much less likely is an entire populace to demonstrate unity? Since such unification of will cannot be shown to obtain in a populace, how is it that those of us living in democracies

⁴¹ Paulina Ochoa Espejo, *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and the Democratic State*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011): 2.

can support the legitimacy of our governments? Espejo argues that the concept of popular sovereignty “gets its strength from...the promise of” unification of the popular will” (5) in some distant future, or alternatively from the notion that the popular will had been unified at the nation’s inception.⁴²

Complicating this lack of unity even further, not only are the members of the populace not of one mind, the members are not even the same members over periods of time. People die, others are born, some move away and new members arrive. Given the never-ending flux, “how do you legitimize rule democratically as the people’s composition changes?” (7). At the most basic levels, then, “the people” remains indeterminate, never achieving stable form.

The challenge that democratic theory sustains in the face of this indeterminacy has so far been resolved via one of two unsatisfactory approaches, according to Espejo. The first is to sustain “democratic legitimacy” of the will of the people “while tolerating paradox” insofar as the people’s will can never have been shown to be unified at any point. This opens any government claiming to operate democratically vulnerable to allegations that they have misappropriated “the name of the people to establish the hegemony of a group” (11). The second approach rejects the logical inconsistency, and with it the concept of “the people as a ground of legitimacy” (11). Ultimately the second approach leads some—especially “philosophical anarchists and critics of liberal democratic politics,” Espejo notes—to “dismiss the people as a dangerous fabrication that masks the realities of power” (11). Both options have inherent weaknesses.

The first option, that of tolerating the paradox, could be said to lead to the sorts of totalitarianism and fascism typical of the Schmittian sovereign albeit for a different

⁴² For example at the drafting of the constitution.

reason. Maintaining the paradox that the will of the people is never unified yet possesses democratic legitimacy requires maintaining a vacancy similar to that required by Barth's version of sovereignty. However, in the case of popular sovereignty, what is vacated is a precise definition of "the people." Espejo asserts that totalitarianism results from the need to "quash dissent or even eliminate parts of the population that would threaten ethnic or cultural unanimity of an idealized concrete people" (11). In this case, it is not the decision on the exception that leads to the devolution into totalitarianism. Rather, it is the persistent failure of "the People" to integrate "the people," as Agamben illustrated.

The second option, according to Espejo, represents a failure of imagination that leaves us with little hope of creatively imagining a desirable political order. There is little point in striving for a more just political order if one has already concluded that such an order is unobtainable. Democracy may be the "worst form of government, aside from all those other forms that have been tried from time to time," as Churchill quipped, but to abandon it altogether hardly seems to be an "out of the frying pan into the fire" situation.⁴³

Espejo observes that "the root of the indeterminacy problem is the demand made by theories of popular sovereignty that the people be a fixed and stable thing that seeks to conform to the ideal version of itself, such that its internal changes do not alter the essential nature of the state it founds" (11). In other words, even if the people shift in membership or opinions, the state comes to represent "the will of the people" and as such is construed as both good and immutable. Thus "the will of the people" is tinted with a more or less orthodox theological tone and dualist metaphysics much as is the case with Schmittian sovereignty.

⁴³ Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "The Churchill Hypothesis," *Journal of Democracy*, (1999): 169.

The theological and metaphysical dimension is not lost on Espejo, who contends that the requirement for unification “depends on beliefs and metaphysical commitments that are seldom questioned, despite not often being justified in moral or political terms.”⁴⁴ These metaphysical commitments cannot be easily abandoned, in part because they form the kernel of the contrarian arguments most often deployed to “legitimize the modern state” (12). For instance, much political philosophy is embedded in a philosophy of being, rather than a philosophy of becoming, according to Espejo. Espejo formulates her theory of “people as process” through an integration of process-oriented philosophies of becoming with political theory.

Through recourse to process-oriented philosophies with an emphasis on becoming rather than being, Espejo is free from a need to demonstrate the unification of the people. Further, she is also freed from the need to envision “the will of the people” as immutable or necessarily good. Rather, “the people as process is a source of democratic legitimacy that moors state institutions while remaining compatible with change, surprise, and innovation. It can both sustain democratic institutions and accommodate people’s indeterminacy because it does not seek a predetermined goal” (13). As such, it does not legitimize itself on the basis of past, present or future unification.

Yet Espejo’s theory of the people as process retains the notion of a “general will...as a tendency defined by the expectations of many individuals” (13). The people as process is comprised of “a fleeting community of hopes, expectations memories and fraternal feelings, periodically subject to drastic and unexpected changes” (13). This community encounters institutions and sets of practices that condition and constrain their actions as individuals. Both “the people as process” and the practices and institutions

⁴⁴ Espejo, *Time of Popular Sovereignty*, 12.

with which they interact “are related in a process of becoming” (13). One hears echoes of Baradian agential realism in this description, not to mention Keller’s theology of becoming.

If the open-ended indeterminacy and relational process of becoming characteristic of Espejo’s people as process bears resonances to Keller’s theology of becoming, that is because Keller and Espejo share an intellectual lineage. Espejo, inspired by her mentor William Connolly, draws from a philosophical lineage that includes Leibniz, Hegel, Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze and others. She does not feel compelled to convince her readers that processes are either “a product of cognition, the nature of life, or the nature of all material reality” (141). It will suffice for her purposes to claim that “processes are fundamental entities of social life.” To suggest that a people is a process means, to Espejo, that a people is a series of coordinated events involving a self-creative aim (142).

Espejo is quick to clarify that process thinking does not imply that everything is in such flux that identity is impossible. Some things do endure over time, and thus process philosophy “allows you to interpret entities from the standpoint of change as well as from the standpoint of stability” (143) As a corollary, process thinking does not deny all forms of self-identity, although process thinking would contend that any “self” that existed across time was constituted as a temporally ordered series of repetitive events, rather than the persistence of an atomic individual. That is to say, although most things undergo transformation over time, they nonetheless remain recognizable “for as long as they last” (143). For example, a given person never ceases to change throughout their lives, yet they typically remain recognizable from day to day.

Process must be distinguished from procedure, particularly in the context of political philosophy. A procedure can best be viewed as “an algorithm” by which “an actor may obtain a type of result.” This algorithm is, more or less, predictable and predetermined. By contrast, “the processes that interest us here are *self-creative*” and thus have indeterminate outcomes (144). This introduces a measure of unpredictability into the people as process.

The key features of process thought that Espejo seeks to employ in theorizing “people as process” include “events,” “coordination,” and “self-creation.” An event is an occurrence in a particular time and space. Using the term “event” allows Espejo to “describe social facts as activities and relations rather than substances or essences.”⁴⁵ In order to qualify as events, the occurrences must be coordinated by “conceptual goals”—although these need not be conscious—“causal constraints, and randomness” (147). The conceptual goals motivating events do not consist of idealized, static forms awaiting actualization. Rather, the pattern unfolds iteratively and “it is always the result of concrete occurrences” (146-7). Events do not take place in absolute freedom, because they are constrained by other events.

Because Espejo is crafting a *political* people, not just any event will do. First of all, people events must be characterized by coordination. A political conversation at a coffee house and a democratic election alike could be “considered part of the people” because each is coordinated in relation to “practices of constituting, governing, or changing a set of institutions, which are the *highest* authority...for those affected by the institutions in questions” (158). By Espejo’s standards, “political events restricted to your club, your city block, or your province don’t count” (158). Incidentally, she denies that

⁴⁵ (P. O. Espejo 2011) 145

the decision “whether to grill or broil chicken for tonight’s dinner” could count as a people event. This is a standard I find troubling and about which I will say more shortly.

Participation in people events is not restricted along lines of citizenship, or even necessarily of geography. According to Espejo, participation is open to “all those individuals intensely affected by the supremely authoritative institutions and by the events that modify the institutions. A person is intensely affected by those institutions when they can coerce her and there are no alternative institutions that would allow her to continue her normal life” (159). This, she notes, is not a normative claim based upon entitlement of individuals. Rather, it is an ontological claim regarding the events and relations that comprise a people. By virtue of the impact of particular institutions and practices upon one’s life, one immediately “partakes of the people” (159).

Espejo is adamant that people as process is not about an aggregate of individuals. Rather, it is about the humans, and even nonhumans, related in particular sets of coordinated events unfolding over time. And here a Baradian perspective may shed some light on this distinction. If one thinks of the “coordinated series of events unfolding over time” as material-discursive apparatuses that specifically relate to the highest authority in one’s life. The material-discursive apparatuses are thus unavoidable. And because they are apparatuses, they leave marks on bodies. They shape the material conditions of one’s becoming. Espejo’s concept of “the people as process” is so expansive as to permit the inclusion of “related processes like the market, the environment, and international pressures” as among those highest authorities which constitute people events (161).

Once one partakes of the people, one has a “good moral claim to certain rights over those people events” that affect one’s life (160). Espejo argues that even

undocumented workers have good moral claims on the nation in which they currently reside. She cites the example of an indigenous servant living in colonial Peru. By Espejo's account, this servant was intensely affected by the Spanish empire, and therefore "partook of the people of Spain." Subsequently, had the Spanish Empire been otherwise configured—for example as a democratic republic—this servant "could have demanded some political rights. Moreover, he had a good moral claim to those rights" (160-161). The moral claim stands, despite the fact that the political configuration of the Spanish Empire denied him those rights.

It occurs to me that if a Peruvian servant partakes of the peoplehood of Spain, the peasant farmers in developing nations who grow food for American citizens also, by Espejo's calculations, have a "good moral claim" to some rights from the transnational corporations and multilateral trade agencies setting agricultural agendas. They may, for example, have a moral claim to be freed from pressures to adopt high-input agricultural methods that are cost-prohibitive for smallholders in the short run and deplete the soil in the long run. And people living downstream of a proposed oil pipeline might have a good moral claim to have the pipeline diverted, since their access to water will be inescapably impacted by a pipeline spill.

Organizations such as the Pachamama Alliance that support food sovereignty and indigenous rights in Latin America speak in terms of the "rights" of the nonhuman, raising questions as to whether Espejo's "people as process" might prove sufficiently elastic to stretch to nonhuman "persons"—or even nonhuman nonpersons. In some cases, the nonhuman world may make upon human social, political, and economic structures as well, as the nonhuman world is also intensely affected by these structures. For example,

what moral claims to freedom from abuse might be made by a cow *en route* to slaughter after enduring the confines of a concentrated animal feeding organization? What moral claims to freedom might a farm-raised salmon make? Or for that matter, the rivers and oceans that the salmon call home? Might there be a way in which these broader concerns might find expression in the concept of people as process?

Let us revisit the decision whether to broil or fry chicken for dinner. Previously, Espejo suggested that this type of decision could not be considered a people event, in light of prior discussion of contemporary food politics. Admittedly, it is possible that even within the context of food politics the decision between broiling versus frying is likely not a political decision, and may not qualify as a people event. But I would suggest that decision whether or not to eat chicken at all *might* qualify as a people event.

For example, increasing numbers of people are now choosing vegetarian and vegan food plans in part because they perceive chickens and poultry workers as making a moral claim to better living and working conditions. These food plans are often preferred in part because of their lower carbon footprint as well. And then, getting back to the concerns about nonhuman moral claims, there are those who find the inhumane treatment of poultry—confined to tiny cages, and selectively bred for breast size at the expense of the ability to even stand up—morally repugnant. Naturally, individual consumer decisions alone will not result in the political transformation of our current political, economic and agricultural configurations to a sustainable society. Yet, as already discussed in chapter two, the financial, political, and agricultural institutions currently shaping our food system are the highest authorities in our society. And as described in

chapter five, the global food system imposes myriad harmful effects upon the nonhuman world as well as the human.

Subsequently, if a political conversation in a coffee house counts as a people event, it is challenging in the present context to imagine that making an ethical decision regarding what to have for dinner does not also count. Many people are choosing vegetarian food practices in order to reduce their carbon footprint. Vegetarian options or locally raised, pastured, grass-fed beef are also preferred by many who acutely perceive their moral complicity in the treatment of livestock. Some, in recognition of the “good moral claim” to rights on the part of coffee growers purchase only fair-trade coffee. As I cannot stress enough, ethical eating alone will not shift our food system toward ecological sustainability. But nonetheless, ethical eating can constitute a “people event” because it is coordinated in relation to “practices of constituting, governing, or changing a set of institutions,” effectiveness or lack thereof notwithstanding. And, more to the point of nonhuman “rights,” ethical eating can function as a people event that recognizes the “good moral claim” of the nonhuman world to be liberated from oppression by human systems.

Espejo’s “people as process” overcomes several problematic components of popular sovereignty that in many regards mirror those already identified with Schmittian sovereignty. Meanwhile her “people as process” validates the legitimacy of “the people” as rightfully capable of demanding some laws and structures, while resisting others. Espejo’s “people as process” could be used to legitimate the moral claim of peasant farmers to some rights from the transnational corporations and multilateral trade agencies

setting agricultural agendas, and also to highlight the political nature of ethical eating as a “people event.”

Both applications of Espejo’s “people as process” seem to take her theory in directions she does not necessarily intend or endorse. They could, in fact be seen as diluting the potency of a people by virtue of the transnational, global tendrils of connection between “the peoples” and some of the highest authorities in their lives—the transnational corporations and multilateral agencies determining how food is produced and distributed worldwide. Yet, this dilution of both moral accountability and political power seems inherent within our contemporary food system. And if “related processes like the market, the environment, and international pressures” are among the authorities that establish a people as process, then certainly the corporate food regime would seem to be a legitimate series of people events. Espejo’s theory at least begins to identify how we can view ourselves as political agents morally accountable to a myriad of other unknown Others, and how we might find ourselves in solidarity with them.

“People as process” further begins to shift our perception of these relations. We in the Global North are not reduced to the role of guilty oppressors. We are participants in a people. When some in the Global North learn about the injustices, the environmentally destructive practices, the animal cruelty they decide they want to change. But when they try to change, they are faced with their limited capacity to exit the global food system. They cannot afford to buy locally grown organic produce, or humanely raised grass-fed beef, because the production of these foodstuffs is not subsidized in the way that conventional agricultural products are subsidized. And they may not live in an area where these items are available. The fact that we are in some regards constrained by the same

institutions as are landless peasants could shift our self-perception from “oppressor in the Global North” to “someone with limited options in the Global North.” This shift is subtle, and as with all things process this shift holds no guarantee. But perhaps there is something to the self-definition as “oppressor” that incapacitates effective political action, whereas identifying ourselves as also constrained suddenly clarifies our skin in the game.

The oppressions in the global food system are differential, to be sure, and we in the Global North are indeed privileged. But we are already losing access to nutritious food, and we are losing the capacity to make ethically and ecologically sound choices because the corporate regime has eclipse our power. Since we are already losing these benefits—and stand to lose much more should climate crises suddenly disrupt our food system—we might gain greater commitment to genuine solidarity with landless peasants and migrant farm workers with this shift in perception.

“The people as process” also holds great benefit as regards the application of human rights language to the question of food. As we discussed in chapter three, in the context of our climate-induced mass migration such rights are rather fragile, dependent as they are upon notions of citizenship for their enforcement. But “the people as process” does not view peoples as “legally bound groups of individuals in a given territory,” as do many conceptions of popular sovereignty (167). Versions of popular sovereignty which view peoples as territorially bounded contend that “peoples can only exist if they are legally recognizable by a third party and have fixed borders” (167). By contrast, “peoples as process can exist without such external legal recognition and without fixed borders. Their existence depends only on internal institutions and interactions, and they may be

nested in one another, flow into one another, or separate from one another if the rate and intensity of interactions ceases” (167). Subsequently, climate refugees do not lose the moral right to food simply because they do not hold citizenship. Certainly, they will be intensely affected by a new set of highest authorities, and while this will not give them the moral claim to citizenship, it will nonetheless give them the moral claim to food.

Espejo has devised a way for “a democratic people as process” to “rule itself democratically without unifying reason and will,” yet even this process is neither entirely democratic nor self-determining (185). Other events and forces impinge upon the outcome, for example: unconscious motivations of participants; other peoples; unanticipated consequences of decisions; and blind luck (186). Furthermore, a popular decision at this point “may be good or bad” and carries no normative weight;” it cannot be declared a “good” solely on the basis of its popularity (186). This is a significant qualification, and not to be passed over lightly. And at the same time, this qualification in fact applies to every political decision and is the very reason why a transcendent source of valuation is so frequently sought. In summary, then, Espejo has theorized a model of popular sovereignty that avoids the hazards of requiring unification or divine validation.

Yet, simultaneously this model *does* shine a spotlight on the less than democratic nature of our food system in a way that clarifies the limitations of its “goodness.” This model inherently critiques our global food system as undemocratic, because, as Espejo writes, “it is only when such a people obtains that those individuals who partake in the people, and who are affected by its decisions, have an equal say in the process of making, governing, and changing the institutions that rule them” (185). Subsequently, the starving and the obese—along with peasant farmers—cannot be said to contribute meaningfully to

decision-making regarding agricultural practices and food distribution networks in our current system. However, Espejo's "people as process" creates an opening for more robust political approaches to transforming the food system if these groups could collectively recognize their peoplehood.

Espejo concludes by agreeing "with the philosophical anarchist critics that all currently existing states are illegitimate," yet she believes that the state must be tolerated as a necessary evil. She does not go so far as to promise a utopic solution to the problems inherent in the state form, however. Nonetheless, she maintains "that if you don't have at least the logical possibility of legitimate government, then there is no good reason to try to improve it" (192-3). In other words, Espejo's tolerance of the state as a necessary evil awaiting our remediation is not parallel to Schmitt's perception of the sovereign as *katechon*, restraining the Antichrist until the solution descends from above. She goes on to say that her "conception of the people as process restores the possibility of legitimizing rule on the basis of individual and collective freedom, and of developing a theory of democracy in terms of the experience of creative freedom" (195). Creative freedom will be much needed as we endeavor to coax new forms from wreckage of the old.

But tolerating the state as a necessary evil decidedly does not equal granting any nation-states (or their leaders) *absolute* sovereignty. Indeed, absolutes tend to fall by the wayside in a political theology of food with roots in process philosophy. It is rather, in good process philosophical fashion, to acknowledge the self-organizational capacity and the self-determining quality inherent in a universe of becoming, and to recognize the sovereignty of a "people as process" as an extension and expression of that self-

organizational potency. A nation-state becomes visible of one of many modes of self-organization, rather than an absolute good or absolute evil.

Further speaking against, absolutes, to embrace the demands of landless peasants that the sovereignty of their nation-states be recognized is to simultaneously inscribe a limitation to the sovereignty of *other* entities, such as multilateral trade organizations and transnational corporations—and other nation states as well. To say that claims of sovereignty can be made by a people as process (such as the food sovereignty movement) is certainly not to say that that movement has the authority to determine how the rest of the world should farm. It is, however, to honor the delineation of a collective, to use Latour's term, or the decision of a sovereign "people as process" to use Espejo's descriptor, that has collected itself through a rigorous process of perplexity, consultation, hierarchization and institution—numerous "people events" large and small—and determined that transnational corporate agriculture has at best a limited role in their collective.

Conclusion

Noting the family resemblance between theological concepts and political concepts, Carl Schmitt declared that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."⁴⁶ Schmitt also asserted that "the metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization."⁴⁷ Schmitt's loss of faith in liberal democracies led him to uncritically deploy a secularized version of an orthodox, transcendent theology in the construction of his concept of

⁴⁶ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

sovereignty. In doing so, he proposed a structure that contradicted the metaphysical image of our epoch—and his own.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, a dualist metaphysics with strong ties to “the classicism of a separable objectivism” no longer reflects the metaphysical image of our epoch. *The metaphysical understanding of this epoch—the basic understanding of reality—is disclosed to be iterative and process-oriented by science studies.* This was the case even during Schmitt’s time, as he himself acknowledges. Schmitt sought to preserve “the exacting moral decision” and to guarantee order, two goals he perceived as only achievable in the context of a source of transcendence. Thus he rejected the process-oriented, immanent metaphysical framework, popular even during his own lifetime and certainly gaining traction in our own, and instead opted to secularize an orthodox version of a transcendent God as the basis of sovereignty. This chapter sought to investigate two questions in relation to Schmitt’s claim: The first is whether orthodox theologies necessarily support Schmitt’s model of sovereignty. The second is whether immanent theologies are in fact incapable of guiding moral valuation, as Schmitt feared.

Schmitt’s reliance upon a transcendent, orthodox theology to underwrite human sovereignty falls to theological critique from not only Walter Benjamin but also neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth, a contemporary of Schmitt’s and Benjamin’s. This significance of this failure should not be overlooked, as both Barth and Benjamin shared Schmitt’s ultimate concerns, but their religious commitments prohibited their conflation of human and divine sovereignty. Both Barth and Benjamin would have perceived this conflation as idolatrous.⁴⁸ Thus the answer to the first question “do orthodox theologies

⁴⁸ Alfred North Whitehead would have referred to this as the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

necessarily found models of sovereignty consonant with Schmitt's as their only or most logical response?" would appear to be "no."⁴⁹

Catherine Keller's theology of becoming and apophatic entanglement unfolds a profoundly unknowable inseparability on the immanent plane that *demand*s the exacting moral decision. This demand remains present even when—or especially when—the exact outcome cannot be guaranteed or even anticipated. This would seem to answer the second question “can an immanent divine provide a framework within which “the exacting moral decision” can be made?” in the affirmative.

Paulina Ochoa Espejo's “people as process” provides a sampling of the sorts of politics that would be resonant with the metaphysical image of our epoch as iterative and process-oriented and its valuation of the immanent material plane. Drawing heavily from similar sources to Keller, her politics is also consonant with Keller's theology of becoming. Subsequently, it provides a framework for political organization compatible with the metaphysical understanding of our epoch and also with a theology of becoming. Thus, it is not necessary to jettison either God or a scientifically informed worldview to embrace this version of a popular sovereignty.

Not only is Espejo's version of popular sovereignty more compatible with the metaphysical image of our epoch than Schmitt's absolute sovereignty—or even previous versions of popular sovereignty—it has disarticulated its claims to legitimacy from claims to unity. Relevant to the present study, this political theory of popular sovereignty

⁴⁹ This is particularly relevant in 2017, as the same concerns motivating the conversation in the 1930's have again emerged, and there is a widespread trend toward retrenched nationalism sweeping global politics in the form of Brexit and Trumpism to name only two instances. Trumpism in particular is noteworthy for the manner in which it seeks mutual legitimation between Trump's version of white ethno-nationalism and fundamentalist versions of both Christianity and Judaism, although a detailed explication of this phenomenon is far beyond the scope of this dissertation.

has the capacity to support food movements that resist the totalizing maneuvers of transnational corporate agriculture—even when these food movements demand national sovereignty. Furthermore, when applied to the question of food politics, this political theory might facilitate solidarity between the Global North and the Global South. We in the Global North, as part of the “eating public” participate in “people moments” with each forkful of food we eat. Meanwhile, Espejo’s “people as process” circumvents the appeals to ipseity upon which sovereignty even of the popular variety is founded. It redraws the political and ethical map such that we are not related solely by virtue of territorial boundaries or citizenship status. Most importantly, it clarifies the “good moral claim” of *homo sacer*, the Other who asks that we not let him die alone.

CONCLUSION

The dominant narrative is that only conventional agriculture can produce sufficient quantities of food to feed the Earth's burgeoning population. Yet despite the fact that sufficient calories are currently produced to feed every human on earth a two thousand calorie per day diet, hunger has yet to be eliminated. Because conventional agriculture is tethered to an economic model in which food is commodity rather than entitlement, this is unlikely to change. In the context of climate change the problem of hunger is likely to worsen due to declining crop yields. Industrial agricultural methods in combination with global food trade—a combination referred to in this dissertation as the corporate food regime, based upon the theory of Friedmann and McMichael—are responsible for a significant portion of greenhouse gas emissions, meaning that global food trade jeopardizes its own long-term efficacy.

Numerous challenges to the corporate food regime have arisen, but their rhetoric has been easily appropriated by the corporate food regime. Currently, the food sovereignty movement is seen by many as a potent challenger, unlikely to be similarly coopted. This movement began in Latin America and has spread globally. It is comprised primarily of peasant farmers, among the most marginalized in the global food system. In addition to demanding the right to grow and eat nutritious and culturally appropriate food, they demand that transnational corporations and multilaterals respect the sovereignty of their respective nation-states. The movement's paradoxical combination of radically democratic and inclusive practices with demands for a stronger nation-state defies easy comprehension.

The concept of sovereignty is historically entangled with the global food trade. The global food trade has long been characterized by asymmetrical flows of power and capital, and according to Akhil Gupta, the concept of sovereignty has historically reinforced that asymmetry. He further observes that rarely has an analysis of the concept of sovereignty as it appears in global food politics been undertaken, a point reiterated by Daniele Conversi more recently. Yet contestations over sovereignty have been everywhere apparent in global food trade since the inception of the concept of sovereignty in the latter part of the medieval era.

The analysis of sovereignty as it manifests in global food politics undertaken in this dissertation has been in part an effort to address this lack. Not only has sovereignty as a historical concept seldom been applied to global food politics, has sovereignty as a theological concept has not been applied in this arena. This is a significant omission, since the political concept of sovereignty carries within it a secularized version of the theological concept of God's sovereignty, according to Carl Schmitt.

Schmitt identifies the sovereign as "he who decides upon the exception," and explicitly remarks upon the historical and structural connections between the concept of the sovereign and theological concepts. For example, Schmitt insists that the exception is structurally parallel to the miracle in theology. Schmitt would object to the radically democratic processes by which the food sovereignty movement organizes, perceiving the movement to undermine the very notion of sovereignty by postponing inevitably the decision on the exception. Furthermore, Schmitt believed that only a transcendent sovereign could guarantee security and provide a framework for moral valuation. He would find their more or less "immanent" grassroots approach objectionable.

The sovereign is found to share several characteristics with traditional images of God. The sovereign is characterized by unity; guarantees security for those under the auspices of his protection; decisively suspends the system of law in order to annihilate existential threats. When applied to global food politics, those characteristics become visible as fault lines along which the political concept of sovereignty ruptures.

Theologically, the claim that the theological concept of sovereignty can be secularized and transferred to a creaturely human is dubious at best. Despite the divinity with which a monarch was once bestowed, even neo-Orthodox theologian Karl Barth raises serious challenges to the concept of sovereignty on theological bases, as does Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin. Calling attention to the theological dimension of this political construct may instigate a fresh critique of global food politics.

Unity is a condition that never quite obtains—certainly not in a nation-state and not even for a given individual. A new materialist analysis demonstrates that the materialization of the human body—and behavior and cognition along with it—arises as the result of its perpetual intra-actions with food and social structures. Different bodies materialize in the context of different social settings and the nutrition available in those settings. No essential, unchanging unity can be demonstrated—not for the sovereign nor the populace. The metaphysical image of our epoch as revealed by science studies no longer supports such a static picture.

Whatever measure of security is established under the leadership of a sovereign, it is far from absolute. Not only is it temporally limited, it is at best unevenly distributed to the sovereign's subjects. Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* elucidates the persistence, and even exacerbation, of bodily vulnerability in the context of enactments of

sovereignty. That vulnerability only intensifies under the sovereign exception would seem to imply that if the exception is at all parallel to a miracle, it is a miracle that fails to materialize.

Finally, it is unlikely to the point of being impossible that any human act of sovereignty will resolve the existential threat posed by climate change. This is all the more relevant in the context of global food politics, as the vulnerability of the food system is already being exposed in the early stages of climate change, a problem expected to worsen significantly. Simultaneously, global food trade is responsible for up to thirty percent of greenhouse gas emissions thus fortifying its most significant existential threat rather than reducing it. The existential threat posed by climate change is likely to be perpetual, unpredictable and uncontrollable for the next several decades. And as an application of Latour's *Political Ecology* demonstrates, enactments of sovereignty are likely to worsen rather than improve the situation in part because these enactments prematurely simplify an inherently complex situation, expelling numerous factors from the good common world. But these factors do not disappear forever; they eventually return to haunt the collective.

And yet the food sovereignty movement demands sovereignty, both for the movement and its members and for their respective nation-states. This dissertation has posed several questions in an effort to support its simultaneous calls for grassroots democratic processes and a sovereign nation state. Is it possible to defend the movement against the critiques that a Schmittian would likely level against their procedures? Likewise, is it possible to support their demand for a stronger nation-state despite the critiques of those on the left aimed at the nation-state and its abuses of power? Can we

support their use of “rights” language despite its reliance upon problematic notions of citizenship and state, especially in light of the massive displacement of people likely to occur (and already occurring) as climate change progresses?

As I hope has become clear, the problems with Schmittian sovereignty are not restricted to the fact that it is associated with, and enacted at the level of, the nation-state. I have argued that the corporate food regime enacts an economic rendition of Schmittian sovereignty, yet this regime is not attached to any nation-state. It could be said to be a supersovereign, or at least a manifestation of the larger supersovereign that transnational global capitalism has become. This supersovereign claims to embrace the principles of democracy, but is shown to betray those principles with regularity.

Some of the greatest threats posed by this supersovereign are quite similar to those posed by the Schmittian sovereign as identified by Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*. These threats arise due to the corporate food regime’s (supersovereign and) manic obsession with unification. In its press to unify, it attempts to level out differences. Only one economic system will do: neoliberal capitalism. Only one agricultural method can be legitimated: industrial high-input agriculture. As Agamben attests, whatever cannot be integrated in this push toward unification—agroecological methods, smallholders, peasant farmers, insects and the bats that eat them—is often targeted for elimination.

Socially, this is reflected in staggering amounts of oppression, persecution, violent conflict and dislocation. Agriculturally, this is reflected in the mandate that developing nations retool their agricultural systems in order to produce cash crops for global trade at the expense of producing staple crops for local consumption. Ecologically,

the consequences of this push toward unification appear as depletion of topsoil, oceanic dead zones, and global climate change, all of which are intensified as the ecological problems wrought by the agricultural methods induce an intensification of those methods, rather than reconsideration. The resulting carnage caused by the consolidation of top-down sovereign power is in direct proportion to size of the territory and population ruled. In the case of a global sovereign, contemplation of the potential for suffering is mind-numbing.

It is to some degree a desire to ward off those threats that inspires the food sovereignty movement to demand nation-state sovereignty. Although the concept of national sovereignty props up lethal totalitarian regimes, it simultaneously provides a stop-gap measure against an even *more* totalizing, absolute global sovereignty. This dissertation has explored other ways to think about sovereignty—either popular or national—that do not rely upon the concept of unification (either of God or sovereign), which is associated with many problematic outcomes of deployments of sovereignty. It has urged that sovereignty not be construed as necessarily the unlimited authority to suspend law, as with Schmitt, or the capacity “not to,” Crockett’s alternative. Instead, this dissertation has argued for sovereignty as the power to do otherwise—the power to refuse the binary and forge a third, or fourth or fifth option. This dissertation has sought other ways to think about God—a concept that underwrites sovereignty—that are more reflective of the metaphysical image of our epoch as disclosed by science studies and described by new materialism.

Process and feminist theologies such as Catherine Keller’s theology of becoming are more consonant with the metaphysical image of our epoch as disclosed by science

studies than is the orthodox theology upon which Schmitt modeled his concept of sovereignty. Keller's God is intimately entangled with the fluctuating material world. Rather than overpowering it in order to assure security, this God seductively coaxes order from chaos again and again, and invites us to do the same. Keller articulates an immanent framework for ethical responsiveness capable of responding to Schmitt's assertion that the immanent domain does not provide such a source. Keller's is particularly inspirational vision in the context of climate-induced chaos, from which we will need to coax order again and again if the human species is to endure.

Resonant with Keller's theology of becoming because drawn from the same process philosophical wellspring, Paulina Ochoa Espejo's "people as process" provides a framework useful for navigating the paradoxical claims to sovereignty made by the food sovereignty movement. Espejo's model of popular sovereignty liberates the sovereignty of a people from the concept of unity by refusing to legitimate the sovereignty of a people on the basis of past, present, or future unification. In fact, unification is not a goal. The goal is to permit those who are unavoidably affected by authoritative institutions to have an equal say in the decisions made by those institutions. Because the goal is not unification, this model sidesteps some of the pitfalls of traditional, Schmittian sovereignty.

Popular sovereignty based upon the notion of a "people as process" establishes a framework for resisting the totalizing maneuvers of transnational corporate agriculture—even in the context of a demand for national sovereignty. This framework is capable of establishing a "people" even across national boundaries, as a "people" is defined by the highest authorities in their lives, from whose grasp they cannot escape. In the context of

the authority of the corporate food system, we in the Global North—whether geographically or socioeconomically—can find ourselves in a shared peoplehood with those in the Global South. On the one hand, we are relatively privileged, but on the other our nutritional needs are not being met and we, too, will face catastrophes as climate change worsens. Yet because the sovereignty of a “people as process” does not require unification in the same manner that traditional models of sovereignty do, these differences do little to diminish our togetherness.

This analysis was undertaken in large measure in support of the food sovereignty movement, its people and its platform. Yet the resistance to unity permeating the arguments against Schmittian sovereignty could also be directed against the food sovereignty movement insofar as support for the validity of this movement does not imply that all other approaches to agricultural production and distribution ought to be immediately abandoned. That is to say, this dissertation does not support the unification of under single agricultural method. An abrupt unification around agroecological farming and local consumption would consign billions of people to starvation, as the infrastructure for such methodology is not yet in place. But continued unification around industrial agriculture *also* threatens billions of people as well as uncountable species. Diversification might appear as an advantageous solution to a complex set of problems.

What this dissertation has hoped for above all is to analyze the concept of sovereignty in the global food system in such a way as to increase the number of people actively participating in conscious decision-making about how food is produced and distributed both locally and globally. Through an application of Espejo’s people as process to global food politics, this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate that since

Global North and Global South alike are subject to the authority of the corporate food regime (although admittedly with differential outcomes) together we form a people. By calling attention to the increased vulnerability resulting from the sovereign decision, the intra-active becoming of human flesh, and the threat posed by climate change this dissertation has attempted to illuminate what is at stake for all of us—even those of us in the Global North who are relatively food secure at the moment.

A deployment of science studies reveals a metaphysics characterized by iterative, intra-active becoming. While the news about climate change is bad, and the forecast even worse, perpetual becoming means that change is not only possible but inevitable—and it *could* even be change for the better. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predictions indicate, there are numerous sociopolitical interventions that could potentially minimize the loss of lives both human and nonhuman—and the lives of the poor and nonhuman are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Because the global food system is both causative of and vulnerable to climate change, it is potentially a pivotal site for effective intervention. Might we capitalize on what Espejo calls “people moments” large and small in our intra-actions with the global food system in order to create a change for the better?

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