

# Moving from “matters of fact” to “matters of concern” in order to grow economic food futures in the Anthropocene

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**Abstract** Agrifood scholars commonly adopt “a matter of fact way of speaking” to talk about the extent of neoliberal rollout in the food sector and the viability of “alternatives” to capitalist food initiatives. Over the past few decades this matter of fact stance has resulted in heated debate in agrifood scholarship on two distinct battlegrounds namely, the corporate food regime and the alternative food regime. In this paper I identify some of the limitations of speaking in a matter of fact way and of focusing on capitalist and neoliberal economies as the yardstick by which to assess all food economy initiatives. Using stories of bananas in Australia and the Philippines I advocate for a new mode of critical inquiry in food scholarship that focuses on matters of concern. Following Bruno Latour I use the term critical inquiry to refer to research methods and thinking practices that multiply possible ways of being and acting in the world. The new mode of critical inquiry I propose centers on enacting three broad research matters of concern. These are (1) gathering and assembling economic diversity (2) human actancy and (3) nonhuman actancy. I argue that through becoming critical minds in the Latourian sense researchers can play a key role in enacting economic food futures in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords** AFNs · Alternative · Anthropocene · Bananas · Community food economies · Diverse economies · Food regimes · Latourian · Post-capitalist food economies

## **Abbreviations**

AFN                    Alternative food network

ATC           Alter Trade Corporation  
CSA           Community-supported agriculture

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### **Author Biography**

**Ann Hill** completed her PhD in 2013 at The Australian National University's Crawford School of Public Policy. Her doctoral research was about collective ethics and methods for growing community food economies based on empirical research in urban neighborhoods of Manila and Mindanao in the Philippines. She is a member of the Community Economies Collective and a Research Coordinator at the University of Western Sydney. Her current research interests include post-crisis transformation and livelihood rebuilding, theorizing and enacting community economies, posthumanist ethics, and hybrid collective research methods.

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### **A tale of bananas**

After floods and Cyclone Yasi decimated 90% of Australia's banana industry in 2011, prices of bananas in our domestic market were beyond the average consumer's budget for many months at sometimes as much as \$A17 per kilogram. In response to the price hike some Australian-based economists called for banana imports from the Philippines, arguing bananas grown by agribusiness corporations such as Del Monte in Mindanao could be sold locally for two dollars Australian. Their argument was that Australian consumers deserve continual access to low cost food commodities, such as imported bananas (Knowledge @ Australian School of Business 2011). This proposition, however, is in conflict with current Australian government policy. While the 1908 *Quarantine Act* technically permits importation of bananas from the Philippines, it is nearly impossible to enact because of stringent biosecurity policies (Australian Government DAFF 2011). The government believes that allowing banana imports from the Philippines would dramatically increase the risk of pests and diseases entering Australia and potentially jeopardize our disease control programs and the local banana growing industry (Australian Government DAFF 2011). Some researchers agree with the government's approach. They caution against international trade "neoliberal priorities" that compromise local agricultural industries. Furthermore they advocate for alternative trade and alternative food industries outside the neoliberal frame (Maye et al. 2012, p. 150; Maye et al. 2007). Other scholars such as the Economists at Knowledge@ Australian School of Business, argue neoliberal priorities should shape local industries.

This post-Yasi banana debate reflects debates in the broader food scholarship arena where food policies encapsulate the kind of social, economic, and environmental change scholars wish to advocate for (Miller 2008, p.14). For example, they may promote neoliberal priorities and international trade at all cost or they may call for close monitoring of world trade agreements because of perceived threats to local biosecurity and biodiversity and "alternative" food industries. It also reflects a scholarly adoption of "a matter of fact way of speaking" about the extent of capitalist markets, global trade, and neoliberal roll-out in the food sector (Latour 2004). Over the past few decades this matter of fact stance or way of speaking has resulted in heated debate in agrifood scholarship. Debate has taken place on two distinct battlegrounds. The first centers on the extent of neoliberal rollout in the food sector and the second on the viability of "alternatives" to capitalist food initiatives. Following Philip McMichael and other scholars in the

Australasian Agrifood Research Network I identify these two battlegrounds as “food regimes” (McMichael 2009; Le Heron and Lewis 2009).

In this paper I use the food regime concept and stories of bananas to (re)examine some of the heated debates in food scholarship. I identify the first battleground as the legacies of the corporate food regime and the second battleground as the legacies of the alternative food regime (McMichael 2009). I also identify some of the limitations of speaking in a matter of fact way and of focusing on capitalist and neoliberal economies as a metrologically valid yardstick by which to assess all food economy initiatives. I use the food regime concept and bananas to advocate for a new mode of inquiry in food scholarship that focuses on “matters of concern” (Latour 2004). Following Bruno Latour I use the term “critical inquiry” to refer to research methods and thinking practices that multiply possible ways of being and acting in the world (Latour 2004, p. 248). Drawing on community economies scholarship I advocate for a mode of critique that enables researchers and communities to enact diverse economic worlds. In the food arena this mode of critique invites intellectual and empirical moves beyond heated corporate and alternative debates toward examining the range of actors involved in growing economic food futures around matters of concern.

Why might we want to make these moves and mobilize actors around concerns? Our global food system, on the one hand seemingly bent on turning broilers into chicken Kiev and potatoes into French fries, is on the other still a work in progress, dependent on billions of decisions made in households, neighborhoods, and regions. In “the Anthropocene,” the period of time from the Industrial Revolution onwards in which humanity has radically increased its power and effect on the earth’s biological, ecological, and meteorological systems, it is paramount we find new ways forward by placing collective responsibility for the care of others and for earth itself at the center of concern (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). Research has a role to play in this, in helping new ways of thinking and acting to materialize. This paper is one contribution in this regard.

The body of the paper comprises four banana stories that highlight the mode of critical inquiry I advocate for and demonstrate how to move from matters of fact to matters of concern. The first story is about agribusiness bananas. The legacies of the corporate food regime and the battleground arising from this are what the agribusiness banana story emerges from. The second story is about fair trade bananas. It emerges from the second battleground around the alternative

food regime. The third story is about experimental community economy bananas and focuses on a collective of independent Muslim farmers in Mindanao who want to change their own economic future. In the fourth story climate concerns are at the fore and the banana story is of a human-nonhuman ethical assemblage post-typhoon Yasi. In the third and fourth banana stories I argue that one of the ways scholarship can shape diverse economic food futures is by focusing more on matters of concern around how environments and populations, human and nonhuman, survive well collectively. The new mode of critical inquiry in food scholarship that I propose centers on enacting three broad “research matters of concern.” These are gathering and assembling (1) economic diversity, (2) human actancy, and (3) human-nonhuman actancy. Using the stories of bananas I explore how a focus on these three broad research concerns might serve to grow different economic food futures.

### **Agribusiness bananas and the corporate food regime**

Mention “Del Monte” to anyone who has had something to do with food industries and agriculture and I am pretty sure they will associate it with agribusiness; with bananas but also tomatoes and pineapples; with large mechanized farms and with the processing of these crops into tinned and dried goods. Family and friends recall consuming copious amounts of canned pineapple in Australia in the 1980s sold under the Del Monte label. It is still on Australian supermarket shelves today, but because of the rise of “home branding” and changes in labeling requirements, it is harder to track the extent of Del Monte’s reach. For example, dried banana chips sold under “Coles” and “Woolworths” own labels may well be grown and processed for export by Del Monte in the Philippines and then packaged in Australia. The label on the “Select” Woolworths brand banana chips in my pantry—an easy to transport snack for my children’s lunch boxes—simply reads “Packaged in Australia” and “Imported ingredients.”

I have vivid first impressions of driving across Northern Mindanao’s fertile coastal plains seeing the vast tracts of agricultural land owned by Del Monte and other international agribusiness corporations. One single crop planted as far as the eye could see with formidable efficiency, order, and monotony. A stark contrast to the diversified farming practices featured in the documentary I was helping to produce at the time, practices seemingly agriculturally

“inefficient” in comparison and certainly insignificant as players on a world stage. Our film crew was filming corporate owned farmlands as contextual footage for social enterprises in the food sector featured in *Building Social Enterprises in the Philippines: strategies for local economic development* (Gibson et al. 2009).

This first impression of Northern Mindanao has stayed in my mind for another reason. At that time word had passed on to Filipino film crewmembers that local conflict was brewing. The latest round of peace talks between the national government and separatist groups such as the Moro Independent Liberation Front had not gone well. This meant that I and the other Australians in the film crew were potentially at greater risk than usual of being kidnapped and held for ransom. We were advised to sit away from the windows in the van during our travels so as to keep out of view of any potential hijackers. We did our filming of the agricultural lands quickly to avoid attracting too much attention but inside the van, behind tinted glass, discussions about failed agrarian reform, on-going conflicts over land and corporate foreign-owned farming practices took place. Because of the immediacy of potential threats to our safety I had a heightened awareness of the complexity of the issues. From those discussions with Filipino colleagues in the van and from my readings in literature I have pieced together this tale as follows.

Del Monte operates extensive banana farms in Mindanao in relatively poor areas with Muslim populations. Many of these farms have emerged from a complex history of land relations (Fagan 2005, 2006; De Leon and Escobido 2004). In the 1960s the Marcos government promoted regional development and foreign exchange earnings in Mindanao by developing the Filipino banana industry in particular to supply Japanese markets (Fagan 2006). A common development practice among the Filipino elite was to evict subsistence farming land owners and landless tenant farmers off large tracts of land in order to establish plantations, often in partnership with transnational corporations (TNCs), and then to encourage peasant farmers (in many cases those who were evicted in the first place) to switch to growing bananas under contract for the TNCs (Fagan 2006; Krinks 2002).

In general the development of corporate banana farms has been to the detriment of local independent banana farmers and diverse mixed farming practices in Mindanao (Krinks 2002). Peasant farmers have found it difficult to compete due to the high production costs they face as small-scale independent producers. Those who have chosen to be contract growers for Del

Monte often receive meager incomes, have little control over their own economic practices and have little capital, resources, and know-how to break with the dependency on the TNC practices that keep them in a state of economic vulnerability (De Leon and Escobido 2004; Krinks 2002).

In the 1980s and 1990s minority world national governments and industry encouraged the globalization of food markets and intensification of agriculture (McMichael 2009). In the case of bananas Del Monte, Dole, and Chiquita emerged as key players in the globalized commodity banana trade. By 2000 these “big three” TNCs controlled two-thirds of the world banana trade (Fagan 2006). The development of capitalist global markets, neoliberal policies, and financial deregulation worked together with the growth in technologies that enabled highly mechanized, industrialized farming, and new agricultural science innovations. This combination of circumstances led to strategic alliances between agribusiness, chemical, and biotechnology industries that “de-peasantized” farming practices and legitimized the conversion of majority world food growing efforts into a “world farm” (McMichael 2005, 2009).

The banana became representative of commodities tied up in global capitalist markets and commodity chains and framed in scholarship as a legacy of the “corporate food regime” (Fagan 2005, 2006; De Leon and Escobido 2004).

Typically research on the corporate food regime and the impacts of the rise of agribusiness in contexts like Mindanao, adopts a productivist research, development and policy perspective that hails from the latter part of the 20th century. A productivist perspective assumes maximizing agricultural yields and profits to be key motivators in agricultural production. It assumes that commercial and capitalist industry and growth is dominant over subsistence and other non-capitalist agricultural practices (Lawrence et al. 2013). Key terms employed in this research are arranged as binaries in Table 1. In agrifood and economic development scholarship of the latter 20th century these key terms generated a set of constructed meanings whereby “capitalist,” “developed world,” “commercial,” and so forth acted as a “master signifier” that stabilized relations of difference by preventing things outside of those terms to be understood as anything other than subordinate to their master (Saussure 1966; Gibson-Graham 2000).

<<Table 1 about here>>

Over the past few decades scholars have made use of the terms in Table 1 as a “matter of fact” way of speaking about the rise and dominance of capitalist food economies (Latour 2004). One way to understand a “matter of fact” focus is to see it as an effort by scholars to describe the world as it *really* is without also acknowledging research as performative of worlds and language as having symbolic power that reinforces certain ways of thinking and acting over others. Fagan’s (2005, 2006) analysis of Del Monte and other banana TNCs and Peter Krink’s (2002) analysis of agriculture in Mindanao are examples. Their research focuses on the dominance of large-scale, first world, corporate agribusiness over other local or “developing world” farming practices.

More recently scholars have used some of the binaries in Table 1 to problematize the productivist focus of capitalist agriculture in the minority world, or as it is still termed in some of the literature “developed” nations (Lawrence et al. 2013, p. 30). Lawrence, Richards and Lyons examine Australia’s banana industry in this vein. Del Monte in the Philippines goes by other names in the Australian context. In Australia it is the big supermarkets that wield power; Coles and Woolworths control 60 to 70% of the domestic market for fresh foods and bananas are one of the top selling grocery items (Lawrence et al. 2013; Koutsoukis 2006). For many years Coles and Woolworths have concentrated their banana purchases in the one region—Tully/Mossman/Innisfail in Queensland (Lawrence et al. 2013). For this reason 90% of Australia’s banana industry is now located in that region. Farmers and suppliers outside this region have effectively been locked out of supermarket purchasing. They cannot compete with growers in the supermarket-preferred zone. Farms in the buying zone face different challenges. There is pressure on them to be large and “efficient” and to have the competitive edge on neighboring suppliers. Lawrence et al. describe farmers as exposed to the “get big or get out doctrine” of “neoliberal capitalism” (2013, p. 37). Also when an extreme weather event strikes the zone of concentrated banana growing, it inevitably wipes out most of the nation’s crop. This was the case with Cyclones Yasi in 2011 and Larry in 2006. As Lawrence et al. state “the location of virtually all of Australia’s bananas in one production region might make economic sense for the supermarkets and their fleets of trucks, but the destruction of the nation’s entire crop raises questions about wider food security” (Lawrence et al. 2013, p. 33).

Scholars have also examined how the global rollout of neoliberalism pressures the Australian banana industry and the agrifood sector. O’Neill and Fagan (2006) critique the role of



the WTO, noting that since its formation in 2005 the WTO has continued to push for free trade of agricultural commodities and to reinforce that quarantine concerns should not be a barrier to free trade. Similarly Dibden et al. (2009) note this WTO focus on “neoliberal agriculture” is pushing Australian producers into hyperproductivism.

Clearly the language and framing of the corporate regime favored by industry and governments are also a strong focus within food research. The matter of fact way of speaking about food economies in the examples above equates with emphasizing the dominance of capitalist agribusiness enterprise over other economic forms and with high yield and maximum output for as low cost as possible. One of the consequences of adopting this emphasis is that the corporate regime is reinforced as an inevitable but hopeless way forward: “... in the face of the need for Australia to fundamentally redesign its agriculture for the new century, the current productivist trajectory will continue to be pursued with vigor creating major concerns...” (Lawrence et al. 2013, p. 37). My own theoretical orientation and ethical stance seeks a more hopeful politics and narrative. I call for scholars to (re)consider what economic reality we wish to perform and reinforce through food research.

From my connection to the Australian and New Zealand Agrifood network, I understand that many of the scholars I have referred to above are gravely concerned about small-scale initiatives that get pushed out by big and subsistence efforts that are taken over by the capitalist priorities. But like other agrifood scholars who are interested in post-structuralism (see for example, Le Heron and Lewis 2009)—I question the performative effect of the productivist agriculture neoliberal mode of critique. What is the effect of scholarship that focuses on the dominance of agribusiness and capitalist food economies without also enacting other possible ways forward? How can we best advocate for the outcomes we desire—more sustainable food systems, food security and biodiversity to name a few? Is it through ongoing neoliberal critique? I believe that research is performative, that all research shapes and creates the world we come to live in (Law and Urry 2004; Gibson-Graham 2008; Cameron and Gordon 2010). Scholars can respond to concerns about the health of populations and environments by seriously considering the role their own research plays in imagining and enacting different food futures. To this end I ask what kind of reality do we want to perform and what kind of reality do we want to reinforce and bring into being through food scholarship? In the second banana tale I examine another

major food regime of the past few decades that reflects efforts of scholars to perform different worlds of food outside the corporate frame.

### **Fair trade bananas and the alternative food regime**

During the 1990s geographers in the minority world became very interested in a new set of food debates. They began to perform an “alternative food regime.” One of the basic tenets of this regime was that the capitalist food system had distanced and detached food production from consumption (Marsden et al. 2000; Whatmore et al. 2003). In response producers and consumers were seeking out locally based networks to re-socialize and form closer and more authentic relationships with one another (Marsden et al. 2000; Whatmore et al. 2003; Venn et al. 2006; Morgan et al. 2008). They were also seeking out “novel” food networks such as farmers markets and community-supported agriculture schemes in an effort to reclaim quality, organic, fresh, and authentic foods (Marsden et al. 2000; Whatmore et al. 2003; Venn et al. 2006). In relation to quality for example, growing concerns about food safety and nutrition were described as “leading many consumers in advanced capitalist countries to demand quality products that [were] embedded in regional ecologies and cultures” (Morgan et al. 2008, p. 7).

Geographers developed a new alternative food language, claiming that the productivist research and policy focus that had emphasized the globalization of food production rendered local and community food initiatives insignificant. Behind the scenes, they argued, local food networks cast aside as marginal, had strengthened and were prolific (Whatmore et al. 2003, p. 389). Shifts in research focus to local embedded food systems were viewed as creating an “alternative” geography of food (Morgan et al. 2008, p. 7). Throughout the 1990s geographers developed particular frameworks and a specific language to support these arguments, which were essentially about a shift in consumer allegiance from conventional to “alternative” food systems. This literature made use of a new set of binary terms (see Table 2) that positioned alternative food as more sustainable, ethical, organic, small scale, and slow.

<<Table 2 about here>>

Increasing numbers of studies focused on positioning alternative food systems and practices in opposition to the mainstream, justifying that position, or questioning how different alternatives really were from the mainstream. The most common frame of reference adopted by geographers and food scholars, particularly in the UK and EU, was to consider various kinds of community based food initiatives—community gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture schemes, food cooperatives, and so forth—under the banner of “alternative food networks” or AFNs (Renting et al. 2003; Sage 2003; Whatmore et al. 2003; Watts et al. 2005; Venn et al. 2006; Goodman and Goodman 2009). AFNs are loosely defined as “food markets that redistribute value through the network against the logic of bulk commodity production; that reconvene trust between food producers and consumers, and that articulate new forms of political association and governance” (Whatmore et al. 2003, p. 389). Other similar terms include “local food networks” and “local food systems” (Jarosz 2000; De Puis and Goodman 2005; Feagan 2007).

Some scholars claim political strength through the deployment of alternative-mainstream binaries. They recognize the benefits to local economic organizing efforts when food economies are articulated as explicitly alternative. For example, framing it this way provides a way for communities of support to develop around organic farmers, enabling them to define and organize themselves for political advocacy in local landscapes dominated by large-scale industrial agriculture (Jarosz 2000, p. 280). Fairtrade Balangon bananas that travel from the Philippines to Japan, are one example of the alternative food story.

Balangon has its roots in the sugar crisis in Negros in the Visayas region of the Philippines in the late 1980s. According to one NGO commentator, plummeting world sugar prices caused “widespread famine among the sugar-dependent poor of Negros Occidental” (Alter Trade 2013). In response to this crisis the Alter Trade Corporation (ATC) was formed with a view to finding “trade instead of aid” solutions to local economic development. It set up an alternative market for bananas and mascobado sugar.

ATC, run by a pro-poor NGO of the same name, describes itself as an “alternative business enterprise” (Alter Trade 2013). Through ATC, Balangon bananas grown by organized farmer groups in the Visayas, are sold directly to organized consumer networks in Japan. ATC plays a key role in enabling the “alternative” market to operate. It acts as a broker negotiating the exchange between farmer groups in the Philippines and Japanese consumer cooperatives. It

guarantees Filipino growers and Japanese consumers fair prices and a relatively stable market despite the fluctuations and uncertainty of prices and markets in the global TNC and WTO driven banana trade (Gibson-Graham 2006).

The Balangon story is exemplar of the “alternative food regime” and an alternative to the capitalist market. ATC seeks to reconvene trust and meaningful exchange between producers and consumers by maintaining a guaranteed market and fair pricing for growers and a quality banana product for consumers who want to support independent farmers. It earns over half its revenue from supporting this fair trade banana initiative.

Not everyone agrees that alternatives like the Balangon banana trade are viable and that they bring about political and economic change such as improvements to the economic well-being of independent banana farmers. Alternative modes of food production, consumption, and exchange are often framed as peripheral, relatively powerless, and socially insignificant, merely the efforts of a self-conscious few at the local scale. From a realist stance, alternatives that are local, small scale, grassroots initiatives are sometimes framed as ineffective and weak when compared and measured against the size and scale of capitalist enterprises and markets (Cameron and Gordon 2010; Healy 2009). When this argument is made, the binary opposition of mainstream versus alternative works against the viability of diverse economic forms. Thus potentially “alternativeness” can shut down possibilities for growing economic worlds in the community arena.

As in food systems, the term “alternative” is problematized in economics. The term alternative, by its very nature, underscores a foundational insight from modern linguistic theory—that no term derives its meaning self-referentially. The existence of an “alternative economy” implies that there is a dominant or mainstream economy against which the alternative is defined (Healy 2009). Healy’s reflections parallel the arguments that have been made in the food sector, namely, when referenced to the mainstream, alternatives can be seen as weak and ineffective but also as only being defined in comparison to a dominant other and therefore inevitably bound to the mainstream.

In relation to the second banana story one commentator wrote “[Alter Trade Corporation] is a fake and a promoter of unfair trade.” It dictates “cheap buying prices for peasants’ products that are in turn sold at high prices to foreign consumers ...” ATC is part of the “psy-war machinery of the US-Arroyo regime...”(Ombion 2007). In this commentary banana two is

viewed with skepticism and distrust. According to this Philippines based journalist, the Balangon banana initiative may look good on the surface but it is inevitably co-opted into international neoliberal policy agendas such as profit maximization for foreign consumers. According to Ombion these agendas do not translate into benefits for relatively poor peasant farmers in the Philippines.

In food scholarship Julie Guthman's work reflects the broader argument about neoliberal gains highlighted in Ombion's ATC commentary. Guthman adopts a matter of fact mode of critique in her research on agro-food activism and organics in California (Guthman 2008a; Guthman 2008b). One of the key aims of her work is "to theorize how projects in opposition to neoliberalizations of the food and agricultural sectors seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and mentalities" (2008a, p. 1171).

A challenge for all of us interested in researching food economies is how to emancipate ourselves from the realist structural dynamics and thinking patterns of capturing and assessing existing objects in terms of how they measure up against perceived economic norms such as capitalist and neoliberal growth trajectories (Gibson-Graham 2008). Whether our approach is geared towards trying to reinforce the dominance of the corporate food regime or whether our approach is to lobby against it via an alternative food regime, we can easily find ourselves locked into a structural ontology that presumes capitalist market transactions, waged labor, and capitalist enterprises to be dominant and the array of other markets and nonmarket transactions, other forms of labor and enterprise to be subordinate. Adhering to this underlying, often subliminal spatial ontology typically keeps the alternatives peripheral.

For the reasons I have outlined above geographers have for some time contested the suitability of the word "alternative" in food scholarship. They have identified the limitations of an alternative-conventional dualism in food economies analysis (for example Holloway et al. 2007). By my reading of the literature, the release of *Alternative food geographies* in 2007 marked a peak in the "alternative-conventional" food debate beyond which the language and frameworks of the alternative food regime can be seen to have less meaning and less use in food systems analysis (Maye et al. 2007). Out of the alternative food literature has emerged a regime shift. It has involved thinking about other possible food economies outside the neoliberal and capitalist frame.

## **Community economy bananas and a critical regime shift**

Lewis Holloway and five co-authors in the UK were among the first food scholars to call for “possible food economies” outside the mainstream versus alternative binarism (2007). One of their projects involved developing heuristic fields for analyzing a vast array of food production-consumption initiatives. Noting the diversity in the initiatives they examined, at the conclusion of the project they argued “the question arises as to the possibility that some sort of broader political project might be established which seeks to change the overall food supply system for the better, without reverting to a story of alternatives positioned against a monolithic conventional food system” (Holloway et al. 2007, p. 15). In their research these authors adopted ideas from economic geography because thinking about alternative and community food as sites of economic possibility had already gained momentum and recognition as part of the post-capitalist politics developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006).

Within economic geography attention to the variety of economic activities and on-going practices outside the realm of capitalism readily includes analysis of AFNs—farmers markets, community gardens, household and neighborhood food production, and community-supported agriculture schemes. Holloway and his co-authors and other food scholars recognize that to think about alternative food initiatives as other than ineffective, weak, and co-opted into neoliberal ideologies, requires a different theoretical framing. It requires a framing that recognizes that the marginality (and paranoia) associated with alternative initiatives comes from defining something as alternative in the first place (Healy 2009).

Gibson-Graham’s theoretical intervention, including their work with other Community Economies Collective scholars in more recent years, is to replace the binary opposition of mainstream and alternative with the conception of economy as a space of difference (Gibson-Graham 2006; 2008; Healy 2009; see Cameron and Gordon 2010 and Harris 2009 for AFN related examples). The diverse economy framing offers an ontology in which the economy is understood as being composed of an array of markets, transactions, forms of labor, enterprise, property, and finance that constitute multiple and diverse economic worlds (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). Within the diverse economy frame, capitalism “becomes just one particular set of economic relations situated in a vast sea of economic activity” (Gibson-

Graham 2006, p. 70). Other non-capitalist community economy initiatives are brought into view using the diverse economy lens.

The third banana story is about a community economy initiative. It is the story of one community experimenting with growing a regional community-supported banana economy. The Lakatan Banana Growing Project is an initiative of an association of Kagan Muslims banana growers in the Compostella Valley Province of the Pantukan local government area in Mindanao. Lakatan is a variety of table banana, common in local markets in the Philippines and the banana of choice among Filipino consumers.

The Lakatan story emerged from a food project mapping exercise that took place in the Growing Community Food Economies Workshop, a research event in Mindanao, in 2009 that was attended by over 40 people from NGOs, local governments, community groups, and universities in Australia and the Philippines, all of whom were interested in growing different food and economic futures in the Philippines (for more on this event see Hill 2013; Cameron et al. 2014). In the exercise participants were asked to pick a food project they were involved in and map a six-month plan of how to develop the project into something that might constitute a community food economy. Arnel Pinduruan of the Learned Kagan Muslim Foundation Incorporated was representing the Lakatan project at the workshop. He worked on a project plan with members of the social enterprise NGO Unlad Kabayan who were already providing some in-kind support to the Muslim foundation. At the time of the workshop the Lakatan banana growers of Pantukan were already affiliated as a 100 member strong association. They were looking to increase membership among the additional 300 banana growers thought to reside in the Pantukan region. They were also looking to grow a new market to generate community and household income from the sale of bananas. (Personal communication, Arnel Pinduruan, 30 April 2009). The growers association wanted to develop a regional banana industry that connected Muslim growers in Pantukan to Filipino consumers elsewhere in Mindanao via a community-supported agriculture (CSA) scheme.

As with Balangon, the fair trade bananas, consumers in a CSA in Mindanao could organize themselves into buying cooperatives. Alternatively CSA growers might set up some other kind of mechanism for regular trading such as a weekly local food market. They may look to an overseas market (for example, Alter Trade in Japan) or to supply a regional Philippine-based market. The emphasis of a CSA is on providing a steady income stream for growers via

developing some kind of consumer “community of financial support” for independent and often smaller scale growers. In many CSA schemes around the world, consumers agree to purchase the harvest regardless of climate conditions and economic price fluctuations that are beyond the control of the producer. For example, if typhoons and floods were to damage the Lakatan crop in Pantukan, consumers in the City of Cagayan de Oro would agree to purchase damaged fruit at the regular price and to bear the cost of weather fluctuations under a CSA memorandum of agreement.

At the time of the workshop the Pantukan growers were wondering how to develop their CSA scheme. In the report back session Arnel explained that the Pantukan based growers had plenty of land and labor at their disposal. They already harvested bananas for household consumption, communal food gatherings and informal neighborhood exchange. But they had little idea about how to pool funds and other resources, how to set up a region-wide trading system and about how to manage themselves collectively in a way that would enable them to supply bananas to their regional market on an on-going basis.

The workshop conversations helped Arnel think through what partnerships might help the project get off the ground. For example, participants discussed what support could be given by the Department of Agriculture employees who were present at the workshop, in terms of crop management to ensure a continual harvest. They also discussed accounting and business planning with in-kind support to be given by NGO Unlad Kabayan and how they could work more effectively with the Department of Agrarian Reform.

Academic and lay-researchers helped Arnel and the project (via the planning exercise) start with what was already available at hand. Diverse and community economies mapping activities at the workshop encouraged the project to draw not only on partnerships that would provide research and development support, but also on all the economic assets they already had in the Pantukan Municipality. These assets included reciprocal labor arrangements, traditional trading practices, independent businesses, entrepreneurial ideas, vacant land and buildings, and available materials. Drawing on existing economic assets is a useful first step in helping experimental food economies, such as the regional banana trade, get started and to think outside the capitalist economic frame (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 170; Gibson with Hill 2010). Rather than over-capitalizing through large external loans in its infancy, the Lakatan project was encouraged to start small and with what they already had, to maintain sustainability and



resilience in the local region. They were not looking to become contract growers in a capitalist venture (as in the tale of banana one) or to export bananas (as in the tale of banana two). In the tale of banana three the local community wanted to maintain some control over their own economic futures but also to work collectively to grow a food economy in their own neighborhood and across the Mindanao region.

It was beyond the scope of my own research to follow this tale beyond the workshop and I suspect as with other experiments of this kind the Lakatan venture has been slow to develop due to the investment of time required to start something from the ground up with a large number of farmers and little capital. My reason for telling this tale is to focus on the experimental approach and to highlight a story where various human actors (not only academics but also lay-researchers like Arnel) do research together to build a different economic food future. Collectively the people in this story embrace a non-capitalist vision of a food economy that turns the economic hopes of an association of Muslim banana growers into a real economic possibility. By working together with organizations like Unlad and government departments, the association has the potential to enact a post-capitalist politics and a regional growth trajectory for the banana industry in Mindanao.

I propose a new mode of critical inquiry for food scholarship that foregrounds a collective project of constructing post-capitalist food economies. I propose a mode of inquiry that centers on “gathering” (as in bringing together) and “assembling” (as in arranging in a particular way) diverse economic practices and diverse “modes of existence” and actancy (Latour 2013). In the case of the Lakatan story: Muslim farmers in Mindanao, diverse economies researchers, social entrepreneurs working for Unlad Kabayan, the Lakatan banana trees, and land in Pantukan long fought over in contested agrarian reform programs, were gathered and intersected in the workshop via conversation, planning, and partnership building. The collective project of construction, the “assembling” work, in the Lakatan case involved developing a community food economy around a shared matter of concern, namely, an interest in growing regional banana trade and in fostering local economic development in Mindanao. The social enterprise ideas and community economy practices in the Lakatan story were foregrounded in the workshop setting. The emphasis was on being open to what new economic activity might emerge from the work of gathering and assembling the Lakatan story at the workshop.

The proposed new mode of “critical” inquiry also offers various actors new “arenas” in which to gather and assemble (Latour 2004, p. 246). In some cases the arenas may be face-to-face such as a workshop event or they may be a web interface or a digital platform for academic and lay-researcher interaction. In other cases arenas maintain a more traditional text-based focus, gathering and assembling ideas and actors in a new way in written words and published manuscripts.

Critical inquiry involves gathering and assembling ideas and practices that are “fragile” precisely because they are experimental and inconclusive as in the case of the Lakatan tale. The critical scholar must embrace the novelty and the “always in the process of becoming” nature of the ideas being worked with, in this case ideas about how to develop and foster post-capitalist economies (Nancy 2000). Bruno Latour explains the role of the critic in the following way:

The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is ... the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution. (Latour 2004, p. 246)

A significant matter of concern for critical scholars is gathering and assembling economic diversity. They are interested in highlighting food economies as diverse because this is a useful first step in thinking about possible economic growth trajectories outside the realm of capitalism. Wright’s (2010) diverse economic reading of Puno, on the island of Panay in the Philippines, is one example. Wright describes a whole array of transactions, enterprises, and forms of labor in a traditional rice-growing region. She demonstrates that people in Puno “transform the very meaning of economic practice” by traversing various capitalist but also non-capitalist economic spaces in their daily lives all of which are part of their livelihood (Wright 2010, p. 297). Robbins et al. (2008) gather and assemble economic diversity by showing the range of economic practices and the diversity of laboring subjects who gather food (and other non-timber products) in forests in the USA. By foregrounding a diverse economy of non-timber forest products they challenge norms about non-timber harvesting practices and subjects. Instead of being some kind of

alternative or marginal economic practice, non-timber forest harvesting is shown to be important for a whole cross-section of people and livelihoods.

A second matter of concern for critical scholars is gathering and assembling human actancy. Highlighting how various human actors can work together, for example, how Muslim banana farmers, NGO workers, and academics re-thinking economy can intersect at a workshop in the story of Lakatan, is another useful step in thinking about possible post-capitalist economic growth trajectories. Cameron (with Gerrard) (2008) gathered and assembled various academics, lay-researchers, and community food organizers and practitioners for a workshop on thinking and practicing economic values within the community food sector. The workshop exercises highlighted that there is no one prescriptive pathway for enterprises to follow, rather food enterprises (including community gardens, food cooperatives, permaculture networks) are constructed by the ethical economic decision making of economic subjects who are themselves always in the process of becoming. Cameron points out in the workshop report that if any one thing characterizes post-capitalist food enterprises, it is that they are engaged in “an on-going process of thinking through and practicing their values” or matters of concern (Cameron (with Gerrard) 2008, p. 49).

DeLind gathers and assembles human actancy through volunteering civic engagement within a local food system. She describes herself as involved in “civic agriculture” that “identifies a diverse and growing body of food and farming enterprises fitted to the needs of local growers, consumers, rural economies, and communities” (DeLind 2002, p. 217). Actors she gathers and assembles in her scholarship include the Allen Neighborhood Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to neighborhood development; the Allen Street Farmers Market; a Youth Services Corps of 12–16 year olds who work in gardens, for example, building garden beds; and Hunter Park a 30-acre green space commons with walking trails, children’s play equipment, a pool, and a garden house where neighborhood groups build raised garden beds. DeLind’s work privileges citizenship and civic engagement and largely takes place within a community economy (DeLind 2002, 2011). But gathering and assembling work need not necessarily occur outside the realm of capitalism. In New Zealand various food scholars are involved in ongoing efforts to gather and assemble human actancy and research capabilities in partnership with agricultural industries (for example see Gray and Le Heron 2010 on the NZ dairy industry).

In the above examples critical scholars use gathering and assembling methods to widen economic worlds. They widen the world by foregrounding economic diversity especially economic practices overlooked when the focus is on the capitalist economy and by highlighting various human actors working together to imagine and enact new economic food futures. Critical inquiry can also enact new ways of being in the world by attending to a third research matter of concern—gathering and assembling human-nonhuman actancy. In the fourth banana story, I discuss this important and necessary work in the Anthropocene.

### **Bananas in a human-nonhuman assemblage and a new food regime for the Anthropocene**

When I mentioned my “going bananas” in this paper to a colleague, his first reaction was to send me a link to a YouTube clip of the “Banana Splits,” the four animal characters who sang “one banana two banana, three banana four” and appeared on a children’s variety show on television in the late 1960’s. I watched the clip (YouTube 2010). It was a welcome, humorous, lighthearted moment amid the intensity of writing. It was also a de-subjectifying moment. I became the 16,617th viewer to watch slightly weird looking characters of the pre-digital age, singing “tra la la, tra la la la” driving dodgem cars and sliding down slippery dips (YouTube 2010). I found myself thinking about the assemblage of things and gathering of things represented in this moment: YouTube, viewers watching old television footage on modern digital devices (laptops, iPads, iPhones, “smart” things), 1960s television technology, humans in nonhuman costumes, the nod to Kellogg’s Cereals, the multinational food manufacturer that sponsored the television series and very interestingly, I think, the absence of the raw food itself. Bananas may well be included in the name “Banana Splits” just for television and commercial gain. But the usefulness of this analogy lies in the gathering and assembling of human and nonhuman actors and what emerges for the human actor out of this gathering and assembling work: desubjectification and then perhaps resubjectification into a more-than-human assemblage.

How might this resubjectification process work? Latour proposes human-nonhuman “pairing” as a way of being and acting in the world (Latour 2004). One way in which we can see this pairing occurring in the twenty-first century is through digital technologies. For example, in conjunction with his most recent book Latour (2013) has embarked on a project of human-

nonhuman pairing by setting up a digital site alongside the book that allows visitors to become co-investigators of the material presented there. Latour's intention is to carry out an investigation on diverse regimes for living with the participation of his readers via web-based technologies.

Cook (Follow the Things 2013) makes use of digital technologies in a similar way in the food arena. Using web-based technologies he has developed a research center designed to resemble an online store. The followthethings.com website encourages people around the world to order a "following the things" grocery bag free of charge, to fill the bag with things they buy or receive, and then to research the origins of the contents and to write up the stories. For example, I could take my bag to my nearest supermarket and fill it with banana products (fresh fruit, dried fruit, banana cake, banana flavored milk, etc.) and then trace where those ingredients come from. Cook and others invite me onto the web platform to add my grocery bag information and photos to the "followingthethings" site. The stories of various foods on the website showcase a diversity of food economies (Follow the Things 2013).

Digital technologies are not the only focus of human-nonhuman pairing in food scholarship. Plants, trees, soil, ecosystems are also a focus, for example, in the work of Puig de la Bellacasa (2010) on permaculture and in the work of Roelvink and Zolkos (2011) on farming innovation and sustainable land management practices. Cameron and co-authors (2011) focus on growing a community of community gardens wherein plants, bees, and soil microbes are as much the gardeners of gardens as people are.

In all these examples of human-nonhuman pairing there is equally a gathering and assembling of human and nonhuman actancy. What might this "pairing approach" or work, yield for populations and environments straining under the current global food system? And how might it help us develop post-capitalist food economies around matters of concern in a climate-changing world? The story of banana four is food for thought in relation to these ideas. In this tale we come full circle to the post Cyclone Yasi economic dilemma but this time different sensibilities are in play.

Sharon was one of the last banana trees standing after Yasi; her roots, branches and bunches of fruit survived the cyclonic winds and torrential rains. In the days and weeks following the devastation Sharon's human companion, farmer Cameron Fledger, went row by row, tree by tree, over his farm assessing and cleaning up the damage with a group of backpackers he employed. Cane knives in hand, the team of amateurs worked with Fledger to cut

down broken trees and smashed fruit. They salvaged what they could and burned or buried the rest to minimize spread of disease. They named the six trees that survived. ‘Sharon’ was one of the lucky ones. Her name was bestowed on her as a mark of respect and dignity for what she had endured and for the food future she represented. Sharon and the land that nurtured her would live to bear more fruit and to inspire the renewal of the Fledger farm in Tully, Queensland.

A year on from the local disaster, Fledger spoke to an ABC reporter about his rebuilding efforts. Sharon and the five other survivors had “pumped out a haul of bananas” according to Fledger. He joked with the reporter about where Sharon ended up: “some multi-millionaire ate [her fruit at A\$17 per kilo] down in Brisbane or Sydney I suppose” (Anderson 2012, comment added). Despite Sharon and her five siblings’ plentiful yield and some other fruit salvaged from trees that died, the total harvest for 2011 off the Fledger farm only amounted to 80,000 cartons of bananas compared to a normal year of 700,000 cartons. Overall, Fledger estimated financial losses of \$A8 million. The re-building funding he received from the Queensland state government of \$A25,000 was gratefully received but small in comparison to the costs of restoring and rebuilding the farm and dealing with various on-going environmental challenges (Anderson 2012). Sharon and the five trees had grown, but so too had major fungal problems and crop diseases. Diseases had “bloomed” according to Fledger (Anderson 2012). No doubt the exceptionally wet conditions had encouraged disease and fungal growth.

With Sharon at the center we see the post Yasi dilemma introduced via banana one, with a different perspective. Sharon is a tree. She is a living breathing entity that is respected and honored by Fledger for what she has endured and for what she provides for his livelihood. With Sharon at the center we see post Yasi matters of concern that cause us to ask more questions that we have answers for. We see the importance of land management after an extreme weather event. For example, burning or burying prevents the spread of disease and fungi among the living trees but it also returns the waste to the earth to begin the life cycle once again. In this tale diseases “bloom” in Australia even with present disease and quarantine controls. We can imagine the enormous work of post-disaster livelihood rebuilding; for example, Cameron Fledger undertook extensive tree planting in the weeks following Yasi. We see the potential benefits of farmers having a Coles and Woolworths contract and perhaps the necessity of higher banana prices post disasters (I am speculating from the tone of the ABC report and the location of the farm that Fledger has a contract to supply one of the two big supermarkets). Shouldn’t we after

all accept that we must pay a high price for being human in a climate-changing world? The dialogue between Sharon, Fledger, and the ABC reporter/lay researcher Anderson inspires new research conversations and a pondering of the kind of new food regime we might cultivate through scholarship in the Anthropocene.

## **Conclusion**

In a climate-changing world where food futures are increasingly uncertain, food scholarship can move towards gathering and assembling economic experimentation around “matters of concern” such as post-disaster economic resilience, food security, and ecological sustainability (Latour 2004). Shifting focus from matters of fact to matters of concern invites open conversation and collective effort between the different actors gathered and assembled around a particular concern. In a matter of concern mode of inquiry gathering and assembling methods shift focus toward how scholars, lay researchers, farmers, banana trees, weather events, and a host of other “actors” work together to enact diverse and post-capitalist economic futures.

Gathering and assembling diverse food economies in a climate-changing world is an on-going work-in-progress both in scholarly outputs and communities at large. By following bananas I have examined some of the dominant food regimes of the past decades and the shifts that have occurred in scholarship. There are many ways forward and much experimenting to be done. I have called for a new mode of critical inquiry as one way through which food scholars can foster and contribute to open and experimental conversations and activities that in turn shape and grow new food futures. I have proposed a new mode of critical inquiry that gathers and assembles economic diversity, human actancy, and human-nonhuman actancy as a means of cultivating post-capitalist food futures.

When we consider issues that dominate mainstream airtime we can be forgiven for thinking that the global food system driven by agribusiness corporations and supermarket chains is sunk as it were into common sense. Orienting our work towards building new food futures and post-capitalist food economies does not mean ignoring the “realities” and challenges of growing different food futures, but rather, accepting the politics of any reality and allowing for new ways of thinking and being in the world to emerge through being more attentive to matters of concern.

What this paper has shown is that through becoming critical minds in the Latourian sense researchers can help the new to materialize—perhaps through running research events that help grassroots economic food initiatives like the Lakatan Banana Growing Project to develop, and perhaps through writing and reporting differently on how humans and nonhuman actors encounter each other after extreme weather events as in the case of “Sharon” and her banana farm companion, Cameron Fledger. Whatever our research interventions may be, what is clear is that we make choices about the kind of world we bring into being through our work. If we want to play a key role in shaping and enacting economic food futures for the Anthropocene then we need ways of thinking and writing to that end.

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**Table 1.** Corporate food regime binaries 1970s to the present

<b>Dominant term</b>	<b>Subordinate term</b>
commercial	subsistence
regulated	unregulated
productive	inefficient
mechanized	labor intensive
first world	third world
north	south
capitalist	non-capitalist
economic	non-economic
large-scale	small-scale
market	non-market
developed	underdeveloped/developing

**Table 2.** Alternative food regime binaries 1990's to the present

<b>Dominant term</b>	<b>Sub-ordinate term</b>
mainstream	alternative
conventional	alternative
unsustainable	sustainable
large scale	small scale
global	local
fast	slow
price	quality
chemical	organic
contaminated	safe
unhealthy	healthy
unethical	ethical
bad	good
manufactured	fresh