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“IF THERE WASN’T FARMING, SOMEBODY WOULDN’T EAT”: SMALL SCALE
AGRICULTURE, COMMUNITY AUTONOMY, AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN
MISSISSIPPI

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by

IRENE VAN RIPER

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the historical context of small scale farming and grassroots social movements in Mississippi's history, and investigates the ways small farmers and community advocates are drawing upon their land-based heritage and local knowledge systems to create community-controlled food systems in dialogue with broader national and global conversations about sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty. Employing a multi-scalar method of analysis, the research studies issues from the perspective of individuals, communities, institutions, as well as national and transnational systems. The work draws from previous scholarship in environmental studies, agroecology, critical race studies, rural sociology, critical historiography, agrifood studies, and regional studies to further a person-centered critique of industrial agriculture. It uses the scalar model to connect Mississippi's history of small scale farming, black land loss, and grassroots social movements to global human rights struggles and the food sovereignty movement. The original research suggests that individuals with strong senses of place and commitments to community are integral to sustainability in local food systems. It forwards the conclusion that these individuals can be powerful agents of change on a global scale when they join together in solidarity and resistance to global institutional policies which systematically undermine local environments, local people, and local knowledge practices.

KEYWORDS

Local food systems, small scale agriculture, community advocacy, grassroots social movements, food sovereignty, sustainability

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family and friends in California and Mississippi. I am sincerely grateful for the unconditional love and guidance that my parents, Joanne Jacovides and John Scott Van Riper, have given me all along my journey. Mom, thank you for being my number one fan since day one. Dad, thank you for teaching me how to discern truth from fakery in all aspects of life and music. For Rebecca Moore Jernigan, whose encouragement is the reason I kept coming back to Mississippi and who welcomed me here in the first place. Thank you for continually inspiring me with your love of storytelling and of life in the south. For Rick Stevens, whose humor, wisdom, and faith motivated me to keep going when I thought I wanted to quit. Thank you for walking with me as my closest confidant throughout the past four years. For Sophia Trimboli, my soul sister. Thank you for always understanding my reasons for needing to undertake this work. Finally, for my spiritual and musical mentors who have helped me keep the fire burning in order to tell this story.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933
CNG	Certified Naturally Grown
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
FSC/LAF	Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LVC	La Via Campesina
MAC	Mississippi Association of Cooperatives
MACE	Mississippi Action for Community Education
MSAN	Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SAAFON	Southern African American Farmers Organic Network
SSAWG	Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
STFU	Southern Tenant Farmers Union
UM	University of Mississippi
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

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I would like to thank all of the research participants who graciously shared with me their stories and experiences for this project. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Catarina Passidomo Townes, for the hours of time she spent reading and commenting on drafts. I could not have asked for a more astute, articulate, and supportive advisor. I must also thank Dr. Kathryn McKee and Dr. Andy Harper who consistently provided me with encouraging and stimulating conversation throughout the past two years, and who kindly found time to read my final draft and offer thoughtful feedback during my defense.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Albert Nylander who advised me in an independent study course, provided much of the initial support for the project, and introduced me to a unique perspective with which to study the Mississippi Delta. Dr. John Green also assisted significantly in the beginning stages of the research. I am grateful for his willingness to introduce me to his theoretical frameworks on local food systems. I owe many thanks to Jonathan Jernigan of Patti Belle's Seafood, who catalyzed my involvement in Oxford, Mississippi farmers markets. Daniel Doyle of the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network gave me much useful information and advice throughout the research process both as a research participant and as an employer.

I am particularly grateful to the University of Mississippi's Graduate School, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, whose assistantships, research awards, and internship stipend provided me with the funding necessary to undertake my graduate studies as well as this thesis research.

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INTRODUCTION

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” – Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

Early in my research, I had the pleasure of talking with Rick Caldwell², a gentleman who works for the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives and provides technical assistance to low resource farmers. We had just spent the past two days listening to activists and scholars discussing the intersections of civil rights, race, and sustainability in the Mississippi Delta at the University of Mississippi Law Center’s Race and Sustainability Conference. He was one of two African American farmers invited to speak at the conference, and his words consistently caught my attention. In a conversation with him following the conference, I expressed concern about conducting research in the Delta. Earlier work in the region had left a sour taste in my mouth, but speakers at the Race and Sustainability Conference spoke of rekindling civil rights conversations in the discourse of sustainability. I was in safe company, and I felt comfortable expressing to Caldwell my doubts. Was I right to believe that racial microaggressions I had seen represented an ingrained social code of black deference to white supremacy built upon a culture of racial terror and violence? Was I right to believe that elite whites had attempted to drive blacks from the Delta by defunding their schools and denying them welfare at the same time that cotton production was mechanized and sharecroppers were evicted in the mid-20th century? How could I continue my research with the knowledge that this state is steeped in a history of violence and racism and that the memory of it still underlies every interaction between activists and elites in the region?

¹ King 2010: 47

² Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of all interview participants, except when otherwise noted.

Caldwell assured me that my misgivings were valid. The microaggressions in the past and present are very real and their purpose is to send an explicit message to communities who work towards social change and justice, he told me. This is cultural genocide, this is war, and black communities in the Delta have been fighting it for generations. “So what good can I do as an advocate for local food systems here?” I asked him. He went on to give me an example. You don’t always have to work from outside the box, he told me. If you’re trapped inside a box, you can work from the inside to redraw the lines, erase the edges, and make it a circle. This requires more planning and more skill, but in the end, the results will be more sustainable. “If something is worth doing, it will always be difficult,” he reminded me. Then he talked about his farm, his views on food sovereignty, his involvement in civil rights, and sustainability. He explained that the civil rights conversations that had surfaced in the 1960s were being brought up again in conversations about sustainability. The more that people who believe in unity and human rights come together in conversation, the stronger the undercurrent of energy in the movement will be. By connecting civil rights conversations to sustainability, he told me, the vision of human rights in Mississippi will be sustained, and the more internal power it will have.

It was out of this conversation that I gained an invaluable perspective on my work. Being paralyzed by the fear of outside threats was giving those institutions more power. It could only be through a commitment to engaging in the values of sustainability in my experiences, perceptions, and reflections that I would be successful in my work, I realized. A sustainable research method would have to fully recognize the challenges yet must emphasize the strengths of people and communities implicitly. And a strong personal belief in the autonomy of individuals and communities to sustain their own cultural and physical livelihoods would have to overshadow any fears of external threats. If I was to contribute to this local process of human

rights advocacy in a meaningful way, I realized that my work must similarly start within the box to begin redrawing some lines.

This project is motivated by an interest in identifying the challenges and opportunities in the development of Mississippi's local food systems. Primarily, I investigate small scale agriculture and local food systems advocacy work in North Mississippi and the Mississippi Delta. To a lesser extent, my research also explores food sovereignty conversations in South Mississippi. While the scope of the project situates farmers and community advocates within their statewide contexts, the intent of the research is not to present a comprehensive overview of Mississippi's local food systems. Instead, I aim to contextualize research participants within the state as a whole while emphasizing the unique, place-based experiences of each individual. My objective is to critically examine the ways that individuals and communities in these regions have historically and are presently navigating pathways to environmentally, culturally, and economically sustainable locally-controlled food systems. By grappling with the similarities and differences of the regions' approaches to building self-sustaining food systems, I seek to understand local and state relationships to national and transnational conversations about people's movements, small scale agriculture, and food sovereignty.

Overall, the intent of the research is to find out what local people and non-local people in partnership with locals are doing presently to grow local food systems and how they imagine their work as it relates to their own lives, communities, institutions, and broader social patterns in the state, nation, and world. The purpose of the project is to explain, through first-person narrative and ethnographic inquiry, how lessons from the past plus visions for the future are being employed to create environmentally, culturally, and economically healthy communities in the present. A broader goal of the research is to demonstrate that local actions and projects are

not isolated in their scope, but are dialogically engaged in national and global processes which both inform and are informed by the actions of local people.

My use of the term *food system* in this project draws from Steve Gliessman's explanation, who defines it as, "The interconnected meta-system of agroecosystems, their economic, social, cultural, and technological support systems, and systems of food distribution and consumption."³ My use of the term *local food system* does not delimit the meaning of 'local' to a strict definition, but it emphasizes the community-level and regional interactions of food production and consumption instead of national and global interactions.

The word *sustainability* has multiple and varied meanings, but for the purposes of this research, I define agricultural and cultural sustainability as processes that emerge as products of sustainable systems. According to its classical dictionary definition, the word 'sustainable' "pertain[s] to a system that maintains its own viability by using techniques that allow for continual reuse."⁴ When I use the term *sustainable agriculture movement*, I am not referring to this classical definition of 'sustainability.' Instead, I refer to the recent collectivization, nationalization, and consumerization of low-impact agriculture, commonly associated with the environmentalist movement and signified by the words 'organic,' 'green agriculture,' and 'natural food,' as characterized by Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) as well as Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) and USDA Organic certifications.

In addition, the frequently used terms *small scale agriculture* and *small scale farmer* are intended to represent a spectrum of low impact, sustainable, and regenerative farming practices. Though the terms evoke a sense of scale, it is not my intent to restrict use of the terms based on

³ Gliessman 2007: 371

⁴ www.dictionary.com

farm size. For the most part, research participants have self-identified as ‘small scale,’ and farm sizes represented in this project range from two acres to 400 acres. The terms also signify a farmer’s relationship to their local food system, where ‘small scale’ not only refers to farm size, but also to distribution area. Some farms represented in this project distribute their products as near as their front doors, and some distribute as far as New Orleans, Louisiana. Some farmers only sell to friends and neighbors, and some sell commercially to locally-owned grocery stores. Overall, the term ‘small scale agriculture’ describes the sense of community that localized systems produce, and it expresses the commitment to sustain the character of a local place through food.

Finally, the term *food sovereignty* will be expressed following La Via Campesina’s definition:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It develops a model of small scale sustainable production benefiting communities and their environment. It puts the aspirations, needs and livelihoods of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”⁵

Each of the following chapters is divided into four sections that each considers local food systems work from different scales of social life. The first section considers the ways in which individuals forge attachments to land and environments through their expressions of land use narratives and land ethics. The second section explores the ways in which community engagement and participation affects and inspires the work of individuals, with attention to issues of race and claims to place. The third section discusses the relationships that individuals and communities have with institutions, and it offers critiques of power inequalities that

⁵ www.viacampesina.org

institutions often inscribe through their work. The final section explores the role of national and transnational conversations within the context of local work, and it emphasizes the dialogic relationships of local concerns to broader issues and social movements.

Chapter one synthesizes the literature relevant to my research, and it emphasizes agroecology, rural sociology, critical race theory, state theory, and agrifood studies in its exploration of the four sections. Chapter two provides a brief history of agriculture and food systems in Mississippi, and it specifically focuses on moments in which small scale farmers and farm workers have joined in solidarity to resist the effects of institutional exploitation and neglect. Chapter three surveys the methods by which I conducted the research, and it summarizes key findings of the interviews and participant observation work. In chapter four, I present a discussion and analysis of the research in the context of the literature and history that supports it. In addition to grappling with each section individually, I also use this chapter to unify the scales of analysis by considering the interdependence of each part to the greater whole.

Each section considers the ways in which individuals and communities are forging pathways towards sustainability within their local food systems. In addition, the scalar method of analysis allows me to demonstrate that sustainability does not only emerge within discrete levels of social life in isolated interactions. The following research argues that it is only by considering the totality of processes involved in the interactions between individuals, communities, institutions, and transnational social movements that the emergence of whole-system sustainability can be thoroughly grasped and properly represented.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In this literature review, I compare, contrast, and synthesize the works of authors who have explored the topics and theories that inform my research project. Part one reviews literature about the relationships of individuals to land and environments, and it emphasizes agroecology's whole-system approach as a basis from which to consider other approaches. Using agroecology as a lens through which to view different scales of human activity, I broaden the scope of each following section, using different variations of the agroecology metaphor to show the interdependence of individual parts within a functioning whole system. Part two reviews literature relevant to the issue of participation and engagement within community settings, emphasizing rural sociology's sustainable livelihoods framework and critical race theory. Part three examines state theory and anchors it among other historical, anthropological, and journalistic critiques of the relationships between communities and institutions. Finally, part four considers literature that engages in conversations about radical food movements, agroecology, community, and institutions within a transnational context. This final section emphasizes the centrality of local places and people to transnational agricultural issues, and it brings the agroecological metaphor full circle by demonstrating the importance of local land and people to the healthy functioning of global environmental, social, political, and economic systems.

PART ONE: LAND USE NARRATIVES AND LAND ETHICS

The body of works that I have gathered for review in part one sit within the context of social science with an emphasis on agroecology, environmentalism, history, and cultural studies. They aim to locate human thinking and knowing within the context of landscape, and they all attempt to include human cultural experience within an ecosystem metaphor that includes all

biotic communities as central to the healthy functioning of the whole system. Steve Gliessman's agroecology textbook, *Agroecology: The Ecology of Sustainable Food Systems*, anchors this approach by articulating it in the language of natural science and social science.

Following over 300 pages of describing the physical-scientific approach to agroecology, Gliessman ends the book by explaining the cultural component of the discipline. According to him, "*a sustainable food system is one that recognizes the whole-systems nature of food, feed, and fiber production in balancing the multifaceted concerns of environmental soundness, social equity, and economic viability among all sectors of society, across all nations and generations.*"⁶

In this model, the social conditions necessary for sustainability are inseparable from the ecological conditions necessary for sustainability. Social conditions such as equitability, quality of life, satisfaction, efficiency, and cultural stability achieve balance with ecological conditions such as stability, resilience, efficiency, health, and permanence in a sustainable food system. In this model, Gliessman argues that the condition of sustainability is not simply a product of individual interactions between social and ecological components in a system, but instead is determined by the emergent qualities of their interaction as a whole.⁷

Central to the arguments of the other pieces is a conception of humans as parts of a greater system, which is made and remade in an ongoing process of balancing and re-centering. In this, many ecologists and environmentalists agree in their idea of the symbiosis of landscape and people; one cannot exist without the other, and indeed, each forms and reshapes the other. Geographer Carl Sauer first theorized the idea of cultural landscapes, arguing that a landscape is not simply a physical mass of earth, but an ongoing cultural process of negotiation between

⁶ Gliessman 2007: 345 (italics in original)

⁷ Gliessman 2007: 348

humans, their cultures, geomorphologic processes, and environmental processes. In this, humans themselves are geomorphologic agents who gradually transform natural landscapes into cultural landscapes with fundamentally changed meanings.⁸ Likewise, humans are products of those landscapes, and are subject to the processes and patterns of the natural world despite their relative control over them.

Adding to Sauer's perspective, early environmentalist Aldo Leopold argued that land is part of an ongoing dialogue with humans, and that humans have the responsibility to engage in that dialogue in order to keep the system in balance. In this, he feels that humans have an obligation to protect the land, "above those dictated by self-interest" and social values.⁹ While the two texts agree in their perspectives of interdependent parts within a whole, they diverge in their approach to reconciling the tensions inherent in the relationship of humans to land. Leopold asserts that humans should condition their actions based on the needs of the land, while Sauer avoids putting a value placement on the ethical responsibility of people to be stewards of land. Both Sauer's and Leopold's works provide a framework for assessing my research not just from a human perspective, but from a whole-systems perspective that emphasizes landscape and the interdependence of all parts within the whole.

Scholars of cultural studies add to this conversation by arguing for a more humanistic approach to land that frames people and their cultures as the primary determining factor of a healthy social and natural system. Political scientist Kwasi Densu adds a cultural argument to Gliessman's ecological perspective by considering African American farmers in relationship to a culturally relevant theory of agroecology and sustainable agriculture. By emphasizing the

⁸ Sauer 2009 (1931): 139

⁹ Leopold 1966: 245

spiritual land ethic and nature-based philosophies of African and African American communities, he decenters the scientific reductionism of agricultural thought in the United States, and re-centers on a land ethic based upon traditional agroecological principles of African agriculture. He argues that it will be impossible to solve the problems of African American land loss and rural poverty from a capitalist socioeconomic perspective. Instead, he considers the issues from sociocultural perspectives that decenter the alternative food and environmentalist movements from their long-held white identities and re-center them within African and African American identities.¹⁰

Anthropologists Teresa Mares and Devon Peña build off of Densu to further the argument towards cultural appropriateness within the alternative food movement in terms of food justice. Like Densu, Mares and Peña shift, decenter, and reframe the conversation of local food from a white and mainstream identity to a tradition deeply rooted in the knowledge systems of traditional communities and nonwhite people. They argue that traditional agricultural knowledge has consistently been threatened by colonialism, displacement, and environmental racism, and assert that a healthy food system cannot function without an attention to how these realities continue to impact our current food systems from all angles.¹¹ The authors of both pieces call for a shift from the food security and food access paradigm towards a more radical food sovereignty and autonomy framework that is more culturally appropriate for all people, especially for people of color and communities who do not subscribe to the value systems of the social majority.

For the purposes of my research, these works will be helpful for my discussion of individuals and their relationships to land. Instead of framing my discussion within a

¹⁰ Densu 2007: 93-5

¹¹ Mares and Peña 2011: 201

socioeconomic perspective, I specifically aim to frame my research around a holistic and agroecological model that accounts for cultural resiliency, biotic diversity, and the autonomy of individuals. Bringing along Gliessman's discussion of agroecology, Densu's work will allow me to explore cultural bases for definitions of sustainability which emphasize rural and culturally-appropriate knowledge systems. This framework is particularly meaningful in Mississippi, where minority and low-resource communities have long sustained land relationships independent of dominant socioeconomic institutions and value systems.

In addition, historian Mart Stewart's argument that southern plantations were sites of agroecological practice by both planters and slaves exemplifies the multiple and varied ways scholars have sought to find examples of humans and nature involved in conversations of resistance within sites of strict, nonorganic order. Likewise, it is useful to consider the metaphor of agroecology in relationship to a range of physical and cultural systems. My research similarly uses historical analysis to create linkages between the past and the present within an agroecological, or whole-systems approach. In addition, it draws from the strengths of each of these pieces in order to forward a perspective of land that is rooted in the agroecological approach and which emphasizes that the ability of people to sustain their communities' cultural knowledge systems is integral to the ongoing process of negotiation towards whole-system sustainability.

PART TWO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

This section's texts come from the University of Missouri-Columbia's school of rural sociology and out of the movements of critical legal studies and radical feminism.¹² Both

¹² Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 4

perspectives aim to situate people and communities within the contexts of their social and physical environments, with an attention to the personal experiences and political realities that effect their everyday lives. Anchoring my thinking in this section are works by Anna Kleiner and John Green¹³, who purport a bottom-up, whole-systems, and participatory approach to rural community development. Additionally, critical race theory (CRT) grounds my thinking that scholarship and activism are not mutually exclusive projects, and it guides my person-centered approach to description and analysis.

Works from the school of rural sociology discuss methodological frameworks including the livelihoods and cultural capitals approaches, which further a whole-systems and participatory approach to issues of social inequality and community development. Central to their arguments are the ideas that distinct sets of power relationships in society both permit and limit positive life outcomes for poor and rural people, and especially for poor and rural people of color. In this, they also argue that solutions to challenges will result from diverse, participatory, and locally-controlled community development projects in combination with assistance from strategic partnerships with institutions such as universities and granting foundations.

The livelihoods framework analyzes the contexts and processes that communities employ in order to achieve well-being by emphasizing the historically open pathways (opportunities) and blocked pathways (challenges) that either help or hinder the well-being of individuals and communities.¹⁴ Livelihoods theorists also assert that people and communities employ strategies for achieving material and experiential security, which include constant redefinition of cultural and institutional relationships locally and regionally. This framework relates to Mares and Peña's

¹³ Kleiner and Green 2008; Green and Kleiner 2009; Green, Green, and Kleiner 2011; Green 2014

¹⁴ Green 2014: 437

concept of deep local knowledge in its assumption that people regularly assert their agency to determine their own life outcomes in culturally appropriate ways. The livelihoods framework assumes that communities experiencing challenges such as food insecurity and hunger are the most qualified people to address the issues, but it goes further to assert that institutional support from above can meet those working from the bottom up to catalyze change. Also part of the school of rural sociology is a framework for community development as defined by critical agrifood studies and social movements theory. This approach seeks to challenge and change current oppressive social power relationships by partnering with multiple organizations and institutions within a given place, with an emphasis on issues that affect low-resource farmers.

While these approaches aim to facilitate collaboration and solidarity across race, class, and gender lines, the theories in practice reflect a lack of consideration for the implicit power relationships that transpire between researchers and the people with whom they work. Therefore, while the strength of the livelihoods framework and community development theory lies in their dedication to social change through local empowerment and participation, they tend to lack a critical approach to the term ‘development.’ In this, the literature fails to consider its own proclivity to implicitly reinforce the structures of power that it attempts to dismantle. In other words, the weakness of the theories is that they do not embody the level playing field that grassroots social movements often seek to create, even though they cast themselves as being allies in social movements.¹⁵ Despite these weaknesses, these theories will be useful in my research as I take person- and community-centered approaches to analyzing the ways people use

¹⁵ Green and Kleiner 2009: 152

local ecological knowledge to build social capital and infrastructure in the midst of unequal power relationships, internal controversy, and external institutional barriers.

Also useful in the theory of rural sociology is the community/social capitals framework, which, like the livelihoods approach, emphasizes a systems-level perspective. Defining social, human, cultural, political, natural, financial, and built resources as capitals, these theorists begin with participatory, “people-centered” research that determines the capitals communities do have instead of considering the capitals they lack.¹⁶ This empowering approach is useful to both the researcher and research communities because it doesn’t assume that a bottom-up approach must be supplemented with a top-down approach in order to be effective. It implicitly recognizes the autonomy of communities within a whole system in which sustainability is achieved as a process of negotiation and interaction between all capitals.¹⁷ Following this, Flora and Flora have stressed the importance of *processes* that slowly lead to the condition of sustainability. Included in these processes are all the tensions and controversies that play out in communities as they negotiate towards sustainability in terms of diversity, mutual trust, and reciprocity.¹⁸ I use the community capitals framework as I analyze the community participation and engagement in Mississippi’s local food systems, and I consider both the tangible and intangible capitals that contribute to senses of community amongst producers and consumers.

In a complementary body of theory, critical race theorists aim to complicate traditional approaches to race and power by taking proactive roles in the processes of deconstructing and reconstructing social power relationships, which they argue currently benefit members of the social majority. In this, critical race theorists seek to uplift and amplify the voices of people of

¹⁶ See Gutierrez-Montez, et al. 2009: 111 for a definition of “people-centered” research.

¹⁷ Gutierrez-Montez, et al. 2009: 109

¹⁸ Flora and Flora 1996: 218-225

color so that law, scholarship, and society may be forced to confront engrained racism and consciously work to dismantle it. Also central to the aim of critical race theory is its reflexivity in which theory informs action and action informs theory. As a reaction to the slowing advancements of the Civil Rights movement in the mid-1970s, it became a mechanism for legal scholars and later, humanities scholars, to do both scholarship and activism at once.¹⁹

Central to the arguments of critical race theorists are the ideas that race is a social construction used by the social majority to serve specific purposes of racially-motivated disenfranchisement of social minorities, and that racism, while prolific in the lives of people of color, is so pervasive that it is difficult to address. Delgado and Stefancic summarize six basic tenets of CRT, which include the assumptions that racism serves whites materially and psychically, that different minorities are racialized for specific social purposes (differential racialization), that one person may identify with multiple and different identities at once (intersectionality), and that people of color have both the right and obligation to explain to white people the complexities of racism (voice-of-color thesis).²⁰ Based on these basic tenets, CRT's central aim is to provide communities of color with the language and tools by which they can articulate and voice their realities to the dominant majority, with the goal of shifting power away from those who currently wield it.

Although CRT only peripherally addresses rural identities and issues, the literature is nonetheless useful to me in thinking about a person-centered and action-oriented approach to analysis. CRT's revisionist approach, which reexamines American history from the perspective of people who were disenfranchised by processes of capitalism, is useful to my analysis of

¹⁹ Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 3-4

²⁰ Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 7-9

minority farmers in Mississippi. Similarly, intersectionality theory, as practiced by critical race theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins²¹, emphasizes the importance of individuals speaking for themselves, in their own voice and from within their own social contexts. A focus of intersectionality theory, perspectivism is “the insistence on examining how things look from the perspective of individual actors,” and is employed to avoid oversimplification of the human experience.²² As part of a whole-systems, or agroecological, approach, these theories guide my person-centered methods of research and analysis.

PART THREE: INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The body of works that I have gathered for review in part three come from a range of frameworks within the social sciences and include state theory, landscape analysis, agrifood studies, journalism, and historical analysis. The authors approach social institutions critically, and all aim to carve a rhetorical space within their disciplines that deconstructs systemic power imbalances and imagines more equitable futures for communities in relationship to those institutions. Anchoring my study of institutions is James Scott’s state theory, which he uses to survey the failings of the imperialistic and high-modernist state in its suppression of *metis*, or practical, local knowledge²³. All of the texts implicitly draw from the concepts of state theory to explain and analyze the disenfranchisement of minority groups or to contextualize the organizational structures of grassroots movements within greater institutional relationships.

²¹ Collins 2000

²² Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 58

²³ James Scott defines high-modernist ideology as “the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing

satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.” Scott 1998: 4-6

Central to the arguments of these texts is the idea that the knowledge systems of institutions and political systems are fundamentally incommensurable with the knowledge systems of local and non-institutionalized communities. Scott argues that the imperialistic tendencies of high-modernist social order systematically disenfranchise those people who exist outside of the bounds of planned and reductionist social order. Furthermore, he argues that rigid, high-modernist projects to create social order are flawed in that they attempt to erase *metis* yet are untenable without it. In this, he defends the necessity of *metis*, specifically within agriculture, which, along with social and natural diversity, remains resilient throughout the world.²⁴ This text responds to the conversations already discussed in parts one and two, and it adds the additional element of critical institutional analysis. It could, for example, easily be applied to critical race theory in that it argues that agribusiness fails to incorporate knowledge that falls outside its social paradigm. Using CRT, the argument deepens to incriminate the white supremacist project of agribusiness that historically has systematically disenfranchised African American farmers²⁵.

In agrifood studies, scholars similarly argue that the restructuring of the global agrifood system has streamlined agriculture to the point that it forces small-scale producers out of business, away from autonomy over their livelihoods, and into dependency that propagates poverty and unequal power relationships. In resistance to this pattern, rural sociologists Constance, et al., and Green and Kleiner argue that this sort of institutional power also encourages social movements and a search for alternatives. As the market withdraws further and

²⁴ Scott 1998: 7

²⁵ For an in-depth study of discrimination against African American farmers, see *Dispossession* by Pete Daniel (2013)

further away from the needs of society, they argue, producers who are pushed out of the market start to join together in movements for social protectionism.²⁶

Approaching the subject from a slightly different perspective, the work of historian Pete Daniel agrees with the previous texts and argues that the USDA and local governments intentionally and systematically disenfranchised African American farmers of their land in the early- to mid-20th century, notably at the same time that federal and local institutions were navigating demands to implement civil rights legislation. Exploring a deep history of the contradictory bureaucratic mechanisms of these institutions, he describes the racism and widespread suppression of local knowledge within the American agribusiness industry that failed to uphold democratic principles and destroyed livelihoods through inconsistent and racist policy enforcement.

Journalist Barry Estabrook follows in Daniel's footsteps by surveying modern cases of *de facto* slavery in Immokalee, Florida's tomato fields. He argues that south Florida is "ground zero for modern day slavery," due to corporate and governmental economic policies that reward elite institutions while disenfranchising the workers who make up the lowest rung on the global economic chain.²⁷ Daniel's historical analysis and Estabrook's journalistic inquiry will be useful to my historical context and analysis in that they use case studies to give life to the theoretical concepts that I've summarized. Also relevant to my analysis is James Cobb's *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, which employs critical institutional analysis to recount an alternative history of the Mississippi Delta. Though these texts do not explore globalization policies in depth, the conditions they describe are precursors to and direct results of the restructuring processes of

²⁶ Constance, et al. 2014: 26

²⁷ Estabrook 2012: xix

recent market transformations. In his description of the tomato industry, Estabrook introduces the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, opening up the conversation on institutions to the broader global conversation on food sovereignty, which I explore in the next section.

While state theory and agrifood studies use a theoretical approach to understand and describe the issues, the historical and journalistic approaches use case studies to describe the problem and offer alternatives. The less critical approach of environmental anthropologists Vaccaro and Norman uses case studies to describe the conflicts between institutions and communities, and it attempts to resolve the fieldwork-related tensions of researchers by putting forth methods through which scholars may understand different sides of a controversy and act as mediators. Central to their argument is the understanding that local knowledge is relevant and deserves equal, if not more, attention than official knowledge within the social sciences. Vaccaro and Norman's explanation of the incommensurability of different knowledge practices is especially useful to my analysis of power relationships within community organizations as I explore the relationships between local and non-local advocates.

All of these texts emphasize the importance of local, or practical knowledge, and their perspectives will aid my research in my argument for its legitimacy within local systems. Additionally, the body of work will aid my description of how the restructuring of the global agrifood system has affected people on the local level. Specifically, state theory's concept of *metis* will aid my analysis of the multiple and debated meanings of 'sustainability' and 'sustainable agriculture' within Mississippi's local food systems.

PART FOUR: NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

The selection of texts that I use in part four include the genres of historical analysis, regional studies, agrifood studies, as well as literature from the transnational food sovereignty movement. Though diverse in their perspectives of analysis, all aim to incite in the reader a global perspective of place that both appreciates diversity and locality while finding unity in the shared experiences of people across political and cultural borders. Anchoring my thinking for this section is Douglas Reichert Powell's concept of critical regionalism, which redefines region as an assemblage of shared traits, values, and patterns that are linked to landscapes across space and time, and which are always connected to global issues and conversations. All of the selected texts explicitly emphasize this sense of a locally grounded, yet globally connected identity in their arguments for solidarity amongst diversity. Indeed, the authors all further the ideas that interactions between people, while necessarily constrained by time and space, are ultimately not as bounded by them as they have been in past decades and centuries, and that lasting social change results from interactions between diverse local perspectives within shared value systems across spaces and times.

Theories from the disciplines of history and regional studies argue that regions, and specifically the southern region, have always been enmeshed in global networks. The historical perspective taken by Matthew Pratt Guterl in *American Mediterranean* discusses the transnational movements of southern planters in the age of Emancipation; he argues that by understanding the historical transnationalism of the south, we can better understand today's globalization as part of a historical social proclivity towards unchecked economic expansion at the expense of workers. This perspective rejects the notion of southern exceptionalism, and instead draws deep historical connections in explaining that antebellum southern planters were

never agrarian pastoralists, but instead occupied one of the top tiers of the world's elite ruling class. This is useful material for my analysis, because the social, political, and economic roles that planters filled in the 19th century are now filled by the politicians and CEOs that control agribusiness. Guterl describes the "continuous thread," that binds the past to the present, and he even considers that agricultural "labor regimes" in 20th century agribusiness mimicked or reproduced slavery.²⁸ While the scale has grown larger, Guterl agrees that the basic structures that produce inequality have remained the same through centuries. Guterl's insights inform my research by allowing me to consider globalization and social movements from a historical perspective while discussing alternatives to the cycles of power and oppression that have characterized world history thus far.

The critical regionalist perspective builds on Guterl's argument by calling for a redefinition of region based on the idea that places are connected through shared experience and sets of complex interactions. Powell's nuanced definition of place articulates that region is at once a "complex relationship among places," a strategic linking of places for purposes of representation, a social invention that envisions interrelationships, and a collection of places linked by factors such as politics, history, and culture.²⁹ Powell attempts to link local struggles and issues to larger systems, and he considers power relationships in explaining how the two ideas of place are connected through time and space. In this, he critiques scholars for applying parochial identities to 'underdeveloped' places without considering their autonomy and relationships with broader issues and other places. Likewise, he critiques scholars for applying

²⁸ Guterl 2008: 186-7

²⁹ Powell 2007: 61-5

sweeping assumptions about global or “other” places without considering their humanity or the inherent value of their knowledge systems.

Central to Powell’s argument is the idea that a study of places must consider both the place in its local context and in its broader context which includes attention to local and global intersections of history, culture, politics, and economics. This approach welcomes local variability and diversity, and it urges scholars to be critical of existing structures. Additionally, it asks us to challenge existing definitions of people and places, and encourages a sense of agency and autonomy by placing individuals in the forefront of the discussion. This text aids my analysis as I approach the research from a critical regionalist perspective that is grounded in the local yet looks beyond to draw linkages to global issues. This perspective also adds to the imperative to not reinforce the structures of power under critique.

While Guterl’s and Powell’s texts further an understanding of region based on historical and present relationships across space, the theories of agrifood scholars argue for alternatives to the world’s current agrifood system which would fundamentally restructure the future of food and agriculture. In their essay, Eric Holt-Giménez and Miguel Altieri summarize the history of agribusiness’s Green Revolution and assert that unification between progressive and radical offshoots of alternative food movements will be crucial for the longevity of the movement, which is currently being co-opted by neoliberal and reformist visions. Neoliberal approaches to food systems, they argue, are part of a corporate food regime which aims to commodify food economies for the benefit of agribusiness. They consider that the reformist approach is also part of the corporate food regime, and explain that it is attempting to catalyze high-modernist industrial development by employing food security discourses. The authors also divide alternative food movements into two trends with corresponding discourses. They argue that the

progressive trend aims to empower communities by invoking food justice discourses, while the radical trend claims self-empowerment and entitlement through food sovereignty discourses.³⁰

The authors call for unification among progressive and radical discourses, especially because progressive sentiments are easily swayed towards reformist goals. As a result of this tendency, the authors urge agroecologists and other progressives to align themselves with the food sovereignty movement and to forge strategic alliances that can challenge the global agrifood complex. These studies aid my analysis of food systems in a global context and further my study of the relationships of local organizations to transnational conversations of sustainability, local food systems, and food sovereignty. They are also useful for analyzing the multiple sides of Mississippi's alternative food system, which similarly includes reformist, progressive, and radical offshoots.

At the end of *Critical Regionalism*, Powell wonders, "what kind of work engages with national and global politics from a firmly emplaced perspective," while challenging people "to reconceive their understanding of the structure and dynamics of their own places' relationships to broader patterns of conflict and change, while respecting the political complexity, intellectual validity, and cultural generativity of the local scene?"³¹ While he doesn't present an answer to this question, the organization La Via Campesina (LVC), also known as the International Peasant's Movement, and their work in the transnational food sovereignty movement offers a firm response, both in ideology and action. LVC's radical orientation to alternative food movements also argues for a historical and global perspective of region in which communities find unity in the midst of different worldviews. However, the movement, led by peasants and

³⁰ Holt- Giménez and Altieri 2011: 321-2

³¹ Powell 2007: 178

small scale farmers from the global south and north, takes these perspectives further by demanding food sovereignty, the right of people to have control over all aspects of their food and fiber systems. It unifies the theories and perspectives that I've reviewed in all four sections by showing them in action, led by the very people who are regularly effected by the processes of globalization, and about whom the other pieces have been written. It challenges globalization from above by countering it with "globalization from below," proving that "a transnational movement of people defined by place," can succeed by finding "unity within diversity."³²

Central to the goals and demands of LVC and the food sovereignty movement is a deep skepticism of development models that are part of institutional structures, echoing Scott's thesis and Holt-Giménez and Altieri's argument. Additionally, it embraces a critical race perspective by arguing that people struggling to live in unjust social circumstances are the most qualified people to speak for themselves and direct the changes necessary to regain their autonomy. It also echoes the theories of rural sociology, as its members organize based on a bottom-up, participatory, and whole-systems model. Unlike rural sociology, though, its egalitarian organizational structure is a product of the knowledge practices of peasants; rural sociology demands top-down institutional support to legitimize their work. And finally, as an agricultural movement that bases its actions and value systems on peasant experiences and knowledge, the food sovereignty movement exemplifies the agroecological metaphor discussed in part one. LVC's work serves as an anchor to the entirety of my project as I level theory and research with a strong emphasis on the power of local people and local movements. By employing a historical perspective and the concept of food sovereignty, I link local actions to the transnational

³² Desmarais 2007: 114; 198; 28

experiences of rural people in my discussion of small scale agriculture and the food sovereignty movement in Mississippi.

CONCLUSION

In this review, I have summarized the arguments of four topics that ground my perspective of the research. From agroecology to rural sociology and critical race theory, to state theory and food sovereignty, all of the texts I've reviewed weave an agroecological metaphor through their prose. The theories purport such values as diversity, interdependence, resilience, cultural stability, and equitability. Furthermore, the final section brings the review full-circle as the texts encapsulate ideas from each preceding section and provide new direction to the work as a whole. It carries with it all the materials I have gathered, and it establishes progressive and radical approaches to issues that are grounded in local experiences yet are unified in their relevance to transnational conversations about small scale agriculture and local food systems.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore significant moments in the history of small scale agriculture and grassroots social movements in Mississippi. Part one explains that relationships of interdependence between land and humans in Mississippi inspired senses of place and the desire for land ownership. This section draws from the historical narratives of small scale farmers and farm workers to explain how the aspiration for land ownership continued to persist despite increasing institutional barriers. Part two explores the role of community organizations and grassroots social movements in resistance to dominant power structures that devalue local knowledge systems. Using examples of locally-initiated and non-locally-initiated projects, I show that Mississippi's history of cooperative farm projects set the precedent for advocacy partnerships in the state. Part three describes the systemic barriers that institutions have imposed on small farmers and farm workers, and it discusses the resistance of communities against the institutions. Drawing from examples of nonviolent direct actions and legal cases, I describe some of the successes that have resulted from peoples' resistance to institutional policy. Section four describes the role of Mississippi small scale farmers within international networks. Drawing connections between the historical struggles of peasants on local, national, and international levels, I locate Mississippi's agricultural history within a global network of resistance to the global agrifood complex.

PART ONE: LAND USE NARRATIVES AND LAND ETHICS

Historical interactions amongst land and humans in Mississippi produced systems of symbiotic interdependence that favored long-range understandings of sustainability, as well as systems of unchecked natural resource depletion, which favored short-term understandings of

human economic prosperity. In his environmental history of the Yazoo-Mississippi floodplain, a region commonly referred to as the Mississippi Delta, Mikko Saikku describes the two ecohistorical periods of Mississippi's history which account for the gradual shift in human-land relationships.³³ He argues that while the Native American populations practiced agriculture, their populations remained low and production practices allowed for the regeneration of the natural environment.³⁴ According to Saikku, the dominant human view of nature in this period regarded all species as equals with reciprocity between humans and nature.³⁵ The influx of European populations and industrial production models, on the other hand, began to dominate the cultural landscape in the 18th century and included a philosophy of passive nature that emphasized human domination.³⁶

Because of its bountiful natural resources, the economy of the region rapidly turned toward logging, flood control, agriculture, and railways. During the transformation from Native American, regenerative land use, to European, industrial land use, the cultural landscape was further transformed by enslaved African communities within settlements and plantations. In many counties throughout the state, Africans were the majority of the population by the 1850s, and despite their enslavement, communities carved out spaces of autonomy. In addition to harvesting wild game and plants, slaves also planted gardens using methods that incorporated African, Native American, and European nature-based spiritual beliefs in the New World setting.³⁷ Following the Civil War, many former slaves and poor whites embraced the promise of

³³ Saikku 2005: 247

³⁴ Saikku 2005: 62-64

³⁵ Saikku 2005: 61, 250 (*Table 5*)

³⁶ Saikku 2005: 251 (*Table 5*)

³⁷ Saikku 2005: 101-2

Jeffersonian agrarianism as they aspired for the sense of security and autonomy that they felt they could attain through land ownership.

In 1866, planter Joseph Davis sold two of his Warren County plantations to Benjamin Montgomery, a former slave, in the hope that the land would remain productive as a freedmen's colony.³⁸ In the decade-long existence of the plantations, Montgomery practiced an early cooperative farming model, noting that tenants could amass individual wealth by pooling their resources and working together for a shared profit. Additionally, Montgomery incorporated ecological production practices into his work, theorizing that the protection of bird habitats could help in the reduction of insects. The failure of the farms in the 1870s due to tenants' search for their own land mimicked the trend amongst former slaves and poor whites throughout the state. Although government-driven disenfranchisement stole the hope of 'forty acres and a mule' from the majority of new small-scale landowners in Mississippi by the early decades of the 20th century, land ownership did become a reality for a number of African Americans and whites. As W.I. Hindman, an African American logger from Natchez explained to his boss in 1866, the promise of federally-allotted plots of land meant that, "this time ther[e] wil[l be] som[e] thing for the South to fight for."³⁹

The system of tenancy and sharecropping locked farm workers into dependency, and it stripped the senses of independence and freedom from former slaves who sought financial autonomy. However, narrative accounts of black farmers and farm workers in the mid-20th century express the persistent philosophies of land-human symbiosis, interdependence, and nature-based spirituality that the idea of land ownership evoked, despite its suppression. In North

³⁸ Saikku 2005: 112-5

³⁹ Saikku 2005: 115 (brackets in original)

Mississippi, African American tenants and landowners practiced a sustainable form of agriculture along with animal husbandry, and they developed a unique style of fife, drum, banjo, and fiddle music that ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax theorized thrived due to the many independent African American landowners who populated the hilly region,⁴⁰ presumably passed up by wealthier whites who favored the rich bottomland soils of the Delta. Out of their autonomy and relative isolation, communities in Tate and Panola Counties developed a sense of social collectivity, which was expressed in their diversified agricultural practices as well as their music. Lomax's writings describe the African-influenced spiritual elements and "true democracy"⁴¹ that found expression in the music and dances of late-summer, harvest-time fife and drum picnics in the counties. Arguably, the democracy of the musical community that Lomax witnessed proliferated due to its geographic isolation and in response to the absence of true democracy within the larger society.

When Lomax visited Panola County in 1959, 90 year-old retired farmer, craftsman, and musician Lucius Smith told him, "The mule'd make his livin' an mine, too. When they put the tractor in, they made away with the mule, but they done killed um out before that come—worked um to death."⁴² Smith recounted the interdependent relationship of men to their work stock, invoking both the autonomy and suffering of people and animals within the system before mechanization relieved them of much physical labor. However rapidly the region was shifting towards mechanized and industrial production, older farmers such as Smith recognized it as both a blessing and a curse, and in relationship to the viability of farming as a career, he told Lomax, "I keep tellin you, things in bad shape, things in bad shape, bad shape. It gets worse and worse.

⁴⁰ Barton 1997: track 2 notes

⁴² Lomax 1993: 336

⁴¹ Lomax 1993: 331

Young folks got it now.”⁴³ While mechanization relieved humans of physical labor, industrialization also threatened the cultural and economic autonomy of the tenants and small-landholders. Lomax, concerned for the survival of the community’s musical traditions, lamented, “with every step in ‘modernization,’ the specialist tended to replace and silence the collective.”⁴⁴

Prior to mechanization, black and white farmers often worked side-by-side and developed mutually supportive relationships, southern historian Pete Daniel argues.⁴⁵ Low-resource tenants and landowners tilled small plots of land because they didn’t have the means to rent or buy larger acreages, but also because the yeoman lifestyle provided them a sense of security and autonomy. Mechanization and industrial agricultural philosophies not only devalued this tradition of local, shared knowledge and community, but it also dismissed small farmers as “inept and unable to adjust to science and technology.”⁴⁶ The industrial philosophy of land use devalued the community-based values and land ethics of small scale farmers. Moreover, it wrongly assumed that all small farmers and farm workers were charitably freed from the bonds of subsistence farming by the promises of urban, industrial society. It failed to recognize the nature- and land-based heritage that created a sense of place and the desire for land ownership amongst small scale farmers and farm workers in Mississippi.

While tenancy and sharecropping dominated the agricultural workforce in the state, many farm workers continued to aspire towards land ownership. Small-scale land ownership in Mississippi has historically been difficult to attain, and once attained by African Americans or poor whites, farms often faced foreclosure due to market pressures on farmers to ‘get big or get out.’ On the other hand, the sense of place and security evoked by the hope of land ownership

⁴³ Lomax 1993: 336

⁴⁴ Lomax 1993: 357

⁴⁵ Daniel 2013: 5-10

⁴⁶ Daniel 2013: 7

persisted and thrived amongst some farmers and farm workers. After mechanization had swept the state and after he had gathered worldwide acclaim during his 30-year career, blues musician Chester Arthur Burnett (Howlin' Wolf), a former sharecropper from Aberdeen, Mississippi, told a reporter in 1974, "Farming's always been my business. I just play blues for fun."⁴⁷ He went on to describe his 65-acre farm on the Tennessee-Mississippi line, where he raised soybeans, corn, and cattle.

He explained to a group of fans before a concert, "I do everything the old way. Other farms collect corn with machines. I use mules. Can't pick corn with machines when it rains. It's alright to have a tractor in dry weather. When it's wet, you need a mule." Despite the governmental policies that disenfranchised black southerners of land and farm jobs in the 20th century and drove hundreds of thousands north for more reliable job opportunities, place-based philosophies that inspired senses of security, community, and financial autonomy persisted. Burnett, among other former sharecroppers and tenants from Mississippi, embraced these positive elements of their agricultural heritage as they purchased land and returned south when their financial circumstances improved after years of working in non-farm careers.

Throughout the decades between the advent of industry in Mississippi, the mechanization of agriculture, and the rise of global agribusiness, small-scale farmers have not inhabited the economically or socially dominant landscapes of the state. Indeed, oppressive institutional systems exploited poor populations and bound them in relationships of dependence to wealthy planters. However, the persistent desire of land ownership, documented in historical and musical scholarship, highlights the strong senses of place and desire for autonomy that have thrived

⁴⁷ Esposito 1974

amongst the state's poorest farm workers and landowners. Restricted by institutional racism, land-based philosophies that did persist grew out of a tradition of resistance. Feelings evoked by land ownership reinforce a sense of place and claim power over place both symbolically and materially. Though land ownership was not achieved by all Mississippians, the persistence of the desire represents a form of resistance that reclaims a symbol of oppression as a symbol of power, autonomy, and financial security.

PART TWO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The place-based, local knowledge systems of small-scale farmers have historically been discredited by institutions, yet they have persisted in spite of the dominant social and economic value systems in place in Mississippi. Community-based organizations and grassroots social movements in the state have similarly flowed under the surface of the dominant power structures and have offered a means of quiet resistance for many low-resource, disadvantaged, and progressive communities throughout the state's history. In the post-Reconstruction decades of the late 19th century, local planters resisted the inflow of federal funds that were allocated for land redistribution for ex-slaves, knowing that land ownership was central to the black community's definition of freedom.⁴⁸ Even so, many African American families strategically sought small rental properties on the forested hinterlands of white-owned Delta plantations, where they were afforded the benefits of the yeoman lifestyle with hunting and fishing opportunities, along with relative autonomy and isolation from their landlords.⁴⁹ The diverse landscape of the forest edges allowed communities of African Americans to negotiate pathways towards subsistence and independence within existing white power structures. These quiet acts

⁴⁸ Cobb 1992: 67

⁴⁹ Cobb 1992: 72

of resistance went largely unnoticed by whites, while the sense of community and collective action they incited persisted.

Even so, the economy of the Delta was rapidly shifting toward large-scale cotton production by the turn of the 20th century, and many small landholders and renters were forced to become tenants, sharecroppers, or to relocate to northern cities in response to social and political tactics of voter disenfranchisement, threats of violence, forced labor, and lack of social services in the rural, post-bellum plantation south.⁵⁰ When, in response to the Great Depression and international competition with the south's cotton economy, the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (AAA) began to pervade the Mississippi Delta's social and economic life, agricultural workers and small farmers were further sidelined by their representatives in local, state, and federal institutions.⁵¹ As acreage reduction programs and mechanization resulted in the demise of many more small farms as well as plummeting wages and the eviction of tenants and sharecroppers, African American farmers, low-resource white farmers, and philanthropic groups from the north began to organize around land, food, and workers' rights for the dispossessed.⁵² In the decades that followed, social movements in Mississippi which began in response to New Deal programs continued to manifest in the civil rights struggles of the mid-20th century and in farmer-led grassroots movements into the 21st century.

In 1934, a group of Christian Socialists founded the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union (STFU) in Arkansas, and by 1939 the organization had gained support amongst sharecroppers in Mississippi.⁵³ Led by intellectuals and philanthropists from northern and southern states, the organization advocated unionization and due payment of earnings for workers who had been

⁵⁰ Cobb 1992: 90-1; 115-17

⁵¹ Cobb 1992: 187-200

⁵² Smith 2009: 239-43

⁵³ Cobb 1992: 201

dispossessed by AAA policies.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, a sense of solidarity existed among local communities before the STFU came, but the attention that the group's non-local leaders generated resulted in a shift from planters' obsession with their "labor problem," and to the problem of the "outside agitators." A Delta Council office manager who eavesdropped on a 1942 STFU meeting in Clarksdale, for example, was focused less on the threat of African American insurgency than on the threat that the union organizers posed to the Delta economy when she listened to "one of the most abusive, vindictive, and profane denunciations of plantation agriculture and those interested in commercial agriculture that I have ever heard."⁵⁵

Clearly, the STFU understood the farm worker's desire for autonomy through land ownership and their hope of breaking out of the plantation economy and into a yeoman lifestyle. Organizers gained membership by appealing to these desires, and their short-lived presence in Mississippi facilitated discussions amongst biracial groups of dispossessed workers that further incited local resistance to oppressive power structures. However, it remained a quiet voice in the state, with only 135 members from Mississippi out of approximately 35,000 members regionally.⁵⁶ The STFU's support of local issues helped expose the nation to the social, economic, and political realities of the state, but despite the organization's socially progressive philosophies, its top-down approach to leadership meant that it never became a people's movement. Ultimately, their solutions to the issues of local workers were idealistic and unrealistic within the established social and economic order of the state at that time.

The history of the Delta and Providence Cooperative Farms in Bolivar and Holmes Counties illustrates this idealistic strategy to incite grassroots social movements within the

⁵⁴ Smith 2009: 240

⁵⁵ Cobb 1992: 201

⁵⁶ Smith 2009: 266

established socioeconomic order of the status quo from the top down. Formed in 1936 and 1939 as projects of the STFU, the Delta and Providence Cooperative Farms were experiments in cooperative farming, community building, racial integration, and agroecological production.⁵⁷ At their peak, the intentionally diverse farms supported twelve white and nineteen black families, and they raised cotton, alfalfa, poultry, hogs, beef, dairy, lumber, and garden produce. However, the political idealism that had incited the projects faltered when racial harmony amongst the farms' financial supporters and tenants rifted and it became clear that paternalism was at the root of the project.⁵⁸ The lack of democratic decision-making, the presence of non-local leadership, and the absence of pathways for tenant financial autonomy resulted in their eventual collapse. In a contradictory tension between values of philanthropic benevolence and democratic egalitarianism, the farms proved to be, according to Smith, "examples of the very institution [their founders] hated. The farms were paternalistic plantations worked by sharecroppers."⁵⁹

The tensions between visions of grassroots social movements by inspired leaders and the practical needs of the working populace has surfaced in Mississippi's history from both non-locally initiated and locally initiated projects. However, the social and economic realities of people have been more thoroughly and equitably addressed in instances where local group participation and leadership remained at the foundation of the work. The history of Sunflower County's Freedom Farm cooperative exemplifies this type of locally organized action toward democratic egalitarianism and community autonomy. Between 1968 and 1972, Freedom Farm operated as a poor people's agricultural cooperative, founded by Civil Rights movement activist Fannie Lou Hamer in response to the disappearance of agricultural jobs in the Delta. Hamer

⁵⁷ For an in-depth exploration, see *The Delta Cooperative Farm and the Death of a Vision* by Fred C. Smith (2009)

⁵⁸ Smith 2009: 267

⁵⁹ Smith 2009: 273

hoped to give back what sharecroppers had long been denied – economic and psychological freedom from dependence on local and federal paternalism. Hamer advocated for the autonomy of African American farmers, for food sovereignty, and for the reclamation of control over their own destinies. As Hamer famously stated, “We must buy land immediately, or our people will die forgotten.”⁶⁰

The Freedom Farm community practiced diversified agriculture and provided basic social services, including a “pig bank” that let families borrow a pregnant sow until it gave birth, and then keep the piglets to raise.⁶¹ Hamer’s vision was one of self-sustained community living, self-government, and collective leadership. This vision of democratic egalitarianism was radical in and of itself, and in a community of people who had been denied the experience of democracy for generations, the vision eventually collapsed due to a lack of management, participation, and funds. L.C. Dorsey, Hamer’s friend and founder of the Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, believed that the people who could benefit most from the farm defined freedom as liberation *from* agriculture, and therefore the idea of liberation *through* agriculture was unrealistic to them.⁶² Members of the farm community had little experience in leadership and accounting, having been denied that education in their lives working on plantations. Thus, Hamer’s vision and the worldview of her community was incompatible at that moment in time. However, unlike the Delta and Providence Farms, which were sustained by the visions of philanthropists, the Freedom Farm remained true to its founding principles, running its short yet powerful course on the visions and hopes of local people.

⁶⁰ Asch 2008: 256

⁶¹ Asch 2008: 257

⁶² Asch 2008: 259

Another locally-initiated action in the Delta further highlights the history of dispossessed and socially disadvantaged Mississippians' power to incite change through collective action. After the 1966 Poor People's Conference at the National Council of Churches' Delta Ministry in Greenville, forty displaced workers and ten civil rights workers began a sit-in at the abandoned Greenville Air Force Base, demanding access to job training, jobs, land, and food, as well as reparations for Washington's agricultural disenfranchisement and unjust welfare policies.⁶³ After being evicted from the site, the group purchased four hundred acres of land for community use and named it Freedom Village. In 1978, Mississippi Action for Community Education, a Greenville-based nonprofit established by African American Delta natives, hosted the first annual Mississippi Delta Blues Festival⁶⁴ at the then impoverished Freedom Village community, explaining that the site, "showed what was wrong with poverty and the programs designed to remedy poverty."⁶⁵ According to MACE,

"While millions of dollars are spent yearly on developing and preserving the various exponents of elite, indigenous American artists such as the Delta Blues masters, cannot find enough work to support themselves and their families. The Delta Blues Festival strikes at the heart of this problem by creating an economic mechanism to promote these artists and their work which is so valuable to us all."⁶⁶

Flowing out of a deep sense of history which tied post-Emancipation land dispossession to the birth of the blues and the incessant drive of people to reclaim rights to land and opportunities which they had been denied, MACE's project drew from local people's history, culture, and leadership. The event they created simultaneously gave testament to the agricultural values, land-based heritage, and musical culture of the state's disenfranchised communities while serving as an economic support system for the region.

⁶³ Cobb 1992: 268-71; Dittmer 1995: 364, 366

⁶⁵King 2011: 26

⁶⁴ Later renamed the Mississippi Delta Blues and Heritage Festival

⁶⁶King 2011: 26

Another locally-initiated agricultural and social movement which emerged out of a regional effort to preserve, sustain, and expand the landholdings of African Americans and other low-resource farmers found lasting success through its broad-based network of support at local, state, and regional levels. The farmer-led cooperative movement in Mississippi partially grew out of the nonprofit cooperative farm projects that philanthropists and landless workers had participated in during the civil rights movement. But the movement gained momentum when land-owning small farmers began organizing for-profit partnerships, drawing from the values of the civil rights movement and seeking full participation in the established system of the nation's agricultural economy. Early cooperatives founded in the mid-'60s include the North Bolivar County Farm Cooperative in Mound Bayou, Indian Springs Farmers Cooperative Association in Petal, Mileston Farmers Cooperative in Tchula,⁶⁷ and West Batesville Cooperative in Panola County.⁶⁸

Like earlier nonprofit cooperative farm projects, the for-profit cooperative model allowed low-resource farmers to share joint ownership and responsibility for sales. In a time when African American farmers earned markedly lower prices for their products than white farmers, membership in cooperative farming associations allowed them to compete in the marketplace with white farmers. By pooling resources, responsibilities, and profits, farmers in cooperatives were able to secure higher profits than they would ordinarily have been able to as individual entities. Twenty-four farm cooperatives in Mississippi are currently members of the state-wide

⁶⁷ Part of the Holmes County Movement, which began in 1942 when a New Deal program through the Farmers Security Administration allotted 9,000 acres to over one hundred African American farmers and allowed them independently own the land. By the 1960s, the number of African American

landowners in Holmes County had increased to nearly 800, and the farmers were instrumental in facilitating voter registration drives during the civil rights movement. See Cobb 1992: 196, 241, 246 and Daniel 2013: 76

⁶⁸ Daniel 2013: 76, 235, 104-5

organization, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (MAC), founded in 1972.⁶⁹ State-level leadership and participation is further organized within the regional umbrella of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF), established in 1967.

According to FSC/LAF's website, their central mission is "to develop cooperatives and credit unions as a means for people to enhance the quality of their lives and improve their communities; to save, protect and expand the landholdings of Black family farmers in the South; to develop, advocate and support public policies to benefit our membership of Black and other family farmers and low income rural communities."⁷⁰ From its beginning, the regional organization has supported its state and local members by attesting, in both language and action, to the necessity of community engagement from below as part of a whole-systems, action-oriented, and participatory approach to community advocacy.

"Throughout its history, the Federation has woven these themes together to create a strong community based movement of organizations seeped in struggle, tested by time, experienced in fighting exploitation and knowledgeable of the tactics, tools and techniques needed to help people build their own property and progress.

The Federation has maintained a membership of low income grassroots people, organized into cooperatives and credit unions to make quantitative and qualitative changes in their lives and communities."⁷¹

The small farmers' for-profit cooperative movement in Mississippi and throughout the south values local people by working with them in the contexts of their social and physical environments and realities, yet it provides people with the resources and autonomy to navigate their own pathways toward security through landownership and farming. In this, social capitals

⁶⁹ www.mississippiassociation.coop

⁷⁰ www.federationsoutherncoop.com

⁷¹ www.federationsoutherncoop.com

such as trust, diversity, and reciprocity complement the physical capitals, such as shared profits and physical infrastructure, that have emerged through the relationship between the two.

Today, FSC/LAF contains over 70 active member groups supporting over 20,000 families in ten southern states. The movement has had a quiet yet successful history compared to other projects of the civil rights movement, and just as the land ethics and nature-based philosophies of small-scale landowners has persisted despite external pressures, small scale landownership and the cooperative movement in Mississippi has persisted through the state's history of community organizations, collective action, and grassroots social movements. Today, both locally initiated and non-locally initiated community advocacy efforts and grassroots social movements have historical relationships to the civil rights movement, and many organizations bring young and non-southern perspectives to complement this history.

PART THREE: INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The systems of plantation agriculture and agribusiness have historically and systematically disenfranchised African American and other low-resource farmers of their land and economic opportunity to purchase land. However, the negative effects of the national and global agrifood complex have also incited resistance to these power structures in defense of the legitimacy of local knowledge practices and land-based value systems. Alternative histories of southern agriculture and society deconstruct systemic power imbalances in order to imagine more equitable futures for communities. Moreover, they tell the stories of both the suppression of local knowledge systems by institutions and of community resilience and resistance to those power structures.

The plantation agriculture and agrifood complex, functioning on local, state, national, and global levels, has historically forced small producers out of autonomy and into dependency and dispossession. During the period between 1920 and 1999, when at least 880,000 African American farmers in the United States were dispossessed of over 13 million acres of land,⁷² institutional policies on all levels interacted in contradictory bureaucratic processes that Pete Daniel's *Dispossession* argues were the intentional results of ingrained institutionalized racism. Beginning in 1933, the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act initiated the tradition of widespread federal support of agribusiness in the south. Daniel recounts how complex subsidy policies involving acreage reduction and tax policies that encouraged large farms to profit from losses made it nearly impossible for smaller farms to compete.⁷³ These federal policies worked independently of, though alongside, the policy decisions of local governments and had similar results of forcing African American and low-resource farmers and workers out of their land, their jobs, and their homes.

In Mississippi, local institutions reacted to federal policies designed to soften the blow of AAA on dispossessed workers by discouraging the inflow of industry and education in the trades to ex-sharecroppers. In 1955, three years after the Delta Council began to consider industrial development for job creation and improved public schools for African American education, they changed their position, stating that, "rural areas with a heavy concentration of Negroes at the present time may have few Negroes ten years from now."⁷⁴ Indeed, Cobb argues that the Delta elite attempted to force African Americans out of the region with various threats to their freedoms and lives, including a "Genocide Bill" that would have made it a felony to have a

⁷² Daniel 2013: 260

⁷⁴ Asch 2008: 130-1

⁷³ Daniel 2013: 11

second illegitimate child unless the individual submitted themselves to sterilization, a conspiracy to starve African Americans out of the Delta, and the reduction of welfare payments to those who attempted to vote.⁷⁵ Although local institutions often operated independently of the federal government, ingrained institutional racism on all levels continuously attempted to sideline small landholders and landless workers out of existence. The peoples' representatives in government offered few solutions and many obstacles, and by force and coercion they attempted to subdue millions of agricultural workers who had been made economically obsolete by industrial high-modernism and its visions of large-scale agribusiness.

By 1972, the USDA attempted to define small farms out of existence when they proposed the redefinition of the word "farm" from an operation selling at least \$50 in product per year to one that sold at least \$5,000 in product per year. Because over half of all American farms failed to meet that quota, including 46% of all African American farms, the change was not made official.⁷⁶ However, the USDA was winning their fight for agribusiness, and in the process they discredited the livelihoods and knowledge systems of thousands of small scale farmers who defined farming more as a way of life than as a business partnership with institutions. In an example of this restructuring process, the federal Farm Bill of 1965 allowed large farms profit from their excess acreage through subsidies that paid them to cut their production. Meanwhile, the workers forced off these jobs as a result of these policies were given no compensation from the government, and small farmers continued to be denied loans and other services necessary to compete within the system.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Cobb 1992: 266-7

⁷⁶ Daniel 2013: 244-5

⁷⁷ Asch 2008: 227-8

However, within this history of dispossession and disenfranchisement, moments of resistance have challenged institutions to meet the demands of grassroots movements. At the Greenville Air Force base strike of 1966, nearly one hundred displaced farm workers and civil rights workers demanded food, land, job training, and jobs for the dispossessed, and the group intended to stay put until they caught the attention of Washington.⁷⁸ Unita Blackwell, a spokesperson from Issaquena County and Civil Rights movement activist, told reporters that, “We, the poor people of Mississippi, is tired. We’re tired of it so we’re going to build for ourselves, because we don’t have a government that represents us.”⁷⁹ The vocal protesters caught President Johnson’s attention, and within a day, federal troops had surrounded the base, forcibly removing people from the site.

To persuade them to leave, Attorney General Katzenbach had assured the protesters that they would receive “surplus food distribution, crash employment, and as many poverty programs as we can fund.”⁸⁰ However, due to the dissenting voices of many federal and local officials, none of their requests were fulfilled except for donations of surplus food. Though the sit-in was not a victory in the short term, it sent the federal government the clear message that landless farm workers were angry about being ignored and were prepared demand representation from their government. Combined with other nonviolent direct actions during the civil rights era, the Air Force base sit-in helped establish the precedent that grassroots, local organizations could gain the attention of the federal government by holding them accountable for their lack of representation.

Even when significant civil rights gains were made in the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 for the region as whole, African American farmers and extension

⁷⁸ Dittmer 366-8; Cobb 1992: 269-71

⁷⁹ Cobb 1992: 270

⁸⁰ Dittmer 1995: 268

service agents in Mississippi and Alabama were notably excluded from the legislation's intended effects, and they experienced some of the harshest discrimination in the country's history as a result. Following the merging of the Federal Extension Service and the Negro Extension Service in 1964, black extension agents at Tuskegee University and Alcorn University were transferred to the formerly white-only college offices at Auburn University and Mississippi State University. In a display of total resistance to federal civil rights legislation and the principle of integration, white officials regularly gave African American agents office space but no work responsibilities, and Tuskegee records were destroyed and offices demolished.⁸¹ As African American agents were removed from positions of financial and personal autonomy to subjugation, it was clear that the merger didn't end segregation but instead made it worse. In the new spaces, black extension agents and the farmers they had been supporting were again sidelined by local reactionaries in response to federal legislation that had backfired on the very people it was intended to help.

Even so, individuals, grassroots organizations, and institutional-community partner organizations have continued to fight against the discriminatory policies, drawing from the precedents of resistance set by generations of non-majoritarian Mississippians. In an example from Alabama, Tuskegee extension agent Willie Strain filed a lawsuit in 1969 against the president of Auburn University for racial discrimination in the workplace. The Department of Justice sided with Strain and ruled that the university must enforce anti-discrimination policies. Though the case didn't end discrimination, it set precedents that people could reach the nerve centers of bureaucracies. According to Strain, "the suit of *Strain* helped black males, white women, black women, and white men that the system didn't like, but they had the qualifications."⁸² Since the New Deal, the federal government had regularly played the

⁸¹ Daniel 2013: 164-6, 201-3

⁸² Daniel 2013: 209

opportunist, passing legislation that, on the surface, helped both whites and blacks, but ultimately further polarized the two communities against each other. However, cases such as *Strain* also set the precedent that partnerships between local communities and the federal government could result in effective policy changes.

The *Pigford v Glickman* case also exemplifies this sort of relationship. After a series of cases beginning in the mid-1980s had begun to seek reparations for minority landowners who had been denied loans by the Farmers Home Administration, a federal judge ruled in 1999 that the USDA had indeed discriminated against minority farmers, denying them loans resulting in farm failure and redistribution of the land to wealthier farmers.⁸³ After nearly 500 farmers had filed complaints and pursued reparations from the USDA, President Obama announced a final \$1.25 billion settlement in 2010. Through the arduous and decades-long process of complaints, lawsuits, and rulings, the statement that, “the USDA is not above the law,”⁸⁴ finally rang true for a small percentage of the total population of African Americans who had been denied opportunities at land ownership since Emancipation.

Since the 1960s, many grassroots and community-institutional partnership organizations have worked to defend minority landowner rights and culture from a policy perspective. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund has operated since 1967 as a regional umbrella organization to statewide organizations including the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives and local farmer cooperatives. In addition, individuals whose work is grounded at the local level are similarly connected to broader networks of support. Ben Burkett, fourth generation farmer and member of the Indian Springs Farmers Cooperative Association in Petal,

⁸³ Daniel 2013: 259-60

⁸⁴ Daniel 2013: 260

has served as the director of MAC, as Mississippi state coordinator for FSC/LAF, is currently the president of the National Family Farm Coalition, and is also the director of the food sovereignty commission for La Via Campesina. Although stories such as Burkett's do not surface on the radar of major news outlets in Mississippi, the south, or the nation, the work that small scale farmers and small farmer advocates have done make an impact within the communities they serve and they join an international network of individuals, communities, and organizations that share similar histories and struggles.

Over the past century, significant gains have been made by people and organizations in defense of local knowledge systems, democratic principles, and opportunities toward land ownership for low-resource and historically disadvantaged farmers. But while isolated victories have made positive changes locally and nationally, the restructuring of the global agrifood complex in recent decades momentarily put local agriculture coalitions in retrograde as they were forced to reconsider their strategies within the global agricultural arena. As liberalized trade policies began to affect small producers and landless workers throughout the world, it became more difficult for local groups to resist and protest the changes. In response, agricultural communities and organizations began to forge strategic partnerships with other communities on regional, national, and global levels, creating diverse partnerships and meeting globalization from above with "globalization from below."⁸⁵

PART FOUR: NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

A deep historical understanding of Mississippians' land-based heritage, community-based farmer advocacy, and contradictory relationships with governing institutions is critical to

⁸⁵ Desmarais 2007: 114

begin grappling with the issues as they surface in the state today. In addition, a transnational perspective of place that binds local issues to national and global histories can demonstrate the power of unified yet diverse networks of rural people in their struggles for representation by institutions whose policies have historically attempted to render their lifestyles obsolete. As historians of national and world agricultural history have found, the U.S. south's plantation and agrifood complexes are part of an international proclivity toward modernist science and unchecked economic expansion at the expense of the working poor.⁸⁶ Likewise, local issues of the rural poor are bound, in their traditions of resistance and resilience, to rural communities across the world. Thus, land-based value systems, while necessarily diverse due to their place-based histories, are connected to transnational rural issues and conversations. As history proves, the interaction and unification of these diverse perspectives has the potential to incite social change on a global scale.

The globalization of the plantation and agrifood complexes means that not only do institutions have the opportunity to consolidate their power on a worldwide scale, but that the rural people who are affected by these systems also have the opportunity to unify in resistance to them on a global scale. As historians of globalization show, the scales on which power is exercised are larger today than they were in the past, although the structures that support them are similar, if not the same.⁸⁷ Carrying forward this understanding of historical continuity, stories of national and global nonmajoritarian rural resistance to agribusiness also show that locally grounded, yet globally conscious networks of resistance can effectively challenge “globalization from above” with “globalization from below.”⁸⁸ The following history summarizes the ways that

⁸⁶ See Cobb 1992, Scott 1998, and Guterl 2008 for in-depth explorations of this argument.

⁸⁷ Guterl 2008: 186-7

⁸⁸ Desmarais 2007: 114

the restructuring of the world's food system has played out on global and national levels, and it specifically gives attention to the roles that Mississippi individuals, communities, and institutions have played in facilitating national and transnational dialogues about small-scale agriculture, sustainable agriculture, food justice, and food sovereignty.

The gradual economic restructuring of the world's agrifood complex that began in the mid-20th century has had detrimental effects on the social, economic, and political lifeways of the world's small scale and low-resource farmers in a case that strikingly resembles the century-long struggle of poor farmers and farmworkers in the Mississippi Delta. In *Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*, Holt-Giménez and Patel argue, "The rise of food dependency and hunger in the global South is not the result of overpopulation, a conspiracy, or the 'invisible hand' of the market. [I]t is the result of the systematic destruction of Southern food systems through a series of economic development projects imposed by Northern institutions."⁸⁹ In Mississippi's history, local institutions inhibited the paths to land ownership amongst ex-slaves in the Reconstruction era, federal institutions passed New Deal legislation that evicted workers from plantations and rendered them economically obsolete, and Civil Rights legislation systematically disenfranchised black and low-resource farmers from their land in anticipation of the rise of agribusiness. Similarly, the global policies of financial and governmental institutions since the 1960s have rendered formerly food-secure and independent agricultural communities across the world voiceless and dependent on the very institutions that claimed to help them.

According to Holt-Giménez and Patel, the globalization of agriculture began in 1960 as a way for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to foster a favorable global

⁸⁹ Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009: 22

trade environment and implement development programs including food aid for “developing” nations.⁹⁰ But as grain surpluses and overproduction resulted in environmental, financial, and cultural degradation across the global south, government-initiated rural development projects continued to consolidate farmland in the hands of the wealthy and drive peasants from rural areas to urban centers. According to *Food Rebellions!*, the global industrialization of agriculture, “was less a campaign to feed the urban poor than a strategy to prevent the rural poor from seizing land to feed themselves,” and the text argues that the strategy was a “thinly veiled attempt to eliminate the ‘surplus’ peasantry” from the countryside.⁹¹ Just as mechanization and subsidization of agribusiness had resulted in the eviction and dispossession of Mississippi Delta farmers and farmers from the 1930s to the 1960s, Green Revolution policies similarly forced former agricultural workers to urban centers, where they were used to meet labor shortages in factories.

Along with the globalization of agribusiness, government-sponsored industrial development projects, food aid programs, the deregulation of international agricultural markets, and free-trade agreements further limited the self-sufficiency and food sovereignty of communities in the global south.⁹² These structural adjustment programs, headed by the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s and 1990s, forced surpluses of subsidized northern grain commodities into southern markets, where the poorer countries couldn’t compete as producers or engage as consumers in the northern market. While northern institutions provided the legal means for agribusiness to inundate southern rural economies, World Trade Organization-inspired free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 (NAFTA)

⁹⁰ Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009: 24, 26-27, 31, 36-37

⁹² Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009: 25, 37, 40-5

⁹¹ Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009: 31

further limited domestic control over agriculture. As NAFTA policies inundated the Mexican countryside with cheaper, imported corn, local small-scale producers could no longer compete.⁹³ In the decades that followed, the land-based heritage of peasants, cultural significance of maize-based agriculture, natural environments, and rural populations were decimated by policies that have failed to live up to their promises of development.

The “de-peasantization”⁹⁴ that occurred in Mississippi during the 1930s through the 1960s has many historical similarities to the dispossession of peasants in the world’s southern nations beginning in the 1960s. It is useful to note also that “underdeveloped” countries, as they have been labeled by industrialized nations, are not underdeveloped per se, but, from the perspective of modernist agribusiness, impediments to the gears of globalized agribusiness’s hyper-development engine. Framed as slow, backward, and primitive, “underdeveloped” countries and states, including Mississippi, have historically been systematically and specifically treated as passive objects from which to compare, contrast, and promote the promises of progress, modernism, and industry to the rest of the world. In Mississippi, rural farm workers have often been appropriated as objects by state and local institutions to demonstrate the parochialism and simplicity of rural lifeways and heritage to the nation at large.⁹⁵ However, the institutions responsible for the literature fail to connect histories of slavery, sharecropping, poverty, and dispossession to their stories about strong cultural traditions in the state. Similarly, attractive stories that tell of institutions ending world hunger are often facades covering the results of policies that have motivated corporate takeover of the countryside and dispossession of the world’s peasantry.

⁹³ Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009: 56-7

⁹⁴ Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009: 45

⁹⁵ See King’s (2011) critique of blues tourism in the Mississippi Delta in chapter 6, “Public Memory, Historical Amnesia, and the Shack Up Inn”

While the effects of policies in global agribusiness continue to disrupt the lifeways of the world's small scale and low-resource farmers, an increasing number of local people and communities are fighting back by working on solutions to global issues that manifest in local problems. Conversely, regional, national, and transnational partnerships have begun to challenge global agrifood policies and institutions directly. Since its inception in 1993, La Via Campesina has demonstrated, through direct nonviolent actions and forums, that the globalization of agriculture will not go unchallenged by the people who it most seriously affects. Among LVC's basic tenets are the views that people's movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) represent two fundamentally incommensurable perspectives on development, that agrarian reform should be based upon the needs of the world's peasants, that rural lifeways and cultural diversity are obviously worth fighting for, and that every nation has the right to produce and sustain its own food systems.⁹⁶ Out of these principles, the diverse international community of small scale farmers and farmworkers agree that progress on the international level must both inform and follow the lead of work that organizations are doing on local levels. It is out of this wide support network that many national and local organizations have found a platform from which to voice their concerns on the international stage.

Locally, Ben Burkett of the Indian Springs Farmers' Cooperative Association in Petal, Mississippi, sustains transnational relationships as a member of LVC's Food Sovereignty Commission. The Mississippi Association of Cooperatives serves as the statewide voice of farmers' cooperatives and maintains membership in national and regional small farm advocacy organizations including the Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural, the National Family Farm

⁹⁶ Desmarais 2007: 68; 152-3; 4; 34 [in sequential order]

Coalition, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, and the Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON). In 2015, Ben Burkett and MAC gained recognition from the US Food Sovereignty Alliance when they won the Food Sovereignty Prize, an award that honors grassroots organizations and people “who are taking back their food systems.”⁹⁷ While these regional and national organizations are not the only ones that bridge local efforts to the international food sovereignty movement, they represent the people’s food movement as it exists outside of the corporate, institutional system.

Regionally, FSC/LAF has worked since 1967 to protect African American-owned land in the south. Coming directly out of the civil rights movement, the FSC/LAS and state organizations such as MAC have worked on issues of black land loss, retention, and economic development, and they represent the deep history of struggle in African American and other low-resource communities to retain their land-based heritage, rural livelihoods, and the legal rights to land ownership. In 2006, SAAFON formed in response to the growing demand for organic produce in local markets.⁹⁸ This group joins the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) and other southern organizations that are expressly focused on the development of local markets for organic, small scale, local, and sustainable agriculture. Joining MAC as a statewide leader in advocacy for local food systems and small farmers, the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network (MSAN) formed in 2013 to help unify the diverse voices of small scale farmers and their advocates in the state. Both MAC and MSAN build from the traditions of long-established small farmer organizations in Mississippi, and are currently

⁹⁷ www.usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org

⁹⁸ www.saafon.org

working to further a historically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable vision of small scale agriculture for both farmers and consumers in Mississippi.

CONCLUSION

In the histories of their land-based heritage, community movements, resistance to institutions, and international partnerships, Mississippi's nonmajoritarian farmers and farm workers have established traditions of resiliency and solidarity in defense of their rights to agrarian representation in the state's social, political, and economic systems. It is out of this deep history that I present research that describes and analyzes individuals and communities that continue to sustain long-held agricultural traditions as they navigate relationships to land, community, institutions, and international networks amidst the current social, political, and economic environments in the state.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

I approached this project by considering scale, both in the process of research and the process of analysis. I wanted to understand how individuals, communities, institutions, as well as the nation and world, are interrelated from the perspectives of history and ethnographic interpretation of the present. To meet this objective, I sought out people, organizations, and events that I believed could help me understand relationships at a variety of scales: individuals' relationships to land and agriculture; community organizations and their relationships with individuals; institutions and their relationships to communities; and the relationships of local people with national and transnational conversations. Participant observation of community organizations and events, as well as semi-structured interviews with individuals, allowed me to gain a holistic perspective of people's roles and philosophies within small scale agriculture, as well as the significance of their work within the broader community, regional, national, and global contexts. The ethnographic method of interviews and participant observation allowed me to develop relationships with individuals, which I could not have obtained from secondary research alone. By interacting with the same people and community organizations for extended periods of time, I was able to more clearly understand, from their perspectives, the objectives and significance of their work within broader historical and geographic contexts.

Participant observation research allowed me to build close relationships with individuals in diverse communities throughout Mississippi. From the initial contacts I made through my work as a vendor at Oxford farmers markets, I learned by word-of-mouth of other individuals and organizations that were involved in small scale agriculture. Through networking, my relationships with small scale farmers and their advocates gradually grew to include communities throughout the state, and I interacted with international activists as well. Just as my research

objective was to consider scale, my research process followed this method too, and I began my research process with personal relationships, which grew to include participation in community organizations, institutional partnerships, as well as national and transnational conversations.

The participation observation work I present in the following sections describes one statewide sustainable agriculture organization, two community development conferences, and a luncheon at a small farmers cooperative. I worked as an intern for the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, a nonprofit advocacy organization founded in 2013 that works to connect small farmers to markets, communities, and policy conversations. I also participated in an event at the Indian Springs Farmers Cooperative Association in Petal, Mississippi that brought small farmers from Mississippi and an agronomist from central Uganda together to discuss black land loss, food sovereignty, and the future of farming in rural America and rural Africa.

The conferences I participated in included the Race and Sustainability Conference and the Delta Regional Forum. The Race and Sustainability Conference was titled “Fighting to Live,” and it brought activists, scholars, and community advocacy workers together to discuss the challenges and opportunities for historically disadvantaged communities in Mississippi to live more sustainably. It was hosted by the University of Mississippi Law Center and included tours of health centers in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, a panel discussion at Delta State University’s Institute for Community-Based Research, and conference at the University of Mississippi’s School of Law. The other conference, Delta Regional Forum, was titled “Population, Development, and Entrepreneurial Problem Solving,” and brought scholars, public health professionals, and nonprofit workers together in Clarksdale, Mississippi, to discuss approaches to community development in the region. It was organized and funded by the UM Center for Population Studies, the UM McLean Institute for Public Service and Community

Engagement, Mississippi State University, the University of Missouri, and the Mississippi State Department of Health.

While I have substituted the names of interview subjects with pseudonyms for the sake of privacy under the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have chosen to use the given names of participants I observed at public events. Because of their public presence and positions of leadership within their communities, it is not necessary to disguise their identities. The names of these individuals are Dorothy Grady-Scarborough, Daniel Doyle, Ben Burkett, and Edward Mukiibi.

The ten individuals I interviewed live in Mississippi and their work centers around farming and local food system advocacy work. I knew or knew of all of them through my work at other research sites. The first two interviews I conducted were part of my work with MSAN. After this, I asked two farmers in person at the Oxford Mid-Town Market if I could interview them, and I asked two others in person at MSAN meetings. I contacted the other four farmers, two of whom I had met previously, through email conversations. I conducted the interviews at the farms of six people and at the workplaces of three. I conducted one at a fast food restaurant in a town close to the individual's farm. I asked everyone the same IRB-approved questions⁹⁹, except when more information was necessary to understand the context of a previous question.

Because the experiences of white and black farmers have differed significantly throughout Mississippi's history, the research pays close attention to the ways in which race effects past actions and present experiences. Specifically, I examine the ways that black farmers and community advocates are navigating ways of sustaining their farms and communities within

⁹⁹ See Appendix for a list of the interview questions

a historically racist social system. In my description and analysis of findings, I have indicated an individual's race when the information relates directly to arguments pertaining to community capitals and cultural competency. However, a chief aim of this project is to forward a person-centered perspective which emphasizes the particularities of individual experiences. In light of this objective, I do not highlight a person's race when they have not done so first during interviews or while speaking at events.

The findings of the research describe many of the tensions, opportunities, and philosophical underpinnings of small scale agriculture and local food systems in Mississippi. Drawing upon case studies from three different cultural and geographic regions in the state, the data represents similarities and differences between various philosophies about small scale farming and local food system advocacy work. Within these various regions and professional orientations, individuals and communities are in the process of navigating pathways to environmentally, culturally, and economically sustainable locally-controlled food systems. In some cases, individuals are working alone and with their communities to achieve their sustainability goals. In other cases, communities have partnered with institutions and have formed strategic alliances to work together on their goals. And in other cases, community organizations have partnered with international community organizations and are envisioning global solutions to issues they've recognized on the local level. In the following sections, I discuss the results of the interviews and the three case studies which are most relevant to my analysis.

Table 1: Research Timeline

Date	Event / Organization	Location
April 1-2, 2015	Race and Sustainability Conference	Lafayette County and Bolivar County
May 2015 – November 2015	MSAN internship	Lafayette County
May 28, 2015	Interview # 1	Benton County
June 4, 2015	Interview # 2	Yalobusha County
June 12, 2015	Interview # 3	Pontotoc County
June 17, 2015	Interview # 4	Tate County
June 17, 2015	Interview # 5	Panola County
June 24, 2015	Interview # 6	Clay County
July 7, 2015	Interview # 7	Lafayette County
July 13, 2015	Interview # 8	Attala County
July 16, 2015	Delta Regional Forum	Coahoma County
July 17, 2015	Interview # 9	Lafayette County
November 2, 2015	Interview # 10	Lafayette County
November 13, 2015	Indian Springs Farmers Association luncheon	Forrest County

Table 2: Research Locations¹⁰⁰



¹⁰⁰ Blank map template from www.freeusandworldmaps.com

Table 3: Interview Subject Profiles

Interview Number and Name	Full or Part-Time Farmer	Other Profession	Food Products Raised	Primary Markets	Primary Distribution Area
1. Sophia Eisenhower	FT	N/A	Mixed produce, eggs, chickens	CSA	Memphis
2. Frank Green	FT	N/A	Herbs, mushrooms, beef, goats	Farmers markets	Yalobusha and Lafayette County
3. Jake Coleman	FT	N/A	Chickens, turkeys, beef, pork, goat cheese, eggs	On-farm sales, farmers markets, restaurants	Pontotoc County and neighboring counties
4. John McGowan	FT	N/A	Mixed produce, watermelons, heirloom tomatoes, beef	Grocery stores, farmers markets	Tate County and neighboring counties
5. Adrian Jackson	FT	N/A	Pork	Restaurants, farmers markets	New Orleans, Memphis, Oxford
6. Tommy Goodman	PT	Retired	Beef, lamb	On-farm sales	Clay County
7. Seth Niles	PT	Food hub manager	Chicken, pork, beef	Farmers markets, food hub	Statewide
8. Rick Caldwell	PT	MAC employee	Leafy greens	Food hub	Attala and Holmes County
9. Tony Jarvis	N/A	Student; MSAN intern	N/A	N/A	N/A
10. Daniel Doyle	N/A	MSAN executive director	N/A	N/A	N/A

PART ONE: LAND USE NARRATIVES AND LAND ETHICS

Central to interview participants' philosophies towards their work was an obligation to continue the tradition of their families. Several of the respondents are farming on their family's land, and others were raised on farms, but moved away and are now farming other pieces of land. Adrian Jackson, a fifth-generation farmer explained that, "I'm the youngest, so if it wasn't me, that would have been the end of the tradition." Another farmer, Rick Caldwell, was raised in an African American community where family farming and gardening were central to his father's philosophy about self-sufficiency. Caldwell's passion for growing food and helping others sustain their agricultural livelihoods is both a product of this father's guidance and his own experience. "I think that everybody has a right to feed themselves," he explained. "A person needs to own their own. The independence of ownership makes for a stronger character in a person, and the more you have to manage something, the more influence you will have on your offspring." Many farmers also expressed a responsibility to providing their communities with a source of local food. John McGowan, an African American commercial vegetable farmer, told me that he farms because he has the skills and experience to meet one of humanity's basic needs. If he and others with his experience didn't farm, he explained, somebody wouldn't eat. The respondents who were raised in farming families agreed that carrying on their family's tradition, educating the younger generation about the importance of farming, and providing for the food needs of their communities were central components of their philosophies.

Frank Green particularly exemplified the respondents' philosophies toward farming in his descriptions of the obligation he feels towards his work. He owns about 400 acres that his parents bought, and he strives to maintain his family's tradition while acting as a steward to his land. Green explained that his philosophy is based upon a personal interest in health and a desire

to share his lifestyle with his community. According to him, “it’s part of the tradition of my family history, it’s the enjoyment, it’s the freedom, and it gives other people an opportunity to enjoy what I enjoy.” Timber and wildlife for hunting clubs makes most of his income, while herbs and mushrooms allow him to interact with his community at farmers markets. Like other interview participants, Green expressed an obligation he feels to his family and community, but he also emphasized the sense of enjoyment he gets from acting as a steward to his land and to the plants and animals that live on his land.

At the Race and Sustainability conference, leaders of community organizations in the Delta described in their philosophies a commitment to inspire self-sufficiency and community empowerment through a preventative and holistic approach to their work. Staff at the Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou believed that a holistic health care model begins with community action and can inspire people to live in healthier ways so that they don’t need invasive medical procedures later. According to one nurse, the center aims to “stop deprivation before it starts instead of playing catch-up later on.” Nurses at the center also described that community education, empowerment, and skills for social activism were all included in their definition of health. Dorothy Grady-Scarborough, a Delta native, former nurse, and the director of Mississippians Engaged in Greener Agriculture in Shelby, Mississippi, expressed the philosophy that the health of individuals improves at the same time as the health of the overall community improves. She emphasized that proactive approaches to community advocacy which focus on youth empowerment will only be successful when culturally appropriate mentors pass on their knowledge to local youth. The philosophies of these community leaders agreed that the umbrella term “health” represents all of the ways in which individuals are educated and empowered to advocate for themselves and their communities.

In describing their long-term visions for the future growth of their farms and communities, interview respondents expressed the desire to see tangible results of their philosophies come to fruition. In order for their philosophies to manifest in their work, they explained, their farms would have to become both financially and culturally sustainable. Tommy Goodman feels an obligation to support the future viability of small farming, and he explained that he would like to create community by sharing his acreage with several young people who have the desire to farm but do not have the financial resources to buy land. Adrian Jackson described a vision that would help resolve the ethical responsibility he feels towards his community. He aims to use his farm operation to create jobs and opportunities in his town, and he wants to “make this area known as a place that made it work.” Central to Sophia Eisenhower’s philosophy was a compulsion to produce a tangible product that has inherent worth. However, she finds herself working 70 hours a week to create that product, and feels that she will only be able to carry out her vision when her farm begins generating a more sustainable income. In general, respondents whose philosophies focused on ethical responsibilities and obligations recognized that the future success of their farms depended on their ability to facilitate measures of cultural and financial sustainability.

In the description of his long-term vision for the growth of his operation, Frank Green reiterated his desire to foster a sense of community and family. Like other interview participants, he felt that growth would depend on economic success, but he emphasized that economic success could only result from the engagement of his family members in farm operations and from his ability to meet the needs of his community. He explained that he wants people to come visit his farm, that he wants the younger generation to understand the farm’s system of operation and history, and that, in general, “we like to make it a family affair for everyone.” While the visions

of other farmers described financial and cultural sustainability, Green's long-term goals focused on community first and assumed that financial success would follow as community support grew.

Like the visions of interview participants, community advocates at the Race and Sustainability conference described in their long-term goals a desire for their philosophies to manifest in tangible outcomes. In order to inspire community engagement and healthy lifestyle choices in the community, nurses at the Delta Health Center have initiated programs that approach health from a variety of angles. A twelve-acre garden, fruit trees, and raised garden boxes at the center allow community members to learn how to garden and gives them access to free vegetables. Nurses explained that cooking, exercise, and breastfeeding classes all work in tandem with the gardens to create a holistic action-oriented approach to health care that allows people to "return back to the future." Dorothy Grady-Scarborough uses also garden education in elementary schools to promote healthy relationships to food amongst youth. She seeks to implement her vision by drawing upon the knowledge of the community's elders to teach young people about traditional gardening practices. Through an oral history project that she has integrated into the social sciences curriculum of local schools, she hopes that the negative perception that many African American youth have towards agriculture can shift to a positive one that emphasizes the holistic benefits of growing one's own food. The visions of community advocates in the Delta draw from philosophies of social action and community engagement to build culturally appropriate spaces where people are empowered to foster health in their own lives and communities.

In addition to philosophies and visions that emphasized obligations toward providing for the food needs of communities and for their own financial sustainability, many farmers

expressed an understanding of history that draws upon the experiences of past generations to inform their perceptions of sustainable agriculture in the present. Many farmers drew from their family history to explain that for the past two and three generations, families who had previously earned incomes from farming have moved off the farm to join the industrial and urban sector. They described that the young generation today is slowly moving back to the farm out of resistance to industrial models. Tommy Goodman, a farmer in his late 50s, explained that this shift represents a paradoxical bifurcation between his generation and the young generation. Tony Jarvis, a student in his mid-20s, explained that his parents and grandparents have positive memories of home gardening, but have negative perceptions of farming as a career. They view farming careers with caution because they worked their whole lives so that their children wouldn't have to struggle like they did, Jarvis explained. Overall, respondents felt that local history positively influenced people's feelings about small scale agriculture and home gardening because their family histories have been closely tied to land. However, they also described a tension between some small farmers and their families who view sustainable agriculture as an extravagance that undermines their past struggles to escape poverty.

Like other farmers, Frank Green also draws from his family's history to inform his present relationship with agriculture. Unlike many other farmers whose families escaped the poverty they associate with rural life, he described a family lineage of land ownership in which small farming was always viewed as an asset. Following Emancipation, family members who were former slaves acquired land and his family has owned land since that time. He showed me the chest where he keeps all of the documentation of his family's land ownership, and went on to tell me a Biblical allegory about Moses freeing slaves by parting the Red Sea. He explained that like slaves in the Bible, American slaves must have felt trepidation in leaving their rural

lifestyles, and he told me that he could understand why many former slaves didn't want to leave the south and *did* want to buy land to farm independently. Relating American history to his family's history, Green explained the responsibility he feels as an African American landowner in Mississippi. Unlike Tony Jarvis and Seth Niles, who had mixed feelings about returning to agriculture after their families had left for two or three generations, Green expressed positive feelings towards small farming as a result of his family's history of maintaining their ownership of land for over one hundred and fifty years.

Just as community leaders in the Delta described holistic and action-oriented approaches to health care in their philosophies and long-term goals, they also drew from history to explain the continuity between the past and the present. Nurses at the Delta Health Center described that their current programs draw from the visions of the center's founder, L.C. Dorsey. Dorsey, who was also instrumental in forming the North Bolivar County Farm Cooperative, believed that most people would rather work a job than depend on relief, and she encouraged this shift in mindset by facilitating education through a whole-system approach to health. Drawing from Dorsey's legacy, nurses at the center explained that they continue to promote her "community health action" model through education and empowerment programs. Dorothy Grady-Scarborough explained that institutions in the Delta have historically underfunded local infrastructure projects and continue to undermine her community's ability to engage in social action work, but she emphasized positive aspects of local history in the descriptions of her work. By using her programs to keep the knowledge of older generations alive in the minds of youth, she hopes to sustain the traditions of local agricultural knowledge that have been integral to the survival of local communities in the past. While community advocates recognized the negative cultural

history of the Delta, they also drew from histories of empowerment and self-sufficiency to describe the continuity between the past and present and positive visions for the future.

PART TWO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

When asked about their relationships with the communities they serve, the majority of farmers described a sense of mutually beneficial interdependence in which both tangible and intangible products are exchanged among participants in their food systems. Many farmers described specific needs that they met within their communities, such as healthy food, access to those foods through education, and the revival of tradition. Sophia Eisenhower described that her community includes not only customers, but local farmers as well. “Other farmers aren’t our competitors, they’re our friends. There’s this sense of abundance, that there’s enough for everybody,” she told me. Adrian Jackson feels that he addresses the needs of every community in his food system by selling both to restaurants and local people. After selling prime cuts of pork to restaurants, he is often able to sell lower cuts to neighbors who want to use them for dishes such as souse or pickled pig’s feet. In return, he is compensated financially, practically, and culturally. By selling all parts of the hog, nothing goes to waste and he feels proud to be part of the revival of local foodways traditions. Overall, farmers described a complex set of interactions between themselves and their communities, where the exchange of money, food, and tradition results in feelings of mutually beneficial interdependence.

Rick Caldwell particularly exemplifies the interdependent relationships that other farmers feel towards their communities. A part-time farmer who works full time for the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Caldwell explained that his role in his community is that of a facilitator between underserved farmers, markets, and institutional support centers. His primary

goal is to teach farmers how to raise their bottom line by growing vegetables on a small portion of their land so that they can diversify their market and increase their access to capital. In his personal farm work, he is a member of the Attala County Self-Help Cooperative where he and twenty-two other members provide vegetables for the local food hub, junior college, K-12 school system, farmers market, and grocery stores. In addition to serving the community, cooperative members also seek to act as role models to young people who are considering farming as a career. According to him, the cooperative's new building and demonstration plots will "hopefully help get people back into the small farm aspect of using what you have." Like other farmers, Caldwell seeks to strengthen his food system and improve perceptions of farming by demonstrating its viability through the work he does.

While farmers described a sense of interdependence in their relationships with communities, Daniel Doyle, the director of the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, explained that the organization's role in the state is to facilitate the growth of local food systems by connecting farmers, organizations, and consumers to resources. MSAN was formed when Doyle, local professors, and farmers recognized a need for a statewide umbrella organization to represent the voices of small farmers in the state. While the number of small farms, and particularly small farms who identify with the sustainable agriculture movement, has been growing, traditional institutions have not been responsive to their needs, Doyle explained. In response, MSAN attempts to bridge the gaps among small farming communities, existing advocacy organizations, and institutional agricultural resource centers. By trying to connect "the old, small, and even conventional farming discussions to the new [sustainable agriculture movement discussions]," Doyle believes that MSAN's role in statewide communities is to be on the front end of this change. Overall, MSAN serves as a connector of voices and resources. Like

farmers, it seeks to build relationships with communities by engaging in the exchange of tangible resources and intangible systems of cultural support.

While many farmers agreed that they benefited from mutually supportive relationships with their communities, their perceptions of community responses to their work were more ambivalent and varied. Tony Jarvis, a native Mississippian from the Starkville area, was critical of the Certified Naturally Grown label because he felt that in rural Mississippi, people will buy conventionally grown local produce before they buy naturally grown local produce. He explained that the certification label might even hurt those farmers in the long run if local people think CNG farmers are, “crazy hippies.” Jarvis’ skepticism of community support for the label was contrasted by a farmer whose operation *is* CNG. According to Sophia Eisenhower, community support of farms that are certified will expand when consumers agree to pay more for higher quality food instead of less for lower quality food. She believes that many locals do not yet understand the philosophical underpinnings of the sustainable agriculture movement and that, “there needs to be a cultural shift about how people think about food and what they’re paying for.” In describing their perceptions of community responses to their work, farmers who have lived in the region for their whole lives were less ambivalent and explained that community members’ support emanates from the trust that they are permanent fixtures in the community.

According to Rick Caldwell, negative perceptions of small scale farming in his community have resulted from the difficulty of small farmers to gain access to markets and capital. In addition, he feels that youth are dissuaded by the perception that farming is hard work, unrewarding, and an extremely volatile profession. He is sympathetic to these perceptions, but added that “it’s the way we’ve got our farming system structured, where it’s ‘get big or don’t do this.’ What we got to focus on is that everybody can sit at the table when it comes to growing

food.” In general, Caldwell felt that communities haven’t made the commitment to feeding themselves because school systems promote industry and technology instead of agriculture. Technology is important, he explained, but the simple technology of feeding yourself is more important because if communities don’t feed themselves, they can’t sustain themselves. Like other farmers who expressed ambivalence about community perceptions of small farming, Caldwell understands the reasons local youth are not drawn to farming. However, he feels that a shift in mindset will be necessary for his community to understand the importance of growing one’s own food.

Like the farmers who expressed ambivalence about their reception by broader communities, Daniel Doyle senses that communities’ perceptions of MSAN are varied and may be critical. While he feels grateful to have been invited to join the conversations of other organization in the past, he told me that he can’t expected to always be invited to the table, and that the quality of MSAN’s future work will determine how the organization is received by existing organizations in the state and region. He recognizes that part of the skepticism that other organizations have for MSAN has to do with the fact that the organization is relatively new, hasn’t established a track record yet, and is in competition with other nonprofits for finite funding resources. In addition, Doyle explained that he doesn’t have much experience with directing nonprofits, and he believes that, “being a white male not from Mississippi visibly and symbolically can hurt the organization and has probably in some cases.” Despite the skepticism of others in the community, Doyle approaches the challenges of his organization as opportunities. He explained that the more MSAN can join in conversation with existing organizations and make positive impacts with its work, the stronger communities’ perceptions of it will be.

Despite the ambivalence of farmers' perceptions of community responses to their work, several farmers agreed that positive perceptions of small farms improves when they prove their commitment to the local region and culture. Adrian Jackson, a fifth-generation farmer in his third year of production, believes that he is in an ideal position to gain the support of his local community because his family has owned the land for so long. Farmers who come to the state from the north, he explained, will never gain the trust of the community because of their transplant status. John McGowan established one of the first farmers markets in the mid-south in the early 1990s and believes that if he didn't sell at that market every week, the community's support of other local farms would disappear too. He explained that, "I got a lot of people that look for me down there. They turn around and leave if I'm not there."

While these farmers feel that a strong local customer base depends on their proven commitment to the region, other farmers have found that a new market base of people not originally from the state has increased their sales significantly. Jake Coleman, a multigenerational family farmer, explained that instead of selling to his local community, the majority of his customers are educated transplants from outside the rural south attuned to the discourse of the sustainable agriculture movement. He believes that this pattern is a result of opportunities in higher education that were not available for many rural residents in previous generations. Despite cultural differences between his local community and his customers, he described relationships of trust that have grown out of these interactions. "All those things that bring the ultra-conservative Christians and the modern hippies together... I have just found that one of the most interesting things in my life," Coleman told me. While many farmers believe that permanence on the landscape and trust are significant factors for determining success within

local communities, other farmers without local customer bases have embraced the intermingling of transplant populations within their markets.

While Rick Caldwell sees a need in his community for locally grown food and new farmers, he also understands the reasons why this shift in mindset may be a slow process. He explained the disconnect between demand and supply, where communities in America believe there is an abundance of food, so they think they don't need to grow any of that food themselves. But when communities realize they are starving for fresh, unprocessed foods on the local level, somebody will step forward, he believes. Caldwell described the openness of thought that will be required for the communities and farmers he serves to understand that it is possible to sustain a farm on small amounts of land. Today, most people think that you need hundreds of acres to be successful, but "everybody doesn't have the resources to do that, but everybody has the resource to take a plot of land and to do what they can on it and be a sustainable community." Though he understands why young people aren't farming, he senses that the work of MAC, county-level cooperatives, and vocational agriculture programs in high schools are beginning to facilitate a shift in mindset as youth begin to recognize farming as a community necessity.

Though MSAN is still navigating its position within statewide communities, Doyle, like many farmers, has found that historical relationships to place impact the way communities view the organization. At the Race and Sustainability conference, he noted that many Mississippians tend to not appreciate the cultural and ecological resources that the state has, while others do. He explained that the state has a great cultural tradition in the blues and a great ecological resource in the land, but historically, it has been outsiders who have lauded the two as significant resources for the state, not locals. In this conversation, Doyle recognized the importance and challenge of attracting local Mississippians to do the work of sustainable agriculture in the state.

By organizing and participating in conferences, educating through internships and farm-to-school programs, organizing farm tours, and participating in advocacy work through state and national policy councils, MSAN attempts to build diversity within the organization as well as in the broader community of small farmers. Overall, MSAN seeks to engage in an interdependent relationship with communities, where it both gives and receives support from local food systems throughout the state. In this, Doyle believes that the growth of MSAN is directly correlated to the growth of statewide local food systems, and that it is MSAN's job to facilitate this growth.

PART THREE: INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

When describing the most significant challenges to their work, the majority of farmers discussed state regulations that limit their ability to sell products and expand their operations. Due to recent legislation that has made it illegal to sell processed chickens off the farms they were raised on, small scale chicken farmers find it nearly impossible to serve their expanding markets. Jake Coleman got “the knock on the door,” when a state inspector threatened to shut his operation down for selling his birds across state lines. Coleman then began selling chickens exclusively from his farm, but due to fear of harassment, he also decided to stop advertising his product completely. In his mind, “It’s like advertising I’ve got three kilos of cocaine here. My chicken’s contraband.” Seth Niles, another livestock farmer, was cited for violating policies that hadn’t gone into effect yet, and was fined \$7,000 for taking his chickens off the farm to sell. Farmers were critical of the way that the state refuses to compromise with small producers, and three livestock farmers expressed bewilderment at the paradox of the state’s position towards small farming. They explained that while the state’s biggest industry is agriculture and it promotes itself as pro-small business, they implement regulations that actively hinder the growth of small farms. Vegetable farmers also complained of the lack of support from the state in

helping them to access land, capital, and commercial markets. According to Tommy Goodman, “not only are they not helpful, they are actually discouraging.” Overall, farmers felt strongly that there is not much opportunity for the growth of small farms in the state due to the current policy environment.

At the community development workshops and conferences that I participated in in the Delta, representatives of institutions and local leaders joined in conversation to discuss the opportunities and challenges of reducing poverty in the region. At the Delta Regional Forum in Clarksdale, a professor from the University of Mississippi explained that subsidy committees in Coahoma County had driven 98% of black farmers from the region within 100 years and replaced economic opportunities for black communities with welfare programs. He felt that the system of subsidies for the wealthy and welfare for the poor had created a system of dependency in which the region’s elite controlled the inflow of federal money in the area. As a result of these local policy decisions, the region’s broken health care and educational systems fuels poverty amongst black communities, he explained. According to a nurse at the Aaron E. Henry Health Center in Mound Bayou, the system had not improved since the 1960s because, “you have to justify what you do multiple times and you still don’t get what you need.” At other conferences and workshops, participants agreed that Delta institutions’ control of federal funding for social services had created the region’s current environment of crippling poverty amongst many black communities.

After describing the regulatory burdens and other institutional barriers that small farmers face, many farmers explained to me their views on why the state was so unsupportive of their work. In reference to the limited opportunities for credit and the high prices small farmers pay for insurance and access to markets, Rick Caldwell said, “He’s got to try to compete on a scale

that's much larger than what his operation sometimes will bear. It's like a Volkswagen pulling a train—it doesn't work out too well.” All of the meat producers cited similar frustrations with the lack of scaled regulations. Several livestock farmers recognized that regulations are ultimately written to keep consumers safe, but their major flaw is a lack of consideration for scale. Jake Coleman understands the need for oversight, but feels that a farm that milks 10 cows a day does not need the same types of inspections as a dairy operation that milks 300 cows a day. He explained, “It goes back to the philosophy of the community based model. Anybody can come down here and watch us kill those chickens. There's nothing to hide. There's no filthy conditions. It's a fresh beautiful, wonderful, healthy product.” While farmers agreed that the state ultimately has the consumer's best interest in mind, they also feel that their preoccupation with industrial agriculture has resulted in policies which ignore and undermine small producers.

At Delta conferences and workshops, representatives of institutions believed that while state and federal policies have crippled the region in the past and present, more partnerships between local people and their advocates in institutions were needed in order to “play the game” with state and federal governments. Both the Race and Sustainability conference and the Delta Regional Forum were funded by local and national institutions, and both featured speakers from public universities and local organizations. But while the conferences attempted to forge strategic partnerships between local communities and institutions, many local advocates viewed the institutional representatives with the same skepticism that they view state and federal agencies with. One local participant described her frustration with institutional partnerships by asking what communities will do when funding ends, when institutions lose interest in communities, and when industrial job training results in unemployment because the state has not invested in local industries. She felt that despite the conversations about forging strategic

partnerships, “diplomacy lets people skirt the real issues,” because of historical patterns of institutional neglect of black communities in the Delta. Instead, she emphasized that the “multigenerational transference of knowledge” and culturally appropriate leadership would be most successful in reducing poverty and increasing engagement within local communities. In general, local African American advocates expressed skepticism that partnerships with institutions would result in long-lasting change in communities, while institutional representatives emphasized the need for the engagement of local advocates in their organizations.

In response to the institutional environment, farmers described various ways that they were navigating the state’s policies. Jake Coleman and Seth Niles felt persecuted and marginalized by the state, and they believe there are no opportunities for changing the policy environment. On the other hand, several farmers believe that it is ultimately the responsibility of farmers and their advocates to create the infrastructure necessary to support local food economies. Adrian Jackson explained that he has begun building a USDA-inspected processing facility on his farm in order to revive tradition, give people access to local meat, create jobs for the community, and catalyze economic development for other farmers. He has been cooperating with state and federal agents, but explained that “sometimes, people don’t even know what we have to do to get a certain license or permit. You get the run-around, but we finally disentangled it.” Rick Caldwell and John McGowan felt that it is the responsibility of communities to demand support from their institutions. They explained that demand for local food is high in low-income communities, but institutional support for them is low. In response, they have put pressure on the state to facilitate programs that will increase access and encourage consumer participation. Caldwell and McGowan also explained that the state’s support of local food in school systems as

well as nutrition assistance voucher programs at farmers markets have benefited their communities. While opinions were varied, the majority of farmers believed that changing the policy environment would be challenging. However, farmers such as Jackson, Caldwell, and McGowan expressed determination to create long-term changes for farmers and consumers through sustained engagement in policy advocacy.

Despite the skepticism of local leaders that institutions could successfully implement poverty reduction programs in the Delta, institutional representatives and local advocates both decided that an agreement about correct philosophical approaches to partnerships could result in positive outcomes for local communities. At the Race and Sustainability conference, many panelists commented that advocacy work must come from the community level up and the policy level down, and that change meets in the middle. The louder and more collective the voices, the stronger the movement will be, they agreed. In this, they advocated for the building of diverse partnerships that confront structural racism instead of ignoring it. Though institutions provide funding, their support often doesn't allow local, African American individuals and communities to manage programs. Local advocates then encouraged institutional representatives to "take off the cape and put on a jersey," and to be "front porch people" instead of "back porch people." They stressed that cultural competency works both ways and that everyone involved would need to compromise in order to find common ground and support sustainable change. While institutional support of local programs was viewed critically by local advocates, they emphasized that a philosophical agreement on culturally appropriate approaches to leadership could improve their relationships with institutions significantly.

PART FOUR: NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Though respondents didn't focus their answers of any one question around the topic of national and transnational concerns, many referenced national and global issues within their discussions of their work, their communities, and institutions. Sophia Eisenhower believes that her role in the local food system is part of a national network. She feels secure in her work locally because the sustainable agriculture movement is very established nationally, and her customers are attuned to these discourses. Others felt similarly optimistic and believed that growth will be stimulated as national and global trends in sustainable agriculture reach Mississippians. They believe that the movement is growing into a critical mass, especially among Millennials who have begun to question the industrial food system. Tommy Goodman felt that opportunities for the growth of statewide local food systems were wide open because of the state's rural landscape. "Even though Mississippi tends to be behind the rest of the country, ten, fifteen years, we've been pleasantly surprised about how many people in our area are interested in local food," he told me. Despite perceptions that Mississippi is behind national trends, Seth Niles viewed the state as the ideal place to grow local food systems due to its low land prices, fertile soil, and abundant water resources. Of the respondents who commented on Mississippi's place in national and global conversations about small farming, most felt that the state is in an ideal position to engage more deeply in conversations about small scale and sustainable agriculture.

At the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, Daniel Doyle also aligns the organization with national and global conversations both practically and philosophically. While developing the organization, Doyle studied many of the successes and failures of national organizations that came out of the farm crisis of the 1970s. However, he also recognized that

Mississippi has local challenges that make it different from other states. The state has a long history of human and natural resource exploitation, he explained, which puts it in the unique position of leading the movement to reverse some of the wrongs of the past. “If we can grow and heal and move past, not by ignoring or forgetting, but by addressing and fixing those previous grievances and problems, then Mississippi could and should be a rightful leader in those conversations,” said Doyle. While he believes that Mississippi may not have the social or political will to lead the country in small farming conversations, he thinks that the state’s abundant natural resources and rural landscape give it the opportunity to be a significant contributor to national conversations in sustainable agriculture.

During an event celebrating food sovereignty at the Indian Springs Farmers Association in Petal, Mississippi, farmer Ben Burkett discussed national trends in small farming with mixed feelings. He didn’t see himself as part of the national sustainable agriculture movement because his community has been doing that work for generations without being viewed as progressive by the rest of the country. In the case of organics, Burkett explained that he is not considering a federal certification because he is already growing organically, and his family has been for five generations. According to him, it’s not worth the extra cost and paperwork because his customers aren’t demanding it. Either they already know that he farms without chemicals, or they don’t care. Similarly, he expressed concern that the traditions of black small farmer cooperatives are being diminished within the sustainable agriculture movement. While the state’s and nation’s interest in the creation of food hubs has been growing recently, he explained, “we’ve been a food hub for twenty years.” While Burkett emphasized his use of sustainable production practices, he doesn’t feel he needs to participate fully in national discussions of sustainable agriculture because he has been farming sustainably since before it was considered a movement.

When describing the ways that they engage in broader conversations, farmers gave examples of the relationships they have built with people and organizations in national and global networks. After noticing my copy of *The Stockman Grass Farmer*, a magazine published in Mississippi and devoted to the subject of grassland agriculture, Seth Niles commented that the publication is the international leader in rotational grazing. Ironically, the magazine's lowest readership base in its home state of Mississippi, he explained. Jake Coleman was very involved in local policy issues with the advocacy organization Heifer International until he began receiving threats from the state about policy violations. Adrian Jackson had "a very formative internship" in the Virgin Islands where he met other young southern farmers who were learning about alternative methods to sustaining their family agriculture traditions within the changing market environment. Other farmers' relationships with national and global networks were more limited, but are represented by their participation in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), CNG, Slow Food, and FSC/LAF. Overall, farmers' participation in broader networks was limited to national and international organizations that they felt directly supported their ability to market and operate their farms sustainably.

In addition to modeling MSAN after national organizations and trying to address history through its work, Daniel Doyle also referenced the growing sense of urgency in the state, nation, and world over climate change, economic disruptions, and the results of systemic inequality. These issues present people with a lot of opportunity to come together in critical mass in support of the growing movement, he explained. According to him, "we've gotten ourselves, as a civilization, as communities, to a point where it's going to be hard to dig ourselves out at this point, and that digging is going to take a lot of work and a lot of different people picking up

shovels.” For him, the collectivization of national and global conversations in local settings is the sustainable agriculture movement’s biggest opportunity.

At the Indian Springs event, local and international farmers discussed the ways that they participate in broader conversations. In the 1970s, the cooperative built their operation by growing for corporations such as Vlasic and a hot sauce corporation. However, since the passing of NAFTA in 1994, they lost the contracts to international growers and are in the process of readapting to the current market conditions. Burkett, who works with national and global organizations including the National Family Farm Coalition and La Via Campesina, explained that it’s not international growers who are the problem; all small farmers are fighting the same enemy. He believes that governments and corporations such as Monsanto and Cargill are at the root of the problems that small farmers face. Edward Mukiibi, a farmer and agronomist from central Uganda, explained that traditional small farming systems are currently being broken up by governments who are taking up large scale, industrial agriculture on the land. Similarly, Burkett described the complex institutional systems in the United States that twist policy to force small farmers from their land. Overall, Burkett and Mukiibi agree that global definitions of development are oppressive for small farmers who try to sustain their cultural, economic, and environmental relationships with traditional markets.

In addition to placing Mississippi within broader conversations for marketing and operating reasons, farmers also discussed the philosophical aspects of imagining local food systems within broader networks. Seth Niles explained that he practices intensive rotational grazing in order to help minimize the global environmental crisis. “I feel grass-fed beef can really impact climate change and there’s data showing that it already is,” he told me. Adrian Jackson chose to distribute locally to avoid the volatility of national markets. He explained that

in the national market, “you have no freedom and no autonomy and you’re at the mercy of all these factors you can’t control.” After describing the isolating separation between producers and consumers, environmental impacts of chemicals, and corporations that force farmers to use their seeds, Jackson told me that there’s no way for producers to win within the industrial model. Rick Caldwell is inspired by several aspects of the national alternative food movement and he explained that rural farm cooperatives have used the momentum that urban agriculture projects such as Growing Power in Milwaukee have generated to inform their work. Just as Growing Power’s director Will Allen took parking lots and turned them into gardens, local cooperatives have been using the model to teach youth that they can similarly turn backyards and open fields into gardens. Of the respondents who discussed philosophical relationships with broader conversations, answers were varied but referenced the threat of climate change, the volatility of national markets, and the national momentum of urban agriculture organizations.

In its work, MSAN aligns itself with the philosophical tenets of the sustainable agriculture movement, environmental movement, and the civil rights movement. Daniel Doyle explained that the organization must work in dialogue with the larger national and global conversations of which it is a part and connect its work to larger histories of resource exploitation in the nation and world. He explained Mississippi’s particular position by stating,

“The larger food movement is starting to grapple with issues of representation, authenticity, and diversity, and is starting to realize that this something that’s bigger. And that the south, particularly Mississippi, because of its history of exploitation and oppression, is the right place to be having, leading, and organizing those conversations.”

MSAN’s funding base is largely national private foundations, Doyle sits on the board of SSAWG and has a relationship with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. But while he is a part of national organizations, Doyle admitted that it has been a struggle to figure out how

local work should and can be connected with national and global work. He wants MSAN to be involved in a bigger network and is still navigating the paths that can lead there. Overall, MSAN has perceived an urgency in the state and nation to bring Mississippi into broader conversations and is working from the perspectives of sustainable agriculture, environmentalism, and civil rights history to navigate this.

In addition to the tangible ways that Ben Burkett and Edward Mukiibi align themselves within national and global conversations, they also described the significance of these conversations on the local level. They explained that because of the similar experiences of small farmers throughout the world, there is a great opportunity to strengthen the movement on a global level. According to Mukiibi, the more conversations take place transnationally, the stronger small farmers will be in collectively fighting powers from above. Burkett believes that while global connections are necessary, national and global partnerships can only work when there is strong leadership on the local level. “For a good system to work, you need local control,” he said. For Mukiibi, the most important thing is that people from all around the world stay connected. His final message to the group emphasized the historical connections between African American farmers in Mississippi and African farmers in central Uganda, but he also spoke to the collectivity of the group when he said, “we have to keep using our strength, together in solidarity and resistance, which we’ve had for hundreds and hundreds of years.” Both Burkett and Mukiibi agreed that conversations between communities of small farmers transnationally can strengthen the local efforts of resistance to industrial agriculture by providing farmers with practical experience in collective action as well as a sense of solidarity and community.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the farmers, farmer advocates, and community leaders who I interviewed and observed demonstrated that their perceptions of their local food systems and communities are grounded in personal experience and expressed that their work centers around the needs and traditions of their local communities. They generally believe that the success of their farm or organization is tied closely to the health of their community, and they find that institutional relationships represent barriers to the success of their work and to the sustainable growth of their communities. However, many farmers are trying to navigate state regulations as much for personal and financial reasons as for feelings of obligation to their communities. Community advocacy workers likewise recognize the potential benefits that may emerge from collaborative relationships with funding institutions. Individuals are aware that while small scale agriculture and rural advocacy have long historical traditions in this state, they are also part of a growing regional, national, and global consciousness which supports small farming systems and culturally appropriate development models. Farmers, their advocates, and community leaders all recognized the interdependence of economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability, and most describe their work in contrast and conflict to the industrial food system that institutions promote.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the findings of the research in conversation with the theory and history that frames the study. In part one, I analyze the findings in order to find out how research participants demonstrate their relationships with local environments and land; how they describe their personal philosophies towards their work; and how their relationships to land differ based on personal experience, memory, and knowledge of history. In part two, I explore the ways that research participants engage with their communities and I discuss the ways that their work affects and is affected by the participation of communities. Part three investigates the ways that research participants engage with local, state, and federal institutions, and it explores the role that institutions play in supporting or restricting their work. Finally, part four discusses the ways that research participants engage in conversations with regional, national, and transnational communities and organizations, and it explores the ways participants strengthen their work locally by building bridges with larger systems.

The answers to these questions provide insight into the overall research objectives, which include understanding the challenges and opportunities present in the development of Mississippi's local food systems as well as the similarities and differences between small scale agriculture and food-related community advocacy projects in diverse regions of Mississippi. Additionally, the research seeks to uncover the ways people are navigating pathways to environmentally, culturally, and economically sustainable locally-controlled food systems as the work relates to their lives, communities, institutions, and broader social patterns in the state, nation, and world. Drawing from relevant theories, histories, and case studies, the analysis also seeks to demonstrate that local actions and projects both inform and are informed by national and global processes.

PART ONE: LAND USE NARRATIVES AND LAND ETHICS

The literature that I reviewed for this section represents a diversity of disciplines and theoretical frameworks that explore people's relationships with environment and land. Within the authors' differences of perspective, several central themes weave their way through the literature and offer methods of analysis. First, the literature reveals that by exploring case studies in a holistic and agroecological perspective, it is possible to view individual experiences for their symbiotic relationships with greater systems. In this, the theory argues for the relevance of understanding individuals, as well as cultural and biotic systems, through the lenses of culturally relevant value systems. In this analysis, I draw from the theories of the literature to argue that individuals with strong attachments to land and sustained relationships with local environments are integral to the healthy functioning of broader cultural and institutional systems.

In Mississippi, deep local knowledge systems connected to land and environment have come from histories of isolation from and resistance to dominant systems. Beginning with the onset of the industrial cultural complex in the 18th century, old world nature-based philosophies became regarded as trivial and primitive by the dominant systems in place. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the hope of land ownership for African Americans was repeatedly tested as local, state, and federal policies denied them pathways for ownership. Despite peonage systems such as sharecropping that rural blacks and poor whites were forced to work under, many families navigated spaces of autonomy despite the oppressive conditions. For African Americans that did become landowners, the industrial agriculture model of the mid-20th century further threatened cultural traditions that valued humans as reciprocal agents in biotic systems. Despite systemic attacks on reciprocal land-based philosophies and small scale land ownership, the

values of ecological sustainability, community, and financial autonomy have persisted throughout Mississippi's history.

According to agroecologist Steve Gliessman, the quality of sustainability is an ongoing process which results from the emergent qualities of interactions between environment, society, and economy. In a healthy system, “environmental soundness, social equity, and economic viability”¹⁰¹ interact as interdependent parts within a greater whole. Carl Sauer's theory of cultural landscapes furthers Gliessman's perspective to include humans as agents and subjects in the ongoing processes involved in landscape production. He argues that by engaging in processes of negotiation with biotic systems, humans both shape and are shaped by the landscapes they live in. Adding to Sauer's argument, Aldo Leopold theorized that not only are humans involved in the process of landscape creation, but that they have the responsibility to act as stewards in protection of the natural landscape. Taken together, these three theorists agree that individuals are parts of greater systems, and that the actions of individuals, while limited in their influence, combine in patterns that contribute to the overall sustainability of physical and cultural landscapes. Following these theories, research participants expressed philosophies of obligation to sustain ecological balance, cultural equity, and financial autonomy within their communities. While their production practices and philosophies were sustainable within the classical definition of the term, the majority of interview subjects did not describe themselves as part of a sustainable agriculture movement.

Adrian Jackson particularly exemplifies the holistic relationships to landscape that scholars have theorized about. Though his family has traditionally grown cash crops under the

¹⁰¹ Gliessman 2007: 345

industrial agribusiness model and depended on African American laborers until mechanization swept through the state in the mid-20th century, he imagines equitable ways that his family farm can stay in business while serving the broader community. While the farm does not, and could not, remediate all of the effects of past wrongs, Jackson nonetheless has taken responsibility for beginning to reverse the effects of pervasive multigenerational poverty in his community which is partially the result of generations of plantation- and industrial-style agriculture. By emphasizing ecological, cultural, and financial sustainability in his philosophy, Jackson recognizes his position of privilege within the cultural landscape and is using it to imagine sustainable futures for the biotic and social systems in his community.

Like Jackson, Frank Green's philosophy about farming also emphasizes feelings of obligation to cultural and physical landscapes. Carrying on a family tradition of land ownership that began during the years following Emancipation, Green feels that he is part of a greater system which includes his family's heritage, the natural ecosystem, and the broader community. However, he feels that the stewardship of his family's heritage and his land's ecological system is most important because the health of his land determines the extent to which he can serve his community. The sense of biotic egalitarianism with which Green expressed his relationship to land emphasized positive relationships to place, and his philosophies about self-sufficiency, community, and financial autonomy have served as powerful foundations to the family's sense of place on the landscape.

Similarly, nurses at the Delta Health Center expressed in their philosophies feelings of obligation to their communities. Though the Delta has suffered from over one century of land and human resource exploitation, community advocates have found that sustainable change results from education which emphasizes the African American community's self-sufficiency

and autonomy. Under the Delta Health Center's holistic definition of health, nurses demonstrated that their goals reach further than just making bodies healthy. They show a dedication to their communities by also including ecological and cultural sustainability in their definition. Likewise, Dorothy Grady-Scarborough demonstrated a similar emphasis on whole-systems health in her philosophy of gardening. By creating spaces for the multigenerational transference of local knowledge, she believes that youth will begin to feel empowered to sustain local traditions. For these advocates, sustainability and whole-system health emerges through cultural processes that value all individuals as interdependent parts within the greater system.

In their philosophies, research participants expressed the three processes of ecological, cultural, and financial sustainability in their discussions of responsibilities and obligations. Following Gliessman's theory of sustainable food systems, they described the role of the individual in stewarding the interdependent processes that contribute to overall system health. Likewise, the philosophies expressed by research participants also demonstrate a sensitivity to the dialogic processes of landscape production that Sauer theorized about. While some participants have engaged in ecological and cultural dialogues that aim to heal past wrongs, others aim to act as stewards for the continued ecological, cultural, and financial health of their landscape. Overall, participants expressed their commitment to stewarding the development of sustainable cultural landscapes in conversation with processes of physical landscape. Finally, Leopold's theory of human responsibility to the land was most emphasized by Frank Green, who believes that his self-sufficiency and health depends on the health of his land. The sense of biotic egalitarianism that he shares with his communities expresses an obligation to maintain system balance and the desire to sustain himself and his land. Overall, the philosophies of farmers and advocacy workers demonstrate that individuals with strong commitments to place are integral

and interdependent parts of greater biotic and cultural systems whose interactions contribute to overall system sustainability.

Under the humanistic theory of sustainable agriculture that Kwasi Densu purports, issues such as land loss and poverty amongst rural, small scale farmers must be taken on from sociocultural perspectives instead of from capitalist and socioeconomic perspectives. He argues that the scientific reductionism of agricultural thought in the United States must be decentered and re-centered on the perspectives of those individuals and communities who are doing the work of agroecological farming and small scale agriculture. Building off of Densu, Teresa Mares and Devon Peña have argued that local food traditions are not rootless, but instead that they come from deeply emplaced knowledge systems of rural people long isolated from mainstream and urban markets. They call attention to the need for framing local food systems within culturally appropriate histories and food sovereignty discourses which assume that local control over food systems is a human right. Together, both theories offer humanistic approaches to the holistic, agroecological model that Gliessman forwards. Additionally, they offer a cultural perspective of sustainability which emphasizes the importance of understanding landscapes from the perspectives of the individuals who live on them.

The long-term goals of many farmers included the desire to see their philosophies manifest in tangible and intangible outcomes, which they expressed in terms of financial and cultural sustainability. Overall, their holistic and agroecological approaches to agriculture agree with Densu in that their goals spring from sociocultural and ecological philosophies, instead of capitalist, socioeconomic philosophies. However, the validity of his argument is complicated by the necessity for farmers to become financially sustainable in the short term and long term. Sophia Eisenhower, for example, is burdened by financial strain and works 70 hours a week to

sustain her vision of agriculture. Though her long-term goal is to make a lasting impact on the environment and prove that industrial models are not the only way, she struggles with the relationship between her vision and the economic reality that her labor-intensive work is not currently financially or physically sustainable.

On the other hand, Frank Green recognized finances as a challenge, yet emphasized the dissemination of knowledge and creation of community as central to his long-term vision. Unlike beginning farmers, he is not paying off a mortgage and he sustains his hobby farming by harvesting timber, hosting hunting clubs, and running a small gas stove installation business. He is aware of the difficult time young farmers have, and he wants to mentor his nephews in the business and philosophies of farming so that his farm may remain financially and culturally sustainable in the future. Many older farmers agreed that finding a way to sustain their vision in future generations will contribute to financial sustainability in the long run. For both new and experienced farmers, finding short- and long-term pathways to financial and cultural sustainability were expressed as fundamental to their overall goals.

The financial realities of many young farmers challenge Densu's view that small scale farmers should be more concerned with the cultural traditions that they sustain rather than the financial sustainability of their operations. If small scale agriculture in Mississippi generated significant income for farmers, Densu's argument would hold. However, most small farmers are struggling to remain afloat economically, in part because of their dedication to the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of the community-based, chemical-free agriculture model. Multigenerational farmers are more secure financially, but the incomes they generate from non-food products often come from customers with disposable incomes who live outside of their local communities. Densu may argue that profits from non-local customers are not sustainable;

however, they provide farmers with the income necessary to maintain their community-based markets and sustain their visions. Overall, farmers are navigating ways to become more culturally and financially sustainable in the short- and long-term. Under the current economic system, maintaining purely cultural and ideological bases for small scale agriculture is not sustainable in Mississippi. However, diversifying markets by selling products that cater to both local and non-local communities may increase the financial and cultural security of small farmers in the present and future.

The visions expressed by community advocates in the Delta also addressed short- and long-term goals, and, constrained by persistent financial concerns, they emphasized cultural sustainability as a powerful community capital. At the Delta Health Center, nurses have attempted to meet the immediate food needs of their community through gardening and food distribution programs. In addition, they hope to inspire lasting change through education by offering gardening, breastfeeding, and cooking classes. In teaching people the skills to “return back to the future,” nurses emphasize self-sufficiency and highlight the positive aspects of past traditions. Though both breastfeeding and gardening have negative associations among many African American locals due to their suppression during the Jim Crow era, the practices also represent great educational and health opportunities in the region. Similarly, Dorothy Grady-Scarborough has used her oral history program to offer a new paradigm in the region that reclaims symbols of past injustices and turns them into symbols of self-empowerment. In this, the goal of “returning back to the future” is a manifestation of philosophy of the whole-system health care model. As an African American Delta native, Grady-Scarborough’s holistic and place-based vision of sustainability starkly contrasts the placeless and generic versions of outsider-driven ‘community development’ that institutions offer.

Both programs frame education within culturally appropriate discourses and account for people's immediate food needs. In this, they agree with Mares and Peña's argument that local agricultural knowledge comes from deep cultural histories of isolation from mainstream markets and that local food systems should be framed within culturally appropriate histories and food sovereignty paradigms. Educational programs at the Delta Health Center and Dorothy Grady-Scarborough's oral history program have begun to reclaim symbols of past injustices as symbols representing self-empowerment. And food distribution programs use garden education to teach communities that they can control their food systems and health outcomes. The holistic health models and food sovereignty programs that local community advocates have implemented demonstrate the argument of Mares and Peña not because it is optional but because it is necessary for the cultural and physical survival of communities. For Delta community advocates, the immediate concern of providing people with food and resources underlays a broader vision to contribute to the long-term cultural and physical survival of communities.

Historian Mart Stewart explains that large scale antebellum plantations were sites of agroecological practice for both slaves and planters. He argues that within these sites of nonorganic order, slaves used their local knowledge of environments to provide food for their families. In this, they transformed oppressive aspects of the system into opportunities for self-sufficiency. In my research, I found that many farmers have taken on a similar perspective in their philosophies about the historical relationship between agriculture in the past and present. For those young farmers whose parents and grandparents view small-scale agriculture skeptically, farming represents freedom from the oppression inherent in the industrial system. However, they explained that older generations left agriculture for the industrial sector because they felt that agriculture represented oppression and that industry represented freedom.

Interestingly, both generations left systems that they felt were oppressive and joined professions that they believed could provide them with more security. For beginning small farmers, the land represents tangible and intangible sources of security, including capitals such as ecological sustainability, financial autonomy, and community engagement. While the symbolic meanings attached to agriculture have changed, the decision to resist oppressive systems remains one similar motivating factor for older generations who joined the industrial sector and for younger people who have returned back to the land.

Multigenerational African American landowners such as Frank Green never expressed skepticism about small scale or sustainable agriculture, although they also didn't self-identify as sustainable agriculture farmers. Instead, Green identifies as a small farmer who seeks to uphold his family's tradition. Unlike younger farmers who are returning to the land out of resistance to industrial agriculture, though, Green's family has lived autonomous of the industrial system for generations and continues to find satisfaction in the lifestyle. He referenced his family's choice to pursue land ownership following Emancipation as an empowering decision that has allowed generations to maintain their agricultural heritage and knowledge systems. In agreement with Stewart and Scott, Green's family history represents a long tradition of resistance to high-modernist and industrial systems. Despite generations of separation, the reasons that young people are returning to the land today and the reasons why African Americans sought land ownership following Emancipation are necessarily different, but they represent a historical continuity of agroecological value systems in the past and present. In this, the longevity of Green's farm and his philosophical values about land represents the classical definition of sustainability that many younger farmers are attempting to navigate through the discourses of the sustainable agriculture movement.

The perspectives on history that community advocates in the Delta have taken exemplifies Stewart's argument due to the regional history of environmental, cultural, and economic oppression of African American residents. Throughout the region's history, and notably during the Civil Rights movement, undercurrents of resistance have worked to empower local residents from within oppressive systems. L.C. Dorsey, the founder of the Delta Health Center, advocated for black autonomy despite systemic pressures that locked people into deprivation and dependency. Nurses explained that today, the center carries on her vision by implementing holistic health programs that focus on education. Similarly, Dorothy Grady-Scarborough's oral history program seeks to empower youth by teaching them about the local knowledge systems of older generations. Though the region's dominant systems have historically been oppressive to the physical and cultural well-being of communities, the work of Delta advocates in the past and present represents resistance to dominant power structures. The persistent resistance of Deltans over generations is a powerful example of sustainability that has emerged from ongoing threats to the cultural and physical survival of individuals and communities.

PART TWO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Both rural sociology and critical race studies assert that a holistic understanding of people and their communities can only come from perspectives that situate them within the contexts of their social and physical environments. They emphasize that attention to the personal experiences and political realities of communities is crucial in the work of activism and social movements. In particular, the livelihoods framework of rural sociology argues that bottom-up, whole-systems, and participatory approaches to community development are necessary in the support of resilient communities. But while sociologists argue that institutions can effectively

support the strategies that communities already employ to secure healthy livelihoods, critical race theorists argue that before this assumption is made, social power relationships need to be deconstructed and examined. They argue that in order to counter the pervasive effects of racism in society, the voices of people of color must be amplified and power relationships that favor the elite must be deconstructed. This section argues that individuals and communities are currently navigating ways to build autonomy, social capital, and sustainable infrastructure in the midst of unequal power relationships, internal controversies, and external institutional barriers.

In the historical context of social movements in Mississippi, local people have often joined non-local organizations in protest against local, state, and federal policies that denied locals access to services. When New Deal policies sidelined agricultural workers in the Delta, non-local organizations such as the STFU advocated in support of workers' rights. In the Delta and Providence cooperative farms that grew out of the Union, however, racial tensions escalated and the projects collapsed after it became clear that the organizations only reinscribed the hierarchical paternalism that they intended to dismantle. Locally-initiated projects such as Fannie Lou Hamer's Freedom Farm Cooperative, on the other hand, thrived under local control, but too collapsed due to lack of managerial support. In response to these projects, for-profit agricultural cooperatives emerged as a powerful locally-controlled alternative. While cooperatives have remained lasting examples of successful social movements in Mississippi, tensions between the visions of inspired leaders and the daily realities of local communities continue to affect the relationships between rural advocacy organizations and their communities in the state.

In their study of community capitals, Flora and Flora have argued that a series of processes within communities interact to result in sustainable systems. They emphasize the autonomy of individuals working from the bottom up and argue that tensions and negotiations

between social, human, cultural, political, natural, financial, and built resources all combine to determine the strength of communities. Though research participants described a range of different approaches to building relationships with communities, all described flexible views on community that emphasized the exchange of tangible and intangible products. In particular, Sophia Eisenhower, the CSA farmer, emphasized a democratic sense of community when she included other farmers in her definition. Because she exchanges knowledge and ideas with other farmers, they are just as important to her sense of community as the customers she sells to. While their support doesn't add to the short-term financial success of her farm, Eisenhower believes that the knowledge shared between farmers builds long-term financial and cultural resiliency in the region. For her, the community capitals of trust and knowledge exchange are integral aspects of her long-term vision of financial sustainability.

Likewise, Adrian Jackson, the hog farmer, defines his community as both the restaurant customers who buy high cuts and his local customers who buy lower cuts for traditional dishes. For him, the tangible exchange of money with restaurants is just as important as the intangible results he gets from selling to his local community. Under the community capitals framework, resilient communities emerge through a series of negotiations between a range of capitals. For Jackson, local tradition, financial compensation, ecological stewardship, and social equity are all part of his vision for strengthening community. Local tradition is sustained when he sells products to locals who will make traditional dishes such as souse or pickled pigs feet, and he is financially compensated by restaurants who pay higher prices for his value-added product. Likewise, humane production practices steward sustainable biotic systems on his land, and he contributes to the social well-being of his community by creating jobs through his processing

facility. In this non-hierarchical view of community resources, all capitals are emphasized as equally important to the overall success of the farm.

Rick Caldwell, the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives employee, similarly expressed concern for the tangible and intangible products of his work in his description of community relationships. As an agribusiness management specialist, he helps other small farmers become more financially productive, and he helps them navigate the federal programs that can help them raise their bottom lines. As a member of his county farm cooperative, he and other farmers grow produce for the local food hub and educate youth about the possibilities of farming as a career. For Caldwell, community relationships depend as much on the exchange of intangible resources as tangible products. The farmers he has helped as a MAC employee see him as an equal, and are open to discussing their goals with him. Likewise, youth view him as a mentor who has their best interest in mind. The intangible product of trust is exchanged in his relationships, and it directly contributes to the extent to which he is able to give people tangible results. By establishing relationships of trust with farmers, Caldwell is able to help them apply for programs which will raise their bottom line. And by mentoring youth about farming careers, he has the chance to carry on the vision of food sovereignty within his community. For him, the interaction of community capitals such as trust and knowledge sharing are integral to the financial and cultural sustainability of small farming within his community.

Like farmers, Daniel Doyle maintains a holistic view of capitals in his perception of farming communities throughout the state. According to him, the communities that MSAN serves include sustainable agriculture farmers as well as conventional farmers. He hopes that by providing them with resources that state and federal institutions do not, increasing numbers of small farmers in the state will turn to MSAN for support. While Doyle's vision recognizes the

knowledge of all farmers as a capital, its emphasis on “sustainable agriculture” versus “conventional agriculture” creates a false binary by failing to acknowledge the varied and intersectional ways that farmers identify themselves. In addition, the organization emphasizes a top down approach to leadership and tends to identify itself as a form of cultural capital, instead of negotiating within existing capitals. In this, MSAN seeks to establish the trust of communities based off of the assumption that they do not trust existing state and federal agriculture agencies. While it is true that many small farmers do not trust these agencies, the capital of trust is built from the interactions of other capitals including cultural competency and financial sustainability. Under Flora and Flora’s framework, sustainable systems emerge from the processes of interaction between all capitals. Moreover, they stress that sustainability is achieved when communities emphasize the capitals that they *do* have instead of the capitals they lack. Doyle appreciates many of the tangible and intangible assets of statewide farming communities; however, long-term cultural sustainability may emerge more readily when the organization establishes relationships of trust by engaging in existing community capitals rather than generating support from the absence of capitals.

While respondents agreed that their relationships with communities were mutually supportive and were built off of capitals such as trust, knowledge, and monetary exchange, their perceptions of community responses to their work were much more critical. According to Tony Jarvis, the Certified Naturally Grown label hurts farms more than it helps because locals view the label with caution. A multigenerational Mississippian, he believes the label signifies an elitist movement controlled by outsiders who do not understand local customs. His perception is supported by rural sociologists who argue that under the livelihoods framework, sustainable communities result, in part, from projects which grow organically from local cultural contexts.

Green and Kleiner have argued that distinct sets of power relationships in society both permit and limit positive life outcomes for rural communities, and they believe that people regularly use local knowledge to build social capital. Under this framework, it is reasonable to assume that local people would not trust CNG food without first trusting the farmers behind the label. For Jarvis, CNG represents a non-local knowledge system that has no basis in the cultural context of his community. He sees CNG as a threat because it emphasizes non-local knowledge as superior to local traditions. Although he believes in chemical-free growing methods, he feels that culturally appropriate measures such as word-of-mouth references and personal relationships with farmers will ultimately generate more support of natural foods within his community than labels generated by outsiders.

Sophia Eisenhower, on the other hand, supports the CNG label and believes that her certification has helped increase people's interest in her farm. The majority of her CSA customers live in Memphis, and she believes that they are attuned to the discourses of the national sustainable agriculture movement. However, she feels that the lack of interest from rural communities in Mississippi is a result of disengagement from the philosophical underpinnings of the movement. According to livelihood theorists, sustainable social movements must spring from local cultural contexts, but they add that non-local discourses can strengthen local movements when local autonomy is emphasized. Eisenhower has identified a need in local communities for fresh food, and she believes that the CNG label is the best identifying marker of that food. However, she finds that local people don't want to pay more for CNG produce, and she feels that it is the responsibility of consumers to educate themselves about the philosophies of the national sustainable agriculture movement. While shifts in mindset may inspire more people to shop locally for fresh food, the livelihoods argument is correct in its emphasis on local cultural

context. Instead of expecting a shift in mindset amongst local communities, Eisenhower may establish more relationships of trust with locals by marketing her products within existing cultural contexts. It is long-term cultural processes, then, and not only short-term marketing strategies, that demonstrate a commitment to whole-system sustainability which may result in the emergence of material sustainability.

In addition to emphasizing the autonomy of local communities in social movements, livelihoods theorists add to their argument by asserting that institutional support from the top down can meet communities at the grassroots level and help strengthen the overall movement. Moreover, they emphasize that universities and granting foundations can successfully join grassroots movements by providing capital and technical assistance. While this approach appears mutually beneficial, flaws in the assumption that people's movements can truly preserve their autonomy when institutions provide the funding emerge upon critical examination. Rick Caldwell's small farm cooperative, for example, formed from the tradition of cooperative community support systems within African American communities who historically have deeply distrusted institutions. Unable to access capital and resources as individual farmers, the cooperative farm movement grew as a coalition of farmers decided to pool their resources and function autonomously from outside support. Today, pervasive distrust of federal agencies and the public education system has lead Caldwell to believe that institutions ultimately do not have the best interest of his community in mind when they offer their support. Though the theory of diverse partnerships under the livelihoods framework sounds appealing, the reality of its effects have resulted in the reinforcement of unequal power relationships which undermine relationships of trust between local communities and local organizations. Although he admitted that a shift in local mindsets regarding food and agriculture will be necessary for the sustainability of the

cooperative movement, Caldwell believes that his community has the power of influence necessary to catalyze this change on its own without the support of institutions.

While many farmers had strong feelings about community perceptions of their work, Daniel Doyle took a neutral approach, citing ways that communities have both positive and negative perceptions of MSAN. On one hand, he is grateful that MSAN has been invited into the conversations of existing organizations in the state who have recognized opportunities in shifting towards sustainable agriculture conversations. However, he is also aware that communities are skeptical of the organization due to its newness and lack of a track record. Doyle is particularly aware that his identity as a white, male, non-local Mississippian hurts community perceptions of the organization. Under the livelihoods framework, grassroots movements are the most sustainable when they are built on strong local control and relationships of trust. However, the theory also argues that non-local influences can add to the strength of existing movements when they join in existing, culturally appropriate conversations. Just as the community capitals framework emphasizes trust, the livelihoods framework emphasizes local cultural context as a factor determining long-term sustainability. For MSAN, attention to establishing relationships of trust within existing cultural contexts has, and will continue to strengthen the level of influence that the organization has on statewide agricultural communities.

When describing their philosophies about sustaining community through local food economies, many farmers expressed the belief that proving their commitment to place was their primary mechanism for securing long-term relationships of trust within communities. Adrian Jackson has found that locals are more likely to buy from his farm than from a farm run by non-southerners because his family lineage represents a cultural heritage that locals inherently trust. Likewise, John McGowan, the commercial vegetable farmer, believes that the future of his

community's local food system rests on his shoulders. Because of the relationships that he has built with his community, customers tend to associate all local food with his family farm. On the other hand, Jake Coleman has few local customers, but has found that his multigenerational ties to the land increase the sense amongst his non-local customers that he is committed to his work and philosophies about chemical-free agriculture. While the commitment to place is seen as a community capital by both local and non-local consumers, the perception of the existence of a social movement varies based on the producer's and consumer's relationship to history and national sustainable agriculture conversations.

For multigenerational farmers, cultural histories of small scale agriculture and rural isolation created a cultural context in which current trends in local food are extensions of the state's agricultural history. For newer farmers and non-local customers, though, current trends in local food are easily viewed as extensions of the national sustainable agriculture movement. While the difference of perception has created tensions between farmers and consumers who perceive the local food economy from different contexts, negotiations have also resulted in mutually-beneficial relationships that find common ground amongst diversity. For Jake Coleman, interactions between his conservative, Christian community and liberal, agnostic friends have dramatically widened his perception of the local food movement in the state. He found that while people's cultural and religious backgrounds are different, their reasons for wanting fresh food are largely the same—they want to raise their children on healthy food within a community-based food system model. Even though locals and non-locals tend to approach local food from different cultural contexts, the meeting place of similar value systems has resulted in mutually beneficial relationships of trust.

The community capitals framework agrees that the process of interaction between a range of capitals results in the ongoing re-creation of sustainable community systems. Likewise, the livelihoods framework finds that the more food system conversations are framed within local cultural contexts, the more likely that long-lasting and truly sustainable relationships between local people and their non-local advocates will emerge. In addition to these two theories, critical race theory adds an insightful perspective to conversations about community within local food systems. It argues that because of pervasive racism in society, American history must be reexamined from the perspectives of those who are marginalized by the white supremacy inherent in high-modernist capitalism. By analyzing different perspectives on community from a critical race perspective, a clearer understanding of the significance of community within local food systems may emerge.

Within discussions of community, African American farmers involved in food sovereignty conversations expressed the need for their communities to perceive agriculture as a pathway to cultural and material survival. Rick Caldwell knows that the young generation hasn't taken up farming because of its negative cultural associations and the difficulty of financial success. However, he has also learned through personal experience and participation in civil rights organizations such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, that because of its dependency on a historically racist agrifood system, his community is literally starving for fresh food. He feels that the belief that agriculture is a profession controlled by wealthy white people needs to change, and he teaches his community about urban agriculture organizations such as Growing Power in order to show that every community has the ability and right to grow its own food. Caldwell believes that the slow process of shifting mindsets back to food sovereignty and sustainability is one way that his community can provide for its own cultural and material

survival. Working within a deep cultural context steeped in the values of the Civil Rights movement, he has established relationships of trust and has offered his community culturally appropriate ways of rethinking their relationships to food and agriculture. Caldwell's proven cultural competency and commitment to place have resulted in the emergence of food sovereignty conversations as well as sustainable agricultural and cultural processes within his community.

While the work of MSAN focuses on connecting the voices of small farmers throughout the state, Daniel Doyle also feels that the organization's work should help heal the negative perceptions that many African American communities have toward agriculture. Likewise, one of MSAN's goals is to help attract African Americans to farming professions. But while the goals of Caldwell and Doyle are similar, the contexts from which their perceptions come are markedly different. The white, male, and non-local identity that Doyle ascribed to himself is a significant concern which may constrain MSAN's ability to establish meaningful relationships of trust with black communities. Unlike Caldwell, who identifies as black and whose family has lived in Mississippi for generations, Doyle lacks a personal relationship with the black community, and this absence has more than just symbolic meanings. Under the tenets of critical race theory, the organization must ask itself what power relationships it reinscribes simply by identifying itself as a leader in the statewide sustainable agriculture movement. By not recognizing MAC and small farmer cooperatives as leaders within black farming communities, for example, MSAN unintentionally implies that only organizations led by educated, white, male, non-local people can truly be leaders. Recognition of the subtle yet meaningful aspects of race relationships that critical race theory calls attention to will be crucial for MSAN as they continue to navigate pathways towards sustainability within diverse communities in Mississippi.

In general, research participants agree that intangible capitals such as trust and knowledge sharing contribute to the financial viability and long-term sustainability of local food systems in Mississippi. Likewise, the respect of local cultural heritage and proven commitments to place are perceived as assets to community-based food systems. In general, participants were skeptical of national discourses about local food movements, and respondents who invoke the discourse of the national sustainable agriculture movement tended to garner skepticism from local communities. Finally, differences between the historical and cultural contexts of farmers and customers didn't negatively affect relationships when the differences were bridged by similar value systems and philosophies about health. However, differences in historical context between historically marginalized communities and communities of privilege do matter. When the work of black communities is symbolically, albeit unintentionally, undermined by organizations in positions of power in terms of race, gender, and class, sustainable communities and relationships of trust will be slow to emerge.

PART THREE: INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The literature that supports this section offers critical analysis of institutional power structures from the disciplines of history and the social sciences. Grounded in concepts furthered by James Scott's state theory, the literature deconstructs systemic power imbalances and argues that institutional suppression of *metis*, or local knowledge, has systematically disenfranchised small farmers and landless farm workers throughout the world. Agrifood scholars agree with Scott and argue that while industrial agriculture aims to suppress it, local knowledge remains resilient because disenfranchisement encourages people to incite social movements. Likewise, historians of southern agriculture have found that racism, disenfranchisement, and human rights violations have been the intended consequences of institutional policies on local, state, and

federal levels. Finally, environmental anthropologists explain that the fundamental incommensurability of local knowledge and institutional knowledge will continue to create power imbalances in societies despite efforts to find compromise. In this section, I argue that despite prolonged attempts by institutions to suppress local agricultural knowledge, individuals continue to navigate systems of power in order to build sustainable food systems within their communities.

Throughout Mississippi's history, local, state, and federal agricultural policies have supported each other and resulted in the systematic disenfranchisement of small farmers and farm workers. Beginning with New Deal policies that benefited wealthy landowners and made farm laborers obsolete, poor, rural people in Mississippi were repeatedly denied access to land, work, and social services. In addition to federal policies, local decisions that encouraged dispossessed farm workers to leave the state compounded federal abuses and resulted in acts of *de jure* and *de facto* racism that aimed to strip people of their local knowledge systems and place-based heritage. At the same time, nonviolent direct actions by grassroots movements have set lasting precedents of resistance to institutional power structures in the state and region. The sit-in by evicted sharecroppers at the Greenville Air Force Base in 1966 proved that poor people could force institutions to listen to their demands. Later, cases such as *Strain* and *Pigford* set the precedent that governments themselves can be held responsible for their actions. Within a history of systemic racism and institutional neglect, social movements from the grassroots level have challenged the power of institutions throughout Mississippi's history.

Research participants whose farm businesses were most severely affected by state policies were extremely critical of the state's involvement in agriculture. To them, the limits that the state has imposed on small producers actively dissuade the burgeoning entrepreneurial

culture in the state. Furthermore, they agreed that the policies that curtail small farming as a viable enterprise are against the state's best interest, which, as a leader in the national agricultural economy, should be lauding the growth of local food systems. In an effort to explain the seemingly contradictory actions of the state, agrifood scholars Green and Kleiner have argued that because state agriculture agencies have relationships with national and global agrifood interests, their neglect of small producers is simply a matter of scalar politics. They also argue that in response to institutional neglect, small producers often respond by catalyzing grassroots social movements that seek to protect their livelihoods. Ultimately, states don't respond to the needs of small farmers because they have no financial incentive to do so. Farmers understand the big business interests of the state, but they also feel that strong local food systems have the power to stimulate significant economic gains for the state overall. In response to what they feel are personal confrontations to their livelihoods, many farmers have adopted a similar language to describe their positions, and they have begun to form a community of like-minded voices driven by collective dissatisfaction.

According to Pete Daniel in *Dispossession*, mid-20th century policies that drove small farmers out of business were not only the intentional results of ingrained institutional racism, but were attacks on the local knowledge and land-based heritage of farmers. Today, similar policies that research participants described cannot only be explained by citing racism. While racism is still a driving factor in statewide policies, many white farmers expressed the same dissatisfaction that black farmers did. In *Tomatoland*, Barry Estabrook explains that many white-owned multigenerational tomato farms in Florida are failing because of state relationships with big banks and corporations that demand the lowest possible prices for food products. In response, any farmer who wishes to pay his workers living wages and still stay afloat in the market is

economically unable to do so. Similarly, small farmers in Mississippi find that they cannot sustain their personal finances and community-based value systems within a state that imposes unreasonable regulations on their operations. Historically opposed to any actions and lifestyles that they perceive as threats to elite interests and to the status quo, the state has undermined both the financial viability and philosophical tenets of small farming for both white and black farmers in Mississippi.

For African American communities in the Delta who have historically been sidelined by state and federal agricultural agencies, institutional neglect is viewed as a foundation of the region's social and economic life. Early Civil Rights demonstrations attempted to call attention to the state's neglect of the poor working class, but isolated victories within the white supremacist culture ultimately resulted in business as usual for the leading institutions in the region. Today, community organizations that were founded during the Civil Rights movement in response to institutional neglect continue to struggle against the barriers that local and state institutions reinforce. One nurse at the Aaron E. Henry Health Center in Mound Bayou explained that in addition to controlling all the federal funds that come into the Delta, local elites actively seek to limit the services available to patients at the center. Under Green and Kleiner's argument, the neglect of poor people is an intentional oversight by the state whose interests lie with big business and big banks. In response, quiet efforts to rekindle civil rights conversations that began in the 1950s have emerged amongst local community leaders. According to Green and Kleiner, the more institutions stray from the needs of people, the louder acts of resistance will become and the more that disparate voices will join to form grassroots social movements.

Throughout the history of the Delta, the neglect of poor people of color has served the interests of the ruling elite. Pete Daniel explained that when the New Deal's Agricultural

Adjustment Act of 1933 offered farmers large subsidies for reducing their acreage in production, wealthy Delta planters scrambled to take advantage of the program. In its wake, however, thousands of farm laborers were dispossessed from their homes and jobs, and over the next thirty years, mechanization and additional subsidy programs continued to disenfranchise workers. In response, local governments initiated a series of policies that James Cobb argues attempted to force blacks out of the Delta. Today, the foundation of elite social thought in the Delta rests on the assumption that local blacks who didn't leave the region stayed out of stupidity and lack of self-will. A critical historical analysis, however, reveals that local institutions implemented a cultural genocide which attempted to starve blacks out of the area culturally, economically, and psychologically. The histories that Daniel and Cobb have told of the Delta reveal that systems of power feed themselves as legislation reinscribes false perceptions of reality. Though the Delta is steeped in histories of violence, local community advocates and communities who have stayed in the region represent a multigenerational tradition of sustained grassroots resistance to dominant power structures in defense of their place-based heritage and local knowledge systems.

Many farmers agreed that ultimately, the state had the consumer's best interest in mind when they created strict safety regulations. However, they also felt that those safety regulations which were designed for large-scale industrial operations are not scaled appropriately to accommodate for the operations of very small, family farms. In defense of their operations, many small farmers also felt that the state lacks a fundamental understanding of the values of the community-based local food model. According to James Scott's critique of high-modernism, the imperialistic tendencies of states tend to systematically disenfranchise those who do not fit their model of planned and industrial social order. In their disenfranchisement, he argues, states also seek to suppress *metis*, or local knowledge, although sustainable societies cannot function

without its expression. For farmers who understand the long-term cultural and economic benefits of strong local food systems, the state's dismissal of their operations discounts a deep history of small farming and land-based heritage in the state. Furthermore, it symbolizes a racist and elitist system that undermines the autonomy and ability of local communities to sustain themselves without institutional oversight.

At community development and social justice conferences in the Delta, non-local institutional representatives asked that local community leaders join with them in strategic partnerships so that together, they could catalyze lasting change in the region. The community advocates didn't disagree, but they were highly skeptical of the authenticity of institutional representatives. According to one local leader, institutions have lied to communities and neglected their needs so much in the past that local people have developed a deep distrust of outsiders and institutions. This distrust comes from histories of disenfranchisement by elite, white supremacist institutions on local, state, and federal levels, and has reinforced the belief amongst many local organizations that institutions ultimately seek their own gain at the expense of the people they claim to help. Scott's *metis* argument supports local sentiments, and critical race theory furthers it with the argument that the racism of industrial high-modernism is so pervasive that it is difficult to identify and address in local settings. While many agencies truly believe they can help poor people, they fail to critically assess their own positions within traditionally racist institutions that ultimately reinscribe the systems of power that they claim they fight against. After institutional funds leave the Delta, communities find themselves without jobs, without social services, and without institutional allies. For one local leader, the survival of local knowledge, passed from older to younger generations, is the only way that communities can truly preserve their cultural heritage and physically sustain themselves.

Ismael Vaccaro and Karma Norman have argued that local and institutional knowledge practices are fundamentally incommensurable, and that researchers must be able to decipher the two from each other. The differences between the knowledge practices of farmers and the state agricultural agency have been clearly delineated, and are based off of community on one side and financial interests on the other. The difference between knowledge practices amongst community development institutions and local community advocacy organizations, though, is subtle and more difficult to identify. In one case, a local community advocate was an employee of the federally funded AmeriCorps program; however, she identified herself as a local, spoke for the needs of her community, and defended the legitimacy of local knowledge. In another case, a professor at a public university regularly jokes that he is an adopted member of the local community because he lived there for over a decade. His claims to authenticity are undermined, however, because of his position at a historically racist, elitist, high-modernist institution and his participation in community development projects that symbolically enact paternalism and reinscribe power inequalities. In light of these power dynamics, local farmers and community advocates have begun to follow the precedents set by other non-majoritarian Mississippians in the past in their search for spaces in which they can use their own voices to tell their stories to their communities.

Despite the policy barriers that the state has imposed on small farmers, many producers remain optimistic about the positive change that they can make. By meeting institutions on their terms and negotiating, several farmers have taken positions of leadership and have begun acting as liaisons between institutions and their communities. Adrian Jackson, for example, realizes that nothing can change for small farmers unless they begin to construct the infrastructure that they need within the guidelines of governing institutions. While building his USDA-inspected

processing facility, Jackson took it upon himself to decode federal policies with the ultimate purpose of preserving local tradition and revitalizing the local economy. As Scott argues, the consequences of high-modernist social systems tend to suppress *metis* when policies go unchallenged. However, he also argues that local knowledge remains resilient as communities use their collective knowledge to navigate towards compromises. By working from within the conventional system, Jackson has demanded democratic participation in institutional conversations. Instead of allowing his community's local traditions and food economy to suffer from institutional neglect, he met institutions on their terms and demanded a relationship of diplomacy. Small farmers, then, may find that their collective voices are the strongest not when they fight and fear institutions, but when they meet institutions in diplomatic conversations and work to find sustainable compromises.

For communities in the Delta who remain deeply distrustful of institutions due to decades of neglect and paternalism, compromise will need to take place on the part of institutions before communities begin to trust them. According to local leaders, cultural competency works both ways, and it is not fair that only locals are expected to speak the language of community development institutions. They believe that the institutions that offer them support must also be able to speak their language, and many realize that charitable non-local organizations and funding institutions would collapse if it was not for local participation. Though funding institutions often view local communities as dependent on their assistance, a fairer assessment reveals the opposite: it is institutional employees who are dependent on communities' willingness to participate in their programs (which may or may not benefit locals materially, culturally, or psychologically). Without local participation in their poverty alleviation programs, institutional representatives would quickly find themselves unemployed.

Because Delta communities have deep local knowledge systems and a land-based heritage that came from histories of isolation, violence, and oppression, their needs are often misunderstood and marginalized. Development institutions often see only the poverty and dependency of Delta communities, and they fail to recognize the social capitals that make people in the region autonomous and resilient to pervasive social ills. Locals, on the other hand, refuse to accept the paternalism and patronization of institutions; in effect, they will refuse the terms of community development projects until power relationships are critically and honestly dealt with. By agreeing to negotiate only when institutions agree to their terms, local advocates prove Scott's argument that local people regularly protect *metis* from suppression when it is threatened.

From a critical race perspective, community development institutions don't realize that their projects often effectively reinforce oppressive power structures. However, because they are often represented by people unfamiliar with local cultural contexts, critical race theorists argue that institutions fundamentally fail to understand this. Patricia Hill Collins has argued that when people are not allowed to speak for themselves and from within their own social contexts, the human experience is dangerously simplified. Under her theory of perspectivism, then, local advocates are correct to demand that community development institutions confront the structural racism that they reinscribe and that they work to amend it by proving their cultural competency. Likewise, it is the responsibility of local advocates to continue stating their terms from their perspectives, using their voices. As local advocates, Scott, and critical race theorists agree, it is only when local people use their collective voices to democratically defend local knowledge systems that institutions will begin to compromise and seek sustainable pathways for negotiation.

Overall, farmers and community advocates agreed that institutions either intentionally or unintentionally limit cultural and economic pathways for sustainability in their communities. In

response, farmers who have been burdened with non-scaled safety regulations have begun to find common language to describe their community-based values and philosophies about small farming. In addition, many farmers have begun to act as liaisons between their communities and institutions, navigating policies in order to find culturally and economically sustainable compromises. Delta community advocates have likewise been burdened by institutional neglect, which is compounded by pervasive structural racism that works to silence the voices of local communities. In response, community leaders have agreed to sit at the table with community development institutions, demanding that institutional representatives compromise with the cultural realities and philosophical perspectives of local people. While diverse in their perspectives, both case studies demonstrate the ways that communities in Mississippi are using local knowledge and community-based actions to foster sustainable communities within larger institutional systems.

PART FOUR: NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Central to the literature that supports this section is the notion that local issues are both symbolically and materially connected to larger systems through relationships that span history and geography. Coming from the disciplines of history, American studies, and agrifood studies, all the texts further a global perspective of place in which sustainable social movements result from the unification of diverse local perspectives. The critical regionalist perspective of Douglas Reichert Powell grounds this section with the argument that region is made from sets of unboundaried relationships amongst places. In this, he finds that every person who represents a local place is connected, through their experiences and values, to a global network of people who represent the collectivity of those experiences and values. The work of southern historians, agrifood scholars, and international activists use case studies and current events to demonstrate

the critical regionalist perspective. For them, the repetition of history has resulted in a global crisis which mimics local systems on a worldwide stage, and they argue that this presents an opportunity for similarly disenfranchised people to come together in solidarity. This section argues that while their work is necessarily grounded in local realities, small farmers and community advocates in Mississippi are also engaged in dialogic conversations with national and transnational issues, which both inform and are informed by local events.

Throughout Mississippi's history, people's land-based heritage and grassroots social movements have been undermined by institutions on local, state, and national levels. Within the past fifty years, a global restructuring of agrifood systems has resulted in rural land loss, overproduction, food scarcities, and the depopulation of the countryside, a trend which mimics Mississippi's agricultural history. While local, state, and national policies in the mid-20th century resulted in mechanization, farm worker evictions, and depopulation in Mississippi, current trends in global agriculture compound these results and reinforce their severity in local settings. Globally, trade policies such as NAFTA and governmental support of corporations such as Monsanto have threatened rural people's land and heritage in Mississippi and worldwide. In response to the global threats that agribusiness has imposed on farmers and farm workers, many rural advocacy organizations have joined in solidarity in the discourse of food sovereignty. Led by La Via Campesina, sister organizations on regional, national, state, and local levels offer rural people a means of resisting agribusiness together. In Mississippi, farmers and rural advocates are drawing upon their communities' agricultural heritage and histories of resistance to speak to the shared experiences of rural people throughout the world.

When describing their perceptions of local food systems within national and global contexts, some farmers returned to the position that Mississippi was lagging behind larger trends

and that it needed to catch up. They placed their local food systems within larger networks by explaining that the recent interest in small scale agriculture is part of a larger movement in which people are joining a national discourse about sustainable agriculture. They believed that Mississippi can stand on a level playing field with the rest of the country when communities begin to appreciate its underutilized natural resources. Citing low land prices, fertile soil, and abundant water resources, farmer Seth Niles envisions a shift towards sustainable agriculture when more people join the critical mass of the rest of the country. While these sentiments agree with one part of the critical regionalist argument, they neglect to consider the ways in which Mississippi's own agricultural history can positively inform larger conversations on the topic of local food systems. Following Powell's argument, local communities who feel they can only *be* changed, instead of agents *of* change, within larger conversations, deny themselves opportunities for empowerment within those larger institutional systems that they feel oppressed by. Furthermore, when local people identify the state as a weak link, they also undermine the state's history as a leader in the national Civil Rights movement, whose local actions advocated for the right of rural people to live democratically and independently of institutional oppression.

While many farmers didn't connect the sustainable agriculture movement to other social movements in the state's past, Daniel Doyle explained that he regularly draws upon this history to inform his work at MSAN. He feels that Mississippi's history of natural and human resource exploitation is unique relative to the rest of the country, and believes that the organization is in an ideal place to continue many conversations of the Civil Rights movement. While he wasn't specific in his strategy, he expressed the desire to lead efforts to heal, grow, address, and fix past wrongs, and he explained that this history gives Mississippi the opportunity to be a leader in national conversations about sustainable agriculture. In addition to identifying the state as a

contributor to national efforts, he also believes that the precedents set by national small-scale agriculture organizations can inform the work that Mississippi does. MSAN's work is informed by national trends in sustainable agriculture, and the organization welcomes non-local perspectives to join in conversation with existing local conversations. Following Powell's argument, MSAN correctly places local communities in dialogue within larger networks. But while history informs the work of the organization in a symbolic sense, Doyle didn't explain how MSAN connects the present-day realities of African American and other socially disadvantaged populations to the sustainable agriculture movement. If it claims to be the statewide leader in the movement, the organization must regularly demonstrate the ways in which it unifies the diverse realities of small scale farmers within the movement's discourses.

At a luncheon celebrating food sovereignty and the shared experiences of small farmers in Mississippi and in central Uganda, members of the Indian Springs Farmers' Association cooperative in Petal, Mississippi, explained their position in the national sustainable agriculture movement. Ben Burkett, a fourth generation black farmer and member of La Via Campesina's Food Sovereignty Commission, agrees with the philosophies of the national sustainable agriculture movement, but doesn't consider himself a part of it. According to him, his community had been practicing sustainable agriculture for generations before people began calling it a movement. In addition, he explained that the cooperative was a food hub for twenty years before food hubs became trendy nationally. Though he joins in conversation with the global food sovereignty movement, he finds the sustainable agriculture movement unattractive because it doesn't consider the historical context of small scale African American farmers in its discourse. The perceived differences between the needs of small farmers and the sustainable agriculture movement, then, may be a matter of historical context, cultural context, and

discourse. The Burkett family's multigenerational small scale farming tradition represents a sustained lived experience which inherently challenges the authenticity of newer sustainable agriculture movement discourses.

According to agrifood scholars Eric Holt-Giménez and Miguel A. Altieri, alternative food movements fall somewhere on the spectrum of radical, progressive, corporate, and neoliberal trends. Radical organizations take the position of food sovereignty, they argue, while progressive sentiments focus on food justice. Under this model, the Indian Springs cooperative would be considered a radical organization. They regularly invoke the values of the Civil Rights movement, and they connect their struggles as African American farmers to the food sovereignty struggles of rural people throughout the world. On the other hand, the sustainable agriculture movement can be considered progressive because it advocates for environmental and social justice without always considering the deep historical contexts and intersections of race and food that radical perspectives take. Moreover, sustainable agriculture's reputation of being "unbearably white,"¹⁰² is founded upon its tendency to transform the products of land-based heritages into trendy consumables, a practice that often makes the largely progressive movement slip into a corporate orientation. But while Holt-Giménez and Altieri argue that progressive discourses need to merge with radical discourses, there may be room for compromise between the two perspectives. According to Powell, the strongest versions of place both inform and are informed by larger networks. If there is to emerge a sense of solidarity amongst these perspectives, diversity must be represented by decentralized leadership, democratic participation,

¹⁰² Guthman 2011: 263-281

and explicit attention to how power inequalities are reinscribed when communities and their leaders don't feel welcome in conversations.

While farmers expressed interest in larger movements, their participation in national and global conversations was limited and centered on activities that directly improved their marketability and production practices. Jake Coleman belonged to Heifer International, a global policy advocacy organization for small farmers, until state policies threatened the viability of his operation. Other farmers felt that their interest or participation in nationally-recognized small farmer organizations such as Certified Naturally Grown and Slow Food helped them market their produce. Though several farmers agree with the principles of the sustainable agriculture movement, they didn't clearly express how they participate in it, other than growing and selling food in an ecological and community-based model. When they discussed policy issues, however, they often expressed the hope that someone would represent their interests as small farmers in national conversations, and many cited MSAN as the organization that could best do this work if it generated more local support.

While one of MSAN's objectives is to influence policy, it hasn't had time to focus on the issue due to limited financial resources and small support staff. Still in its first few years of operation, the organization has identified a range of key issues in the state and is in the process of assessing each of them for feasibility. Currently, Doyle is considering the organization's options for participation in larger networks, and he does believe that MSAN's work must both use local resources to solve global problems and global resources to address local issues. He explained that MSAN is part of a global movement of people who are attempting to reverse the effects of climate change, economic disruptions, and systemic inequality, and he feels that any local work that MSAN does will inherently be part of this larger vision. Although Doyle believes

that MSAN can represent the needs of local farmers while sustaining a global vision, it may prove difficult to work from both scales simultaneously. According to Powell, global understandings of locality are only sustainable when they are grounded in the senses of place evoked by local realities. Similarly, Annette Aurelie Desmarais argues in *La Via Campesina* that the international food sovereignty organization of the same name has been successful because of its commitment to democratic representation of the local realities of its members. Only by grounding itself in local truths and experiences, she argues, can the vision of global food sovereignty gain the momentum necessary to be a sustainable reality.

In his description of participation in national and transnational conversations, Ben Burkett explained that a series of global events triggered his interest in the shared experiences of small farmers worldwide. Before global agrifood policies and trade agreements affected the Indian Springs cooperative, the organization had contracts with several national food companies. But after the passing of NAFTA in 1994, the contracts were lost to international growers who accepted a lower price for their produce. At that point, Burkett realized that the livelihoods of small farmers worldwide were being threatened by policies that undermined the value of their skills and knowledge. By engaging in transnational discussions with small farmers similarly impacted by global agrifood policies, he finds that his community is given a voice on a global stage shared by people in similar situations.

Edward Mukiibi, an agronomist from central Uganda, echoed Burkett's sentiments at the event and described the land-grabbing policies that his government is using to dispossess peasants from rural areas. After the land is depopulated, he explained, the government partners with corporations and repurposes the land for industrial grain agriculture. Burkett followed Mukiibi by agreeing that similar political processes had driven Mississippi farmers and farm

workers from the land in the mid-20th century. Because of the historical continuity between current global events and local experiences, Burkett and Mukiibi have identified Mississippi as a place where authentic conversations about food sovereignty can take place. Though he hasn't gained widespread attention locally, Burkett is recognized internationally as a leader in the food sovereignty movement. By basing his global advocacy off the local history and realities of his community, he represents the critical regionalist perspective of locally grounded global activism that Powell describes.

In *American Mediterranean*, Matthew Pratt Guterl argues that the current globalization of the world's food systems is an example of governments' historical proclivity towards unchecked economic expansion at the expense of workers. He furthers his stance by asserting that the reasons that slave owners began searching for alternatives to their labor shortages following Emancipation are the same reasons that agribusiness continues to dispossess people of their land today. By equating antebellum planters to the CEOs and politicians who control agribusiness, he draws a continuous line from the past to the present. Today, the policies that Burkett and Mukiibi are fighting are arguably the same as the ones that evicted Delta farm workers fought when they resisted the effects of mechanization and subsidy policies. Likewise, Guterl's argument shows that the current market climate for small farmers is nearly identical to the one that thousands of black farmers faced before local and national policies forced them from their land in the mid-20th century. By connecting local history and current local realities to the global experience of small farmers, Burkett and Mukiibi demonstrate the power of informed action. Joining a transnational network of farmers similarly impacted by land loss and dispossession, the philosophical underpinnings of the food sovereignty movement have resulted from grounded local perspectives that find unity in collective experience.

While many farmers perceive that the national trend in sustainable agriculture has begun to influence Mississippi local food systems, their own participation in the movement has been limited. However, in their personal philosophies, farmers expressed a global consciousness that drives their local work. The philosophy that rotational grazing can help reverse the effects of climate change was a feeling shared by several farmers. And a collective distrust of global agribusiness and its damaging effects on communities also inspires their local work. National momentum in urban agriculture projects also inspires local cooperatives who apply philosophies of urban self-sufficiency to their rural landscapes. Often, farmers used the term ‘sustainable agriculture’ when describing national trends, but most did not use the term to describe their own work. Instead, they told of sustained family relationships to land, community, and the local economy that together represents an authentic version of whole-systems sustainability. While the work of small farmers could easily be categorized as sustainable agriculture, it is important that outsiders to those communities do not apply the label when local people have not done so first.

According to Desmarais, the strength of La Via Campesina is its decentralized organizational structure and democratic leadership that places the identities, needs, and philosophies of small farmers at the center of all conversations. The organization demonstrates the imperative of diverse, locally grounded identities through its structure that emphasizes processes over products and counters globalization policies from above with an international coalition of grassroots people. Though small farmers in Mississippi have not collectivized their concerns into a movement such as LVC, the organization may serve as an example of local opportunities for creating spaces of farmer-led conversations about food sovereignty, chemical-free agriculture, and the community-based farming model.

Currently, MSAN has taken the responsibility for organizing, facilitating, and leading those conversations. While its work has filled a great need for community discussions around small farming issues, its structure represents the hierarchical, centralized model that has so often failed to represent the practical needs and realities of local farmers and farm workers throughout Mississippi's history. The organization has succeed in bringing diverse voices together in conversation, and it has begun to catalyze cross-cultural discussions about the intersections of environmentalism, civil rights, and agriculture in the state. However, it has also asserted itself as a leader that speaks *for* other people in the pursuit of discrete outcomes, instead of a participant *in* a collective processes towards sustainability. The organization is very young, and Doyle is self-aware that he must find culturally appropriate ways to merge his vision with the practical realities of Mississippi farmers. In this search for identity, though, it may prove beneficial for MSAN to authentically ground itself within local realities of ecology, community, and economy before it spreads outward into broader, statewide issues.

In their philosophies about transnational concerns, both Burkett and Mukiibi agreed that international forums contribute both a symbolic and real power to the work that people have been doing locally for many years. For them, the collectivization of shared concerns represents an opportunity to celebrate the strength that farmer-activists regularly display in local settings. Furthermore, transnational discussions inspire a sense of community that fuels the philosophical engine of the food sovereignty movement. According to Desmarais, regional, statewide, national, and global perspectives of the movement can only be authenticated through examination of conversations and actions taking place on the local level. Because globalization specifically undermines local efforts, she explains, it is imperative that local farmers lead food sovereignty conversations in their resistance to globalization. Thus, efforts such as Burkett's and Mukiibi's to

connect their family histories and personal realities to the similar experiences of small farmers worldwide represents the foundation of the food sovereignty movement. Under the agroecology metaphor, individuals represent the core of the system and form the basis of communities, the objects of institutional policy, and the binding thread of larger networks. Founded upon the daily realities, work, and concerns of local individuals, food systems in Mississippi represent essential parts of a whole system that includes the lives of small farmers worldwide.

CONCLUSION

In their interactions with land, communities, institutions, and larger networks, research participants demonstrate a whole-systems relationship to place. First, land-based heritages and philosophies of ecological stewardship ground this relationship by showing the personal relevance of larger conversations in small scale agriculture. With their strong attachments to local land and places, research participants are integral to the healthy functioning of the larger social systems of which they are a part. Second, relationships that emphasize commitments to the stewardship of healthy communities displays participants' understanding that ecological sustainability is most relevant when local people directly participate and benefit from those processes. In this, participants are currently navigating ways of building social capital and infrastructure despite tensions between different visions. Additionally, participants have displayed their commitment to resisting attacks on local knowledge through their resistance to unequal institutional relationships. Despite histories of institutional neglect, participants are continuing to navigate towards compromises within systems of institutional power imbalances. Finally, participants have begun to consider their relationships with national and transnational conversations that offer larger stages from which to address local issues. Grounding their work in local realities, many participants have engaged in dialogic conversations with national and

transnational issues which inform and are informed by local events. The sum of this research expresses an agroecological metaphor in which individuals form the foundation of a global system whose processes both evoke and invoke the conditions necessary for the sustainability of rural livelihoods, small scale agriculture, and local food systems.

CONCLUSION

This research has employed a multi-scalar method of inquiry to investigate the ways in which small farmers and community advocates in Mississippi are working to navigate the challenges and opportunities present within the growth of their local food systems. The literature that the study draws from agrees that the health of society as a whole depends fundamentally on the degree to which individuals express and defend their commitments to place and local knowledge. The historical context also demonstrates the moments in Mississippi's history in which individuals and communities have defended their rights to land ownership and representation despite systemic injustice on local, state, national, and global levels. Drawing from personal interviews and participant observation research, the original work presented in this study describes the ways in which individuals are employing particular philosophies and relationships to place to inform their own work within local food systems. The analysis of the research draws from each preceding chapter to argue that local experiences in Mississippi ultimately join a network of interconnected local systems that are bound, through similar experience and history, to a global system of people resisting power from above with grassroots power from below. This research has led to the conclusion that the condition of sustainability in local food systems emerges through an ongoing process of interactions between diverse people who share a similar commitment to sustaining their local landscapes and communities. This conclusion supports the argument that it is ultimately the strong connection to local place that motivates people to defend their right to food sovereignty on greater national and global platforms.

Throughout the chapters, the exploration, discussion, and analysis of land use narratives and land ethics has demonstrated that individuals with strong attachments to land and local environments are integral to the healthy functioning of broader cultural and institutional systems.

The literature and history of this section further the argument that an agroecological sense of place includes commitments to ecological, cultural, and financial sustainability within communities. The analysis of the research demonstrates that the work of farmers and community advocates is inspired by this sense of place and commitment to place in which people desire the sustained health of their community-based rural lifestyles. Indeed, it is only one's ability to sustain their lifestyle over time that truly represents the quality and process of sustainability in agriculture.

Explorations of community engagement and participation have demonstrated that individuals and communities are currently navigating ways to build social capital and infrastructure in the midst of unequal power relationships, internal controversies, and external institutional barriers. The literature and history survey the ways that power dynamics between local and non-local people may result in relationships of trust as well as skepticism when local senses of place are believed to be undermined. The analysis of case studies reveals the ways that these power dynamics have played out within local food systems in Mississippi. Despite cultural diversity amongst food system advocates, all research participants expressed a commitment to place and a sincere desire to stimulate within their communities an engagement in lifestyle choices which could sustain their lives and lifestyles into the future.

Within the study of institutional relationships, the research found that despite prolonged attempts by institutions to suppress local agricultural knowledge, individuals continue to navigate systems of power in order to build sustainable food systems within their communities. The literature and history describe complex institutional systems which regularly undermine local knowledge, though they also argue that local communities regularly navigate these systems to defend their land, local knowledge, and financial autonomy. The findings and analysis support

this position, and they explain that local farmers and community advocates are drawing upon their commitments to place to navigate towards relationships of compromise with institutions.

Finally, the exploration of national and transnational conversations demonstrates that while their work is necessarily grounded in local realities, local food system advocates in Mississippi are also engaged in dialogic conversations with national and transnational issues. The literature and history draw from the precedents set by international social movements to suggest that the processes of globalization which undermine local cultures and economies can be effectively challenged by diverse coalitions of rural people working together. The discussion and analysis demonstrate that local people who have strong historical relationships to land and social movements can effectively influence a global vision of food sovereignty when they join in conversation with similarly affected people from other states and countries.

Taken together, the research shows that local actions and experiences have the potential to effect change on a global scale. It supports the idea that individuals, when engaged with others in respectful and culturally relevant conversations, can be powerful agents of change. In this, there is an implicit recognition of the threatening power that large governments, banks, and agribusiness corporations wield over populations of poor people and rural people throughout the world. Particularly, these institutions pose a significant threat to poor and rural people of color who have historically been subject to *de facto* and *de jure* racism, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Today, small farmers and farm workers of every nationality have begun to experience the institutional oppression that poor people in the global south have experienced for centuries. As a result, a collective transnational consciousness has begun to emerge that recognizes the need for solidarity and nonviolent resistance.

In Mississippi, the Civil Rights movement, the small farmers cooperative movement, the food sovereignty movement, and the sustainable agriculture movement are local manifestations of this transnational consciousness. In their local context, grassroots struggles for human rights in Mississippi's past and present demonstrate that people with strong attachments to place and land-based heritages can effectively challenge systems of oppression when they remain persistent in quiet acts of resistance from their positions within dominant systems. In their transnational context, these movements join a collective voice of struggle that La Via Campesina activists have said is composed of "people defined by place" who are working to counter globalization from above with "globalization from below" by finding "unity within diversity."¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Desmarais 2007: 198; 114; 28

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. What is your name and occupation?
2. How did you come to do this work?
3. How would you describe your personal philosophy towards your work?
4. Can you please describe your role in the food system of your community and/or region?
5. What do you feel are some of the major opportunities, or strengths, in the development of your farm and/or local food system?
6. What do you feel are some of the major challenges, or weaknesses, in the development of your farm and/or local food system?
7. How do you think the current local infrastructure, including physical and cultural capital, contributes to the overall development of your local food system?
8. What is your overall vision for the long-term growth of your farm and/or community?
9. How do you think local history positively and/or negatively impacts the community development of your region?
10. Do you have any last thoughts or remarks to add?

VITA

IRENE VAN RIPER

vanriper.irene@gmail.com

Education

Bachelor of Arts with honors in Anthropology
University of California, Santa Cruz, 2012

Santa Rosa High School
Santa Rosa, California, 2008

Employment

Graduate Writing Fellow, The Department of Writing and Rhetoric
University of Mississippi 2015-2016

Just Food Fellow, Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network
Oxford, Mississippi, 2015-2016

Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Department of Southern Studies
University of Mississippi, 2015

Nathalie Dupree Graduate Fellow, Southern Foodways Alliance
University of Mississippi, 2014

Garden Coordinator, Program in Community and Agroecology
University of California, Santa Cruz, 2010-2011

Publications and Presentations

Guest Lecture

“Small Scale Agriculture, Community Autonomy, and Food Sovereignty in Mississippi”

“ANTH 311: Food, Place, and Power,” Professor Catarina Passidomo Townes

University of Mississippi, 2016

Blog Post, “13 Million Acres, No Mule”

Southern Foodways Alliance, 2015

Blog Post, “Small Farmer Cooperatives in Mississippi Work Locally, Organize Globally”

Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, 2015

Album Review, “Lead Belly: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection”

The Southern Register, Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 2015

Awards

Summer Internship Award, The Center for the Study of Southern Culture

University of Mississippi, 2015

Summer Research Award, The Graduate School

University of Mississippi, 2015

Research Paper Award, The Center for the Study of Southern Culture

University of Mississippi, 2015