

This is the second issue in ATLAS's ongoing series of chapbooks printed and bound by hand on the Making Publics Press—a book making studio located at ATLAS's office, which has all the equipment you will need to print, bind and trim your own books and publications.

Through the Making Publics Press and distributing these chapbooks, we are experimenting with a different kind of economy around sharing knowledge, community building and resources. Our chapbooks are available open access online. We invite people to bind their own physical copies for free on our press and to chat with us as they do—welcoming exchange of conversation and ideas rather than money.

Our second chapbook focuses on the economies around food. Food growers, farmers and activists around the world have been at the very heart of visioning and building alternative economies based on social and ecological justice. How are food activists reconfiguring our understanding of the economy in ways that are more ethical, sustainable and diverse?

This chapbook begins in the Gàidhealtachd (Gaelic cultural Highlands and Island of Scotland) with Col Gordon revisiting Highland hospitality. How might learning from the traditional ways

of the past revitalise the current Highland food system?

From a lively desk covered in seeds swapped, gifted and saved, Rowan Lear and Christian Keeve share a conversation on seed saving with us. Can we practise alternative economies based on multispecies solidarity and mutual support through learning to save seeds?

Thirty kilometres from Helsinki, Finland, at the Lassila family farm, Ruby van der Wekken invites us to explore the potential of community supported agriculture to build a more socially and ecologically just food system. Her text is a passionate reminder that acting locally is also acting globally.

As the glue sets on your newly bound publication (or as you begin to flick through the pdf pages), we invite you to help us collectively rethink and re-enact our food economies.

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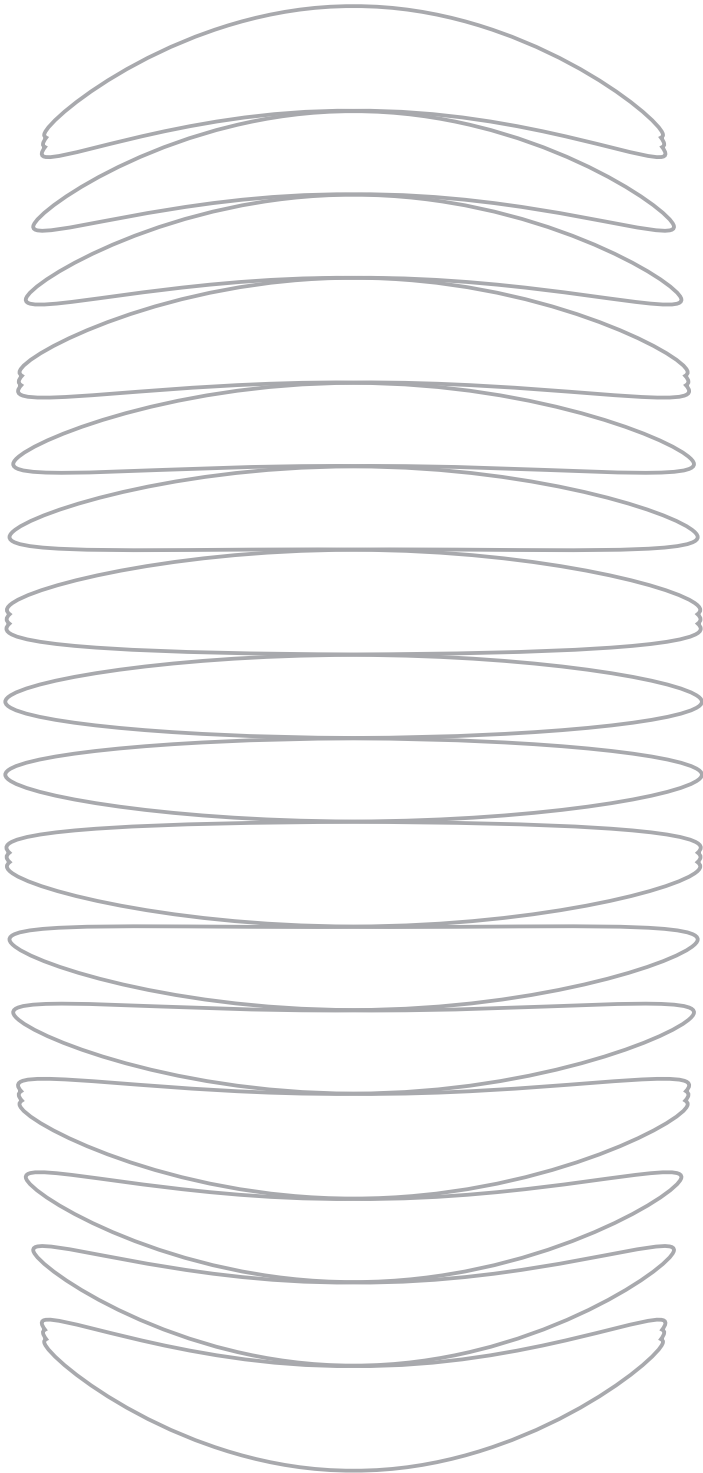
Ruby van der Wekken

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Bios

Còir to Common

Col Gordon



‘Highland Hospitality’ is renowned the world over. Whilst today this is largely a term used by the tourism or hospitality industries, in past times, the practice of giving hospitality was a central aspect of Gaelic society.

The ‘highest moral imperative’ in the Gàidhealtachd was once to give hospitality to those who asked for it (Newton 2009: 154). People could rely on each other when they were in need. In fact, Early Gaelic law tracts show that this duty was even encoded into law, whereby ‘all householders are to some extent under obligation to provide hospitality to any freeman’ (Newton: 154). Johnston McMaster writes that:

underpinning the legal obligation was a code of conduct rooted in an honour-shame culture. To be inhospitable was to be seriously dishonourable ... This also implied a reciprocal culture. To give hospitality was also to receive it: Hospitality assured travellers food, shelter from wind and rain, and protection, but also obliged them to entertain wayfarers who knocked their doors. Within this context, the practice of hospitality was a way of nurturing social ties, developing networks and alliances, and community building (McMaster 2008: 106).

Isolated, hospitality may be seen simply as the act of offering shelter and food to passing guests, but in Gaelic society, the ethics and moral codes at play here could

be seen as part of a much more expansive way of being.

Comparing the duties of hospitality with a practice called *Faoighe*, which meant ‘asking for aid in the shape of corn, wool and sometimes cattle,’ it’s interesting to see a similar moral code at play where the asking ‘entailed no stigma upon the craver’ but where ‘refusal of the thing craved is represented as extremely dishonouring to the person refusing’ (Newton: 156).

This ‘honour-shame culture’, which seemed to be very present within the culture, could be seen as what James C. Scott refers to as a ‘moral economy,’ where ‘patterns of reciprocity, forced generosity, communal land, and work-sharing helped to even out the inevitable troughs in a family’s resources which might otherwise have thrown them below subsistence’ (Scott 1976: 2).

Reinforcement for these societal obligations can also be found within the Gaelic language itself. For instance, the word *Cobhair* means to ‘assist, help, aid, relieve’ and is almost certainly closely related to an Irish word *Comhar* or

‘combined work, mutual assistance, cooperation, partnership’. Another word, which may well also be connected and linked, is *Còir* which means ‘right, justice, duty, obligation’. Looking at this suite of words and ideas, we start to see that these moral obligations to help each other could be hard-wired into the language.

And this was not limited to human relations but extended to include the territories within which the peoples dwelt. The Gaels saw their territories in anthropomorphic terms, describing places as if they were body parts or parts of a human community. According to Michael Newton, this allowed for Gaels to describe the ‘dynamics of their local environment in similar terms to how they describe the functioning of their human community ... The health of the human community and nature are intimately connected’ (Newton: 295). Bateman and Purser argue that ‘nature is not seen as an object outside or different from the human environment. Nature is the human environment and human settlement is as much part of nature as other forms of life’ (Bateman and Purser 2020: 416).

The notion that ‘man [sic] and the land belong together’ as one, was strong within the worldview and encapsulated by the word ‘Tuath’, which means both the territory and the people of that territory (2020: 421).

The two are one and the same. Being the Tuath was often how folk self-identified. This entailed an understanding that it was their duty to care for and steward that territory within which they dwelt, relied on for subsistence and that they themselves were part of. This is expressed in Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir’s words about a pocket of land which had been neglected and lacked the presence of its people:

’Se ’n coire chaidh an dèislaimeh,
On tha e nis gun fhèidh ann,
Gun duine aig a bheil spèis diubh,
Nì feum air an cùl.
*The corrie has gone to ruin
since it now lacks the deer,
no-one having a care for them
or any skill at hunting them.*
(2020: 416)

Throughout many aspects of the culture, there seems to have been an understanding of these duties and obligations to look after and care for one another and one’s

place, and that by doing so, you too would be looked after—an understanding whereby ‘reciprocity serves as a central moral formula for interpersonal conduct’ (Scott 1976: 167).

Another way to look at these reciprocal economies and human ecologies would be to see these forms of relationships as *commons*. Commons are often thought of as nouns—things and assets which can be managed, such as hill pastures, moorlands and woodlands. These certainly can be commons. But another way of viewing the commons would be to see them as ‘ways of acting collectively based on participation, self-regulation and self-negotiated principles and goals’ (Vivero-Pol, et al 2020: 32).

Looking at the moral economies at play, which allowed people to rely on each other and imposed obligations of stewardship towards the territories they relied on, a case could be made that these ways of being and living were, in fact, a commons in action. As such, rather than being viewed as nouns, the commons are ‘best understood as a verb, and

commoning can be understood as a means to rediscover the embeddedness of the individual in society and nature' (2020: 10).

Over the previous hundred years or so, this embeddedness and sense of collective responsibility and duty have greatly diminished as ideologies of individualism have become more and more pervasive. In many cases, things which were once commons, such as the Highland ideal of hospitality, have become commodities.

We appear today to be in a historic moment. Societal pressures, environmental pressures, and economic pressures are all colliding and creating crisis after crisis. Within the current way of operating as a culture and society, our economies, environments and social welfare systems do not appear to be able to cope with the many demands we are asking of them. In the coming years, these enormous and overlapping issues are almost certainly going to demand a significant change in the ways we go about the practice of living.

Relearning *how to common* could be a way to look to and reinvent some of the more useful aspects of our forgotten past. What steps could be taken to allow us to begin to revitalise this process of commoning in ways relevant for today?

As 'food is the foundation of all economies,' it could offer a platform and medium to start this process (2020: 64). Britain today faces a wide range of problems associated with food, including that it 'damages the environment on which it depends,' that 'social inequalities keep food poverty going,' and that there is 'fraying food governance' (Lang 2020: 209, 326, 411). In addressing some of these issues, the notion that food and food systems could be seen as commons has been slowly gaining ground. Whilst we may think of food as simply that which we eat, gaining access to food also involves a number of processes such as growing and raising, procuring and distributing, cooking and preparing and, of course, eating. Food is something we all engage with in some capacity and is an essential need shared by

everyone. Looking at it this way and considering food and the food system as a ‘set of socio-ecological dynamics, we may think of food as a commons as well’ (Vivero-Pol 2020: 30). As food commons activist Jose Luis Vivero-Pol puts it: ‘convivial, relational and important for individuals and societies, food is a perfect agent for change and has transformative power’ (2020: 37).

Vivero-Pol and his colleagues believe that ‘valuing food as a commons informs the idea that communities should invent new ways of guaranteeing access to adequate and preferred food for all by setting up social innovations of various sorts’ (2020: 9).

Time and time again, someone who has set up successful social innovations of this sort is Hilary Cottam. Over the past two decades, Cottam has pioneered the use of design for social change, setting up large-scale projects that focus on a diverse array of services, including employment, the prevention and management of chronic conditions, elder care, prison reform and family services. In 2020 she was awarded an OBE

for her service to the Welfare State in the UK. Recognising that whilst extraordinarily successful when first introduced, our current welfare systems are now overstretched and out of step with modern challenges, her innovations and methodologies have consistently achieved better results at lower costs than mainstream services can offer and have changed the lives of thousands of people.

Whatever service or sector she is approaching, her design principles and processes begin by imagining the conditions needed for human flourishing—to realise this requires systems that are designed to reinforce relationships rather than being designed primarily for individuals. She then looks at what we could potentially become or grow into with the right support. Central to this is the goal of growing our *capabilities*. Instead of attempting to manage our needs, her approach looks to support us to grow our capabilities and starts by assuming agency and that people want to flourish. Particularly important capabilities to focus on building

are: *learning*, through both enquiry and meaningful work; *health*; *community* and above all, building the human bonds between us—our relationships to one another, which matter more than anything else.

By imagining a vision, thinking about our capabilities and then analysing what wider forms of resources are available and how to best connect them together in new and productive ways, we can begin in a different starting point. The act of making visible and joining up these pots can multiply what is available to us. She believes that people—their relationships, knowledge, time, skills and sometimes possessions—are the single biggest resource available to us (Cottam 2018; 2020).

Whilst Cottam has not explicitly worked to tackle issues around food, her design principles and processes could be hugely useful if applied to do so. By using the framework of food as a commons and tapping into her proven methodologies it may be possible to start to develop the social innovations required in order to common through food and by extension re-

imagine some of these old Gaelic ways of relating to one another and to our places.

One example of a project already underway which could be used to do just this is the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGPF). This diverse network spread throughout the Highlands, ‘driven by local people who are passionate about creating a sustainable, local food system’ was set up with a stated aim of helping facilitate ‘a Highland food system that is resilient, regenerative and supportive network of communities, farmers, crofters, food businesses and public bodies built on diversity, interconnectedness and fairness; to enable health and well-being for all of life’.¹ Incorporated as a charity and conceived as a structure to be actively used by everyone, HGPF could be an umbrella to build a food commons under. By taking stock of what resources we have at hand, joining dots and using an approach that prioritises growing our own capabilities, and by rebuilding strong relationships with one another and the environments we live in it could be possible to create a commons-based food

system in the Gàidhealtachd through structures like HGFP that repurposes some of the old values once present.

As Vivero-Pol says, ‘the practice of commoning has the power to create new traditions and revitalize old ones’ (Vivero-Pol 2020: 36). Might rekindling concepts such as ‘*Cha duine, duine ‘na aonar*’ (a person by themselves is not a person), the old Gaelic proverb, instil a duty of care towards one another, a future commons in which we all, human and more-than-human, might thrive and survive (Netwon 2009: 129).

Footnotes

¹ See Highland Good Food Partnership, <https://highlandgoodfood.scot/charter>

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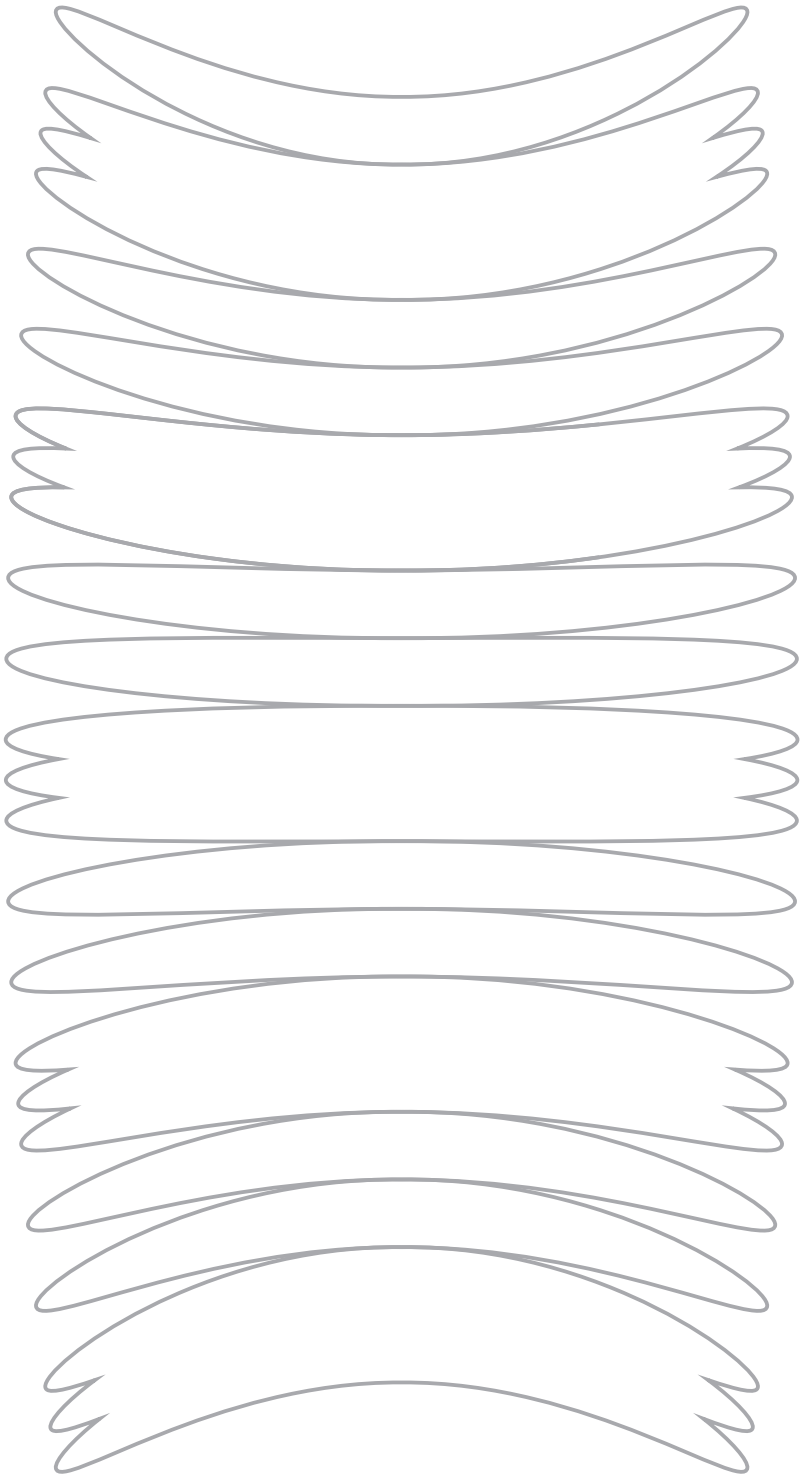
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Economies of Seeds

Rowan Lear and Christian Keeve



Rowan

As I sit to type, I'm surrounded by seeds. On a tray to my left, a chaotic muddle of brassica pods harvested from a community garden here in Glasgow, are turning brown and dry and crispy, the tiny black seeds ready to burst into view. In a small glass jar to my right, a handful of tiny innocuous red beans are waiting to be packed, the gift of an indigenous seed elder thousands of miles away in north east Brazil, which may be the only place in the world this variety exists. Behind, a jar of Darby Stripe Tomato seeds, a cultivar stewarded by the Heritage Seed Library, fizz slightly in their juices, extracted from fruits grown in my tenement window, grown from seeds saved by members of Wales Seed Hub. Every seed present here is part of a tangled web of exchange and effort, spanning generations as well as geography.

This snapshot of my desk on a fairly average day for Glasgow Seed Library, reveals connections to myriad transactions, journeys and forms of labour. From the folk who fed the soil and gleaned the harvest, to the insects that pollinate the plants and the yeasts that ferment wet seed, to the organisational tasks of cleaning, sorting, packing and labelling—seed work is a multispecies affair. How can we understand all these activities as economic relations?

Gibson-Graham and Miller call for a redefinition of economy as the constitution of a livelihood—a livelihood created out of all kinds of human and more-than-human relatings (Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015). Viewed in this way, I wonder if the processes of seed saving, plant breeding and even genetic adaptation might be understood as ways of participating in the co-constitution of a community. And at stake, is the commonwealth of the whole community.

Chris, does this understanding of economy as ecology speak to you and how you have experienced your own seed work?

Chris

This brings to my mind the connecting histories of ecology and economy themselves, as words (back to the Greek *oikos*) but also as concepts (a lot of work around systems thinking in the twentieth century produced what is now conceptually interpreted as eco-). But I love how succinctly you've introduced this approach to economy as one of livelihood and relatings, and I think seed work

lends itself to many useful alternative approaches to economy outside of, and against, an extractive racial capitalist frame. Economies (and ecologies) of seed work are also economies of multispecies care that go beyond production to the reproduction of entire food systems, ecological and social relations through these iterative, cyclical rhythms.

My own work has been turning to the cooperative geographies of contemporary small-scale seed networks, mainly in the United States, to better understand the connections and negotiations between the economies and ecologies of seed work, among humans and across landscapes. This is inspired by much work and words of seedkeepers like Ira Wallace at Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, who reminds us that for seed work, a radical approach to cooperativity is necessary not just for pragmatic biological reasons of isolation (within and between farms) but also because competition is actually antithetical to the health of vibrant, biodiverse, agroecological landscapes. So if cooperativity is necessary for

agrobiodiversity (with all of its historical, cultural, and political connections) to thrive, then what other forms of economic and ecological solidarities and exchanges may be occurring through local and regional seed networks? What kinds of livelihoods and politics might they be facilitating? Or facilitated by?

This turn to cooperativity also comes to light with emergent projects like Ujamaa Seeds (part of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance), whose name is a direct homage to the Swahili concept of *cooperative economics*,¹ but also through my own ongoing work with Truelove Seeds, whose politic goes beyond making open-pollinated varieties available to customers, but also imparting the knowledges of seedkeeping as a practice, so ostensibly they wouldn't return to buy the same seeds year after year. It's not just these offerings of knowledge but also this focus on cooperativity among so many seed folks that really draws connections between the ecologies of seed work and the alternative economies and radical politics that it often works in close

relation with. And I'm interested in how these alternative economic relations manifest across different modalities of seed work, from seed libraries to regional grower networks to small companies to local decentralised seed projects. How the different forms of cooperative formation among seed folks and seed projects are inspired by and inspire different sorts of economic relations (and how those economic relations may result in different agroecological dynamics).

I'm thinking back to a conversation we had last year around the queer ecologies of seed work and the everyday and seasonal reproductive futurisms that seed work inspires. How might seed work be in conversation with different sorts of economies around reproduction, transgression, alterity, etc?

Rowan

Yes, I have this ongoing curiosity about the relationship between seed stewarding, reproductive justice and queer life.² I suspect that in Europe, alienation from

ancestral seed saving practices coincided with the enclosure of common land and dispossession of people from agricultural ways of knowing. As their positions as herbal healers, midwives and alewives were successively prohibited, women were excluded from wage labour and robbed of the ability to represent themselves legally, so becoming the property of men. As Silvia Federici puts it, ‘women themselves became the commons, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations’ (2004). As such, the reproductive labour of women—not only birthing, but caring, cooking, cleaning and other domestic work—was intensively exploited while being designated as simultaneously outside of economic relations, even as it maintained the very conditions that made capitalism possible.

Losing knowledge of remedies and in particular, abortifacients, further suppressed women’s power over reproduction. As the zine *Gay Plants* (2017) notes, ‘controlling access to plants and plant knowledge was evidently crucial to the development of compulsory

heterosexuality’. At the same time, plants themselves became subject to a new, masculinized science, which applied to them a highly sexual classification system, mirroring the heteronormative and patriarchal society of humans. Botany helped to demonstrate ‘the overwhelming strength of binary thought, as plant sexuality became, from the eighteenth century onwards, a battleground over the gendering of nature, knowledge, and the social order’ (Castro 2019). Meanwhile, the intensified agriculture and colonial extraction enabled by the new sciences, decimated the very diversity of species identified by this system. So there is this parallel destruction of plants and people’s intuitive and inherited knowledge of their plants.

The suppression of sexuality and privileging of the nuclear family offers a vision of futurity based on generational reproduction and genetic inheritance. Sometimes I worry that working with seeds and essentially ‘plant breeding’, remains tied to a disciplinary, heterosexist and ableist mode of genetic transmission. As Helen Hester (2018) asks, ‘How can we

think reproduction—even just in the sense of ensuring the survival of others into the future—without also reproducing the worst of reproductive futurity? ‘Of course, seeds are not the products of heteronormative processes, plant sex is wilder and more transgressive than we can imagine. And when we grow open-pollinated seed, the plants inherit much greater genetic diversity. This variation offers the capacity for adaptation and change: it can also produce queer effects, divergences from intended paths. Seed saving might even corrupt the speciesism of reproductive futurity. We save seeds of the plants we like to eat, but there are no guarantees that there will be humans around to feast on them.

Chris

I love where you’re going with this idea of an open-ended, multispecies futurity through seed! On this note, I’ve been thinking at the intersections of work on social ecology and queer ecologies to think about life-making practices among decay and collapse; so how, as Gardiner Brown (2020)

has said, ‘living with failure, living with damage, and living with hope’ might inspire forms of other-than-human care work that, quoting Nicole Seymour (2013), ‘expands “not definitions of humanity, but definitions of what deserves care”’. Seymour’s *Strange Natures* is especially useful in my thinking around how queer futurities might thread human and nonhuman politics. In thinking through radical care practices beyond the human, she explores non-linearity and the messy radical politics of queer anti/futurity and ephemerality in environmentalism; a radical queer environmental futurity that can ‘act in the interests of nameless, faceless individuals to which one has no biological, familial, or economic ties whatsoever’ (2013).

Moving beyond the linear generational impulse that influences a lot of discourse around eco-social futures, in favour of a politic that leans into the unknown and ephemeral, working through care and solidarity right here and right now.

So there’s a lot to think through with what you’ve offered around humans engaging in the repro-

ductive futurities seed politics with the knowledge that they may not be around to feast. To come back to this question of economics and ecologies, I'm wondering about the material dimensions of these sorts of radical seed politics; how they intersect with the affordances of biodiversity, the ecological and geographic relations of particular seed projects, the infrastructures of growing sites and distribution networks, and the material conditions of growers and seedkeepers (among other things).

There are different practices of care and temporalities of care for different species, and this is not only in tension with people's economic, social, and cultural selection pressures but also with what material supports growers have access to and are able to provide, fundamentally to people's daily, weekly, and seasonal capacities. How might these material conditions influence seed politics, but also how might these seed politics provide infrastructures of solidarity and mutual support?

Rowan

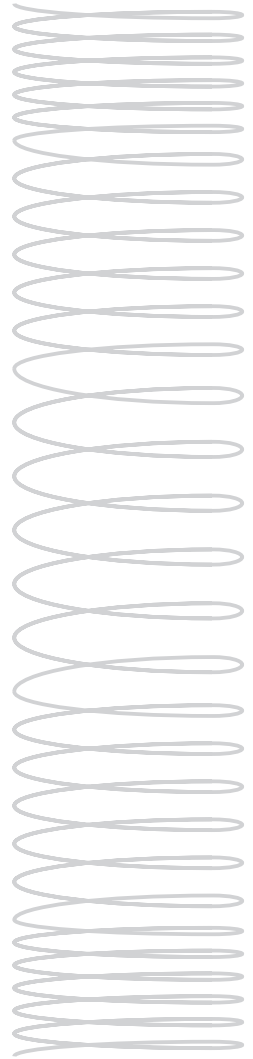
I've learned the most about the potential of seed politics from seeds themselves, from my experiences of learning to grow for seed, and from folk who have borrowed and grown seeds for Glasgow Seed Library. Seed production, even on the smallest scale of growing some tomatoes on a balcony, asks for a heightened attentiveness: becoming alert to germination rates, plant vigour, changes in weather, first and last frosts, dates of pollination, what else is flowering and might cross, what weeds are dominating according to what healing is required in the soil, how the fruit is forming, if the air is dry enough for harvest, whether a seed has marks that indicate a burrowing insect, and so on. These arts of noticing span the infinitesimal, like a latent viral infection carried inside a seed, to the atmospheric, like a profound climate event like drought. Seed saving weaves together the local and the global.

I recognise that a seed library exists in a kind of interstice between small to medium

scale seed producers and folk who are saving seed on their own patches. That a seed library is not explicitly economic (the seeds are not for sale) and largely self organised (no one is in charge) puts it in a legal grey area. This is a fruitful place to be, to slip between the cracks like seeds themselves do so well. It also renders the library vulnerable –it can only exist through acts of solidarity, gifting and care, and so it participates in a larger economy in which access to land, to resources, to time and to energy are unequally distributed.

Seed work is never just about the seeds. It always involves working holistically and collectively, and that means politically. The situation of a people devoid of land, of uncontaminated soil, of local food, of ecological knowledge, of inherited stories and biodiverse cultures, is a historical phenomena created out of a particular economic system. But there is a counterhistory of loud and quiet revolt, anticapitalist and anticolonial protest, land occupation and strike, here in Glasgow as well as everywhere else, and these

strategies need to be recalled and reimagined and reseeded. Seed work rightfully participates in these struggles.



Footnotes

¹ See, <https://ujamaafarms.com/about-ujamaa>

² This concern has continued to resonated with me, thanks to discussions with the members of an LGBTQI+ Gardening Group led by Martha Adonai Williams in Glasgow, and with the participants of Modern Nature, an online queer reading group co-organised with Lydia Honeybone in 2021.

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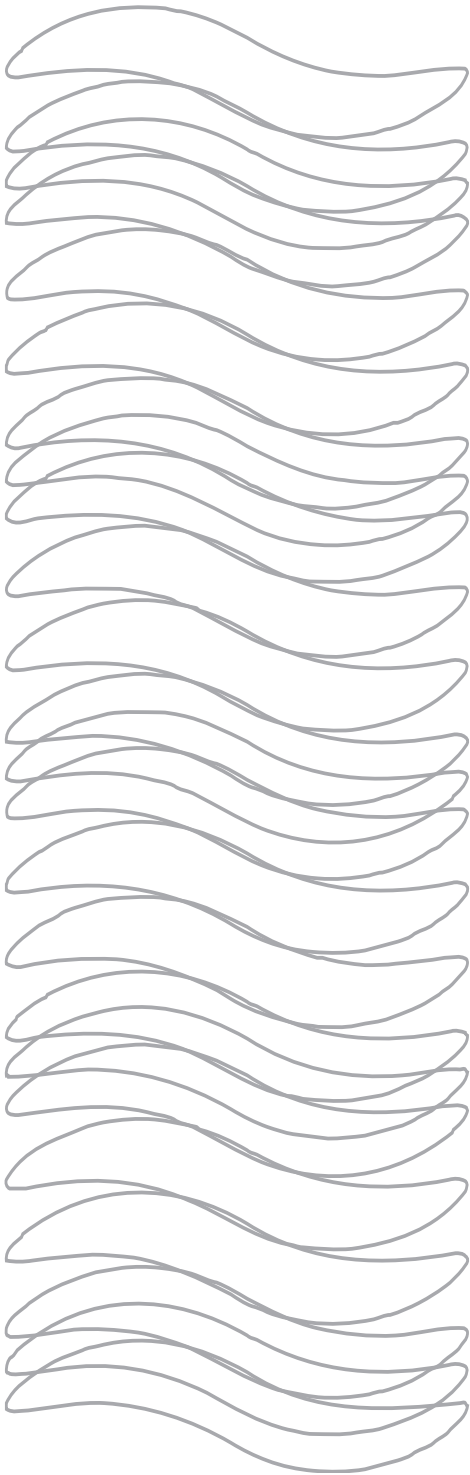
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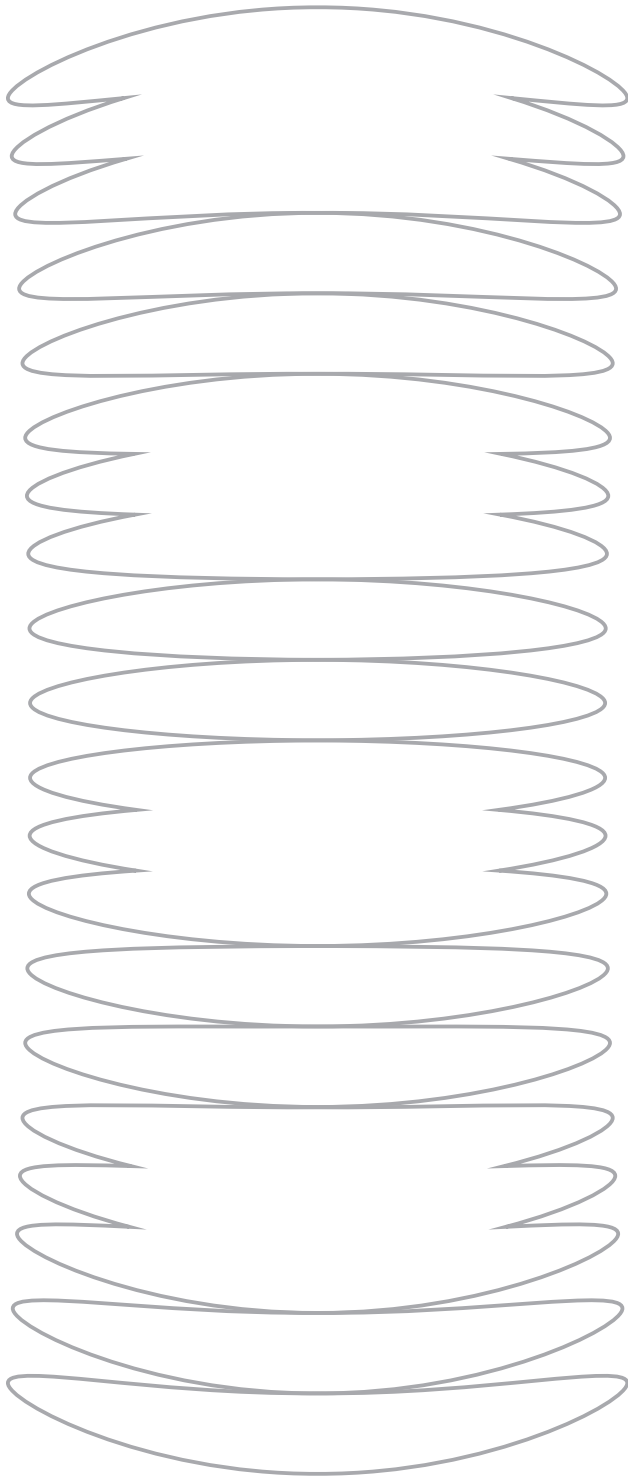
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Our Food System: economic organising towards a healthy ecology and justice

Ruby van der Wekken



‘Oma Maa is a food co-operative based on community supported agriculture (CSA) and ecologically and socially sustainable food production methods. Oma Maa supports an all year around ecological community process around good agriculture. Here agriculture refers to the cultivating and developing of the land to fulfil people’s need for food as well as other basic needs, and to make good, ecological life possible.’ (from food cooperative Oma Maa’s Plan of Action 2021-25)

The following writing aims to spotlight some insights our struggles for food sovereignty offer regarding systemic change and how these can be seen as fundamentally part of global interdependent struggles for justice.

Food sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty was put forward by La Via Campesina, which is today the world’s largest social movement, composed of some 200 million small-scale farmers’ organisations, rural workers, fishing communities, and landless and indigenous peoples globally. 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 food and agriculture systems.’¹

The food sovereignty movement grew as a response to the globalisation of agribusinesses and agricultural policies affecting peasant farmers in the South, who had to compete against cheap exports from hyper-productive, highly subsidised European and American agriculture. Small-scale farmers needed to develop a common vision and campaign—to defend their livelihoods and participate directly in the decisions impacting their lives. In response, the concept of food sovereignty put agricultural producers and consumers at the core of the debate.

In the last decade, as the agro-industrial model of food production has expanded and corporate control over many aspects of the food system increased (e.g. via corporations such as Monsanto and the World Trade Organisation), people working with food in the ‘Global North’ have come to realise that food sovereignty is also relevant to them. Our collective struggles for food sovereignty do not stand alone but are part of a larger movement contesting a neoliberal economic

system. *Oma Maa’s* struggle for food sovereignty can be situated within a wider project of envisioning and building solidarity economies.

Food sovereignty and Economy

The solidarity economy approach is an invitation to rethink the economy, starting from everybody's daily life and needs. It challenges the idea of the economy as a separate, abstract area of a society dominated by the role of a small number of experts (economists, bankers, financial advisors). Instead, solidarity economics suggests that we see the economy as a much broader set of diverse relations and activities and as something that everybody can play a role in envisioning and enacting.

Contrary to mainstream economic thinking, according to which the value of financial profit-making predominantly guides economic activity, solidarity economies have a shared and interdependent commitment to a different sense of economic values based instead

upon diversity, autonomy, equality, shared power and ecological sustainability. These values—values that are shared by the food sovereignty movement too—are at the core of economic relations within solidarity economies, where the main objective of economic activity is not profit but sustaining life.

Solidarity economy building is firstly a process of identifying and making existing solidarity economy initiatives visible, through which they will be increasingly used and thus strengthened. Secondly, the increased visibility enables existing solidarity economy actors (those involved) and practices to find each other, create links and relationships, and through this, develop new practices. So it becomes not only about movement building but also strengthening and enhancing the processes of these economies too. Importantly, solidarity economy building is not a proposal for a more socially and environmentally friendly sector separate from an otherwise predominantly extractivist economy but concerns, in fact, a paradigm shift in thinking

for the whole of the economy.

The commons are an important part of a solidarity economy. The commons refers to cultural and natural resources being held 'in common', co-produced and accessible to all members of society. The commons, whether this is a forest, food, ideas or currency, are best understood through the social practices of commoning, a term coined by historian Peter Linebaugh (Linebaugh 2008). Commoning is the process of co-producing, co-governing and co-managing a commons— not just the resources or goods needed to live well but also the social structures, relationships and processes—by a community or network of users, by commoners, following the principles of sustainability, fairness and direct democracy. As such, there are no commons without the commoning by commoners.

Commons are the antithesis of capital and market commodities—with a commons economy referring to the circulation of commons, not commodities, operating beyond but not necessarily

without State or market—as the late Silke Helfrich described things (see Bollier and Helfrich 2012).

The development of a solidarity economy, the increased linking up of solidarity economy actors and practices, can be seen as leading to more commoning and commons. Looking at different global struggles for food sovereignty, we can situate those involved as solidarity economy actors, working at co-producing our agricultural/food commons and the commoning around them—of working towards a transformation of the economy and global food justice.

'Oma Maa's activities are rooted in the Lassila farm (in the Lassila family since 1697) and Kauko farm in Tuusula, with product distribution and activity points reaching out to the cities of Järvenpää and Helsinki. Through cooperation with both farms in 2022, Oma Maa will develop and care for approximately 100 hectares of arable land according to the principles of permaculture and polyculture. Two to three hectares will be used for crops and 30 hectares for forestry, of which

around 1.5 hectares will be a forest garden. In addition, there are three hectares of natural pastures, where the Lassila farm's three cows graze in summer and fulfil their role as guardians of biodiversity.

The food produced is distributed to Oma Maa members throughout the year in the form of food bags, which directly express Oma Maa's agricultural practices. The food grown challenges what the mainstream market has determined can be locally grown and eaten. The food bags contain many seasonal products but also products that are conserved, refined and processed by Oma Maa. Such ready-made products include wheat and rye bread, falafel, seitan, oat yoghurt, various fermented and dried produce, and different grains, groats and flakes. Oma Maa wants to integrate local and traditional methodologies of both efficient and ecological resource use with global practices and tastes and, with this process, address the issue of what can and should be the food of the future.

Throughout it all, Oma Maa actively puts out a continuous call for cooperative members and others interested in joining in peer-to-peer pedagogical

processes of co-production, be it on a momentarily or more permanent basis.'

Food sovereignty and other food system building

Today, in Finland, struggles for food sovereignty have, among others, manifested in a push for organic and local products. In addition, different groups and initiatives now exist to take out the middlemen, for example, various food exchange groups organised through social media.² However, what brings us closest in terms of actual systemic change, and not reformism tinkering with consumerism, is community supported agriculture (CSA).

Although there are now many variations, the basic CSA model is based on community members helping to provide a portion of the farmer's yearly budget through purchasing 'shares' for a season's harvest in advance of the growing season.³ Community supported agriculture is about bringing farmers and people who eat their

produce closer to each other to share more of the risks of farming and give the farmer a helping hand. This social organisation forms a web of mutual support and helps foster a better sense of community. The international network for community supported agriculture, Urgenci, has estimated that up to one million people are currently involved in CSA initiatives in Europe.

CSA schemes foreground the need to help farms and farmers, and this is an important need to be acknowledged and acted upon. But there is further potential to capture and bring to the forefront why our struggles for food sovereignty matter.

'Food is a core societal thing. Food is, first of all, what joins all of us. And in whose hands the control of our food system is, including, of course, water, in those hands the control of society lies. In other words, people can better govern their own lives if food (and the food system) is in their control. In that sense, all efforts to get food under the control of people are significant for the development of society,

and only by addressing this can we change our society into being more just and fair.’ Jukka Lassila (farmer of Oma Maa food cooperative, in an interview with Jukka Peltokoski for KSL in 2014)

Brought to the forefront here are three important and related insights: firstly, by changing our basic needs systems—by changing the production, distribution and consumption of our basic needs such as food and energy—we can develop pathways towards more socially, ecologically healthier communities and society locally and globally. These basic needs are such daily, pervasive societal issues; changing how they are managed can change many things.

And secondly, such social and ecological systemic change in society is rooted in community/ peoples’ processes around their daily needs. These need to be co-produced, co-governed and co-managed according to collectively held values and not decided by profit-seeking markets, for they will not deliver the desired change. In other words, our struggles for food sovereignty can be a sys-

temic change maker when these processes are in the hands of the people—when food is a commons.

And thirdly, this reaches beyond the local. Food sovereignty isn’t a one-size fits all approach but is, in fact, specific to people and places. And whilst the circumstances in which struggles for food sovereignty often seem to differ substantially, these struggles can be seen as engaged together and interdependently for the right to see things as a commons.

This right to be able to see things as a commons, the right to achieve food sovereignty anywhere, and to be able to stop, for instance, having to overtly focus on growing for export, implies that we must everywhere take up in our own corners the struggle for our own food sovereignty, which is then ultimately also a struggle for global justice. It is the answer with which farmers in India responded to Oma maa member Niklas Toivokainen when he asked them in 2013, after listening to their stories of extensive hardship, of suicides, what it is we here in Europe, in Finland, should do: ‘Grow your own food!’⁴

The above insights have important ramifications when we seek solutions to our climate and biodiversity crises. The debate about how to deliver systemic change in society is often framed by way of juxtaposing the responsibility of government to be designing and enacting effective policy with the responsibility of citizens in the form of consumer choice—and the conclusion is often that real responsibility and power lies with the big policy of government. However, through this framing a fundamental insight that Oma Maa also puts to the forefront is overlooked: that in response to today’s challenges, community processes are not to be seen as small, insufficient and irrelevant actions, but are in fact cornerstones to systemic change. The work we do as part of community supported agriculture initiatives is an invitation for all of us to explore the potential for social and ecological systemic change through our engagement with agriculture and food



Footnotes

¹ 'The concept of food sovereignty was developed by Via Campesina and brought to the public debate during the World Food Summit in 1996'. See, Via Campesina, available online: <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/>

² See for instance the REKO circles in Finland, which since 2013 have been facilitating the direct selling from farmers to consumers via closed Facebook groups. Available online: <https://urgenci.net/reko-a-winning-concept-in-finland/> Last accessed 22.08.2022).

³ See for example, <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk>; and <https://urgenci.net>

⁴ See, <https://commons.fi/2013/01/12/kasvattakaa-oma-ruokanne/>

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Colophon

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programme of long-term projects, screenings, residencies, meals, workshops and sharings. We pay attention to the social, political and global significance of these conversations and the building of communities in between.

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