

# Of Global Cause and Consequence: The Organic Farmers of Saskatchewan Versus Monsanto and Bayer

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates the nature of the social project surrounding the lawsuit between the organic farmers of Saskatchewan, Canada, and Monsanto and Bayer, the two largest biotechnology companies in Canada. The thesis also explores the culture of organic farming in an era of high technology and globalization. An ethnographic approach is employed in order to address this research aim from the perspective of study participants. Based on interview data, I detail the difficulties facing farmers, especially small organic farmers, in Canada today. I also describe a hope and determination amongst organic farmers who see themselves resisting the erosion of the rural landscape at the hands of powerful corporations and a dominant industrial model of food production. In the end, the organic farmers of Saskatchewan are recognized as part of a broad, coalitional and embryonic new social movement whose lifeworld, or cultural, focus reflects the post-modern character of contemporary society and presents some interesting challenges for social science.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks first to my supervisor Michael Mehta – for giving me the space and (what must have seemed like) endless patience within which to work. To my formal advisory committee, Michael Gertler and Zaheer Baber, and those informal mentors who provided me with invaluable advice and reminders such as “Kelly, writing *is* recursive.” To my utterly selfless parents whose complementary views have shaped my own. To those friends who appreciate my individuality and even support me despite some pesky idiosyncrasies. To the one who, through no doing of his own, almost made the writing of this thesis impossible – an unparalleled distraction. To all of the study’s participants who work the land and the system in unwavering devotion and hope, to you most of all. Because this study is important but not more than the people’s survival it hopes to serve.

## DEDICATION

For those who consider everything carefully and who still imagine a world of joy and decency.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

In this period of neo-liberal global capitalism, a new social order is emerging that is characterized by intensely contested relations among state, economy and civil society. Although ‘globalization’ is widely used and variously defined, there is an overwhelming sense that we live in a distinctive global era. We see vernacular evidence of global connections: in news, in goods manufactured in one area of the world and sold in another, in corporations with global reach, in migrants moving about the planet, and in transnational campaigns on behalf of environmental, religious and moral causes.

To most, globalization means increased capital flows and the removal of restrictions on trade that have created a degree of global economic integration whose new quality and impact can hardly be doubted. Global economic transactions are reaching a level achieved in no previous epoch, and they directly affect national economies on a previously unknown scale (Held, 1997). Nader and Wallach (1996) describe this new economic model as “corporate globalization” asserting that it places supranational limitations on a nation’s legal and practical ability to subordinate commercial activity to national development goals.

Since roughly the early 1970s, global markets have become increasingly liberalized, capital mobility has accelerated, and industrial production has shifted to meet the needs of post-Fordist flexibility (Habermas, 2001). Trade liberalization, and flexibility in organizing business, made possible in part through innovations in communications technologies, have given transnational corporations enormous market power to the point where leaders of nation-states have become hostage to threats to move businesses elsewhere (Bonanno *et al.*, 1994). Governments, aware of the mobility of transnational capital, have been pressured into a situation of cost-cutting and deregulation, sometimes referred to as an ‘international race for the bottom’, where necessary economic objectives

are reached only at the expense of social and political ones. Riding the wave of the dominant, neo-liberal, economic ideology, governments willingly placed themselves in this vulnerable position by signing early free trade agreements; and they entertain increasing accountability to transnational corporate interest through negotiations at the level of the World Trade Organization and elsewhere.

The effects of these large structural changes find their tangible expression in conflicts at the local level including the current lawsuit between the organic farmers of Saskatchewan, Canada, and two biotechnology companies, Monsanto and Bayer. With little doubt, shifts in the world economy have had consequences for rural residents everywhere. Through internationalization of Canadian agricultural policy, and technological development, residents of the rural Canadian landscape have become increasingly vulnerable to macro-economic shifts, and agricultural practice has in many ways been restructured into a highly industrialized business (National Farmer's Union, 2001). Despite the efficiency of conventional agriculture, Canadian farmers are caught between low commodity prices and staggeringly high costs of chemical and technological inputs. This paradox is explained in large part by deregulation and corporate monopolization, combined with heightened global competition among farmers (National Farmer's Union, 2001). For the organic farmers of Saskatchewan, the wide application of biotechnology to agriculture, itself a result of Canada's push to become competitive in the world economy, has meant a loss of international markets, money and the possibility of entire industry ruin.

On January 10, 2002, two organic farmers of Saskatchewan filed a class action lawsuit against Monsanto Canada Inc., and Bayer Canada Inc., on behalf of all of the province's certified organic grain farmers. These farmers allege that the genetically engineered canola produced by these corporations is contaminating crops so extensively that certified organic farmers no longer grow canola, robbing them of a lucrative market (Organic Agricultural Protection Fund, 2002). They also suggest that the anticipated commercialization of Monsanto's genetically engineered wheat will destroy their ability to grow organic wheat similarly (see Appendix A). While there is doubtlessly a high

degree of conviction among the aggrieved, previous rulings have highlighted the courts' hesitancy to address the issue of responsibility for the accidental spread of genetically engineered seed (Sudduth, 2002).

In 1998, Monsanto Canada Inc. brought Prairie farmer Percy Schmeiser to court for growing their patented genetically engineered canola without having signed a contract or Technology Use Agreement. The Supreme Court ruled that whether by intent or accident genetically engineered canola was grown without requisite contract and the seed, and resultant crop, in such a situation are the property of Monsanto as the patent-holder (see Appendix B). Given this, it seems unlikely that the organic farmers of Saskatchewan will achieve success in the legal arena, and we can question whether the significance of this lawsuit lies only in its final legal outcome.

## 1.2 Purpose

The seeming contradictions involved with this lawsuit present a unique research opportunity: this case is a window to the exploration of the culture of organic farming today. While the motivations of the organic farmers of Saskatchewan in their legal pursuit of Monsanto and Bayer are questioned, the ultimate purpose of this study is to analyze the nature of this social project and of contemporary organic farming.

## 1.3 Research Questions

With one eye on the idea that the actions of the organic farmers of Saskatchewan, in their legal pursuit of Monsanto and Bayer, are possibly partly instrumental; and they, and organic farming in general, might be part of a broader new social movement, I remain open minded. As Creswell (1994, 95) states, “the qualitative researcher does not want to foreclose the debate by operating within the tight strictures of literature or assumptions.”

The study will be more inductive than deductive to avoid having theory or my assumptions become a “container into which the data must be poured” (Creswell, 1994, 95). My overarching research questions, therefore, reflect this and they are quite general: What does it mean to be an organic farmer in an era of corporate globalization and high technology? What is/are the motivation(s) behind the legal challenge and what does this reflect about the nature of organic farming? Ultimately, can organic farmers of Saskatchewan be conceptualized as part of a broader new social movement, and if so, what are the movement’s identity(ies), objective(s), and its adversary(ies)?

#### 1.4 Significance

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First, in consulting organic farmers about their experiences, voice will be given to a group of people who receive relatively less attention in the literature. Although there are researchers who have been exploring the culture of organic farmers through in-depth, qualitative work they are in the minority (Kaltoft, 1999). In this way, by increasing general awareness of the issues facing organic farmers today, the study will hopefully open dialogue among researchers, policy makers and organic farmers.

Second, this research is significant because it adds to the academic body of knowledge on new social movements that has until now received little input from qualitative, and specifically grounded and ethnographic research. Certainly, as Martin and Halpin (1998, 447, emphasis mine) confess, “qualitative investigations of *rural*-based social movements do not figure prominently in the literature.” If we are eventually to conceptualize the actions of the organic farmers of Saskatchewan as part of a new social movement, then there is a practical reason why studies such as this must be given central importance. As Touraine (1985) suggests, “for the first time, social movements are becoming the main actors of society...the principal agents of history” and for social scientists to continue to elucidate the forms and contents of social change, the perspective of *movement participants* must constitute a research agenda for sociology.

Lastly, in our unique position of imaginative uncertainty as to what 'globalization' is, while recognizing that it is occurring, it seems prescient to follow Beuchler's (1999) claim that the study of social movements can facilitate our understanding of sociology's central questions: the relation between micro and macro, structure and agency. The investigation of a regional social movement that implies broader connectivity may force our attention to the ways in which the contemporary personal and local experience is simultaneously embedded in national and global structures and processes. In this sense, much of the literature on the impacts of globalization and technology on agriculture seem to suffer from a myopic failure to recognize the importance of the individual and the regional at the local/global interface (Mooney, 2000).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

During the early phases of this study, the actions of the organic farmers of Saskatchewan in their legal pursuit of Monsanto and Bayer were conceptualized as being symbolic as well as strategic. Their actions seemed to be part of the efforts of a broader social movement. In consulting the literature on social movements, one realizes that while sociology has been engaged with the study of social mobilization for some time, its theoretical legacy has left some substantial inadequacies. There are therefore, as Cohen (1985, 697) argues, “compelling reasons for a renewed reflection on social movements.”

Two relevant approaches to the study of contemporary social movements can be distinguished: resource mobilization theory and new social movement theory. While the former emerged out of, and sought to address weaknesses within, collective behaviour perspectives, it has proven reductionist in its emphasis on excessively structural and interested-oriented perspectives. Counterposing this, new social movement theory works to locate social movements in macro-social patterns of cultural change and emphasizes struggles around quality of life, equality and participation. Still new social movement theory seems disconnected from years of insight into social mobilization, and is unable to link culture’s impact to variables of unquestionable import such as resources, political opportunities and so on (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995). Although attempts at integrating these two approaches are extant in the literature, arguably none has done an adequate job in conceptualizing what is exactly ‘new’ about new social movements; as Kriesi *et al.* (1995) suggest, some, indeed many, new social movements are no longer new.

This literature review will work to address the weaknesses in contemporary social movement theory to eventually propose a general interpretation of conflicts, rather than to limit ourselves to classifying and separating types (Touraine, 1985). Habermas’

general theory of societal rationalization will ultimately be discussed as one that allows the integration of competing paradigms. The review will conclude with the theoretical framework for the present study.

## 2.2 Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory emerged as a response to earlier theories of social movements, which saw protest either as evidence of participants' pathologies or the dissolution of community linkages in mass society (see Smelser, 1963). While there are significant variations within this general theoretical framework, those working within its parameters agree that social movements are rational and pervasive and social mobilization occurs within the proper confluence of resources, organization and opportunities (Jenkins, 1983; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Ruggiero, 2000). But while resource mobilization theory has been successful in establishing protest as rational and established political action, it virtually ignores grievances of ideology and community.

In his review of the resource mobilization perspective, Jenkins (1983) notes that the main problem of this model is its lack of resolution around questions of solidarity and commitment, of collective identity formation. He asks, "how are collective identities formed? Is there a logic of emergence that governs the content of such collective entities?" (Jenkins, 1983, 549). While some resource mobilization theorists have attempted to address this question, the focus has been on strategic motivation and has resulted in a failure to analyze the moral basis of action. Therefore, resource mobilization theory has only partially contributed to our understanding of how people get recruited into organized social action, while the creation and maintenance of ideology and community – and its effects on both the life and action of movements – has not been sufficiently discussed. As a result, the need to address the question as to what is new and particular about contemporary social movements cannot be adequately met by a reliance on resource mobilization theory alone.

### 2.3 New Social Movement Theory

New social movement theorists accurately point out that contemporary social movements – such as peace and ecological movements – share identities and goals that are historically new vis-à-vis older social movements (Cohen, 1985). Displacing the materialism and the instrumentalism of older forms of collective action, and the related modes of organization, the new social movement stress falls on the symbolic and cultural spheres (Kivisto, 1986; Crook *et al.*, 1992). In place of unions or political parties, new social movements form grassroots, horizontal, democratic and issue-specific coalitions, which more often target the domain of civil society rather than the state or economy (Cohen, 1985; Kivisto, 1986; Touraine, 1985, Mooney, 2000). They raise issues concerned with the democratization of structures of “the grammar of forms of life” and focus on communication and collective identity (Habermas, 1984, 391; Touraine, 1985, Crook *et al.*, 1992).

But what is new about the new social movements? Cohen (1985) argues that the most salient feature of new social movements is not that they engage in expressive action, asserting their identities, but that they have become aware of their capacity to create identities and affect the power relations involved in their social construction. Similarly, Touraine (1985, 778) asserts that what is new about new social movements is their post-industrial context writing, “in our times we feel that our capacity for self-production, self-transformation, and self-destruction is boundless.” According to Touraine (1985), post-industrial society provides a new culture and a field for new social conflicts and movements; and it can be defined in a more global and radical way than previous societies. It must be defined by the production of symbolic goods, which shape or transform our representation of human nature and of the external world. For these reasons, research and development, information processing and the biological transformation of organisms are key components of this postindustrial society (Touraine, 1985). In Appadurai’s (1996, 3) “modern” world, electronic mediation have given a new twist to imaginative possibilities such that “they are resources for experiments with self-

making” that “compel the transformation of everyday discourse.” Beck (1995) also suggests that a new world has dawned in which we self-reflexively create our own identities and new social movements are a collective expression appropriate to this new mode of being (see also Appadurai, 1996; Tobera, 2001).

That the context of new social movements is the key to their novelty, is an idea not unlike Trotsky’s (1953) notion that the mediating factor between objective conditions and subjective responses is not poverty or control over production but instability – economic, political, ideological and cultural. Certainly, with the creation of a more globalized economy, we have seen a marked and undeniable shift toward greater instability. It is a condition where employers and states look to new ways to uphold their world-market position, and it demands drastic restructuring of social relations (Nader and Wallach, 1996; Habermas, 1998; Habermas, 2001). Similarly, Castells (1997) has described what he terms the conflicting trends of contemporary society: globalization and identity. In the present conjuncture, he argues, social movements ought to be interpreted as expressions of collective identity which “challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their lives and environment” (Castells, 1997, 2).

Undeniably, a process of systemic change has occurred – variously termed the emergence of the post-industrial, post-modern, globalized or risk society – involving a shift in social composition, which has, in turn been reflected in the fate of social mobilization (Barker and Dale, 1997). This systemic change is associated with a change in contested issues; where previously material questions were front and center in social conflict, now post-material or symbolic issues share center stage. As well, these changes create diasporic public spheres, which confound social movement theories that depend on the nation-state as the key arbiter and target of important social changes (Appadurai, 1996). In essence, the modernization of economy and polity is producing, or develops in tandem with, a set of cultural changes that find expression in new patterns of social movements.

The action of new social movements is clearly reflexive, non-instrumental and cultural and this has, in no small part, something to do with structural conditions in which movements occur. However, these broad social conditions do not create movements and hold them together; movement participants do this, in line with powers and opportunities, but also shared understandings and norms or what Tucker (1989, 37) calls “the ideological conditions promoting this unrestrained reflexivity.” And as Jenkins (1983) points out, identity and community are inseparable from questions of moral commitment, where morality only takes on meaning within particular cultural and normative frameworks. To analyze the moral basis of collective action, a theory with a normative dimension is required. Here, in addressing the normative aspect of contemporary social movements, and in attempting to supersede the dichotomy between instrumental and expressive-cultural strategies, Habermas’ general theory of societal rationalization proves useful.

#### 2.4.1 Habermas’ Notions on Societal Rationalization and Evolution

At the center of Habermas’ notions of societal rationalization lie his thoughts on communicative action, and as Cohen (1985, 705) states, “Habermas’ recent reformulation of the theory of communicative action allows one to see how the differing paradigms of collective action can be complementary.” Habermas (1984, 47) is interested in how language can function as “a medium of unhindered understanding.” Human action may be oriented to many goals, but linguistic action is oriented towards the coordination of action achieved by mutual understanding. Within his work, social actors who seek resolution to practical situations communicatively do so in “a cooperative process of interpretation aimed at attaining intersubjectively recognized definitions of situations,” with the effect that the resulting action is motivated by reason (Habermas, 1984, 14).

Habermas’ defense of the rational potential inherent in communicative action is inseparable from his critical project of promoting a democratic social order (Pusey, 1987; White, 1988, Rasmussen, 1990). Habermas proposes that social theory can, and should

work to, uncover structures of rationality embedded in everyday life; and it is this affirmative view of modernity that places him in contrast to the more pessimistic of his fellow critical theorists. As articulated by Pusey (1987, 15):

To a certain extent critical theory gave up its role in promoting critical self-reflection and, for all practical purposes, severed the link between reason and emancipation. Habermas wants to redirect critical theory back to its Marxian aspiration to incorporate philosophical concerns with rationality in a critical theory of society.

Habermas builds on Marx's historical materialism in a way that allows him to account for sociocultural dynamics – the relation between individual action, culture, and social structure. What results is a conceptual model that integrates both the instrumental, task-aspect of action as a necessary condition of material reproduction, and also a communicative aspect that he views as a necessary condition of institutional-normative reproduction. It is the latter that constitutes what Habermas means by the lifeworld (Habermas, 1979; Habermas, 1984; Baxter, 1987). The lifeworld is the background or “horizon” of common assumptions that people draw on in their everyday conduct, and it represents the patchwork which, through communicative action, draws together the different strands of social life (Habermas, 1984). The dynamic of lifeworld and system interaction comprises Habermas' discussion of societal rationalization, a model that eventually allows him to analyze some of the pathologies of modern society and the role of new social movements (Habermas, 1979; Baxter, 1987).

Habermas conceives of societal evolution as a two-sided rationalization process of the social system and the lifeworld (Habermas, 1979). The development of social systems can be charted as a process of increasing internal differentiation, complexity and so on. While the rationalization of the lifeworld is analyzed in terms of enhanced reflexivity, the universalization of beliefs and the differentiation of the value or knowledge spheres of science, morality and art. Emerging sub-systems such as state and markets become detached, or functionally differentiated from the lifeworld, and money and power are the media that appear and overcome the need to achieve understanding in these spheres by linguistic means; accordingly, actions are motivated instrumentally rather than rationally.

Although Habermas recognizes societal rationalization as progressive, he outlines the constraints this evolutionary advancement places on the reproduction of the rationalized lifeworld. He argues that system imperatives, operating through de-linguistified media of money and power, eventually re-enter and interfere with the operation of the lifeworld, calling this a colonization of the lifeworld. Ultimately, because the maintenance of a lifeworld reproduced through communicative action is essential for societal reproduction, the colonization of the lifeworld is both functionally and normatively pathological to modern society (Habermas, 1979; Goldblatt, 1996).

#### 2.4.2 Modern Pathologies and Economic Globalization

Habermas (1975) elaborates his notions on the pathologies of contemporary society at a higher level of theoretical specificity to talk of specific crisis forms, including legitimation crisis. Habermas' legitimation crisis is developed against the background of his general action and systems theory framework. The economic sub-system, which can be construed as the ensemble of privately owned capitalist enterprises, produces goods and services for profit (Habermas, 1975; Pusey, 1987; Scott, 1990). It is assumed that in advanced capitalist societies this sub-system is dependent on the state apparatus, or the political and administrative sub-system for maintenance and support. The state provides steering functions for the economy in that it provides favourable conditions for economic growth. One of the defining features of an evolved society, however, is that the welfare state is differentiated from private production though still dependent on it for revenues or fiscal skim off. Still, the welfare state must maintain popular assent and mass loyalty using its fiscal revenues to provide social, educational and welfare services that legitimate the whole system (Habermas, 1975; Pusey, 1987; Scott, 1990). Habermas (2001, 77) argues that the only kind of democratic process in the welfare state that will be seen as legitimate is that which succeeds in an appropriate allocation and fair distribution of "social policy":

Social policy in the broadest sense – labour policies, health care, educational policies, environmental protection and urban planning – the whole spectrum

of the state's services that produce collective goods and secure the social, natural and cultural living conditions that protect civilized society from collapse.

In attempting to avoid major economic crisis, which seems inevitable in an advanced capitalist system with episodic cycles of economic growth and recession, the modern welfare state displaces these crises to the political and cultural level (Braaten, 1991).

He refers to the possibility of legitimation crises, where norms are brought into question and contested, losing their integrative power, and the lifeworld ceases to reproduce the basic dispositions (such as work ethic) required by the societal system as a whole. Specifically, a legitimation crisis arises out of the dilemma for the administration in choosing between loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and interference (for example through taxes or regulation) in the private economy. Public and private demands for facilitating the role of the administration in the market economy are ultimately contradictory, putting pressure on the partnership between the administrative and economic sub-systems (Habermas, 1975; Scott, 1990; Braaten, 1991).

It is not difficult to envision this legitimation crisis embedded in larger structures such as the global economy. While social research has historically assumed the nation-state as its sphere of analysis, socioeconomic problems manifest at the national level are increasingly extralocal in their origins, scope and impacts. Sklair (1991) has argued that we need to take a step towards a sociology of the global system, one that does not ignore the relevance of the nation-state but offers a conception of nations within an international context. Although international linkages and interdependencies are not new (Gunder Frank, 1969; Wolf, 1997), McMichael (2000, xxxvii) suggests that the historical integration of people through "exchange of goods, literature and ideas" does not belie the fact that the world is now "connected more intensively than ever before." And the most significant dimension is economic globalization, whose new quality can hardly be doubted:

Global economic transactions, if measured against nationally limited economic activity, are reaching a level achieved in no other previous epoch, and directly affect national economies on a previously unknown scale

(Held, 1997, 254).

As national policies increasingly reflect supranational ideology, and the goals of individual nations are subsumed by the needs of the global marketplace, the legitimation crisis is crystallized. In this way, globalization poses dilemmas for national welfare states whose mandate is both capital accumulation and protection of citizens' social security (Bonanno *et al.*, 1994; Habermas 1998; McMichael, 2000). Habermas (2001, 50) has recently reformulated his theory in a "postnational" context stating:

In the context of a global economy, nation-states can only increase the international competitiveness of their position by imposing self-restrictions on the formative powers of the state itself resulting in a revocation of the welfare state compromise where crisis tendencies previously counteracted now break out into open view.

#### 2.4.3 Habermas and New Social Movements

The crisis tendencies of late capitalism, made more real in a globalized context, are a result of a fundamental tension between the normative principles of a democratic polity and the functional requirements of an economic system that threaten the social integration of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1981; Goldblatt, 1996). Habermas' position on new social movements is that they are a response of the lifeworld to this threat (Scott, 1990) and, as a corollary, to "cultural impoverishment" (Habermas, 1981). To re-iterate, the colonization of the lifeworld amounts to a penetration of those systems (economic and political) which have become uncoupled from the lifeworld back into it in a corrosive way. Economic colonization, for example, entails the uncoupled market mechanism extending further into the lifeworld, eroding cultures and replacing traditional (communicative) forms of social interaction and relationships with (self-interested) financial transactions. This is problematic culturally because economic transactions cannot fulfil the important symbolic functions performed by tradition and communicative engagement such as the reproduction of a sense of identity and purpose. Related to these

processes of colonization and impoverishment is a decline of the public sphere, where truly political issues have become merged with economic interests and there is a general degeneration in the level of political public debate.

Habermas, therefore, offers an explanation of new social movements against the backdrop of broader shifts in contemporary societies while outlining how moral imperatives and non-strategic motivation (communication and the communicatively reproduced lifeworld) remain at the core of contemporary movements. His theory of social action does not reduce the normative dimension to structural factors; and his discussion of ideology does not obviate the examination of structural conditions, and the role of the state and economy in understanding the dynamics of new social movements (Habermas, 1981; Tucker, 1989).

In his analysis, new movements continue to resist the extension of technical rationality into all spheres of social life while at the same time they continue to demand higher levels of rational justification in the moral and cultural spheres; where “the new problems have to do with quality of life, equal rights, individual self-realization, participation and human rights” (Habermas, 1984, 392). To him, new social movement activity can be seen as “progressive resistance” that does not simply defend traditions but seeks to re-moralize and re-politicize politics, simultaneously revitalizing a flagging public sphere. They generate a public debate about matters of public morality and social organization, contesting the norms by which we live our lives (Habermas, 1981). New social movements thematize issues of personal and social identity, contest the social interpretation of norms and communicatively create and agree on new ones, and suggest alternative ways of relating to the environment (see also Alario, 1994). From this perspective, it is perfectly conceivable that a social movement can involve both strategy and identity (Cohen, 1985). Under this rubric, there is no reason why the paradigms discussed above (resource mobilization and new social movement) should be seen as incompatible (Cohen, 1985; Tucker, 1989; Manning, 1993; Goldblatt, 1996).

Habermas (1984, 393) suggests that new social movements such as the youth, peace and ecology movements, are part of a wider swathe of new political activity, united by a

“critique of growth.” Based on a perception of growing system complexity and its unchecked effects on the lifeworld, resistance to lifeworld colonization and demands for its decolonization are mounted. The problem of growing system complexity in contemporary society sensitizes social movement actors to lifeworld colonization. And, similar to Touraine’s ideas on new movements, everyday life is increasingly subject to bureaucratic (and more prescient here) to technological regulation. Normative and existential questions are being reduced to technical problems and the traditions and culture which previously ‘answered’ them for people are being eliminated or eroded. In this way, Habermas presents a more systematic articulation of the post-industrial context thesis as a means of interpreting contemporary society and new social movements. The dynamics of economy and polity have reached a scale and complexity so enormous they are uncontrollable: for example, nuclear power and, more significant to the present study, genetic engineering (Goldblatt, 1996).

## 2.5 Literature on the Transformation of Agricultural in Canada

The application of genetic engineering to agriculture in Canada is just one part of an “aggressive transformation of agriculture worldwide” (Goodman and Watts, 1997, 3). An examination of the shifts in Canadian agriculture will make it clear how a Habermasian framework – large-scale structural changes finding their tangible expression in social movement activity – can be used for the present analysis of organic farmers in Saskatchewan.

Rural Saskatchewan is suffering a process of transformation that is characterized by a declining number of farmers, increasing farm size and disappearing rural communities; which makes the situation a “crisis” more than simply a transformation (National Farmer’s Union, 2001). Farm crises from the 1930s to the postwar boom were met with emergency assistance from the State. Since the 1960s, however, the government is less and less attentive to the needs of farmers in Canada alleging its hands are occupied with the demands of the global economy. The new direction and objectives of federal

agricultural policy were clearly spelled in the 1970 *Report of the Task Force on Agriculture*: the key recommendations all pointed to a new era in agriculture where there would be a smaller number of farmers, and a smaller role of governments in production, while markets would play a greater role in the agricultural economy (National Farmer's Union, 2001).

The diminished involvement of the nation-state in relation to the globalization of the agri-food sector is a central theme in the literature on agriculture and food. With the growth of post-Fordist economic strategies came the decentralization of production in many sectors (in order to minimize the rigidities associated with environmental regulations and labour union power) as well as the increased informalization of labour and 'global sourcing,' whereby production was obtained globally at the lowest possible cost (McMichael, 1996). While most researchers agree that this process of neo-liberal restructuring involved a shift in power from the nation-state to transnational corporations (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989; McMichael 1996), others emphasize the continued importance of the state and the uniqueness of land-based agriculture. Goodman and Watts (1994) assert that the role of the nation-state remains essential in the negotiation of competitive global arrangements, and they call for a renewed focus on the processes of the rural local to better understand agrarian production structures in the global era. Even so, it remains clear that the underlying conception and processes of globalization remain uncontested: that global considerations and initiatives have significant impacts on a nation's policy choices and directions (Juillet *et al.*, 1997).

In the early 1970s, as the terms 'globalization' and the 'world economy' became standard political language, there was increasing emphasis on the importance of national policies that would make the state more globally competitive. This meant the adoption of policies that called for less government spending, less regulation, and generally less government oversight over the economy. As such, and in fact since World War II, states have experienced decreasing levels of sovereignty because organizations associated with agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade have enforced new rules concerning economic strategies and agricultural policy (Juillet *et al.*, 1997). Knutilla

(2003, 69) writes about the western Canadian experience, “new policies are clearly designed to allow the logic of the market to restructure prairie agriculture,” where the agriculture industry is being shaped according to an industrial rather than an agricultural model. For some rural residents, large scale and highly industrialized production is seen as a desirable form of socioeconomic development providing needed profit to some farmers. For others, like organic farmers in Saskatchewan, this accumulation strategy is met with resistance.

### 2.6.1 Theoretical Framework

The actions of organic farmers in Saskatchewan can be analyzed within a broad Habermasian framework. Ultimately they may be viewed as progressive defensive mobilization against the colonization of the lifeworld of organic production due to agricultural industrialization, and larger economic restructuring; and also as mobilization against the colonization of a political system wherein legitimate decision-making has been subsumed under economic considerations.

### 2.6.2 The Lifeworld of Organics

Habermas and others suggest new social movements emphasize the fusion of means and ends (Habermas, 1981; Mooney, 2000). In a discussion of the West German Greens, Tucker (1989, 45) stresses that “ideology and experience are intimately interconnected, for ideology provides a prism through which experience is filtered.” At least part of the assumed ideology behind the actions of organic farmers in Saskatchewan in their legal pursuit of Monsanto and Bayer is expressed through the vernacular experience of organic farmers; as Lampkin *et al.* (1999, 13) suggest, “organic farming appears able to demonstrate its value in practice while working in the food market.” To attain environmental and social sustainability in agriculture, many organic food farmers structure their farms according to this ethic. As such, many though certainly not all,

organic farmers use little to no chemical inputs in their practices and they favour smaller farm operations thereby bolstering the longevity of traditional rural community. Food is part of a way of life such that organic farming aspires to produce food, which also produces a certain kind of society (Fiddes, 1991; Beardsworth and Keil, 1992).

That the form of technical control over production is neither neutral in respect to nature nor in regard to society (Goodman and Redclift, 1994) must be clear to farmers who live in direct dependence on natural resource bases; those who are put into a more immediate and everyday material concern with environmental issues (Mooney, 2000). While organic farming may be economically viable, organic farmers are aware that it may be doubly significant both environmentally and socially (Heaton and Brown, 1982; Reif, 1987; Barnes and Blevins, 1992). Not much is known about the specific characteristics of those who adopt organic practices (Malia and Korsching, 1989), and for that matter what is known is varied and contested (Buttel *et al.*, 1990; Saliel *et al.*, 1994). Still, a number of farmers in North America adopted low-input sustainable agriculture during the 1970s and 1980s due to a rise in environmental concern (Lighthall, 1995). Those who first advocated organic farming systems were deeply concerned that a system which relies heavily on chemical inputs is unsustainable: it threatens the health of soils, crops and the animals who depend on them (McMichael, 2000; Kaltoft, 2001). Organic farmers also, at least in theory, believe in minimum levels of processing and in decentralized forms of marketing; organic food production in many respects runs counter to the ideology at the root of the industrialized food system (Goodman and Redclift, 1994; Pugliese, 2001). To wit, the decision to pursue organic production is a meaningful response, a practice based, in part, on environmental ethics and other qualitative considerations like family and social cohesion.

Now, more than ever, socio-political factors are influencing farmer decision-making. Individual farmers may express resistance to chemical use for a variety of reasons including concerns about the multinationalization of food production and the inequality of power in the current industrial food regime. The primacy of the social or the central meaning of agency was apparent in Hofstee's (1946) early ideas about the adoption of

farming styles as cultural repertoire, where he argued that “full account must increasingly be given of the nature and being of life in its fullest sense of the social group in which the production process takes place” (translated in van der Ploeg, 1993, 243). Rickson *et al.* (1999, 266) provide convincing evidence that Australian farmers are increasingly adopting sustainable production methods, from permaculture to organic farming, as:

A reaction to the dominant system’s social and environmental impacts and as part of an alternative paradigm of promoting a decentralized farming system that values farming as a way of life, local autonomy, and soil and water conservation.

Organic production, therefore, could be seen as part of a wider new social movement involving farmers, consumers and others in a challenge against the assumptions and practices of unbridled economic growth, and the development ideologies at the epicenter of contemporary capitalist society (Tovey, 1997; McMichael, 2000). Mooney (2000) suggests that new rural social movements sprouted during the North American farm crisis of the 1980s; certain farmers began to identify themselves as being part of new rural movements and not the older farmers movements, suggesting a shift away from an identity based in the production sphere. These new rural social movements reflected broader influences and combined efforts with other actors such as environmentalists, and consumers. Nigh (1999, 285) suggest that we think of food as a highly mediated cultural artifact, and that “the future of food and agriculture is in the hearts and minds of consumers” (see also Fiddes, 1991; Murdoch and Miele, 1999). Nigh (1999) emphasizes the aestheticization of material goods in the production and consumption process where the organic food label guarantees that food was grown and processed according to certain standards and ethics. Labels in forms such as ‘certified organic’ seem to be the future, rather than the symbolic attack of corporate labels that attempt to manipulate consumers into the purchase of commodities of industrial agriculture (Nigh, 1999). Canadian organic farmers are certainly tapping into a consumer market that has grown by over 20 percent in the last decade (Boyens, 2000). Useful here, is the notion that consumers and farmers compose and rationalize their cultural identity based upon the process of production (McMichael, 2000). In this way, organic agriculture, and the consumption of organic

foods, can be seen as the sharing of unique cultural and environmental values that facilitates a collective identity opposed to the global industrialized food model. Organic farming is a rejection of the instrumentalization of labour, where instead farming is seen as a way of life (Kaltoft, 2001). Consumers of organic foodstuffs reject the role of a modern consumer for its commodification and depersonalization of goods, and healthy and meaningful food is increasingly in demand (Nigh, 1999). This coalition also includes anti-biotechnology and globalization activists, peasant movements and a multitude of others whose efforts worldwide are challenging the conventional at the interstices of lifeworld and system.

### 2.6.3 Gaining a Voice in a Dysfunctional Political System

If, as Habermas suggests, late capitalist societies are to be characterized predominantly by the expansion of purposive rationality over communicative ethics, then one would expect new social movements to make demands to extend the right to participate in the decision-making process to previously excluded groups. Taken in a broader context, the actions of organic farmers of Saskatchewan may come to be interpreted as a strategy to generate publicity to regain voice in a dysfunctional political process wherein, largely because of economic considerations, system media are increasingly paramount to other lifeworld interests and procedures.

Interestingly, as the Federal Court of Canada ruled against Percy Schmeiser, public opinion was largely on his side. Through his imbroglio with Monsanto, Schmeiser received an overwhelming amount of focus; he became a global symbol pitting farmers who want to work the land with traditional techniques against high-tech companies transforming fields and food with genetic engineering. Neither the outcome of Schmeiser's case nor the veracity of his defense appear to matter to the public. A cursory glance at the press portrays Schmeiser as David fighting Goliath Monsanto. As Schmeiser went from "lone farmer from Bruno Saskatchewan" to "international hero and

spokesperson of smaller farmers and anti-biotechnology organizers,” the organic farmers of Saskatchewan, along with many others, were surely watching (Broydo, 2000).

Saskatchewan organic farmers must be acutely aware of their potential to generate positive media attention through a legal pursuit of Monsanto and Bayer; and it is likely that this lawsuit is being used to generate discussion on the issue of agricultural biotechnology and to put public pressure on the government to effect political change like the prevention of the commercial introduction of genetically modified wheat.

This dramatic media campaign (via the courts) seems to verify the exclusion of certain groups from the formal decision-making community. There are ostensive systemic reasons why the government is unresponsive to public concern over biotechnology: the Canadian government’s regulatory priority is admittedly to create a strong, innovative and competitive biotechnology industry and their goal is to “secure Canada’s place as a leader in agricultural biotechnology in a free-trade based economy” (Ottawa, 2001). The Canadian government was involved with the private sector in the initial commercialization of biotechnology. In 1983, strengthening the biotechnology sector was deemed “a national priority for economic development” and 11.9 million dollars Canadian per year were allocated to foster its industrial progress (Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, 1999). In 1993, after regulatory concerns began to surface, the government responded and announced among the basic principles of Canada’s new Regulatory Framework for Biotechnology the goal of “fostering a favourable climate for the development of sustainable Canadian biotechnology products” (Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, 1999, 26). The Framework was criticized for this goal, which to many public interest groups seemed to stand in contradiction to the purpose of regulation in the public’s interest. Critics also point to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency’s mandate to “facilitate market access of biotechnology products” as evidence that regulatory duties have been subsumed by trade and commerce functions (Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, 1999, 35; Sharrat, 2001). All of this suggests that money has replaced discourse in political decision-making and has colonized the regulatory function of the state.

Not surprisingly, this legitimation crisis is connected to the government's goal of "securing Canada's place as a leader in agricultural biotechnology in a free-trade based global economy" (Ottawa, 2001). As the government contributes more money to the biotechnology sector in order to build a globally competitive biotechnology industry, it becomes increasingly difficult for the government to attend to public concerns over genetically engineered products. The commercialization of biotechnological products in Canada is moving ahead despite the fact that many societal groups say the products are not wanted. This, to many, seems to indicate that the Canadian nation-state has been restricted by its involvement in supranational trade organizations such that its policy on biotechnology must mirror that of its trading partners (Nader and Wallach, 1996; Sharrat, 2001).

As the concerns of Canadian citizens regarding biotechnology continue to be minimized, the legitimacy of formal political processes is eroded and citizens turn to informal means, like dramatic media campaigns and protest, in order to have their views heard.

## 2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the literature on social movements and given the broader theoretical framework I wish to use in explaining the study's data. I have also tried to contextualize the circumstances that Canadian farmers may find themselves in by giving evidence in the literature of systemic changes to national agriculture and agricultural policy through reference to changes in the global economy. It is my view that these large-scale structural changes are reflected at the local level in events like that which is the focal point for this study: the current lawsuit between the organic farmers of Saskatchewan and Monsanto and Bayer.



## CHAPTER 3

### PROCEDURE

#### 3.1 Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research design seemed the most appropriate methodology for the investigation of the culture of organic farming in an era of globalization and high technology. As well, the assumptions that underlie qualitative methodology coincide with my own analytic framework and worldview.

#### 3.2 Analytic Framework

This study operates largely within a constructivist, or otherwise called interactionist, framework. When working within this framework the researcher assumes that realities are subjective and multiple, that they are constructed by each participant and researcher in a study (Silverman, 1993; Creswell, 1994).

The researcher does not aim to achieve objectivity in a project by distancing himself or herself from the participants but instead interacts with them, often over long periods of time (Creswell, 1994). The epistemology of the constructivist paradigm is tightly linked with community building and partnership, and for this reason I observed and participated in the community of farmers, farm policy and food security activists under study for a period of one year prior to the onset of formal data collection. By doing this, my rapport with participants and my depth of probing were enhanced during the interviewing process.

#### 3.3 Nature of the Study

While qualitative methodology is a natural choice for me as a researcher because I do see reality as a social construct, the nature of this research topic also encourages the use of a qualitative design (Creswell, 1994). As mentioned previously, there is relatively less

academic work on organic farming, and new social movements that is informed by qualitative, specifically grounded and ethnographic, research. This study's research questions lead directly to qualitative methodology for their answers because the experience of participants is of central interest. As Merriam (1998, 6) states, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's."

If we are eventually to conceptualize the actions of the organic farmers of Saskatchewan as part of a new social movement, then there is practical reason why movement participants themselves must be consulted in an attempt to discover what shapes new movement identities, relations and stakes of conflict. Maybe such qualitative work is the answer to Touraine's (1985, 749) question:

How is it possible to overcome the obvious prejudices, which so often make discussions about social movements useless because they inform us mainly about social opinion of some limited sectors of academia?

Allowing participants the space to relay their experiences in their own words, instead of within a predetermined set of questions, will hopefully enable the reflection that is necessary in order to tease out the complexities and the underlying social conditions affecting organic farmers today.

### 3.4 Study Design

The specific type of qualitative design, which I have assumed in addressing this topic, is a focussed ethnography. A focussed ethnography is like a critical ethnography in that it is a "reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgements of meaning to challenge research, policy and other forms of human activity" (Morse and Richards, 2002, 4). Focussed ethnography differs, however, from traditional ethnography in that the researcher identifies a topic before commencing the study (Morse and Richards, 2002). Critical ethnography is cultural study or cultural description using analysis that interprets meanings. The researcher speaks on behalf of

his or her subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects' voice as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change (Thomas, 1993, 4).

### 3.5 Data Collection Methods

My primary method of data collection was unstructured and in-depth interviews. Silverman (1993) calls the interview a “conversation” because it is based on a sustained relationship and a sharing between the informant and researcher; and for this reason, I used open-ended questions to explore participant perspectives and experiences on the topic under study (Silverman, 1993, 9; see Appendix C). I also tried to elicit participants' reflections on the meaning they make of their experiences by encouraging discussion concerning the various factors in their lives that may have interacted to bring them to their present situation.

All of the interviews were taped on mini-cassettes and were transcribed verbatim immediately following the interview; as Silverman (1993) suggests, detailed transcripts are an essential corrective to the limitations of intuition and recollection and they enable repeated examination thus extending the range of observations. A total of 13 interviews were conducted ranging in length from 97 minutes to 9 hours. The interview transcripts range in length from 11 to 41 pages.

Participants were contacted through key persons at the National Farmer's Union and the Organic Agricultural Protection Fund Committee and some were arrived at through my observation and participation in the community (see Appendix D). As most qualitative manuals suggest, I purposefully selected my participants as I recognized them as valuable informants best able to answer my research questions (Creswell, 1994).

Patton (1990, 169) explains:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.

In this regard, I did interview non-organic farmers who appeared to be active in the endeavours of the organic farmers in their fight against Monsanto and Bayer; specifically, in relation to the issue of genetically engineered wheat in order to understand the ‘movement’ character of these actions.

Where possible, interviews were conducted at the participant’s farmhouse and otherwise were conducted at a local coffee shop or restaurant of the participant’s choice.

Before beginning the interview process, a researcher has a responsibility to try and understand the circumstances from within which her participants see the world. Active interviewers should be familiar with the material and cultural circumstances to which respondents might orient (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, 77). As well, Silverman (1993) recommends that the interviewer listen carefully for the inner voice – the true thoughts and feelings – of the participant, rather than being satisfied with hearing only the public voice – the words they might express in company. In this study, the use of observation techniques before beginning interviews aided in cultivating rapport and trust with participants so that during the interview itself they hopefully felt comfortable enough to share their inner voices with me. This observational information was recorded as field notes.

Lastly, a collection of documents, such as informational brochures, posters, and emails from the various relevant community listserves to which I belong, comprised the remainder of data collected.

Ethics approval was secured at the outset of data collection and as a part of this process, each interviewee was made to sign a consent form before each interview.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Data collection and preliminary data analysis were done simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). Data collection is not just gathering information; the researcher must always actively consider meanings, relationships, and develop further questions from on-going analysis. Qualitative data analysis “begins with the first interview, the first observation because emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data

collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one's questions, and so on” (Merriam, 1988, 119).

The analysis was more inductive than deductive (Creswell, 1994). Instead of having set categories ahead of time in which to place collected data, I built these categories as they emerged from the research process. Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe my process of analyzing data. First, all interviews and other types of data, such as observation field notes, were read over again. Then all collected data speaking to one theme or concept was placed together and this information was read through several times from beginning to end. While reading, notes, comments, observations, or queries were made (Merriam, 1988). Each time a new theme or category became evident, the original data was reviewed to find examples of that theme (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Once categories were constructed, the data within each category were then compared and analyzed for nuances in their meaning and to tease out connections among the categories. This was done so that categories would ultimately be incorporated into overarching ideas regarding the topic under discussion.

In essence, “analysis amounts to systematically grouping and summarizing the descriptions, and providing a coherent organizing framework that encapsulates and explains aspects of the social world the respondents portray” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, 79). Results, however, are not simply a summary and organized version of what interview participants say as much as they deconstruct participants’ words, highlighting for the reader the narrative dramas of lived experience (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). The lived experience of a person is the frame of reference of meaning that he or she constructs within the context of his or her experience of being within a particular culture and place in time.

In this study, analysis was completed with the help of QSR-NUDist a qualitative data analysis program to make the process as dynamic as possible.

### 3.7 Delimitations and Limitations

One of the most easily identified limitations to such a study is the researcher's closeness to the participants and the material itself. I would argue, however, that this is at once a limitation and a great benefit to the research in that my closeness and knowledge of this community of people will allow me to recognize their semantic games, their contradictions; to know their tactics. While most advice on qualitative methods would argue that my goals are not generalizability nor objectivity I realize that as a social scientist it is my role to attempt to attain certain 'truths' from the situation which implies a certain element of distance, abstraction or 'stepping back'. In the next section, therefore, I outline in some detail those steps I have taken to address the natural limitations of my project.

As with many ethnographic research projects, the sampling method used for this study was not random. In some ways I depended on initial participants and other key informants I had contact with during the data-collection phase of the research to assist in identifying subsequent participants. This sampling method was chosen because I wanted to interview people that could best answer the study's central questions. As well, as an outsider it was difficult to know where to begin. The technique does not guarantee a representative sample of organic farmers in the province; however, by interviewing key and vocal informants I tried to best fulfill the aim of capturing the motivations of the organic farmers in their lawsuit against Monsanto and Bayer and the culture of organic farming today.

### 3.8 Methods of Verification

Lincoln and Guba (1985) present their "trustworthiness criteria" as a qualitative response to quantitative concepts of internal and external validity. Their criteria: credibility and transferability are addressed in this study in several ways.

The criterion of credibility is the qualitative equivalent of internal validity. In order to establish credibility, the qualitative researcher should ensure that engagement with participants is prolonged, observation is persistent, and results are triangulated. In the case

of this study, I engaged in fieldwork for approximately one year, during which time I spent lengthy periods of time with my interviewees, and observed and participated in a number of meetings of farmers and farm policy activists in order to gather other forms of data. This fieldwork mostly addresses the issues of prolonged engagement and persistent observation. To address triangulation, which is “the use of multiple and different sources, methods, and theories” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 305) a number of data collection methods were used, including observation, a reflexive journal, individual interviews, and document collection. Similarly, another device used to establish credibility is to do member checks, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally collected (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 314). Each interviewee reviewed and discussed with me his or her interview transcript, and copies of the final report will be sent to a select number of participants with request for feedback before the completion of the study.

Transferability is the qualitative response to the issue of external validity, that is, whether findings can be generalized to other situations. While the internal validity of this study is substantial, the external validity cannot be specified in an *ad hoc* fashion although the description necessary to enable generalization or comparison upon reading the final report can be ensured. The written report will contain detailed description of the participants' experiences so that readers may be able to make an informed judgment on the transferability of the data to other situations. The inclusion of rich descriptions of the context in which data were gathered will also be included to be fair in reproducing participants' experiences. As well, that a relatively large sample of participants was achieved makes for easier generalizability. Lastly, the central assumptions behind the research have been stated and can be replicated. Similarly, to make more explicit my values and biases as a researcher and to have these be a filter through which the following chapters of this study – importantly the analysis and discussion – will be read, I will briefly describe my life history.

### 3.9 Researcher's Background

The qualitative researcher is expected to present the opinions he or she brings to the research in order to reveal biases. I would therefore like to include a short description of who I am, the life I have led up until now and some of the values I hold.

I am a Canadian woman in my mid-twenties. I was born in downtown Toronto, Ontario and spent my first 12 years as an inner-city kid after which point I moved with my parents to the much smaller and sleepier Canadian city of Peterborough, Ontario. I enjoyed four years in Kingston, Ontario where I studied at Queen's University. In total, I have lived and worked in five Canadian cities spanning the country from Montreal to Saskatchewan.

Neither of my parents is university-educated, although they highly value learning and education. As the eldest of six in a large working-class family, my mother never got the opportunity to attain higher education; this right was reserved for the males of the family. My father has a few partial degrees, and expertise in everything from electronics to woodworking: he is self-taught and a true Promethean man. I am an only child and was raised as an equal third party in the family. I was also raised with endless encouragement, creative and intellectual stimulation, and support.

My parents, both implicitly and explicitly, taught me about my responsibility toward my fellow human beings; they taught me to do all I can to make this world a better, fairer place. Growing up in a multi-cultural environment made me appreciate diversity and I learned to accept people for their differences, cultural or otherwise.

I studied environmental sciences in university though I did not choose a major until my second year of study before which time I attended classes in literature and art history, geology and chemistry – such is the varied nature of my interests. In my third year of university I found myself becoming more and more frustrated with the narrow focus of the natural sciences, the lack of discussion to the social side of issues. I was hungry to talk about the practice and impact of science and technology, rather than simply learning of science as an isolated entity. I finished my degree, I published molecular genetic work I had conducted on a wetland plant named Flowering Rush in my

fourth year, with the intention of continuing my education in an area where I could approach issues relating to science and sustainability through a wider lens. Thus, I came to Saskatchewan to pursue a Master of Arts degree looking at the social implications of agricultural biotechnology.

I am not from a farm and have never even driven a tractor, though my grandmother grew up in a farmhouse on the Saskatchewan. As such, I know nothing of what it is like to be a farmer, and certainly I know nothing firsthand of the current difficulties farmers in this country are facing. I feel a very strong sense of responsibility to understand what most urban consumers do not: the life of a farmer, especially today in an era of high technology and globalization.

In terms of an ideology with which I feel comfortable, I would say I am a woman who believes in gender equality though I would hesitate in calling myself a feminist. I am most amenable to the principles of socialism and such views on how society should be organized; I believe strongly in universal health care and other social programs and that help bridge the gap between society's rich and poor.

I bring these values and experiences to my work and I understand (to the extent I can be aware of such things) its impact on what I write and the way I perceive the information that I receive.

### 3.10 Summary

This chapter detailed the research methods used to meet the objectives of this study. The rationale for investigating the culture of organic farming using a qualitative methodology was explained: using focused ethnographic technique is ideal because the experience of participant's is of central interest, and it allows them the space to lay out the complex situation facing organic farmers today. This chapter described the study sample and how fieldwork was conducted. The means of interpretation and analysis of data were detailed. The purpose of this chapter was to prepare the reader for the following chapters by

introducing the practical and epistemological groundwork behind both the planning and execution of the research phase of this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Introduction to the findings of the data

In order to obtain an understanding of what it is like to be an organic farmer today – in an era of high technology and globalization – 13 farmers (two of who represent farm couples) were interviewed. Cognizant of the ethical considerations regarding participants' anonymity, interviewees are numbered according to the order in which they were spoken with, though further detail regarding the sample appears in Appendix D.

As described in Chapter 3, I built categories – linking ideas and concepts of similar theme – from the data, throughout the analysis. The data are first presented here as these categories (in italic typeface) under subheadings representing the larger themes that emerged. What I had not imagined at the outset of this study, was the startling commonality among participant responses across various questions and issues: a consistent and, although multifaceted, cohesive “global thematic narrative” emerged from the data which I will go on to describe in some detail in Chapter 5 (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Each categorical description makes use of my overall sense of the results, of participant's perceptions, and includes sample quotations to further illustrate the findings.

#### 4.2. Problems with farming today

I'm never quite sure how to take it when people say to me they wish they'd got out of farming when I did. 'Cause I know I'd rather be farming – farming is a wonderful life – and I know they would like to keep farming. But under these circumstances it is almost painful to try and stay in year after year. A lot of people have just said to hell with it. A lot of people are willing to do anything in the short term; take more loans, take off-farm jobs, plow the money back in, but ultimately they just can't make it. (Interviewee #1, August, 2002)

The overwhelming impression I gained during the data collection phase of this study – from my time with each participant to my observations and participation in meetings of organic farmers and farm policy activists – was that although they entered the business of

farming expecting unpredictability, difficulty and hard work, the present situation with farming (whether organic or conventional) in Canada (and throughout the world) is harder than it has ever been. Ten different topics or sub-categories consistently emerged and can be grouped under the larger theme of the problems with farming today.

Six of the interviewees mentioned difficulties in their farming operations caused by the *weather* – specifically drought conditions – although it did not arise as a prominent sub-category. In the words of interviewee #7 (October 2002) “It is surprising how many people don’t realize it’s a problem. I think it’s because weather variation has been a fact of our lives all the time, especially as farmers.”

Interestingly, every study participant stated that there is no such thing as a typical day in farming.\* Instead, many interviewees alluded to an acceptance of (even a deference to) the power and unpredictability of nature: “attempting to control Mother Nature is impossible, she’s a powerful old girl” (Interviewee #3, August 2002). Alternately, every participant emphasized a frustration with his or her lack of control over the rising *input costs* associated with farming. Interviewee #1 described it as “...breathtaking. You used to be able to farm with 100 000 dollars worth of machinery but now a medium size operation has got millions of dollars of machinery.” Similarly, and with great historical perspective, interviewee #3 noted that “in 1939 it took me 240 dollars to farm half a section, and now people have tractors that are worth 300 thousand Canadian dollars...and if you figured out the ratio, the cost is so far out compared to what you’re getting paid for your product it’s ridiculous.” The drastic disparity between input costs and prices for the farm product – commonly known as the ‘cost-price squeeze’ – was mentioned by all participants not only in relation to machinery but also inputs like chemicals and seeds.

All participants spoke strongly to the problem of egregious input costs and they connected it in every instance with problems brought on by *globalization* and increased *corporate power*. The following comments make this clear:

We [the NFU] have graphs that show grain prices slowly working their way up

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\* One of my interview questions was, quite directly, “I’d like you to take me through a typical day – not necessarily special things just routine” (see Appendix C)

and fertilizer prices tracking them perfectly. And...I think that's what's caused farmers to leave the land, corporations have just squeezed everyone so hard that they leave...well...they're forced out...It is really opportunistic profiteering; there is so little competition among corporations they have the power to just raise prices at will. (Interviewee #1, August 2002)

We are so inter-linked that the Canadian canola crop is literally in competition with Brazilian soybean crop – that's what's happened on the farm side. And you know, economics tells you that if you crank up competition you're gonna predictably push down prices and profits. The fundamental problem is that while farmers work in a perfect market, the firms that supply us chemicals, machinery, aren't competing – they are few in number and they're consolidating or merging and becoming more powerful all the time. (Interviewee #13, April 2003)

Interestingly, the concentration of corporate power was something that came up in each interview when talking about *biotechnology*. While material and practical concerns were raised regarding the application of biotechnology to agriculture – such as a perceived lack of scientific testing, and the accidental spread of modified seed – anxieties were predominantly social and cultural, where most participants were, "...not against biotechnology as such but against the corporate control of food" (Interviewee #5, September 2002). As this interviewee elaborates:

I think there is a real element of human greed that rises to the surface when decisions concerning agriculture are left up to biotechnology corporations... this is leading to more of a corporate controlled food system and at some point not only are organic farmers going to suffer but also consumers and conventional farmers. So I think the problem of bioengineering is really this gold-rush mentality that is taking over the genetic commons. (Interviewee #5, September 2002)

Or in the words of another participant:

I'm extremely negative about this whole cultural endeavour – I think it's concentrated...I think it's just more of the same idea as the control over natural processes, which will extract a profitability for a very small number. And I think it's completely the wrong view of ourselves within the web of life...it's completely the wrong view in terms of other values around culturally appropriate food, nutritious food, healthy and safe food, food for everybody...values that are undermined by this technology. (Interviewee #12, April 2003)

Essentially, the story that each participant gave was the same: small family and organic farming operations in Canada, and the values they deem to represent, are being made obsolete (or as Interviewee #1 said “terminal”) in the context of increasing corporate power and an increasingly industrial model of food production. In the end, as interviewee #7 (October 2002) stated clearly, “there are a variety of different challenges that are leading to a total disintegration of the rural community.” The word “disintegration” here is powerful because it is evocative of a system coming undone and in this way speaks to the heart of the problem with farming today: farmers are becoming disconnected from one another, from consumers, from the land.

#### 4.3 Solutions to the farm crisis

While participants’ stories were predominantly about hardship, they were also about a hope born of commitment to the land, and a steely determination to resist what they see as the takeover of the small farmer, his or her values and way of life. Interviewee #13 described a *rural resistance or pride* that was evident in the testimony of each participant saying, “there’s still here a big resistance to the notion of giving up and leaving – people are very attached to the land which they work.” What surprised this interviewee was not that smaller farmers were leaving the land, but that, under the present and sustained difficult conditions, that more had not left:

We’ve lost some of our neighbourhood institutions – like the elevators got burned five years ago and the local post office and store. So at an obvious level we’re losing ground, but at another level we’ve retained a remarkably strong neighbourliness and we’re still a cohesive network.

Not surprisingly, participants talked with great hope about the possibility for *organics* as a solution – both practical and social. In almost every case, they admitted that the strategy typically adopted by farmers to overcome a lack of profitability is to get bigger, produce more and thereby try to recover costs. Still, every participant but one (who

considered urban market gardening the solution) mentioned that scaling down, reducing inputs or becoming fully organic, was another strategy:

I made the change to organic for social reasons, but also because economically what I was doing on the farm was not sustainable. You know agriculture has been going in a downward spiral for some time and the traditional way of coping with that is to get bigger and run harder and dig yourself into a deeper economic hole. I could see organic farming as one way of addressing that problem...I sort of see that there's coming to be a divergence in agriculture where you either get bigger and more industrialized or you could scale down, branch off and try and develop more contact with your customers...in the long run I think it's a more sustainable way of farming that could have some real benefits at the community level. (Interviewee #5, September 2002)

Interviewee #13 (April 2003) stated honestly that "being organic doesn't completely pull you from the hostile environment that agriculture, well primary agriculture, is in but it offers you the advantage that you can do it cheaply..." Interviewee #12 (April 2003), the wife of #13, interjected to talk about organics in a different way than her husband:

...My calculations were never as clearly economic but more environmental or social. I see the organic model as in favour of the unstandardized, the unique to every situation, as recognizing the complexities – it just seems to me that the dominant agricultural model misunderstands how extremely complex and interrelated natural ecosystems are. With organics there's a whole other range of thinking: a reconnection of people to communities, to the ecology, and it is production that recognizes our ecological place in ways which are much more sustainable.

There was another similar dialogue between interviewee #4 and his wife, who entered their farmhouse living room to interrupt the following comment of her husband's:

Basically all of agriculture is producing at below the cost of production at the expense of the soil and of the rural communities. And eventually you are seeing corporate farms in most areas and there's a lot more monocropping than there should be and there's a cost to everything in this world. But that's one thing that organic producers have been able to do is to some extent pass their costs on. First there's a high demand for organic products and the consumers of organic products seem to have a rapport with the producers and they're willing to pay extra costs whereas the conventional farmer is the price taker at both ends...

But organic farming is more than that...it's about taking care of the earth and the community...

These exchanges highlight a *gender* issue that emerged from the interviews with organic farmers: it was apparent, in every case, that while the man of the farm was thinking of going organic for economic reasons, it was the woman who was pivotal to its conversion for health or environmental reasons. Interviewee #3 (August 2002) makes this clear:

My wife and I got married in 1969 and the first two years we had piles of wheat right here in the yard because of international overproduction and we couldn't sell it. And it was hard and I thought, 'what can I do?' so I quit spraying to cut costs. Meanwhile, my wife was a librarian...and she got interested in the environment and was very concerned and dug out lots of information. So by 1972 I she gave me enough reason to know I wasn't going to spray anymore and I sold my sprayer. But I got criticized for selling my sprayer by a radio station – this is the kind of thing I ran into.

Interviewee #3 also said women provided his greatest support when he initiated an organic food cooperative in the 1970s because, in his opinion, women were more used to thinking about the health and welfare of their families and by extension the environment. When I asked interviewee #12 (April 2003) about the relationship between gender and organics she underlined that “economics is not the most important motivating feature for all of us. It's always been clear to me that this is the case with women – if your personal economic fortunes were any kind of a driver no woman would have children because that is without fail a drain on your time, your body and your economic well-being as a woman.”

Interviewee #12 (April 2003) also declared herself to be “in a different position in terms of socially what rides on it for me” and she described “farming as a very patriarchal male pursuit where a lot of the judgements of success are measured in terms of what it looks like to the neighbours.” In fact, every male organic farmer described a community-level resistance to organics for aesthetic reasons where, “a weedy field looks like neglect and poor farming and that looks bad not to the woman of the farm but very often for the male of the farm” (Interviewee #8, January 2003). Interviewee #2 agreed that “the

decision to farm organically is socially and aesthetically a much more difficult decision for men than for women” (Interviewee #2, August 2002). That female participants also spoke of “the many demands that are made on farm women” without proper recognition suggests that both the credit for a farm’s success, but also the social censure surrounding its ‘failure’ fall on the man of the farm.

Along with reducing dependency on chemical inputs through organic production, participants listed working together as farmers in *cooperatives* or supply management systems as other ways to “bypass the multinationals” (Interviewee #10, February 2003), or “participate in our own way in what’s becoming the corporate thing” (Interviewee #8, January 2003). Participants seemed to harbour a romantic notion of the “small town cooperatives of 60 years ago” and of organic farming. As interviewee #3 stated:

Whenever we would gather at the Girvin organic cooperative it was a very exciting time because we talked about all these things in the same way the pioneers talked about them when they first homesteaded. It was a strong community of organic growers. We may not have agreed on all things, but organic farmers are part of a larger community.

Other interviewees were perhaps more honest regarding the ability of farmers to work cooperatively. Talking about the same organic cooperative initiative, interviewee #8 (January 2003) stated:

Well to me my only cooperative experience was the Girvin coop and it kind of left a sour taste in all of our mouths because it fell apart – people had trouble working cooperatively. It was terrible...

He goes on directly, however, to say:

...I recall seeing a play called Paper Wheat that goes back to the pioneer times when all of the immigrants came and started farming and it was tremendous. Eventually people saw they were being taken advantage of and so they formed these cooperatives and everything was great.

Regardless of how difficult it is for farmers to think collectively, I got the sense from each of the organic farmers I interviewed that they recognized it as necessary to work in

*community*. The idea of community, both physical but also figurative, emerged as directly linked with organic farming, as interviewee #7 (October 2002) noted:

Conventional producers tend to associate basically with their neighbours.

Whereas a beekeeper, and it is largely true with an organic producer, may have to travel fifty miles to talk with another similar producer, to talk shop. And it is important for producers to talk shop. But where a conventional grain and cattle producer can just go next door and talk shop they don't have the same community that beekeepers or organic producers have.

Interviewee #5 (September 2002) talked about this figurative group of like-minded and directed individuals even more broadly:

Well I think it all goes back to the philosophy behind organic farming: that is concern for the ecology, concern for personal health – health of your family and of other generations. There is a whole international community of people who are aware that the path we've been treading is not sustainable.

Interestingly, this notion of an international community of people working together for change arose in every interview when talking of the lawsuit between the organic farmers of Saskatchewan and Monsanto and Bayer. Participants hardly talked at all about the case in practical or strategic terms but they talked more about broad societal objectives. In the words of interviewee #5 (September 2002):

It's maybe tilting at windmills to a certain extent. These companies have very deep pockets and organic farmers don't so it's an uphill battle that is probably going to be fairly lengthy and we may not win. But I think it's a fight that has to be fought whether we win or lose. Even if we lose, I guess at the end of the day we'll have the satisfaction that we at least made a stab at it. And I also think too that this is just one little fight that organic farmers are involved in – I think worldwide there is a growing movement of people not just farmers but the public in general, that is rising up to take control of their lives back from the corporate agenda. Our class action lawsuit here is just a part of a growing movement that combines all sorts of related issues, social, political, economic...I think globally there are all kinds of groups and causes that are related and can take inspiration from this. The community building is really important because it is an international community of people concerned about the future of life on this planet.

#### 4.4 The Global Thematic Narrative: Competing models of food production

Attride-Stirling (2001) suggest organizing qualitative data into themes at different levels – from lowest order premises arising from the data which are then collapsed into a super-ordinate or global thematic narrative. It became evident through observation, the interview process, and continued analysis, that the larger story interviewee #5 (September 2002) sketched above of, “a growing movement of people not just farmers but the public in general, that is rising up to take control of their lives back from the corporate agenda” was the story consistently given by all farmers – conventional and organic – and national and international farm policy activists.

By the end of the interviews I recognized that the plot of each participant’s story could be represented metonymically by the single element of control: in their minds, farmers are waged in a battle with large corporations for control over the way food is produced, distributed, and even consumed. Using QSR-NUDist to search interview text for the frequency of 25 significant words (like movement, power, government, conventional, organic and so on) revealed ‘control’ as the most common among them. Interviewee #5 (September 2002) spoke about competition for control over farm inputs while we were discussing agricultural biotechnology:

I think what’s going to get us is the lack of control over inputs and that’s this common problem that organic farmers have with conventional – we are all gradually losing control over our inputs and seed is the big one. The growing involvement of big chemical companies in providing not only fertilizer and spray and all that but also seed is going to continue to be a problem. I see the corporate control over agriculture as a growing problem for both conventional and organic farmers though I don’t know how many farmers are aware of it yet.

When asked what the biggest challenge facing farmers in Canada is startlingly every participant’s answer was much like that of interviewee #8 (January 2003):

The big challenge is to stand up for our rights against the corporate takeover. Because if we don’t do that then we’ll be trying to climb out of a hole, we’ll end up being serfs on the land – these companies own everything and if they haven’t bought it already they’re on the verge of doing it. If it’s not chemical companies it’s grain companies. And the effects of this in my book are quite evident: in my

hometown we now have no businesses no elevators and in ten years the landscape has changed so there's no sign of opportunity. And even organic operations could be more sustainable but these corporations get away with terrible stuff because they're big – they can afford to be wasteful and they can do things to primary food products that would make your head spin. It just shows the disregard by corporations for public health and ethics and the environment.

Just as with the above words of interviewee #8 (January 2003), one could parse each participant's opinion on any range of issues from the food system to the lawsuit into an 'us' (farmers, especially small family or organic farmers) against 'them' (corporations) situation. And ultimately, what was clear was that the battle is largely cultural: it is between competing ideologies, values, interests that underpin opposing views on food and food production. Interviewee #12 (April 2003) underlined that this is largely a cultural battle when she said:

It's about different value systems. The whole value around clean fields, monoculture, maximizing production, not a weed in sight, needs to change and this will take some revolutionizing. And consumers demand it, and consumers also have to re-think what they value in food. They will begin to see the thousand apples all looking exactly the same way as commentary on the chemicals and the residual toxins rather than seeing it as a commentary of good farming practices. And farmers didn't invent this, it's part of a general cultural bias towards maximizing and standardizing and industrializing everything. All of this flies in the face of the values of organic production.

Significantly, participants recognized the corporate model as dominant partly because this "cultural bias" is cultivated by a link with the formal decision-making community. They all spoke with frustration about how "the policy and international trade agreements and expertise are all geared towards looking at the industrial segment" (Interviewee #6, September 2002). Interviewee #11 (February 2003) spoke of a "long-standing propaganda for the industrial way of farming..." where "...every expert you talk to, all of the industry and money, all of the policy are pushing us in that direction." Likewise, Interviewee #9 talked about how "closely Canadian government is working with industry" in relation to biotechnology in Indonesia because, in his opinion, "the Canadian government seems to really believe that opening up markets in developing countries for

Canadian businesses is good and they think they've got something with biotechnology.” Despite the dominance of the industrial or corporate model, participants described a situation where through actions including the present lawsuit between the organic farmers and Monsanto they were fighting to preserve a different way of life. Interviewee#13 (April 2003) summarizes the entire cultural contest clearly, saying:

Although very few people are ever able to challenge them, least of all farmers who are labeled as not educated and discounted, there's another picture where it looks quite different. We're at the point now where there's a whole other range of thinking – and this is the optimistic me – both from consumers who are more and more suspicious of the dominant model and what kinds of food stuffs they get out of it, to farmers who are beginning more carefully to assess just what the options are and move to options like organics that unhook themselves from that productivist model of agriculture altogether. It's handy to have a label for that other party that's concrete, in this case 'Monsanto'. But Monsanto of course represents a whole range of interests: corporate interests, and a way of seeing the world as resources to be exploited, a way of looking at people as mobile and exploitable and expendable, and a way of looking at living organisms as manipulable. So 'Monsanto' really represents a way of seeing and way of organizing the political domain such that fewer and fewer actors determine what life, the environment, and economy will be like for more and more people without any reference to their preferences, their citizenry, and their democratic rights. I think this lawsuit in some ways acts as a shorthand for these two opposing and competing range of interests or issues.

#### 4.5 Summary

This chapter began by outlining the problems with farming in Canada today as participants communicated them to me. Predictably, participants spoke of frustration over the poor weather conditions of recent years although the majority of problems they spoke of were sociological in nature. For instance, participants spoke at length about farm-level tension caused by the rising costs associated with conventional farming, especially the costs of chemical inputs. In each case, they connected these rising costs with a concentration in the power of corporations supplying farm inputs – from seeds to machinery. Similarly, they traced this concentration in corporate power to changes in the global economy, which have increased competition among farmers worldwide while

decreasing competition among farm corporations. Increasing corporate power, a prevalent theme, was also conveyed to be the main concern regarding the application of biotechnology to agriculture. Unexpectedly, participants spoke less of practical or science-related concerns over agricultural biotechnology than what this technology means in terms of giving corporations power over the seed supply, the food system.

Although high levels of anxiety and apprehension about the future of farming in this country were common among the participants with whom I spoke, this was only one half of each interviewee's story. Presenting this story first is true to my initial impressions from fieldwork: the earliest entries from my reflexive journal are loaded with a sense that farming in Canada today is more difficult than it has ever been. As the study proceeded, however, it became clearer to me that what participants wanted to convey through their words and more so through their vernacular activity was a story of pride and resistance, not one of despair. In saying 'no' to the dominant model of farming – industrial, big, productivist, corporate – they revealed to me much self-esteem and their words and actions were palpably self-affirming. The second part of this chapter, therefore, dealt with participant's views of solutions to the Canadian farm crisis. Not surprisingly, interviewees spoke of organics as a way of "capturing whatever margin is to be had for primary producers" by cutting input costs, and directly marketing to consumers who are willing to pay more for the product (Interviewee #5, September 2002). Interestingly, with every organic farm I visited, the woman of the farm was crucial to its conversion because she was thinking not of the economic benefits but of the environment, her family's health or the community. It became clear that because women typically fill a behind-the-scenes role in the operation of the farm, they are free of the social censure surrounding conversion to organics, something each organic farmer detailed. Participants also talked about the power and difficulty in working cooperatively and the importance of community.

The study's global narrative was one of competing "constellations of interest" (Interviewee #12, April 2003) where small family and organic farmers are waged in a cultural battle against corporations, and to some extent state, for control over how food is

produced, consumed and ultimately valued. Many of the quotations from this chapter reveal a broad sense of purpose among an international community of farmers and farm policy activists. It was astounding to me that every interviewee related his or her struggle, the struggle of farmers in Canada, to broader struggles concerning “a nexus of issues – social and environmental” worldwide (Interviewee #12, April 2003). In sum, every participant seemed to be saying, ‘we may be in the minority but it is a diverse and prophetic one’ and I wish to expound upon this in the next and final chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

#### 5.1 Discussion of the results

As stated in Chapter 1, the ultimate purpose of this study was to analyze the nature of the social project involved with the lawsuit between the organic farmers of Saskatchewan and Monsanto and Bayer, and more broadly the culture of contemporary organic farming. I feel that the results presented in the previous chapter aptly address this broad purpose and touch on each of the more specific research questions I posed at the outset of the study. In reference to, but without rehearsing, the results I will use this final chapter to illustrate my main conclusions.

#### 5.2 The Impact of Global Structural Change

*That farming in Canada has come under pressure from global political and economic changes influencing agriculture is patently clear, and the socio-structural dimension of the actions of study participants is undeniable.* My in-depth ethnographic work is in support of the many researchers who for years have been arguing that “globalization is perhaps the most outstanding process of change in the contemporary food sector” (Bonanno *et al.*, 1994, 6). Each of my participants was aware of the process and impact of globalization. They spoke with historical reference to increased competition among farmers (many citing the 1970s wheat and oil crisis as a major incident in this regard). Just as the textbook rendition of international exchange and a competitive world market involving separate national economies is on the wane, farmers spoke more about globalization in reference to the advance in power of giant farm input and food companies who are “aggressively transforming the world agro-food economy” (Watts and Goodman 1997, 3). As early as 1993, Friedmann offered a vision of the future with transnational corporations, not nation states, as the major agents attempting to regulate agro-food according to their logic of profit and investment opportunities. This has proved accurate such that a high share of world trade is internalized by transnational corporations who are merging to grab even more market power. The effects of this at the local level

are enormous and were communicated to me clearly by participants: staggering costs of farm inputs, low prices for farm outputs, all of which has led to an erosion of the Canadian rural landscape which was once populated by small, family farmers (National Farmer's Union, 2001; Boyens, 2001).

There has been much debate about the process of global economic restructuring in relation to this power dynamic between nation states and the transnational corporations (Juillet et al., 1997). While the reality of economic globalization is more complex than a complete crippling of nation-state power at the hands of transnational corporations, the results of my study validate Habermas' theory of legitimation crisis – where the normative principles of a nation's democratic polity and the functional requirements of its economic system (now heavily dependent on transnational corporate interest) are in fundamental tension.

Sommers and Napier (1993, 131) argue for the continued importance of the state; via its prescriptions and sanctions of certain farming practices, and via its “specific distribution of possibilities or limitations.” Participants spoke of their wish for state support in the difficult period of conversion to organics, in obtaining certification; this is doubly meaningful in the context of Michelsen 's (2001, 15) study of organic farming in Europe whose results indicate that “the positive impact of political support for certification included both that growth was obtained quicker and included more farms than was expected.” Certainly participants pointed to the state as also limiting organic production through research and support systems which perpetuate only the productivist and industrial model of farming – that which they see as serving industry and government's connection to it. As interviewee #9 stated clearly, “It wasn't very popular for someone in agriculture to focus on sustainable agriculture at that time, in the 1980s, and I'm sure it is even less popular now – the government and industry, they don't support that sort of research.” Many participants' answers echoed the sentiment that private interests heavily influence public research, highlighting that this issue is prevalent not only in the literature (Busch and Lacy, 1983; Buttel, 1986; Kloppenburg, 1988) but also at the farm level.

Similarly, every participant highlighted the government's connection to the biotechnology industry as the reason for "their being so aggressive in support of GM foods and biotechnology research." Many commented, like interviewee #1, that "the government has a huge investment and they see it as Canada's niche in the global economy." These results are in line with Sharratt's (2002, 1) conclusion that "the Canadian regulatory system is a result of a powerful partnership between the government and the biotechnology industry" and as Juillet *et al.* (1997, 316) have admitted "sustainable land use appears to clash with current economic incentives favoring production that serves the world market."

From an ideological perspective, Marsden (2000, 25) stresses the importance of questioning "how the unsustainable is being sustained" where "regulatory systems that legitimize productionist technological innovations tend to support an accumulation ethic which furthers the marginalization of alternatives." Many participants spoke to this suggesting, like interviewee #12, that "there are deep prejudices against the model we call organic but what might be called somewhere else in the world the peasant model" and they similarly spoke of the systematic devaluation of farmer knowledge and experience versus 'expert' opinion. Kloppenburg (1991), among others, argues that agricultural science has used a decontextualized rationality to dominating effect over that which he calls "local knowledge" – knowledge contained in the heads of farmers and agricultural workers. The consequences of this were clear to participants who talked to me not only of a devastating lack of financial and institutional support of organics, but also of the power of the industry model, supported by government, over the mindsets of farmers. Interviewee #3 admitted that "the government hasn't done a damn thing for organic farmers in the way of national certification standards or anything" but he stressed the relative importance of the *ideological* marginalization of alternatives saying "all the neighbours tell me that they'd quite spraying if the government would tell them to."

### 5.3 Organic Farmers Fail to Collapse at the Hands of Global Corporate Power

In light of the foregoing conclusion, as Kaltoft (2001) suggests, organic farming is very interesting from a sociological perspective since it enjoys a measure of success despite the current circumstances. All of the interviews and observation told me that although organic farmers see themselves in a power struggle against the dominant corporate and industrial model of food and farming they talked with *a sense of hope and determination that implied not a collapse of organics but a resistance and even a potential evanescence of their current circumstances.*

As a secondary observation, from an outsider's perspective, I do perceive participant's glorification of organics and its practical and social possibilities (evade rising input costs and foster a healthy environment as two respective examples) as partially self-idealizing. Lieblich and Josselson (1994, emphasis mine) assert that within the doctrine of subjective truth it is important to grasp the significance of *how* the story is told – its meaning is inextricably linked to how it is argued. I see participants' stories in some way as “weighted with the force of social morality” (Appadurai, 1996, 5); as an attempt to persuade both me and also them that they made the ‘right’ choice in converting to organics, which is clearly a constant campaign against the odds. Pugliese (2001) suggests that because organic farming requires such a high level of commitment – both at the cultivation stage because it cannot resort to easy chemical solutions and more broadly in a system in which it is disadvantaged – that it induces awareness of self-potential. Similarly, Tovey (1997) suggests that going organic means gaining possession and pride of one's role as a producer, that is, as an expert of the land and its products.

Consequently, organic farmers do not consider themselves passive beneficiaries of state support nor simple executors of instruction but as experts, which makes the lack of state support (while difficult) in some ways irrelevant. Many of my study participants did separate themselves from others in their ability to think outside convention, supporting Franklin's (1990, 40) prediction that true social change will come not (at least at first) from the institutional level but from the vernacular, “from bringing in direct experience.” Pugliese (2001, 116) underlines the importance of the unconventional nature of organic farmers and he attributes the movements' unlikely achievements to the “persistent

commitment of many pioneer farmers...who have played a key role...working on the fringes of the agricultural world and operating far from the centres of power and of decision-making.” Buttel (1997) cites the innovativeness of organic farmers in generating local knowledges and their strong commitment to the unconventional as evidence of the social movement character of sustainable agriculture and this brings me to my final conclusion.

#### 5.4 A Broad and Coalitional New Social Movement

As imagined, I can use Habermas’ position on new social movements – as having moral and ideological imperatives partly fueled by broader political and economic shifts – to conceptualize the actions of the organic farmers of Saskatchewan.

There is little doubt that the organic farmers of Saskatchewan are part of a new social movement: they are “horizontal” (Cohen, 1985) in their associations, they represent a fusion of means and ends, they are self-aware (Beck, 1995) and so on. Certainly, this group’s efforts challenge globalization on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their lives and environment (Castells, 1997). Although Habermas is not perfectly clear on this matter, the links between the colonization of the lifeworld and the rise of new social movements are twofold in this situation. First, the colonization of the lifeworld of organics is the cause of the various grievances and strains that this new social movement is mobilizing around. As well, the administrative system seems largely unreceptive to public opinion and pressure; the public sphere has been largely eroded through the process of colonization and the bureaucratic structures of the system appear indifferent to communicative action and debate. The system, therefore, is frustrating the very same projects it set in motion, amplifying the intensity of these projects and their tendency to follow alternative and contentious routes like, in this case, media spectacles over unlikely court cases.

In relation to this court case, there is clearly a strong strategic dimension to movement activity. For instance, most participants did highlight the lawsuit against Monsanto and

Bayer as partly strategic where interviewee #4 said, “despite on-going lobbying efforts to get full public hearings on the issue of GE wheat, to date there has been no action and we hope the lawsuit can do something to change this.” While the means may seem pragmatic, however, the organic farmers of Saskatchewan are no doubt consciously struggling to a communicative and symbolic end – to widen democratic space, push the issue of agricultural biotechnology into the flagging public sphere and reconstruct the relationship between political and private institutions. Non-strategic aims are at the epicentre of this social project. This movement is resisting the extension of a technical rationality and defending a quality of life based not on system values such as money but, for the most part, on community, ecology. And, evidencing a true new social movement character, they are doing so in an embryonic way – the product of organic farming itself encapsulates the values involved with the production process (Murdoch and Miele, 1999). Like Touraine’s (1983) conclusions about the Solidarity movement in Poland, this is a movement creating an alternative sphere (in his words a “society within a society”) that reasserts civil society against the dominant cultural model although it neither retreats fully into “communal Utopias” nor orients itself exclusively towards the state in an attempt to capture state power. As with Touraine, I see this movement as one “most appropriate to post-industrial society” because the struggle is over the production of knowledge, which today forms the main source of social power: this movement is focussed on the re-politicization of issues of social importance through an opening of public sphere. While this movement may not be standing entirely outside of the system, participants remain lifeworld-focussed and they furthermore seem aware of their ability to emerge, grow, become incorporated, bifurcate and stay a somewhat coherent network of people and groups working worldwide in the same direction. I am surprised, in fact, by the broad character of this network. My final conclusion, therefore, is that *the activity of this new social movement is primarily lifeworld-focused and it is far from singular; it is being pursued by way of multiple motivations and goals and in diverse contexts.*

Earlier conceptions of alternative agricultural movements set to reduce movement aims to a short list of classifications, or characterizations (see Beus and Dunlap, 1990). In

contrast, researchers are increasingly recognizing, as Buttel (1997) suggests, that there is no single overarching theme, rationale or principle to sustainable agriculture but instead it is intrinsically a coalitional movement in which diverse views, objectives and aspirations need to be blended for a common and more abstract purpose. The broad nature of these movements is significant in what it indicates about the power of civil society (Evans, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995) such that Hart (1997, 57) suggests it speaks to the “multiple, nonlinear, and divergent trajectories of global restructuring and capitalist development.” Certainly, my data seem to defy the literature, which treats these movements as homogeneous, and it also goes against the deterministic notion that global economic restructuring is directional; that only one end is possible. As stated in the previous chapter, the larger story interviewees relayed to me was one of a competition between views of how farming (the community, the world) should be shaped; but it was one told with enough hope and determination to open the way for some progressive possibilities. Berry (1996) asserts that people interact within and among social arenas in multiples ways and relations among them are constituted through multiple processes of negotiation or contest which often occur simultaneously or in close succession but not necessarily synchronized or even consistent. In this study, participants spoke with a strong sense of solidarity about legal battles in the United States between farmers and Monsanto and about legal battles between peasant organizations in the south and biotechnology companies. Of those Saskatchewan organic farmers involved with the lawsuit against Monsanto and Bayer, many I interviewed were going on speaking tours in Europe, Mexico, Australia. Participants were communicating with like-minded and directed farmers around the world, and were viscerally aware of the fragmented, simultaneous and broad movement of people who are worldwide working to bring about social change in a similar direction as the organic farmers of Saskatchewan.

## 5.5 Implications of this Study for Future Sociological Work

Michelsen (2001, 3) recognizes that “the developments of organic farming are not only a matter of agricultural change but they also represent important aspects of recent changes in society at large.” This new social movement reflects general societal concerns for the environment, increasing doubts regarding the importance of science in solving social problems and increasing doubts about how society should be organized and governed. This movement and the alternative agriculture movement at large forces contemporary sociology to reconsider many things like nature-culture relations, the local and global, the partnership between science and industry, and the role of the expert versus the non-expert. All of this evidences what post modernists might term the presence of a risk society (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Beck, 1995), or “growing system complexity and the post-industrial nature of contemporary society” (Habermas, 1984). This supports the argument that it is a novel societal context which makes new social movements new and this merits further study.

Qualitative and grounded studies of movements such as this contribute to new understandings of the post-modern issues concerning new social movements and they are central to current theorizing (Kaltoft, 2001). Goodman (2001, 182) has argued that an “eradication of the modernist antimony between nature and science would allow social studies of food to engage more coherently in the new political spaces being carved out by the ‘green’ ethics and relational ethos of bio-political movements including environmental organizations and food activists.” Similarly, the results of the present study suggest that future social scientific analyses of alternative agriculture movements should recognize the centrality of the emotional and cultural to their struggle and therefore the importance of confronting the ontological assumptions of our discipline. Kloppenburg (1991), among others, warns that science’s detachment from nature and the objectification of the natural mean our current model is inadequate in understanding an ecological view of nature and therefore in properly understanding alternative agriculture movement and achieving a sustainable agriculture (see also Merchant, 1980). The dualistic nature of present day science, is the neglect and delegitimation of local knowledge production or as Hesserl (1970) put it, “the progressive separation of science

from the lifeworld,” which seems especially erroneous considering the results of this study suggest new movements are primarily lifeworld focussed. In this way, the results also underscore the importance of giving proper recognition to the lived intelligence and the solutions appearing at the farm level from organic farmers and actual circumstances; organic farmers present a positive definition of an improved farming system and demonstrate its value in practice (Michelsen, 2001).

What is most instructive about the results of this study is not whether we can call a movement a movement, nor whether we can label it ‘new’. Diversity along ideological lines and with respect to broad aims among *social movements who label themselves as such* is in itself significant. Similarly, these results suggesting that social movements might evaluate high technologies like biotechnology in a different way from scientists and experts, point to wider implications. Scholars, government legislators and industry representatives assert that negative consumer response to agricultural biotechnology is more emotional than scientific, and this study verifies that resistance lay in the cultural arena. Tensions around this biotechnology seem to operate with a different temporality and scale from those surrounding high technologies of previous centuries and they therefore fail to resolve themselves through the same lens. Are we incapable of absorbing contemporary technologies because of an outdated system of understanding? This gap in understanding is as much a product of disciplinary shortcomings as of political and economic realities. That we have yet to theorize how the deep social meaning of food intersects with the political economy of food production leaves us with an incomplete understanding of critical events occurring in rural and urban areas, such as the growing popularity of alternative agriculture movements. An enriched investigation of this phenomenon has the potential to reveal the existence of a cultural ethos held by Canadians that isn’t reflected in current food policy.

Studies such as this present new challenges for social science – its conceptual armoury and praxis. Still, we can conclude that the data presented here give reason for concern but grounds for optimism about the future of science, agriculture, the environment and rural communities across the globe.



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## APPENDIX A: TIMELINE FOR THE CASE ORGANIC FARMERS OF SASKATCHEWAN CASE

**2002** – Monsanto applies to the Canadian and American regulatory systems for the approval to release Roundup Ready wheat as a commercial crop. In light of contamination of organic fields by Monsanto's genetically engineered canola, the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (an umbrella group representing producer's, consumers and buyers or certified organic products) launches a class-action lawsuit against Monsanto and Aventis (the latter company has now been bought by Bayer). SOD's statement of claim is registered at the Court of Queen's Bench in January of 2002 but in April of this year Monsanto and Aventis ask to be relieved of their usual obligation to file Statements of Defense. Although an initial ruling upholds their responsibility to file such statements, in June the appeal court rules that they do not have to produce such Statement at this time.

**2003** – Monsanto and Bayer are allowed to cross-examine SOD's witnesses. SOD's case attracts international attention: as one example, the former UK Minister of Environment tours Saskatchewan to meet the organic farmers and learn about this legal action. The Canadian Wheat Board is publicly hesitant regarding the projected commercialization of Monsanto's Roundup Ready Wheat and SOD is asked for a statement in support of the Wheat Board's paper detailing this hesitance, "Conditions for the Introduction of GM Wheat."

**2004** – In January the Canadian government ends its contract with Monsanto which would have provided the government with royalties from the sale of Roundup Ready Wheat and SOD applauds this decision. In early February of this year, SOD amends their initial statement to include compensation for the ongoing costs of removing genetically engineered canola from organic farmers' fields and seed supplies. Monsanto and Bayer move to strike some of the affidavits submitted in this revised statement but the court ruled against this. The hearing which will decide on the status of SOD (as class-action or otherwise) is now set for May 17 and 18 of 2004.

## APPENDIX B: TIMELINE FOR THE SCHMEISER CASE

**1998** – Monsanto sues Percy Schmeiser, a conventional farmer working 1,400 acres of land east of Bruno, Saskatchewan, for growing their patented Roundup Ready canola crop without having signed a Technology Use Agreement and without having paid the biotechnology company for the patented modified seed accordingly. Monsanto has altered the plant's genes to make the canola resistant to Roundup – a Monsanto chemical weed killer – and holds patent over the gene making this canola resistant to Roundup and the process of inserting it into the seed.

**1999** - Schmeiser countersues, claiming Monsanto's modified seed blew onto his property and got mixed with his other seed in the traditional practice of seed-saving he and many other farmers around the world deploy. Schmeiser says Monsanto is trying to take away the fundamental rights of farmers as plant breeders and landowners (Schmeiser takes issue with the fact that Monsanto trespassed on his land to investigate for its original statement of claim). Schmeiser says he is entitled to damages because of what he calls “the arrogant, high-handed and shocking conduct of Monsanto” and more specifically for the contamination of his non-genetically modified crop.

**2001** – A Federal Court judge in Winnipeg ruled that Schmeiser violated Monsanto's patent on its genetically modified canola seeds. He did not disagree that Monsanto's Roundup Ready seeds may have blown onto Schmeiser's land but he said it was Schmeiser's, not the corporation's, responsibility to deal with contamination. Within weeks of this ruling, Schmeiser decides to appeal instead of continuing his lawsuit against Monsanto.

**2002** – The Federal Court of Appeal upheld a ruling that found Schmeiser guilty of illegally planting genetically modified canola patented by Monsanto.

**2003** – The Supreme Court granted Schmeiser the right to appeal this latest ruling.

**2004** – The Supreme Court's momentous decision on Percy Schmeiser vs. Monsanto. The David-and-Goliath battle waged over the past six years has ended, and David has lost. Court documents explaining the 5-4 decision that favours Monsanto mentioned an earlier court decision by the Federal Court where “The Federal Court judge didn't disagree that the Monsanto seeds may have blown on to Schmeiser's farm. The judge did agree, however, that it was Schmeiser's obligation to destroy whatever Monsanto canola resulted from the blown seeds.” The bottom line, according to the Supreme Court, is that “The appellants actively cultivated Roundup Ready Canola as part of their business operations. In light of all of the relevant considerations, the appellants used the patented genes and cells, and infringement is established.” This means that farmers are responsible for seeds blown onto their farms, possibly contaminating their crops, and the farmers also are responsible for removing the invading seeds. Percy said his legal fees have reached about \$400,000, of which some \$100,000 has been paid with the help of donations from groups and individuals around the world. The heart of the matter, it has been said in the documents, is the issue of patent law and Monsanto's right to protect its invention

although this raises issues such as intellectual property and the patenting of higher forms of life and the power of corporations versus farmers and citizens.

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. I would like to begin with your experiences farming. I would like you to take me through a typical day – not necessarily special things just routine.
  - 1 Tell me when you started farming and why you got into it in the first place?
  - 2 Would you make the decision to farm if you could start over again?
  - 3 Have you noticed any significant changes in the nature of farming in Canada throughout the past 20 years?
  - 4 What do you think are some of biggest challenges facing farmers in Canada?
  - 5 What advice would you give a new farmer?
  - 6 Most people define the current food system (from producer to consumer) as industrialized. Do you think that the industrialized model is ideal? Why or why not?
  - 7 What would an ideal food system look like?
  - 8 I have heard both good and bad things about the use of biotechnology in agriculture, what are your thoughts?
  - 9 Has the presence of biotechnology influenced or had an impact on your farming practice at all? How so?
  - 10 How do you feel about the Canadian government having a role in promoting agricultural biotechnology?
  - 11 What are your thoughts on the present class-action lawsuit between the organic farmers of Saskatchewan and Monsanto and Bayer? Why do you think the Saskatchewan organic farmers are pursuing this and do you think it is important?

## APPENDIX D: DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SAMPLE

Interviewee #1: Male, in his 30s, and is a paid farm policy activist with the National Farmer's Union. He grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan and himself farmed with his partner until 1999 (mixed grains and some alfalfa) when they leased the bulk of their land because of the money required to stay in, and the pull of off-farm work. They tried, and really enjoyed, farming organically for a few years but found the conversion period too uncertain, too financially difficult. He is quite active in the community and even left the interview for a short time to take a conference call with the Union – just like farming, he lives his job.

Interviewee #2: Female, in her 50s, and the partner of #1. Quiet though bright and thoughtful. While Interviewee #1 was on a conference call during my time at their farmhouse, I got an opportunity to speak with her and discover her deep love for literature, the environment, and her spirituality.

Interviewee #3: Male, in his late 70s, who certainly fits Pugliese's (2001) description of the pioneer organic farmer working from the fringes. I was privileged to spend two days at his farmhouse and the organic research station, which he started in the 1970s. At the station he grows everything from flax and mixed grains to hemp seed (in fact the government was sampling the hemp plots the day I arrived). To this day I maintain contact with him via phone and am continuously amazed at his energy, resourceful nature, dedication to environmental and health politics and the broader endeavours of organics.

Interviewee #4: Male, in his 40s, and superficially appears very much like any other beef farmer – big presence, outspoken. Still, he is quite dedicated to organics such that works with the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate.

Interviewee #5: Male, in his 60s, and by far the most philosophical and ecologically minded organic farmer I interviewed. He is very humble though extremely well versed in issues ranging from sustainable agriculture to globalization. He wishes to innovate his operation so that it is as sustainable as it can possibly be.

Interviewee #6: Male, in his 30s, and an outlier in that he is an urban gardener and though he doesn't spray any chemicals he is not classified organic as such – he did talk at length about how it was impossible for him to gain certification and this hindered his business. He is quite business minded though he and his wife are dedicated to sustainable living and appear to have strong environmental ethics.

Interviewee #7: Male, in his late 70s, and also an outlier in that he is a beekeeper. He is from a large, third-generation farm family, which is very present within the province's farm policy and activist community. He was very humble, kind, and for someone his age surprisingly well versed on current issues, both political and practical.

Interviewee #8: Male, in his 30s, a French Canadian organic farmer who works with the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate. When I met with him he was in the middle of a speaking tour where he was meeting with groups of organic farmers in Australia and England who are involved in their own battles regarding biotechnology. He made reference to his wife and family a lot during the interview and it seems as though family, community and the environment are of central importance to him.

Interviewee #9: Male, in his early 30s, a graduate of agricultural sciences in Canada who is now doing policy work with NGOs in Indonesia on the issue of genetically engineered food. He spoke about the relationship between farmer struggles in the North and the South as “horizontal conflict” where there are lots of similarities, and solidarity. He is married to a woman from Indonesia and feels very strongly about not undermining peasant cultures and sustainable models of production in favour of Western, productivist production models.

Interviewee #10: Male, in his 60s and probably the most self-critical organic farmer interviewed. He spoke at length about the difficulties posed by the lack of support but also regulation of organics within Canada. He has a concern for the environment and he and his wife are generally socially active in the community.

Interviewee #11: Female, in her 60s and the wife of #10. She was very well spoken and surprisingly globally aware: she made reference to farmers’ struggles in the South. She appears to believe strongly in global social justice and cooperation.

Interviewee #12: Female, in her 50s and from a large farm family. She is very politically active and a long-time farm policy activist with the NFU, the Via Campesina and other organizations. She teaches at the University of Saskatchewan and is extremely well spoken, her ideas balanced and well thought through. She cares deeply for her family, the community and the earth.

Interviewee #13: Male, in his 50s, and the husband of #12. He is well educated – in economics and he also has an agricultural degree. His ideas are equally abstract and complex as his wife and I was struck during the interviewee and what a loving and supportive relationship they have with one another and the other members of the family. Unlike his wife, he is not from a farming family and as such spoke about the difficulties of coming to the community as an outsider. Still he cares deeply for the earth and despite the social pressures will continue with organics.