

## Dialogue

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*An Interview with Oscar Temaru*

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*The Corporate Food Regime and Food Sovereignty  
in the Pacific Islands*

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## *The Corporate Food Regime and Food Sovereignty in the Pacific Islands*

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Given the importance and centrality of agriculture and food to subsistence as well as to global trade, regulation has been an important factor in the globalization of food and agriculture (Pechlaner and Otero 2010, 179). Global trade regulations have been pivotal in entrenching the neo-liberal agenda. According to Philip McMichael (2004, 2), the corporate food regime was institutionalized through the World Trade Organization (WTO). In order to secure profits for its agribusinesses, the United States redefined food security as a market relation during the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations in 1993. The corporate food regime shifted the locus of control for food security away from the nation-state to the world market. This was engineered through WTO agreements including the Agreement on Agriculture and the Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, which came into force in 1995. Under the Agreement on Agriculture, states are required to relinquish their right to seek food self-sufficiency (McMichael 2005). Under the TRIPS agreement, WTO members are obliged to extend private property rights to life forms, opening the gates to the commodification of plants and plant genetic resources through patents and plant breeders' rights. The effect of these agreements has been the steady erosion of the power of nation-states with regard to protecting food security.

This essay focuses on the Island members of the Pacific Islands Forum, namely, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Sāmoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. In this essay, we refer to these countries as the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Ten million people live in this region, comprising comparatively large coun-

tries such as Papua New Guinea with a population of 6.5 million people, Fiji with under a million people, and some of the smallest countries in the world such as Tuvalu and Nauru, each of which has a population of fewer than 10,000 (Morgan 2010, 1).

Six Pacific Island nations—Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Sāmoa—are WTO members. There has been a trend of progressively more rigorous commitment requirements imposed on PICs acceding to the WTO, regardless of their developmental level and individual circumstances. These stipulations have been imposed in an imbalanced and asymmetrical manner. Under WTO accession agreements and free-trade agreements, the PICs that comprise some of the smallest and most geographically isolated countries in the world have been pressured to undertake trade reforms far beyond what countries like Australia, the United States, and India have committed to under the WTO. The PICs are small states possessing a unique set of characteristics that greatly curtail their prospects of ever fully benefiting from the rigors of international trade and global markets. Their right to become part of the world trading system and to reap its putative benefits has been bought at great expense to whatever vestiges of real autonomy and independence they may have had, especially with regard to control over local agriculture.

The PICs are also negotiating a WTO-compliant free-trade agreement with the European Union known as an Economic Partnership Agreement. While negotiations have been slow and protracted, the agreement will build on WTO policies and rules, especially as they relate to agriculture. In 2009, Australia and New Zealand, which are members of the Pacific Islands Forum, commenced negotiations for a free-trade agreement known as the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations–Plus (PACER Plus). The negotiation agenda of PACER Plus is wide and far-reaching and includes the liberalization of agriculture.

This essay explores the implications of trade-liberalization policies in the PICs for food sovereignty. The first part focuses on food regime analysis and explains the different global food regimes from a Pacific Islands perspective. The section that follows explores the concept of food sovereignty and how the principles of food sovereignty are preserved to some extent in the PICs. The final section analyzes how free-trade policies affect food sovereignty in the PICs. Data for this paper were gathered through twenty-four in-depth, open-ended interviews in Fiji, which is one of the bigger Pacific nations, and in Vanuatu, a smaller nation with just over 200,000 people. We interviewed nongovernmental organization officials,

academics, agriculture experts, church groups, civil society organizations, business groups, government officials, and members of different communities. Despite the diversity in the region, three important thematic issues emerged from the interviews in relation to food sovereignty: (a) the importance of prioritizing local agriculture to feed local people; (b) the right of smallholder farmers and fisherfolk to productive resources such as land, water, and seed; and (c) the need for popular participation in agricultural policies. These issues are presented in the final section.

### FOOD REGIME ANALYSIS

Regime analysis occupies an important place in political economy and international relations. Stephen Krasner described regimes as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations” (1982, 186). These interconnected strands form the web of a regime, which can come in various forms pertaining to trade, finance, politics, and economics. There are different explanations for the genesis of regimes. Hegemonic stability theory explains regimes as designed by hegemonies who establish rules to achieve strategic objectives and enforce compliance with the regime (Kindleberger 1986, 841–842). Others see regimes arising as a response to a perceived need or demand. States and other actors seek cooperation and interaction due to a confluence of interests and objectives. The nature and quality of the interaction and the transparency and availability of information are important factors in the success of the regime. The various participants in the regime may make adjustments and compromises as required to maintain its viability (Keohane 1984, 51–54).

A food regime is characterized by a structure, rules, procedures, and norms and is animated by a driving ideology. It encompasses the interplay of all vested interests: social classes, lobbies, states, and capital. The interests of the most powerful players, who set the agenda and make the rules, will tend to prevail. The land, labor, and resource inputs of food production are distinct, as are food distribution and consumption. Sector interest groups such as transnational corporations, farmers, landholders, distributors, processors, retailers, policy makers, and consumers are all identifiable groups whose actions affect each other’s interests (McMichael 1992, 345–355). Harriet Friedmann defined a food regime as “the rule-governed structure of the production and consumption of food on a world scale”

(1993, 31). The regime sets the parameters, dimensions, and direction of the production, distribution, and consumption of food occurring within it. The principles and ideology of the food regime organize what, how, and where food is produced and consumed, and by whom. The regime forges a link between food, a fundamental human need, and hegemonic political and economic power. The food regime can thus be emblematic of the distribution of political and economic power worldwide. In a 1989 article, Friedmann and McMichael framed two clear food regimes: a colonial-settler regime (1870–1914) and a postwar food regime (1947–1970). McMichael subsequently identified a third food regime commencing in the 1980s that marked the beginning of corporate-led agriculture severely compromising the role of the state (2005, 277).

Regime formation is apparent in the European and North American colonization of the Pacific Islands and has culminated in their integration into successive global food regimes.

### *Colonial-Settler Food Regime*

From the earliest time, European economic engagement with the Pacific was founded on extractive and exploitative development. Plantation agriculture, initiated in the late nineteenth century, was based on subsidized resources and labor and access to European markets. The colonial food regime converted several of the Pacific Islands into agricultural commodity exporters. Fiji from 1874 to 1939 was a representative example: it was transformed from a self-sufficient tribal society into an export-oriented economy based on the production of sugar and copra for world markets. Most of Fiji's sugar export income from 1882 to 1939 flowed to the dominant Colonial Sugar Refining Company. The income generated was often either repatriated overseas as profits or spent on imports. Income was also unequally distributed, with little trickling down to the general population or to the laborers who toiled to produce it. The sugar company opposed agricultural diversification, instead encouraging specialization in sugar production by offering low-rent land, low-interest finance, fertilizer at cost, and capital equipment below cost (Knapman 1985, 72). Similarly, copra was a major export crop for Sāmoa, Vanuatu, and several of the other islands. It commanded high prices on the world market at the time (1900–1914), and plantation economies were thus imposed on the colonized countries to feed the markets of empire (Firth 2000, 183–184).

In this era, patterns of resource allocation, production, and distribution of food were dictated by requirements of the centers in Europe. Land

and labor, which had traditionally been communal, became commodities (Campbell 2003, 194). The link between food production appropriate for local and domestic needs and peoples' traditional ties to the land was severed. This, feeding into a commercially driven food regime, disconnected food production from local needs and priorities: it was reoriented toward export, resulting in a net flow of food from the South to the North.

An important theme of this era in the Pacific was "cooperative imperialism." Though expansionist rivals, the European powers restrained cut-throat competition among themselves. This suggests that regime formation was occurring in which France, Britain, and Germany collaborated, compromised, and agreed to a framework of rules regulating their behavior in the interest of stability and continuity. Britain and Germany, for example, signed a convention in 1886 defining and respecting each other's spheres of interest in the western Pacific (Campbell 2003, 178–179). The convention demarcated their spheres of influence for the entire Pacific Islands region, with the exception of Sāmoa.

Expansionist foreign commercial and capital interests melded with imperial strategies to target the Pacific Islands and reconfigure them to suit foreign interests. The formation of this regime was a commercially driven process marked by labor migration, the alienation and acquisition of land, and the production of bulk cash crops such as copra and sugarcane for world markets. In Polynesia, commercial opportunities grew with the settler population. Settlers increasingly sought and obtained unitary governments and frameworks of law, including unequal treaties, to protect and increase their property and wealth (Campbell 2003, 99). In Fiji, settlers and the European powers pursued order and stability for landowners by keeping accurate records of transactions (Campbell 2003, 109). The British colonization of Fiji altered the customary land-tenure system in the islands, introducing a system of indirect rule wherein the indigenous land-tenure culture was preserved while at the same time linking it to a centralized colonial administration. The legacy of this dual "Western" and "traditional" system of land tenure persists in Fiji to this day (Rakai and others, 1995, 251–254).

Tonga was the only Polynesian kingdom that remained independent of European rule. Constitutional reforms in 1862 granted common people ownership rights to their land and labor and forbade sales of land to foreigners (Campbell 2003, 102–103). In 1869, the king of Tonga borrowed money from the Godeffroy Company of Hamburg. In return, the Tongan government collected tax revenues in the form of copra, which was then

turned over to Godeffroy for export. The Wesleyan Methodist Church established a similar arrangement: Godeffroy loaned money to Tongans for church contributions, and the debts were eventually repaid with copra or expropriated land (van der Grijp 2010, 307). Tonga also signed a treaty of friendship with the German Empire on 1 November 1876 (van der Grijp 2010, 306), allowing Germany access to the Tongan harbor at Vava'u in exchange for recognition of Tonga's nationhood (Campbell 1990, 89). Using debt as an instrument, the Godeffroy Company accumulated significant landholdings and attained a virtual monopoly of the Tongan copra trade.

There were some positive developmental side effects of this commercial regime in the Pacific Islands, most notably in export production and trade-related infrastructure and institutions. In Fiji, the British established accounting and auditing systems to authenticate and monitor commercial activity (Davie 2000, 341–346), which they also did in Solomon Islands (Hauriasi and Davey 2009, 234). The Americans created a central marketing point for copra in Sāmoa (Campbell 2003, 225). In Fiji, export expansion increased government revenue, developed infrastructure and institutions, raised per capita output growth, and created wealth for capitalists, a modicum of which did trickle down to Fijians. Nonetheless, aside from sugar, copra, butter, soap, and biscuit production, manufacturing was not developed (Knapman 1984, 79). The development that did occur was narrowly focused on commodity production and extraction for export and colonial-settler and imperial interests.

### *The Postwar Food Regime*

The second global or postwar food regime was characterized by state intervention and influence in agriculture, both in the developed and developing world. Policy tools such as subsidies, quotas, and price supports became accepted practice, as did the role of the private corporate sector in public policy and agricultural research. Government policies supporting the agriculture sector in countries of the North resulted in vast surpluses of food commodities such as wheat, corn, and soya. The postwar food regime was characterized by a reversal of the net flow of food seen in the first regime; it now began to flow from North to South (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 110).

In the Pacific, the second food regime reinforced and perpetuated a key element of the first, emphasizing export over local needs. Plantation agriculture continued to dominate, with countries producing a narrow range

of products, often in competition for the same small export markets: citrus fruit from the Cook Islands; timber from Solomon Islands; and timber, coffee, and cocoa from Papua New Guinea. Traditional subsistence economics became less viable with less available land and, in some countries, depleted soil fertility. Island governments encouraged cash cropping and plantation agriculture for quick returns. Economic growth and development for the Pacific Islands was believed to require economic planning, which often took the form of five-year plans based on the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank (Campbell 2003, 334–336).

Agriculture in some Pacific Islands tended to stagnate in the postwar period. For example, in Solomon Islands, infrastructure was ravaged by the war, and the copra industry was brought to a standstill. In 1940, the Colonial Development Welfare Act was instituted, allowing project grants that were difficult to implement due to shortages of trained workers, shipping, and supplies (Bennett 1987, 304). The British Ministry of Food continued to purchase all Solomon Islands copra at an agreed annual price, but production was very low at only 494 tons in 1947. Commonwealth Development and Welfare projects included rice and cocoa research. The British government's first development plan, from 1955 to 1960, used funds from import and export duties for grants-in-aid that included surveys and research on natural resources and agriculture. Plantation agriculture was encouraged, with the Commonwealth Development Corporation conducting field trials of rice, soybeans, and oil palms (Bennett 1987, 314–315).

The focus on large-scale agriculture came at a cost to rural development. Government bias toward corporate plantation agriculture that prioritized exports, quick returns, and profits became evident, as did its relative disregard for rural farmers and small farms. As Judith Bennett noted (1987, 334), the Solomon Islands government did not introduce a second staple village crop in the twenty years before independence. Although it encouraged rice growing in the villages, it later abandoned the projects and pursued quicker, more cost-efficient returns from foreign corporate farming in Guadalcanal.

The 1970s in most Pacific Islands brought increased public-sector planning and public spending financed largely by foreign aid, which made up one-third to two-thirds of government budgets. This persisted into the 1980s, when foreign aid comprised a third of Papua New Guinea's budget and a fifth of Western Sāmoa's even after twenty years of independence.

Most Pacific Island countries also had an unfavorable balance of trade: Western Sāmoa's imports were four times the value of exports, Vanuatu's imports two and a half times its exports, and Tonga's imports five times its exports (Campbell 2003, 335). The net effect was to superficially increase economic activity, with little deeper development to make the Pacific Islands self-supporting.

Development aid strategy also shifted from grants and budgetary support to project aid, with the emphasis on increasing production. Historical plantation states increasingly specialized in a few crops such as sugar and copra that attracted public expenditure, whereas staple food crops were neglected. Such conditions contributed to a decline in subsistence agricultural production, which along with changing tastes and ready availability of food imports facilitated "food dependency" in some Pacific Islands, where food and beverage imports to feed local demand are disproportionately high (Connell 1991, 256). A study published in 1983 on changes in food habits over the previous twenty-five years in Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea, found that while protein and energy intake had increased over the period, so had dependency on imports. Subsistence agriculture seemed to be declining even as cash incomes rose and food preferences changed (Harvey and Heywood 1983, 34–35). As of 2008, Pacific countries such as Kiribati, Sāmoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, and Palau were heavily dependent on food imports (Parks and Abbott 2009, 17).

The second food regime reiterated the trade linkages of the first, colonial food regime. Trading relationships reflected historical and political links among countries (Bureau and others 2006, 230). These took the form of trade agreements, such as the first Lomé Convention in 1975, which granted preferential market access to Europe for certain African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries by their former colonizers. Successive conventions gave ACP countries preferential market access to the European Community, with industrial goods being duty free and quota free, and agricultural products such as sugar, beef, veal, rum, and bananas being covered by special protocols, in some cases with price guarantees. In practice, free access to the European Community market was curtailed by rigorous rules-of-origin requirements (Nilsson 2002, 442; Firth 2007, 115).

The preferential access enabled by the sugar protocol of Lomé was crucial to Fiji: in an average year it would provide a market for 30–40 percent of the crop (Dearden 2008, 208), and Fiji held one of the five largest quotas (Firth 2007, 116). But aside from Fiji, other Pacific Island countries did not have the capacity to avail themselves of the market access afforded by

the Lomé agreements. In addition to consolidating historic political and trade relationships, the sugar protocol was annexed to the convention at a time in the 1970s when there was a worldwide shortage of sugar, which gave exporters a temporarily strong bargaining position (Firth 2007, 116). The European Community also gained through Lomé, securing a stable source of a commodity then in short supply.

While the second, postwar food regime reinforced the patterns of the colonial-settler regime, some PICs withstood the tide of history and retained or regained some autonomy over their own lands. When Vanuatu achieved independence in 1980, article 71 of its new constitution affirmed that all land in the republic belonged to its indigenous custom owners and their descendants, thereby nullifying the right of foreigners to own land there (Van Trease 1987). This action swiftly restored the rules of custom ownership as the juridical basis of landownership in Vanuatu, as it abolished the concept of freehold imposed by the imperial powers (Farran 2010). In Solomon Islands, a sympathetic British colonial administration in the 1920s–1940s allowed alienated land to be returned to native owners after adjudication. From the 1940s to the 1970s, a concerted system of land registration was introduced that automatically converted freehold titles held by foreigners into seventy-five-year leases, conditional on the foreigners developing the land (Tagini 2001).

Though some Pacific Islands may have been little more than vassal states locked into plantation or extractive economies as the second food regime drew to a close, this did not have to be the case for all. The choices of PIC governments in shaping their development, trade, and food policies, though limited, did exist in the postwar food regime. The international trade regime accommodated the role of governments in markets, enabling preferential trade agreements that attempted to work with the resource capabilities of Pacific countries.

### *The Corporate Food Regime*

The third global food regime is rooted in the conditions created during the second food regime. The exported surpluses of the North overwhelmed markets in the South, enabling the integration of corporate food supply chains into a system of world agriculture that gave corporate agribusiness enhanced access to arable land, labor, and markets in the Global South (McMichael 2005, 274). The new food regime arose through the deliberate and systematic dismantling of its predecessor, a process driven by an aggressive and expansionist neoliberal ethos of “free trade” promulgated

by large corporate agribusiness. As McMichael noted, the international trade rules set by the WTO reflect this stance, wherein national regulations to protect agriculture, the environment, society, and health are regarded as trade restrictive (2005, 283–284). WTO members must convert these national regulations into tariffs, which in turn must be reduced over time. This opened Southern agricultural economies to food imports while simultaneously eroding the traditional role of the state. With trade liberalization and the advent of global trading rules, structures that nurtured or protected the agricultural base of vulnerable countries of the South were razed: tariffs and price guarantees for farmers were abolished or sharply reduced and agricultural research and support services were decimated by the shift in priorities and development funding to the commercial export sector.

The corporate food regime comprises institutional components and key actors including the WTO; international finance and development institutions such as the World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; agri-food corporations such as Cargill, Monsanto, and Carrefour; and large private philanthropies such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 119). In the Pacific, the WTO accession packages and discourse are permeated with the neoliberal ideology and agenda, which is reinforced through the web of multilateral institutions acting in synchrony. McMichael has argued that food sovereignty as a concept is a reaction to neoliberalism and therefore is a strong feature of the corporate food regime (2004).

## FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

La Vía Campesina, the global peasant alliance comprising farmworkers, peasants, smallholder farmers, and indigenous people, developed the food sovereignty concept in the 1990s, with its advocacy at the 1996 World Food Summit sparking broader recognition. Its statement to the summit opened by emphasizing that any food policy discussion that ignores food producers, in particular its peasant membership, would “fail to eradicate poverty and hunger.” It further stated: “Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security” (La Vía Campesina 1996).

La Vía Campesina put forward food sovereignty as a strategic challenge

to food security as shaped by neoliberal globalization and the corporate food regime. Food sovereignty also targets power structures that legitimize elite control over agriculture (McMichael 2008, 217). A worldwide food sovereignty movement has since emerged, active at the local, national, and international levels. This includes La Vía Campesina and a diverse array of people's movements, civil society organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (Windfuhr and Jonsén 2005, xi).

Geographically, politically, and socially diverse groups are encouraged to articulate food sovereignty consistent with their own experience (Patel 2007). Participatory food sovereignty summits in Cuba (in 2002) and Nyéléni (in 2007) were formative in shaping a global food sovereignty agenda. The International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty, an international network now engaged with 800 organizations, has also facilitated the advocacy of smallholder farmworkers, farmers, and fisherfolk at the FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations) since 2000. La Vía Campesina continues to spearhead the movement and also emphasizes food sovereignty for the urban poor. Food sovereignty is increasingly mainstreamed, with national governments adopting food sovereignty policies and laws, and FAO and the UN special rapporteurs advocating food sovereignty principles imperative to realizing the right to food (Desmarais and others 2010, 7–8).

Despite the different definitions of food sovereignty that have been developed, Michael Windfuhr and Jennie Jonsén's literature review found most definitions to be consistent (2005). Most included the articulation of "rights" (encompassing legal rights and political goals), such as the right of smallholder farmers, landless people, and fisherfolk to access land, water, and seed; smallholder farmers' right to produce food; the human right to food; a country's right to protect itself from food dumping; and consumers' right to decide what food they consume. Other elements included prioritizing local agriculture to feed local people, linking agricultural prices to production costs, encouraging popular participation in agricultural policy decision making, and promoting women's rights and agroecology. Significantly, Jefferson Boyer noted an early shift in La Vía Campesina's focus from emphasizing a nation's right to decide food policy to stressing the rights of local communities and peoples, who may not be represented by the nation-state (2010, 330–333). While the Nyéléni conference emphasized that the food sovereignty principles work together, Rajeev Patel described participatory democracy as the core concept of food sovereignty (2007, 91).

Hannah Wittman's exploration of agrarian citizenship outlines a theoretical framework to coherently link food sovereignty's diverse claims (2009). For Wittman, agrarian citizenship represents a social contract that determines access to resources as well as class, town-country, consumer-producer, and gender relations. It is also a contract between society and nature, recognizing that nature can influence agriculture and responds when its needs are not met, for example, through changing weather. Wittman argued that this social-nature contract has been weakened by a historic process of "simplifying" agriculture through capitalization. This simplified view narrowly defines agriculture in economic terms and does not recognize agriculture's ecological, social, cultural, and political dimensions—and, importantly, its geographic place. Breaking the social-nature contract results in social inequities, ecological disaster, loss of culture, and other issues—a situation that food sovereignty movements seek to address.

#### FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE PACIFIC

The term "food sovereignty" is not commonly used in the Pacific. Yet some of the principles of food sovereignty are not only recognized but also deeply rooted in agricultural practices. The independence movements of the 1970s and 1980s emphasized a self-reliance philosophy. Land reform was a key political issue, as was reconciling state land structures with customary governance. Most land in the PICs is under communal title. In Fiji, Sāmoa, and Solomon Islands, the figure is as high as 90 percent; in Papua New Guinea it is 97 percent (Chand 2011). Food sovereignty is safeguarded through land tenure systems that include access to water sources and to the shores and sea that surround the land. There is recognition of a very strong social contract in agriculture and in caring for productive resources such as land and water. According to Joel Simo from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, the ni-Vanuatu are inseparable from their land. He has explained that land is "the web of life that holds together custom, culture, history and beliefs of each person in a community" (Simo 2005, 1).

Similarly, interviewees in Fiji stressed the importance of land for food security. Community groups and local enterprises emphasized the cultural, spiritual, and social roles for sharing knowledge and growing, sharing, and selling food within communities. This emphasis is consistent with Witt-

man's social-nature contract of "agrarian citizenship" (2009, 806–807). In Meten village in Vanuatu, communities who own land have access to coconut water, coconut meat, a large variety of bananas, pawpaw, and root crops such as cassava and taro. Women also plant tomatoes, different varieties of cucumber, sweet potatoes, and corn to sell in the local markets or roadside stalls. What is not sold is consumed at home or shared with villagers. Communities also have access to seafood. Women generally fish on the seashores of their customary land, whereas men engage in deep-sea fishing. Access to seashores is extremely important to ensure not just food security but also nutritional security. As long as most communities practice subsistence agriculture, they are food secure in many parts of the Pacific. However, as discussed in the following section, this is now beginning to change. According to Clare Slatter, an academic based in Suva, customary ownership of land is the one thing that stands between people of the Pacific Islands and hunger. Without land, people will be impoverished and totally dispossessed and will lose sovereignty over food (Slatter, pers comm, Feb 2011). Yet, under the corporate food regime, customary ownership of land also stands in the way of economic growth and development.

The term "food sovereignty" is not recognized under the dominant ideology of the corporate food regime (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 115–117). The term "food security" is used instead. This term emerged in response to the 1972–1973 world food crises, first appearing internationally in the report of the 1974 World Food Conference (United Nations 1975). The postwar period emphasized state intervention to develop industrial agriculture and markets and to distribute food aid. It framed agriculture as central to economic development, rejecting peasant agriculture as backward (Fairbairn 2011, 21). The late 1970s and 1980s marked a shift in food security definitions toward individual access, rather than state-level availability (Fairbairn 2011, 24). The World Bank's definition reflects this, describing food security as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life" (1986, 69). This definitional shift reflected a shift to a corporate food regime, which features powerful corporate agribusiness, neoliberal discourse and ideology, an emphasis on free markets, and a loss of centrality for the nation-state (Fairbairn 2011, 24–26). In the Pacific, the neoliberal model is slowly being entrenched through the WTO and now through free-trade agreements such as the proposed PACER Plus and the Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement.

## FREE TRADE POLICIES UNDER THE CORPORATE FOOD REGIME AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Given the sociocultural nature of agriculture in the Pacific, in this section we use a food sovereignty framework to explore how trade agreements under the corporate food regime are affecting the Pacific. We examine three key themes that emerged from the interview data: (a) prioritizing local agriculture to feed local people; (b) the right of smallholder farmers and fisherfolk to productive resources such as land, water, and seed; and (c) popular participation in agricultural policies.

### *Prioritizing Local Agriculture to Feed Local People*

Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia face distinctive food security challenges. Within these regions and individual countries, there are issues of undernutrition, overnutrition, and malnutrition. All these issues require strong state-level intervention, which is being undermined by free trade policies. Under these agreements, the PICs are constrained in terms of pursuing policies to assist local agriculture.

Joanne Wallis has given an account of Tonga's accession to the WTO that is illustrative of the experience of other PICs emerging from social traditions and models of economic development that may not be compatible with the neoliberal orthodoxy of the WTO (2010). Tonga sought WTO membership at the instigation of its developmental partners and began the process in 1996. The small island nation with a population of just over 100,000 people was pressured to make numerous costly concessions that in some cases exceed those of comparable "least developed countries" and even those of developed countries. Tonga agreed to bind all tariffs at 20 percent. Tonga is therefore not able to protect its agricultural sector through the use of tariffs and would risk a dispute with another WTO trading partner if it decided to increase a given tariff line. Tonga's tariffs on agricultural goods are much lower than those applied by developed countries for some products. For example, Iceland applies a 442 percent tariff on lettuce and Norway a 386 percent tariff on nuts (ICTSD 2009, 7–8).

Under its accession package, Vanuatu is required to bind 100 percent of its agriculture import tariffs with further tariff cuts to follow that may go below the bound rate. Agricultural products will be bound at 46.3 percent (WTO 2011c). The resulting loss of tariff revenue for the government

and the Ministry of Agriculture will affect their ability to provide support through agricultural services and subsidies. Vanuatu will not be able to curtail food imports through the use of tariffs.

WTO members are periodically reviewed by the WTO to ensure compliance with WTO rules. According to the WTO, “surveillance of national trade policies is a fundamentally important activity” that runs throughout the work of the organization (WTO 2011b). As part of the review process, economists from the WTO secretariat produce a detailed report consisting of many chapters examining the trade policies, trade practices, and trade measures of a given country. The review process is used to bring the country into line in terms of its trade policies. While there are many who argue that the WTO surveillance program is quite weak and needs to be strengthened (Zahrnt 2009, 2), the trade policy review mechanism puts pressure on countries to comply with WTO rules and regulations. For example, Fiji’s 2009 trade policy review report by the WTO secretariat makes note of the Fijian Farm Assistance Scheme, which was introduced in 2001 to assist indigenous Fijians and provides farmers in different villages with free inputs ranging from planting material to chain saws and outboard motors. According to the report, such “farm input subsidies tend to distort markets, institutionalise unprofitable farming practices, and do not improve marketing initiatives” (WTO 2009, 73). Aseema Sinha argued that the purpose of surveillance is not enforcement but transparency. However, it does have the effect of ensuring compliance (Sinha 2007, 1191). Enforcement is ensured through the WTO dispute settlement system and through accession agreements, under which WTO members cannot independently design trade policies that could affect market-access opportunities for other WTO members.

Interviewees for this study raised food imports as a key issue in connection with the right to produce food. Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in dependence on imported food, with rice and bread replacing traditional staples in some countries (Coyne 2000, 1). This dependence has worsened under free-trade policies, and in countries like Vanuatu it will increase. According to the Chamber of Commerce in Vanuatu, what is urgently required to address food issues in the country is not free trade but local training for farmers, investment in food processing and storage facilities, and the creation of cooperatives to ensure that the interests of farmers are protected. In Fiji, interviewees noted the lack of investment in farmers’ training and skills. They stressed the urgency of reducing dependence on imported white rice and white wheat flour, which

have led to health problems in the PICs. Agricultural experts in Fiji believe that there are local solutions to local problems. For example, instead of depending on imported grains, the PIC governments should focus on producing flour from cassava and breadfruit, which are local foods. Local processing would create jobs, increase the nutritional value of foods, and be less susceptible to price increases when compared to imported rice and wheat. Under the corporate food regime, the emphasis is on food imports, liberalization of the market, and land reform. Agricultural extension services to support local farming and self-sufficiency are not on the list. In fact, many measures to protect local agriculture are not permitted under free-trade agreements.

The degree of reliance on imports as a percentage of food expenditure varies, from 36 percent in Kiribati to 84 percent in Palau (Parks and Abbott 2009, 17). This reliance has made the PICs vulnerable to volatile food prices, which in many countries has led to undernutrition and malnutrition among those who are landless and unable to grow their own food. In Fiji, farmers discussed the impacts of free-market policies on local food production, such as the closure of local dairy farms and farmers reducing rice production to only supply household needs. Urban populations in Fiji subsist on the cheapest imported food, such as white rice and noodles, which are low in nutrition. The urban poor have less access to land or less secure access and a weaker food-growing culture than rural areas. As more people are alienated from their land through free-trade policies, they are threatened with food insecurity, especially during times of food-price spikes.

Cheap food imports in the Pacific are leading to other problems related to poor health and nutrition. Polynesia is facing a major health crisis due to lifestyle diseases, based on access to sugary and fatty imported foods (Coyne 2000, 39–48). International trade policy has played heavily in national decisions on fatty meat imports. In 2007 Sāmoa introduced a ban on turkey tails due to health concerns (Thow and others 2010, 558), which was then withdrawn as part of its WTO accession package (WTO 2011a). Similarly, recommendations to Tonga's Ministry of Health to ban unhealthy imported meat such as mutton flaps were shelved, at least in part because of concerns that this could stymie Tonga's efforts to join the WTO. As a WTO member, Tonga would find it very difficult to put an import ban on such foods without risking a costly battle in the WTO, which requires trade measures imposed on health grounds to be the least trade restrictive. Even Fiji, which has managed to uphold its 2000 ban on

mutton flaps sales, faced a threat from New Zealand to take the case to the WTO. Also, the ban on sales was structured in such a way as to still allow imports of mutton flaps for food processing, with imports rising since 2004 (Thow and others 2010, 560).

Unlike other countries, Fiji applies excise duties on sugar, chocolate, instant noodles, and snack foods, and a 10 percent tax on soft drinks was introduced in 2006 (Maclellan 2010, 304). Under a PACER Plus free-trade agreement, these would need to be removed and other Pacific countries prevented from adopting them. Free-trade policies in the PICs directly affect the ability of governments to use trade measures to protect food security, health, and nutrition.

While the Pacific has rapidly increased food imports, it has not expanded agricultural exports. For example, small island countries such as Tuvalu and the Cook Islands rely largely on food imports from Australia and New Zealand but have almost no commodity exports to these countries (although they do have sizable exports to Asia) (Government of the Cook Islands 2012, 5, 7; PRISM 2010, 1; Government of Tuvalu 2008, 14, 17). Niche export markets that do exist to support the livelihoods of small-holder farmers are subject to the will of big players in global markets. The PICs lack the political sway to achieve a fair deal for their farmers. According to an agriculture expert we interviewed in Fiji, “We can get the production, but where do we sell it?” The expert noted that Australia and New Zealand want to increase trade, but they erect totally unreasonable trade barriers: “The taro is the best example of that. . . . No sign of any justice or justifications. You cannot have it both ways. You can’t be wanting to expand trade and you don’t give the Islands any access to your markets under the guise of quarantine. It is not quarantine, it is abusive quarantine.”

Another interviewee outlined how Europe’s and Australia’s kava bans have cost the smallholder-dominated industry over one billion dollars. Under the Agreement on Agriculture in its WTO accession agreement, Vanuatu was forced to discontinue its export subsidies program (Gay 2005, 8). Without assistance from governments and donor agencies, there is very little scope to develop a viable export sector.

### *Protecting the Right of Smallholder Farmers and Fisherfolk to Productive Resources*

Under global free trade, countries are to compete based on economies of scale and comparative advantage. As small, isolated states, the PICs face

challenges to participating in this model. Access to productive resources such as land and the seas are, in most countries, the basis of formal-sector economic development. As Nic Maclellan noted: “Pacific trade patterns are characterized by narrow exports, dominated by natural resources such as minerals, timber, agricultural products or the fisheries in island Exclusive Economic Zones” (2010, 295).

Dependence on extractive industries leaves countries vulnerable to the “resource curse” whereby resource-rich countries end up worse off as they face issues with corruption, wasted earnings, and challenges to developing the non-oil economy. For example, after almost one hundred years of phosphate mining, people in Nauru live with high unemployment, squandered revenues, and a devastated environment. Similarly there are enclave industries such as tourism in Vanuatu, with foreigners dominating the value chain that takes productive resources out of common use (Slatter 2006).

There are broader social costs and benefits: mining in Papua New Guinea has been well reported as supporting corrupt practices, environmental destruction, and land-rights violations (Human Rights Watch 2011). Major reforms to resource use and access have taken place with few, if any, safety nets and are therefore biased toward more powerful actors familiar with market-based land systems. Foreign direct investment (FDI) statistics do not assess how much profit stays in country; the depreciation of assets such as land, water, or fish stock due to these industries; and the opportunity cost of alternate uses or policies.

Melanesian land advocate John Salong has described this model of economic development as “asset liquidation,” which does not build long-term, sustainable economies. He has critiqued the inability to envision a Pacific-specific approach to globalization. Several others have suggested that “you cannot stop globalization but can redirect its sails” (Salong, pers comm, March 2011).

Tim Anderson highlighted the deeply flawed economies and disparities between theory and reality on foreign direct investment and land leases or sales (2010, 14–18). He compared the opportunity cost of FDI projects in Papua New Guinea to local livelihoods, noting that land value studies have typically underestimated or ignored the value of subsistence food production. Anderson also outlined specific examples of how economic modeling in favor of land-tenure reform has excluded the subsistence and local economy (2010, 17). The equivalent retail value of subsistence food production in Solomon Islands is roughly half the annual gross domestic

product, with that extending to isolated rural areas (Bourke and others 2006, 24).

Claire Slatter exposed gross undervaluation, misinformation, corruption, and intimidation in relation to land being used for tourism in Efate, Vanuatu's main island (2006, 7–10). Today, more than 90 percent of coastal land on Efate has been alienated from customary owners (AusAID 2007). Coastal land alienation also has an impact on local people's access to fishing, an important source of nutrition and livelihoods (Naupa and Simo 2008, 108; Slatter 2006, 8–10). For small Pacific atolls, fisheries play a critical role in the food system and the broader economy; however, they also face associated risks of overexploitation and increased exposure to price volatility.

Building value-adding opportunities is also challenging within a free-trade framework based on incentives for business rather than requirements of local communities. For example, the PNG government has offered considerable tax holidays to fish canneries such as RD Tuna (Hunt 2001, 11), although the basic wage provided by the company is well below informal-sector incomes (Anderson 2008, 68). By contrast, many countries have local content requirements for their fishing industries. Fishing can represent up to 79 percent of all exports, as occurred in 2007 in the Cook Islands (Gillett 2009, 20). This has supported the training of i-Kiribati and Tuvalu seafarers and sees 27 percent of fisheries worked by local boats. However, until recently Pacific Islands have recouped only a small percentage of the value of foreign companies' catch, representing a massive loss. Overfishing is also affecting local fisherfolk.

In Melanesia, changes to land laws and land tenure systems are in effect expropriating land by dissolving rights held in the customary system when bringing in new land laws and land lease processes. Donors and international institutions have pushed these changes through AusAID and World Bank programs as well as WTO accession agreements. They heavily emphasize the role of law in land governance without acknowledging that the poor and less powerful have less access to the courts or law-writing processes and are more vulnerable to any process allowing them to alienate their land due to distress sales, lack of access to independent information, and unfamiliarity with a market-based land system (Slatter 2006, 7–10; Anderson 2010, 15).

The Vanuatu WTO accession agreement raises serious implications for land use and tenure. While foreigners cannot own land outright, it is possible that under the services schedule, the country will not be able to limit

the amount of land foreigners can lease for agriculture, hunting, or forestry, with only specific exceptions permitted. Already, under current rules in Vanuatu, to reclaim the land at the end of a lease, landowners can be required to compensate the lessee for any improvements made by the latter on the land. The inequality in incomes between ni-Vanuatu and foreigners targeted for new housing developments means that the cost of this requirement is likely to be beyond most owners (Stefanova 2008, 2). In addition to the intergenerational land alienation arising from seventy-five-year leases (with one-off payments), this can lead to long-term, indefinite land alienation, with the term land “sales” often used to refer to leases (Slatter 2006, 7).

Free-trade policies also raise serious issues with regard to access to seed. WTO members must adhere to the TRIPS agreement of the WTO. The TRIPS agreement is today the most wide-ranging and far-reaching global agreement on intellectual property rights (Watal 2001, 2). Under the patents section of TRIPS, WTO members are obliged to extend private monopoly rights to plant varieties either through patents or through a *sui generis* (unique) system of plant breeders’ rights. While many developing countries are choosing to adopt a *sui generis* system, few of them have the legal and technical capacity to design a system that would protect the rights of farmers.

The TRIPS agreement requires a *sui generis* system to be effective. Many developing countries are being pressured to sign the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) agreement in order to meet their obligations under TRIPS. This agreement is the only treaty that regulates plant breeders’ rights at the international level. Forty of its 64 members joined UPOV after 1995 when the TRIPS agreement came into force (Ranjan 2009, 222). Over the years, UPOV has been greatly strengthened to safeguard the rights of commercial breeders at the expense of farmers’ rights. PICs that were original members of the WTO were not required to sign UPOV to meet their obligations under TRIPS. However, new members such as Vanuatu have been pressured to accede to UPOV 1991 as part of the WTO accession package. Under this treaty, farmers could be denied the right to the traditional practice of saving or exchanging seeds saved from previous harvests.

### *Popular Participation in Agricultural Policies*

Few farmers or fisherfolk are involved in national agriculture policy decisions, with little popular participation in decision making and education

on complex issues affecting agriculture, such as trade policy. Compared to other regions, in the Pacific there is little organizing between farmers or fisherfolk to influence policies or markets. There are few farmers' movements, lobby groups, or farmer-to-farmer networks. Overall, there is low community awareness of the implications of free-trade agreements. Most national or regional organizing that does occur focuses on export issues such as quarantine, copra, kava, and fair-trade certification (Consumer Council of Fiji 2007, 3).

Under the corporate food regime, the agri-food sector focuses on food (and related industries and services) as a commodity. It does not recognize the complex social, cultural, economic, and political interconnections that agriculture historically entails (McMichael 2005, 291). The main aim of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture is to "provide for substantial progressive reductions in agricultural support and protection" (WTO 1994, 43). There is no "space" for popular participation; in fact there is no need for it. Interviewees in Vanuatu revealed that, far from communities being consulted during the WTO accession negotiations, even elected members of Parliament were left out of the process. There had been no robust parliamentary debate on the issue. Three months before Vanuatu's accession agreement was signed, the majority of the parliamentarians heard about the implications of the agreement for the first time during a meeting organized by civil society groups.

There is a visible community presence in land debates, especially in Melanesia. However, explaining the complexity of WTO agreements and accession negotiations as well as the links between free-trade policies and food sovereignty is quite an onerous task. In Vanuatu, a "No to WTO" committee has been established by civil society and local business groups facilitated by VANGO, the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organizations. Church groups in particular have been vocal in their opposition to WTO accession and have been raising awareness about the issue among their congregations and the public at large. The Pacific Conference of Churches together with other church councils put out a very strong statement in September 2011, asserting that "consultation, participation and consent of our people are often not readily sought on issues that matter most to us, in particular, the representation of the concerns of our people, the way our economic life should be organized and managed, and how we should be good stewards of our lands and environment" (2011, 2).

There is little voice of smallholder or subsistence farmers in policy making. Several interviewees pointed out that agriculture policy is often deter-

mined by economists or by people living in urban centers with no farming experience. Some people raised issues such as communities' lack of access to independent information about the impacts of mining, for instance. Others contextualized the issue in terms of postcolonial experience, with people having been taught to wait for handouts or developments rather than to actively create opportunities.

The Fiji-based nongovernmental organization *Cava E Tiko E Ligamu* (CETEL) emphasizes livelihoods, rather than just income, from leasing. As CETEL network facilitators Sakiasi Veitogavi and Eremasi Lovodua explained, the organization encourages landowners to negotiate leases with first-sale preferences for local people's products. In small-scale pilot projects that have supported local people in selling food to hotels, CETEL has also used this business as an entry point to support local communities to improve nutrition, encourage local food production, address underlying social tensions, and revive local culture (Veitogavi and Lovodua, pers comm, Feb 2011).

## CONCLUSION

The first colonial-settler food regime saw expansionist foreign commercial and capitalist interests melding with imperialist strategies to reconfigure Pacific Islands as suppliers of food and raw materials to the colonial metropolises. While this period of the first food regime advocated a "free market," it was heavily ensconced in the workings of empire. The second, postwar food regime was characterized by a reversal of the net flow of food seen in the first regime; it now began to flow from the developed to the developing world. In many of the PICs, this regime created dependency on imported foods. This notwithstanding, governments still had some power to ensure that local food sovereignty was preserved through customary ownership of land, subsidies, and support for local agriculture. However, the third, corporate food regime has undermined the control of governments and communities over food. This was engineered through the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture and TRIPS agreements, WTO accession packages, and now free-trade agreements. In terms of food sovereignty, free-trade policies under the corporate food regime are undermining the right of Pacific Island countries and communities to grow local food and, importantly, the right of communities to productive resources, especially to land, water, and seed. Trade negotiations exclude not just Pacific Island communities but also elected government

officials. In the name of “free trade,” decisions are made in secret, and there is little public debate about whether these policies are suitable for some of the smallest and most geographically isolated countries in the world.

\* \* \*

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*Abstract*

Using food regime analysis, this paper explores how neoliberal agricultural policies are affecting food sovereignty in Pacific Island countries (PICs). The principles of food sovereignty are strongly rooted in Pacific Islands agricultural practices. However, under the corporate food regime, the locus of control for food security is shifting away from communities and the nation-state to the world market. It is argued that food sovereignty in the Pacific Islands is being undermined through membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), WTO accession agreements, and regional free-trade agreements. These agreements seek to reduce tariffs, curtail government support to local agriculture, and oblige PICs to extend private property protection to plants and seeds. Driven by commercial interests, trade agreements are also facilitating control of communal lands by the private sector, which has serious implications for food sovereignty.

KEYWORDS: food sovereignty, free-trade agreements, World Trade Organization, corporate food regime