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Biography:

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Abstract
This paper explores a number of questions surrounding the transnational diffusion of social movements and their ideas through case studies of the food sovereignty movement in the UK and in Canada: How do social movements in one country or world region diffuse to another country or region? How do social movement participants learn about other movements and their ideas in different countries and organize and mobilize around these same ideas while at the same time adapting them to their local context? What are the channels and mechanisms of social movement diffusion?

In addressing these questions, the paper contributes to our understanding of the transnational diffusion of social movements and the ways in which social movement participants adopt, interpret, and adapt new ideas, organizational forms, and agendas and causes that originated outside their own countries. It highlights the ways in which groups and communities around the world recontextualize social movement discourses to make them relevant to their own circumstances and to connect their causes and struggles to global movements.

Keywords
Social movements, diffusion, food sovereignty, transnationalism
Transnationalism and Diffusion: A Study of the Food Sovereignty Movements in the UK and Canada

Introduction
In July of 2012 a number of NGOs in the UK gathered in the London area to launch a food sovereignty movement in the UK. The effort to build a food sovereignty movement in the UK was inspired by food sovereignty movements in other countries and regions, and the nascent movement in the UK defines itself as part of the global movement. The website of the movement indicates that the July 2012 event was “inspired by efforts around the world”¹ to advance food sovereignty and states that “Food Sovereignty UK acknowledges the great work being done around the world and seeks to be an ally and collaborator with such movements.”² This indicates that the idea of food sovereignty and that organizing a campaign around that idea diffused to the UK from other countries and regions. The same is true for the food sovereignty movement in Canada, whose activists and organizations see themselves as part of the global food sovereignty movement.³ The diffusion of social movements and their ideas cross-nationally is not a new phenomenon. But while diffusion has occurred for a long time and been noted by students of social movements, we still know relatively little about the processes and mechanisms of diffusion, as well as the actors who are involved in the cross-national diffusion of social movements.

This paper explores a number of questions surrounding the transnational diffusion of social movements and their ideas through case studies of the food sovereignty movements in the UK and in Canada. How do social movements in one country or world region diffuse to another country or region? How do social movement participants learn about other movements and ideas in different countries and organize and mobilize around these same ideas while at the same time adapting them to their local context? What are the channels and mechanisms of social movement diffusion?

In addressing these questions, the paper contributes to our understanding of the cross-national diffusion of social movements and the ways in which social movement participants adopt and adapt new ideas, organizational forms, and agendas and causes that originated outside their own countries. In the context of food sovereignty, this is an important contribution, for as Desmarais and Wittman have noted, “While there is a growing body of literature on food sovereignty at a global level, much less is known about what food sovereignty movements look like in specific places and how their expression is largely shaped by local dynamics” (Desmarais and Wittman, 2013, p. 1).

The paper is organized in several sections. I review the theoretical literature on the diffusion of social movements in the first section. I then introduce the concept of food sovereignty in the second section. The third and fourth sections are case studies of the diffusion of the food sovereignty movement to the UK and to Canada. They are informed by the theoretical discussion and draw on interviews with participants in the food sovereignty movement. The fifth and final section is a conclusion that summarizes the main findings.
Analytical Framework

Scholars studying processes of diffusion distinguish between transmitters and adopters of ideas, information, innovations or other diffusing items; the diffusing items themselves; and channels or pathways of diffusion that link transmitters and adopters. These transmitters and adopters could be individuals, groups, or organizations and institutions, and the channels of diffusion can be direct and relational, connecting transmitters and adopters at a personal level, or indirect and non-relational, involving media or other pathways of diffusion that do not entail interpersonal contacts (McAdam and Rucht, 1993, p. 59; della Porta and Kriesi, 1999, p. 6). Relational diffusion rests on trust, a sense of similarity and shared identity, and pre-existing social ties and networks (Tarrow, 2005, pp. 103-104). Non-relational diffusion rests on theorization, “a kind of “folk theory” that defines some thing or activity in abstract terms and locates it within a cause-effect or functional scheme” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 104). Cross-national diffusion often involves both relational and non-relational pathways of diffusion, with interpersonal contacts early on facilitating non-relational forms of diffusion later in the diffusion process.

In addition, diffusion also requires that adopters identify to some extent with transmitters, which can be the effect of the institutional, structural or professional equivalence or similarity of transmitter(s) and adopter(s), but in the case of the cross-national diffusion of social movements often also entails the social construction of similarity and of a shared identity (McAdam and Rucht, 1993; Snow and Benford, 1999). This idea is referred to as homophily, and it suggests that the likelihood of diffusion will increase with the level of structural or cultural similarity between transmitters and adopters (Snow and Benford, 1999, p. 25).

More recent theoretical formulations add a third pathway of diffusion, mediated diffusion, which involves brokerage, “the connection of two unconnected sites by a third” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 104). Brokers, individual or organizational actors, sometimes serve as “movement halfway houses” and “connect people who would otherwise have no contact with one another” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 105). Cross-national diffusion entails external diffusion, or diffusion into (as opposed to within) a population (Strang and Soule, 1998). Strang and Soule argue that one of the central sources of external diffusion are change agents who spread new ideas, innovations, or practices, and one can argue that these change agents can be conceptualized as brokers who connect an organization or group with the ideas and practices of other organizations or groups.

Research on the cross-national diffusion of social movements has also addressed the issue of agency in cross-national diffusion processes. Arguing that the focus on homophily and structural and cultural equivalence or similarity deemphasizes agency and its role in the diffusion process and in the active social construction of similarity, Snow and Benford distinguish between four types of diffusion processes that differ from one another in terms of the role of adopters and transmitters. These actors can either be passive or active participants in processes of diffusion, which means that diffusion can entail a)
reciprocation, b) adaptation, c) accommodation, or d) contagion (Snow and Benford, 1999). Reciprocation denotes active participation in the diffusion process by both the transmitter and the adopter, whereas adaptation refers to a diffusion process in which the adopter is actively engaged in appropriating and adapting the diffusing item to its own setting, while the transmitter is passive. Accommodation is a process involving an active transmitter working to introduce and adapt a diffusing item to a new setting without active participation by the adopter, while contagion refers to a process in which both transmitter and adopter are passive. Benford and Snow argue that contagion is not a relevant process in the case of the diffusion of collective action (Benford and Snow, 1999, pp. 26-27). The emphasis on the agency of adopters in diffusion processes characterized by reciprocation and adaptation is also consistent with Roggeband’s idea of adopters as seekers who proactively look for inspiration and solutions in other countries (Roggeband, 2007, p. 255; see also della Porta and Kriesi, 1999).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the cross-national diffusion of social movements and their ideas can also entail rearticulation and appropriation. When norms and social movement ideas diffuse cross-nationally, they are often not simply adopted wholesale, but adapted to better suit domestic political and cultural settings (Snow and Benford, 1999). This entails what is referred to as interpretive work, which Strang and Soule describe in their review of the diffusion literature as the effort “of translating concrete practices into abstractions for export and then unpacking the abstraction into a (suitably modified) concrete practice upon arrival” (Strang and Soule, 1998, p. 276) to make it more relevant and appropriate for the context into which it diffuses. The body of literature focused on the diffusion of global legal and human rights norms is helpful in this context (Levitt and Merry, 2009; Merry, 2006; Roggeband, 2007; Zwingel 2005; Zwingel, 2012). Merry and Levitt (2009) and Merry (2006) use the term vernacularization and explain that it is a process by which international ideas and norms are localized and adapted to local contexts so they become resonant with the local settings into which they diffuse, while Roggeband describes processes of rearticulation and recontextualization of diffusing ideas and models for responding to an issue or problem (Roggeband, 2007). Similarly, Zwingel has developed theoretical formulations that posit that the diffusion of norms occurs across different spheres of action - global, national, and local - that are interrelated and interact to shape global norms to fit specific settings. Global norms are thus not simply adopted at the national or local levels. Rather, they are interpreted, adapted and appropriated in a process referred to as creolization to be more legitimate, relevant, and resonant in local contexts. This argument implies that global norms and the global sphere of action are not dominant and that global ideas do not diffuse homogeneously, but interact with national and local spheres of action and local social agency to create resonant norms (Zwingel, 2005; Zwingel, 2012). The individuals and groups whose agency makes this rearticulation and appropriation possible have been described as translators or vernacularizers, individuals who “have one foot in the transnational community and one at home” and can navigate and connect global and local sites of activism (Merry, 2006, p. 42; see also Levitt and Merry, 2009). Translators can thus be seen as brokers in a process of mediated diffusion.
The Food Sovereignty Paradigm

Food sovereignty is defined in terms of six principles, which are summarized in the Nyéléni Synthesis Report, an outcome document of Nyéléni 2007: Forum For Food Sovereignty (also referred to below as the global Food Sovereignty Forum), the first international gathering of food sovereignty campaigners held in Mali in 2007. First, the concept of food sovereignty “focuses on food for people” and views food as a human right, and not simply another commodity, and defines the human right to food as a key dimension of public policy. Second, it “values food providers” and supports the rights of farmers, pastoralists, agricultural workers and other food providers, opposing policies that do not respect their labor and undermine their livelihoods. Third, the idea of food sovereignty “localises food systems” and supports the rights of providers and consumers to participate in decision-making processes pertaining to food and agriculture and to be protected from dumping, genetically modified foods, unsuitable food aid, and an international trade regime that gives corporations too much control over the food system. Fourth, food sovereignty “puts control locally”, calling for food providers to have local control over the natural resources (e.g. water, land, seeds) that are needed for producing food and to manage these resources sustainably, resisting the privatization of natural resources. Fifth, the framework of food sovereignty “builds knowledge and skills” and prioritizes traditional and local agricultural knowledge and practices, rejecting technologies that could weaken them. Sixth, food sovereignty “works with nature” and supports agroecological and sustainable practices that preserve ecosystems, rejecting high-input agricultural practices that harm the environment and exacerbate climate change (in addition to the Nyéléni Synthesis Report see also Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, pp. 167-170; Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Rosset, 2008). Together, these six principles imply that food sovereignty is about “the right of democratic control over food and food-producing resources” (Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011, p. 128). If used to guide food and agriculture policy, this framework can, according to its advocates, put in place a food system that is socially just, environmentally sustainable, and conducive to human health and welfare.

Finally, it is important to note that “while it is critical to have a common framework, there is no single path or prescription for achieving food sovereignty. It is the task of individual regions, nations, and communities to determine what food sovereignty means to them based on their own unique set of circumstances” (Schiavoni, 2009, p. 685). In other words, the process of interpretation, adaption and appropriation described above is built into the framework of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty represents a vision for transformative change, and in seeking change, the food sovereignty paradigm connects different social struggles within and between communities, countries, and regions, and it acquires different meanings in different contexts (Desmarais and Wittman, 2013, pp. 4-5). The idea of food sovereignty “is very much situated; it occurs in a particular place and how it is expressed is determined largely by local dynamics” (Desmarais and Wittman, 2013, p. 5).

According to the Declaration of Nyéléni, Food Sovereignty Forum participants aimed to “strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty”, indicating this could be done “by
forging alliances, supporting each others’ struggles and extending [their] solidarity, strengths, and creativity to peoples all over the world who are committed to food sovereignty”. Participants also stated in the Declaration that they had “arrived at a number of collective actions to share [their] vision of food sovereignty with all peoples of this world”, “so that the spirit of Nyéléni permeates across the world and becomes a powerful force to make food sovereignty a reality for peoples all over the world”. These quotes show clearly that while diffusion and movement building were intentional and are among the central goals of the Food Sovereignty Forum (implying social agency and processes of reciprocation and adaptation), Forum attendees also recognized the idiosyncrasies of local struggles and circumstances. This implies that movement building was driven by an effort to diffuse a framework and discourse that can inform and connect efforts already underway that are centered on revamping and transforming the food system, which dovetails with Schiavoni’s and Desmarais and Wittman’s statements, and is reflected in the case studies presented below.6

The Food Sovereignty Movement in the UK

*The diffusion of the food sovereignty movement to Europe and the UK*

After the Food Sovereignty Forum in Mali, a group of European attendees came together to discuss bringing the food sovereignty movement to Europe, recognizing the global dimensions of food system problems that made food sovereignty also relevant and important in the Global North. Their effort culminated in the European Food Sovereignty Forum (Nyéléni Europe), which was held in Krems, Austria, in 2011.7 The goals of the European Food Sovereignty Forum were threefold, namely, to highlight the meaning of food sovereignty in Europe, to identify the difficulties of realizing food sovereignty in Europe, and to develop joint strategies to advance food sovereignty in Europe.8 Nyéléni Europe can be seen as a manifestation of diffusion. The use of the name “Nyéléni” indicates that European food sovereignty advocates see strong connections between their causes and the global Nyéléni process that was launched in Mali in 2007. In fact, the Declaration adopted at the Nyéléni Europe Forum states that this European event is “building on the foundations of the Declaration of the Nyéléni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty, which reaffirmed the international framework for Food Sovereignty - the right of peoples to democratically define their own food and agricultural systems without harming other people or the environment”9. Moreover, the website of Nyéléni Europe describes the Nyéléni Europe process as a next step after the 2007 Food Sovereignty Forum.10

European activists chose to keep the name “Nyéléni” because it was used for the Food Sovereignty Forum in Mali in 2007. In Mali, Nyéléni is a symbolic figure for struggles surrounding food and farming11. A “mother figure of agricultural productivity”, it was suggested in Mali that she be “the iconic figure of the food sovereignty movement”12. One of the leaders of the global food sovereignty movement, Ibrahim Coulibaly, described the Nyéléni Europe process as a decision by European social movements to “carry the torch of Nyéléni” to address food and agriculture issues in Europe.13 Other activists involved in the food sovereignty movement in Europe indicate that the Food Sovereignty Forum in Mali was a very important event that sparked the effort to
coordinate a Europe-wide food sovereignty movement (interview # 9; interview # 10) and provided an example on which the Nyéléni Europe process was modeled. That process borrowed several key organizational features and substantive foci from the 2007 Food Sovereignty Forum (interview # 9). This is all evidence that a diffusion process has occurred and is unfolding.

Before the launch of more coordinated food sovereignty movements in Europe and the UK, there were initiatives, campaigns and organizations in the UK doing work that focuses on different aspects of food sovereignty, but without country-wide coordination or visibility (interview # 6). Many of them did not (and in some cases still do not) use the term food sovereignty to describe their work, but their work did/does promote key dimensions of food sovereignty including, for example, a commitment to local and sustainable food systems (interview # 1).

The ways in which the food sovereignty movement diffused to the UK are indicative of different pathways of diffusion. Some of the individuals and organizations that initially helped introduce the term food sovereignty into the UK context had transnational ties. Some of them, for example, were development and environmental NGOs that have an international focus as well as connections to groups in different countries working on food sovereignty (interview # 4). These actors can be seen as brokers or change agents who connect local groups to global discourses. Brokerage is, however, not the only mechanism of diffusion that can be identified in this case. Relational diffusion was also important, as opportunities to attend events like the global Forum for Food Sovereignty or the Nyéléni Europe Forum and connect with other activists were important for the leaders of the nascent food sovereignty movement in Europe and the UK. These international events provided the impetus to use a food sovereignty framework to strengthen, connect, and coordinate the work of disparate groups whose causes and agendas fit within that framework and mobilize these groups into a movement. These two forums are both a manifestation of and a driving force behind diffusion as they reflect the global scope of a movement that originated in the Global South and serve to continue to spread and diffuse its principles and ideas into areas in which they are still fairly unfamiliar. The presence of members of the global food sovereignty movement at the Nyéléni Europe Forum (e.g. Ibrahim Coulibaly, one of the movement’s active international figures) is also indicative of reciprocation, the active involvement of both transmitters and adopters in the diffusion process. Finally, activists in the UK also see a significant degree of structural equivalence between themselves and members of the food sovereignty and peasant movements in other countries and regions of the world. Although there are no doubt many differences between the Global North and Global South, there is evidence that food sovereignty activists in the UK believe that much like activists and peasants in the Global South, they are mobilizing to oppose a food system within which they have a similar structural position in relation to corporations and the agri-food sector (more on this below).

The meaning of food sovereignty in the UK
It is important to note that the term “food sovereignty” is a very new term and framework with which many people in the UK are not familiar, including individuals who are
involved in the food movement and working to bring about change in the food system (interview # 1; interview # 2; interview # 4; interview #5).

In many ways, individuals, groups and communities active in the UK-based food sovereignty movement share with other actors in the global movement many of the same definitions and interpretations of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty activists in the UK see themselves as part of the global movement and emphasize the similarities between the problems of the UK’s food system and those in other countries. For example, while in many European countries hunger is less severe of a problem than it is in many countries of the Global South, because of corporate control over the food system “the population has no power at all over the food” (Vaarst and González-□García, 2012, p. 7). This makes “control and responsibility over the food systems and thereby also agricultural systems which heavily influence environment, plant and animal species, and human social life” (Vaarst and González-□García, 2012, p. 2) as relevant in Europe as they are in the Global South.

In the UK specifically, one respondent noted that when it comes to food and the food system people “live under the illusion of choice”, but the only choices available to them are not good for people or the environment (interview #5). In addition, respondents highlight many of the same food system issues that are the focus of the global food sovereignty movement, including the lack of support for small-scale farming and the corporate control of the food system and of food and agriculture policy (interview # 1; interview # 2; interview # 5; interview # 6). This is an indication that they perceive themselves to be in a similar situation as food producers and consumers in other countries, a perception of a similarity and shared identity as opponents of a corporate-controlled food system that undermines democratic control of the food system as well as ecological sustainability and the right to food.

Respondents also emphasize the effort of the global justice movement in Europe to “listen” to (interview # 4) and to demonstrate solidarity with the Global South and support its struggle for food sovereignty (interview # 1). They point out that the Nyéléni Declaration and the Nyéléni Synthesis Report adopted at the Food Sovereignty Forum in 2007 offer a conceptualization and definition of food sovereignty that is the “starting point” of any discussion of food sovereignty in the UK, even though the practical application of the term is up to the different groups that are part of the food sovereignty movement (interview # 7; see also interview # 5). When asked, respondents do highlight issues that they believe are particularly important in the UK context, such as access to land (interview # 3; interview # 6) and the debate surrounding GM (interview # 4; interview # 5; interview # 6), but overall they stress the connections and similarities between their own causes and the struggles in other countries and regions.

At the same time, the breadth of the idea of food sovereignty makes it relevant to the idiosyncratic circumstances of different communities, allowing them to use it as a way to connect their struggles, concerns, and priorities to those of other communities and as a framework to aggregate and articulate their proposals and demands for policy change. The example of crofting in Scotland illustrates this well.
Crofting, an unusual land tenure system, is unique to Scotland. But crofting is more than simply a land tenure system – it is also a distinct culture and way of life, and crofters have in the past argued that they should be recognized as Indigenous peoples, whose culture is very strongly connected to their land and their agricultural activities (MacKinnon, 2008).  

The term croft refers to “a small agricultural unit”. Most crofts are located in the crofting counties in Northern Scotland, and the average croft size is five hectares. Crofters are individuals who live and work on crofts, and they are typically tenants who pay rent to the landlord of the croft, although some crofts are also owner-occupied. Most crofters seek employment opportunities away from their crofts that provide much of their income as most crofts cannot provide full-time employment. Much of the agricultural activity on crofts is small scale and the main crofting products are lamb and beef, although crofters sometimes also grow crops. Food sovereignty activists advocating on behalf of crofters believe that crofting is not only an agricultural system or practice, but a way of life that entails a distinct culture: “Crofting must cease to be considered as only a subsistence agricultural system or as an unusual system of tenure and be understood as the physical basis of distinct, valuable and valued way of life founded on community – a word derived from an Old English word also meaning fellowship, union, common ownership” (MacKinnon, 2008, p. 7). For this reason, one of their important demands is that the distinct cultures of crofting regions be recognized and that rural skills and traditions be preserved. Some of their demands for agriculture policy and rural development that are designed to achieve these goals also reflect the idea of food sovereignty. They include support for a local food economy, enhancing access to economic opportunities and making available public services, support for crofting, and the recognition of the crofting cultures, as well as other measures, all to encourage the sustainability and viability of remote and rural crofting communities (interview #8). One example that illustrates the connection between food sovereignty and culture from crofters’ perspectives is the traditional seed blessing ceremony that was performed at a European agricultural biodiversity forum, Let’s Liberate Diversity: Celebrating Crofters’ Seeds and Breeds, which was held in Scotland in March 2012 and co-organized by the Scottish Crofting Federation, a member of La Via Campesina, the global peasant movement and a leader in the global food sovereignty movement, and (interview # 7). Part of the program of the forum focused on crofting culture, which can be seen as highlighting the connections between food sovereignty and culture in the crofting areas as well as the ways in which food sovereignty principles, including respect for traditional agricultural knowledge and practices, the protection of biodiversity, and control over seeds can all help protect the cultural heritage of crofting areas.

The Food Sovereignty Movement in Canada

The diffusion of the food sovereignty movement to Canada

The food movement in Canada has its roots in the 1970s when rising hunger and the oil and food price crises set the stage for the mobilization of civil society groups around the
problems of the food system. The People’s Food Commission, staffed mostly by volunteer commissioners, held over seventy hearings across Canada between 1978 and 1980 to solicit and collect testimonies and input from citizens that later informed the Commission’s final report that provided a critical analysis of the food system (Kneen, 2010; Kneen, 2011; Kneen, 2012).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the food movement continued to grow, and it included a variety of different groups and initiatives, including food banks, community kitchens, public health initiatives, farmers’ markets, and community supported agriculture programs (CSAs) (Kneen, 2011). The food movement was able to provide input to inform Canada’s policy position at the 1996 World Food Summit and the follow-up conference World Food Summit: Five Years Later. Civil society groups conceptualized food security broadly to include not only access to food, but also environmental sustainability and the opportunity to produce food (Kneen, 2011).

A few years later, in 2004, members of the food movement began taking active steps to create a formal food security network in Canada, Food Secure Canada, and they defined their work in terms of three pillars that reflected the same holistic view of food security: zero hunger, a sustainable food system, and healthy and safe food (Kneen, 2011, p. 85). Sustainability was conceived in terms of social and environmental dimensions. The food movement continued working in 2005 to establish Food Secure Canada, drafting its constitution, deciding on an agenda, and adopting bylaws (Kneen, 2011, p. 86). In the context of this paper, an important moment for the Canadian food sovereignty movement came in October 2006, the year that Food Secure Canada was chartered, when a joint meeting of the food movement in Canada and the Community Food Security Coalition in the United States was held in Vancouver. Focusing on “Bridging Borders Towards Food Security”, this meeting introduced members of the food movement in Canada to the framework of food sovereignty, which was a case of relational diffusion: “the key concepts of food sovereignty were presented to the Canadian movement by farmers from the Global South and North America” (Kneen, 2011, p. 86). This relational mechanism of diffusion was also characterized by reciprocity as the event was attended by food movement activists from different countries.

A few months later, a few individuals affiliated with Food Secure Canada, which has been described as “the convener of the food movement in Canada” (Kneen, 2011, p. 95), traveled to Mali to attend the Forum for Food Sovereignty, and one of the leaders of the movement notes that they “were inspired to come back home and share the analysis of food sovereignty” (Kneen, 2011, p. 90) and “determined to find a way to translate food sovereignty into the context of a Northern, wealthy country” (Kneen, 2012, pp. 2-3). For although there had been a food security movement with a strong sustainability focus in Canada for a long time, the term food sovereignty was not used, although individuals and organizations with transnational ties and contacts knew the term (interview # 11). But those who attended the Forum for Food Sovereignty did not only bring that term into greater focus in Canada; they also brought several important elements of the food sovereignty discourse to the food security movement, including gender and the principle of democratic control over food systems (interview # 11).
Sovereignty was thus a venue that encouraged relational diffusion, but also allowed those in attendance from Canada to serve as brokers or translators/vernacularizers, spearheading a process of mediated diffusion within Canada. The quotes above also indicate that some of the movement leaders were quite aware of the need to rearticulate and reconceptualize food sovereignty to make it relevant and resonant in Canada or the Global North more generally.

The mechanism selected for doing so was the People’s Food Policy Project (PFPP), which over the course of two years built on the work of the People’s Food Commission and engaged about 3500 people in conversations about the food system and food policy to develop a vision and policy proposal for a food system that is conducive to social justice, health, and environmental sustainability (People’s Food Policy Project, 2011; Kneen 2010; Kneen 2011; Kneen 2012). The PFPP was participatory and inclusive, and it consisted of Kitchen Table Talks, policy submissions, teleconferences, three national meetings, and online proposals and comments. The input and ideas generated through the PFPP were compiled into ten thematic discussion papers that then informed the final report, which is titled Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada.

It is also very important to note that even though the process described above has been very significant in terms of bringing the food sovereignty movement to Canada, it has not been the only process of diffusion. The term food sovereignty had been used by the National Farmers Union prior to the formation of Food Secure Canada. The National Farmers Union (NFU) was a founding member of La Via Campesina (interview #12; interview #13), the global peasant movement, which is a leader of the global food sovereignty movement. Members of the NFU helped draft the Nyéléni Declaration (interview #12), and the NFU is an active member of La Via Campesina. Prior and parallel to the process described above, the NFU has worked to connect the Canadian movement to the global movement through the NFU’s International Program Committee (IPC) (interview #12; interview #13). This process of diffusion has combined relational and mediated diffusion. Members of the IPC and NFU attend several food sovereignty meetings at the regional and international level every year (interview #12; interview #13). Following these meetings, IPC/NFU attendees debrief the IPC, and reports about the meetings are published in the Union Farmer Quarterly, which is available online, and which members receive by mail (interview #13). In addition, the IPC also coordinates the dissemination of La Via Campesina’s press releases (interview #13). One could therefore argue that these international meetings are sites of relational diffusion and the NFU (through the work of the IPC) is a broker and helps connect the regional and global spheres of activism with the food movement in Canada.

The meaning of food sovereignty in Canada

Much like food sovereignty activists in the UK, those mobilizing in Canada around the food system share many of the same concerns about the food system with the global food sovereignty movement. The PFPP involved groups with global ties to international groups working to advance food sovereignty, and it stressed “that food sovereignty is a global project” (Kneen, 2010, p. 235). The food system analysis in Resetting the Table is global in scope, and although it has a strong focus on Canada, the discussion of the food
system in Canada is presented against the background of the global context of food and agriculture policy. *Resetting the Table* also has a section on international food policy, and one of the ten discussion papers that informed this final report focused on international food policy. Finally, many of the same issues that the global food sovereignty movement identifies as critical issues are highlighted in *Resetting the Table* in the analysis of the Canadian food system. These include environmental decline and the industrialization of agriculture, an export-driven food system that treats food as a commodity, hunger and poverty, genetically modified organisms, and the influence of corporations on food and agriculture policy.

At the same time, the food movement in Canada has put its own stamp on food sovereignty activism, beginning with the PFPP. This initiative was unique in that it engaged a significant number of people in a participatory process that reflected the principles of food sovereignty. This resulted in the realization that “food sovereignty is both a goal and a process for achieving that goal” (Kneen, 2012, p. 3). The IPC has also worked to contextualize global struggles and make clear “how they manifest themselves in the Canadian context” (interview #12), to educate people about the implications of global issues for Canada, and to examine international discussions and issues in the Canadian context (interview #12).

Moreover, even though the PFPP was “clearly rooted in the global movement’s understanding of food sovereignty” (Kneen, 2011, p. 91), that term acquired meanings that were unique to the Canadian context. In addition to the six principles of food sovereignty defined at the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali in 2007, the Canadian food sovereignty movement added a seventh pillar during the first few months of the PFPP to reflect Indigenous understandings of food sovereignty. The seventh pillar or principle, which was proposed by the Indigenous Circle, a group within Food Secure Canada, “recognizes that food is sacred” (People’s Food Policy Project, 2011, p. 10). This reflects the culture and values of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Morrison, 2011, p. 100), whose conceptualization of food sovereignty provides an example of the ways in which food sovereignty is adapted, rearticulated, and recontextualized in the different settings into which it diffuses.

Indigenous food sovereignty “describes … the present day strategies that enable and support the ability of Indigenous communities to sustain traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and distribution practices” (Morrison, 2011, p. 98) and offers a framework that can help generate analyses of the food system as well as proposals to transform it in ways that can make it socially just and environmentally sustainable (Morrison, 2011, p. 98). Rooted in Indigenous eco-philosophy, Indigenous food systems are based on interdependent relationships of peoples and their natural environments and the sacredness of food, land, and animals. Food sovereignty is a framework and practice (interview #11) through which Indigenous peoples have articulated a response to the crises and concerns that their communities face as well as an alternative to the dominant food system, an alternative that is based on their traditional food systems that were sustainable for millennia. These crises include deep
poverty, low levels of food security, a very high rate of diet-related chronic diseases like diabetes, lower life expectancy, and a loss of cultural traditions, including traditional knowledge rooted in Indigenous foodways that were sustainable and conducive to human health (Desmarais and Wittman, 2013; Kneen 2010; People’s Food Policy Project, 2011, pp. 10-12).

For Indigenous communities, food sovereignty is one dimension of their sovereignty and their struggle against domination and assimilation (Kneen, 2011, p. 89). European settlement of the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples resulted in a loss of access to traditional foods and to traditional territories and hunting and harvesting grounds, as well as the undermining of the traditional food system and foodways (Desmarais and Wittman, 2013). In addition, traditional territories have experienced environmental decline as a result of mining and other economic activities and development projects. Food sovereignty is a framework that connects these challenges to the food system and connects Indigenous struggles to the broader struggles surrounding food and the food system. It uses the transformation of that system as one way to respond to these different hardships and injustices Indigenous communities face and reclaim traditional culture connected to traditional foodways.

Food Secure Canada has sought to work with the Indigenous community in advancing food sovereignty, in part because traditional food systems were sustainable for millennia, but also to give voice to one of the most marginalized communities (Kneen, 2010). As a result, the framework of food sovereignty in Canada includes the seventh pillar mentioned above establishing that food is sacred. Indigenous communities believe that food is sacred because it is essential to life and a gift from the Creator, and while the notion of sacredness is implicit in the Nyéléni Declaration, there is a sense in Canada that sacredness needs to be more explicit (interview # 11).

In addition to devoting one of the discussion papers that informed Resetting the Table as well as one segment of this food policy platform to Indigenous food sovereignty, Resetting the Table also incorporates the situation of Indigenous communities in all other segments of this report, thus addressing, for example, environment and agriculture or fisheries in ways that reflect the unique circumstances and rights of Indigenous communities. Indigenous food sovereignty is not simply an additional and separate dimension of food sovereignty in Canada, a seventh pillar that is added on to the six pillars identified at the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali in 2007. Rather, it is incorporated into much of the discussion of how the food system can be transformed into one that is fair and sustainable, and it is an integral part of the policy proposals and recommendations that the food movement has put forward. Incorporating Indigenous food sovereignty across the different areas of the discourse surrounding food sovereignty in Canada was intentional (interview # 11). This makes the conceptualization of food sovereignty in Canada quite distinct and a product of a process of recontextualization of the food sovereignty discourse that is rooted in the unique circumstances of that country.
**Concluding Remarks**

Following a review of the theoretical formulations surrounding the diffusion of social movements and their ideas and discourses, this paper presented two brief cases pertaining to food sovereignty that illustrated the different pathways of diffusion, the role of local activism and social agency in translating global discourses into action and policy proposals at the local level, and the ways in which global discourses can acquire local meanings and applications.

The paper demonstrated how diffusion occurs via a number of different channels and describes the diffusion of the food sovereignty movement to Canada and to the UK. These cases illustrate processes of relational, non-relational, and mediated diffusion, which combine to bring certain movements and their discourses to countries and regions other than the ones in which they originated. And while in both countries there was activism and organizing surrounding food and the food system prior to the use of the term “food sovereignty”, one can clearly still speak of diffusion. This is so because the disparate groups involved in food movements began to connect their work and/or think about their causes in terms of global food system issues when they were introduced to the global food sovereignty discourse. The food sovereignty framework presented above provided a common language, common goals, and more coherence to the various causes of the food movement and fostered a sense of shared identity, solidarity, and common purpose among food producers, consumers, and rural communities around the world by emphasizing the similar impacts the global food system has on communities all over the world. In short, what diffused is a framework and discourse that are helping integrate the efforts of food system activists around the world, and a more coherent and systemic critique of and proposed alternatives for the global food system.

My argument also highlights the importance of social agency and its role in social movement diffusion. The most original and useful argument developed in the paper pertains to the recontextualization and reinterpretation of the food sovereignty discourse to connect it to different local struggles. I have shown that the framework of food sovereignty has been recontextualized by representatives of different cultural communities in both Canada and the UK to link their idiosyncratic circumstances and concerns about their cultural heritage and the viability of their communities to global discourses and to articulate their visions for rural and agricultural development, as well as food policy and the food system in terms of a global framework.

As the global food sovereignty movement continues to work for change in the food system, it will be interesting to continue analyzing the ways in which different countries and different communities connect their struggles to the discourse about food sovereignty and use that framework to articulate their own concerns, special needs and priorities. Since the cases discussed here are designed to be brief and illustrative of the process of diffusion and recontextualization, it will be important to develop more in-depth case studies in future research to generate a deeper understanding of how social movements at the national, subnational, or community levels connect their own struggles and challenges to global discourses and use these discourses to articulate a vision for change. Future research would also be very useful if it included ideas, discourses and norms other than
food sovereignty. Such research can help us better understand the diffusion of social movements and their ideas as well as shed light on the interactions between global discourses and norms and local activism and mobilization in an increasingly globalized world.

3 The website of Food Secure Canada refers to the definition of food sovereignty of the global movement. See http://foodsecurecanada.org/who-we-are/what-food-sovereignty (accessed 16 February 2014).
6 The diffusion of food sovereignty to local communities has not been uncontroversial, and some of the policies and practices that food sovereignty activists and farmers committed to food sovereignty have promoted have provoked opposition. A discussion of these controversies is beyond the scope of this paper, but here is an example from the U.S. that illustrates some of the controversies that can emerge when food sovereignty is translated into local practices: http://bangordailynews.com/2013/04/21/news/state/farmers-speak-out-against-local-food-sovereignty-movement/ (accessed 19 October 2014).
7 This information was gleaned from the report of the UK delegates to the Nyéléni European Food Sovereignty Forum to the UK Food Group. The audio-recording of the report is available from http://www.ukfg.org.uk/pdfs/2011_FoodP_NyeleniEurope.mp3 (accessed 22 January 2014).
8 See the website of Nyéléni Europe for the goals and objectives of the Nyéléni Europe Forum: http://www.nyelenieurope.net/en/home/forum/goals-a-objectives (accessed 26 January 2014).
13 This quote is from a video documenting the Nyéléni Europe Forum that is available from http://vimeo.com/37734507 (accessed 26 January 2014). A link to this documentary

14 As mentioned above, there was activism in the UK on issues of food sovereignty that pre-dated the use of the term food sovereignty.


22 I am grateful to Cathleen Kneen for her help in editing this sentence to make sure that its content is clear and accurate.

23 Issues of the Union Farmer Quarterly are available online from http://www.nfu.ca/publications/unionfarmerquarterly (accessed 20 April 2014). Examples of reports on the international and regional meetings that some members of the NFU have attended include the examples in the Summer 2012 issue (p. 15), the Spring 2013 issue (pp. 13-16) the Fall 2013 issue (pp. 16-17), and the Spring 2014 issue (pp. 12-14 and p. 17).


29 I am grateful to Cathleen Kneen for her help in editing this sentence to make sure that its content is clear and accurate.
Interviews

Interview # 1: Phone interview with Dan Iles, World Development Movement, 14 January 2014

Interview # 2: Phone interview with Pete Richie, Nourish Scotland, 15 January 2014

Interview # 3: Phone interview with Jyoti Fernandes, Land Workers’ Alliance, 17 January 2014

Interview # 4: Phone interview with an NGO staff member active in the food sovereignty movement in the UK, 20 January, 2014

Interview # 5: Phone interview with Rupert Dunn, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, 23 January, 2014. The views that were expressed in the interview are Dunn’s personal views and do not represent the views of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

Interview # 6: Phone interview with Haidee-Laure Giles, War on Want, 24 January 2014

Interview # 7: Phone interview with Patrick Mulvany, Co-chair, UK Food Group, 27 January 2014

Interview # 8: Phone interview with Robin Pakeman, The James Hutton Institute, 30 January 2014

Interview # 9: Phone interview with Anna Korzenszky, Secretary Nyéléni Europe Movement for Food Sovereignty, 4 February 2014

Interview # 10: Phone interview with Genevieve Savigny, European Coordination Via Campesina, 10 February 2014

Interview # 11: Phone interview with Cathleen Kneen, The Ram’s Horn, 28 February 2014

Interview # 12: Phone interview with Hilary Moore, National Farmers Union, 24 March 2014

Interview # 13: Phone interview with a member of the National Farmers Union, 2 April 2014

References


