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Lund University Master of Science in  
International Development and Management  
June, 2015

**Engendering Food Sovereignty:**  
*Feminist Post-Development and Gendered Discourses in the  
Food Sovereignty Movement*

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Much ink has gone into thinking about what development is and whether it is happening - development as not yet or in the process of becoming, or development as myth and illusion.

Wrestling with such issues often entails a moment of *aporia*: a paralysis, a quandary, a condition in which one does not know where to go - the ordeal of the undecidable. The outcome of such a risk, the decision, determines whether one opts to position oneself on the side of development, post-development, or somewhere else (Saunders, 2002b:18-19, emphasis in original).

**Abstract**

The food sovereignty movement (FSM) calls for transformative change towards equality in power over food systems and social relations, including gender relations. The purpose of this feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) was to gain insights into the gendered discourses of the FSM at the international level and discursive repertoires on gender and food sovereignty at the grassroots level in Tamil Nadu, India, through feminist post-development (FPD) thought on gender and transformative change. The analysis showed that at the international level, the FSM's discourses in key texts challenge dominant neoliberal discourses, but also reveal rifts in ideological coherence on gender in discourses on the community, family, and women. At the grassroots level, the analysis suggested that discursive repertoires in interviews with staff and members of two food sovereignty-oriented organizations both resist and (re)produce dominant gender ideologies. The gendered discourses and discursive repertoires of FSM texts and actors, interpreted through a FPD lens, are part of a process of transformative change; but moving forward, actors within the FSM may reflect on how they conceptualize categories of community, family, and gender to make space for difference and choice as part of the journey towards establishing new social relations.

**Key words:**

Feminist Post-Development, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender, Food Sovereignty, Food Sovereignty Movement, Tamil Nadu.

Word count: 14,980

## **Acknowledgements**

To all the people I met during the time I spent in Tamil Nadu for this study, I cannot thank you enough for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me. Thank you as well to the staff of WST and S2H for being so welcoming and for sharing your extensive knowledge with me. I would also like to thank the staff of The Swallows India Bangladesh for not only getting me interested in food sovereignty in the first place, but also for setting me on the path towards Tamil Nadu. To my supervisor Catia and my peers - thank you for challenging me and expanding my perspectives. Finally, I would of course like to express my deep gratitude for my family and friends, who have inspired me along the way. It's been a journey.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDA	Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis
FPD	Feminist Post-Development
FSM	Food Sovereignty Movement
GAD	Gender and Development
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LVC	La Via Campesina
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PD	Post-Development
S2H	Seed to Hearth
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development
WST	We Stand Together
WTO	World Trade Organization

# 1. Setting the Scene

## 1.1 Hunger for Change

A rise in food prices in 2007–2008 shook the world and sparked increasing debate on the development project's failure to combat hunger and poverty. This upward trend in food prices has pushed 105 million people into poverty by some estimates (Agarwal, 2014:1250). Amongst the hardest hit by food insecurity are smallholder farmers and landless agricultural laborers, a growing number of whom are women (Agarwal, 2014). Women farmers generally have less access to land and other productive inputs, services, and voice in decision-making arenas than their male counterparts, which can have a significant impact on their lives in terms of food security and well-being (Patel, 2012).

Already in the 1990s, the development project's lack of success in bringing about changes in the status quo was decried by scholarly communities and social movements calling for transformative social change. Amongst these scholarly communities are post-development (PD) and feminist post-development (FPD) scholars, who have critiqued the effects of development discourses and practices on the peoples of the Global South<sup>1</sup> (Saunders, 2002a). Many of these scholars are themselves activists who participate in the movements they study<sup>2</sup> and call for reimagining development by exploring “alternatives *to* development” (Escobar, 2012:xix, emphasis in original). FPD scholars in particular challenge gendered power structures and inequalities as part of their imaginary of alternatives to development.

Anti-neoliberal social movements that emerged around this time also envision a different world and have begun acting on these visions in practice (Dinerstein and Deneulin, 2012; Escobar, 2012). Amongst these is the food sovereignty movement (FSM), which has a vision of an alternative future wherein peoples and communities have power in food systems and of new

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<sup>1</sup> In this study I generally use the terms ‘Global South’ and ‘North’ (or West), however I recognize that these terms have their own role to play in (re)producing global inequalities. However, if the term ‘Third World’ was used in a text I have referenced, I have chosen to keep the formulation in respect for the author and, if relevant, time period it was written in, but also in recognition of the fact that many feminists and other activists have reclaimed especially the term ‘Third World’ (Lind, 2003:240-241).

<sup>2</sup> Among others: Kriemild Saunders, Patience Elabor-Idemudia, and Lloyd Sanchez (Saunders, 2002a).

social relations “free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations” (NGO/CSO FFS, 2007:1). According to some activists and scholars, the social and political transformations the FSM calls for inherently entails addressing unequal gender relations as well, due to the movement’s challenge to structural inequalities and power hierarchies (Wittman et al., 2010b:5). However, the FSM is also characterized by internal contradictions, including in its standpoints on gender, which might hamper its potential for achieving transformative change (Patel, 2010:190).

## **1.2 Purpose and Research Questions**

Scholars writing on PD issues are according to Saunders (2002b:18-19) tackling moments of *aporia* - “a paralysis, a quandary [...] the ordeal of the undecidable,” which determines whether one positions oneself on the side of development, PD, or somewhere else. In this study, I aim to explore not only the aporias of development and PD as posited by FPD scholars but also some of the potential aporias of the FSM’s standpoints on gendered issues. Utilizing feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA), I seek to examine gendered discourses of the FSM at the international level and discursive repertoires within two organizations working on food sovereignty initiatives at the grassroots level in Tamil Nadu, India. Tamil Nadu was chosen for the study since several food sovereignty-oriented organizations are active in the state. Furthermore, there is little empirical research on food sovereignty and gender in Tamil Nadu specifically, which I believe makes it relevant to see what might be learned from the actors working on these issues.

Examining both the FSM’s international level discourses on gendered issues as well as grassroots actors’ understandings of food sovereignty and gender is critical for starting a conversation about some of the movement’s contradictory stances on gender, how these might resist or (re)produce gendered power relations and inequalities, and to begin exploring strategies for future action. FCDA is well suited for this as it aims to “show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged” (Lazar, 2007:142). The purpose of this FCDA is thus to open a space for a discussion on the FSM at an international

and grassroots level using a FPD lens on gender and transformative change to gain insights into and discuss food sovereignty discourses and repertoires on gender relations and gendered issues.

As the FSM is itself highly critical of power structures and actively involved in an emancipatory struggle for social justice, it might seem counter-intuitive to do a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of this progressive movement. I believe that this is where a specifically *feminist* CDA is valuable, as gender inequalities are often perpetuated even within progressive movements (Taylor, 1999:13). Furthermore, I would like to echo Hennessy's (1993:xviii) conviction of the constructive power of an "ongoing double move between solidarity and critique." As such, I aim to stand in "critical solidarity" (Hennessy, 1993:2) with the FSM through the discussions in this study.

In order to delve deeper into the purpose at hand, I seek to answer the following research question:

*As the food sovereignty movement calls for transformative change, especially in terms of gender relations, what insights can be gained on gendered discourses and discursive repertoires in the food sovereignty movement through a feminist post-development lens?*

As part of this process, two operational research questions are also examined:

*What gendered discourses are used by the food sovereignty movement at the international level and in what ways do these resist or (re)produce gender inequalities?*

*What discursive repertoires on food sovereignty issues are found amongst grassroots level actors working with food sovereignty in Tamil Nadu, and in what ways do these resist or (re)produce gender inequalities?*

Texts from the international FSM, consisting of declarations and key statements issued by factions of the FSM at conferences and forums between 1996 and 2007, are analyzed to discuss discourses at the international level. The analysis of grassroots actors' discursive repertoires is

based on fieldwork with two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in Tamil Nadu, India. Semi-structured interviews with management and field staff, as well as members active in the organizations' initiatives were conducted, and some degree of participant observation is also used to inform the analysis and following discussion. The results of the two levels of analysis are used to inform the overall discussion.

### **1.3 Overview**

Having delineated the purpose and main research questions guiding this study, in Chapter 2 I situate and contextualize food sovereignty. Chapter 3, outlines the premises of FPD and Chapter 4 delineates the methods of FCDA and the study's research design. Chapters 5 and 6 present my interpretation of the international level discourses and grassroots level discursive repertoires, respectively. In Chapter 7, a discussion to answer the main research question is undertaken. Finally, Chapter 8 presents concluding thoughts and suggestions for further research.

## **2. Situating and Conceptualizing Food Sovereignty**

In this chapter I situate food sovereignty by outlining two of the phenomena which the FSM critiques: the Green Revolution and neoliberalism. I then define and discuss both food sovereignty and food security, before turning to a literature review on food sovereignty in general and with regards to gender.

### **2.1 Situating Food Sovereignty**

#### ***2.1.1 The Green Revolution***

The Green Revolution, which mainly lasted from 1965 to 1990, originated in the post-war push for food security and development of 'Third World' countries (Hazell, 2009; McKeon, 2015). In the spirit of modernity and progress guiding the 20th century, the Green Revolution was characterized by systems of intensive agriculture meant to increase agricultural yields and food security through a 'technical package' of high-yield hybrid seeds and new technology, irrigation systems, and chemical fertilizers and pesticides (McKeon, 2015). While the Green Revolution was successful in its main objective, increasing agricultural productivity and crop yields, it is also the subject of ongoing debate, especially in India (Das and Tripathi, 2014; Rahman, 2015;

Satyavathi et al., 2010). Critics argue that viewed more holistically, rather than in terms of productivity and yield, the Green Revolution is a contributing factor to broad ecological and socio-economic consequences, especially amongst those who work in the agricultural sector in India, and women smallholders and agricultural laborers in particular (Sobha, 2007).<sup>3</sup>

### ***2.1.2 Neoliberal discourses on development***

On the heels of the Green Revolution, the 1980s saw the dawn of neoliberalism and the age of globalization as the new face of the development project. As part of this paradigm, free trade, privatization, and market liberalization were promoted to drive economic growth and development (McKeon, 2015). Increasingly, financial institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO), largely run by powerful Western economies, set the terms of trade for countries in the Global South, including for agriculture (Hawkes and Murphy, 2009:17). The privatization and reduction of state support for the agricultural sector resulted in a system wherein private corporations capitalize on agriculture but do not take over states' duties to the citizens providing the labor for that same sector (McKeon, 2015:3).

## **2.2 Conceptualizing Food Sovereignty and Food Security**

### ***2.2.1 Origin and definition of food sovereignty***

Food sovereignty as a movement and idea emerged in the 1990s from grassroots groups' disillusionment with the Green Revolution, the neoliberal development project, and the concept of food security. The term 'food sovereignty' was first coined by the international peasant movement *La Via Campesina* (LVC) in its manifesto 'Food Sovereignty: A Future without Hunger,' which was released in 1996 at the civil society forum held as an alternative to the 1996 World Food Summit coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome. Throughout its now almost twenty year history, food sovereignty as a concept has evolved from an initial focus on state level self-sufficiency and political sovereignty

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<sup>3</sup> In India, in terms of the environment, the Green Revolution's intensive technical package is accused of contributing to soil degradation, water pollution and depletion, biodiversity loss, pest resistance and resurgence, and being a factor in global warming (Hazell, 2009; Rahman, 2015; Satyavathi et al., 2010; Sobha, 2007). The Green Revolution is also attributed a myriad of socio-economic effects, such as ill health for those in contact with agrochemicals, many of whom are women (Sobha, 2007:109-110), and 'deskilling' (Stone, 2007). Perhaps most contentious is the cycle of debt and risk afflicting many smallholders who become dependent on high-cost externally sourced inputs (Panneerselvam et al., 2014; Rahman, 2015).

to championing the rights of peoples and communities to have power, participation, and voice in policy and decision-making on agriculture and food systems (Agarwal, 2014:1248). Food sovereignty is often talked about as a “dynamic process” that allows for a diversity of interpretations and forms of practice (Edelman et al., 2014:912). Today, the definition from the Nyéléni declaration is one of the most widely acknowledged, which states that “food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (NGO/CSO FFS, 2007:1).

### ***2.2.2 Food security***

The concept of food security, on the other hand, has its roots in the 1940s in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II, as the scope of poverty around the world became apparent like never before (CFS, 2012:4). Today, food security as a term and paradigm is firmly nestled within development discourse and policy. The definition of food security has also evolved over the years, but the definition from the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome is perhaps most commonly used, stating that “food security exists when all people at all times have physical, [social],<sup>4</sup> and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (CFS, 2012:7).

### ***2.2.3 Which path to take?***

Both food security and food sovereignty at surface level appear to be working towards the same end - eradicating hunger - yet the means through which these concepts seek to achieve this goal differ. Proponents of food sovereignty and critical scholars argue that the food security paradigm commodifies food through for-profit production and manufacturing processes that are rarely locally embedded (Hospes, 2014). Food security can be achieved through top-down management and distribution, with little local input or control over food systems. Food sovereignty advocates argue that food security fails to challenge global power structures and does not address the interconnectedness of economy, social life, and environment, which the FSM sees as crucial for combatting inequalities (McKeon, 2015).

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘social’ was later added by the FAO to the 1996 definition (CFS, 2012:7; McKeon, 2015:75).

### **2.3 Prior Research on Food Sovereignty**

The concept of food sovereignty has also engaged an epistemic community (Hospes, 2014:119). There has been avid debate within academia on the definition and theorization of food sovereignty as an alternative paradigm to the neoliberal development project's conceptualization of agriculture, trade, and food security (Fairbairn, 2010; Wittman et al., 2010b). Scholars have also discussed food sovereignty as a new frame for policy and rights (Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012; Haugen, 2009; Wittman, 2011). The issue of land rights in relation to food sovereignty has been explored (Borras Jr. and Franco 2010; Lerrer and de Medeiros, 2014; Rosset, 2011) and the congruent concept of seed sovereignty has its own epistemic vanguard (Bezner Kerr, 2010; Kloppenburg, 2010; 2014; Wittman et al., 2010b).

Scholars have also pointed to the contradictions of the FSM (Edelman et al., 2014). Authors have problematized the target group, asking who the movement actually addresses - nations, peoples, communities, or individuals (Haugen, 2009). They have also questioned how consumers, urban dwellers, and migrants would be integrated into a food sovereignty paradigm largely driven by smallholders' perspectives (Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012). Based on research in India, Agarwal (2014) points to the contradictions of an international movement claiming to represent local smallholders' interests and asks whether the FSM's belief in democratic choice also applies to smallholders who *choose* to use hybrid seeds, chemical inputs, or to quit farming altogether. These issues are worth continued discussion; this study, however, places its point of departure in the debate surrounding the implications of food sovereignty for gender relations.

### **2.4 Engendering Food Sovereignty**

Wittman et al. (2010b:5) argue that because women play a key role in food production and preparation "the social and political transformation embedded in food sovereignty as a concept specifically entails changed gender relations," making striving for gender equality a central component of food sovereignty. Women's participation in decision-making and policy processes, as well as challenging patriarchal structures at both the international and grassroots level is part and parcel of the goals of the FSM (Patel, 2010).

The FSM's call for new social relations builds on agrarian reform and control over land for those who farm it, necessitating a gender perspective as women carry out large portions of agricultural labor throughout the world, but own the least amount of land (Agarwal, 2014; Patel, 2010). According to Sachs (2013:7), farmers' knowledge and skills are also especially valued in the FSM, bringing gender into the picture as women engage in much of the local seed saving and plant breeding that happens around the world - an important but historically undervalued skill-set. Land, seeds and knowledge thus constitute gendered arenas within the FSM.

Nonetheless, "fatal" gender contradictions remain (Patel, 2010:190). Routledge (2015) in a study on gender in the FSM in Bangladesh found that discourse often differs from everyday practices and that unequal gender relations can be reinforced in the course of food sovereignty activism. Park et al. (2015) argue that a gender analysis is largely missing from food sovereignty discourse and what gender analysis there is serves to homogenize women at best with a 'we are all the same' solidarity rhetoric. The authors call for an increased use of gender analysis within the FSM and academic writing thereof, as well as a recognition of difference amongst women at multiple levels of food systems (Park et al., 2015). Of note is Sachs' (2013:7) call for the importance of valuing women's contributions to food production and provisioning for the household and local food systems without reinscribing traditional gender roles and responsibilities.

### **3. Feminist Post-Development as a Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Post-Development - A Call for a New Vision**

Post-development emerged largely in the 1990s as a critique towards mainstream development practices and policy.<sup>5</sup> According to Escobar (2012), PD stems from post-structuralist and post-colonialist critiques that see development as a set of discourses that have a significant effect on how the world sees 'underdevelopment' and the 'Third World.' For Escobar (2012:216-217), PD entails imagining "the end of development as a regime of representation [---] imagining the day when we will not be able to say or even entertain the thoughts that have led to forty years of incredibly irresponsible policies and programs."

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Latouche (1993), Rahnema and Bawtree (1997), and Sachs (1992).

### 3.2 Feminist Post-Development - Women in (Post-)Development

On the need for alternatives to development, Elabor-Idemudia (2002:239-240) writes,

With poverty, instability and environmental degradation on the increase in the wake of contemporary development strategies in most Third World countries, it is becoming increasingly clear that externally devised Eurocentric strategies for economic growth have failed to support sustainable development.

Feminist scholars have taken up the PD debate and expanded on it by asking questions relating to what development and neoliberalism mean for women, especially in the context of the Global South, and calling into question Western feminism's role in reproducing global inequalities (Lind, 2003:228; Saunders, 2002a). These scholars represent a diverse range of academic disciplines,<sup>6</sup> are based in countries in the Global South and North, and engage in critical debate with both development thought and the works of other PD and FPD scholars. Below I outline the most relevant aspects of these discussions for this study.

Feminist scholars engaging in the PD debate have especially critiqued the Women in/and Development (WID and WAD) as well as Gender and Development (GAD) models (Saunders, 2002b). These scholars argue that the 'Western gaze' (Mohanty, 1984) used by development institutions and practitioners when creating development programs meant to 'include' women in the Global South is highly problematic as they promote a 'sisterhood is global' discourse and universal notions of empowerment that lack local grounding and homogenize women's struggles (Lind, 2003:231-232).

Many FPD scholars are also critical of their PD contemporaries for homogenizing development discourses as well as for romanticizing 'traditional' modes of life (held up as the key to a sustainable future) and for underestimating the ability of marginalized peoples to create their own understandings of development (Lazreg, 2002; Nanda, 2002; Parpart, 2002). Nanda (2002:223) makes the argument that we cannot simply take 'traditional' cultures' norms as good and just at face value due to the risk of co-optation by traditional patriarchy who seek to maintain the status quo. According to Nanda (2002), this is especially relevant in India, where the traditional Hindu cosmology that still prevails in many parts of the country promotes a

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<sup>6</sup> *Inter alia*: anthropology, sociology, women's studies, geography, critical development studies, economics, and political science.

hierarchical and unjust social order. Parpart (2002:55) even calls for a *post*-post-development that “requires moving beyond the glib assumptions of alternative post-development thinking, with its anti-modernist stance, its inattention to structures and its underestimation of the ability of the poor to create their own discursive understandings and arguments.” In a similar vein, Simmons (1997) contends that a new approach is possible - something different from the current development model but that simultaneously does not restrict women to the ‘traditional’ either. This new approach “can begin by acknowledging that a mistake was made in attempting to define what women should aspire to be” (Simmons, 1997:252). What might be taken away from these arguments is the need to give space for women and men to create their own meaningful paths towards their own visions of the future.

Today it is necessary, more than ever, to continue to explore these visions and hopes for a different future in light of what Saunders (2002b:24) identified as at stake over a decade ago: “the continuity of life on our planet, intricately bound up in the question of justice for all.” Below, I outline an analytical model for the FPD imaginary which I aim to use as a lens to gain insights into the discourses and discursive repertoires of FSM at the international and grassroots levels.

### **3.3 Seeing the World through the Feminist Post-Development Imaginary**

According to Lind (2003:238), “constructing alternatives to development is nearly impossible [...]. Yet envisioning a different kind of society is not, nor is critiquing the economic, political, and cultural arrangements within which we currently live.” This critical and simultaneously visionary practice is what I believe lies at the heart of the FPD imaginary.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that the imaginary is not an end destination, but rather a way of seeing the world and a call for a collective transformation of values and practices. Based on the writings of FPD scholars,<sup>8</sup> I

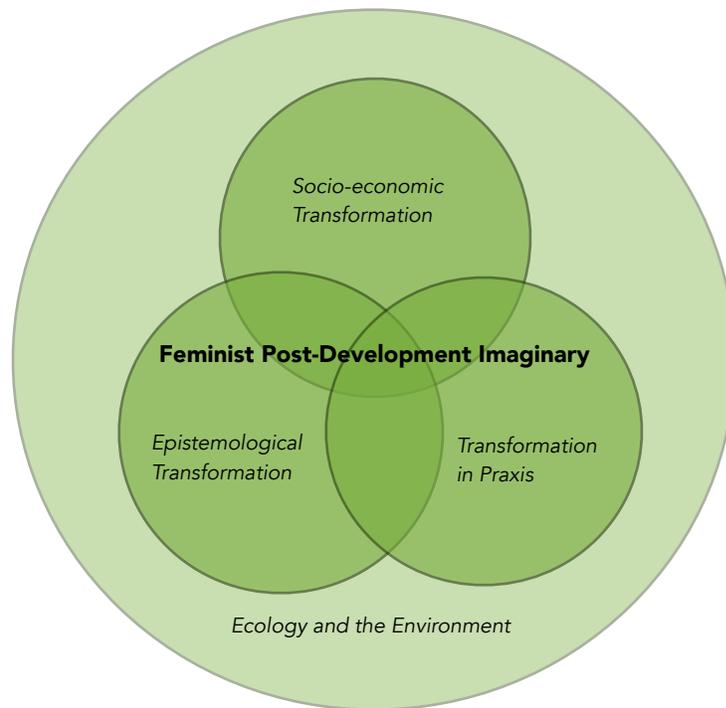
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<sup>7</sup> For the FPD imaginary as a theoretical lens, I was inspired by Escobar’s (2012:xix) conceptualization of PD as an “imaginary of alternatives to development,” which led to the question, what does the FPD imaginary entail? Drawing in part on Taylor’s (2004:23) conceptualization of the ‘social imaginary’ as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations,” the FPD imaginary is for me the normative ways in which FPD scholars as a community view the world and theorize on how social relations and practices ought to be constructed and carried out.

<sup>8</sup> I draw primarily from the works in Saunders (2002a), Lind (2003) and Simmons (1997), with some input from additional scholars writing on related issues.

suggest that the FPD imaginary, illustrated in Figure 1, calls for a transformation along three planes: socio-economic, epistemic, and praxis; processes which are embedded in ecological perspectives. As Simmons (1997:251-253) writes, a different approach is possible, but this does not entail a new development model but rather - “something different.”

Figure 1. *The Feminist Post-Development Imaginary*



### ***3.3.1 Transforming the way we (inter)act: a socio-economic transformation***

A central theme in FPD thought is the need to rethink the economic systems that inform how we behave and interact, not only between people but also between humanity and nature. Generally, the critique of the current economic system and development centers around capitalism and a disproportionate and unsustainable emphasis on growth that exploits both people and natural resources (Saunders, 2002b:17). Some FPD scholars, such as Simmons (1997:250), explicitly connect the expansion of capitalist social relations with the deeper entrenchment of patriarchy. Simmons (1997:250) explains,

If sustained economic growth is dependent on the increasing exploitation of limited resources, then competition to use these resources can only become more frenzied. In these circumstances, all oppressive systems - including colonialism, racism and sexism - will be increasingly necessary to defend the status quo. If women go on defending economic growth, then they are also, by default, defending patriarchal privilege.

Boserup (1970), writing on the negative effects of development on women, was one of the first to point out the significant but largely unrecognized role that women have in economic production. Since then, the various versions of WID and WAD (less so GAD<sup>9</sup>) called for development practitioners to integrate women into development, suggesting that they had previously been excluded. Simmons (1997:248) posits that this is false, explaining that “what is more accurate is that [women] were invisible to development planners, policy-makers, government officials and foreign ‘experts’” and that it was women’s unpaid labour that provided the foundation for the ‘modernization’ project.

Still today, women’s labor and skills are largely undervalued. Reproductive labor, generally the responsibility of women around the world, is set within the realm of the informal and is as such unpaid or underpaid. Economic growth and the supposed “magic of the market” will not benefit those who do not have equal access or relations to said market, the majority of whom are women (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002:231). In recognition of these aporias in mainstream development and economic thinking, a reimagining of the economic system itself is a dominant theme of the FPD imaginary, which might rather posit that “the magic is not in the market but in people” (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002:231-232). A main aspect of this transformation would entail a turn away from growth, extractivism, and exploitation of natural resources and women and men’s labor.

### ***3.3.2 Transforming the way we know: an epistemic transformation***

A major tenet of both feminism and PD is a call for an epistemological transformation - to redefine what we value as knowledge and to re-evaluate who can know. FPD draws on both these traditions to call for a recognition of locally-grounded and women’s knowledges to decenter ways of knowing. Especially highlighted are rural and indigenous ways of knowing, which FPD scholars argue are largely ignored by scientific and development communities. Many FPD scholars reflect that there needs to be space for alternative constructions of knowledge and

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<sup>9</sup> GAD emerged in part out of a critique of the androcentric nature of WID and WAD and the attempt to simply ‘integrate’ women into development policies and practices. GAD instead sought to recenter focus on the social (power) relations *between* men and women and how these played out both in public and private institutions (such as the state and family) (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015:402-404). Cornwall and Rivas (2015:404) however argue that the gender binary categories in GAD have in many ways also reinforced “gender myths” and essentialisms.

knowing, and of concepts like ‘community’ and ‘body’ (Apffel-Marglin and Sanchez, 2002; Marcos, 2002; Saunders, 2002b:34).

According to Agarwal (1992:135), subsistence farmers’ and indigenous communities’ knowledge on nature’s processes and sustainable ways for humanity and nature to interact have been systematically devalued and marginalized. She argues that modern institutions that produce ‘scientific knowledge’ have created a hierarchy of knowing that excludes those who ascribe to knowledge that is deemed ‘traditional’ (Agarwal, 1992:136). This especially affects women, who in indigenous or rural subsistence communities are often those who interact closely with nature in their daily tasks and lives - relying on it for food, fuel, and fodder (Agarwal, 1992).

In essence, the FPD imaginary seeks to re-establish local control over knowledge and knowing, with a focus especially on valuing and recognizing different forms of knowledge (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002:231). This would entail a shift on a broader scale by multiple actors in terms of how we conceptualize ‘development,’ ‘wealth,’ ‘progress’ etc... Decentering knowing suggests the need for a plurality of definitions and thought that can coexist side-by-side, rather than in a hierarchy of ‘truth.’

### ***3.3.3 Transforming the way we do: a transformation in praxis<sup>10</sup>***

FPD scholars have also problematized the ways in which development theory and discourse translate into development practice. These critiques cover a broad range of issues - from the ways participation and empowerment are conceptualized and carried out by development actors, to the physical and material technologies used to promote development, for example the prevalence of bio-technology and chemical inputs in agriculture.

As outlined by Simmons (1997:252) and others above, the WID, WAD, and to some extent GAD discourses of development served more to reinforce women’s marginalization in many ways. Simmons (1997) declares that a more emancipating and empowering form of development, or

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<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this study, I draw on Freire’s (2005:79) definition of praxis as “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” According to Freire (2005:125-126), praxis is the combination of practices (action) and intellect (reflection) that is informed by theory and which is a central component of liberation and the transformation of oppressive structures.

rather PD, would entail women having real choices and power to make decisions for themselves. This includes the power to define not only their own problems, but also solutions for those problems. Parpart (2002:44) calls for a recognition that development cannot be “given” and stresses the need for true participation and empowerment as the foundation of a grassroots, people-oriented, transformative development.

While some FPD scholars, such as Shiva (1988; 2002), reject modern science and technology as epistemologically and methodologically violent, some see the advantages of a reconciliation between local and modern ways of doing (Nanda, 2002; Subramaniam et al., 2002). Such scholars call for hybrid approaches; they see a value in some of the gains in efficiency that modern science has brought about while recognizing the importance of context-based insights that local technology have fostered. An important aspect of the hybrid approach is a recognition that neither ‘modern’ or ‘Western’ scientific knowledge nor local knowledges can be granted “epistemic purity” - both are limited and potentially oppressive (Subramaniam et al., 2002:204-205). The FPD imaginary calls for a change in praxis towards truly bottom-up processes that are participatory not only in name but also create avenues for people to pursue modes and means of livelihoods of their own choosing.<sup>11</sup>

### ***3.3.4 Embedded in the environment***

Permeating and circumscribing these transformations is an increasing attention and awareness to ecology - the relations of living organisms - and planetary boundaries. This calls for people’s conscious interaction with and participation in the planet’s rhythms and an awareness of the interconnectedness of life based on an ontology of the world as an active subject itself, rather than as resource (Mies and Shiva, 1993; Saunders, 2002b:19-20).

### ***3.3.5 A journey of the imagination***

The transformations along all three dimensions - socio-economic, epistemic, and praxis - are all interrelated with each other and a shift in one cannot occur without a simultaneous shift in the

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<sup>11</sup> A point of tension here lies in the question of *which* paths and solutions are viable choices according to FPD scholars themselves. Would scholars that completely reject Western sciences and simultaneously call for democracy at the grassroots level find it acceptable that people might *choose* Western sciences and modes of knowing over those declared to be traditional and more sustainable?

others.<sup>12</sup> Overall, these transitions would entail embarking on a transformation of societies and development as we conceive of them today onto a non-hierarchical, non-linear path. To begin with, these transformational journeys would entail a need to re-examine and remake underlying structures of power, inequality, and domination, such as class, patriarchy, and developed/developing, and to also incorporate multiple lenses, not solely the Western gaze, on how we view people and the world we live in (Lind, 2003:228). This FPD imaginary entails an opening up, a *reimagining*, of categories, such as gender, as part of these visions of alternatives to development (Lind, 2003:229-230).

### **3.4 Reflexive Critiques of Feminist Post-Development**

As one of the most radical reactions to development theory and practice, PD has received critique throughout the years, generally centering around the lack of concrete suggestions for ‘alternatives to development’ and for being reductive of development discourses (Kiely, 1999; Pieterse, 2000). Many FPD scholars echo these sentiments in reflexive critiques of contemporaries’ work, bringing to light some FPD scholars’ tendencies to romanticize and essentialize. Nanda (2002:215) for example, critiques FPD and PD discourses alike for essentializing non-Western cultures by continuing a tradition of setting them up as ‘Other.’ She argues that FPD scholars that call for decentering knowledge and power towards ‘the Local’ romanticize local communities as sites free of oppression and power struggles. By doing so, they are not only over-simplifying the lives and situations of the individuals in these communities, but also the strategies that are seen as viable tools for the FPD journey (Nanda, 2002; Parpart, 2002).

## **4. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method**

In this chapter I review the main tenets of FCDA and provide a brief overview of ontology and epistemology in FCDA. I then outline key concepts, describe the procedures used for data collection and analysis, and discuss research quality, ethical issues, and limitations to the study.

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<sup>12</sup> The distinction amongst the three planes is rather artificial, so interconnected are they; however, for the purposes of this study, I believe this categorization is useful.

## 4.1 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This study uses FCDA as a method of inquiry, drawing on FCDA as outlined by Lazar (2005; 2007) with theoretical and methodological support from key CDA scholars. As Lazar (2005; 2007) points out, feminist scholarship and CDA are both motivated by emancipatory goals and seek social transformation. As both are based in criticism of unequal power relations and a broader ambition for social justice, Lazar (2007:141) argues there is a place for an explicitly feminist CDA praxis to “advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements.” The aim is then to explore the “material and phenomenological” consequences that discourse (as divulged and interpreted through language in texts<sup>13</sup>) has for women and men in specific contexts (Lazar, 2007:142).<sup>14</sup>

## 4.2 Ontology and Epistemology of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

In CDA, discourse is seen as socially constitutive and socially conditioned, but it is not the only means through which we create meaning and interpret our world (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). FCDA recognizes that discourse is just one element of social practices and one component of how we structure our realities (Lazar, 2005; 2007). FCDA recognizes a material world, apart from discourse, but which discourse can both affect and be affected by. Through my use of FCDA, I therefore draw on a social constructivist ontology and a material feminist<sup>15</sup> epistemology, especially in terms of understanding how gendered issues are constructed by various actors’ discourses and repertoires and the effects this might have on maintaining or resisting power inequalities materially and phenomenologically.

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<sup>13</sup> A text can in CDA refer to several types of materials apart from written texts, it can refer to *inter alia* interview transcripts, videos, or photographs (Fairclough, 2003:3). However, for the sake of clarity I refer to the texts from the international level as ‘texts’ and to the interviews as ‘interviews’ in my analysis.

<sup>14</sup> While some CDA scholars, such as Fairclough (2003) and Wodak and Meyer (2009), take a more linguistic approach to CDA, in this study I aim to utilize the principles of FCDA to explore gender ideologies and gendered relations of power at a more abstract level by examining and drawing out underlying ideas and concepts from the texts and interviews analyzed, rather than focusing on the *linguistic* specificities thereof. According to Lazar (2007:151), the methods of analyzing discourse in text do not solely stem from linguistics and can be multiple and varied, reflecting the post-disciplinarity of the practice of FCDA.

<sup>15</sup> While gender is a socially constructed interpretive category, the systematic privileging and hierarchical structuring of the group that we interpret as men over those we interpret as women genders our social practices and has material consequences for the individuals in these groups (Letherby, 2003:55). According to Haslanger (2000:38) material feminists prioritize staying grounded in the material realities of women’s lives in order to “show how gender oppression is jointly sustained by both cultural and material forces.”

### **4.3 Key Concepts**

As there are a multitude of ambiguous and loaded terms floating around the field of FCDA, let us pause to define a few key concepts and their relevance to FCDA, namely: hegemony and power, ideology, discourse, discursive repertoire, and gender.

#### ***4.3.1 Power and hegemony***

FCDA draws in part on a Foucauldian tradition, which views power as invisible and everywhere, but Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999:24-25) suggest that this should be complemented with a view of power as domination, which allows for the role of structure and agency in social practices. Power then both shapes and is shaped by our social practices (Lazar, 2007). Lazar (2007:148) also utilizes the Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony as a form of power and draws on Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999:24) definition of hegemony as "relations of domination based upon consent rather than coercion, involving the naturalization of practices and their social relations as well as relations between practices, as matters of common sense."

#### ***4.3.2 Ideology***

An ideology is a discursively produced construction of certain practices or parts of the world that has a role in creating and upholding relations of power and domination (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999:27; Fairclough, 2003:9; Wodak and Meyer, 2009:7). Ideologies are sense-making practices that we see as 'the way things are' or 'common sense' (Hennessy, 1993:14; Routledge, 2015:3). The ideologies that CDA explores appear natural and generally go unchallenged, making them an important part of maintaining relations of power and hegemony, a state which FCDA seeks to counteract, specifically in relation to gender ideology (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999:24; Lazar, 2007; Wodak and Meyer, 2009:8).

#### ***4.3.3 Discourse***

FCDA takes the view of discourse as one element of social practice, wherein discourse is in a dialectical relationship with the social - meaning it both shapes and is shaped by social practices (Lazar, 2005:11). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999:38) refer to discourse as semiotic (meaning-making) elements of social practices that includes forms of communication such as language

(e.g. written, spoken, singing), non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expressions, body language, gestures), and visual images (e.g. photographs and film).

#### ***4.3.4 Discursive repertoire***

Discursive repertoires<sup>16</sup> is a concept used in critical forms of discourse analysis to examine human agency in the discursive construction of social life, rather than looking at how people are being ‘subjected’ to various discourses (Edley, 2001:202; Wetherell, 2006). Potter and Wetherell (1987:203), define repertoires as “recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena.” These are the “building blocks” of conversation and communal sense-making and often there are multiple repertoires at play in a single conversation, leading to a “patchwork of ‘quotations’” that may be contradictory or inconsistent (Edley, 2001:198).

#### ***4.3.5 Gender***

In FCDA, gender is seen as an ideological structure that is embedded and reproduced in discourse (Lazar, 2007:146). The general conception of gender as a phenomenon largely based on and determined by biological sex hierarchically categorizes people into two classes: men and women. Different contexts, divided by space and time, ascribe different traits and roles to these two groups, however the hierarchy of patriarchal domination is similar throughout the world (Lazar, 2007:148). While the ‘naturalness’ of these gender categories has been shown to be socially constructed (Butler, 1993) the material effects and gendered social practices that result from this constructed categorization are salient.

### **4.4 Data Collection**

For this study, three main methods of data collection were utilized: desk-based research, semi-structured interviewing, and participant observation; the main considerations of which are outlined below.

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<sup>16</sup> Also referred to as interpretive repertoires or interpretative repertoires. According to Wetherell and Potter (1992) the term discourse *or* interpretive repertoire can be used, but for the sake of consistency I refer to discourses and *discursive* repertoires, rather than interpretive repertoires (in Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000:114-115).

#### 4.4.1 Sampling

According to Wodak and Meyer (2009:27-28), there is no unified methodology for sampling in CDA. As is common in qualitative research, this study utilized purposive sampling to identify the texts, organizations, and participants (Bryman, 2012:418). Next, I delineate the methods used to select the texts for analysis as well as the organizations I collaborated with for fieldwork.

Desk-based research of literature on the FSM was conducted in order to find texts that can be said to be of importance for the movement at an international level. The five chosen texts, presented in Table 1 and Appendix 1, range in time of publication from 1996 to 2007, and have been selected for analysis upon the basis that they a) have been identified in the food sovereignty literature as of importance for the movement,<sup>17</sup> b) have been signed onto or adopted by a broad range of actors around the world, and c) represent the FSM through time.

Table 1. The Texts for Analysis

Text	Year	Title
1	1996	<i>The Right to Produce and Access to Land - Food Sovereignty: A future without hunger</i>
2	2001	<i>Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty: For the peoples' right to produce, feed themselves and exercise their food sovereignty</i>
3	2001	<i>Priority to Peoples' Food Sovereignty: WTO out of Food and Agriculture</i>
4	2002	<i>Food Sovereignty: A right for all</i>
5	2007	<i>Declaration of Nyéléni</i>

The organizations were selected upon the basis that they are a) based in Tamil Nadu, India, b) actively working with food sovereignty issues,<sup>18</sup> and c) active at the grassroots level working with farmers to implement food sovereignty-oriented initiatives. A list of possible organizations was drawn up. Thereafter issues of practicality, preference, and permission from the directors of the organizations ultimately guided the final decision. The two organizations, for which I am

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<sup>17</sup> Primarily drawing from Beuchelt and Virchow (2012) and the works in Wittman et al. (2010a).

<sup>18</sup> *Inter alia*: land rights, organic and sustainable farming methods, and promotion of indigenous seed varieties.

using pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of those whom I have interviewed, are presented in Text Box 1.

*Text Box 1. The Food Sovereignty-oriented Organizations*

*We Stand Together*

The first organization I spent time with as part of my fieldwork, which I refer to as *We Stand Together* (WST), is an organization that has been active for several decades throughout Tamil Nadu. The organization was founded as a women's rights organization and has worked primarily on campaigning and raising awareness on issues related to violence against women. The organization also works extensively with alternative farming methods, holding workshops, trainings and info-sessions on organic farming techniques and healthy consumption habits with the aim of promoting food security and food sovereignty at the household level. One of the WST's main activities in relation to this is bringing together single, widowed, and landless women, particularly from the Dalit community to lease land together and carry out organic farming activities as a group, with a particular focus on millets and other indigenous crops. WST also works with women's self-help groups and children's groups. WST is an active member in several food sovereignty networks.

*Seed to Hearth*

The second organization I visited during my fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, which I call *Seed to Hearth* (S2H), is an organization that has also been active for several decades in Tamil Nadu. The organization began with a strong focus on conservation and operates from an ecological perspective. A few decades ago the organization began developing and testing organic farming methods and holding trainings and workshops on organic farming techniques for local farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers. S2H has a strong focus on promoting millets as a sustainable and nutritious alternative to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and works to establish local seed banks. The organization works with family farmers and also coordinates women's self-help groups. S2H is also a member of several food sovereignty networks.

Both of the organizations are active in political advocacy and campaigning on the topics with which they work to petition the state and national government for policy level changes, particularly against GMOs.

#### **4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews provide for flexibility and for the voice and perspectives of the interviewees to come through, while still containing enough structure to analyze across the interviews (Bryman, 2012:470-472). In order to get a broad range of voices and opinions, people from various levels of the organizations were chosen as participants, including management staff, field staff, and members (farmers) active in the organizations. Interview guides (one for staff and one for members) were prepared in advance of the interviews to ensure that a general outline and key issues were discussed. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, questions specifically relating to gender were phrased in a general, rather than personal way. The interviews were meant to be open for new questions and topics as they arose, allowing for

follow-up questions and divergences from the rather deductive format of the interview guide to be explored throughout the course of the interview.

Eight interviews were conducted at WST. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three management staff, two with field staff, and one with a member. Additionally, two informal group interviews were held with two of the organization's joint farming groups. All of the participants were women. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted at S2H; consisting of three interviews with management staff, two with field staff, and four with members. Both men and women were interviewed at each level of the organization, four men and five women in total. For an overview of interview participants, see Appendix 2. Interviews were done in English or with the aid of an English-Tamil interpreter<sup>19</sup> as necessary, some of the potential issues of which are elaborated on in section 4.8.2. When possible, interviews were recorded and later transcribed, however, in some instances the participant did not feel comfortable being recorded or recording was deemed inappropriate or impractical, in which case only notes were taken.

#### ***4.4.3 Participant observation***

At both organizations I recorded observations and reflections regarding the organizations, the interviewing process, the physical 'field,' and general experience of conducting fieldwork. While I was not actively participating in the work of the organizations, I was still passively participating and observing, which might influence the situations and people around me (Bryman, 2012:446-447).<sup>20</sup> Observation was not done in a systematic manner, rather recorded as reflections and thoughts as they arose, in addition to notes on methods and programming used by the organizations, and was used to inform the analysis and discussion in a general, rather than specific sense.

### **4.5 Data Analysis**

In discourse analysis, FCDA included, there is no one procedure or 'recipe' to follow (Bryman, 2012:530; Wetherell and Potter, 1988:177). The analytic process rather entails an "analytic

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<sup>19</sup> I came into contact with the interpreters through the two organizations. Prior to beginning fieldwork, the interpreters and I discussed and went through a form detailing the importance of confidentiality for the interview participant as well as the purpose of the interview.

<sup>20</sup> What Bryman (2012:443) might call a "Minimally Participating Observer."

mentality,” wherein the researcher is guided by certain questions, hunches, and ways of viewing the world (Bryman, 2012:530). In my analysis I was guided by Lazar’s (2007:151) call for FCDA to explore both overt discourses and “less obvious, nuanced, implicit meanings.” I also drew inspiration from the suggestion that “what is said is always a way of *not* saying something else” (Bryman, 2012:531, emphasis in original).

#### ***4.5.1 Analysis of discourses in text***

After the texts were selected, a process which involved an initial reading, they were read through once completely in an exploratory manner without any written notes being taken. After this I read through them again, keeping the above suggestions in mind for trying to draw out both overt and more subtle gendered discourses. Notes were made of repeating concepts, turns of phrase, ideas, and words. Here, I was especially interested in seeing which actors were at play and who may or may not be included in that set of actors. On the basis of these notes, I began to explore overarching ‘overt discourses’ and the more subtle ‘gendered discourses’ by grouping excerpts and ideas expressed in the texts under various discursive headings.

#### ***4.5.2 Analysis of discursive repertoires in interviews***

The analysis of the interviews was largely similar to the texts, but differed on a few points. After transcription was completed I began reading the material for the purpose of sketching out the discursive repertoires. In order to do so I kept Wetherell’s (2006:np) suggestion of “searching for regularly repeating and inconsistent motifs” in mind, as well as the questions outlined above. The list of possible repertoires and corresponding interview excerpts were then entered into a spreadsheet to facilitate an overarching understanding of the repertoires. This could be seen as a form of coding, which Potter and Wetherell (1994:52) see as a useful preliminary step in repertoire analysis. Having gotten a feel for the “discursive terrain” (Edley, 2001:199), that made up the interviews, I began the process of sketching out which discursive repertoires might constitute overt and more subtle gendered repertoires, based on my own interpretations and informed by the methods and theory outlined above.

## **4.6 Objectivity and Trustworthiness in Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis**

FCDA is inherently political in nature and therefore does not strive for ‘objectivity’ or ‘neutrality’ in any traditional academic sense - rather it weaves in the author’s biases and personal viewpoints explicitly into the argument (Lazar, 2007:154). Indeed, as pointed out by Alvesson and Kärreman (2011:6), social science in general is “notoriously and inevitably political.” Objectivity is neither possible nor desirable in discourse analysis, as the researcher’s view of the world colors all aspects of the study - from which texts are selected, which questions are asked, and the ways in which the experiences of others as told in interviews or other channels are interpreted - everything is ultimately funneled through the eyes of the researcher (Fairclough, 2003:14). Trustworthiness strategies were nonetheless employed as part of the study: first, the use of multiple forms of data; second, member checking, as a draft version of the study was sent to the two organizations for comments and feedback<sup>21</sup> (Bryman, 2012:390-393). Peer debriefing with other students and a supervisor was also utilized throughout the research and writing process (Creswell, 2009:192).

## **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

### ***4.7.1 Reflexivity and positionality***

Due to the subjective nature of FCDA, Lazar (2007), and many other feminist scholars before her (England, 1994; Rose, 1997; Sultana, 2007), stress the importance of reflexivity and positionality in feminist research. The various layers of how I identify as and how others identify me as white, Northerner/Westerer, middle class, masters student, woman, young - all have certain implications not only for how I am met by and interact with other people, but also in how I interpret and understand texts, discussions, and observations.

I also believe it is critical to make explicit my position as an outsider to both the FSM as well as the cultural and organizational context in which I carried out the fieldwork. While I stand in solidarity with the FSM and share many of their emancipatory and social justice goals, I cannot claim to be a participant in the movement, a position which might have led to different interpretations and conclusions than those which I put forward here. Furthermore, having only spent around five months in the state of Tamil Nadu conducting an internship and fieldwork, I

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<sup>21</sup> However, due to time constraints, only one of the organizations was able to comment on the draft.

am an outsider to the cultural context where the fieldwork took place, especially as the internship I was doing at the time was not with either of the two organizations I engaged with for the study. Lazar (2007) and some FPD scholars<sup>22</sup> are wary of Western academics researching people and phenomena in the Global South and making authoritative knowledge claims about them without being explicit about the researcher's own positionality, as it can lead to discursive colonization (Mohanty, 1984). While I certainly seek to limit my engagement in acts of academic neocolonialism and instead contribute to counter-hegemonic discourses, I am still a product of Western academic institutions. By engaging in the form of knowledge production necessitated by this study, I myself am part of the very tradition which has been so heavily critiqued by many of the authors cited in this study - a strong contributing factor to my ongoing personal sense of aporia.

However, being an outsider can in some ways also have its benefits. As Lazar (2005:6) also points out, sometimes it is easier to see power relations and ideologies in discourse from the point of view of critical theorization rather than as a participant. An outsider has the benefit of viewing a situation, phenomena, and line of argument afresh and might therefore see the situation in a different light or ask different questions than someone who is more ingrained in the fabric of the situation. I therefore believe that FCDA might be well served by an outsider's perspective.

#### ***4.7.2 Informed consent and confidentiality***

In line with academic ethical standards and qualitative research principles (Bryman, 2012), all interview participants prior to the interviews were informed of the purpose of the study, the scope and voluntary nature of the interview and asked for permission for the interview to be recorded. I explained that their responses would be treated confidentially and that no identifying information in the form of names or specific locations would appear in the final study, which is why I am not specifying locations within Tamil Nadu and using generalized titles. For this purpose, I have also chosen to use pseudonyms to anonymize the organizations as an additional layer of confidentiality. Due to considerations of language and practicality, verbal, rather than written, consent for participation was obtained from the participants.

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<sup>22</sup> Such as Frederique Apffel-Marglin (Saunders, 2002a).

### **4.7.3 Interpreting and translation**

Interpretation comes with a whole set of interpretive/reflexive issues in and of itself, especially within the Indian context in which intersectional issues of gender, class, caste, religion, language and region are highly relevant. Translation is not simply mechanical and an interpreter is not an instrument through which words flow uninterpreted and uncolored, rather it is a subjective act involving “the imperfect mediation of cultures” (Bujra, 2006:172). However, one of the main implications of working through an interpreter are, as Routledge (2015:3) puts it, that “the female subaltern [...] can only, in this paper, be represented through others’ and my own interpretations.”<sup>23</sup>

### **4.8 Limitations**

Edley (2001:198) refers to the analysis of repertoires as a “craft skill” learned through practice, making it a daunting undertaking for a student. As such, I might misstep since I am certainly not a master of the skill; but it is again in the spirit of “critical solidarity” (Hennessy, 1993:2) in which I undertake this study, for which I find FCDA to be the most useful tool. Here I think it is important to note that I cannot and do not intend to construct any ‘knowable truths’ about the FSM. Rather, the analysis and discussions put forth here relate solely to the specific instances of text and the interviews and observations which I made during my fieldwork with WST and S2H in Tamil Nadu. I recognize that the five texts are not representational of the movement, neither historically nor today; nor could any text analysis ever be used to say anything about a supposed “underlying reality” (Bryman, 2012:554). Similarly, the interviews and observations from the organizations cannot be used to say anything about the organizations as a whole, nor indeed even the participants whom I spoke with. In this I share Sultana’s (2007:378) sentiments:

I know that I was only able to partially access the lives of the people I was interested in. The important thing for me was to be as faithful to the relations in that space and time, and to the stories that were shared and the knowledge that was produced through the research, however partial.

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<sup>23</sup> An example of this is that the interpreters with whom I worked frequently shifted between using third and first person narrative while translating. For the sake of coherence however, I have changed interview excerpts to first person narrative as necessary. Furthermore, it is of note that even those interviews that were in English were not conducted in either my own nor the interviewees’ first language, which could affect the interpretation of the questions and responses from both sides.

However, it is my hope that perhaps the thoughts put forth here can nonetheless be used as points of discussion or reflection, perhaps by parts of the FSM, other movements and activists, or academics.

## **5. The International Food Sovereignty Movement's Gendered Discourses in Text**

As might have been expected given the aims of the FSM, the various texts have counter-hegemonic narratives that resist neoliberal discourses and instead present an alternative vision for the world and the peoples in it. This vision entails a reworking of global systems of power that puts those who produce and consume food at the center of food systems, rather than agribusiness corporations. The texts use rights-based language to call for safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food from sustainable local systems of production and natural resource management. The authors of the texts seek recognition of the value of farmers', women's, indigenous peoples', fishing communities', and pastoralists' (amongst others) labor and knowledge, and call for their increased voice in decision-making arenas related to trade and food. There are also gendered discourses at play within the texts, as revealed through discussions on the categories of community and peoples, the family, and women. Below I aim to outline some of these gendered discourses as they are used by the FSM.

### **5.1 Community and 'the Local'**

The texts use a rights-based discourse, especially communities' and peoples' rights, as evidenced by the various titles and definitions of food sovereignty delineated in the documents (see Appendix 3). Communities' and peoples' rights to food, food sovereignty, and resources for food production, such as land, water and seeds, are asserted throughout the texts. Furthermore, communities' and peoples' modes of food production, natural resource management systems and governance are lifted up and prioritized as more economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable than those promoted by globalized neoliberal policies on agriculture. The discourses in the texts center the community and peoples as a frame of reference for food sovereignty:

In order to guarantee the independence and food sovereignty of all of the world's peoples, it is essential that food is produced through diversified, community based production systems (Text 3, 2001:1).

Food Sovereignty means the primacy of people's and community's rights to food and food production, over trade concerns. This entails the support and promotion of local markets and producers over production for export and food imports (Text 4, 2002:3).

While I do not seek to negate statements such as “we have seen in practically every country countless examples of sustainable and organic food production in peasant and indigenous communities and sustainable and diversified management of rural areas” (Text 2, 2001:4), I do think there is a danger in promoting ‘the Local’ and communities and peoples as inherently just and egalitarian. ‘The Local’ is often also a site of struggle and hierarchical relations, gendered and otherwise, especially in terms of access to resources and decision-making. In the context of India in particular, hierarchies of class, caste, and gender become especially salient in local institutions such as the *khap panchayat*, local village councils, which are the seat of religious and patriarchal domination.<sup>24</sup> While the food sovereignty texts challenge local power relations by calling for changed class and gender relations, these issues do not feature prominently throughout the texts and there appears to at times be a tendency to romanticize ‘the Local,’ as exemplified in the statement, “we are doing this, brick by brick, have been living in huts constructed by hand in the local tradition, and eating food that is being produced and prepared by the Sélingué community” (Text 5, 2007:1).

Other scholars have also problematized glossing over local issues. Borras Jr. and Franco (2010) for example, stress the need for more nuanced analysis within the FSM, especially in reference to the call for agrarian reform. They make the argument that in many land-abundant countries in Africa, the problem with land rights lies not with landlessness but rather with competing claims among members of the same community or between, for example, pastoral communities and sedentary farming communities (Borras Jr. and Franco, 2010:112-113). Nanda (2002:223) further argues that feminism and other progressive social movements must challenge the terms of the debate by confronting discourses of “patriarchy, caste and other inequities justified by traditional cosmologies” or risk “easy appropriation by traditional patriarchs.” I would therefore suggest

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<sup>24</sup> A discussion of ‘community’ in the context of India could be expanded on as in India ‘community’ at times refers to caste or tribal belonging, which means that in any one place there might be many communities and sub-communities (due to sub-caste identities, gender identities, religious affiliations, land holdings etc...) engaged in struggles and relations of power.

that the FSM could do more to ‘open’ the categories of ‘the community’ and ‘peoples’ to examine power inequalities between and within communities.

## 5.2 Family Values

All five of the texts make reference to family farming as a priority and part of the basis for food sovereignty; for example, “food sovereignty entails the recognition and appreciation of the economic, social, environmental and cultural advantages of small-scale, family-based, peasant and indigenous agriculture” (Text 2, 2001:5). The texts juxtapose family farms’ economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable modes of production against large-scale, industrial agriculture’s unsustainable practices. As illustrated in Text 3 (2001:1), “governments must uphold the rights of all peoples to food sovereignty and security, and adopt and implement policies that promote sustainable, family-based production rather than industry-led, high-input and export oriented production.” This excerpt appears to make the argument that all peoples’ right to food sovereignty can be achieved by promoting family-based production. Family farming emerges as the preferred mode of agriculture for achieving food sovereignty in other statements throughout the texts, for example:

Food Sovereignty requires: Placing priority on food production for domestic and local markets, based on peasant and family farmer diversified and agroecologically based production systems; [---] public investment in support for the productive activities of families, and communities, geared toward empowerment, local control and production of food for people and local markets (Text 4, 2002:2-3).

However, as noted by Patel (2010:190), the family is also one of the oldest “factories for patriarchy.” Extensive research has brought to light the ‘secondary poverty’ experienced by many women and girls in resource-constrained households<sup>25</sup> (Chant, 2007:42). Furthermore, in many places, India amongst them, the family is a site of struggle between women of different generations and positions in the household<sup>26</sup> (Chant, 2007). The family is thereby just as much an institution as the market or the state, and is as such marked by gendered struggles and

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<sup>25</sup> According to Chant (2007:41), underlying reasons for this secondary poverty are structural and cultural biases that favor ‘investing’ in men and boys over women and girls, resulting in male household members having greater access to intra-household resources (Chant, 2007:41-42).

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps in recognition of this, Text 1 (1996:2) makes a caveat to its promotion of family-based forms of agriculture, stating, “peasant families, especially women, must have access to productive land, credit, technology, markets and extension services.” This nonetheless places women’s access to resources within the frame of the family unit, a somewhat conservative stance for a progressive movement seeking gender equality.

tensions, which may not make the family the most conducive vehicle for achieving “new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women” (Text 5, 2007:1).

While the texts are not explicit about which types of families they mean, the lack of definition calls to mind, my mind at least, a heteronormative family unit with a patriarch at the helm. The FSM, in its promotion of family farming, could thereby be excluding alternative constellations of households and lifestyles from the food sovereignty vision. I am not critiquing family-farming as a matter of course; however, I do believe more nuance and attention to intra-family power relations and non-heteronormative lifestyles is necessary for the movement to truly be as radically egalitarian as it aims to be (Patel, 2010:194). As Patel (2010:194) states, it is “in challenging deep inequalities of power that [...] we see the core of food sovereignty,” and certainly challenging patriarchal and gender inequalities at the family and movement level is an integral part of that process.

### **5.3 Women as ‘Woman’**

All five of the texts make particular references to ‘women’ or ‘gender’ at some point. Four of the texts seek to recognize and draw attention to women’s particular role in food production and food sovereignty, and to certain skills and knowledges held by women. As such, there is a demand for their equal access and right to resources integral to food production, such as land, seeds, and water. For example:

Women play a central role in household and community food sovereignty. Hence they have an inherent right to resources for food production, land, credit, capital, technology, education and social services, and equal opportunity to develop and employ their skills (Text 1, 1996:1).

We recognize and appreciate the fundamental role played by women in the production, harvesting, marketing and preparation of the products of agriculture and fishing and in passing on the food cultures of the peoples. We support the struggles waged by women for access to productive resources, and for their right to produce and consume local products (Text 2, 2001:7).

At the same time, the category of ‘women’ is presented within a framing that is reminiscent of dominant gender ideology that promotes a hierarchical gender order. Throughout the texts, women are lifted up as a separate, additive, category through phrases such as “especially women,” (Text 1, 1996:2) and “this is specially so in the case of women” (Text 5, 2007:1).

The category of women is presented as a homogenous group with a seemingly universal experience of struggle. For example, under the heading “what are we fighting against?” Text 5 (2007:2-3) proclaims, “the internationalization and globalization of paternalistic and patriarchal values that marginalize women, diverse agricultural, indigenous, pastoral and fisher communities around the world.” This excerpt seems to suggest that all women around the world are marginalized by paternalistic and patriarchal values in the same way and further assumes that “the subjectivity of those persons termed ‘women’ are constructed solely by gender” (Grewal, 1999:341). While farmers are frequently differentiated by markers such as ‘small-holder,’ ‘marginal,’ ‘peasant,’ or ‘family,’ there is little differentiation amongst women by socio-economic status, class, caste, race, ethnicity, or sexuality - differences which have vast effects on women’s subjectivities and material realities (Lazar, 2005:10).

The category of ‘women,’ or rather, ‘Woman,’ is frequently listed together with various ‘other’ groups, such as indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and workers. While this recognizes and calls attention to the situations of these various groups, including women, it also seems to suggest that a person cannot simultaneously be a woman and a pastoralist, or be an indigenous woman. Women as persons consisting of more than their gender category are conspicuously absent. By not paying attention to the differences in contextual and material realities *amongst* women these texts play a part in reinforcing an androcentric worldview in which ‘Woman’ constitutes a monolithic ‘Other.’<sup>27</sup>

The lack of differentiation amongst women’s experiences and life-situations is reminiscent of the monolithic ‘Woman’ and ‘global sisterhood of struggle’ propounded by dominant development discourses. While there is some differentiation made for rural women (Text 1, 1996:3) or women as food producers (Text 2, 2001:7; Text 4, 2002:3; Text 5, 2007:1), differences amongst women seem to stop there. According to Hennessy (1993:11), paying attention to “difference” and how and why social difference is (re)produced is crucial to emancipatory, oppositional movements.

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<sup>27</sup> It must also be mentioned that there is a push for feminist food sovereignty from some activists and academics within the food sovereignty community (Park et al., 2015; Patel, 2010; Sachs, 2013). A primary example is the declaration of Maputo issued at the fifth international LVC conference in 2008 (which was not chosen for analysis since it did not fulfill all the selection criteria) which recognized that “all the forms of violence that women face in our societies - among them physical, economic, social, cultural and macho violence, and violence based on differences of power - are also present in rural communities, and as a result, in our organizations” (LVC, 2008:np).

Replicating dominant (gender) ideologies and making social differences and the histories and struggles behind them invisible, “dampens the potential for the production of a collective oppositional subject,” which counteracts a central component of the FSM’s goals (Hennessy, 1993:13).

## **5.4 Ideological Coherence**

According to Patel (2010:189), one of the strengths of the FSM’s broad “big tent” politics is that many different groups can fit their needs and goals under the same umbrella. Certainly, writing declarations and statements that incorporate the views and situations of representatives from movements, regions, and communities from all over the world cannot be an easy task, making some generalization understandable. However, there still needs to be “an internally consistent set of ideas” (Patel, 2010:189) at the core of such political statements, which perhaps requires further contemplation in terms of reconciling the FSM’s emancipatory aims in terms of gender relations with its discourses on community, the family, and women. Next, I turn to the staff and members of WST and S2H in Tamil Nadu and examine the discursive repertoires on gender and food sovereignty at play at the grassroots level.

# **6. Grassroots Actors’ Discursive Repertoires on Food Sovereignty and Gender**

## **6.1 A Note on Agriculture in Tamil Nadu**

Agriculture is an important sector in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, with about 70 percent of the population engaged in agricultural activities for their livelihoods (tn.gov.in, 2015). Marginal and smallholders make up 90 percent of the total farmholdings,<sup>28</sup> and account for about 62 percent of the total food grain production in the state (Panneerselvam et al. 2014:253). The average area under cultivation for marginal and smallholder farmers is 0.48 hectare, a high proportion of which are dependent on rainfed agriculture. Rice constitutes the main crop, but

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<sup>28</sup> In India, farm classification is based on the landholding size, and a household possessing <1 hectare (ha) of land is classified as a marginal holding, 1–2 ha is a smallholding, 2–4 ha is semi-medium, 4–10 ha is medium and a large holding is 10 ha and above (Panneerselvam et al., 2014:253).

many different kinds of millets,<sup>29</sup> pulses, fruits, and vegetables are also cultivated (Panneerselvam et al., 2014). In Tamil Nadu, like most of India, the caste system still affects many people's day-to-day lives and socio-economic situations. Especially impacted are the Dalit communities,<sup>30</sup> which make up about 20 percent of Tamil Nadu's 72 million population (Census of India, 2011). The majority of Dalits in India live in rural areas, yet 91 percent of Dalit households in rural areas are landless or have marginal holdings (NCDHR, 2012). Due to the patriarchal nature of the Indian state and many parts of society, few women, and even fewer Dalit women, own land and have limited access to other productive resources, services, and voice in decision-making processes at multiple levels, from the household to the state (ActionAid, 2013). About 74 percent of the female work-force in India is engaged in agricultural activities, yet women own only about 12.8 percent of the cultivated land, which means that most women work as agricultural day-laborers, or coolies, on others' land (Agarwal, 2014; Satyavathi et al., 2010:443).

## **6.2 Gendered Food Sovereignty Repertoires**

The discursive repertoires relating to food sovereignty used by the grassroots actors that I spoke to during this study were both similar to and different from the discourses used by the international FSM in the texts. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for more in-depth interaction and discussion on key issues than an analysis of texts alone can provide. The 'overt' food sovereignty repertoires - phrases, arguments, rhetoric - that emerged centered around the need for 'safe food' and a return to traditional farming methods. Staff members saw food sovereignty as an important component of bottom-up development starting at the village or even family level, with conceptualizations of food sovereignty differing just as much as they do in the international level texts. What follows is an overview of the specifically 'gendered' repertoires that emerged during discussions with staff and members of WST and S2H on food sovereignty and gendered issues.

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<sup>29</sup> Millets are often referred to as 'traditional' or 'indigenous' crops in India that have a long history and cultural significance. They are credited with being both rich in nutrients and drought resistant and are therefore especially important for food and nutritional security and bio-diversity in the arid and semi-arid regions of India (Takeshima and Nagarajan, 2012:605).

<sup>30</sup> Formerly also referred to as casteless, untouchables, or harijans, Dalits are those who according to Hindu cosmology fall lowest in the caste hierarchy and have historically and still today been extremely marginalized and discriminated against in Indian society. Despite a constitutional ban against it, caste discrimination permeates most sectors of society in India yet today (Chishti, 2014).

### ***6.2.1 Women (and men) in food sovereignty***

Amongst the staff members of the two organizations two repertoires related to gender emerged that differed from the international level discourses. Staff members often suggested that it is better to work with women as men are more interested in cash crops and profits. Regarding women, many staff members lifted up women's role in care-taking, providing food security for the household, and their hands-on engagement with agriculture as reasons for raising awareness amongst women on food sovereignty initiatives such as organic cultivation of food crops and seed preservation. For example, one staff member explained,

because women are responsible in the family to give food to family members we educated the women and we were trying to tell the women that actually you are feeding your family with poison. [---] So that is why we started working with women, because it was easy to address the food safety issue with the women and food security at the family level (Management staff 2, WST).

Women were also talked about as more open to new ideas; particularly when it came to providing for the family and ideas that were more geared towards long-term food security and sustainability, rather than immediate profits. As a staff member of S2H explained, “the women are more into what we can produce for the family, how the income can be strengthened so that they can have an income spread over the whole year. So, the women have a more long-term perspective” (Management staff 2, S2H). Here we see that rather than having ‘women’ as an additive category, these grassroots actors have centered food sovereignty around women and their role in agriculture.

Men on the other hand were presented as more profit-oriented, and reluctant to change their ways. Some staff members saw men as being interested only in cash crops and uninterested in actually implementing organic methods of cultivation, even if they did come to training sessions.

See, the men who are actually the owners of the land, it's very difficult to convince them to change the methods of cultivation because they are so used to chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and they want money for today [...]. They are applying more and more fertilizers to try to get more and more returns. So it's very difficult to bring them out of that [habit] (Management staff 2, WST).

Sometimes the men, they listen and they don't do it in the field. That's why with the agriculture related work, mostly we are working with the women farmers (Field staff 2, S2H).

These gender repertoires, while lifting up women's central role in agriculture, can be homogenizing and essentializing of both men and women in their own way. They are in a sense reminiscent of some of the 'smart economics' repertoires utilized by neoliberal development actors who present initiatives 'investing' in women and girls as a 'smart' and 'efficient' way to promote economic development (Chant and Sweetman, 2012:518).<sup>31</sup> Of course the staff of the two organizations are not speaking in the money-metric terms that 'smart economics' talk often comes in, but the rhetoric that women are more 'altruistic' and 'self-sacrificing,' whereas men are 'irresponsible' has a similar tone and shows how pervasive dominant gender ideology can be. The reproduction of such repertoires can be problematic as they perpetuate gender stereotypes and essentialisms of how both men and women 'are' (Chant and Sweetman, 2012).<sup>32</sup>

Of note here though is a key difference between the 'smart economics' discourses and that of the FSM, including these two organizations. A main critique of 'smart economics' approaches is that they constrain women's collective action as a group through its individualistic focus and that they 'use' women to further their own gains (Chant and Sweetman, 2012:523). The FSM on the other hand, and these two organizations, works actively with collective political engagement, advocacy, and mobilization for social justice.

### ***6.2.2 'We are all equal here' and seeing difference***

Often, when asked a bit into the discussion whether or not they perceived any differences between how issues relating to agriculture affects men and women farmers, most family farmers and staff members working primarily with family farmers reacted with a 'we are all equal here' response, assuring me that the family is equally affected as a whole. For example, one member responded,

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<sup>31</sup> The general rhetoric used in these discourses can perhaps be best summed up by the World Bank's statement in the report *Enhancing Women's Participation in Economic Development* that "investing in women is critical for poverty reduction. It speeds economic development by raising productivity and promoting the more efficient use of resources; it produces significant social returns, improving child survival and reducing fertility, and it has considerable inter-generational pay-offs" (1995:22; in Chant and Sweetman, 2012:519).

<sup>32</sup> Chant and Sweetman (2012) argue that the potential effects of the essentialization of women and girls through 'smart economics' discourses could be a further exploitation of women's labor and resources in what might be seen as an instrumental manner.

When yield is reduced the whole family will get problems, when health is affected the whole family is affected. The soil is also like that and the water is also like that. So as a family we are affected, not as an individual (Member 2, S2H).

This might have been because of the sensitive nature of the question coming from an outsider, or because this is how the participants truly see it, or any other multitude of reasons. Interestingly however, usually as these conversations progressed the person I was speaking with explained how women have more responsibility in the home taking care of other family members, how women have less access to assets such as land, how women do more of the work on the farm and conversely how men have more of the decision-making power, or how it is men who migrate to seek ‘outside’ jobs when the family cannot make a profit at farming. As expressed by one staff member:

Equally the family loses or gets income. So [if the] husband is going for a loss on the field, he has to migrate, and women have to take care of the livestock, take care of the children, and go for [taking care of] the relatives or going to the agricultural field [...]. So most of the pressure is on the women (Management staff 3, S2H).

Members who were single or widowed and farmed jointly with other women in similar situations, as well as those staff members who worked with them, were more prone to bring up differences between men and women in relation to agricultural issues, such as access to resources, decision-making, and gender roles. Especially stressed by women in the joint farming groups was differences in access to land. As a member of one of the farming groups explained, “normally, gents have their own land, so we women have joined together to get land” (Group Interview 2, WST). These members and the staff who work with them also more frequently utilized a repertoire of difference - identifying as and bringing up issues affecting single women, widows, Dalit women, and landless women, as opposed to the family farmers’ discourse of equality. As one staff member of WST explained, “women are mostly landless. We bring together widows, poor ladies, and single women in farm groups to lease land together” (Field Staff 2, WST).

Here we can see two contradictory discourses, one of farmer solidarity, the ‘we are all the same’ repertoire that has also been identified by Park et al. (2015), and a repertoire that is more differentiated about women’s material situations. The first repertoire echoes the international level discourse of peasant solidarity, which proclaims that all are equal in the movement and the

struggle for the food sovereignty vision, and one which reads more along the line of FPD's calls for 'seeing difference' not only between men and women in society and the family, but also amongst women as a group.

### ***6.2.3 Agency and power***

The various trainings, workshops, and joint farming and women's self-help groups (hereafter referred to as joint activities) coordinated by the organizations were talked about as sites of collective agency and resistance to dominant power hierarchies in several ways. The members often stressed the economic benefits and increase in skills and knowledge they gained through the joint activities as important to them, and for some for their family's well-being. One member expressed the changes brought about from the trainings:

While going to the trainings [we] were introduced to some intercrop methods. These intercrop methods will control the pests. [...] Also from the intercropping [we] have extra income from the family. And whatever I learn I share with my friends and neighbors. [...] through the sales of seeds, [we] have a good income for the family (Member 2, S2H).

The participatory nature of the joint activities and farmers' self-definition of problems and solutions was more stressed by staff members, rather than the economic benefits that were brought up by the members themselves. Some staff members pointed out that in the farming groups and trainings the members collectively identify the problems that are most relevant to them and brainstorm solutions together with the staff. Other staff pointed to the farmers' rights to decide themselves which seeds to sow. Several members of both organizations pointed to the benefits of knowledge and labor exchange between farmers made possible through the joint activities. To paraphrase the sentiments of one of the members of the women's farming groups I spoke with, "women know everything about farming, here we can share our skills with each other" (Group Interview 1, WST).

Women's self-help groups seemed to have had the additional function of acting as a springboard for food sovereignty-oriented activities. Many of the members I spoke to pointed to their involvement in a self-help group as the reason they initially became involved in organic agriculture activities. While I did not set out to review the specific impact of these various program activities as a part of this research, and further examination would be necessary to make

‘conclusive’ statements about the matter, for those members and staff that I spoke to, these joint activities seemed to, in some ways, be a site for increased agency and resistance to dominant power hierarchies. As put by one of the members of a women’s farming group at WST and a member of S2H,

Generally in farming in India, men take the main role. Here women take decisions, for example on what and when to grow. The women are not second to men here. We want to do everything independently of men. We want to show that even women can (Group Interview 1, WST).

Before I didn’t have much confidence. Now I am able to go to the bank and deal with the savings and credit things, and this is through the empowerment trainings I got. After the trainings, association with [S2H], the organic farming and millet production, I have got a lot of knowledge about different methods and present trends and varieties and how important seed conservation is, so now I am more involved in that. This I learned through the organization and self-help [group] (Member 1, S2H).

Recognition of farmers’ knowledge and skills seems to be a starting point for many of the activities and members expressed a feeling of what might be called ‘empowerment’ by being able to augment their incomes, increase their skills and knowledge, collectively share labor and resources, and to decide for themselves which crops to grow and how to do it. Through this process they also challenge power relations and dominant ideologies. Throughout the conversations with the grassroots actors, both staff and members, the women farmers’ agency shines through, which again strikes a chord of difference in comparison with the international level discourse, wherein ‘women’ are at times cast as an additive category to the food sovereignty vision.

#### ***6.2.4 Seeds of one’s own***

Seeds especially seem to be a site of resistance for the women members I spoke to. Many of the women members repeated variations of a ‘own seeds’ repertoire. They expressed that preparing and storing your own organic seeds means that you are not dependent on others, such as shops or companies, for seeds, knowing that the seeds are non-toxic and of a good quality, and that you are able to sow whenever, however, and whatever you want. As one member put it,

It is good always to keep our own seeds. When buying [from the] outside sometimes the germination is a big problem, and they won’t germinate in time and some [seeds] are giving all this vegetation only, not the quality grain. [---] If I have my own seed preservation I can [choose] how much I want to cultivate of this variety or that variety, I can choose myself. [...] I have my own seed and I can change my crop variety anytime (Member 4, S2H).

When asked if she exchanged seeds with any other farmers she explained that since she has the best seeds she does not participate in direct exchange, but other farmers come to her to purchase from her stores. Other women members also valued being able to choose their own crops, knowing they have quality seeds, and being able to exchange seeds with other farmers or bring surplus seed stores to sell at the marketplace.

I believe that here we can perhaps see an example of how to begin to disentangle the dilemma presented by Sachs (2013:7) of how to value women's contributions to food provisioning without reinscribing traditional gender roles. Having one's own seeds seems to imply a process through which women's 'traditional' knowledge and skills are not only preserved but lifted up as a process through which women can gain agency and power. Women choosing and preserving their own seeds resists both global and local power hierarchies by counteracting agribusiness interests and putting control in women's hands over some aspects of local cultivation and markets (Routledge, 2015:17). The processes surrounding seed preservation as put forth by the women I spoke with could present an avenue through which women's labor and knowledge is valued and respected, both by themselves and perhaps in the larger community.<sup>33</sup>

### **6.3 Resistance and (Re)production in Repertoires**

Through these discursive repertoires we can see that there are several ways in which the grassroots actors at times resist and (re)produce dominant ideologies, both in terms of neoliberal discourses and gender hierarchies. These repertoires are also occasionally internally contradictory, in ways similar and different to the international level discourses. Women's role in agriculture is both lifted up and central to the food sovereignty-oriented activities, but this role might also be essentialized through stereotypes of how women and men 'are.' At the same time, the centrality of farmers to the programming also potentially acts as platform for agency and power for many of the members, including women farmers. Seeds might be an especially important avenue for women's increased sense of self-determination and choice. The joint

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<sup>33</sup> While I cannot make statements on whether or not the larger community does or does not value women's seed preservation processes as this falls outside the scope of the research, some of the farmers and staff I spoke with claimed that through seed preservation and other organic agriculture activities they have gained more respect from other farmers, members of the outside community, or within their own families.

activities and organic farming methods also challenge neoliberal discourses on agricultural ‘science.’

## **7. Engendering Food Sovereignty through the Feminist Post-Development Imaginary**

As outlined above, FPD scholars seek to reimagine development and call out for a vision of ‘something different’ for women and men around the globe. The FSM has declared that it has what might be such a vision for the world - where power over food and livelihoods connected to food production rests in the hands of the people producing and consuming food, rather than agribusiness corporations and international financial institutions. Food sovereignty and FPD theory share many of the same critiques of dominant neoliberal discourses and both these social justice-oriented communities also strive towards gender equality. Having used FCDA to draw out some of the gendered discourses and discursive repertoires from parts of the FSM, the following section aims to discuss the ways the FSM’s gendered discourses might be understood through FPD, particularly the extent to which these discourses may or may not highlight transformative changes in power relations. In order to do so, I utilize the FPD imaginary outlined above in section 3.3 as a theoretical lens through which to examine the FSM’s international gendered discourses and discursive repertoires from Tamil Nadu. The FSM, at both the international and grassroots levels, seem to share FPD’s environmental perspectives, with a belief in working in collaboration with nature reappearing throughout the texts, interviews, and observations. This perspective permeates the socio-economic, epistemic, and praxis planes, discussed in turn below.

### **7.1 Socio-Economic Transformation**

The FPD imaginary calls for a reimagining of the economy, with less emphasis on growth and exploitation of people and natural resources and greater focus on perspectives on economic systems and the environment that value women’s and smallholders’ labor. The FSM at both the international and grassroots level challenges dominant economic actors through calls for reform of agribusiness and international financial institutions, and through food sovereignty practices, for example using local and organic farming methods. The organizations in Tamil Nadu

challenge entrenched economic power structures by establishing avenues through which farmers can engage in labor, seed, and knowledge exchanges and also engage in joint farming as a group.

The two organizations recognize women as farmers in their own rights and value women's particular agricultural skills, which echoes FPD scholars' calls for making women's labor visible. Seeing farmers' skills and labor as a contribution to bottom-up development and essential to the food sovereignty vision is evocative of the FPD proposition that the magic is in people, not in the market (Elabor-Idemudia; 2002:231-232). However, many of the members pointed towards economic benefit as a motivation for and benefit of participation in food sovereignty-oriented programming, showing that farmers themselves are keeping at least one foot in the 'mainstream' capitalist economy. But rather than seeing this as not fully 'reimagining' socio-economic relations, an unrealistic task for singular organizations, I would posit that these organizations are making spaces and platforms for alternative livelihood paths and ways of resisting dominant power structures within the current economic system.

Conversely, some of the discourses and discursive repertoires outlined above edge towards what many FPD scholars are wary of: romanticizing and essentializing. For example, the at times romanticized discourses on community at the international movement level might fail to question community power structures which could hinder a socio-economic transformation at local levels. Staff members of the two organizations' repertoires on women and men's attributes and interests might also reinforce gender stereotypes and essentialisms. Thus, examining to what extent and in what ways men and women are involved in different aspects of food systems and exploring ways members could be involved that can simultaneously promote food sovereignty and counteract essentialization of gender roles could be of value.

## **7.2 Epistemic Transformation**

The FPD imaginary calls for decentering ways of knowing. This would entail recognizing women's and smallholders knowledge and reconceptualizing e.g. 'development' and 'community.' Throughout the texts and conversations with staff and members of the organizations there was a focus on traditional and locally-based agricultural knowledge. Women's agricultural knowledge, especially seed preservation, was particularly acknowledged.

Both WST and S2H are working on changing definitions and conceptualizations of food towards ‘safe food’ with a focus on re-popularizing millets, showing an attempt to transform the way both producers and consumers think about food and agriculture. The organizations’ recognition of women as farmers entails an epistemic shift in conceptualizations of who knows and does farming, which in the long run could perhaps lead to shifts in ideas on who can own and have access to land and other productive resources.

At the international level there is a danger that the discourse on community, family, and women might limit rather than open up these categories for different conceptualizations. I would argue that the conceptualization of family and the family-farming centric nature of food sovereignty discourse at the international level, and to some extent the grassroots level, could warrant further discussion; particularly in terms of the potential implications for masking intra-household inequalities, as well as the potential repercussions of a heteronormative family ideology. The framing of ‘women’ at the international level might be useful for bringing to light certain forms of gender oppression, but also runs the risk of reifying women as ‘Other’ and could obscure other forms of oppression that women experience that are not necessarily related to their gender identity (Saunders, 2002b:13).

### **7.3 Transformation in Praxis**

The FPD imaginary’s call for a transformation in praxis entails a shift towards decision-making processes where women and men have true choices and self-definition of problems and solutions. According to many FPD scholars it also entails changing the way we ‘do’ many activities, not only in terms of participation, but also the tools used, for example agricultural methods and technology. While I cannot analyze ‘actions’ within this study, I outline some thoughts on the discourses of practice used by the FSM and perceptions on practices from the persons interviewed at WST and S2H.

Food sovereignty at heart necessitates a transformation in praxis on multiple levels, covering everything from how food is produced and consumed, to how it is traded, governed, and thought about. At the international level, there is a call for heightened democracy and choice for farmers in food and agricultural systems. At the local level, involving farmers in programming, valuing

and utilizing their skills and knowledge of farming, and working towards bottom-up development is stressed by staff members from the organizations. By going against agribusiness' interests and an international and domestic political impetus for chemical inputs and hybrid seeds these food sovereignty actors are doing "something different" (Simmons, 1997:251). This can be especially exemplified by women's seed preservation in Tamil Nadu; an alternative way of 'doing' that resists agribusiness and neoliberal interests in a grounded way.

Grassroots organizations' and the international FSM's rejection of 'modern' technology and non-organic farming might also be at odds with some farmers' everyday realities and desires, conflicting with food sovereignty's call for choice for farmers. Here lies what might be a crux for the FSM. By rejecting 'modern' agricultural technology, the FSM may replicate what FPD scholars have critiqued development actors for - defining what farmers should aspire to be, rather than making space for true choices (Simmons, 1997). This becomes especially poignant for women in agriculture and Sachs' (2013) dilemma. In continually pointing to women's 'fundamental' role in agriculture as manifested for example in providing food security for the family, the FSM risks reinforcing gender roles. Food sovereignty actors therefore need to exercise caution that there is room for women in agriculture to define for themselves what they aspire to be or do. However, as mentioned, I think that it is possible for traditional gender roles to also entail processes of 'empowerment,' as evidenced by the testimonies of seed preservers in Tamil Nadu.<sup>34</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1 Summary

Having arrived at the end of this study, we might be wondering, where did this journey take us? In this study I used FCDA and theoretical perspectives from FPD scholars to discuss parts of the FSM's gendered discourses and discursive repertoires at international and grassroots levels. In

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<sup>34</sup> While I do not know to what extent the women who engage in seed preservation feel that they *choose* to preserve seeds or if they do so for other reasons, as this was not a main focus of my interviews from the outset, I would hazard a chance to say that any process of 'empowerment' that might be taking place would be strengthened through choice and self-determination. As such, apart from women having more choices when they do preserve seeds, *choosing* to preserve seeds in the first place, in light of other options, such as purchasing 'outside' seeds, could very well be part of resolving Sachs' (2013) dilemma.

analyzing texts from the international FSM, I found that in addition to overt counter-hegemonic discourses, there are also several gendered discourses at play. In the texts, the discourses on the categories of community, family, and women appear somewhat closed, which might constrict room for difference and choice for the people within these categories. This could also occlude gendered power relations and serve to maintain hierarchies, rather than promote the ‘radical egalitarianism’ that the FSM stands for. Throughout my conversations with staff and members of two food sovereignty-oriented organizations in Tamil Nadu, discursive repertoires relating to gender relations and gendered issues emerged, which both resist and (re)produce dominant gender ideologies. There was at times a discrepancy between repertoires of familial equality and the discursive differences between women and men’s roles, responsibilities, and access to resources. I also found that many staff members, while lifting up women’s role and expertise in agricultural processes, may also reinforce essentialisms of how women (and men) purportedly ‘are.’ However, the grassroots actors’ discursive repertoires may also hold clues for pathways forward on how the FSM might address some aspects of gendered issues, as exemplified by discussions on joint activities and seed preservation as platforms for self-determination and choice.

Embarking on a journey through these discourses and discursive repertoires with the FPD imaginary as a lens for discussion showed that the FSM is in many ways engendering transformations in socio-economic and epistemic relations and praxis, but is at times also characterized by rifts in ideological coherence when it comes to how the movement discusses gendered issues. The FSM, just as some FPD scholars, in their emancipatory and transformational struggle at times stumble into the same pitfalls as those whom they critique by romanticizing and essentializing some people and aspects of the movement. However, I do not believe that these issues constitute aporias for the FSM, but are an important part of the process forward.

## **8.2 Paths Forward**

In light of the above, I suggest a few points for consideration for the FSM in their work towards gender equality and building oppression-free social relations. These are meant to ‘keep the

conversation' going and could play a role in a strengthened dialogue between international and grassroots levels of the FSM, and could be of value for food sovereignty actors at multiple levels.

As stressed by several authors, neither the 'Local' nor the 'traditional' are unproblematic nor oppression-free. Oftentimes, communities themselves are sites of unequal, traditionally validated power structures. It can therefore be problematic to uncritically romanticize these constructs. Not glossing over struggles between or within communities, including along class, ethnic, caste, and gender divides constitutes an important part of the FSM's transformative project. Furthermore, in recognition that 'the personal is political,' I believe a key challenge for the FSM and the actors therein will be to open up the category of 'the family.' Traditional notions of family farming that reinforce patriarchy ought to be questioned and the notion of 'family' should be opened up to explicitly include non-heteronormative constellations. Paying attention to and discussing intra-household power relations, between men and women as well as between generations, should be on the agenda for FSM actors.

As revealed by the discourses of the international FSM, the discursive repertoires of food sovereignty actors, and prior research on the FSM (Park et al., 2015) paying attention to intersectional perspectives and material and subjective differences in women's lives is crucial to understanding and counteracting the multiple forms of oppression that affect our lives. Only by acknowledging these differences are we able to identify the commonalities of gender (and other forms of) oppression and tackle these issues together (Lazar, 2007:153-154). Furthermore, the FSM faces some internal contradictions, not least in terms of the space it gives for democratic choice for the members of the movement. I believe a critical point here is to resist essentialist notions of farmers (or other individuals or groups) and women (in agriculture or otherwise). By not deciding for men and women what they inherently are or should aspire to be, the movement can give more space for real choices for its members. Finally, moving forward, I believe that a useful task for actors in the FSM, be they individuals, organizations, networks, or international fora is to engage in critical (self-)reflection on the gendered "struggle within the struggle" (Nayak, 1990:147; in Routledge, 2015:16) and their role in resisting or (re)producing hierarchical gender relations within the movement.

### **8.3 Journeying Onwards**

Within the scope of this study I have focused primarily on gender relations and gendered issues in food sovereignty discourse and repertoire, however it is worthy of note that feminism seeks to counteract all forms of oppression, therefore research on the role of class, ethnicity, caste, generation, or sexuality within the FSM would be important for the food sovereignty vision of establishing oppression-free social relations. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to delve deeper into the gender aspect of food sovereignty to examine not only how food sovereignty actors ‘speak’ gender but also ‘do’ gender; for example by examining gender practices within food sovereignty organizations. I would also like to encourage scholars interested in FPD to keep the conversation going by asking not only how FPD thought might inform food sovereignty, but also what FPD might learn from the FSM’s principles and practices.

Social movements calling for alternatives, such as food sovereignty, not only criticize the current socio-economic and political situation, but actively seek new ways of being and knowing. These social movements are both contesting the discourses of neoliberal actors and institutions and are on the path towards embodying the ‘something different’ that FPD calls for. FPD might not constitute an end destination, however, perhaps by continually questioning not only dominant hegemonic powers but also examining ourselves and our own progressive movements, we can come closer to an articulation of a feminist post-developmental mode of life - one which takes the form of an ongoing transformation, conversation, and journey of the imagination.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Sources and References of Texts

<i>Text</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source and Reference</i>
1	1996	<b>The Right to Produce and Access to Land - Food Sovereignty: A future without hunger</b>	Issued in November of 1996 by La Via Campesina at the alternative forum to the World Food Summit being held in Rome at the same time. It is seen as the foundation and original declaration of the food sovereignty movement and its principles and goals.	Source: Wittman et al. (2010a).  LVC - La Via Campesina, (1996). The Right to Produce and Access to Land: Food Sovereignty: A future without hunger. pp.1-3. Available at: <a href="http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/1996%20Declaration%20of%20Food%20Sovereignty.pdf">http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/1996%20Declaration%20of%20Food%20Sovereignty.pdf</a> [Accessed 10 May 2015].
2	2001	<b>Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty: For the peoples' right to produce, feed themselves and exercise their food sovereignty</b>	Also known as the Havana Declaration, this declaration was issued at the World Forum on Food Sovereignty held in Havana, Cuba in September of 2001 and was signed onto by the more than 400 delegates from various peasant and indigenous organizations, fishing associations, non-governmental organizations, social agencies, academics and researchers from 60 countries around the world.	Source: Beuchelt and Virchow (2012).  World Forum on Food Sovereignty, (2001). Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty: For the peoples' right to produce, feed themselves and exercise their food sovereignty. Alliance21.org. pp.1-9. Available at: <a href="http://www.alliance21.org/2003/article.php3?id_article=2524">http://www.alliance21.org/2003/article.php3?id_article=2524</a> [Accessed 10 May 2015].

<i>Text</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source and Reference</i>
3	2001	<b>Priority to Peoples' Food Sovereignty: WTO out of Food and Agriculture</b>	Issued by the 'Our World is not for Sale' Coalition and signed onto by 69 international and regional movements and organizations from around the world, the <i>Priority to People's Food Sovereignty</i> statement was issued in November of 2001 just prior to the the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Doha.	Source: Wittman et al. (2010a).  Our World Is Not For Sale Coalition, (2001). Priority to Peoples' Food Sovereignty: WTO out of Food and Agriculture. pp.1-13. Available at: <a href="https://www.citizen.org/documents/wtooutoffood.pdf">https://www.citizen.org/documents/wtooutoffood.pdf</a> [Accessed 10 May 2015].
4	2002	<b>Food Sovereignty: A right for all</b>	This is the written text of an oral statement delivered by Sarojeni Rengam of Malaysia in the final address of the June 2002 Rome NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in conjunction with and in opposition to the FAO World Food Summit of 2002.	Source: Beuchelt and Virchow (2012).  NGO/CSO FFS - NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty, (2002). Food Sovereignty: A right for all. Viacampesina.org. pp1-4. Available at: <a href="http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/food-sovereignty-and-trade-%20mainmenu-38/398-declaration-ngo-forum-fao-summit-rome5">http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/food-sovereignty-and-trade-%20mainmenu-38/398-declaration-ngo-forum-fao-summit-rome5</a> [Accessed 10 May 2015].

<i>Text</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source and Reference</i>
5	2007	<b>Declaration of Nyéléni</b>	The Declaration of Nyéléni was signed onto by more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries representing various aspects of the food sovereignty movement, including “peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisher-folk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, women, youth, consumers, environmental and urban movements” (NGO/CSO FFS, 2007:1) at the Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in Nyéléni, Mali in 2007 and contains what many acknowledge as the most widely adopted and signed onto definition of food sovereignty (Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012).	Source: Beuchelt and Virchow (2012).  NGO/CSO FFS - NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty, (2007). Declaration of Nyéléni. 27 February 2007 Nyéléni Village, Sélingué, Mali. pp.1-3. Available at: <a href="http://www.nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf">http://www.nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf</a> [Accessed 10 May 2015].

## Appendix 2. List of Interview Participants<sup>35</sup>

### *Semi-structured Interviews at WST*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Location</b>
Management Staff 1	15.01.12	English	WST's Office
Management Staff 2	15.01.12	English	WST's Office
Management Staff 3	15.01.12	English	WST's Office
Field Staff 1	15.01.16	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site
Field Staff 2	15.01.13	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site
Member 1	15.01.16	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site

### *Group Interviews at WST*

<b>Group Interview</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Location</b>
1	14	15.01.16	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site
2	ca 15 (some participants left during)	15.01.13	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site

<sup>35</sup> Interview guides can be made available upon request from the author.

*Semi-structured Interviews at S2H*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Location</b>
Management Staff 1	15.01.23	English	S2H's Office
Management Staff 2	15.01.19	English	S2H's Office
Management Staff 3	15.01.23	English	S2H's Office
Field Staff 1	15.01.22	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site
Field Staff 2	15.01.22	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Field Site
Member 1	15.01.21	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Member's Home
Member 2	15.01.21	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Member's Home
Member 3	15.01.21	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Member's Home
Member 4	15.01.21	Tamil/English (with interpreter)	Member's Home

### Appendix 3. Definitions of Food Sovereignty in the Texts<sup>36</sup>

Text (year)	Title	Definition of Food Sovereignty
1 (1996)	The <b>Right</b> to Produce and Access to Land Food Sovereignty: A Future without Hunger	Food sovereignty is the <b>right</b> of each <u>nation</u> to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. <u>We</u> have the <b>right</b> to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine <i>food security</i> (pp.1).
2 (2001)	Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty  <i>For the <u>peoples'</u> <b>right</b> to produce, feed themselves and exercise their food sovereignty</i>	We define food sovereignty as the <u>peoples'</u> <b>right</b> to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution and consumption of food that guarantee the <b>right</b> to food for the entire population, on the basis of small and medium-sized production, respecting their own cultures and the diversity of peasant, fishing and indigenous forms of agricultural production, marketing and management of rural areas, in which <i>women</i> play a fundamental role (pp.4).
3 (2001)	Priority to <u>Peoples'</u> Food Sovereignty WTO out of Food and Agriculture	Food sovereignty is the <b>right</b> of <u>peoples</u> to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets, and; to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the <b>rights</b> to aquatic resources (pp.1).

<sup>36</sup> The emphases on certain words are my own, and are meant to illustrate in part how some of the discourses from the texts were brought forth by searching for repeating and seemingly significant words and phrases, especially by paying attention to actors in the texts.

<b>Text (year)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Definition of Food Sovereignty</b>
4 (2002)	Food Sovereignty: A <b>Right</b> For <u>All</u>	Food Sovereignty is the <b>RIGHT</b> of <u>peoples, communities, and countries</u> to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances (pp.2).
5 (2007)	Declaration of Nyéléni	Food sovereignty is the <b>right</b> of <u>peoples</u> to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their <b>right</b> to define their own food and agriculture systems (pp.1).