

literature that shows not only how undemocratic, but ultimately also how neoliberal the EU is. Under such conditions, it is no surprise that member states such as Denmark refuse to trust the EU with social protection and insist on doing it themselves.

Ana Bobić
Hertie School
bobic@hertie-school.org

Matthew C. Canfield, *Translating Food Sovereignty: Cultivating Justice in an Age of Transnational Governance* (Stanford University Press, 2022).

Since the publication of Matthew C. Canfield's book *Translating Food Sovereignty*, economic and political crises, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, are erupting around the world. Grievances over high prices, low wages, and crippling debt are fracturing society, instigating unrest, and creating openings for the ascension of right-wing populism. In this precarious moment, *Translating Food Sovereignty* is a call for collective action that transcends the divisions between urban globalists and rural nationalists and points to a globalized future reclaimed from neoliberalism and grounded in justice.

Canfield makes both theoretical and methodological contributions that are salient for scholars and activists alike. Drawing from his scholar-activist praxis, Canfield offers a first-hand account of how power is negotiated, contested, shifted from the top down, and built from the ground up. He shows how food activists, rallying behind the claim to "sovereignty," confront the neoliberal ideology that underly both global trade and international development to address food security and food aid. Concepts from cybernetics and information studies are politicized as they interface with discourses on labor, trade, and social reproduction. Through the lens of legal anthropology, Canfield presents a novel analysis of the mutually constitutive relationship between neoliberalism and transnational governance, a panoramic view of global food sovereignty networks as a decolonial project, and an intimate portrayal of how activists use the language of "food sovereignty" to construct a political constituency.

Translating Food Sovereignty is as conceptually expansive as it is descriptively nuanced. Canfield positions food sovereignty activism within a continuous struggle against imperial conquest, colonial control, and capitalist extraction. The book is structured around three spatial scales of food sovereignty activism. At the local scale, an ethnography of the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council is situated within a broader history of food politics surrounding organic certification. At the regional scale, the success story of farmworker organizing by Familias Unidas por la Justicia in Skagit County, Washington, reveals global value chains as not simply a product of corporate exploitation, but also a process for grassroots governance. At the global scale, the resistance against the Gates Foundation-funded "super banana" exposes the epistemological enclosure of biosafety regulation, agricultural biotechnology, and philanthro-capitalism writ large. By examining how activists representing diverse peoples and places consolidate their demands for justice, Canfield lays bare the self-defeating nature of market-mediated solutions to address market-mediated inequalities under neoliberal globalization.

The shared prefix, “trans-”—across, beyond, the subversion of binaries—is a consistent theme throughout the book. In this regard, Canfield’s analysis of transnational governance both uses and transcends spatial scales. Just as the globalization of the food and agriculture markets through the World Trade Organization disrupted the Westphalian authority of the nation-states, the local, the regional, and the global are no longer stable geographies but contentious sites where opposing visions of governance play a tug of war. Transnational governance is both a product of and a tool for contesting global capitalist expansion. Corporations use transnational governance to subvert state power; activists, organizing transnationally under the banner of food sovereignty, use transnational governance to subvert the power of corporations. Canfield’s richly detailed ethnography makes clear that prevailing frameworks of legal scholarship, which fail to address the entanglements between economic and political power, cannot contend with neoliberal inequalities or transnational networks of resistance rising around the world.

In the long shadow of empire, *Translating Food Sovereignty* shows how activists use translation as an organizing practice. For Canfield, “translation” is a metaphor for the process by which the language of “food sovereignty” gains currency across different communities. In the same way that the US dollar facilitates international trade, activists around the world chose the English term “food sovereignty” to facilitate transnational organizing, deftly deploying the English language to subvert the corporate power of the English-speaking global North. As the language of “food sovereignty” gains more explanatory power, food sovereignty activists build more political power. Grounding his analysis in key texts (such as the Declaration of Nyéléni, La Vía Campesina’s statement at the 1996 World Food Summit, the letter from AGRA Watch and the Alliance for Food Sovereign in Africa to the Gates Foundation, and the letter from Civil Society and Indigenous People’s Mechanisms of the Committee on World Food Security to the Secretary-General), Canfield shows how collectively authored, signed, and translated texts that constitute an emerging food sovereignty corpus dissent from the mainstream narratives around the liberalization of global markets and advance a new legality of the Majority World.

However, language and its medium are mutually dependent. Artifacts such as the Tiltth newsletter and the pamphlet *Food Sovereignty: Join the Local Nation, and International Movement to Regain Control of Our Food and Farm System* not only articulate the claim of food sovereignty, the self-printed, published, and distributed nature of the medium supports the language about sovereignty. In other words, food sovereignty activists’ political power depends on both language and its medium. The language of food sovereignty cannot endure without the sovereignty of its medium. Unfortunately, Canfield’s only analysis of the medium is from 1974, the beginning of the neoliberal turn: the subject index of the directory of the Northwest Conference on Alternative Agriculture, which was compiled using edge-notched cards. Created at the cusp of personal computing and the internet, it was a proto-social network, a poignant demonstration of language and its medium supporting one another. In an era where digital platforms dominate the technology of communication, contestations between corporations and communities, commodity and commons, economy and politics play out not only in the social practice of translation, but also in the governance of data and technology. Black box algorithms sever language from the material basis of its power—one cannot control food without controlling the land in which the plant takes root. The message and its medium—using corporate-owned social media for grassroots organizing, for example—subvert one another. Unlike the Northwest Conference on Alternative Agriculture directory, which was a physical artifact mailed to conference attendees and collected by the Washington State University Libraries, the Declaration of Nyéléni is hosted online. Its message is visible to the world while the medium that contains it—the technology stack—is not as accessible as a visit to the library. Because the medium undermines the underlying premise of food sovereignty organizing, analyzing text is insufficient.

For bold scholars such as Canfield, it is therefore especially crucial to probe the medium that is hidden from critique. In this endeavor, Canfield could benefit from an expanded group of transdisciplinary interlocutors, including political economy of media and communication (Innis, Mattern), affordance of social network-based organizing (Tufekci, Matias), and Indigenous data sovereignty (Carroll, Kukutai). Such an effort would strengthen the central argument of *Translating Food Sovereignty*, which is that governance from below, as practiced by food sovereignty activists, not only upends powers that have commanded the world order for the last three hundred years; it demonstrates a different architecture of power altogether, one that is designed for the project of collective liberation in the centuries to come.

Joanne Cheung
UC Berkeley
jkcheung@berkeley.edu