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# De-agrarianisation and urban food producer movements: A case from South Africa

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## Résumé

South Africa's neoliberal agri-food system and agrarian transformation are characterised by highly exclusionary dynamics. Over the past decades, the country's agricultural and food policies have followed a neoliberal ideology to satisfy and compete in the global market. In this way, the government has been creating an enabling environment for corporate activities which path the way for large food retailers and large-scale agriculture. Throughout these developments and the country's history of oppression many farm workers and farmers have been expelled from the countryside. Today, we are confronted with dynamic realities of jobless de-agrarianisation. Many left the countryside in hope for a better future in cities. However, harsh urban lifeworlds including food insecurity are an everyday reality. 26% of South Africa's population is experiencing hunger. In view of these challenges, many deprived urban dwellers have turned to food production on empty plots and at the fringes of cities to make a living and to meet their nutritional needs. While this might be termed as economy from below, it moreover presents a breeding ground for progressive social movements which claim access to healthy and affordable food, land, and water. In recent years, this kind of initiatives gained momentum in cities across the country. The paper departs from fieldwork in South Africa between 2015 and 2017. As such this paper draws out in depth analysis about an urban food producer movement in George, Western Cape. This group of more than 700 farmers and gardeners is rooted in the urban working class including many retrenched and un(der)employed dwellers. While many are socioeconomically deprived and are suffering from nutritional deficiencies, members are promoting urban food production, healthy nutrition, and sharing and selling of the literal fruits of their labour. Drawing on Marxist traditions and particularly Lefebvre's approach of the right to city, the everyday politics of these food producers are investigated. Based on qualitative research, this work provides insights into the economic structures, solidarity practices, and diverse forms of resistance in everyday life. The main part sheds light on the construction of a progressive social movement and demonstrates the ways that these practices can both resist and be captured by neoliberalism. For instance, the failures of the welfare state contribute to informal practices of growing and selling food, which are often considered as marginal and neglected. However, those self-help mechanisms and alternatives do not only serve the poor; several practices are demonstrated to be constitutive of the neoliberal economy and the exclusionary agri-food system in place. In this way, radical change remains challenging. In the long run, the key findings exemplify that the dynamics of (rural) de-agrarianisation partly shift the agrarian question to urban areas. In this light, the emergence of agrarian citizenship in cities needs to be discussed, which might even build the link to the re-peasantisation debate.

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**Mots-Clés:** De, Agrarianisation, Social Movements, Urban Food Producers, South Africa