Food (in)justice and social inequalities in vegetable and market garden production in Normandy, France

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

Adopting a class-based approach to the agricultural world, this article proposes a holistic analysis of agri-food justice, one that takes into account production as well as consumption. Empirical material is drawn from field work for a PhD thesis on the vegetable and market gardening supply chains in Normandy, France, including surveys and semi-directive interviews. The goal is to move beyond a binary, dominating-dominated perspective and to focus instead on how social inequalities create situations of food injustice. To this end, the first section describes the organisation of the vegetable and market gardening worlds into five social class fractions. Next, an analysis is provided of one fraction of vegetable growers, those experiencing 'incomplete bourgeoisification' (*embourgeoisement*), and how they are dominated by the agri-food senior executive. Agricultural alternatives have been developed to counter these forms of injustice but have at the same time structured new food inequalities in their turn. Finally, through the observation of fractions at the bottom of the agricultural social hierarchy, the paper considers how these same alternatives can also constitute resources against the employment insecurity suffered by the working classes.

Keywords Social classes · Inequalities · Food justice · Market gardening · Case studies · Normandy

Every year since the early 2000s,[1] in mid-August, a group of fruit and vegetable growers affiliated with the Movement for the Defence of Family Farmers (MODEF, for *Mouvement de défense des exploitants familiaux*) organise a combined demonstration and farmers' market in Paris and the Parisian suburbs. The event also

[1] « Opération du Modef contre les marges de la grande distribution», *Challenges*, 23/08/2007 [online]: https://www.challenges.fr/entreprise/operation-du-modef-contre-les-marges-de-la-grande-distribution_384093 (accessed 9/06/2021).

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attracts activists from the French Communist Party (PCF), which has historic ties to MODEF. The participants' objective is to denounce the 'abusive' profits taken by produce distributors and the unfair competition represented by imported produce grown with pesticides prohibited for use in France.[2] In place of these practices, MODEF and the PCF call for shorter supply chains and increased 'food patriotism', a way of countering the rise in supermarket prices that have made fruits and vegetables increasingly unaffordable for those on low or moderate incomes. This comes close to the idea of 'prices suitable for low-income households [made possible] by the … efficiencies gained in the terms of the cost of services' (Noël et al., 2020, p. 105). Each year, the event follows on the heels of a report on fruit and vegetable prices published by the Rural Families Association. These reports show that prices for fruits and vegetables have been increasing since 2007, to the point where the poorest households are unable to follow the nutritional guidelines for daily consumption of these foods.[3] Despite some short-term drops in prices, many fruits and vegetables remain very expensive.[4] Other groups have denounced the excessive profits taken by large supermarkets and other commercial practices that exacerbate high prices for end consumers, especially for organic foods.[5]

Civil-society actions like these point to the link between food access—a long-standing rallying cry of the food justice movement—and food system production dynamics. By focussing on vegetable production, emblematic within this field of study, participants are calling for a more holistic understanding of what may be termed 'agri-food justice' (Hochedez & Le Gall, 2016). The activism and analysis of these groups highlight the mechanisms of injustice that exist at the intermediate levels of the agri-food system. There are black boxes here (id., Darrot et al., 2020) that need to be examined more closely. While reference is often made to the role of major distributors and wholesalers, producers' cooperatives operating at the international level have received much less attention within the agri-food justice critique. In reality, however, the economic returns of vegetable farming and marketing gardening are in large part determined by 'the grouping of farmers into cooperatives', the increasingly international strategies of which expose growers to competition and to a loss of control over their prices and profits (Assens, 2013). The present article, based on research completed for a PhD thesis on field vegetable production and market gardening[6] in Normandy (Guillemin, 2020), describes a form of agri-food injustice experienced by vegetable farmers: their cultural and commercial domination by

[2] « Fruits et légumes contre le dumping sanitaire», *Ouest-France*, 19/08/2016; « Action fruits et légumes – Paris et banlieue», posted 20/07/2016 on the MODEF website: https://www.modef.fr/evenements/action-fruits-et-legumes-paris-et-banlieue/ (accessed 9/06/2021).

[3] Les fruits et légumes de plus en plus chers», 24/08/2016; « Fruits et légumes: les prix ont augmenté depuis un an», 24/08/2018; Bon F., « Le panier de fruits et légumes pèse lourd», *Ouest-France*, 27/08/2019.

[4] « Les prix des fruits et légumes ont baissé cet été», *Ouest-France*, 25/08/2017.

[5] « Bio: des tarifs trop élevés selon l'UFC-Que Choisir», *Ouest-France*, 20/08/2017.

[6] Field vegetable production is here defined as vegetables grown on a relatively large scale within rotations also featuring cereals and/or protein and oil-seed crops. Market gardening is defined as specialised vegetable production, typically on a smaller scale.

the salaried professionals who work for the agricultural organisations with which these farmers are affiliated (Repplinger, 2015), including agricultural co-ops.

The agricultural protests and demonstrations organised by the contemporary French Communist Party are limited in scope and not widely publicised, but they suggest a useful interrogation of the concept of agri-food justice based on inequalities of social class. By pursuing this suggestion, I intend to contribute to the re-emergence of Marxist analyses in France and to 'the rise of critical agrarian studies' in Anglophone scholarship (Morena, 2019, p. 9), while aligning these efforts with Gilles Laferté's call to reconsider the social stratification of agricultural operators (Laferté, 2021). There is a fine line, of course, 'between an activist perspective and a framework for scientific analysis' (Hochedez & Le Gall, 2016). To help negotiate this distinction, I draw on recent work on justice (Slocum et al., 2016) and food systems (Marie et al., 2020) that emphasise the extent to which various forms of 'alternative agriculture', including organic farming and direct-to-consumer marketing, are 'undemocratic', that is, not equally available to all farmers or all consumers. Rather, they remain largely the domain of the educated and the well-off, individuals with steady incomes who are able to use their food systems practices, consciously or unconsciously, to draw symbolic lines between themselves and those who are poorer in financial or cultural capital (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). To what extent have these alternatives, while seeking to reduce agricultural injustice, simultaneously created new forms of food injustice? In this article, I offer a class-based analysis of some specific agricultural worlds through the prism of agri-food justice while avoiding dualities of 'rich vs. poor' or 'solvent vs. insolvent' (Faure et al., 2018, p. 7). Instead, I adopt a relational, systemic perspective that seeks to identify the forms of justice or injustice at work in class relations, using two examples: first, the case of vegetable growers 'dominated within the dominant class'; and second, the case of working-class appropriations of agricultural innovations which are otherwise structured and dominated by the upper classes.

In the first section, following a presentation of the methods employed for the fieldwork among vegetable growers in Normandy, I will describe the fracturing of this agricultural sector into five social classes, each with its distinct interrelationships. I will thus avoid the binary classist reading that could have been drawn from this context, characterised by the bourgeois ascension of field vegetable growers on the one hand, and the professionalisation of working-class gardening practices on the other.

Social stratification in agriculture and agri-food injustice

The food justice and agri-food justice paradigms have emerged relatively recently, more or less simultaneously with 'the dawn of social class analysis' in French rural studies (Laferté, 2014a). Class-based approaches have likewise regained stature in the social sciences more broadly (Burlaud & Mauger, 2019), and there is potential for cross-fertilisation with the agri-food justice paradigm, provided the classes

identified are relevant to the inequalities observed across the different fractions of these agricultural worlds.

Class inequalities within agriculture

The lowest rung of social stratification in agriculture corresponds to the 'social demotion of the small-scale peasantry' (Bessière et al., 2014, p. 5): growers with insecure revenue despite some accumulation of patrimony (Laferté, 2014a, p. 431). At the highest rungs are found segments of the *bourgeoisie* and even the *haute-bourgeoisie*. This hierarchy coexists with a transversal segmentation of various Professions and Socio-professional Categories (PCS),[7] as shown by a statistical analysis of asset bands that identifies small farmers as 'scarcely better endowed with economic capital' than the working classes (Sinthon, 2019, p. 44). Higher up the socio-economic ladder, large farmers enjoy levels of inherited capital similar to those of the upper classes (id., p. 45). There thus emerges a three-way division of agricultural social classes, which Laferté aligns with the Bourdieusian categories of the economic bourgeoisie, the cultural petite bourgeoisie and the propertied fraction of the working classes (2014a, 2021).

This tripartite perspective has the advantage of moving beyond a binary division of dominant/dominated, although it still tends to minimise the 'hidden field of class struggle' (Bihr, 1984) and to homogenise the nuances of class belonging within the petite bourgeoisie. This tendency is evident in the study of social structure within local food networks (Paranthoën, 2013; Richard et al., 2014). From a mobility and social relations perspective, 'it would appear that the social distance separating [some] farmers from the intermediate or higher professions of the tertiary sector is diminishing' (Bermond, 2007, p. 112). In strictly economic terms, however, how much does 'the *petite bourgeoisie* (made up of [farmers,] artisans, and small shop owners)' really have in common with 'the mid- [or upper] level salaried employees' whom Alain Bihr refers to as 'the capitalist supervisors' (*l'encadrement capitaliste*)? (Bihr, 1984, p. 103). From the perspective of agri-food justice, this question echoes the takeover of small-scale market gardening by capitalist modes of production (Robert, 1986, p. 109), and reminds us of the pre-capitalist character of the *petite bourgeoisie*, 'historically condemned to disappear in and through capitalist development, even as it is reproduced in a subaltern and degraded form' (Bihr, 1984). This degradation, or 'downclassing' fits well with the trajectories of downward mobility noted above (Bessière et al., 2014), while at the same time some segments of the agricultural petite bourgeoisie have emancipated themselves via productivist modernisation, thus embarking on the road to *embourgeoisement* (or 'bourgeoisification') (Laferté, 2014b). Leaving behind the rural sociabilities of the petite bourgeoisie, their *embourgeoisement* is characterised by an integration into new agri-food relationships, accompanied by new forms of agricultural management. Lastly, it is

[7] The PCS is an official classification of professions and employment categories established by INSEE, the French national statistics service.

the 'cultural' agricultural petit bourgeois fraction (Laferté, 2021) that develops in parallel with new forms of local food leadership (Naves, 2016).

An ethnographic study of field vegetable growers and market gardeners in Normandy

Departing from this positioning within the current literature, this article's hypothesis is as follows: within the relationships among the 'embourgeoisé' and petit bourgeois agricultural fractions, on the one hand, and agri-food and food movement professionals, on the other, complex dynamics of exclusion and inclusion exist; these dynamics, moreover, may run contrary to or in sync with objective notions of agri-food justice. In pursuit of this hypothesis, the qualitative analysis of individual case studies using ethnographic methods can contribute to a larger effort of generalisation (Laferté, 2021, p. 167). The present study of field vegetable growers and market gardeners in Normandy (with social characteristics comparable to those of other regions and other types of agriculture) was conceived of in this light (id.).

The findings presented here were gathered using a mixed methodology approach. Nineteen interviews, averaging 90 min in length, were completed as a part of research for a PhD thesis. The first interviews were conducted as a follow-up to a survey, conducted in 2016, of small market gardeners selling at a market in Caen. This initial phase of research provided 'a series of opportunities to elaborate new' hypotheses (Olivier de Sardan, 1995), in an iterative fashion, and was likewise supported by a typology of field vegetable growers and market gardeners (Guillemin, 2020). Vegetable farms of different types were identified in order to investigate the social logics internal to the sector, which is less accessible than that of small-scale market gardening. In other words, the dynamic specific to the study was used to direct the choice of farmers to interview, rather than random sampling; this had the advantage of providing a sampling of information internal to the 'strategic group' (id.) of farmer leaders. The relatively high number of interviews in the Calvados area was due to practical considerations as well to the intersection of the thesis with a larger research initiative[8] and a representative sampling of other supply chains (wholesalers and the Coop de Creully). One organic market gardener was originally interviewed for separate project, a study of the Gilets Jaunes,[9] using a dedicated interview guide.

To better understand the growers' position with respect to other class segments within the agricultural social hierarchy (Bessière et al., 2014), three semi-directive interviews were conducted with other key individuals: the directors of two local

[8] The research project FRUGAL (for *Formes urbaines et gouvernance alimentaire*) was a multi-site project running from 2015 and 2020 and funded through PSDR (*Pour et sur le développement regional*), a program bringing together researchers and local partners in support of regional development.

[9] The research project LonGI was a multidisciplinary initiative using longitudinal, biographical interviews to better understand the motivations of participants in the Gilets Jaunes movement, an extended series of demonstrations protesting increases in the gasoline tax and other government policies in France in 2017 and 2018.

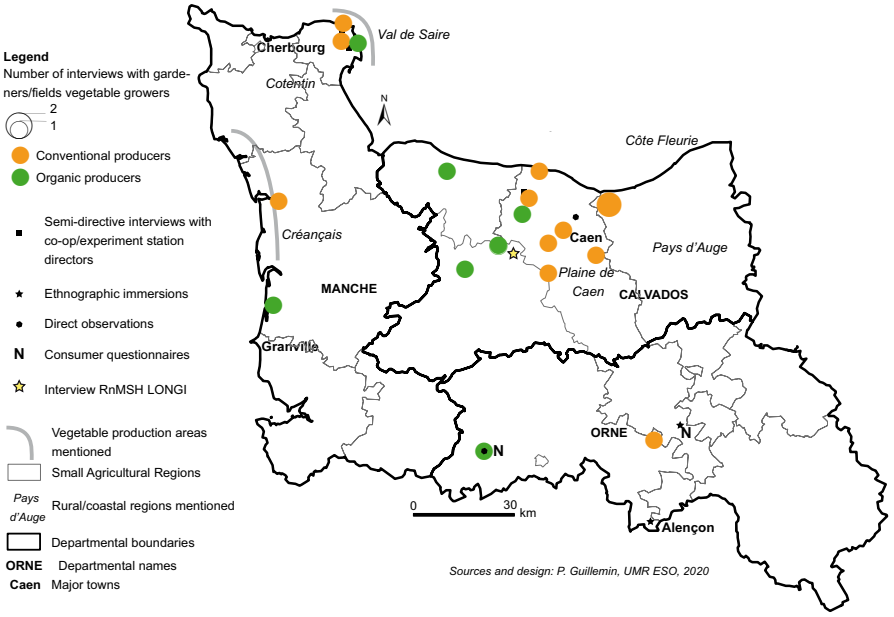

Fig. 1 Field research location and methods: three *départements* in the western part of the region of Normandy

coops (the *Coop de Creully* and the *Groupement des Producteurs de Légumes de la Manche*) and the head of a local experiment station. The relational approach to market gardening worlds using a combination of different investigative techniques had been previously validated for the analysis of shorter, regional supply chains (Ripoll, 2008, p. 24). Social characteristics of the organic market gardeners' clientele were determined using two questionnaire-based surveys. In addition, drawing on a network of acquaintances in the area, two immersive ethnographic experiences and two direct observation opportunities were completed. The wide range of different observational contexts (peri-urban areas around the regional capital, isolated rural areas/hamlets, traditional vegetable-growing areas near the coast) provided contrasting situations in which to observe the 'internal differentiation' (Bessière et al., 2014) of the agricultural group under examination (Fig. 1).

This methodological framework was put to use for an extended field study (2014–2020), yielding an initial research result that seeks to go beyond a tripartite social division of the farming population (Laferté, 2021) and to instead understand farmers as currently belonging to a minimum of five social class fractions.

Domination and cooperation among different classes of market gardeners and field vegetable growers in Normandy

The unequal distribution of capital among market gardeners and field vegetable growers in Normandy (Guillemin, 2020) is broadly reflective of structural

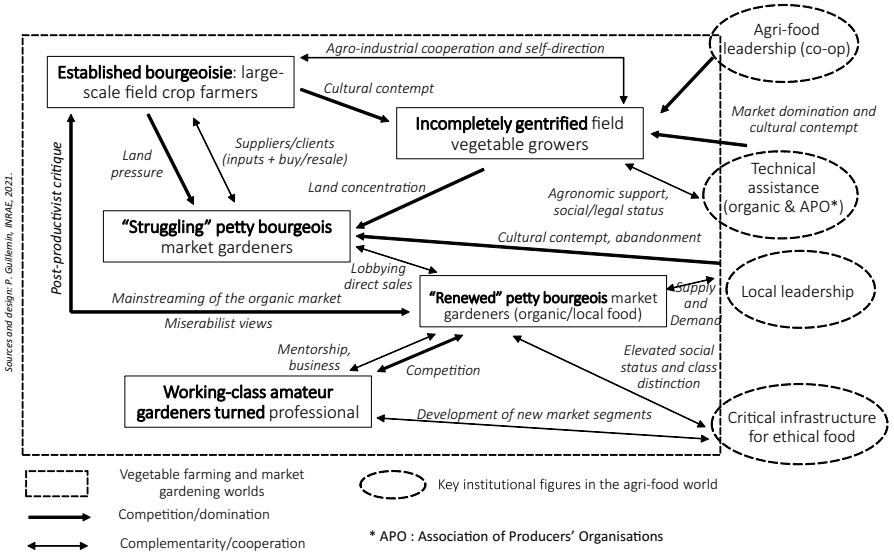

Fig. 2 Relational view of stratification within the worlds of vegetable production

inequalities in the agri-food sector as a whole. The stratified picture that emerges suggests typical inequalities in the means of production among large farmers and small producers. This article provides a complementary view, based on field research (Fig. 2), highlighting the mechanisms of domination and/or cooperation that exist among different fractions, more or less socially proximate, of the vegetable-production sector.

The dominant members of these vegetable-production worlds belong to the agricultural bourgeoisie (Laferté, 2021). This includes the well-established agricultural bourgeoisie, many of whom are the 'inheritors of the most valuable [agricultural] land', and 'the rising petite bourgeoisie' (id., p. 167), whose *embourgeoisement* is incomplete. These two fractions come together within the agro-industrial co-ops (*Agrial* and the *Groupement des Producteurs de Légumes de la Manche*). In the traditional growing areas near the coast (the Créançais and the Val de Saire in the *département* of Manche), salaried directors monitor the technical and economic performance of the farmers with the largest farms, who are themselves in charge of significant numbers of full-time staff. But their *embourgeoisement* remains incomplete. The study found that the 'closed system' constituted by the producers' co-op did not allow for their emancipation with respect to the agri-food sector leadership and the heads of their supply chains.

The leading vegetable growers' world has been reorganised both socially and geographically in recent years by the integration into Agrial of a number of large farms historically linked to the irrigated parts of the Caen Plain. Many of the farmers here identify culturally as the (third generation) descendants of Flemish immigrants. Their fathers were active in the co-ops, and they in their turn have gotten involved in building the regional, multi-national cooperatives of today, developing new markets

for diversified, high-value vegetable production. Together with a few large farms owned by non-Flemish families, they constitute a nexus of successful, large-scale vegetable operations that refers to itself collectively as the 'CAC Carotte'.[10] The largest of these farms employ substantial numbers of both permanent and temporary workers (e.g., 10 year-round and 50 seasonal employees; 40 year-round and 100 seasonal employees), hierarchically organised, following a logic of maximum workforce flexibility. They favour simplified management structures and make significant use of short-term contracts and temporary migrant labour (primarily Poles and Senegalese). Benefitting from many years of experience supplying both national and European markets with large volumes of product, these 'capitalist farmers… are often also involved in ancillary agricultural enterprises such as marketing, processing, and distribution' (Berstein, 2010, trad. 2019, p. 153), adopting an attitude of 'market opportunism' (Laferté, 2021) to advance their position within the organic and local market segments.

Within the local market, these large farmers may act as both suppliers and buyers to the market gardeners of the petite bourgeoisie, whom they tend to regard with a sort of pity, tinged with contempt for those who have failed in their efforts to scale the economic ladder. For the bourgeois vegetable growers and market gardeners, the downwardly mobile, petit bourgeois position of the smaller market gardeners appears to reflect a 'social order [understood as] the natural result of each individual's abilities' (Laferté, 2018, p. 128), whereas in fact, objectively speaking, it corresponds to differences in inherited wealth (smaller farms) and market access (fewer commercial contracts, uneven supply). Traditional, petit bourgeois market gardeners, like other small business owners, struggle to survive from one generation to the next. Business domination (opaque wholesale markets, price variability) and uncertain land access (short-term rental agreements, large farms buying up additional land) lead many to keep working past retirement age, rounding out meagre pensions and maintaining market relationships for direct sales to consumers. For others members of this class fraction, their low social position corresponds to a shift from the working classes via the 'professionalisation' of a gardening hobby as an alternative to unemployment.

A different form of social repositioning into the market gardening world characterises the 'reinvented' fraction of the independent petite bourgeoisie, those coming from the qualified tertiary sector. These social trajectories and the alternative modes of production associated with them (small-scale organic farming and/or local direct marketing) are remaking the population of specialised market gardeners both in urban agriculture (Poulot, 2020) and in rural areas. If it is difficult to 'specify the contours of this group of new arrivals' (id.), this is because their position as a reinvented petite bourgeoisie is often temporary or partial, resulting from multiple moves (Paranthoën, 2014) in and out of other forms of employment. This fraction finds its legitimacy (and its markets) by drawing on resources linked to these social trajectories, which in turn structure their alliances with other social fractions (Richard et al., 2014), including 'public sector employees, the intellectual and artistic professions, intermediate-level members of the teaching and healthcare sectors', etc.

[10] Loosely, the 'S&P 500 of vegetable production'.

(Paranthoën, 2013). Indeed, some of these resources—prominent chefs, journalists, local elected officials, municipal employees—constitute critical infrastructure for market gardening and have been contributing to the recent elevation in social status of this reinvented agricultural petite bourgeoisie (Guillemin, 2020), symbolic representatives of a typically French gastronomic ideal, for whom they are helping to develop markets and thus constituting a new type of territorialised leadership framework (Fig. 2). To speak of displacement in analysing the reinvention of the agricultural petite bourgeoisie 'to the left of the social space' is to agree that these farmers 'are not becoming bourgeois (Laferté, 2014b, p. 45) because 'becoming bourgeois presupposes recognizing… a normal or natural order of things, including a respect for the social authorities that serve as guardians of this order' (id., pp. 46–47). This fraction of the agricultural petite bourgeoisie has defined itself by means of a critique of productivist agriculture, a critique which in turn requires a rejection of the 'miserabilist' critique of alternative agriculture offered by the established bourgeois vegetable growers (with interviewees citing, for example, the difficult working conditions of small-scale market gardening, resulting in low output and insufficient returns).

The disdain of the latter extends not only to the small-scale organic farmers, but also to the cooperative vegetable growers whose 'bourgeoisification' is still incomplete. In the view of the agricultural bourgeoisie, this failure is linked to the petit bourgeois' relationship to work. The fact that they work 'uncounted hours' (Laferté, 2018, p. 129) both limits the development of their farm business—which would require wage stratification—and impedes their access to a lifestyle featuring leisure habits similar to those of the upper classes. All these elements contribute to the petit bourgeois growers' incomplete social elevation, which in turn impacts their social relations of production.

The dominated among the dominant: the incomplete 'bourgeoisification' of some vegetable growers

Economic success does not necessarily shield farmers from the disdain of other social fractions. In the Châtillonnais, for example, in eastern France, if a newly prosperous crop farmer buys or builds a 'McMansion' (*maison d'orgueil*), it may attract only scorn from the more cultivated fractions of the farmer's extended family or acquaintance (Laferté, 2016). In the Cotentin (the peninsula in the northern part of department of Manche), it is the attitude toward work that best crystallises the disdain suffered by vegetable growers who are incompletely *embourgeoisé*, and who thus remains dominated on the commercial level within their own co-ops.

Too much work and the contempt of the agri-food leadership

Market leaders and technical assistance providers readily point to the Cotentin vegetable farmers' lack of availability, their lack of free time, as a professional problem (Sarrazin, 2016). The more prosperous, more successful vegetable farmers in other production districts likewise highlight this issue, criticising their fellow farmers,

for example, for rarely or never going on holiday. The Cotentin farmers themselves acknowledge that 'at certain point, you just can't be everywhere, there is a limit to what you can do' (interview, 10 October 2018). Paradoxically, the expansion and modernisation that are the key to their *embourgeoisement* also hold them back, in a dynamic that has been described by Marcel Mazoyer:

> 'The farmers are well aware of this: beyond three or four individuals working closely together, nothing is gained. Once you have more than six or seven employees you have management and supervision expenses, waste and losses, which become so many "diseconomies" of scale.' (Cited by Ruffin, 2018)

Employment practices are thus a barrier to expansion for vegetable growers in the Cotentin. As one farmer put it, 'That is our limit to growth' (interview, 10 October 2018). He speaks from direct experience: he is among the largest vegetable producers in the Val de Saire, with 10 employees, and all of his free time is consumed by his management responsibilities. With regular local meetings at the co-op, additional meetings at the regional headquarters in Caen, plus trips abroad to visit the group's foreign acquisitions, he cannot afford any more time away from the farm, which he co-manages with his son. The two of them know they need to promote some of their employees and reorganise their workload around designated sub-managers, but they cannot bring themselves to do it. They lament the fact that their employees 'are not guys who can seed a crop,' oversee irrigation, or apply pesticides, but neither have they trained them to do so.

Pesticide applications are nearly always the most sensitive point in the division of labour on the farm, a task that is rarely delegated to employees. Nevertheless, agricultural advisors in the district state that the goal of reducing pesticide use must be met by improving the level of expertise among applicators (telephone interview, 10 May 2018). The director of the local agricultural experiment station points in particular to a need for training on 'family operations that have shifted to a larger business model', adding that such training should be accompanied by a reorganisation of work hierarchies, 'with assistants, a foreperson, a head of crop production' (id.). This does not appear to be the path usually taken, however: with the exception of cases in which several farmers work together and/or when a successor farmer(s) is taking over the reins, the internal promotion of farm employees charged with the management of key cultivation tasks (planting, irrigating, spraying) is uncommon, and illustrates the unachieved *embourgeoisement* of the farm.

The Cotentin vegetable farmers' overwork and inability to delegate likewise deprives them of the free time necessary for their own continuing education requirements, creating friction with the agri-food executive (technical advisors, sales managers, agricultural engineers, general managers, for example). In general, the regulatory framework for pesticide use is regarded by agricultural technicians as a problem because of the growing difficulty of recruiting qualified employees and the overall aging of the farmer population, added to which is the lack of the continuing education that is regarded as essential to overcoming various forms of 'resistance to change' (id.). One interviewee, the former director of a cooperative in Manche, had been the head of business, marketing, and communication from 1989 to 2014 for

Savéol,[11] a notable Breton success story. In Brittany, he said, the greenhouse producers participate in 'study clubs' to improve their production techniques, whereas in the Cotentin, he lamented, 'the field growers don't have any groups like that. Here, in May, the guys are in the field from 5:30 in the morning to 8:00 o'clock at night. There's no point in asking them to reflect on their work for 5 or 10 h after that; they're zombies. Plus, field growers don't like measuring themselves against one another' (interview, 9 April 2018). He went further, expressing something close to contempt for the farmers who had recruited him: 'They don't understand consumer expectations here. They grow great big potatoes, the bog-standard item; they focus on yield over quality. They've made no effort to cultivate an image of terroir.'

This neglect of training and innovation, this 'resistance to change' and hesitancy with respect to imposing a tiered system of management on their workforce—all these elements place the largest vegetable farmers and managers in the Cotentin in their position of 'dominated among the dominant'. The established, bourgeois vegetable producers continually remind them of their ambiguous social status, and can use their management roles within the co-op better to secure their own commercial dominance, thus creating forms of agri-food injustice.

Commercial injustice within the value chain

Applying a relational approach to the question of social mobility also helps highlight situations of injustice. The Cotentin vegetable growers' relationship to '*cadrisme*' (direction, governance – Uhel, 2019), especially the 'orchestrators [who dictate] what must be done for production to conform to the needs and expectations of the market' (Sarrazin, 2016, p. 50), is expressive of their incomplete social ascension as a form of agri-food injustice. These 'orchestrators' occupy positions of authority at the agricultural experiment stations and within the specialised supply chains to which the cooperatives belong. In a context in which the French National Assembly has ordered a report on cooperative governance, which has drawn 'increasing scrutiny as [the cooperatives] grow in size',[12] including internationally (id.), the question arises 'of the power of the member … within the organisation of the cooperative group' (Filippi & Triboulet, 2003). In theory, member farmers are elected to administer and lead the co-ops. But a distortion exists in practice with respect to the balance of power 'between individuals in their capacity as elected directors… and employees, private or public, the elected professional director or paid technician' (Sarrazin, 2016, p. 53). The field research described here often contradicted the idea that 'at the end of the day it is the professional representatives who have the last word or first priority on a contract' (id.). By virtue of their integration into the capitalist mode of production, some farmers begin a process of *embourgeoisement*, but they struggle to fully establish

[11] Savéol is the trademark of a market-gardeners' co-op established in 1981 in the neighbouring region of Brittany. It has found success specialising in greenhouse crops and is now the leading French producer of tomatoes.

[12] Guérit J., « Réparer la démocratie des coopératives agricoles», *Ouest-France*, 17/02/2022.

themselves as *bourgeois*. As a corollary to this capitalist integration, moreover, a class of leaders or directors of the agri-food market develops according to its own interests (Bihr, 1984): meaning the interest of the cooperatives, rather than interest of the individual farmers, large or small, who belong to the co-op. Consider this account from a large-scale vegetable grower in the Créançais basin:

> 'Oh, I said yes, but you have to have zero residue, everything has to be more perfect than before! No, but … the thing is, well, in my opinion they slapped me in the face on that one. But I warned them that I treated more this year. And this year, my leeks, I had a field where I had some thrips, but the other fields were good. Well, they were better than last year, and this year there was more pest pressure. But this year, I went for it a bit, because they screwed me last year! I'm not going to lose €20,000 again this year – better to spend €3000 on product than to lose €20,000 in sales.' (Interview, 5 November 2018)

This grower is also a co-op administrator. But he has come to the point of saying he has been 'slapped in the face' by the co-op leadership in an exchange relating to the reduction of pesticide use. Like many farmers, he is open to the idea of using fewer pesticides, particularly when it comes to treatments whose intended effect is primarily aesthetic. Thrips cause discoloration in the green part of the leek—a defect that has little impact on the quality of the leek, since the green part is not usually eaten. The growers want to reduce their use of insecticides. Accordingly, this grower decided to reduce his number of treatments in 2017, when heavy rains inhibited pest pressure somewhat. For two and half months, he delivered leeks that showed some thrips damage and was docked 10 centimes per kilo. For an average yield of 30 t per hectare, the loss amounted to €3000/ha and the grower thus calculates his loss of revenue at €20,000. While he may be protecting the environment and his own health in making this choice, he loses money because the savings on two insecticide applications is minimal (each application costs €120): he has lost more than €15,000 in gross profit for his operation. These facts sufficiently explain his language.

But the feeling of injustice this grower expresses is larger. He explained to me that the policy by which certain vegetables are downgraded is the same at the two Cotentin cooperatives, but that the 'competitor' co-op imposes a steeper penalty, a price reduction of 20 centimes/kilo. Although the discoloration caused by thrips doesn't make leeks unsuitable for consumption, it does affect how long they keep. The other co-op sells primarily to the fresh market and thus is more reluctant to take thrips-damaged leeks. This grower's co-op sells into fourth- or fifth-quality markets, vegetables mostly destined for processing. Thrips-damaged leeks can be used by processors in a different way, with the green part cut off and the white part made into ready-to-eat preparations, such as leeks in vinaigrette. This is what happened with the thrips-damaged leeks delivered by this farmer in 2017:

> 'But the thing is, the best part is, last year my leeks, I had leeks with really good white. They cut off the green and made them into vinaigrette. So they could have paid me the same price. Because if they hadn't had any like that, they would have had to use undamaged leeks, and so they would have paid more.' (id.)

He also tried to get the pay-scale policy changed so that it would support the goal of reducing spray treatments. He believes farmers who make the effort to reduce cosmetic spraying should be exempt from price penalties on thrips-damaged leeks. In support of his position, he cites the accounts of the cooperative that makes the best margins on the sales of leeks for processing into leeks in vinaigrette: 'That's how it is best used, best valued' (id.). In his role as co-op administrator, he advanced the idea at the next local general assembly:

> 'Well, I tried to negotiate last year, I told them at the general assembly, "Well ok, if that's how it is, next year, I am going to spray the maximum and that's it". Well…. They didn't say much in reply. But even so, I was…. Last year no one supported me on that point. There has to be a give and take. They could have… I felt like last year, the leeks were very good for vinaigrette, they could have paid me extra. To tell me, 'You tried to spray less, it didn't work, but we're not going to penalize you'. If they want zero residue…. But apparently [the director of environment and quality for the co-op], he said that in any case they don't find any insecticide residues… It doesn't show up, but if we can avoid spraying too much, ok fine.' (id.)

Here, we see that it is the agri-food system regulators who in fact have the last word, within the context of 'a shift in power downstream within the co-operative groups' (Filippi & Triboulet, 2003). Curiously, this domination is not expressed so much in casual, quotidian interactions, for example at the time of delivery and unloading of the leeks, in the bustle of work and out of view of the general membership. This asymmetrical relationship is expressed most powerfully in the formal setting of the co-op's general meeting, where in theory power is supposed to lie in the hands of the farmers, especially those who have been elected to administrative positions. While these large vegetable farmers have become the directors of their co-op, at the same time they appear to be dominated within the dominant class. A similar dynamic has been described among certain dairy farmers, who may be 'developed in economic terms, but dominated in terms of access to the centres of power' (Repplinger, 2015). This type of domination by agri-food system decision-makers is also found at the other vegetable co-op in Manche. That co-op's president, a farmer-member, expressed scepticism with regard to commercial strategies targeting the 'no pesticide residues' market segment:

> 'We are well below the LMR[13] [maximum residue limits] in most cases, I would say 97% of the time. Sometimes we are even at zero residues, it does happen. But you can't be too careful, because zero really has to mean zero.' (Interview, 9 April 2018)

[13] For the National Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety (ANSES), 'the Maximum Residue Limits make it possible to define acceptable thresholds in foodstuffs […] for substances contained in [pesticides or] veterinary medicines' (https://www.anses.fr/fr/content/limites-maximales-de-r%C3%A9sidus-lmr-de-m%C3%A9dicaments-v%C3%A9t%C3%A9rinaires, accessed on 26 August 2022).

Nevertheless, that very morning, the co-op's director said he was going to increase the budget for residue testing and hire more quality technicians so as to develop their 'no residues' product lines. In absolute terms, these agri-food strategies could tend towards greater justice, given that these specialised lines are intended for large-scale supermarkets and thus serve a wide range of consumers. We could assume that we are dealing here with new market segments to make healthier, safer food more widely available than that provided by alternative value chains 'trusted by an educated population' (Hochedez & Le Gall, 2016). But in opening the black box of how these product lines are actually being developed within the producer cooperatives, the agri-food justice argument becomes less clear. Agri-food justice has been described as having three dimensions: (a) to improve and expand access to (b) 'a locally based, quality agriculture and food', all while (c) fighting 'against structural inequalities in the agri-food sector' (Noël, 2020, p. 196). The domination of vegetable farmers by their salaried co-op managers and technicians involves a number of active practices (indicated here in italics) that in fact correspond, in a negative sense, precisely to these three dimensions (indicated a, b, or c): *the interested parties are poorly integrated* (c), creating a wholesale market that is *not fair* (a) at the upstream levels of the value chain. A *lack of ethics* (a) is evident in how the product line is created (only eliminating those pesticides that can be 'detected' by testing), in turn failing to prioritise the health of farmers or the environment in the areas of production. Agri-food injustice is thus present here in the form of an environmental claim that lacks *agro-ecological* substance (a) and which *poorly remunerates producers* because *profit margins are unfairly distributed* (b).

The value of this three-dimensional approach to agri-food justice is that it offers a process-based analysis that reveals the blind spots that remain with respect to the production chain. The initial focus on food security and food accessibility (Hochedez & Le Gall, 2016) has allowed for comparative analyses, at the international level, of the elitism and in some cases the exclusivity of the food justice movement. These structural inequalities should also prompt a consideration of how historically dominant supply chains might contribute to agri-food justice, and of how the food justice movement, a priori elitist, may open up possibilities of emancipation upstream in the value chain, via the creation of farming opportunities for vulnerable populations.

The working-class appropriation of agri-food alternatives

Many of the alternatives linked to the cultural repertoire of ethical food (e.g. local and organic dining, plant-based/low-meat diets, buying direct from the farm—see Johnston & Baumann, 2014) are socially and even politically selective at the consumer level (Mundler, 2013; Paranthoën, 2013; Richard et al., 2014; Ripoll, 2008). As both this literature and my field study have shown (Guillemin, 2020), socio-cultural proximity is a key factor within local food networks. At the producer level, although originally developed to provide a more just monetary return for farmers, the spread of such alternatives has gone hand in hand with a reorganisation of the profession. The banner of 'ethical food' is largely carried by new farm enterprises founded by individuals from non-farming backgrounds, many of whom, in the case

of certified organic production for local markets, are 'young, educated, politically engaged, and in search of a career redirection' (Bermond et al., 2019). Direct-to-consumer sales without a quality label—e.g., non-certified organic or 'low-spray' production—are more aligned with working-class appropriations of alternative agriculture (id.), the political inflections of which are variable (Samak, 2016b). As a reflection of distinctive consumption and in the face of structural inequities in access to land, efforts at positive discrimination have been put in place by municipalities and associations seeking to restrict land opportunities to agricultural projects proposing to focus on local markets (Horst et al., 2021). In doing so, however, they may favour individuals who are land-poor but rich in cultural capital, thus nurturing a 'small world' that has little regard for procedural justice, that is, the idea 'that no potential beneficiary be excluded from the process' by 'modes of inclusive distribution' (id.). In these terms, the food justice movement appears to be only minimally inclusive, moving farther away from a notion of agri-food justice. Nevertheless, the market segments that have been developed can also offer poorer social fractions the opportunity to seize hold of these alternatives as a resource (Samak, 2016b). We will now consider some examples of this dynamic at the lower levels of the agricultural social ladder.

After being made redundant: farming as an alternative to unemployment

Among the poorer market gardeners, some social positions may appear to be unclassifiable, corresponding neither to the downwardly mobile petite bourgeoisie nor to the circumstances of so-called small-basket[14] producers (Guillemin, 2020). Consider the case of one 55-year-old market gardener (who will be called Jean-Yves), who, when I first met him, had recently launched a business as an independent grower. Having spent 20 years as a labourer on a farm with '2000 hectares of flax' (id.), submitting to a mode of production he describes as 'damaging', he then spent 12 years as a lorry driver. When the company he was driving for fell upon hard times, he was made redundant. Faced with the uncertainty of accessing his retirement pension early, he also struggled with the forced inactivity. As his wife put it: 'At home, he was always restless, he just wasn't happy' (id.). In the spring following his first winter of unemployment, he began to prepare the family garden as usual while continuing to search for a new job as a driver. At a market in Caen, he took to chatting with the grower from whom he bought his garden starts; eventually, the seller encouraged Jean-Yves to set up as a grower himself:

[14] 'Small-basket' growers are small landowners with a kitchen garden, orchard, or other growing area who sell their seasonal surplus in a specific street (called '*des petits-paniers*') for which they have been given a market permit. Typically in their 50 s, often from a farming background, these small growers tend to be women seeking to supplement a small retirement income, widow's pension or unemployment benefit (Guillemin, 2020). Although the '*petits-paniers*' designation is specific to western France, similar arrangements exist in other parts of the country. In the Rhône-Alpes region, for example, they are referred to as 'garden surplus' growers; the participant population is similar and they have the right to use certain streets for their sales, sometimes even within a town's covered market area (Navarro, 2015).

> [He would say,] 'Go for it, you'll see… it's not bad this type of work! So yeah, you'll need….' Then he tells me, 'You need land and everything, but if you have a little piece of garden' – since he knows I buy my plants from him. He said, 'Keep at it, grow a bit more, you'll see, you might be able to make a living.' (id.)

Early in 2015, Jean-Yves decided to go professional, tripling his production area to 1.2 ha and putting up a second unheated tunnel: 'We put my severance pay into the tunnel!' (id.). Otherwise, he kept using the same equipment he had for his garden, continuing too to grow a wide range of different crops, including small fruits to round out his offerings through the growing season. Already familiar with the local markets, he focussed on these for selling his product, despite difficulties in getting a place at the trendier markets of the Côte Fleurie. He was invited to help relaunch defunct or declining markets in the small towns of the Auge, but he makes less there than at the four markets in Caen and in the inner ring. Residing not far from the coast, he benefits from the summer visitors to the seaside towns and camping areas. But while his on-farm sales and market receipts are improving, his overall returns are still modest. He makes a conscious effort to keep his prices low, seeking to build customer loyalty and not alienate the working-class part of his clientele. This means calculating prices more in terms of his cost of production than in terms of a target income for himself. He has given up growing some traditional varieties that he thinks are too expensive.

This type of grower is holding on thanks to a number of different factors. First, the mode of production: the economic logic of traditional gardening practices emphasises limiting expenditures on inputs. Apart from the parcel of land, which he owns, and the investment of his severance pay, this grower has few expenses: he works mostly by hand, uses no herbicides or pesticides, and collects horse manure from nearby horse owners who 'don't know what to do with it'. He also has pig manure from pigs he raises for his own use. Second, the support of a spouse: this type of entrepreneurial resilience in the face of unemployment is a two-person affair (Bertaux-Wiame, 2004), with Jean-Yves's wife assisting with the morning harvest and early sales at the markets. She also has a job at a supermarket, providing additional income for their household. If, therefore, we must recognise 'the private aspect of the undertaking and the meaning that it has within the family, and more precisely within the couple' (Bertaux-Wiame, 2004, p. 16), we should also not overlook the importance of the spouse's income in enabling this late career shift into an independent business (id.: 30). In this working-class family, it is the spouse's salary that makes it possible for the family to survive.

The importance of the couple as an economic unit was also found in a similar situation documented by the biographical study known as LonGI[15]: an organic market gardener from a working-class background (we will call him Thomas) who began his business as part of a strategy of resilience in the face of unemployment, drawing

[15] See footnote 9, above.

on gardening as a working-class leisure activity that contributes to the domestic economy.

Although Thomas had stopped participating in the Gilets Jaunes demonstrations in the spring of 2019, he still thought of himself as a Gilet Jaune. He received me in a new house, built in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of town, far to the west of the urban centre of Caen, 'after 33 years living in the suburbs' (Interview, 7 July 2020). Together with his wife and their four children, he moved here to be closer to the agricultural operation he created in 2011. His shift into farming was unforeseen: 'Before this, I was a machine-tool operator'. He lost his job when he was made redundant. With a professional *baccalauréat* in production mechanics, and contending with some health problems, he obtained a reclassification to receive a professional license in production and quality management. He was then able to find work as a manager overseeing the setup of industrial production lines, which he describes as increasingly robotised. More interested in the ergonomics of his colleagues' work stations, and critical of 'excessive' robotisation, his repeated disagreements with his various employers resulted in his being let go several times. He was left with a feeling of injustice; and then the economic crisis of 2008 made work harder to find, so that he had to search farther and farther afield. Frustrated, and tired of commuting, in 2011 he decided to set up as an organic market gardener on 3.5 ha, focusing on direct sales.

Thomas began by selling at four markets in Caen. In 2013, with assistance from the organic farmers group in Calvados, he created two community-supported agriculture[16] programs on the southeast edge of the city, including one near to where he was living at the time. These now accounted for 35% of his sales. Later, he reduced his number of outdoor markets (finding them too time-consuming) and shifted instead to selling to a Biocoop[17] store in Caen (35% of his sales) and to the kitchen of a nearby school district (10% of his sales). He works alone; his wife is a home health aide. His production system, although similarly developed as an alternative to unemployment, is different from that of the former lorry driver described previously: he has twice the growing area and a wider range of marketing channels. In this he is more like the certified organic market gardeners selling at the Caen markets, who tend to have more different outlets than their non-certified counterparts.

One reason for these differences is Thomas's relative youth; another is his greater cultural capital, having given up a salary at the level of *assimilé cadre*, a mid-level manager. A quality manager is a subaltern within the workplace hierarchy, and it no doubt for this reason that he defines his origins and his current family life as 'proletarian'. Still, such a position entails being responsible for the day-to-day, practical work of a business. It seems fair to surmise that his early socialisation (his father was a maintenance technician at a factory) and later professional experience have translated favourably for independent work. His interest in improving the ergonomics of work stations on factory production lines also appears to manifest itself in his

[16] In France, the equivalent of the CSA or community-supported agriculture model is known as AMAP, for *association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne*.

[17] Biocoop is a chain of organic shops.

current activities: he describes his market garden operation as being 'based on old principles', but that he has plans 'to modernise'. 'Because, well, even physically, I find it a bit harder now'. For this grower, modernising means buying a tractor and implements like a cultivator, for easier and more efficient weeding. Overall, Thomas's operation is bigger and seems more stable than that of the ex-lorry driver. But from a financial and familial point of view, the end result is nearly the same, even if he describes it as more or less satisfactory:

> 'Well, yeah, sure, my current economic situation, it isn't too bad. I have everything I need. That is, I'm not rich, I'm not poor, I don't want for anything. I have everything I need, but even so, I have to pay attention, you know. Plus, for me, you have to do everything yourself, to keep costs down. In the end, we are on minimum wage, we are not, well, we make the minimum, you know.' (Interview, 7 July 2020)

Noting that his monthly income, based on his total annual revenue, is equivalent to the standard unemployment benefit (known in France as the *Salaire Minimum de Croissance*, or SMIC), he corrects himself: 'Not even, I probably make €800 per month'—or about a third less than the SMIC. In this situation, it is his spouse's income (Bertaux-Wiame, 2004) that enables the family to get by, that makes it possible for this man to become an organic market gardener as an alternative to unemployment, just as for the ex-lorry driver.

Another similarity between the two men is their familiarity with gardening as a working-class leisure activity (Pluvinage & Weber, 1992, 1993; Weber, 1996). Thomas had many years of experience as a backyard gardener, a hobby he acquired as a child, as a family activity, and which he continued in the same fashion:

> Researcher: You were a gardener, you told me?
> Grower: Yes, I've always had a garden. I come from an old-fashioned family.
> Researcher: At Cormelles, in the community gardens?
> Grower: Yes. And then I also had my grandmother. I did my grandmother's garden. It was kind of about being with the land, with nature.

His 'thirty-three years in the suburbs' are also significant in terms of socialisation (Bermond, 2007). He grew up in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of greater Caen, in a community in which gardening was particularly important: first in Guérinière, a neighbourhood of large apartment buildings interspersed with community gardens; then at Cormelles-le-Royal, a town belonging to an 'IRIS[18] of low-density, working-class houses to the East and South of the city', where the contribution of garden produce to the local diet is comparable to that of a small, working-class town (Marie, 2019). In his case, as for the ex-lorry driver, gardening as a leisure activity was both an important food resource and an affirmation of personal identity, involving a significant investment of time, a specific *savoir-faire* and an attitude of recycling and

[18] IRIS stands for *Îlots Regroupés pour l'Information Statistique* (aggregated units for statistical information), and is the basic geographic unit for the diffusion of French statistics at the infra-municipal level. An IRIS accounts for around 2,000 inhabitants.

re-use (Pluvinage & Weber, 1993). As the lorry driver's spouse put it, 'For our holidays, we spent them doing the garden,' including 'making jam, putting up food'. Working-class gardening *savoir-faire* includes growing, harvesting by hand in the cool of the morning or the evening, bringing vegetables to market unwashed so they will keep longer, the way customers expect. Recycling and re-use means collecting manure from neighbours or clients with animals, gathering wild horsetail and other plants for use in homemade fertilisers and pesticides. But this type of working-class gardening also means 'reducing expenses and not counting one's own time' (Weber, 1996). This relationship to time comes up often in discussion: for if it is true of hobby gardening, it is even more true of market gardening. The lorry driver's wife brings it up to emphasise that the operation is not profitable. On the other hand, to think strictly in terms of accounting would be to overlook the inherited rationale of the worker's garden, the principle of reducing household expenses by growing one's own food: 'We have always supported ourselves,' his wife says, 'in the old way' (Interview, 25 April 2016). Thomas embraces the same lifestyle, explaining how making your own, growing your own 'keeps the costs down', and is 'pretty much traditional' (Interview, 7 July 2020). For both these families, this attachment to tradition is a significant marker of their social position.

Poverty, resistance and (in)justice: the challenge of classification

Alain Bihr, to support his critique of the orthodox Marxists who persist in thinking in terms of a two-tiered class structure, contrary to any idea of gradations of class difference or of the middle classes more broadly, points out that such analyses make no room for 'class identification… within these gradations, to the traditional [classes], those outside of the salaried world (possessors of a small capital, petite bourgeoisie, etc.)' (Bihr, 1984, p. 102). The two market gardeners whose stories are presented above are, precisely, examples of this: individuals who have escaped the salaried world and its vicissitudes (being made redundant) by virtue of a small capital mobilised within the context of a working-class tradition of growing food as a leisure activity. They identify with a mode of production and a lifestyle they define as traditional. These two cases thus appear to confirm Poulantzas's analysis (1974) of the differentiation of the petite bourgeoisie, including what he calls a traditional fraction of a new petite bourgeoisie.

Within the relations of production, this traditional fraction corresponds to the small-scale market producers and small landowners (Poulantzas, 1974) and participates in manual labour from the point of view of the division of labour (id.; Bihr, 1984, p. 104). This categorisation is useful for understanding the social position of the two market gardeners from working-class backgrounds who began farming as an alternative to unemployment, of the '*petits paniers*', of the retired and semi-retired farmers who are de-capitalising their farm business while maintaining a small amount of market production and sale to bolster a barely adequate retirement pension. All of these may be considered as typical figures of a degraded market-gardener petite bourgeoisie. Examples of traditional market gardeners holding on in what remains of the historic market-garden belt around major cities, shut out of

major market channels and with insecure land tenure, suggest that rather than being 'condemned to disappearance in and by the capitalist mode of production', this social fraction has been reproduced 'in a subaltern and degraded form' (Bihr, 1984, p. 104).

Poulantzas (1974), too, saw in the traditional petit bourgeois fraction a transitional class in the process of disappearing. One is reminded as well of other petit bourgeois fractions belonging to the agri-food system who are likewise in decline: the small independent grocery store owners, small-scale food artisans (restaurateurs, butchers, fishmongers, etc.), even the small and medium-sized broker-wholesalers. The absence of commercial activity in small towns and villages, even in some near-to-centre urban neighbourhoods in medium-sized cities, does this not also correspond to the spatial dimension of the decline of these businesses and the degradation of this class fraction? Similarly, the loss of agricultural land, the increase in size of the largest farms, the pressure to use more of the countryside to meet the environmental and recreational needs of urban populations—do not all these too correspond to the spatial dimension of the elimination or marginalisation of the agricultural petite bourgeoisie? It is tempting to reply in the affirmative, although this would perhaps be too strict an application of the idea of injustice drawn from the neo-Marxists (Poulantzas and Bihr), while the elitism of the food justice movement is associated with the emergence of other agricultural fractions, less dominated, and whom I refer to here as 'reinvented'.

As Faure et al. (2018) observe, while guarding against the notion of 'trickle-down' benefits for the lower classes, it seems nevertheless impossible not to consider the opportunity for reclassification and recognition that the 'ethical food' segment offers our two market gardeners refusing to join the ranks of the unemployed. Recognising 'relationships maintained with other social groups' is essential to the study of social position (Bessière et al., 2014) and thus also to a reconsideration of agri-food justice. For the former lorry driver, an invitation from local elected officials to help revive certain weekly markets helped him make his first direct sales. The Gilet Jaune market gardener now supplies two CSAs that were developed with the help of an organic farming organisation. In possession of land with agricultural potential, both individuals were able to drawn on local agri-food innovations to give them 'the perspective of a facilitated access to the role of farmer' (Samak, 2016b), enabling them to avoid a socio-professional downgrading that has nonetheless begun. Available statistical data, albeit dated, suggest that these situations may be less rare (Bermond et al., 2019) than a regional field study is able to demonstrate (Guillemin, 2020). Although far from resolving the structural inequalities endemic to the agricultural sector, especially with regard to old age and retirement, alternative agri-food initiatives provide poorer agricultural fractions with more accessible commercial outlets, outlets that are in some cases commercially valuable and at least serve as a complement to other revenue streams. At the same time, we should not idealise the agri-food alternatives embodied by these petit bourgeois market gardeners, whose systems in many cases depend on the unacknowledged work of a spouse (Bertaux-Wiame, 2004). This is a form of gender inequity (Berstein, 2010, trad. 2019, p. 27) that undermines the claims of agri-food justice, and may likewise be found in the 'reinvented' fractions of the agricultural petite bourgeoisie, many of whom come

from the salaried professions with advanced degrees (Samak, 2017), and who are typically over-represented in these alternatives.

Conclusion

Drawing on examples from two fractions of the vegetable growing and market gardening worlds, this article has sought to demonstrate what a class-based analysis of the production end of the agricultural sector can bring to a more holistic view of agri-food justice. In line with the sociology of social class as applied to agriculture (Berstein, 2010; Bessière et al., 2014; Laferté, 2018, 2021), the premise here has been to examine the relations between different fractions involved in the various phases of the agri-food value chain, recognising that it is the coexistence of agricultural and food models that structures the 'alliances and confrontations of actors and ideas' (Gasselin et al., 2021).

Another avenue that could be pursued with respect to agri-food injustice would be to examine how the market gardening and vegetable-growing bourgeoisie engage in conservative direct action against workers in transport and logistics (Guillemin, 2019). There is likewise material for further study with respect to deregulated wage practices (Guillemin, 2020), working around certain labour laws for full-time employees who are French citizens and relying increasingly on immigrant seasonal labour and circular migration networks, the injustices of which have been examined elsewhere (Potot, 2012; Zeneidi, 2017). At the same time, the potential role of the established bourgeoisie, no less than that of the struggling petite bourgeoisie, merits attention within the framework of agri-food justice. For specific market segments (organic agriculture, zero pesticides/pesticide residues), and given the scale of their operations, these dominant figures of the rural and peri-urban worlds have the capacity to supply quality agricultural products at prices 'adapted to different income levels' (Noël, 2020) and/or destined for mass consumption (supermarkets, cafeterias). Moving beyond a simple 'rich vs. poor' reading of the agricultural landscape, future scholarly work could explore how these 'large' farmers can better contribute to food access by means of a larger concept of agri-food justice in which they too have a place: a more just distribution of profits, the creation and maintenance of quality employment, the development of local food policy efforts addressed to farmers rather than to farming. Understanding the dominated position of the incompletely *embourgeoisé* vegetable growers with respect to agri-food executives is likewise relevant to the cause of justice since the knowledge and expertise of food consumers is poorly served by the opacity that surrounds many aspects of agri-food quality regulation (id.).

This opacity of agri-food supply chains is another reason for the development of alternative agricultures combined with the diversification of the farming population via the development of the 'reinvented' agricultural petite bourgeoisie. While claims for peasant justice have achieved social, cultural and even political recognition, the agricultural petit bourgeois fraction remains in many cases economically insecure, even impoverished. What will become of the ideal

of agroecological justice if a fair remuneration for organic market gardeners is not guaranteed? As Berstein emphasises, critical agrarian studies must steer clear of 'simplistic and moralizing stories… for example, the idea that 'small is [always] beautiful'… or that peasant agricultural production is always virtuous' (2010). Indeed, are not these alternatives themselves unjust if they are made possible by the invisible labour of family, friends, or 'volunteers' (Samak, 2016a)? Certain feminist critiques remain compatible with productivism and the family farming model (Comer, 2018), despite substantial progress in the recognition of female work. Finally, how can we qualify as virtuous agri-food transitions that, overseen by an internal elite, 'have not fully succeeded in realizing their [promise of sustainability]' (Noël, 2020), especially with respect to social accessibility?

In seeking to move from the paradigm of food justice to a more holistic notion of agri-food justice, finally, perhaps we need a broader set of analytical concepts that incorporate the spatial or territorial dimensions of food production and consumption. In addition to food deserts or food swamps, for example, we could identify areas that may be described as agricultural sacrifice zones. The focus here would be on the injustice constituted by the development of agricultural transitions in prosperous areas, while productivist agriculture carries on in geographic regions characterised by weak economic and demographic growth, high unemployment and low educational attainment (Bermond et al., 2019). Studies in rural social geography, by virtue of their multidisciplinary and historically Marxist modes of analysis, have much to offer in reconsidering the processes, practices, and perspectives of agri-food justice.

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