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## LAND SOVEREIGNTY AS A COUNTER-HEGEMONY AGAINST THE CORPORATE FOOD REGIME

### *KEDAULATAN TANAH SEBAGAI KONTRA HEGEMONI MELAWAN REZIM KORPORASI PANGAN*

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**Abstract:** The global food regime has failed and led to a food crisis. However, food regime can transform from time to time in order to dominate the food system globally. The current food regime is also known as the corporate food regime. In this period, capital accumulation reorganization is no longer centered in the state, but in multinational corporations. Therefore, there needs to be a framework to address the transformation in order to provide an effective alternative food system, especially for the Global South. This study elaborates on how land sovereignty initiated by *La Via Campesina* can be a counter-hegemony against the corporate food regime to get out of the crisis of capital accumulation through massive land investments, especially in the Global South. Moreover, this paper refers to Friedmann and McMichael's (1989) concept about the food regime and examines such conditions by using Gramsci's (1971) ideas on hegemony. In conclusion, the land sovereignty concept can be considered to be an effective alternative framework to deal with the hegemony of neoliberal globalism for five reasons, namely: 1) the possibility of using various property rights systems; 2) the possibility to be implemented through land reform redistribution policy with several adjustments; 3) the probability to be a common platform because the concept recognizes land not only as a resource but also as culture and as a landscape; 4) the probability to be connected with other campaigns; and 5) the probability to be connected with political work of the broader working community globally.

**Keywords:** the corporate food regime, neoliberal globalism, the land sovereignty, hegemony

**Intisari:** Rezim korporasi pangan telah gagal dan memicu terjadinya krisis pangan. Meskipun demikian, rezim pangan dapat bertransformasi dari waktu ke waktu untuk menghegemoni sistem pangan secara global. Rezim pangan saat ini juga dikenal sebagai rezim korporasi pangan. Dalam periode ini, reorganisasi akumulasi kapital tidak lagi berpusat pada negara, tetapi pada korporasi-korporasi multinasional. Oleh karena itu perlu adanya sebuah kerangka untuk menjawab transformasi tersebut sehingga mampu menawarkan sebuah sistem pangan alternatif yang efektif, khususnya bagi negara-negara Global Selatan. Kajian ini mengelaborasi bagaimana kedaulatan tanah yang diinisiasi oleh *La Via Campesina* dapat menjadi kontra hegemoni melawan rezim korporasi pangan untuk bisa keluar dari krisis akumulasi kapital akibat investasi-investasi tanah yang masif terutama di Global Selatan. Tulisan ini merujuk pada konsep dari Friedmann dan McMichael (1989) mengenai rezim pangan dan mengkaji beberapa situasi dengan menggunakan ide Gramsci mengenai hegemoni. Kesimpulannya, konsep kedaulatan tanah dapat dipertimbangkan sebagai sebuah alternatif kerangka yang efektif untuk menghadapi hegemoni globalisme neoliberal untuk 5 alasan, yaitu: dimungkinkannya menggunakan berbagai sistem hak kepemilikan, kemungkinan untuk diimplementasikan melalui kebijakan land reform redistributif dengan sejumlah penyesuaian, peluang untuk menjadi platform umum karena konsep tanah tidak lagi hanya dipahami sebagai sumberdaya, tetapi sebagai budaya dan lanskap, peluang untuk menghubungkannya dengan kampanye yang lain serta kerja politik pada tataran kerja komunitas luas secara global.

**Kata kunci:** rezim korporasi pangan, globalisme neoliberal, kedaulatan tanah, hegemoni

## A. Introduction

The corporate food regime is the face of the neoliberal globalism project that promotes liberalization of the agricultural sector by pushing agro-export globally and dictating countries in the South to follow the North's scenarios and interests. The scenarios are optimizing food trade liberalization, eradicating the protection of the agricultural sector, and implementing intellectual property protections. This neoliberal project scheme operates through mechanisms of structural adjustment and WTO's rules. Moreover, the corporate food regime, according to Araghi (2009) in McMichael (2012), is a reorganization to deal with the global capital accumulation crisis. Furthermore, as a unit of food regime, its restructuring is expressed through land grabbing (McMichael, 2012).

In the name of 'food and energy security', large-scale capitals capture control of large-scale lands, and shift the land use, especially in the global South. Oxfam International (2012) reports that, between 2000 and 2010, foreign investors took over land in poor and developing countries as large as London every six days. In the same vein, GRAIN (2016) documents that 491 recent large-scale land grabs cases cover nearly 30 million hectares of land in 78 countries.

This essay not only provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge, but also makes an important contribution to the field of social transformation, especially on agrarian reform issues. The agrarian (land) reform implementation, especially for developing countries, is essential to overcome the problem of poverty and inequality in general. In addition, Lipton (2009) argues that agrarian (land) reform, ultimately, is also expected to be able to address horizontal inequality, and mitigate 'poverties' in particular groups such as women, the rural, and the remote.

The qualitative approach was used in this essay to answer a central question namely, 'how can the land sovereignty acts as a counter-hegemony against the corporate food regime?' This approach offers an effective way of in-depth analysis of secondary sources that were used, such as textbooks,

journal articles, and organization websites. Furthermore, this research used three main concepts as the framework, namely land sovereignty (La Via Campesina, 2007), food regime (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989), and counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 1971).

This essay has been divided into four parts. Section 2, as background, describes the corporate food regime and its consequence on land grabbing. This part explores definition, history, and actors of the food regime. Section 3 presents the land sovereignty in detail. This section not only defines land sovereignty, but also describes the dynamics and contestation of the land sovereignty with other land tenure concepts. Section 4 specifically examines how the land sovereignty works as counter-hegemony against the corporate food regime. In conclusion, as a counter hegemony against the corporate food regime, the land sovereignty conceptualizes land, both individually and collectively, within social context reflecting the relationship between humans and the environment that must always be maintained as an ecological unit. To realize this, certain conditions are needed that support the implementation of land sovereignty positively, both at the state and society level.

## B. Background

There is a large volume of published studies describing the relation of land tenure with food security. Holden and Ghebru (2016), who conducted a research on the relationship between tenure security and food security, conclude that since access to land is an important indicator of achieving prosperity, the government should regulate specifically distribution of land in order to encourage welfare distribution. This statement is supported by Alwang et al. (2017) who proves that although poor farmers can adopt certain varieties, they are still hampered by their welfare if they have poor access to land.

However, there are few studies that specifically focus on food issues in a post-colonial perspective, and link them to the neoliberal development model that dominates globally today. The

study of Friedmann and McMichael (1989) about agriculture and the state system is an important milestone that reviews the issue of food into a comprehensive post-colonial perspective. They argue that the food regime is a series of structure of food production and consumption that has relevance to the history of political economy globally. Currently, the concept is used as an analytical tool to raise specific questions regarding governance and political-economic relations concerning food at the global level in certain periods. In addition, Borras and Franco (2012) also propose the concept of 'land sovereignty' as an analytical framework to understand the complexity of land issues, which can also become a worldwide political alternative platform today. For the purposes of this essay, land sovereignty encapsulated beyond land reform, which carries out restitution for people, and implement/ facilitate land redistribution initiatives and supporting policies such as reallocation of forest land, community-based forest management, and tenure reform (Borras and Franco, 2012). Accordingly, these two concepts, food regime and land sovereignty, were chosen as the framework of this study.

### **C. The Corporate Food Regime and its Current Revival**

As a reflection of the relationship and dynamics of global political economy, the food regime has certain periods until it reaches the phase of the corporate food regime. Lipietz's (1986) regulation theory significantly influenced the food regime concept that bases its analysis on the relationship of capital accumulation, and regulatory or governance centres, which always experience the process of growth, stability, crisis, and transition. The 'center of accumulation' and 'regulation' relate to the dependency theory, where there are peripheral countries that provide commodities for the core countries, and the core countries provide financial supports to the periphery countries (Dwiartama, 2016). Furthermore, these centers can change, so that the relationships within the structure also change.

The first food regime (the 1870s-1930s) is also

called the colonial project. This period was a representation of British hegemony in the global economy (Bernstein, 2015). McMichael (2009) explains that in order to ensure that the British 'workshop of the world' continued to operate, this food regime combined tropical colonial imports, and grains and livestock from settler countries to Europe. The first regime has two significant periods, namely: 'the settler-colonial food regime' in the 1870s to 1914s (Friedmann, 2004), and 'the diasporic food regime' in 1914s to late 1940s (Friedmann, 2005).

The settler-colonial food regime period, according to Friedmann and McMichael (1989), was a crucial period to the creation of a national economic system managed by independent countries that occurred after the metropolitan countries expanded their colonial formal space. As a result, new countries or settler states such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina emerged and became extensions of colonial empires (Dwiartama, 2016). Their relationships with European countries became the initial basis of the international system. They adopted a model of agricultural and industrial production, then ran it as an international division of labor system (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989).

The diasporic food regime period implemented the colonial trade monopoly which used political administration in colonial countries in order to integrate colonial export production into the metropolitan economy. In this period, global agriculture had new relationships with industry to facilitate international trade between settler countries and Europe. These new relationships are characterized by the launch of competitive trade through adjustment the complementary products to the climate and social organization, the industry relations with the market as a capitalist economic sector to separate agriculture, 'the complementarity between commercial sectors of industry and agriculture, which originated in international trade and remained dependent on it, was paradoxically internalized within nationally organized economies' (Friedmann and McMichael 1989, p. 102). In the end, the first food

regime began to weaken during the Great Depression and World War II. According to Dwiartama (2016), the weakening of the first food regime was also influenced by environmental degradation and the emergence of political movements in the colonies.

The second food regime (the 1950s-1970s) was a period of universalizing development projects in post-colonial countries where the United States became the center of accumulation and trade of food. This period was an illustration of the United States' hegemony in the post-war world economy (Bernstein, 2015). Developing countries were systematically directed to adopt the concepts and technology of the green revolution, institutionalize land reform for the market, and ensure market penetration into the countryside. According to Raynold et al. (1993) in McMichael (2009), when the universalization of the project was implemented coincided with a 'new transnational division of labor' in the agricultural sector for global commodities. Friedmann and McMichael (1989) explain that 'the new division of labor' operates in two ways, namely: expanding the influence of the state system into post-colonial countries (imports of wheat, especially from the United States production surplus, and reducing the tropical export market through state substitution imports by advanced-capitalists states), and the restructuring of the agricultural sector globally by agro-food capitals. In the 1970s, at the end of the cold war, the crisis of food and oil ended the glory of the second food regime (Dwiartama, 2016). However, food relations between the US and developing countries continue to take place, and at the same time, a new set of agro-food relationships emerged (Friedmann, 2005).

The third food regime (late 1980s-present) specifically acknowledged as 'the corporate food regime' (McMichael, 2009), and 'neoliberal globalism' (Bernstein, 2015). A number of scholars are still debating, whether the food third regime has taken place, and if it has, what are the forms (Dwiartama, 2016). This is acknowledged by McMichael (2009) that this theme is still on a debate. The main characteristic of the third food

regime is the implementing actor. In this period, accumulation is no longer centered in the state, but in multinational corporations. Hendrickson and Heffernan's (2002) study indicates that a few multinational companies control most of the resources and markets of food products through vertical integration of the global food agriculture system. Moreover, Friedmann (2005) explains that the third food regime integrates environmental elements into food governance. An example that we commonly encounter is ecolabel certification within the food commodities' supply chain (Dwiartama, 2016). Thus, another feature of the corporate food regime is the use of supra-state institutions, such as WTO, to regulate markets and properties that prioritize agribusiness. The regime also practices mercantilism, a legacy of the second food regime, through subsidies institutionalized by the WTO to stimulate agribusiness production and export cheap food (McMichael, 2005).

However, the neoliberal globalization approach to cheap-food triggers the global food crisis and harms food producers in the global South. McMichael (2015) argues this approach impacts on the instability of small-medium farmers, encouraging depeasantization and casualization of labors. The FAO (2011) reports that, during 2000-2004, prices of staple foods in many countries experienced an increase of at least 50%. In the third quarter of 2006, corn prices surged by 70% in a few months, and rice prices doubled in the first quarter of 2008. As a result, in 2009, one billion people in the world, especially women, were thought to experience malnutrition and hunger (McMichael, 2009).

The food (and energy) crisis is an indication of the capital accumulation crisis. Therefore, capital accumulation restructuring is immediately carried out by the control of large-scale land tenure, which then raises the land grabbing phenomenon. Moore (2010) assumes this because capital needs to translate its financial power into new productive investments, including cheap land in the global South. Furthermore, McMichael (2012) explains that land grabbing is a response to food prices that causes export bans and government

initiatives to maintain energy security, as well as speculation in food, energy, and land commodities as financial capital.

Land grabbing is not a new phenomenon. In this study, land grabbing is seen from a political economy perspective which is associated with the context of capital accumulation recovery as a response to the global food crisis. Borras et al. (2013) define land grabbing in the current context as the capturing of land (and other natural resources) in a variety of ways and involving capital-intensive, which often changes the usability orientation for extractive purposes such as food convergence, and energy.

For example, in Indonesia, on behalf of food and energy security, a megaproject called Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) was launched in 2010 targeting 1,282,833 hectares of land (Ito et al., 2014). The MIFEE attracted many investors, especially from the Gulf countries. Similarly, in Guatemala, around 2011, the Widdmans family with a loan of US \$ 32 million by the Bank of America's Integration Economic Central Bank, controlled 5,400 hectares of traditional land in the Polochic Valley for sugar production (Borras et al., 2013).

#### **D. How hegemony is operated**

Gramsci (1971) in Zembylas (2013) defines hegemony as a set of ideological practices for carrying out political leadership over the subaltern class by cultivating false consciousness. While counter-hegemony is a process and practice against hegemony, the ultimate goal is human liberation. Hence, hegemony can operate in two ways, namely transformative and expansive (Zembylas, 2013). Furthermore, Mouffe (1970) in Hastuti and Adian (2013) argue that the practice of transformative method tends to aim at reaching consensus or agreement that is passive and neutralizes antagonistic political forces. However, the expansive method is an active action by the dominant class to get approval through allying with hegemonic powers by using popular approach. In the context of land grabbing, the practice of hegemony uses both transformative and expansive

method. Although the main actor of the corporate food regime is the multinational corporation, it does not mean that there is no state role at all. Borras and Franco (2011) identify three state roles in the land grabbing process, namely to administer and govern, giving authority to "non-state space" in the name of development, and coercive and violence. Garcia's (2007) study has found that land grabbing can be done in various ways, such as by coercive and legal instruments. In detail, Hall et al. (2011) identifies forms of power to exclude people from their land, namely regulation, force, the market, and legitimation.

An effective means of legitimacy for hegemony is the knowledge that is often framed in certain discourses. Foucault (1980) in Dryzek (2013) argues that discourse is able to realize power through conditioning perceptions and values so that interests can be engineered and make it easier to organize individuals and groups. Currently, during the corporate food regime era, some discourse namely multiple crises of food, energy, climate, and finance, are commonly used in policy and political narratives to legitimate land grabbing (Borras et al., 2011). For instance, in 2010, a mega project in Indonesia, named Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) was diligently designed to make socially accepted. The project was framed in 'food and energy security' to legitimate land dispossession in the Merauke region (Ito et al., 2011).

As opposed to hegemony, according to Zembylas (2013), Gramsci (1971) conceptualizes the counter-hegemony movement. This counter's thesis illustrates Gramsci's reconstruction of the conception of the determination of the base-superstructure which can transform the base through praxis. The superstructure in here is the aspect of ideology (the area of cognition or consciousness) and the politics of actions or actions to seize power. An important note from Gramsci is the need for a new culture in order to break the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, before achieving changes in political social, through cultural, ideological, and intellectual leadership (Zembylas, 2013). Furthermore, Gramsci also conveyed the

necessity to establish an alliance system for counter-hegemony (Zembylas, 2013). Gramsci believes that the working class must pay attention to the various interests of the class and other social groups and find ways to bring together their interests to further gain production leadership (Huda, 2006). The way to integrate the leadership of a power group in civil society with leadership in production was called by Gramsci as 'historic block'. The main actor who can push the historic block and make hegemony are organic intellectuals. Kolakowski (1978) in Huda (2006) defines organic intellectuals as intelligentsia or educated classes that do not merely use scientific rules, but also use cultural languages to express real feelings and experiences of society (working class).

### E. Land sovereignty prospects

In resistance to neoliberal globalism hegemony, *La via Campesina*, an international peasant's movement organization declared the food sovereignty in 2007 and stated land sovereignty is a basic element of the food sovereignty. This element is a response to the agrarian crisis under the neoliberal project (McMichael, 2013), and a proposal to shift the framework of 'land reform' and 'land tenure security' which are considered to have too many limitations (Borras and Franco, 2013). 'Land reform' is essential to development, especially in the countryside, but this concept is insufficient to answer the current global land issues. On the other hand, the term 'land tenure security' has been seized in such a way by ruling classes and business groups, so that they lose the connotations that favor the poor.

*La via Campesina's* concept of land sovereignty was translated by Borras et al (2015) as 'the rights of working peoples, rural and urban, to have effective access to, control over and use of land, and live as a resource, space and territory' (p. 610).

Therefore, how can the concept of land sovereignty act as a counter-hegemony? Based on the explanation of Gramsci's (1971) theory above, counter-hegemony, at least, requires three basic conditions. The first condition is an alliance sys-

tem with other social groups. This alliance system is an attempt to get the approval of other social forces through the struggle of ideology in order to counter the hegemonic class that existed before. The concept of land sovereignty provides communication space with other social groups to then jointly challenging global hegemony. There are two points inside the land sovereignty concept that can be used as an entrance to building a strategic alliance. The first point is the subject of land sovereignty, who is 'working people', which reflects the spirit of solidarity and is not limited by administrative areas (rural, urban, national, and global) or sectoral (for example farmers, labors, fishermen, and indigenous communities). The second point is land sovereignty accommodates various property rights systems, such as communal, community, state, and private (Borras and Franco, 2012).

The second condition is the existence of organic intellectuals to build historic blocks. Organic intellectuals are intellectual groups that are not limited to certain professional groups, which have the role of thinking and directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. The concept of land sovereignty that is inclusive and grows from reality (action and reflection) of grassroots communities enables the emergence of educated groups organically. Currently, the topic of food sovereignty and land sovereignty are increasingly emerging, not only in movement activist circles but also in academic classes. In particular, this group is projected to translate the land sovereignty concept into particular contexts (time and space). They are also expected to criticize discourses that were deliberately created as a strategy of hegemony by the bourgeoisie. For example, land grabbing practices are framed on the reasons for development and food/energy security.

The third condition is strong organizations to carry out the two previous conditions. A collective awareness that has consolidated through the two previous conditions requires strong organization so that it can facilitate economic, political, intellectual, and moral goals. Also, a strong orga-

nization is needed to grow and manage the two conditions mentioned above. Although the concept of land sovereignty was originally conceived by *La via Campesina*, this concept is being to be adopted and campaigned by several civil society organizations and academic institutions. In addition, in December 2018, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution concluding the UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas which included land sovereignty (*La via Campesina*, 2008).

## F. Conclusion

The concept of food regime is an effective analytical tool to understand the transformation of food and agriculture from a political-economy perspective, or more specifically, from a post-colonial view. The food regime describes the dynamics of food as a relationship between production and consumption within the structure of the global political economy. The food regime is divided into three periods, namely the first food regime (1870s-1940s) or also known as 'the colonialism project', the second food regime (1950s-1970s) or also known as 'the developmentalism project', and third food regime (late 1980s - now) or also known as 'the corporate food regime'.

The current land dispossession or also known as land grabbing phenomenon is a consequence of capital accumulation restructuring as a result of the neoliberal globalism crisis in the agricultural and food sectors. This condition can also be referred to as the failure of the corporate food regime which is reflected by the global food crisis. The actor, as well as the main characteristic of the corporate food regime, is the multinational corporation. This neoliberal practice is facilitated and regulated by the WTO as a supra-state institution to ensure the market operates on the agenda. Mostly, the practice of land grabbing is covered in the frame of development and investment in food security. This situation is part of a hegemony that is intentionally built by neoliberal globalism.

The concept of land sovereignty can be an effective counter-hegemony in facing the corpo-

rate food regime. This concept is considered to be an effective alternative framework for dealing with the hegemony of neoliberal globalism for five reasons, namely: the enable to use of various property rights systems (such as communal, community, state and private), the enable to implement through a policy of redistribution of land reform with several adjustments, the enable to be a common platform (peasants, labour, and indigenous people) because the concept recognize land not only as a resource but also as culture and as a landscape, the enable to be connected with other campaigns and the political work of the broader working community globally (Borras and Franco, 2012). The land sovereignty concept can be promoted to challenge the hegemony strategy of neoliberal project which conducted by the third food regime. Also, land sovereignty can shift some concepts related to land and development such as 'land reform' and 'land tenure security'.

To sum up, the concept and implementation of land sovereignty must meet certain conditions so that the counter-hegemony can run effectively. The conditions include the involvement of alliance systems with other social groups, the existence of organic intellectuals to build historic blocks, and the participation of solid organizations to carry out the two previous conditions. In addition, as a global struggle concept, the technical tools for implementing land sovereignty should be formulated based on the context of time and area. Therefore, each organization and its supporting actors, within the logic of organic intellectuals, are expected to be able to operationalize land sovereignty according to the context. Ultimately, with the complete condition, the land sovereignty concept is the potential to conduct 'war of position' and 'war of movement' as Gramsci's theory.

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