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### Solidarities from below in the making of an emancipatory rural politics: Insights from food sovereignty struggles in the Basque Country

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# Solidarities from below in the making of an emancipatory rural politics: Insights from food sovereignty struggles in the Basque Country

Rita Calvário, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Joseba Azkarraga

## **Abstract**

*Exclusionary and regressive politics are on the rise globally. How do food sovereignty struggles contribute to counter these forces? We ground our analysis on how EHNE-Bizkaia, a Vía Campesina member organisation from the Basque Country, advances food sovereignty. Inspired by Featherstone's work on left politics and solidarity, we shed light on the ways in which this organisation mobilises food sovereignty to establish political bonds between the marginalised, helping to construct political identities and enact forms of subaltern agency that challenge uneven power relations and geographies. The paper provides theoretical and empirical insights on what constitutes a radical and emancipatory politics of food sovereignty.*

**Keywords:** food sovereignty, solidarity from below, emancipatory politics

## 1. Introduction

The post-2008 economic crisis catalysed the (re-)emergence of radical politics, but not necessarily in a progressive direction. Resistance to austerity and neo-liberal globalisation came from both the left and populist, far-right spectrum of politics. Right-wing populism, expressed by regressive nationalist/gender/race politics is on the rise; in some countries, it has a strong rural constituency, as was evident by recent elections in Europe and the US. How are rural social movements in some places contributing to block the emergence, and proliferation of these forces? This paper addresses this question by looking at how food sovereignty is conceptualised and practised in a particular context—the Basque Country. In doing so, we explore how food sovereignty struggles potentially offer opportunities to counter the emergence and expansion of right-wing populism.

Food sovereignty, as defined by the transnational agrarian movement *La Vía Campesina* (LVC), aims to build a society ‘free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations’ (LVC 2007). Consequently, food sovereignty

requires transcending the social conditions and relations of capitalism and developing a post-capitalist agrarian – and non-agrarian alternative. Thus food sovereignty is about building power within the fissures of capitalist social-property relations, (...) to transform food systems in favour of peasants, smallholders, fishers, food system workers and underserved communities (...). Food sovereignty is an objective which must continue to be sought, by popular mobilisation and struggle, by practice and by dialogic popular learning (Akram-Lodhi 2015, 567).

The idea of food sovereignty is thus rooted in an anti-capitalist left politics which may, depending on the particular conjuncture, strategically engage with, and confront the state, while also working to ‘transcend’ the state itself (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 129). This, together with food sovereignty’s emphasis on changing unequal social and ecological relations makes it a radical and emancipatory political project. As the political framework of food sovereignty ‘now inspires collective action among tens of millions of people all over the world’ (Shattuck, Schiavoni and VanGelder 2015, 422), a growing academic literature is revealing the multiple tensions, contradictions and challenges that social movements face as they engage in on-the-ground struggles to advance the political project of food sovereignty (Alonso-Fradejas, Borras, Holmes, Holt-Giménez and Robbins 2015).

In a move against binary constructions of food sovereignty—local resistance vs. global dynamics (Figueiroa 2015), ‘of the state’ vs. ‘of the peoples/communities’ (Shattuck, Schiavoni and VanGelder 2015), domestic vs. international markets (Li 2015), for example, among others — some are calling for more historically grounded and relational views of food sovereignty (Schiavoni 2017). As Desmarais and Wittman (2014, 1157) argue, a

range of factors, including history, social relations (class, race, gender, age), ecology, politics and culture, shapes the particular nature of each food sovereignty struggle in any given place (...). Food sovereignty is very much situated; it occurs in particular places and how it is expressed is determined largely by local dynamics, but also in response to changing global dynamics.

There is a need, however, for more research that provides theoretical insights on what constitutes a radical and emancipatory politics of food sovereignty.

More specifically, how do food sovereignty struggles, as they develop in particular contexts, engage in/build an emancipatory politics? In writing this paper, we were inspired by Featherstone’s (2008, 2012) work on left politics and solidarity as a lens through which to analyse food sovereignty struggles. We argue that the building of ‘solidarities from below’ is crucial to advance the radical and emancipatory political project of food sovereignty. This entails establishing connections, as transformative political relations within and between social groups and spaces, through which to

construct political identities and enact forms of subaltern agency that challenge uneven power relations and geographies. In a context of rising right-wing populist politics, we claim that cultivating a left politics throughout society through food sovereignty has the potential to prevent and oppose exclusionary identities and politics.

This paper focuses on the Basque Country for two main reasons. First, food sovereignty is front and centre in configuring rural politics and in influencing the nature of activism in society at large. Second, in the Basque Country, food sovereignty is also linked to the goals of political sovereignty, thus bringing into discussion the connections between food sovereignty, 'sovereignty', and nationalist politics.

We ground our analysis on the historical and leading social actor of Basque food sovereignty: Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna (EHNE)-Bizkaia, a small farmers' union member of LVC. This paper draws on qualitative research conducted between 2012 and 2016 in Basque province of Bizkaia. Calvário and Desmarais, separately, were participant observers of EHNE-Bizkaia activities at different periods of time in 2013 and 2014. Calvário conducted 28 interviews with EHNE representatives and agroecological producers while Desmarais did 12 interviews with various EHNE-Bizkaia leaders and representatives of non-governmental organizations. In 2015, Azkarraga and Desmarais conducted research involving group interviews with 46 Basque youth who had recently started to grow food and 10 interviews with established *basseritaras*.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 elaborates on the relationship between constructing spaces, imaginaries and practices of solidarity from below, and emancipatory politics. Section 3 analyses how food sovereignty is conceptualised and practised in the Basque Country by EHNE-Bizkaia, focusing on the ways in which food sovereignty is grounded in a politics of solidarity-making within and between social actors, struggles and spaces. We conclude in Section 4.

## 2. Solidarities from below and emancipatory politics

In seeking to advance an understanding of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall (1985) coined the term "authoritarian populism" and defined it as

a movement towards a dominative and "authoritarian" form of democratic class politics (...) [that characterises] certain strategic shifts in the political/ideological conjuncture. Essentially, it refers to changes in the "balance of forces". It refers directly to the modalities of political and ideological relationships between the ruling bloc, the state and dominated classes (Hall 1985, 118).

This definition calls attention to the political/ideological dimension of right-wing populism, which 'is often either neglected or reductively treated by the left generally and by some Marxists' (Hall 1985, 121). It also signals the importance of broadening the struggle to simultaneously include several fronts rather than being limited to the economic sphere. As such, a radical and emancipatory left politics invokes 'greater flexibility, openness to diverse views (...), and innovative departures' from binary political positions of 'either/or', as Edward Soja (2009, 69-71) puts it. And, in Doreen Massey's (2005, 181-183) view, it has to escape a long tendency on the left to denigrate or to romanticise local struggles vs. global dynamics. Rather, she argues that local struggles must to be placed within the complex power-geometry of spatial relations. For her, this is key to understanding the formation of political identities and politics. In turn, she states, political activity reshapes both identities and spatial relations. In her view, space is relational and a sphere of multiplicity which is an essential part of the character of, and perpetually reconfigured through, political engagement. The 'closure of identity in a territorialised space of bounded places provides little in the way of avenues for a developing radical politics', she concludes (Massey 2005, 183). To move beyond the local, then, is not to isolate local struggles, but rather to engage in a 'politics of connectivity' that is

one of extension and meeting along lines of constructed equivalence (...). The building of such equivalences is itself a process, a negotiation, and engagement of political practices and imaginations in which ground is sought through which local struggles can construct common cause against a (now differently constructed) antagonist (...). [And] within this process—precisely through the negotiation of a connection and the construction of a common antagonist—the identities of the constituent local struggles are themselves subjected to further change. (Massey 2005, 182)

In short, Massey argues that a radical politics requires a ‘greater “outward-lookingness”’, or what she calls a ‘politics of place beyond place’ (Massey 2009, 141-142).

Featherstone (2008, 2012) expands this notion of ‘politics of connectivity’ by engaging with the process of solidarity-making from below. For him, this is about constructing relations within and between oppressed social groupings for political activity, in and beyond “the local”. Solidarity thus propels Massey’s idea of connection of local struggles to include also the connection of individuals and social groupings in/through/for politics. In his view, solidarities shape political identities and forms of agency—they can thus be part of a process of politicisation and are also key to shaping processes of contestation. Solidarity is hence ‘a transformative process which works through the negotiation and renegotiation of political identification’ (Featherstone 2012, 37). For Featherstone, the creation of solidarities from below is a ‘powerful source for reshaping the world in more equalitarian terms’ (2012, 4). We add that solidarities from below are also critical for preventing/opposing the growth of right-wing populism.

Featherstone considers that the forging of solidarities is not a ‘given’, i.e. an innate or an automatic outcome of belongings to a social position such as class, gender, nationality or ethnicity. Rather, solidarities are actively constructed through political activity and struggle. This has four implications.

First, solidarities are constructed through uneven power relations and geographies—they are about practices of negotiating racialised, gendered and classed spaces of encounter. These practices are not unproblematic. They can entrench existing political identities, relations of power, and further marginalise others, or they can actively create new ways of relating through which to challenge, rework, and bring into contestation prejudices and cut across and/or refuse powerful divides. He calls for an engagement ‘with the power relations through which solidarities are crafted and conducted as a necessary condition for foregrounding the contested processes through which solidarities are generated’ (Featherstone 2012, 21). This sheds light on what type of political project and left politics are being constructed and mobilised. Second, solidarities are expansive and not bounded within particular groups. This highlights the existing divisions and fragmentations between marginalised social groupings and the ways in which political links and bonds can be built. Third, ways of articulating solidarity are contingent and embedded in context and as such, they are always partial, limited, and situated. This recognizes ‘that histories and geographies exert pressure, set limits and constitute possibilities for the construction of political identities’ (Featherstone 2008, 7). Fourth, constructing solidarities is a generative process. This is about practices that actively generate, shape, and (re)make shared values and identities, fashioning new relations, linkages and knowledges. Through these practices of solidarity, diverse outcomes may emerge, contributing to shape political activity.

The making of solidarities also has a spatial dimension. Inspired in Gramsci’s work on the ‘Southern Question’, Featherstone (2012, 29) argues for taking seriously the ways in which ‘subaltern geographies of connection’ are fashioned through the solidarity work of building political relations to contest geographies of power. Similarly to Massey’s ‘politics of place beyond place’, this is also a call to view solidarity not as a process of scaling up political activity beyond the local, but as enmeshed in complex place-based politics. It embodies a view of militant place-based political activity as being shaped by connections with other social actors, places and struggles. Rather than viewing struggles as only formed in particular places, then networked, this approach invites us to look at ‘the ways in which place-based politics is produced out of negotiations with trans-local connections and routes of

subaltern activity' (Featherstone 2008, 4). It is also through these specific articulations and embodied, passionate connections between different places that internationalism can be constructed. He situates 'universality as produced through political relations and struggles', and positions 'solidarity as a universalising political relation' (Featherstone 2012, 38). Thus, analysing how political relations are built through solidarity work allows for a better understanding of the terms on which political antagonisms are being constructed.

Following Featherstone's perspective, when analysing food sovereignty struggles, the focus of analysis should fall into the ways in which solidarities from below are being constructed to challenge uneven spatialities and socio-ecological inequalities, in and beyond the local. This is about a process of generating forms of political identity and agency that cut across, rework, and confront powerful divides of class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality; seek to build political links and bonds between marginalised social groupings; and are open to learn from praxis and reshape political activity, while engaging in a 'politics of place beyond place.' In the following section, we analyse how EHNE-Bizkaia engages with uneven power relations and geographies.

### **3. Basque food sovereignty struggles: the role of EHNE-Bizkaia**

Food sovereignty in the Basque Country emerged from *baserritarras*' struggles to protect a way of life and secure livelihoods against encroaching agrarian modernisation and the imposition of neo-liberal policies, but it then rapidly spread throughout society. Nowadays, a plurality of movements and social actors – ranging from youth groups, women's organizations, labour unions and community groups embrace food sovereignty as a mobilizing frame for social change. Meanwhile, some municipal governments use it to determine local policies and programs, while the Basque International Development Agency requires that all rural development projects and programs it supports must indicate how these relate to food sovereignty.

Several factors specific to Basque society help to explain why food sovereignty has had so much adherence. First, *baserritarras* are an essential part of the Basque cultural identity, as they played a crucial role to maintain Basque language and culture during the Franco dictatorship. Second, although we cannot explain them here due to space limitations, various communal and non-mercantilist social customs and institutions are historically entrenched in Basque shared values and identities, and for the most part, these remain alive today and/or are being actively reshaped in both rural and urban areas (Arpal 1985; Pérez-Agote 2006; Gatti et al. 2005; Azkarraga 2017). Third, "sovereignty" has been and remains a key struggle for Basques. Struggles for self-government have a long history in the Basque Country (Letamendia 2013, 10). Basque nationalism was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> as a movement against liberalism, the excesses of capitalism, and socialist and anarchist ideals. During the Spanish Civil War, Basque nationalists, socialists and republicans allied into an anti-fascist autonomy government. During the 40 long years of the dictatorship, this alliance was maintained as part of the struggle against Franco's violence and repression, but it also gave rise to more radical forms of Basque resistance. This historical context helps explain why Basque nationalism has had a strong left-wing (and plural) front in which the struggle for sovereignty and Basque cultural identity have been connected with the desire for a more equal society. The unilateral abandonment of armed struggle in 2011 led to the emergence of new political actors, as well as the confluence of left-wing political forces in the struggle for a democratic Basque state. Many of these actors and forces are imagining, recreating, and putting into practice ideals of sovereignty. Among these, are movements struggling for food sovereignty and energy sovereignty.

The historical and leading social actor of Basque food sovereignty is EHNE-Bizkaia, a small-farmers' union and member of LVC. Born clandestinely in 1976, EHNE-Bizkaia has a long history of left-wing political activism to defend *baserritarras* and dignify their work, as Unzalu, the current coordinator of the organization, explains. In 1981, EHNE-Bizkaia joined forces with the provincial agrarian union of Gipuzkoa and the Unión de Agricultores y Ganaderos Alaveses in the province of Álava to create the

confederation EHNE. Subsequently, EHNE expanded to include the whole Basque region in Spain when the union from Navarra also joins up in 1986. Several of our interviewees from EHNE-Bizkaia explained that this convergence aimed to strengthen the organisations' capacity to politically analyse shifting agrarian issues, to engage in multi-scale protest with institutions, and be better able to respond to the sector's immediate problems.

With Spain joining the European Economic Community in 1986, EHNE reaches across borders seeking to better understand the agrarian situation and get to know other rural actors in Europe. By 1992, EHNE joins the family farmers' coordination organizations in Spain (Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos), and the Confédération Paysanne Européenne (CPE). EHNE also participates in the founding conference of LVC held in April 1993 in Mons, Belgium.

By the early 1990s, EHNE takes a critical stand on European and Basque agrarian policies that pushed for an industrial, capital-intensive agriculture where small farms were considered 'inefficient, not viable, and to be destroyed', as Andoni, a livestock producer and member of EHNE-Bizkaia, explains. Andoni describes the impressions of Basque farmers when they participated in an exchange with German counterparts in the mid-1990s: 'we saw the huge technological shift, and decline of farm-holdings, but also the fear [German] farmers had of us; they had been told we would become competition due to lower costs'. This, of course, was far from the reality. As Andoni stresses, many Basque farmers adopted the view that 'being small had no value', but the problem was that such 'production and technological shifts raised costs beyond any economic rationale'. EHNE often clashed with the Basque government whose policy goal 'was never to support the *baserritarra*, but the agro-food industry;', Andoni affirms. In reality, he adds, the government

sold to us a model totally distant from our social base, and our culture. We need to remember that *euskera* [the Basque language which was forbidden during the Franco dictatorship] (...) has been saved thanks to *baserritarras* and rural areas—how can you understand a model that goes against small scale agriculture when this is a good part of our culture?

Unzalu also recalls that sovereignty was becoming increasingly important. By then EHNE argued that "We are producers of food and we need to be able to do so in ways that we determine, and as a project of the country." But as the Common Agricultural Policy takes hold in the Basque region, farmers begin receiving subsidies as compensation for low prices which leads to a certain lethargy and a loss of perspective within EHNE. Meanwhile, LVC begins to expand and articulates the food sovereignty alternative which subsequently gains momentum internationally and also within EHNE.

After years of struggles against 'the intensive model, the capitalist model, always being against (...) with few convincing results', Unai Aranguren, an EHNE-Bizkaia leader, explains that in the mid 2000s, the union shifts to promoting re-peasantisation by focusing on agroecology, community-supported agriculture (*Red Nekasarea*), and re-localisation. This approach is embedded in its goal of advancing food sovereignty for *Euskal Herria*, a region that encompasses seven provinces in both Spain and France. Through food sovereignty, EHNE-Bizkaia has worked to politicise agri-food issues through a 'clash of models' and attract new young *baserritarras* in the face of an increasingly ageing sector (Calvário and Kallis 2016). In doing so, the union combines a prefigurative politics "in the here and now" with a contentious politics of social protest, while demanding progressive policy reforms.

EHNE-Bizkaia's shift of politics lead to its split from EHNE in 2010. There are a number of reasons for this split but due to space limitations we can only discuss one. According to Andoni, EHNE 'stopped responding to unionism goals, stopped making demands, stopped having a European or world vision, and it stopped having an analysis of the root causes of problems.' Other members of EHNE-Bizkaia we interviewed recalled years of feeling somewhat held back and blocked as they tried unsuccessfully on many occasions to shift EHNE to take more progressive, alternative, radical positions that were more in line with food sovereignty. They also mentioned a growing impatience or dissatisfaction with EHNE's strong discourse of food sovereignty that was not accompanied by policies and actions aimed at transforming the industrial agricultural model. By moving away from



EHNE, EHNE-Bizkaia was free to then embrace food sovereignty more wholeheartedly, concertedly and proactively.

In Unai's view, food sovereignty has enabled *baserritarras* to recover their 'dignity' and '*la ilusión*' (the closest but somewhat inadequate English translation might be 'hope', 'vision' or 'dreams'); now, he says, *baserritarras* feel that their work is valued by others in society, and that this is 'a project with a future'. He exemplifies the shift that happened with *Red Nekasarea*, a community-supported agriculture scheme advanced by EHNE-Bizkaia in 2007. In *Red Nekasarea*, producers supply agroecological food baskets of seasonal vegetables, milk, meat, eggs and pasta. Each group is coordinated by the producer of vegetables, who collects the other products to different producers and delivers the weekly basket to a specific agreed-upon place. In 2012 it had 700 households divided into 27 consumer groups, supplied by 80 *baserritarras* (EHNE-Bizkaia 2012). Whereas before, *baserritarras* would sell 'their big lettuces in the market where no one saw them, and they were forced to lower the price, and just got upset', in *Red Nekasarea* they hear how 'tasty and good their products are', he says. The *Red* has also brought 'pride' in being a *baserritarra*, something that before seen as 'derogatory', he adds, and this happens also 'because people feel that they are participating in a project for social change.' Most of the *baserritarras* who participate in *Red Nekasarea* are new producers, as older ones face difficulties in shifting from intensive models to agroecology and short-supply chains due to indebtedness, and age. More than half of EHNE-Bizkaia's affiliates are lifelong farmers who are over 50 years old and practice conventional farming. The others are engaged in agroecological farming and their background varies from being children of farmers and landless rural workers to non-farmers (Calvário 2017).

EHNE-Bizkaia has prioritized the rejuvenation of agriculture by supporting the entry of new *baserritarras*. To help this goal, it has introduced since 2007, training courses in agroecology. For new producers, agroecological farming is advantageous for its low dependency on investment, technology and external inputs. *Red Nekasarea* also supports this process by ensuring new *baserritarras* with a market for all of their produce, encouraging them to plan their production and thus avoid surpluses. In this scheme, those who are purchasing the baskets assume a one year commitment to buy the food baskets at a fixed price, thus guaranteeing a secure income to *baserritarras*. EHNE-Bizkaia's approach also sought to take advantage of the new lifestyle aspirations of the Basque youth. As Unai explained 'In these days, those who are going to farm are no longer children of peasants, instead, there are many youth from the cities who want to be peasants.' According to him, from 2008 to 2012, around 50 new agroecological *baserritarras* were established on the land with the support of EHNE-Bizkaia. And more than 1,000 of young people have taken agricultural training courses organised by them (Azkarraga and Desmarais 2017, 201).

Through food sovereignty, EHNE-Bizkaia has also engaged in a 'politics of connection', as Massey would put it. First, it has reinforced networks of peasants and small farmers in *Bizkaia* and *Euskal Herria*, as well as within Spain, Europe and internationally. Second, it has established connections with consumers and the youth in urban areas by advancing agroecology and establishing *Red Nekasarea*; and connected with other social and political forces in *Euskal Herria* through *Etxalde*, a Basque social movement of *baserritarras* for food sovereignty born in 2011. *Etxalde* works 'to connect [food sovereignty] initiatives that exist and promote new ones' (Etxalde 2015), while constructing alliances with other social movements and political actors.

Next we explore how these connections follow and challenge uneven power relations and geographies, inquiring into how 'connections' build solidarities from below, and what political identities and forms of subaltern agency they help to generate. We do this by first examining how EHNE-Bizkaia conceptualises food sovereignty, and how putting food sovereignty in practice embodies a politics of solidarity-making. We specifically focus on how EHNE-Bizkaia navigates class and gender power relations, while engaging in 'solidarity' work to expand and generate new political relations. Second, we investigate how EHNE-Bizkaia builds 'subaltern geographies of connection' through political activity grounded in bringing together and reshaping place-based struggles and in constituting

heterogeneous networks. We do this by looking at EHNE-Bizkaia's efforts of movement- and alliance-building.

### ***3.1. Conceptualising food sovereignty: uneven power relations and spatial divides***

*(in progress)*

### ***3.2. Expanding solidarities and reworking political identities: a focus on class and gender***

*(in progress)*

### ***3.3. Constructing trans-local 'subaltern geographies of connection'***

*(in progress)*

## **4. Conclusion**

In analysing how EHNE-Bizkaia advances food sovereignty in the Basque Country, both conceptually and practically, we have shed light on what can constitute a radical and emancipatory politics of food sovereignty that has the potential to counter the emergence and expansion of regressive and exclusionary identities and politics. Drawing on Featherstone's notion of "solidarity from below", we explored the ways that EHNE-Bizkaia mobilises food sovereignty to construct solidarities between marginalised social groupings to confront and challenge uneven spatialities and socio-ecological inequalities, within a 'politics of place beyond place'. As we have shown, Basque food sovereignty embodies a 'politics of connection' through which to build political bonds among peasants and small farmers at multi-scales, as well as between producers and non-farming social actors. Importantly, connection is built around an 'integral, open and alternative' political project of food sovereignty that puts uneven and unequal power relations at its core, and seeks to transform the whole of society, by mobilising a social majority.

Connection also entails a process of transforming political identities. This is a process through which to challenge, rework, and bring into contestation prejudices that (may) divide and fragment oppressed social groupings. EHNE-Bizkaia develops a sustained work of politicisation of producers and formation of a peasant identity around food sovereignty ideals that seeks to go against divides between *baserritarras* practising different farming models, or due to generational, cultural differences. This work involves efforts also to build solidarity relations between *baserritarras* and other social groupings throughout society, such as the youth, consumers, workers, etc. A discourse and practice of delivering "food for workers, not elites" helps this purpose, as does developing networks like *Red Nesakarea*. By extending the scope of its activities beyond its direct social base—through training courses, publications, and debates directed to all society, while also engaging in diverse local struggles together with other organisations, movements and social actors—EHNE-Bizkaia is expanding food sovereignty ideals to urban areas and thus politicising and mobilising society around the transformative project of food sovereignty. These efforts embody not only a concern with social inequalities, but also with gender issues. EHNE-Bizkaia adopts a discourse and practice that is attentive to, and seeks to address issues such as violence against women, barriers to political participation, etc. As regard agriculture, EHNE-Bizkaia develops efforts to give visibility to women's labour, as well as to deconstruct gender roles in the farm. The paper did not deal with ethnicity and the ways in which EHNE-Bizkaia addresses xenophobia and racism, immigrant labour exploitation in agriculture, and other forms of oppression in rural areas. This is particularly important to understand what ideals of Basque identity are being constructed within the ambitions of political sovereignty. This

is an important topic for further research on what constitutes an emancipatory, non-exclusionary politics of food sovereignty.

Our analysis of EHNE-Bizkaia also demonstrates that the process of solidarity-making is not linear. To advance food sovereignty and embrace a politics of ‘solidarity from below’, EHNE-Bizkaia’s first site of struggle was within the agrarian union itself. By cutting connections with EHNE, EHNE-Bizkaia was subsequently able to more freely shape the ways in which sought to build solidarities and political bonds with counterparts within *Euskal Herria* and beyond. This adds to Featherstone’s theory, as in order to construct/expand solidarities from below towards an emancipatory project/politics it may be needed, in some particular moments, to cut and rework some already established connections. The break of these connections, however, does not imply that they are lost, only that they are, or can be, reworked in other ways.

We have also shown that EHNE-Bizkaia’s “outward-lookingness” has a relevant spatial dimension. This is revealed through its efforts to build trans-local ‘subaltern geographies of connection’, both within and beyond agriculture. EHNE-Bizkaia is an active actor in consolidating solidarities between diverse peasant place-based struggles as integral to movement-building, whether within the Basque Country or beyond such as with COAG in Spain, and internationally, with the Europe Coordinating Via Campesina, and LVC. EHNE-Bizkaia also builds alliances and solidarities beyond the rural, especially with labour unions, NGOs, and diverse social movements in *Euskal Herria* and beyond.

By mobilising Featherstone’s notion of “solidarity from below” we have provided a lens through which to analyse what constitutes a radical and emancipatory politics of food sovereignty. In doing so, we respond to recent calls for more historically grounded and relational views of food sovereignty which pay attention to local specificities, but also provide theoretical insights and analytical tools for a better understanding on how food sovereignty struggles, as they develop in particular contexts, can engage in/build an emancipatory politics. This approach focuses on the building of connections, as transformative political relations between subaltern social groupings in and beyond place-based struggles. In other words, it centres on the ways in which food sovereignty helps consolidate a multi-scale peasant movement, and facilitates alliance-building between peasants and non-agrarian actors. To be emancipatory, however, these connections must embody the transformative project and politics of food sovereignty that aim at challenging uneven power relations and geographies. This means engaging with the ways through which conceptions and practices of food sovereignty navigate and contests classed, gendered and racialised inequalities and spatial divides. Through this analysis, much can be understood on what kind of political project and left politics food sovereignty helps to construct and mobilise. In the current context of rising right-wing populist politics, we claim that a project and politics of food sovereignty grounded on building “solidarity from below” that cultivates a left politics throughout society has the potential to prevent the emergence and spread of these forces.

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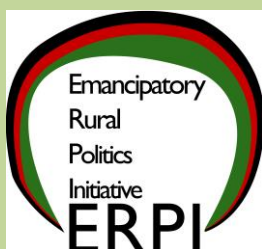
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