

## **FRUITS OF OUR LABOUR: WORK AND ORGANIZATION IN THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM**

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Special Issue Guest Editors

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Work undertaken to produce food is one of the most fundamental and ancient forms of labour human beings must engage in to survive and flourish. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the academic focus on food work has been on primary forms, i.e. 'on' rather than 'off' the land. Thus, there are many studies of peasant labour, of the transitions caused by industrialization and mechanization of farming, of the role of migrant labour on the land. Yet, remarkably less attention has been given to the broader range of food labour – despite the revolution in length, complexity, control and technology of food work in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As societies have industrialized and urbanized, food remains perplexingly hidden to most of us (Li, 2011). The need for consumers to understand these processes bubbles up from time to time. It was forcefully brought home, for instance, by the horsemeat scandal that gripped Europe in 2012. Scandals such as these have spawned a range of consumer and policy reactions, from skepticism to changed behaviour to moments of renewed interest in the production and regulation of food production.

This partial picture suggests room for improved understanding of the role of food work in modern systems. While there has been welcome attention to food retail (Burch & Lawrence 2007), there has been less focus on modern food factories, or the growth of artisanal production. Catering remains the Cinderella service in academic studies that Gabriel noted three decades ago (Gabriel 1988). Demand for local and fair-trade food, for instance, indicates some appetite for food with provenance that is 'ethically produced', though some studies indicate that even this niche has had limited impact on some sections of food labour, previously thought to benefit (Cramer et al. 2014).

To understand how change and growth in the food system and all its sectors affects those working in the agri-food system, we need to lift the commodity veil and explore the production processes behind food and the context that shapes them (Allen & Sachs 2012; Bonanno & Cavalcanti 2012; Cramer et al. 2014). As a transition unfolds from an era of low food prices to one characterized by, what Moore (2015) calls, 'the end of cheap nature', the costs and scale of production assume even greater importance. Yet, the costs and benefits within the agri-food system are unequally distributed among the various actors in the system (Van der Ploeg 2009).

Understanding food as a set of practices that are embedded in a historical, globally distributed system has been one of the main theoretical lenses developed over the past decades (Ericksen 2008; Rosin et al. 2013). While for some authors a systems perspective mainly involves showing the integrated relations between food, people and nature (Pretty 2002), others highlighted the

unequal distributions of power, land and access to food and markets, leading to conceptualizing the global food system as a set of 'value chains' (Allen & Sachs 2012), as capitalist 'regime' (Friedmann 2005; McMichael 2009) and historical world-system (Moore 2015).

Increased financialization (Clapp 2014), a growing dominance of the food system by large agri-businesses (Lang & Heasman 2015), as well as policy contradictions, characterized by the promotion of intensive production methods on the one hand and sustainable rural development on the other, have impacts on this distribution (Banks & Marsden 2000; Garzon 2006). At the same time, there is greater awareness among both policymakers and the wider public of the unacceptable social costs of cheap food, in terms of exploitative and unsafe conditions for workers and food producers across the system (Burnett & Murphy 2014). The experience of these workers ranges from slave-labour aboard Thai fishing boats to volunteer work by the home or allotment gardener producing food for their own table. The wider political, economic, social and cultural contexts that shape such different forms of work and labour in the food system are important here.

Equally important is the recognition of alternative approaches to organizing food systems. Local and organic food demands a price premium by customers. Agroecology, permaculture and other, more sustainable agricultural models have gained momentum across the world. Peasants and other rural movements are struggling for access to land and less control by agri-businesses (Borras et al. 2015). Food production and consumption cooperatives experiment with different organizational models. These are all examples of noteworthy innovations and struggles in the global food system. Yet, their implications for work and labour remain under-explored. Are these alternatives really improving labour processes and livelihoods of workers?

In this special issue we invite authors to engage theoretically and empirically with the organization of capital, work and labour in the global agri-food system. Specifically, we ask authors to explore how work and labour in the agri-food system have been shaped by the political economy of food and agriculture, and how these issues relate to other pertinent challenges, including climate change, the obesity epidemic, ongoing hunger, food poverty and land grabbing. Finally, we are also interested in new forms of work and labour that resist dominant political economies of the agri-food system, showing pathways towards more sustainable, equitable and just futures.

We invite contributions from researchers, activists, artists, and professionals on the following topics, though this list is by no means exhaustive:

- The experience of work and labour in the agri-food system
- Political economy of value/supply chains
- Organization of work and labour in the agri-food system
- Historical perspectives of food labour and organization
- Organization of small-scale food producers
- Migration of labour in relation to food
- Pro-sumption of food (the role of the prosumer)
- Work and labour implications of new technologies in food systems
- Food and agricultural co-operatives

- Struggles for land and their implications for work and labour
- Agro-ecological work and labour
- Global divisions of labour in the agri-food system
- Fairtrade vs free trade and the implications for work and labour
- Organizing labour unions and informal resistances in the agri-food system
- Consumer understanding of and engagement with food labour processes

### **Submission**

Papers may be submitted electronically from May 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 until the deadline date of June 30th, 2018 (final deadline) to SAGETrack at:

<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization>

Papers should be no more than 8,000 words, excluding references, and will be blind reviewed following the journal's standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines published in Organization and on the journal's website:

<http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200981/manuscriptSubmission>.

### **Paper development workshop**

The special issue editorial collective will hold a two-day paper development workshop at the University of Exeter in January 2018, helping authors develop their papers for the special issue. The deadline for submission of FULL papers to the paper development workshop is 31 October 2017. Participation at the paper development workshop is independent of the actual special issue process; that is, acceptance to the workshop does not imply acceptance of the paper for the special issue.

### **Further Information**

Please contact the guest editors for further information:

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### **About the guest editors**

**Steffen Böhm** is Professor in Organisation & Sustainability and Director of the Sustainability & Circular Economy Research Cluster at the University of Exeter Business School. He is an expert in the political economy and political ecology of the food-water-energy-environment nexus. He has published over 100 journal articles, books and book chapters. Between 2012 and 2015 he led a research project, funded by the British Academy and the East of England Co-operative Society, on the connection between people's participation in local food projects and their well-being. Between 2014 and 2015 he led a seminar series, funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) on the political economy of the global food system. Since 2015 he's been leading a research project, funded by the ESRC's Nexus Network, on agroecological business, exploring alternative, small to medium-sized economic projects in sustainable agriculture. His books include *Ecocultures: Blueprints for Sustainable Communities* (Routledge,

2014).

**Tim Lang** has been Professor of Food Policy at City University London's Centre for Food Policy since 2002. After a PhD in social psychology at Leeds University, he became a hill farmer in the 1970s which shifted his attention to food policy, where it has been ever since. For over 35 years, he's engaged in academic and public research and debate about its direction, locally to globally. His abiding interest is how policy addresses the environment, health, social justice, and citizens. He has been a consultant to the World Health Organisation (eg auditing the Global Top 25 Food Companies on food and health). He has been a special advisor to four House of Commons Select Committee inquiries (food standards x 2, globalisation and obesity), and a consultant on food security to the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). He was a Commissioner on the UK Government's Sustainable Development Commission (2006- 11), reviewing progress on food sustainability. He was on the Council of Food Policy Advisors to the Dept for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (2008-10), and was appointed to the Mayor of London's Food Board in 2010. He has written and co-written many articles, reports, chapters and books. His most recent books are *Food Policy* (with D Barling and M Caraher, Oxford University Press, 2009), *Food Wars* (with M Heasman, Earthscan 2004), *Atlas of Food* (with E Millstone, Earthscan 2003/2008), *Unmanageable Consumer* (with Y Gabriel, Sage 1996/2007). *Ecological Public Health* (with G Rayner, Earthscan/Routledge) is published in May 2012. He writes frequently in the media and has written a monthly column in *The Grocer* since 2000.

**Marja Spiereburg** is Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies at the Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands), and is affiliated to Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Her research focuses on the role of the private sector in nature conservation and land reforms in Southern Africa. She coordinated/s several research programmes in cooperation with colleagues in Southern Africa, including a project on partnerships between private sector actors and land reform beneficiaries, and a project on the socio-economic impacts of farm conversions to wildlife-based production. Marja Spiereburg also serves as scientific director of CERES, the national research school for resource studies for development. In addition, she is Vice Chair of the scientific committee on the Programme for Ecosystem Change and Society (part of the Future Earth initiative) and member of the programme committee of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research.

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