

# Localisation: a strategic solution to globalised authoritarianism

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For those who care about peace, equality and the future of the planet, the global political swing to the right over the past few years is deeply worrying. It has us asking ourselves, how did this happen? How did populism turn into such a divisive and destructive force? How did authoritarianism take over the political scene once again?

From my 40 years of experience working in both industrialised and land-based cultures, I believe the primary reason is globalisation. When I say globalisation, I mean the global economic system in which most of us now live – a system driven by continual corporate deregulation and shaped by neoliberal, capitalist ideologies. But globalisation goes deeper than politics and the economy. It has profoundly personal impacts.

Under globalisation, competition has increased dramatically, job security has become a thing of the past, and most people find it increasingly difficult to earn a liveable wage. At the same time, identity is under threat as cultural diversity is replaced by a consumer monoculture worldwide. Under these conditions it's not surprising that people become increasingly insecure. As advertisers know from nearly a century of experience, insecurity leaves people easier to exploit. But people today are targeted by more than just marketing campaigns for deodorants and tooth polish: insecurity leaves them highly vulnerable to propaganda that encourages them to blame the cultural "other" for their plight.

Let me illustrate how this happened in Ladakh, or Little Tibet, where I first visited as a young woman and where I have worked for over four decades. Situated in the Indian Himalayas, Ladakh was relatively isolated—culturally and economically—until the late 1960s. When I arrived in the early 70s, a campaign of Western-style development had just been launched by the Indian government—giving me the opportunity to experience what still remained of the ancient culture, and to observe the changes that came with modernisation.

In the old culture, work involved providing for the basic needs of the community—food, clothing, housing. Although there was little money, there was no evidence of the kind of poverty one sees all over the so-called 'developing' world — where people are hungry or malnourished, and have neither adequate shelter nor clean drinking water. In fact, throughout Ladakh I was told regularly: "We are *tung-bos za-bos*", which means "we are self-sufficient, we have plenty to eat and drink".

During my early years in Ladakh, a remarkable degree of social harmony was evident; particularly noteworthy was the fact that the Buddhist majority and Muslim minority lived peacefully side-by-side. Of course there were problems, as there are in all human societies, but the harmony and *joie de vivre* I encountered were vastly different to what I'd known growing up in Europe.

Within a decade, however, there was a terrifying shift away from the traditional harmony, as Buddhists and Muslims began seeing one another as enemies. Ethnic and religious differences began to take on a divisive political dimension, causing bitterness and enmity on a scale previously unknown. Young Ladakhis, for whom religion had been just another part of daily life, took exaggerated steps to demonstrate their religious affiliation and devotion. Muslims began requiring their young daughters to cover their heads with scarves. Buddhists in the capital began broadcasting their prayers over loudspeakers, so as to compete with the Muslim prayer call. Religious ceremonies once celebrated by the whole community – Buddhist and Muslim alike – became instead occasions to flaunt one's wealth and strength. In 1989, tensions between the two groups exploded into

violence that took several lives. I heard mild-mannered Buddhist grandmothers, who, a few years earlier were sipping tea with their Muslim neighbours and even celebrating each others' religious festivals, declare: "we have to kill the Muslims before they finish us off".

Outsiders attributed the conflict to old ethnic tensions flaring, but any such tensions had never led to group violence in 600 years of recorded history. As someone who lived there and spoke Ladakhi fluently, I had a unique perspective as both an outsider and insider, and it was obvious to me that there was a connection between the economic changes wrought by development and the sudden appearance of violent conflict.

The most noticeable changes in the economy centered on food and farming. Imported food, heavily subsidised by the Indian government, now sold at half the price of local products, making local agriculture seem "uneconomic". Food self-reliance was steadily replaced by dependence on the global food system, and many Ladakhis – the vast majority of whom were farmers – began to wonder if there was a future for them.

Changes in education also had a huge impact. In the past, Ladakhi children learned the skills needed to survive, even to prosper, in this difficult environment: they learned to grow food, to tend for animals, to build houses from local resources. But in the new Westernised schools, children were instead provided skills appropriate for an urban life within a globalised economy – a way of life in which almost every need is imported. The new schools taught almost nothing about the Ladakhi way of life; instead children were implicitly taught to look down on the traditional culture.

The locus of political and economic power changed as well. Traditionally, the household was the centre of the economy, with most of the larger decisions taken at a village level. With the arrival of the new economy, economic and political power became centralised in the capital city, Leh, leaving villagers out of decisions that deeply affected their lives. Meanwhile, young men were being pulled out of their villages into Leh in search of paid jobs. Suddenly cut off from their village community and in cutthroat competition with hundreds of others for scarce jobs, their once secure sense of identity was deeply eroded.

These changes were further amplified by an influx of foreign tourists, by the introduction of satellite television, and by a bombardment of advertising campaigns – all of which served to romanticize western, urban culture, making the Ladakhis feel backward and stupid by contrast.

It was clear to me that the arrival of the global economy had created a pervasive sense of insecurity and disempowerment. On a practical level, the Ladakhis were becoming dependent on far-off manufacturers and centralised bureaucracies instead of on each other. Psychologically, they had lost confidence in themselves and their culture. It is not hard to see how people who feel insecure and disempowered can turn to anger and extremism.

The speed and scale at which these changes took place in Ladakh was overwhelming, making the structural connection between globalisation, insecurity and conflict very obvious. It was also clear that the same process is underway around the world: the economic system, I realised, has become a driver of fear, fundamentalism and political instability worldwide. And in both the global North and South, the enormous psychological and material insecurity fostered by globalisation has greatly magnified the ability of demagogues to use fear and prejudice to manipulate public opinion.

To reverse this trend, neither a politics of identity, nor of conventional 'left' versus 'right' politics, is sufficient. Instead, we need to fundamentally change the structural economic forces at the root of the problem. Those forces have been unleashed by the deregulation of global banks and corporations, and reversing that process is our best hope for peace and stability.

In order to see how corporate deregulation has led to a breakdown of democracy, to increasing fundamentalism and violence, and to the rise of far-right political leaders, it is vitally important that we see the broader connections that mainstream analyses generally ignore.

## Globalisation & Insecurity

Many people, especially on the left, associate globalisation with international collaboration, travel and the spread of humanitarian values. But at its core, globalisation is an *economic* process – one that has been at the heart of neoliberal ideology and the corporate agenda since the end of World War II. In the Global South, it's referred to as 'development', in the global North, as progress. But in both North and South the fundamental process is the same: the deregulation, centralisation and privatisation of business, finance and politics.

These days, this is mainly accomplished through 'free trade' treaties that give corporate entities the freedom to move across the world in search of the cheapest labour, the least stringent health and environmental standards, the biggest tax breaks and the most generous subsidies. These treaties enable corporations to move operations – and consequently jobs – wherever they please. They even give them the right to sue governments over laws or regulations that threaten their potential profits – thus making a complete mockery of democracy. Locked into a system requiring constant global "growth", communities have seen their local economies undermined, pulling them into dependence on a volatile corporate-led economy over which they have no control.

The trajectory of growing corporate power is not inevitable or natural, nor is it a consequence of supposed 'efficiencies of scale', as many assume it to be. Rather, it is the result of decades of policy choices by national governments as well as international bodies like the World Bank and the IMF, which deliberately support the big and the global in the belief that corporate growth is the pathway to peace and prosperity. Not only have global corporations and banks been allowed to take advantage of differences in labour, health, safety, and environmental standards across the globe, they have also been granted huge tax breaks and massive direct subsidies. Even more insidiously, the corporate system has been built on a range of indirect subsidies – largely for the infrastructure on which globalisation depends. Global marketers like Wal-Mart, Amazon and Apple require a well-developed and constantly expanding transport network of seaports, railways, airports and mega-highways, as well as massive amounts of heavily subsidised fossil fuels for transport. To monitor their supply and delivery chains they also need advanced satellite communications technologies – something also required by global banks and financial institutions for moving capital around the world. In almost every country, educational systems have been shifted towards training students for the skills needed by the corporate world. All these mechanisms structurally favour big and global businesses over those that are localised or place-based, and most have been paid for not by the corporations themselves, but by the taxpayer.<sup>1</sup>

Even the global businesses that appear to have been ‘bootstrapped’ into existence by charismatic entrepreneurs owe much of their success to government largesse. As author Mariana Mazzucato argues, even the iPhone was less a product of Steve Jobs’ imagination than of publicly funded research by the US Department of Defense and the National Science Foundation.<sup>2</sup> And Elon Musk’s futuristic businesses have benefitted not only from \$5 billion in direct local, state and federal support, but from decades of research on, among other things, rocket technology.<sup>3</sup>

## Job insecurity

As corporations have been freed up, the jobs they provide have become increasingly insecure. For example, under the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the USA suffered a net loss of an estimated 700,000 jobs as manufacturers relocated to Mexico, where wages were cheaper and labour standards lower.<sup>4</sup> But globalisation is an ongoing ‘race to the bottom’, so not all of those jobs stayed in Mexico: between October 2000 and December 2003 alone, Mexico lost 300,000 jobs because Chinese mass-produced exports to the United States were cheaper.<sup>5</sup> Overall, Mexico’s farmers were the biggest losers: highly subsidised agricultural products from the United States infiltrated their local markets, undermining the livelihoods of approximately 2.3 million small farmers.<sup>6</sup> Many of these farmers ended up in Mexico’s crowded cities, where they were forced to compete with one another for low-paying industrial jobs. With few viable options, many ended up migrating – legally or not – to the United States. These victims of globalisation, ironically enough, often became the far right’s scapegoats for American job losses.

While the media has emphasised rising standards of living among industrial workers in the global South, the benefits for workers there are heavily outweighed by the benefits to the corporations that offshore their manufacturing operations. Of the price paid for an Apple iPhone, for example, less than 2% goes to the Chinese workers involved in its production, while 58% is captured by Apple as profit.<sup>7</sup>

It’s not only the disappearance of jobs that leads to stagnant or declining standards of living, but the threat that jobs can be easily taken elsewhere if workers don’t accept lower wages, longer hours or fewer benefits. In this way, the many multilateral and bilateral “free trade” treaties now in force serve to undercut workers’ bargaining power and depress wages even for the corporate jobs that haven’t been offshored.

Jobs are also lost as businesses are centralised and scaled up. When a global corporation – propped up by a range of tax breaks and subsidies – enters a new market, the local economy tends to experience a net loss of jobs, as smaller competitors that tend to be more dependent on human labour go out of business. Some studies have shown that every new supermarket in the UK entails a net loss of 276 jobs.<sup>8</sup> The online marketer Amazon has destroyed 150,000 more jobs than it has created, according to a report from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.<sup>9</sup> Like other online retailers, Amazon has not only benefited from communications and transport infrastructures built at public expense, it has avoided collecting state and local sales tax from its US customers – sales tax revenues that states and localities desperately need – giving Amazon a price advantage of as much as 9.75% over main street businesses.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, many jobs are being lost to advanced technology. The obvious example is in manufacturing, where robots have replaced a wide range of skilled workers, but technology is having a similar impact on agriculture. The global economy's export-led markets demand huge amounts of standardised commodities; producing those foods on a large scale means monocultural production, which is heavily dependent on industrial machinery and chemical inputs, but requires only a relatively small agricultural labour force. As a result, there have been massive declines in livelihoods in the agricultural sector. In the EU, nearly 4 million farms with holdings under 10 hectares have disappeared in the last decade; today, just 3% of farms control more than 50% of total EU farmland.<sup>11</sup> In the US, the Census Bureau considers farmers such a demographically insignificant population that it no longer tracks their numbers, but it is estimated that there are now fewer farmers in America than there are people in prison.<sup>12</sup> As information technology becomes more sophisticated, jobs in many other sectors are being transferred away from people to computers. For now, poorly-paid manual work and highly-skilled positions are relatively protected from this trend, but technological advance is leaving everyone more insecure about their job.<sup>13</sup>

## Political insecurity

Deregulation of corporations, including banks, has enabled a handful of giants to monopolise global markets. Some have grown bigger than nation states, both in terms of wealth and political influence. These multinationals have used their unprecedented power to lobby governments into still more economic deregulation, using mechanisms such as Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses in free trade treaties to sue governments and attack public-interest regulations.<sup>14</sup>

While 'free trade' gives big players the freedom to do as they please, it means quite the opposite – more regulation and restrictions – for smaller, nationally-based players. Governments have been lobbied by big business to constrain the activities of smaller businesses by locking them into unreasonable standards and convoluted bureaucracy. In many cases, an unfair burden falls on small-scale enterprises through regulations aimed at problems caused by large-scale production. Battery-style chicken farms, for example, clearly need significant environmental and health regulations: their millions of genetically-identical, closely confined animals are highly prone to disease, their tonnes of concentrated effluent need to be safely disposed of, and the long-distance transport of processed poultry entails the risk of spoilage. Yet a small producer – such as a farmer with a few dozen free-range chickens – is subject to essentially the same regulations, often raising costs to levels that make it impossible to remain in business. Large-scale producers can spread the cost of compliance over a far greater volume, making it appear that they enjoy 'economies of scale' over smaller producers.

At the same time, governments themselves have been impoverished by corporate deregulation. Their funds have been stretched by the heavy subsidies handed out to attract big business, and their revenues have been eroded by tax breaks, offshoring, and the ability of multinationals to hide profits in countries with lower tax rates. The deregulation of finance has left governments ever more indebted to global banks and corporations. At the same time, governments are left to cover all the externalities—the social and environmental problems that are the inevitable by-products of global growth.

Increasingly distanced from the institutions which make decisions that affect their lives, and insecure about their economic livelihoods, many people have become frustrated, angry, and disillusioned with the current political system. Although democratic systems worldwide have been hugely compromised by the *de facto* government of deregulated banks and corporations, most people blame government leaders at home. Because they don't see the bigger picture, increasing numbers of people have grown susceptible to the false claims and empty promises of unconventional, authoritarian candidates, who are thereby able to gain a foothold in political arenas.

## Psychological insecurity

As local, even national, economies are undermined, the fabric of interdependence that holds communities together begins to fray. This not only leads to social fragmentation and isolation, it also unravels the safety net ensuring that the surrounding community can be relied upon for help in times of hardship.

At the same time, the global consumer culture that supports corporate growth is relentlessly expanding. People all over the world are targeted with advertising messages telling them: "you are not good enough as you are, but you can improve yourself by buying our product."

As face-to-face relationships deteriorate and real-life role models are replaced by distant, artificial images of perfection in mass media and in the hyperbolic world of social media, unhealthy comparison runs rife. These trends are associated with rising rates of disorders such as anorexia, anxiety, aggression and even suicide, while social isolation, domestic stress and increasing economic pressures have given rise to epidemics of depression and addiction.<sup>15</sup>

Left insecure and marginalised by the new economy, people can be highly vulnerable to prejudice. In the global South especially, the breakdown of communities and cultures is severing rich intergenerational relationships and uprooting identities, often replacing them with unhealthy alternatives that reflect a desperate need for belonging. Ideological fundamentalism and extremism seem to offer an explanation for worsening social and personal ills, as well as a radical solution. It can provide personal validation and meaning, solidarity and a sense of community – all essential human needs that have been undermined by globalisation.

The uprooting of land-based populations – a dramatic and visible trend in the countries of the global South – has been the driver of much of the ethnic conflict, fundamentalism and radicalism in that part of the world. In the global North, rural areas have been similarly hollowed out by global economic forces. Small family farms tied to the global food economy are caught between the rising prices charged by the agribusinesses that sell them inputs and equipment, and the falling prices paid by those that purchase their production. They simply cannot compete with heavily subsidised export-led agribusinesses, and their steady demise has decimated the local economies and communities they once supported. Young people who have grown up in these rural areas often see no future for themselves there: not only are jobs scarce, but – just as in Ladakh – the media and advertising tell them that urban life is 'cool', glamorous and exciting by contrast. These parts of the country – referred to as 'the heartland' in the United States – have become fertile ground for far-right authoritarian movements.

## Challenging Authoritarianism: the prospect of localisation

We urgently need widespread awareness of the big picture of economic deregulation and its impacts on our communities and personal lives. It is only ignorance about this system that enables the pseudo-solutions of Trump, Brexit, Duterte and others to gain strength, even as the global economic system marches onwards, unfettered. Despite the fact that these right-wing political forces are often branded as “anti-globalist”, they are actually serving to strengthen global monopolies.<sup>16</sup>

Any movement to address the woes of the disenfranchised must not only expose and diagnose the systemic illness of economic deregulation, but must also present a coherent alternative. I believe economic localisation is the most strategic solution. The localised path would involve a 180-degree turn-around in economic policy, so that business and finance become place-based and accountable to democratic processes. This means reregulation of global corporations and banks, as well as a shift in taxes and subsidies so that they no longer favour the big and the global but instead support small scale on a large scale. Rebuilding stronger, more diversified, self-reliant economies at the national, regional and local level is essential to restoring democracy and a real economy based on sustainable use of natural resources – an economy that serves essential human needs, lessens inequality and promotes social harmony.

The way to bring this change about is not to simply vote for a new candidate within the same compromised political structure. We instead need to build up diverse and united people’s movements to create a political force that can bring about systemic localisation. It means raising awareness of the way that globalisation has made a mockery of democracy, and making it clear that business needs to be place-based in order to be accountable and subject to the democratic process. We need to start talking politics with one another – with those concerned about social justice and peace, those focused on unemployment, environmental issues, or spiritual and ethical values. It means raising awareness of the common interest that unites single-issue campaigns and bridges left-right antagonism. Creating face-to-face local groups that then link up nationwide and even internationally, can form a diverse movement—a critical mass—which can enter politics and remain strong in its pro-democracy/anti-corporate position, despite the systemic vested interests that it will inevitably have to challenge.

Although such a global movement has not yet arisen, in some countries we’ve seen glimpses of the widespread desire for fundamental change. In the last UK election, the Labour party manifesto included several progressive measures, such as renationalising key sectors that have been taken over by private corporations. Although Labour did not win the election, it received a large proportion of the vote. In the US, the 2016 presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders was another example of a politician responding to the growing chorus of voices critical of corporate control of the economy.

However, the issue is complex: the nation state remains the political entity best suited to putting limits on global business, but at the same time more decentralised economic structures are needed, particularly when it comes to meeting basic needs. These localised economies require an umbrella of environmental and social protection strengthened by national and even international regulation, but determined through local political engagement. This comes close to the platform of La Via Campesina, originally Latin American but now global in scope. Although it does not run candidates for political office, it has come to represent over 400 million small farmers worldwide



in campaigning for food sovereignty and in opposition to corporate deregulation.

Localisation is a solution-multiplier. It can restore democracy by reducing the influence of big business on politics and holding representatives accountable to people, not corporations. It can reverse the concentration of wealth by fostering the creation of more small businesses and keeping money circulating locally. It can minimise pollution and waste by providing for real human needs rather than desires manufactured by the consumer culture, and by shortening distances between producers and consumers.

Localisation also enables people to see more clearly the impacts of their actions: in smaller-scale economies, for example, one readily knows whether food production is dependent on toxic chemicals, whether farm workers have been mistreated, and whether the land remains healthy. In this way, business becomes more accountable.<sup>17</sup>

By prioritising diversified production for local needs over specialised production for export, localisation redistributes economic and political power from global monopolies to millions of small producers, farmers and businesses. It thereby decentralises political power and roots it in community, giving people more agency over the changes they wish to see in their own lives.

The exponential growth in localisation initiatives— from food-based efforts like community gardens, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture schemes and urban agriculture, to local business alliances, decentralised renewable energy schemes, tool lending libraries and community-based education projects—attests to the fact that more and more people are arriving, in a largely common-sense way, at localisation as a systemic solution to the problems they face.

Here is a brief sampling of some initiatives already underway:

- In Fitzroy, Australia, people meet monthly at a local park to exchange produce, seeds, eggs, jam, chutney, flowers, recipes and gardening tips. There is no money involved and people are encouraged to take what they want. This self-described Urban Harvest not only helps people save money on food, it provides an opportunity for residents to get to know their neighbours and build community links.<sup>18</sup>
- In the state of Vermont, USA, The Pine Island Community farm enables refugees, mostly from Africa and Asia, to continue the agrarian and culinary traditions they left behind when they were driven from their homes. Not only does the farm offer these immigrants the opportunity to grow and raise affordable, culturally relevant foods, it connects them with each other and with their new community.<sup>19</sup>
- In Oxfordshire, UK, the Low Carbon Hub is working to create a locally-owned, decentralised renewable energy infrastructure, turning rooftops and brownfields into a micro-grid for local needs. The project is paid for through sales of community share offers.<sup>20</sup>
- Even the financial system – the source of so much mischief and woe – is being localised with profound effects. In the slums of Fortaleza, Brazil, for example, a community bank, Las Palmas, was created and is governed by local residents with the aim of meeting local needs. Among other things, it issued its own currency, which circulates only within the community. When the project began, only 20% of purchases were made locally; today, that number is over 90%.<sup>21</sup>

These are just a handful of the literally thousands of creative grassroots initiatives that demonstrate both the viability of localisation and its systemic benefits.

Unfortunately, localisation is sometimes confused with isolationism and even right-wing nationalism. In fact, the opposite is true: localisation requires international collaboration and solidarity in order to halt the corporate juggernaut; it is built upon a profound respect for cultural diversity, and therefore tolerance for differences.

The town of Preston in the UK is a good example of how localisation expands collaboration. In 2011, the city and county councils set about localising procurement in response to cuts in national government funding. By changing the spending focus of six regional institutions, including a police force, housing associations and colleges, they managed to increase the amount spent at local suppliers from 14% to 28% in two years. Concurrently, there was a growth in the number of local cooperative businesses.<sup>22</sup> Far from being isolationist, the Preston council is now collaborating with other cities across the EU, as part of the Europe-wide Procure Network, to explore how they can make similar changes in their local economies.

Other networks are growing at national and international levels. These include the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), which unites hundreds of local business leaders from all over North America to share best practices. Likewise, the New Economy Coalition brings together NGOs, businesses and activists across North America to exchange strategies for localising. The Transition Town network links together groups that are working to de-link as much as possible from the fossil fuel economy. My organisation, Local Futures, has set up an International Alliance for Localisation (IAL), which takes this exchange to a global level and currently includes organisations and individual members from more than 50 countries. True localisation means *small scale on a large scale*, and that takes collaboration at all levels.

A major challenge to the acceptance of a localist agenda among progressives has been the impression that local and natural are 'elitist' and affordable only to those of comfortable means. Corporate think tanks have been effective in disseminating this message, but the relatively higher cost of healthy alternatives—whether organic food, local natural building materials and fibres, or alternative medicine—is largely a product of externalised costs and government subsidies for export-oriented corporate production. Strip away all that artificial support and the cost of *globalised* products would be out of reach for most.

A related 'elitism' charge is that the Northerners working to localise their economies are turning their backs on the impoverished people of the global South, who need Northern markets to pull themselves out of poverty. The truth is that many years of export-oriented 'development' (with its roots in colonialism and slavery) have left most countries of the South deeply in debt – most of it incurred to build up the infrastructure needed for global trade. Today, the lion's share of the wealth created on the backs of Southern workers goes to finance this debt, not to meet local needs. Promoting localisation means encouraging people in both North and South to diversify their economic activity and become more self-reliant. For Northerners, this would mean getting off the backs of people on the other side of the world, whose impoverishment is a direct consequence of having been forced into producing for export rather than for their own needs. Reversing dependency on both sides would not involve some sort of overnight boycott; instead it would be a careful economic process that includes close North-South grassroots collaboration.

In light of our global crises – environmental, social and economic – governments would do well to fundamentally shift direction. Rather than continuing to deregulate and subsidise big, global banks and businesses, they should focus instead on supporting local trade and small producers. Since food is something that everyone, everywhere, needs every day, a key focus should be on rebuilding the local food economy. Doing so strengthens the entire economy, rebuilds community, and helps heal the environment. It also contributes to resiliency in the face of climate change: diverse localised production systems in an interdependent network, rather than dependence for our basic needs on far-off sources, will better equip communities to withstand the upheavals to come.

Needless to say, the PR departments of global corporations are working hard to counter this message – telling us that whatever the costs of the global food system we have no choice but to double-down on chemical- and energy-intensive monocultures, genetic engineering and global trade if we are to feed the world's growing population.<sup>23</sup> What they simply ignore is that studies conducted all over the world reveal that smaller farms are more productive per unit of land, water, and energy than large-scale monocultures.<sup>24</sup> Industrial agriculture is only efficient when measured in output per unit of labour: monocultures are great if the goal is profit for the few at the expense of millions of farm jobs, but not if the goal is to sustainably produce as much food as possible with the earth's limited supply of arable land, fresh water and energy.

Those who live in the global North – where the industrialisation of agriculture has been underway for many generations – can easily lose sight of the fact that most of the food consumed in the world today is produced by small farmers on holdings of fewer than 5 acres.<sup>25</sup> To replace those smallholdings with industrial monocultures means destroying the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, and pushing them into real poverty in urban slums. We should not be surprised when a sizeable fraction of those millions become frustrated, angry, and susceptible to extremist views.

The global food system is inefficient in other ways, especially when one considers 'redundant trade'. In a typical year, Britain exports over 100,000 tonnes each of milk, bread, and pork, while importing nearly identical amounts. The same is true in the US, which exports and imports nearly 1 million tonnes of beef, and hundreds of thousands of tons of potatoes, sugar, and coffee.<sup>26</sup> In some cases, it is literally the same product that is both exported and imported: for example, prawns from Scotland are routinely shipped to China to be shelled by hand, then shipped back to Scotland where they are breaded, packaged and sold.<sup>27</sup> This may pad the bottom lines of the agribusinesses involved, but it can hardly be called efficient.

As it is, the trade-based food system is incapable of feeding the current global population sustainably. With food more tightly controlled by corporations than ever before, some 870 million people are undernourished<sup>28</sup> – even though more than enough food is produced to adequately feed everyone on the planet. In the US, for example, long supply chains and the corporate elimination of cosmetically blemished produce means that over 40 percent of the food grown for human consumption is eventually discarded.<sup>29</sup> The amount of food thrown away globally is four times what would be necessary to feed all the malnourished people in the world.<sup>30</sup>

To support the local food movement, subsidies could be redirected towards strengthening local infrastructures, including distribution lines that connect local producers with local consumers,

and even giving financial support to small-scale, diversified farms themselves. Such policy changes would see local, job-rich, community-based, ecological economic systems become the mainstream remarkably quickly, thereby enabling even low-income wage earners around the world to benefit from their local economy. Similarly, reducing subsidies for fossil fuels and increasing taxes on more polluting industries would internalize many of the hidden costs of resource-intensive economic systems, bringing market prices more in line with actual resource and pollution costs. These shifts would have the effect of making local products the cheaper, more accessible option for the wider population.

The rise of authoritarianism is just one of many interrelated impacts of economic globalisation. Today's global economy heightens economic insecurity, fractures communities, and undermines individual and cultural identity – thereby creating conditions that are ripe for the rise of authoritarian leaders. If globalisation's environmental costs – climate change, desertification, flooding – are allowed to rise, we can expect ever larger waves of refugees that will further destabilise nation-states while straining their willingness, as well as their ability, to act humanely.

The most strategic way to address all of these crises is to immediately begin scaling down and decentralising economic activity, giving communities and local economies the ability to meet as many of their own needs as possible, including the human need for connection.

The movement for economic localisation will require many facets of strategic change-making: the spread of awareness, dynamic political campaigning, enlightened grassroots action and international collaboration. This may seem inadequate to the scale of the crises we face, but the banner of localisation has the potential to engage huge numbers of people from both sides of the traditional political spectrum, and to bring together hundreds of single-issue campaigns. It enables us to move past the “blame game” and the antagonistic divisions caused by confusion and fear-mongering, instead uniting us in a common cause underpinned by big picture understanding of the common roots of our many crises. In this way, systemic, collaborative localisation is ultimately the most effective antidote to authoritarianism.

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Authoritarian politics have risen in the context of profound political, economic, social and ecological insecurity caused by corporate-led globalisation. The movement for economic localisation has the potential to unite communities, disarm authoritarian politicians, restore democracy and build a real economy based on sustainable use of natural resources.

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