

CHAPTER TEN

The Neoliberal Marginalization of Indigeneity: A Case for “Orphaned Indigenous Food Crops”

Morris D. C. Komakech and Chantal Nyirakanani

Abstract

This chapter is concerned with the threat of extinction of Indigenous foods and diets of the Indigenous peoples of the world. The marginalization, undervaluation and subsequent exclusion of Indigenous crops, seeds, and food systems from the dominant discourses of neoliberal food security measures account for the exclusion of Indigenous foods from the markets. The loss of Indigenous foods and diets highlights the intricate link between neoliberalism and entrenched colonial legacies of marginalization of indigeneity, leading to food insecurity. We illuminate the enduring influences of colonial practices of subjugating indigeneity as a pathway to the relegation of Indigenous food crops to the “orphaned crops” regimes. Orphaned crops have become manifest as the destructive impact of colonization on Indigenous food cultures and traditions. Through the materialist/structuralist political economy approach, we expose the politics and practices of commercial actors and institutions that have amassed power and gained control over the global food system through financialization, market shaping, and seed control. We argue that neoliberalism as an ideology systematically enforces the exclusion and marginalization of “Indigenous” from the “exotic” as a reincarnation of racist colonial practices of subordinating Indigenous food crop production, as non-commercial, non-productive. Therefore, Indigenous foods are consigned as having lesser market value. Thus, colonial large-scale cash crops (export or commercial) agriculture was designed to obliterate Indigenous farming practices and food crop production. The chapter concludes by arguing that the loss of Indigenous food autonomy/sovereignty and the systematic exclusion from the dominant market are issues central to social justice issues requiring urgent redress.

Keywords: Neoliberal Marginalization, Indigeneity, orphaned foods, neoliberalism, marginalization, commodification, financialization, post-colonialism, market-oriented economy

Introduction

Scholars always debate about food – its history, uses, cultural imperatives, and politics – casually. When people read or think about food in relation to their food practices and food (in)securities, they start to imagine the indignity of hunger and starvation. Some authors have

found pleasure in writing about culinary arts, the history, politics, and philosophy of foods (Leach et al, 2020; Sweeney, 2017; Heldke, 2013), while numerous resources exist that detail the imperatives of foods in shaping human civilization. Thus, Michel Foucault, studying how ancient Greeks cared for self through dietary regulations and dietary regimes, proclaimed that food practices are aesthetics of self-constitution (Foucault, 1983, Taylor, 2010). And yet, a plethora of literature exists on food insecurity and their contending or complimenting discourses as embodying the politics of social control of an era (Dietler & Hayden, 2010; Knezevic et al, 2014; Counihan, 2018; Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019) Some scholars, however, consider that discussions about food are intricately an existential matter scaling both human, animal and planetary boundaries (Conijn et al, 2018; Rampalli, et al, 2023). Food, its conceptualization (deciding what is food or not, and for whom), is an act of exercising power and autonomy, often contextual. What constitutes “food” or not is socially and culturally constructed (Demi, 2014; Meigs, 1987; Sundbo, 2013) and may extend to context (situations) and urgency of when what to eat is contested. Thus, some people eat worms and grasshoppers as part of their main diet, while others may find that kind of diet objectionable and may prefer to eat snakes, snails, octopuses, bats, rats, or vegetables (vegans, vegetarians, etc), fruits (Fruitarians), etc. Invariably, what constitutes food is as diverse as human society itself. Likewise, the essence of food security is embedded within the food autonomy/sovereignty regime – the idea that everyone should have access to nutritious foods that they identify with, desire, consider safe and have it when they need it to sustain their life. Accordingly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (2001) at its 1996 World Summit developed a definition of food security that highlights its multidimensional character as;

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and. healthy life. (FAO, 1996).

Depending on the context in which nature becomes food, food security is about availability, access, utilization and stability within an ecosystem. Food production, harvesting, processing, preserving, distributing, retailing, consuming, and disposing are all seamlessly linked processes tied to geography, cultures, climate, history, traditions, politics and the economy of a people. Thus, there has been a sustained economic infatuation with commercial agriculture in lieu of neoliberal market-oriented ideology. Invariably, the neo-liberal market dynamic distorts the history of Indigenous foods with the social relations built within those food systems. Through emphasizing the commercial value of food systems, commercial actors have clamoured to gain control of what McMichael (2006) called the “global industrial-retailing circuits” (p.407). The global food market is increasingly defined by a narrow base of corporate and financial institutional actors. Arguably, what constitutes “food” or “food crop” have been defined by corporate-controlled genetic sciences. The adulteration of food crop seeds displaces Indigenous knowledge and practices and concentrates seed monopoly in multinational corporations (McMichael, 2006). The qualification of foods as nutritious has essentially been determined through scientifically controlled corporate laboratories. For instance, the excess sugars and salts in processed foods are matters for profiteering through the so-called neoliberal diets (Otero, 2021; Nestle, 2019) or the corporate food regimes (McMichael, 2006). Moreover, food’s omnipresence as part of human civilization draws from its medicinal, nutritional, and inherent social values that are now appropriated through corporate control. Julier (2004) opines that food is an extraordinarily versatile means for examining people’s ambivalence about modernity and the persistence of class and other forms of

inequalities. For Julier, food is part of a contestation of societal power. Thus, the African adage “man is food” becomes essential because food access is an important factor that predicts mankind as both political and social. By extension, the strongest predictor of social and political control over man and territory is food. Thus, food extends beyond that which is served on our Indigenous plates. In this chapter, food is explored as a tool of neoliberal control; as embodying the marginalization, commodification and weaponization (diseased) against the Indigenous peoples. Control over food, its production (machines and seeds), and distribution are dominating functions of the global power of neoliberalism. Invariably, what constitutes market value foods are defined by social class systems, market structures and processes. For instance, studies show that global malnutrition and food insecurity are distributive rather than production (Albritton, 2009; Lawrence, Lyons & Wallington, 2010), underscoring that control of distribution is structured within the production and distribution processes (Jarosz, 2011).

Problematizing “Indigeneity” in the Marketplace

The online Etymology Dictionary defines “Indigeneity” as “a fact of originating” or “occurring naturally” in a particular place (para 1). Inherent basic rights of indigeneity of the community accompany the concept. McCormack (2011) studied the complex relationship between Indigenous people’s claims for use of coastal spaces under neoliberal regime policies in Australia. McCormack observes that, neoliberalism complicates indigeneity by creating moving boundaries for negotiating rights to land use. McCormack concludes that Indigenous people constantly have to contemplate locally, what is native, at the state level, contend with cultural differences, and globally, rights to claims of resources, otherwise native under appropriation (McCormack, 2011). Indigenous spaces and places are fast disappearing, together with the control over what is Indigenous, under the aegis of neoliberalism. Indigenous creativities and lifeways are being systematically wiped out or excluded from the dominant markets imposed by neoliberal ideals. Walter (2010) enumerates that in Australia, Indigenous -specific rights, cultures and places are deemed ideologically at odds with neoliberal principles, problematized, explicitly undermined and negated. However, just as the colonized everywhere have had to contend with the hegemony of colonialism without hope of its end, Latin America has claimed to have transcended neoliberalism into the post-neoliberal era (Coca, 2021). The conceived space for post-neoliberalism sounds to be an ideological abstraction. While colonialism disrupted the development of the colonized, stalling the progress of various facets of Indigenous lifeways, violently, albeit “legally”, a post- neoliberalism society ideally ought to reinvent Indigenous rights to spaces and places relevant for recovering their food production and indigenous food autonomy (Bettache et al, 2020).

Importantly, we adopt materialist/structuralist political economy concerned with identifying and acting upon societal structures and processes that produce inequities (Raphael, 2025). The objective is to expose the politics and practices of multinational corporations and institutions that promote neoliberal ideology. Illuminating institutional structures and processes of society that maintain the problematization of “Indigenous” offers an explanatory insight into how Indigenous is excluded systematically from the capitalist spaces and places such as the markets and research investments. In the matrix of capitalist power, transnational corporations have amassed profound power and control over the global food systems (McMichael, 2006; Otero, 2012). Their influences have been either directly through financialization and transgenic biotechnology of seeds control or more subtly, exerting influence through foreign policies of powerful industrialized Western countries. Critically, the issue here is not the scientific potential

of biotechnology itself which has successfully engineered higher crop yields, augmented disease and pest resistance and enhanced nutritional profiles vital for a growing global population. Rather, the critique centers on how these scientific advancements are bundled with restrictive corporate models. Instead of allowing farmers to traditionally save and adapt these high-yielding seeds across seasons, the technology is weaponized to legally or biologically force them into buying new seeds seasonally (Kloppenburger, 2005; McMichael, 2013). According to Gálvez (2018), such foreign policies, for instance, in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, have pushed local people to abandon their traditional diets and lifestyles for the so-called “modern” neoliberal diet comprising processed foods.

How Colonialism Underdeveloped the Food Systems of The Colonized

We apply “Indigenous” to transcend the narrow use in the common narratives that restrict the application of “Indigenous” to natives and settler America and Australia. By Indigenous, we apply it from its Latin cognate, *Indigenus* “born in a country, native,” or from the later Latin origin *indigena* “sprung from the land, native,” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001 - 2024). Thus, this chapter references those whose social, economic, cultural and political lives were disrupted, fundamentally, by the advent of mercantile colonialism or European imposition over their territories in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia. Although the legacy of colonization may play out differently in the various formerly colonized territories depending on the intensity of the European colonial agents, [see: Komakech, 2025)], its disruption, exploitation and underdevelopment of Indigenous systems, including lifeways, are more or less similar.

For the colonialists, what constituted food was framed as commercial, export or cash-crop crops and plants that fed the European industrial revolution and civilization's urgency. Bjornlund, Bjornlund and van Rooyen (2022) enumerate the history of colonial disruption of food systems in Africa. Agriculture was viable only when it fulfilled certain European market conditions. African forms of agriculture were marginalized, undervalued and framed as subsistence, low productivity, and primitive, as long as it was not to commercial scale. When natives grew their Indigenous foods on their land and hunted animals native to their land, that, in colonial frames, were primitive activities. Thus, the logic of colonial regimes was to disrupt native food systems by appropriating vast arable or fertile lands from the natives or Indigenous people, and forcefully recruiting free labour from Indigenous or native peoples to ensure that the focus of agriculture met export needs.

Bjornlund and colleagues further ascertained that the consigning of the colonized from their native land into reserves and lavishing the usurped land on white European farmers consolidated colonial appropriation and control of indigenous lands. Native or colonized people were deprived of land rights to advance the traditional farming practices that sustained them before colonization. Subsequently, the Indigenous persons required permission (identity cards) to cross to their native land under colonial occupation to find jobs in colonial establishments. Below is a summary of the mechanisms through which colonialism disrupted the development of Indigenous/native food systems that are now driving food dependence and starvation.

Table 1: A Summary of the mechanisms through which colonialism destroyed food production systems in colonized territories (Source: Bjornlund et al., 2022).

Growing Colonial Cash-Crops	Exploitative farming, land appropriation prioritized, driven by European industry and market needs; (especially following the post-WWI impact on European economies).
Diversion of labour	Labor was systematically diverted away from traditional, edible food production systems and concentrated in extractive activities like mines and white-owned farms. This diminished the labor pool available for indigenous food production and livestock rearing, leading to a loss of land rights, food autonomy, and native food rights.
Diversion of Indigenous Food Crops	Focus removed from edible food crops to non-edible cash crops; production quotas were instituted to encourage cooperating farmers to specialize in export crop production or face penalties.
High Direct Colonial Taxes	Colonial taxes were not adjusted to poor harvest seasons; no food assistance to starving farmers; colonial taxes, such as hut taxes, were lower when paid in non-edible crops such as cotton, coffee, and cocoa beans.
Land Appropriation	Mass removal of Indigenous/native people from arable /fertile lands and lavishing it to European farmers, subsequently reducing land access and activities to advance Indigenous food systems, leading to dependence on colonial processed foods, handouts and rations.

The experiences of food production across the colonized world are associated with the violent dispossession, exploitation and repression of colonialism (Bjornlund et al., 2022). The traumatic experiences altered the perception of Indigenous people towards commercial agriculture to this day. Importantly, Indigenous food crops are uniquely adapted to the native land where they support the local way of life, without which food insecurity proffers. However, Indigenous crops were sidelined and subordinated on several grounds, first, on the claim that the crops were of low yield. The Europeans preferred high-yielding crops; second, these crops are seasonal, taking long time to mature to harvest; Europeans preferred crops that matured faster, multiple times a season, moreover, with the use of fertilizers that poisoned the soils, making the land unproductive; third, the local food crops were alien to Europeans and found no value for them. Thus, by devaluing Indigenous foods and food production practices as “unproductive” and “savage”, colonialism embarked on a sustained assault on Indigenous culture, traditions and identities (Waldmueller, 2015; Bjornlund et al, 2022). Conversely, the colonial mode of agriculture was constructed as more ‘effective’, ‘productive’, and ‘technologically prudent’, especially concerning cost and resource input. To measure agricultural productivity efficiency, the repressive colonial quota system was introduced (Bjornlund et al, 2022). Under the colonial quota system, productivity was calibrated on output per unit of land irrespective of whether chemical fertilizers and pesticides were applied, or whether drought and other externalities affected harvest. Waldmueller (2015) enumerates that colonial commercial agriculture contributed to soil erosion, a loss of employment in rural areas (due to technical progress), migration to cities (contributing to urban poverty) and intra- and

intergenerational tensions within families, communities and villages. With the harsh conditions in the reserves, the natives lost the labour pool needed in their rural communities to grow Indigenous food crops sustainably.

Neoliberalism and Loss of Indigenous Food Autonomy

Czyzewski (2011) detests references to “post-colonialism” as a legitimate descriptor of the physical absence of colonial imposition. Czyzewski (2011) opines that the legacy of colonialism is still rolling on through the continued influence of colonial-era policies and histories. Czyzewski cautions that by referencing ‘post-colonialism’, we stand the risk of prematurely celebrating the pastness of colonialism, obscuring the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power, and encouraging a settler triumphant description of time and interpretation of history. According to Czyzewski (2011), assuming a ‘post-colonialism’ state prioritizes European historiography, highlighting a hasty desire to relegate uncomfortable colonial abuses behind us. In Czyzewski’s logic, such strides place the formerly colonized in danger of neutralizing historical inequalities and inappropriately vocalizing relations that do not necessarily reflect the contemporary lived realities of the formerly colonized people. In support of Czyzewski’s arguments, Waldmueller (2015) reiterates that historical injustices resulting from colonial systems of oppression are still impacting the present, but also that colonial imposition has in fact never substantially subsided or ceased. Thus, neoliberalism was built on the repressive institutions of colonialism by conflating colonial legacies to reinvent capitalism. In fact, colonialism metamorphosed into neo-colonialism. Neoliberalism refers to the re-emergence of liberal political ideology that redefines the role of the state in the distribution of economic and cultural resources in society (Komakech & Raphael, 2021; Harvey, 2005). That is, enhancing conditions for capital accumulation and restoring the powers of economic elites on a scale (Yates & Bakker, 2014). While neoliberal policies established the market mechanism as the most dominant societal institution (Raphael, 2015); most of its policies have produced and accentuated global inequities, including increasing food insecurity and poverty (Ostry et al, 2016). Precisely, Wispelwey et al., (2023) observe that neoliberal policies have served to solidify and maintain the hierarchies of colonial relations as the basis of their exploitation. Particularly, for agriculture, the neoliberal policies emphasized trade liberalization, deregulation and commercialization of agriculture, which inadvertently continues with the marginalization policies of Indigenous food systems instituted through colonialism (Bernards, 2021). For Friesen (2018), neoliberal policies have been engaged with increasing global food production while integrating farmers of certain types into the global market. The selective criteria for privileging non-Indigenous farms confirm that the market is about profitability rather than mitigating food insecurity (Jarosz, 2011)

Neoliberal policies impose an anti-statist measure by endorsing a market-oriented economy as the primary institution for resource distribution and service provision. It shifts micro- and macro-level public policy towards retrenchment, leading to greater inequality through mechanisms such as privatization, trade liberalization, deregulation and others (Coburn, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Komakech & Raphael, 2021). Governments that inherited colonial-era policies grappled with the challenge of departing from the trappings of those exploitative and racist discriminative policies. In Africa, these regimes found themselves entangled in the challenges of managing highly divided and racialized states with little or no skills. Consequently, as Komakech (2025) articulates, formerly colonized states resorted to self-destructing activities such as assuming colonial structures of privileges and power. As such, colonial policies and practices that undermined, suppressed, and violated Indigenous Africans were never sufficiently questioned or

reversed. The advent of structural adjustment programs imposed on the formerly colonized countries in the 1980s by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, further accentuated the colonial undervaluing of Indigenous food systems and rural economies. For instance, Jarosz (2011) observes that the World Bank lent developing countries money on condition that they prioritized investments in industrial and agricultural development through market integration and trade liberalization.

Over the years, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) brought negative impacts on Indigenous farming communities. In the formerly colonized countries, SAP obliterated government farm subsidies and price supports for local agricultural activities, whereas farm subsidies are mainstay of agriculture in developed countries (Alston et al., 1993; Lele, 1990). Without government subsidies to farmers as provided in Western countries, small-scale farmers became vulnerable to market fluctuations, land grabs, and unpredictable climate that reduced harvests and incomes, leading to food insecurity. The neoliberal economy is hinged on income – disposable market-based income. With little profit from farming, SAP increased rural poverty and accentuated rural-to-urban migrations, further striking a blow to Indigenous food crop production and food autonomy, leading to dependence. Below is a table summarising the key tenets of SAP or neoliberal policies that further augmented and affected Indigenous or native food systems.

Box 1: A summary of neoliberalism policy impact on Indigenous food systems.

Source: constructed by authors.

- Liberalization of trade and markets for food and other agricultural products that excluded Indigenous foods
- Increasing privatization of resources and services for agriculture
- Reorientation of market-focused economic policy under structural adjustment programmes
- Commercialization and modernization of agriculture such that crops considered non-commercial were disenfranchised and excluded from research and technical development.
- Scaling-down of government-sponsored agricultural services, such as training and extension; and
- Commercialization of agriculture, especially for export purposes, and higher prices for production inputs and goods for household consumption.
- Monetization of social spaces and services

Source: Authors own construction 2025

The Paradox of Orphaned Crops and Famine

Generational marginalization of Indigenous food crops not only excluded Indigenous food crops from gaining access to the global markets, it also denies Indigenous/native food crops funds for research and technical development to enhance their quality and resilience to climate change (Tadele, 2019; Mabhaudhi, 2019; Caselli-Mechels, 2015). The continued marginalization of food crops native to formerly colonized lands is maintained through patterns of injustices traceable to colonial agricultural policies, practices, and schemes (van Beusekon, 2021). Currently, most Indigenous or native food crops are orphaned under the neoliberal parlance. Paradoxically, while it is expected that the influence of neoliberal policies in Agriculture would address food insecurity, the opposite has been true. According to Friesen (2017), there were nearly one billion people in

the world who experience the indignity of hunger. Most recent statistics are even daunting. Various reports released in 2024 indicate that the global population facing hunger had increased by 152 million people since 2019, with 1.33 million people facing famine and famine-like conditions; worldwide, 9 million people die annually from hunger-related conditions, most of them children under five. The inequities in accessing foods from the so-called neoliberal market mechanisms are equally daunting – 2.8 billion people of the world cannot afford nutritious foods, with 36 countries experiencing a serious hunger level, out of which 6 countries experience what the World Food Program categorizes as alarming hunger levels. In 2023, over 282 million people in 59 countries experienced high levels of acute hunger (See: World Food Program, 2024; Concerns Worldwide US, 2014; Global Hunger Index, 2024). Moreover, WFP estimates that 1.9 million people globally suffer from catastrophic hunger.

With such daunting statistics at hand, scholars, researchers and policymakers should be asking themselves, why governments are enacting agricultural policies that singularly focus on export crops or cash crops at the expense of Indigenous food crops that are critical to mitigating household food insecurity. Several UN agencies are reclaiming the deserts and degraded land to create farmlands (See: World Food Program, 2024). Land conversion may be critical; however, it does not speak authoritatively to the vast stretches of arable native lands being appropriated by foreign nationals, corporations, private companies and financial institutions in developing countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, an estimated 40 million hectares of arable land were appropriated from local farmers, thereby entrenching displacement and dispossession policies (Friesen, 2017; Laltaika & Askew, 2021). In settler colonial states such as the Americas and Australia, Indigenous people have lost control over 99% of their base lands (Farrell et al., 2021). Land dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people deprive the people of relying on their land to grow, nurture and develop their food systems.

The African Orphaned Crops Consortium has published a list of orphaned crops [here](#) for interested readers to explore. Such a roster of orphaned indigenous crops exists in most settler countries, such as Canada. There is, however, an increasing recognition that using traditional, neglected, Indigenous, or underutilized crops can reduce food production uncertainties. Nonetheless, tabling claims for research funding and promotion of these crops can become radical, especially since affording the orphaned crops a full-scale market status may require exposing and reversing appropriated native lands to marginal Indigenous farmers.

The Indigenous crops are "orphaned" because they are neglected, excluded from the neoliberal markets, and receive less research and innovation funds to improve their qualities (Tadele, 2019; El-Bilali, 2020). Despite all efforts to save orphaned food crops for Indigenous peoples, these crops are not making their way into the international markets for historical reasons already linked to colonial-era marginalization. The orphaned crops are framed as less resilient to drought, flooding, extreme temperatures, vulnerable to diseases and pests and are considered to be lower in productivity (Tadele, 2019). However, these crops are extremely vital and have thrived in the native lands where they are grown because they are staple - providing the foundation of nutrition in a slew of traditional or cultural food systems; they are a source of income for families and communities, and, above all, these crops are adapted to the environment in which they are grown and provide a genetic reserve that could help enhance the quality of other crops. Most Indigenous foods classified as orphaned crops are grown in Africa, Asia and South America (Caselli-Mechaels, 2015). It is no wonder that these geographies have been scenes of intense colonial exploitation over centuries.

Table 2: Examples of Indigenous Neglected Orphaned Crops

Example of Orphaned Food Crops	The Native Adaptive Lands
Millet (Small, seeded grass, high in magnesium – muscles and nerve function)	India, Nigeria and Mali
Cowpea (Rich in amino acids)	Nigeria and Niger
Pigeonpea (Legume high in protein and fibre, great for intercropping)	India, Myanmar, Malawi, Uganda
Cassava (Third most important source of calories after rice and maize)	Nigeria, Thailand, Brazil, Indonesia, Uganda
Mango, Guava, Sorghum, etc	Grown all over Africa, Asia, and Latin America

Source: African Consortium of Orphaned Crops (N.D)

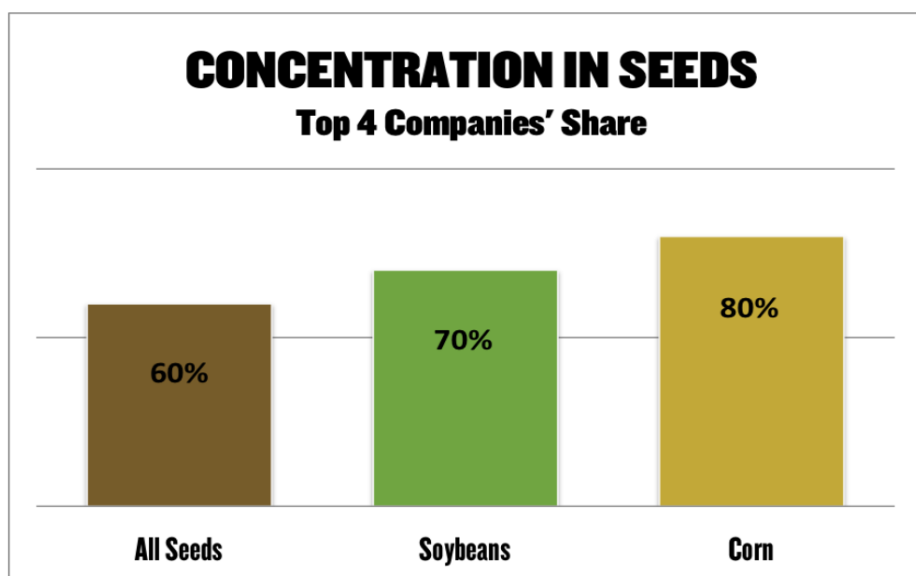
From Colonialism to Corporate Neoliberalism.

One of the central themes in this chapter is that neoliberalism has built its impetus on the colonial infrastructure to quickly secure itself prominence in shaping the global markets. In its wake, Winslow (in press) argues that neoliberalism has firmly established market dominance by permanently marginalizing those goods and services deemed unfit for the market. The strong market mentality comes with an appropriation of rights and autonomy of Indigenous peoples of the world. The market is quickly secured as a commonsense structure, a presence whose facts and imperatives are accepted universally and no longer subject to critical discussion and intellectual interrogation (Winslow, in press -2025). Thus, the marginalization of Indigenous food crops led to the loss of Indigenous food sovereignty and land rights with a profound impact. The loss of food sovereignty implies changing diets to conventional diets championed by neoliberal policies (Otero et al., 2018; Otero et al, 2021); undermining local productivity, thereby sliding people into landlessness and poverty; and creating dependency on foreign donations, handouts or demeaning livelihood measures (Friesen, 2017; Werner, 2019). Ad hoc food safety measures, such as food banks and food stamps, undermine food autonomy.

To further marginalize Indigenous food crops, corporations have embarked on seed governance schemes intended to strengthen their control over food crops. Seeds have undergone scientific adulteration in their DNA under the pretext of enhancing their resistance to certain pests, diseases, and environmental conditions, reducing spoilage and resistance to chemical treatments (Basu, 2007; Raman, 2017). Genetically modified seeds have many hindrances to Indigenous farming. Besides marginalizing Indigenous food crops further, it also limits the participation of Indigenous farmers on Indigenous land due to the costs involved in procuring and caring for these crops. Genetically modified seeds are inscribed with a terminator gene, which means the seeds cannot grow. Farmers must procure seeds from seed corporations each farming season – such practices affirm corporate capture of food production. Additionally, these seeds are known to contaminate the soil, thereby rendering the land unproductive unless fertilizers are applied.

Fertilizers and genetically modified seeds are costly, requiring large-scale farming to take advantage of economies of scale, which are beyond the remit of Indigenous peoples (Farm Aid, 2014).

Farm Aid, an organization that supports farmers in America through fundraising activities, has raised concerns over genetically modified seeds. The first concern is that control of these seeds is concentrated in the hands of four corporations — Bayer, Corteva, ChemChina, and Limagrain — which control more than 50% of the world's seeds. The same companies dominate the global food supply and markets. Four multinational agrochemical firms — Corteva, ChemChina, Bayer, and BASF — now control over 60 percent of global seed sales. Farmer Aid further enumerates that for certain crops, the market is even more concentrated under Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, and Dow — owning 80% of the corn and 70% of the soybean market.

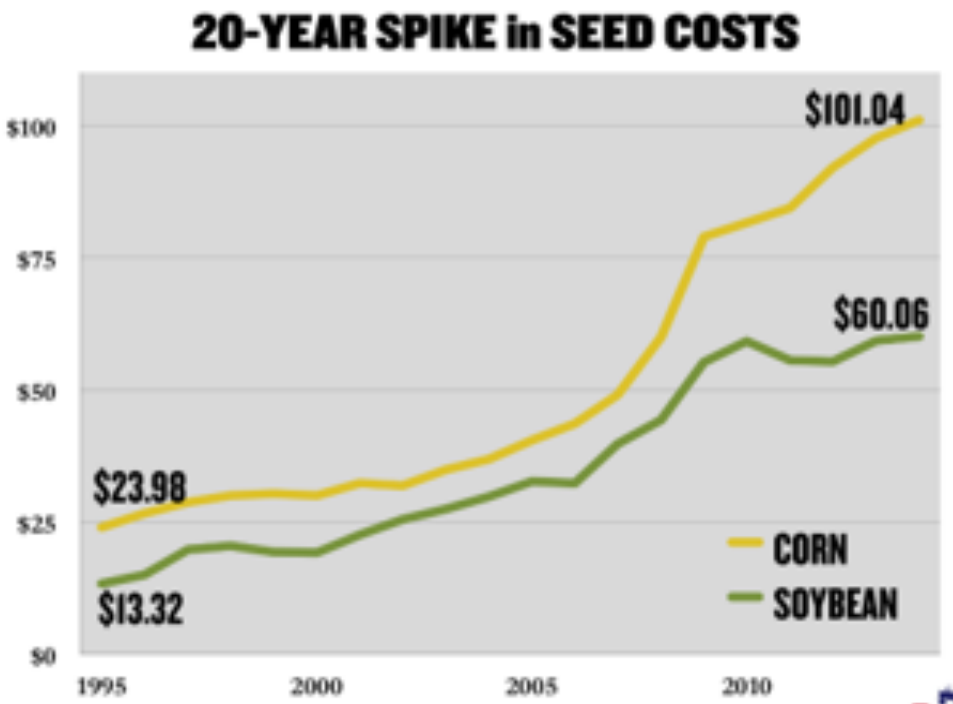


Graph 1: Concentration in seed control under four top seed corporations.
Source: Farm Aid (2016).

Genetically modified seeds are quite expensive for small-scale rural Indigenous farmers, thereby entrenching market exclusion and food insecurity for the small-holding farmer households. The US Department of Agriculture documented a sporadic price rise in genetically modified seeds between 1990 and 2020 (USDA, 2023). According to the USDA report, the price of GM seeds for crops like corn, soybeans, and cotton increased by an average of 463%, while the price of all seeds under corporate control increased by 270% between 1990-2020. The USDA states that the average price of GMO corn seeds in the U.S. is \$250 per bag, compared to \$150 for non-GMO corn seeds. Most important for readers is to note that the food industry is very lucrative and is highly regulated by Western powers through various foreign policies that enforce a monopoly. The Food and Agriculture (FAO) report 2023, entitled “*Food Outlook – Biannual report on global food markets,*” estimates the global food industry to be worth US\$1.93 trillion in 2023. This is an increase by 1.5% expansion of the global food market’s net worth from 2022, having risen by 11 percent in 2022 and 18 percent in 2021 when the world was grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (FAO, 2023). The global food system refers to a gamut of inputs, activities and outputs that support various phases of production, distribution and consumption of foods

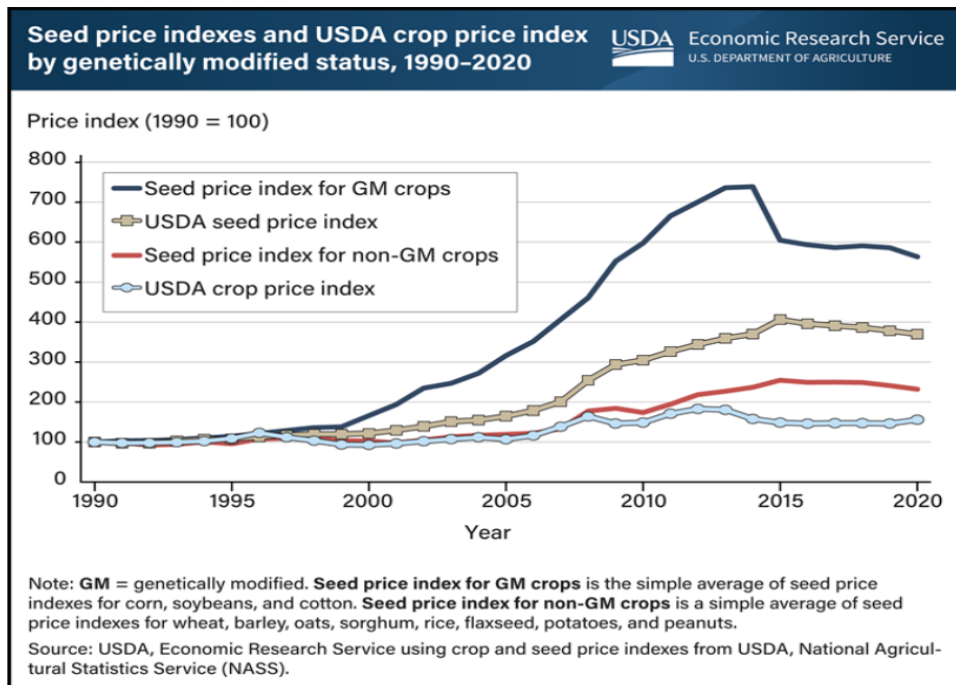
(Eriksen, 2008). Core food systems activities of interest to corporate capture through financialization include production, processing, distribution, storage, and retailing. Keenan et al. (2023) studied the growing influence of financial actors and institutions through capitalist systems. Keenan and colleagues describe how these activities have concentrated power over the food industry in the hands of corporations in profound ways that inequitably shape the ownership and geographies of the food industry. Accordingly, the corporations have focused on financialization for both short and long-term gains, entering into mergers to widen their financial influence and control over shareholder values (Keenan et al., 2023). Despite all these efforts of commercializing, financializing and controlling the global and local food systems, the industry has demonstrated a failure to feed humanity equally, fairly and sustainably.

Graph 2: Illustration of genetically modified seed cost spikes in ten years.



Source: Farm Aid (2016).

Figure 1: US Department of Agriculture data showing how fast GMO seed costs have risen faster than other non-GMO seeds in the US from 1990 – 2020.



Sources: USDA (2023)

Reproduced with written permission from USDA.

MOUNTING RESISTANCE IN THE PLATE – A SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH

Box 2: Key Concepts covered in this section

Food sovereignty is a people's right to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, as well as the right to define their own food and agricultural systems.

Food justice ensures the right of all people to have access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food by addressing underlying structural inequities within the food system which create insecurity and injustice. [Here Just transition](#)

Food security is the right of all people, at all times, to have access to healthy and nutritious food.

Source: Organic BC (2025).

What is food security, food justice and food sovereignty? There is an urgency to resist the obliteration of Indigeneity under neoliberalism by emphasizing food justice and reclaiming food sovereignty. Resistance should be mounted at various points in the chain of food systems, at production (conditions under which food production is organized to exclude Indigenous foods), distribution (the forces involved in dominating supplies of specific non-Indigenous foods), consumption and disposal of food waste (how food is framed in terms of modern neoliberal diet) and disposal of food wastes (Harvey, 2021). When developing strategies to interrupt the capitalist production cycle, it is crucial to identify these stages as they incorporate mechanisms that marginalize, devalue, and overlook Indigenous food values. The institutionalized exclusion of Indigenous foods over time has perpetuated the loss of food sovereignty, thereby transiting Indigenous people to rely on disease-causing neoliberal diets (Glasgow & Schrecker, 2016;

Schorb, 2022). While scholars like Navarro (2007) attribute the root of widespread social inequalities generally to neoliberal policies, Navarro's class analysis remains very salient in this discussion.

For Navarro (2007), neoliberalism is a class alliance moderated through the politics and ideology of the dominant class in both developed and developing countries. Thus, neoliberal policies are class-determined policies that have led to inequalities in growth in income and well-being for the dominant societal class. Navarro argues that to illuminate this inherent class nature of neoliberalism, scholars have to study class structure, class power, and class struggles whose domineering impact has adulterated state actions against Indigeneity. In the same vein, Waldmueller (2015) ascertains that most formerly colonized societies have conformed to practices of deregulation, privatization and trade liberalization at their own peril. Consequently, developing countries are enduring poverty, food insecurity and unsustainable ecosystems amid the wealth they produce. The cumulative effects of neoliberal policies are enduring in generating profound disparities in wealth distribution, leading to a high concentration of power in the capitalist class. In other words, the so-called free market, which is the dominant societal institution, has brought the convergence of class and wealth in an unprecedented manner (Waldmueller, 2015; Pfeffer & Waitkus, 2021).

The global inequities in the distribution of wealth and privileges constitute social justice issues that concern everyone. Neoliberal policies have systematically worked against Indigenous peoples whose organizational capabilities in agriculture, trade, land use, and defence remain marginalized, devalued, and underdeveloped through centuries of injustices inherent in colonialism and neocolonialism. A social justice approach, therefore, strives to illuminate and recognize these actions with an imperative for remedial actions. Social justice frameworks concern themselves with social inequities and how they are produced, reproduced and sustained in society. For Bell (2016), social justice is both a goal and a process, a goal in that it emphasizes a full and equitable participation of people from all social groups in a society where their needs are shaped, contested, and resolved. A process in that social justice demands a democratic and participatory indulgence of society, cognizant of human diversity and group differences, inclusive and affirming of human agencies and capacity for collaboration.

Social justice principles and frameworks envision equitable distribution of opportunities and resources in ecologically sustainable ways. As Rawls (2001) posits, invoking social justice carries the imperative of addressing actions that are not just. Of major concern is paying heed to marginalization and subjugation of disadvantaged cultures and groups from being fairly treated, represented and afforded recognition, and respect for their diversity and societal resources. Critical for this matter of illuminating the systematic marginalization and Indigenous food crops and family practices from the free market, social justice approaches would dictate that we confront and address the class inequalities and societal institutional processes, patterns, and practices that structure inequalities in social relations to create and enhance social exclusions. As Waldmueller (2015) recommends.

There is thus an urgent need for national and international institutions to open up and engage in profound dialogues with different approaches, languages, cultures even religions, to create the space for discussions of reparations for historical injustices and, eventually, to alter the colonial matrix of power by first acknowledging, and second combating, racial, sexist and knowledge-related hierarchies everywhere (Waldmueller, 2015, p. 297)

Thus, critical and urgent actions need to be taken to strengthen Indigenous food rights and resist the regimes of neoliberal diets. However, for all these to happen, a lot more needs to be done. Picking from Raphael (2015), the decision on how food should be produced, distributed, consumed and disposed is steeped in politics. Invariably, the relationship between economics and politics is intrinsic and self-reinforcing, such that transnational corporations have control over global economies and therefore control jurisdictional and global political processes. Recognizing and propelling Indigenous rights to indigenous foods requires onboarding the materiality of the Indigenous marginalization into the mainstream discourses and narratives. Constructing such a discourse requires both politics and economics, such that where marginalization is depoliticized, it gets politicized, and where politicization of Indigenous marginalization has led to problematization of Indigeneity, active depoliticization is undertaken. However, politicization and depoliticization are proactive processes that require social mobilization and striking strategic alliances with left-leaning social formations that wield power and economic advantage. The penultimate aim is for indigeneity to reassert itself by participating, as active ingredients, in smashing the pillars of exploitative capitalism in modern society.

Supporting Orphaned Crops Consortia

Current efforts are underway to support Indigenous food crops. Indigenous crops offer a great prospect because their seeds, when not biologically tinkered with, can reproduce, supporting farmers not to depend on seed corporations for their next farming cycle. Indeed, in those seeds, when well bred, one can raise a forest within a short length of time to avert hunger. There is some hope in Africa that the African Union is working with the African Orphaned Crops Consortia (AOCC) to integrate orphaned crops into the African food systems. The organization is embarking on sequencing, assembling and annotating the genomes of 101 traditional African food crops, to facilitate their genetic improvement and survival (AOCC, 2024). AOCC is incorporating African orphaned crops to address malnutrition and hidden hunger in Africa. Moreover, these crops are not only nutritious, but they also have medicinal values, rich in vitamins, essential minerals and other micronutrients (AOCC, 2024).

Several organizations researching Roots, Tubers, and Bananas (RTB) are collaborating under the RTB partnerships (CGIAR, 2024). The RTB partnership collaboration is led by the [International Potato Center](#) (CIP), working jointly with Bioversity International, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the [International Institute of Tropical Agriculture](#) (IITA), and the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD). The RTB includes a growing number of research and development partners. These research institutions are established in the industrial Western countries with vested interest in “westernizing” or “adopting” orphaned crops for potential appropriation. The science targeting Indigenous crops is a ritual of passage, production of a Eurocentric hierarchy of knowledge to alter the genetics of Indigenous crops and make them alien to native lands and candidate to the markets. Through western science, these “orphaned crops” are individually “qualified” through enhancement and alteration of the genetic components of the seeds to meet both corporate and neoliberal market conditions. This is an act of replacing the Indigeneity of crops with Europeanization. CGIAR reports an annual research portfolio of just over US\$900 million a year, with more than 9,000 staff working in 89 developing countries around the world. The investment in Roots, Tubers, and Cassava is not a bad idea; however, as Waldmueller (2015) notes, it is the “westernizing” or “Europeanizing” of indigenous crops for

profit by asserting a hierarchy of scientific knowledge that further alienates the “enhanced” crops from their Indigenous roots.

Conclusion

This chapter applied a materialist/structuralist political economy to explore the marginalization, devaluation and suppression of Indigeneity in the neoliberal marketplace. The mainstay of the chapter is that Indigeneity is at threat because most of the food crops that should sustain it are on the verge of extinction. By tracing colonial footprints, we explored how the racist colonial modes of production systematically institutionalized marginalization and devaluing of Indigeneity for the exotic. In other words, we enumerated the mechanisms through which colonial agriculture policy focused on export/commercial agriculture over local food crop production. Export agriculture entailed arable land appropriation, internment of indigenous to reserves, imposing ridiculous colonial taxes, forced appropriation of labour, and exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the colonial money economy, thereby underdeveloping rural and Indigenous crops farming. The colonial Agriculture policies further triggered rural to urban migration, depriving Indigenous farmers of the labour needed for Indigenous farming and other undertakings. The chapter then argues that colonial policies, particularly agricultural policies, needed to be ceded. Neoliberalism thus picked it up and perpetuated it, through its politics, wealth accumulation patterns and policies that undermined, devalued and alienated indigeneity from the liberal market. Identifying how neoliberal policies have generated many social inequalities and inequities through the failures of the market to address food insecurity, we use current statistics as proof. While the pending extinction of Indigenous crops is critical for food security, we established that the aim of the liberal market is not to solve food insecurity, but rather to generate profits. As such, the food industry the unequal control over the production and distribution of food is mirrored by the unequal accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of multinational corporations, individuals and governments that control capital flow and define both what is food and the food market. Marginalization and devaluing of Indigenous food crops from the public domain (including research and training funds) calls for action because it is an affront to Indigenous survival, culture, civilization, and identities. All forms of inequities in society are a social injustice and we mobilize global responses within the social justice movement. Strengthening Indigenous rights to ancestral or native land means advocating for Indigeneity as a fundamental human right and Europeanization as an abrogation of Indigenous rights. Governments should be mobilized to direct significant research funds and training to save the orphaned Indigenous crops from becoming extinct. Welfare states in Europe arose from organized social movements. Similarly, Indigenous peoples’ movements could engage political processes and assert their foods and dietary practices in the marketplace as active competitors rather than passive consumers.

References

- African Orphaned Crops Consortium (2024). *Healthy and Prosperous Africa through Nutritious Local African Crops and Trees*. Retrieved <https://africanorphancrops.org/>
- Albritton, R. (2009). *Let them eat junk: How capitalism creates hunger and obesity*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring.

- Alston, J. M., Chalfant, J. A., & Pardey, P. G. (1993). *Structural adjustment in OECD agriculture: Government policies and technical change*. Research in Agriculture and Applied Economics
- Basu, A. K., & Qaim, M. (2007). On the adoption of genetically modified seeds in developing countries and the optimal types of government intervention. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 89(3), 784-804.
- Bell, L. A. (2016). Theoretical foundations for social justice education. In *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 3-26). Routledge.
- Bernards, N. (2021). The World Bank, Agricultural Credit, and the Rise of Neoliberalism in Global Development. *New Political Economy*, 27(1), 116–131
- Bettache, K., Chiu, C. Y., & Beattie, P. (2020). The merciless mind in a dog-eat-dog society: neoliberalism and the indifference to social inequality. *Current Opinion in Behavioural Sciences*, 34, 217-222.
- El-Bilali, H. (2020). Orphan crops in Burkina Faso and Niger: a systematic review. CABI Reviews, (2020).
- Bjornlund, V., Bjornlund, H., & van Rooyen, A. (2022). Why food insecurity persists in sub-Saharan Africa: A review of existing evidence. *Food Security*, 14(4), 845-864.
- Caselli-Mechels, L. (2015). “Orphaned Crops”: What are they, why they matter, and what is being done
- Coburn, D. (2004). Beyond the income inequality hypothesis: class, neo-liberalism, and health inequalities. *Social science & medicine*, 58(1), 41-56
- Coca, E. (2021). Food procurement in post-neoliberal countries: examples from South America. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 10(2), 275-295.
- Concerns Worldwide US (2014). *World Hunger Facts: What you need to know in 2024*. [World hunger facts: What you need to know in 2024 \(and 2025\)](#)
- Conijn, J. G., Bindraban, P. S., Schröder, J. J., & Jongschaap, R. E. E. (2018). Can our global food system meet food demand within planetary boundaries? *Agriculture, ecosystems & environment*, 251, 244-256.
- Counihan, C. M. (2018). *The anthropology of food and body: Gender, meaning and power*. Routledge.
- Dietler, M., & Hayden, B. (Eds.). (2010). *Feasts: archaeological and ethnographic perspectives on food, politics, and power*. University of Alabama Press.
- Ericksen, P. J. (2008). Conceptualizing food systems for global environmental change research. *Global environmental change*, 18(1), 234-245.
- Demi, S. M. (2014). *African indigenous food crops: Their roles in combating chronic diseases in Ghana*. Master’s thesis submitted to the Department of Social Justice Education and the School of the Environment of the University of Toronto, Canada.
- Farm Aid (2024). GMOs – Top five concerns for family farmers. Retrieved <https://www.farmaid.org/issues/gmos/gmos-top-5-concerns-for-family-farmers/>
- Farrell, J., Burow, P. B., McConnell, K., Bayham, J., Whyte, K., & Koss, G. (2021). Effects of land dispossession and forced migration on Indigenous peoples in North America. *Science*, 374(6567), eabe4943
- Friesen, L. D. (2017). The failures of neoliberal food security and the food sovereignty alternative. *USURJ: University of Saskatchewan Undergraduate Research Journal*, 4(1).
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2023. *Food Outlook – Biannual report on global food markets*. Food Outlook, June 2023. Rome.

- Food and Agriculture Organization (2001). World Food Summit, 1996 and State of Food Insecurity Report: FAO, Rome.
- Gálvez, A. (2018). *Eating NAFTA: trade, food policies, and the destruction of Mexico*. Univ of California Press.
- Glasgow, S., & Schrecker, T. (2016). The double burden of neoliberalism? Noncommunicable disease policies and the global political economy of risk. *Health & place*, 39, 204-211.
- Global Hunger Index (2024). *How gender justice can advance climate resilience and zero hunger*. Retrieved from [2024.pdf](#)
- Harvey, D (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press
- Harvey, M. (2021). The political economy of health: Revisiting its Marxian origins to address 21st century health inequalities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(2), 293-300.
- Jarosz, L. (2011). Defining world hunger: scale and neoliberal ideology in international food security policy discourse. *Food, culture & society*, 14(1), 117-139.
- Julier, A. P. (2004). Entangled in our meals: Guilt and pleasure in contemporary food discourses. *Food, Culture & Society*, 7(1), 13-21.
- Keenan, L., Monteath, T., & Wójcik, D. (2023). Hungry for power: Financialization and the concentration of corporate control in the global food system. *Geoforum*, 147, 103909.
- Kloppenborg, Jack. (2005). *First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology*. Bibliovault OAI Repository, the University of Chicago Press.
- Knezevic, I., Hunter, H., Watt, C., Williams, P., & Anderson, B. (2014). Food insecurity and participation: A critical discourse analysis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 11(2), 230-245.
- Komakech, M & Raphael, D. (2021). Tackling Health Inequalities in Africa by Building Upon International Experiences (Ch. 16). In Raphael, D., Kapalanga, J., & Meunier, Y. (Eds.). *Perspectives on International Research on Science in Africa*, 247 – 265.
- Komakech, DC M (In Print, 2025). An overview of social determinants of health in Africa. In Bryant, T. [Ed]. *The Handbook of Social Determinants of Health*. Edgars.
- Laltaika, E. I., & Askew, K. M. (2021). Modes of dispossession of Indigenous lands and territories in Africa. In Gabbert, E. C., Gebresenbet, F., Galaty, J. G., & Schlee, G. (Eds.). *Lands of the future: anthropological perspectives on pastoralism, land deals and tropes of modernity in Eastern Africa*. (Vol. 23). Berghahn Books.
- Lawrence, G., Lyons, K., & Wallington, T. (Eds.). (2010). *Food security, nutrition and sustainability*. London: Earthscan.
- Leach, M., Nisbett, N., Cabral, L., Harris, J., Hossain, N., & Thompson, J. (2020). Food politics and development. *World development*, 134, 105024.
- Lele, U. (1990). "Structural adjustment, agricultural development and the poor: some lessons from the Malawian experience." *World Development* 18(9); 1207-1219.
- Mabhaudhi, T., Chimonyo, V. G. P., Hlahla, S., Massawe, F., Mayes, S., Nhamo, L., & Modi, A. T. (2019). Prospects of orphan crops in climate change. *Planta*, 250, 695-708.
- McCormack, F. (2011). Levels of indigeneity: the Maori and neoliberalism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17(2), 281-300.
- McMichael, P. (2006). Peasant prospects in the neoliberal age. *New Political Economy*, 11(3), 407-418.
- McMichael, P. (2013). *Food regimes and agrarian questions*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Mendly-Zambo, Z., & Raphael, D. (2019). Competing discourses of household food insecurity in Canada. *Social Policy and Society*, 18(4), 535-554.
- Meigs, A. (1987). Food as a cultural construction. *Food and foodways*, 2(1), 341-357.

- Nestle, M. (2019). How neoliberalism ruins traditional diets and health. *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, 7(8), 595.
- Online Etymology Dictionary (2024). *Indigenous*.
[Indigenous | Etymology of Indigenous by etymonline](#)
- Ostry, J. D., Loungani, P., & Furceri, D. (2016). Neoliberalism: Oversold? Instead of delivering growth, some neoliberal policies have increased inequality, in turn jeopardizing durable expansion. *Finance & development*, 53(2), 38-42.
- Otero, G., Gürcan, E. C., Pechlaner, G., & Liberman, G. (2018). Food security, obesity, and inequality: Measuring the risk of exposure to the neoliberal diet. *Journal of agrarian change*, 18(3), 536-554.
- Otero, G. (2021). The neoliberal diet. In *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies* (pp. 556-560). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Pfeffer, F. T., & Waitkus, N. (2021). The wealth inequality of nations. *American sociological review*, 86(4), 567-602.
- Raphael, D. (2025). *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspectives*. (4th Ed) Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Raphael, D. (2015). Beyond policy analysis: the raw politics behind opposition to healthy public policy. *Health Promotion International*, 30(2), 380-396.
- Raman, R. (2017). The impact of Genetically Modified (GM) crops in modern agriculture: A review. *GM Crops & Food*, 8(4), 195-208.
- Rampalli, K. K., Blake, C. E., Frongillo, E. A., & Montoya, J. (2023). Why understanding food choice is crucial to transform food systems for human and planetary health. *BMJ Global Health*, 8(5), e010876.
- Rawls, J. (2001). *Justice as fairness: A restatement*. Harvard University Press.
- Research Program on Roots Tubers and Bananas [CGIAR] (2024). *Partners*. Retrieved <https://www.rtb.cgiar.org/partners/>
- Schorb, F. (2022). Fat as a neoliberal epidemic: Analyzing fat bodies through the lens of political epidemiology. *Fat Studies*, 11(1), 70-82.
- Sundbo, D. I. C. (2013). Local food: the social construction of a concept. *Acta Agriculturae Scandinavica, Section B–Soil & Plant Science*, 63(sup1), 66-77.
- Sweeney, K. W. (2017). *The aesthetics of food: the philosophical debate about what we eat and drink*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Tadele, Z. (2019). Orphan crops: their importance and the urgency of improvement. *Planta*, 250, 677-694.
- Taylor, C. (2010). Foucault and the Ethics of Eating. *Foucault Studies*, 9(1), 71-88.
- van Beusekom, M. (2021). Colonial Agricultural Development Schemes. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*.
- Yates, J. S., & Bakker, K. (2014). Debating the 'post-neoliberal turn' in Latin America. *Progress in human geography*, 38(1), 62-90.
- Waldmueller, J. M. (2015). Agriculture, knowledge and the 'colonial matrix of power': approaching sustainabilities from the Global South. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 11(3), 294-302.
- Walter, M. (2010). Market forces and Indigenous resistance paradigms. *Social Movement Studies*, 9(2), 121-137.
- Werner, M., Contreras, P. I., Mui, Y., & Stokes-Ramos, H. (2019). International trade and the

- neoliberal diet in Central America and the Dominican Republic: Bringing social inequality to the center of analysis. *Social science & medicine*, 239, 112516.
- Winlow, S. (Upcoming). *Morbid symptoms: edging towards the end of the neoliberal age*. In Bryant, T. (Eds) [In print, 2025]. *The Handbook of Social Determinants of Health*. Edgar Publishers.
- Wispelwey, B., Tanous, O., Asi, Y., Hammoudeh, W., & Mills, D. (2023). Because its power remains naturalized: Introducing the settler colonial determinants of health. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11, 1137428.
- World Food Program (2024). *A global food crisis*. Retrieved [A global food crisis | World Food Programme](#)
- World Food Program (2024). *Feeding millions- how land restoration can turn around Africa's Sahel*. retrieved '[Feeding millions' – how land restoration can turn around Africa's Sahel | World Food Programme](#)