AGROECOLOGY VERSUS PRODUCTIVISM:
COMPETING DISCOURSES ON THE FUTURE OF CUBAN AGRICULTURE

Justine M. Williams

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Anthropology.

Chapel Hill
2012

Approved By:
Karla Slocum, PhD
Dorothy Holland, PhD
Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld, PhD
ABSTRACT

JUSTINE M. WILLIAMS: Agroecology versus Productivism: Competing discourses on the future of Cuban agriculture (Under the direction of Karla Slocum and Dorothy Holland)

Over the past twenty years, Cuba has become a poster child for agroecology. However, there has been little scholarship investigating how this movement has affected the social worlds of growers or the extent of their ethical commitments to agroecology. This paper contextualizes these questions in a broader scholarship on alternative agriculture, and pinpoints state and para-state discourses as major influences on agricultural practice. Through analysis of Cuban agricultural manuals and newspaper articles, two distinct discourses on Cuban agriculture are identified: productivism and agroecology. In contrast to earlier research that painted state and non-state actors as relatively equal contributors to sustainable agriculture, this analysis suggests that actors with more autonomy from central government have played a larger role in promoting an ethical commitment to agroecology. Employing a social practice of identity theory, the paper suggests the productivist discourse may spark resentment among growers who have embodied the commitment to agroecology.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For all of their advice, comments and encouragement in the various drafts of this project, I’d like to thank my committee, in particular, my advisors, Karla Slocum and Dottie Holland. For their personal support – including encourage, empathy, home-cooked dinners and editing work – I’d like to thank my parents, Steve Williams and Barbara MacKesson, and loved one, Devin McIntire.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures and Images........................................................................................................vi

List of Abbreviations................................................................................................................vii

Introduction...................................................................................................................................1

Cuba and Agroecology: The History..........................................................................................2
  The emergence of agroecology.................................................................................................3
  Moving away from agroecology?.............................................................................................6

Theoretical Lens and Literature Review...................................................................................8
  An anthropological approach to alternative agriculture and struggle: Contextualizing Cuba...8
  Alternative agriculture and the Cuban state..........................................................................9
  Turning toward discourse......................................................................................................12
  A route to understanding the implications of discourse: Identity..........................................13

Analyzing the Discourse: Materials, Background and Methodology....................................16

The Agroecology Discourse: Fresh Food and Ecological Rationality..................................19

The Productivist discourse: National Sovereignty Through Increased Production............28

Synthesis and Analysis..............................................................................................................36

Conclusion.................................................................................................................................41

Appendix 1.................................................................................................................................42

Appendix 2.................................................................................................................................43

Appendix 3..................................................................................................................................44

Works Cited...............................................................................................................................45
LIST OF FIGURES AND IMAGES

Image 1: Sign outside of organopónico in Havana……………………………………………………………7

Figure 1. “Relaciones entre los componentes de un sistema integrado ganadería-agricultura.”……..24

Figure 2: “Flujo energético en la naturaleza.”……………………………………………………………25

Figure 3. Concept map of themes in the discourses presented in the manuals…………………..27

Figure 4. Concept map of themes in Granma discourse on agriculture……………………………..35
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACAO
Asociación Cubana de Agricultura Orgánica
(Cuban Association of Organic Agriculture)

ACTAF
Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales
(Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians)

ANAP
Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños
(National Association of Small Farmers)

CAC
Campesino a Campesino
(Peasant to Peasant or Farmer to Farmer)

FANJ
Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez por la Naturaleza y el Hombre
(Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Man)

GAO
Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica
(Organic Agriculture Group)

MINAG
Ministerio de Agricultura
(Ministry of Agriculture)

MACAC
Movimiento Agroecológico de Campesino a Campesino
(Agroecological Peasant to Peasant Movement)

NGO
Non-governmental organization
INTRODUCTION

Due to a combination of post-Soviet necessity and the work of innovative agronomists, Cuba has achieved impressive success in implementing agroecological practices and urban agriculture, and has received significant international attention for its efforts. In 1999, the Cuban Association for Organic Agriculture (Asociación Cubana de Agricultura Orgánica – ACAO) achieved a Right Livelihood Award (often referred to as the “Alternative Nobel Prize”) for its work in sustainable agriculture; in 2010 a United Nations report discussing agroecology as key to achieving food security highlighted participatory agricultural practices in Cuba (De Schutter 2010); and across the United States, Canada, Australia, Mexico and elsewhere groups of sustainable agricultural enthusiasts and farmers are coming together to take organized educational trips to Havana. While some writers and scholars – both from within and outside of the movement in Cuba – have documented how agroecological methods were pioneered and spread throughout Cuba, there has been surprisingly little research on how this movement has transformed the social worlds of growers, or even on the extent of growers’ commitments to this style and philosophy of agriculture. Nor has there been significant attention – either in the small body of academic literature or the wider body of public interest literature – to indications of waning Communist party interest in agroecology.

To begin to address these deficits in the literature (which will surely also take significant ethnographic fieldwork to overcome) this paper has four aims:

• First, to ground the case of sustainable agriculture in Cuba within a wider body of anthropological theory on agriculture and livelihoods in order to begin building an informed perspective on how the social worlds and identities of growers have been impacted by agroecology

• Second, to argue that state and para-state discourses hold a powerful role in shaping both agricultural practices and philosophies
• Third, to undertake an analysis of the agricultural discourses currently circulating in Cuba
• And fourth, to propose, employing social practice of identity and discourse theories, that the conflicting discourses identified during this analysis indicate a clear lack of philosophical commitment to agroecology on the part of the state, a lack which may lead to resentment and resistance on the part of growers who have developed a philosophical or ethical commitment to this style of production.

CUBA AND AGROECOLOGY: THE HISTORY

To understand the cultural worlds of agricultural producers or begin to examine the extent of their commitment to agroecology, it is crucial to understand the history of Cuban agriculture since the Revolution of the 1950s. As observers of Cuba are well aware, the country’s economy and cultural history have long been built around the sugar and tobacco industries. However, the Cuban Revolutionary government has shown deep ambivalence over the years toward the role of these export crops in the country’s agrarian history and current practices. A new agrarian vision was very much part of Fidel Castro’s, Che Guavara’s, and their supporters’ goals. In what is recalled as one of his most significant speeches, Guevara spoke in 1959 about the social justice that would be brought about by agrarian reform, placing it at the center of the Revolution’s goals (Kellner 1989:54). The sugar industry, in particular, had become a symbol of the country’s domination by and reliance on the United States’ economy and global trade (Ortíz 1947). This industry made a small group of Cuban and foreign elite wealthy, while the laborers who cut the cane and the smallholders who lived on the land surrounding the plantations benefitted little from the earnings. The revolutionary vision for Cuba was one in which this disparity would be removed and all campesinos would have adequate access to healthcare and education. To build this vision, the government passed the infamous Agrarian Reform
Law in 1961, which reappropriated all medium- to large-scale private landholdings and formed labor cooperatives to operate the farms. The National Association of Small Farmers (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños – ANAP) was formed to extend support to the small-scale farmers who maintained control over their own plots of land, and an extensive effort was made to extend social services, including education, healthcare, and food rations, to people throughout the countryside.

The original vision for the Revolution included a plan to diversify production on small farms and move away from plantation-style agriculture, which symbolized American intervention and a lack of sovereignty (see Nova 2002, Rodríguez 1979, Susman 1974). However, the Soviet Union offered Cuba a large sugar contract that Castro’s government decided to accept, perhaps out of concern that the country could not immediately sustain itself economically if it abandoned sugarcane altogether (Nova 2002:29). But by doing so, Cuba retained and reproduced, if in a less familiar form, the hegemonic model of large-scale mono-cropping and reliance on global trade familiar throughout the Western world and colonized countries. Indeed, since much of Cuba’s agriculture focused on producing sugar as an export crop, food for consumption had to be imported from the Soviet Union. This pattern continued for several decades.

**The emergence of agroecology**

When the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, Cuba was almost entirely cut off from international trade. In addition to losing access to the fuel, fertilizer and machinery needed to run its industrial-style plantations, Cuba lost access to the stream of imported foods that had sustained the population for the past thirty years. Fidel Castro deemed the economic crisis that settled over the county to be a Special Period in the Time of Peace, putting in place austerity measures and rationing schedules that had originally been developed as contingency plans to follow in the case of war. During those years, the average daily caloric intake decreased by approximately 30 percent (Fairweather 2010). The country was forced to redesign its agricultural system. Fidel Castro declared the food crisis to be the “number one priority,” and announced that the country “must produce more
food without feedstocks and without fertilizer,” in part by converting the image of farming to one of the most honored, promoted and appreciated professions (as quoted in Benjamin and Rosset 1994:33).

Even before this time, a number of agronomists had recognized the unsustainability of industrial-style agriculture, and had begun to explore alternatives. These agronomists pioneered methods of agroecology, advocated for them across the country and researched new techniques (Fairweather 2010). In the words of Luis García from the Agrarian University of Havana, agroecology is a “new paradigm [that] views the farm as an ecosystem, and blends the technological advances of modern science with the time-tested and common sense knowledge of traditional farming practices” (2001:90). Additionally, agronomists recommended to the government that many of the large collectivized farms be broken apart in favor of a network of small-scale farms that would each have more independence and flexibility to respond to the needs of the country and to farms’ local communities (Fairweather 2010).

In 1992, father-son agronomist duo Fernando Funes and Fernando Funes Monzote formed the Cuban Association for Organic Agriculture (ACAO) to share knowledge about agroecology/organic agriculture (Fairweather 2010). They encouraged “people’s participation,” in the process, and called what was happening a movement. In 1999, the ACAO earned international acclaim after being awarded a Right Livelihood Award for its work. Just several months later, the government closed down the organization. Although the organization had done what Fidel Castro wanted – raised food production without inputs – it had also threatened the government’s sense of complete, centralized control. However, Fernando Funes continued to work with farmers and to rebuild his relationship with the government (Fairweather 2010). The ACAO has now changed its name to the Organic Agriculture Group (Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica – GAO), and has been incorporated into the Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians (Asociación Cubana de Técnicos
Agrícolas y Forestales – ACTAF), an official branch of the Ministry of Agriculture (Ministerio de la Agricultura – MINAG).

In addition to the GAO, other organizations in Cuba have worked, and continue to work, on issues surrounding agroecology. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Man (Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre – FANJ), named for a Cuban anthropologist and naturalist, has continued to lend support to organic urban farming as part of its mission to support sustainable development. ANAP, the association of small farmers and a member of international peasant coalition Via Campesina, has developed a “social process methodology,” for spreading agroecological knowledge among campesinos. Through this process, initially named Campesino-a-Campesino (CAC), farming methods that have been generated over time are shared and bolstered by a network of peasants in which horizontal knowledge transfer is favored over the top-down knowledge instruction employed by traditional agricultural-extension programs. The process began with government funding, but in 2001 at the first national meeting of the CAC program, the president of ANAP declared that it must find a way to become self-sustaining, stop being a “program,” and become a “movement,” so that it could be driven primarily by the commitment and creativity of campesinos rather than by government grants. Since then it has been known as the Agroecological Movement of Campesinos to Campesinos (Movimiento Agroecológico Campesino-a-Campesino – MACAC), and researchers have found that it has taken on social movement dynamics that have helped foster the success of the agroecology movement more than the mere presence of alternative agricultural options (Rosset et al. 2011).

Although American journalists traveling to Cuba and interviewing leaders have written about the perceived threat ACAO posed to the regime and its subsequent shut down, the written history of the GAO and agroecology movement as documented by its Cuban leaders generally glosses over the transition between the ACAO and GAO, and does not mention a shut down or any tension with the government. I think it is somewhat self-evident why the leaders of the movement would not want to publicly rehash this discord, whereas American journalists would have more flexibility in publishing the full story, and I therefore take the account of American journalists to be reliable.
Moving away from agroecology?

Although this narrative may present agroecology in Cuba as active, resilient and stable, in reality, it may be that the Castro regime endorsed agroecology only as a necessary means to make it through the economic hardship of the Special Period. It is possible that this practice will become increasingly less central to the government’s goals as other options are established. Since 2007, Cuba has achieved increased access to low-cost oil through a deal with Venezuela in return for welcoming Venezuelans for health treatment in Cuba and sending Cuban doctors to Venezuela. As in so many other fields, low cost oil is the primary ingredient in industrial agriculture.

Under Raúl Castro, who officially became president in 2008, Cuba is continuing to build international economic ties, and the socialist economy is making room for private enterprise. At the most recent Havana International Trade Fair – an annual event at which contracts are negotiated with foreign suppliers – the Brazilian ambassador to Cuba suggested that the Brazilian business community was in attendance not only to sell, but also to “help in the effort of ‘updating’ the Cuban economic model and Cuba’s effort to increase its export capacity and reduce imports” (EFE 2011). The Cuban foreign trade and investment minister attested that Cuba would be working to deepen its relationship with Brazil in the coming year and build opportunities to send more exports to Brazil. As of fall 2011, there was ongoing construction at the western Cuban port of Mariel, which is slated to become the nation’s major trade port and act as a symbol of bilateral economic cooperation with Brazil and other countries.

At a national grain and rice conference I attended in June 2011, it was also clear that the prevailing philosophy on the production of these staple crops cannot be described as agroecological. Transnational agribusiness Syngenta was a sponsor of and active presence at the conference. The company had donated to the Cuban government eight rice seed planters that disperse a chemical fungicide along with each seed. Not only was the corporate presence at a government-convoked annual conference striking, but the content of many of the presentations and posters at the conference
demonstrated an almost complete lack of interest in agroecology and a greater interest in the production of higher performing seed varieties to increase production.

In addition to these indications of changing political priorities, MINAG announced in September 2011 that it would be dismantling the historic sugar bureau. This decision should not be read as an indication of waning political support for the sugar industry. Rather, it suggests an increasing interest in generating additional product for export. The bureau was replaced with a holding company dedicated to improving efficiency and increasing exports (AFP 2011). Additionally, the government is reorganizing routes of sales and distribution by allowing farmers to sell excess above their state quotas directly to consumers or the tourist industry (Franks 2011).

As indicated by the forced closure of the ACAO, the government never fully embraced the agroecology movement as it emerged even if it did support agroecological practices and urban farming as a means to increase food output, and achieve some level of food security and stability. Additionally, the recent political occurrences mentioned above indicate that significant changes are underway in the conceptualization and functioning of the Cuban agricultural system, not all of which conform to the agroecology method or movement. This begs the questions: to what extent is the Cuban government continuing to support agroecology or shifting focus to other options? And, how will this affect the system as a whole, and the commitments and reactions of the growers in it?

Image 1. Sign outside of organopónico in Havana. Translation: “Yes! Taste and Flavor - From the garden bed to your table!” Photo credit: author
**THEORETICAL LENS AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

*An anthropological approach to alternative agriculture and struggle: Contextualizing Cuba*

Erin Nelson and colleagues point out that in order to understand how agroecology functions in Cuba, it is not enough to understand the institutional framework. “In the end,” they write, “it is on the farm, where production takes place, that agroecology must be put into practice if transition [to sustainable agriculture] is to be successful” (2009:237). Nelson et al. are the only researchers I have found to investigate Cuban farmers’ levels of commitment to agroecology. In addition to describing elements of the institutional framework for agroecology, they discuss how the Cuban state actually controls and limits activities on farms and describe several growers’ perspectives on agricultural methods of production. Nelson et al. are wise to focus attention on what actually happens on farms in relationship to farmers’ subjectivities; this is something that is discussed surprisingly infrequently in analysis of agricultural production. They make an important contribution through their discussion of the varying perspectives and levels of commitments to agroecology among the farmers they interview. What we still need, however, in order to more deeply understand agroecology and its resiliency in Cuba is a deep analysis of how these varying levels of commitment are developed, and how they fit into the complicated webs of culture in which agriculture exists.

Anthropologists and other scholars of social and cultural studies have long realized that agricultural decision-making cannot be explained by “rational” economics alone. Rather, it is immersed within a deep web of cultural logics that shape how people view and interact with the land, markets, and agricultural policies, as well as with themselves and each other vis-à-vis these elements. To describe farmers’ commitments to certain agricultural practices or lifestyles, anthropologists and scholars from related fields have examined them from a variety of perspectives. These have included discussions of “moral economies,” deeply rooted moral-economic sensibilities that influence peasant and agricultural values (Scott 1976, Edelman 2005); the notion of agriculture as performance in
which a sense of agricultural know-how and creativity is spontaneously enacted in response to the conditions with which growers are faced (Richards 1989, Crane et al. 2011); and agriculture as the embodiment of locally situated, traditional or creative knowledge (van der Ploeg 1993, Gonzalez 2001, Pottier and Sillitoe 2003, Sillitoe 2006). Anthropologists and other social scientists have also explored the dedication with which growers will assert their preferences or traditions and resist impositions of hegemonic styles of agriculture through studies of social movements (Paige 1978, Slocum 2006, Desmarais 2007), everyday banal acts of resistance (Scott 1976, Nazarea 1996), and generative, creative acts of forming new alternatives (Schneider and Niederle 2010, Nazarea 2005).

Anthropologists have also illuminated the knowledge that culturally constructed farmer sensibilities shape farmers’ actions and behaviors on the farm. For example, Kathryn Dudley (2000) studied a Midwestern farming community in the wake of the 1980s farm crisis that forced many farmers out of the business. She questioned what led so many of them down spiraling paths of debt as well as what prevented them from participating in collective action against the policies that were so negatively affecting their livelihoods. What she found was that many were unwilling or uncomfortable breaking from farming identities constructed around deeply entrenched cultural values of hard work and individualism. Peggy Bartlett’s work with farmers in Georgia demonstrates how three particular culturally constructed ideologies about masculinity construct three distinctive types of sense of self, which in turn lead to “contrasting patterns of farm management style” (2006:52).

*Alternative agriculture and the Cuban state*

In much of the aforementioned literature on alternative agriculture and resistance, farmers’ motivations, preferences and self-understandings are shown to be grounded in deep traditions and historically based incompatibility with an imposing and hegemonic style of production (such as the techniques encouraged by the Green Revolution or the systems encouraged by neoliberal trade practices). What makes the case of Cuban agroecology particularly interesting is that it is not born of long-standing cultural traditions (although they may contribute to it), but rather has emerged more
recently. Therefore, if some agroecologists resist other systems of production as agroecology receives waning political support, academics will not be able to fall back on explanations of long-held “cultural traditions” in order to explain the willingness to struggle for agroecology. Instead, we must examine the more recent factors that have coalesced in the past 20 years to build an agroecology movement, and analyze the extent to which they have created enduring farmer sensibilities or forged a commitment to a “moral economy” built around sustainable agricultural practices.

Both Nelson et al. (2009) and Adriana Premat (2009), an anthropologist who has conducted work on urban farming and gardening in Havana, have attested that alternative agriculture has been supported in Cuba by both the state and nongovernmental organizations. Premat indicates that, in Havana, urban gardening practices have been generated both from above and from below. Although she convincingly argues that citizens take an active role in shaping the profile of urban gardening in Havana based on their own needs and preferences, she also makes it quite clear that top-down influence from the state and the NGO FANJ have played a large role in encouraging urban production. While the state encouraged citizens to create gardens on their patios or rooftops through “model garden” competitions and monetary awards, FANJ taught citizens methods of gardening and gave them the opportunity to take on wider roles in teaching these methods to others.² Two of Premat’s informants, for instance, initially began to practice gardening methods in conformity with the state discourse on model gardens in order to achieve recognition and awards. Ultimately, however, they developed a sense of autonomy through continued work with both state organizations and FANJ, through which they had opportunities to teach skills to others, write articles, and receive public recognition.

Based on fieldwork in a rural municipality of Havana Province with a diversity of production styles, Nelson et al. (2009) also assert that exposure to agroecological knowledge and practices come

² I consider FANJ to be a top-down influence because it is a relatively privileged and well-funded organization that has played a key role in urban gardening through dissemination of the techniques and ideals that it is well versed in.
from a variety of forms, including workshops organized by universities and farm visits from state agents. Their research suggests that there is a wide disparity between various farmers’ levels of commitment to agroecology. They found that none of the farmers they spoke with originally took up agroecology by preference, and that many would still return to industrial agriculture if they could. Several others, though, spoke eloquently about their philosophical preferences for agroecology. For this reason, the authors hypothesized that even if farmers did not originally employ agroecology by preference, some might continue with it for this reason. Nelson et al. do not analyze the causes of the disparity in commitments, but I would suggest that the disparity should be examined in relation to the routes through which growers were exposed to and taught agroecological practices. If farmers took up these practices primarily because, as the authors mentioned, visiting state officials encouraged them to use biofertilizers and there were not enough chemical inputs to supply entire communities, these farmers may never have had exposure to the philosophical underpinnings of agroecology. If they attended more enthusiastic workshops marked, as the authors indicate, by inspirational phrases and encouragement, they may be more likely to have developed positive attachments to agroecology.

What these case studies do indicate, despite some gaps, is that agricultural practices have been shaped and constrained by the state, and that non-state actors, like FANJ and university workshop leaders, have also played a prominent role in generating agroecological ideology and shaping growers’ commitments.

The contention that national ideologies have had a major influence on agroecological practices should not be a surprising one. As Corrigan and Sayer (1985) propose in their seminal work on state formation in the United Kingdom, nations are produced (and we might add reproduced) through the continual creation and perpetuation of ideologies, which create social identities and subjectivities for their members. These ideologies help to construct “certain moral and categorical framework(s),” which “orient action (1985:9).” And as Kendall Thu (2001) points out, the state’s ideology – even when it encompasses a variety of sometimes contradictory interests – filters through
a variety of channels to impact, influence and manipulate local community members’ and growers’ perceptions of and response to large-scale agricultural production.

**Turning toward discourse**

One means through which state ideology is presented to individuals is through discourse. Discourse can include both written and spoken communication, and in the case of Cuban agriculture, it could include statements and documents on agriculture by the state as well as those by nonstate actors like FANJ or para-state actors (who are technically part of the government but promote ideologies that are distinct from those of the central state), like the GAO. Although a discourse can have varied and contrasting elements within it, as a whole each discourse demonstrates coherence in terms of epistemology, worldview, and treatment of various topics. As stated by Stuart Hall, a discourse constitutes “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about… a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (2001:72). Following Foucauldian conceptualization (1980, 1982[1969], 1994[1966]), discourse goes hand in hand with power. It enforces power by constituting and governing our knowledge, and determining the ways in which we are able to reflect on and discuss topics. It also enforces power in the sense that it allows dominant institutions’ culturally constructed beliefs to ultimately take shape in everyday life. According to Foucault, a person is, to a large extent, formed within the discourse he or she lives within. While discourses control and author the possibilities open to individuals, individuals do have some agency in that they can attempt to position themselves at a point from which the discourse makes the most sense, and is most advantageous to them. Foucault calls this position a “subject position.”

In the sense that Cuban agricultural discourses do emanate from powerful state institutions and exert great influence on the practices and philosophies that growers demonstrate, a Foucauldian

---

3 I call the GAO a “para-state” actor because, although it is technically a part of the national government, it originally operated outside of it, retains commitments from this prior time, and is not close to the inner circle of the central government.
perspective is useful to maintain. Indeed, Premat (2005) documents a case in which the state discourse, as printed in various newspapers, led to a decline in urban gardening on personal plots in Havana. She finds that beginning in the mid-1990s, the newspapers began to shift away from picturing personal garden plots next to articles discussing urban agriculture, and toward picturing instead relatively large, high-intensity urban plots, such as those kept by managers rather than individuals. At the time, this shift did not reflect any real prevalence of that form of urban production over that of family home plots. However, it did reflect the state’s greater interest in large plots, and as Premat indicates, it foreshadowed various state agencies’ declining support for home gardens. By 2000, this decline had led to a real and significant drop in home plots.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that, in reality, discourses almost always compete with other discourses, and do not always have the power to enforce subjectivities and uniformly actualize their vision. As Arun Agrawal (2005) has pointed out, it is possible for people to maintain their own values, beliefs and ideologies even when a powerful force (such as a colonizing government) seeks to impose its own ideology and govern its subjects’ behavior. He suggests that we analyze when and how subjectivities are or are not formed in relation to state policies. In his work around issues of deforestation in Kumaon, India, he finds that many people resisted and disobeyed the actions encouraged, and even legally required, by state discourse. It was not until villagers became actively involved in forestry councils set up the government, a role that many enjoyed and found benefits in, that they began to imagine and act on environmental stewardship in the way encouraged by the government. What this demonstrates is that, in some cases, people’s mentalities will not be influenced by the state discourse, and their actions will not fully align with the outcomes it encourages, until the subject-position offered by the discourse becomes relevant and meaningful for their lives.
In order to further elucidate when individuals are affected by dominant ideologies and when they are not, and to further examine the implications of Cuba’s agricultural discourses, we may turn to the social practice of identity theory. Holland et al. describe “intimate identity” as “a central means by which selves, and the sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes and in the histories of social collectivities” (1998:270). In other words, an intimate identity is a mediating tool by which, through performed activities, sometimes in relation to collectivities of other individuals, people form and reform their understandings of self in relation to society and history.

Identities are not singular or static. As Stuart Hall (2001) points out, they are always in production, and they are always in the process of retelling or reimagining the past. Additionally, they can be held in relation to or in addition to other identities or understandings of self. “People tell others who they are,” Holland et al. write. “But even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities” (1998:3).

Holland et al. refer to the realm in which these identities are formed as “figured worlds,” “socially and culturally constructed realm[s] of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (1998:52). These “as-if worlds” (1998:52), in practice, are the very real, if constructed, worlds in which actors understand their circumstances, and thus determine their actions and construct and perform identities. Although figured worlds are actively and imaginatively constructed, they are built by using (and often reinterpreting) existing cultural resources.

For Cuban farmers, the available cultural resources that contribute to “figured worlds,” and thus shape identities, include, among other things, agricultural discourses. However, as Agrawal (2005) points out regarding what he calls subjectivities, identities cannot be formed simply by the existence of a discourse. Rather, the discourse must become salient through local spaces of practice (Holland et al. 1998), such as agricultural meetings, conferences, interactions at markets or even
regular farm/garden work. As individuals engage with elements of discourse at social, economic or political levels, they can become more relevant and meaningful to the individual. At this point, the subject-position offered by an agricultural discourse can be embodied as an identity. As described by Escobar, “Identity construction operates through an active engagement with the world” (2008:203). Premat’s two informants are a perfect example of how engagement with agroecological ideology and practice ultimately can lead to a shift in self-perception: “For gardeners like Rafael and Manolo, the experience of modeling sustainable agricultural practices did not just involve physically changing their patios and rooftops but resulted also in a shift of self-perception. Being awarded the title (or being nominated for it) underscored these producers’ stats as outstanding…” (2009:46). If my hypothesis is true – that some of Nelson et al.’s informants professed a philosophical commitment to agroecology as a result of their engagement with dedicated and enthusiastic promoters – this would also provide an example of personal sensibilities shifting through engagements.

What makes culturally constructed identities so interesting and important for questions about politics, social movements, and the construction of the future, is that through embodiment, as Rafael and Manolo also demonstrate, they shape people’s actions and motivations. As Escobar writes, “In political situations, identity involves ethical commitments by activists (2008:203).” When state positions or policies come in conflict with a person’s or group’s sense of who they are, it can lead to resentment and even outright social movements and/or political conflicts. For instance, Satterfield (2002) used aspects of social practice theory of identity in a study of the conflict between loggers and environmentalists over old-growth forests in Washington State. The loggers identified deeply with their work and the lifestyle of logging, and when the federal government was re-examining forestry laws, the loggers spoke out actively and emotionally against bans proposed by environmentalists on logging in old-growth forests.

By keeping in mind the fact that ideologies, as circulated in discourse and brought into spaces of local practice by growers, can have deep influences on growers’ sense of self, and by realizing that this sense of self impacts farmers’ level of commitment to agroecology, we can turn toward an
analysis of Cuban agricultural discourse with an informed perspective on its relevance and potential impacts.

**ANALYZING THE DISCOURSE: MATERIALS, BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

Based on these theories, we can predict that the agricultural discourses present in Cuba have the potential to shape growers’ value-systems, ethical commitments and identities. In order to understand these discourses, I analyzed two sets of data. The first includes seven manuals, training booklets and pamphlets published and/or distributed between 1999 and 2011 by various divisions of MINAG (see Appendix 1 for a full list of materials). They range in length from several pages to 94 pages. Although this literature is officially affiliated with the state through various divisions of MINAG, much of it was written or influenced by the leaders of the agroecology movement who secured official positions in state agencies after the Cuban government decided to incorporate this movement officially. In other words, despite the fact that these are government-approved documents, the philosophies that they present do not necessarily originate from within the dominant thinking of the inner circles of the state. Two of the longer documents in this set of data were authored in whole or in part by Fernando Funes Monzote, son of Fernando Funes, and prominent leader in the agroecology movement, as discussed previously. In order to underscore the fact that these sources and the discourses that they produce are not aligned with those from the center of the state, even if though they are technically part of government agencies, I will refer to these as “para-state” sources and discourses.

Four of these documents, published between 1999 and 2002, were given to me by the family of a technician who worked in agronomy during this period. These materials were given to her as part of her professional education and training. For this reason, I take them to be reasonably representative of the set of materials and written discourse that technicians were exposed to and carried (either
literally or figuratively) with them into the field as they visited farm and garden sites and held
trainings. Although these physical documents may never have reached many growers, the ideology
contained within them may have.

The late 1990s and early 2000s can also be seen as a time when the agroecology discourse
had reached somewhat of a pinnacle in strength and acceptance. As discussed above, by this point the
movement had already achieved success in producing high quantities of food and pulling Cuba out of
the Special Period, and the GAO had just received international acclaim through the Right Livelihood
Award.

Additionally, I included two other more recent documents (one dated 2008 and the other
undated) in the analysis. These documents, which include a pamphlet and a booklet on small-scale
rice production, were given to me in summer 2011 by Fernando Funes to represent the work of the
Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians (ACTAF), the government branch that
incorporated the GAO. This admittedly small sample serves to illustrate that the themes present in the
other five documents are ongoing in literature distributed today.

For my second set of data, I analyzed a collection of articles from Granma. Granma is the
only daily newspaper in Cuba and is the “official organ” of the Communist Party of Cuba, which, of
course, is not only the governing party, but also the only legal political party in Cuba. Granma is run
entirely by the state, and all its writers receive state salaries. In addition to reporting on various events
and developments in agriculture, science, business and popular culture, the newspaper also regularly
prints speeches from political leaders, transcripts and commentary on government assemblies, and
narratives on Cuba’s social history. According to Alexandre Leger (2001) in his thesis on Granma’s
role in Cuban politics and society, Granma serves to establish and reinforce hegemony in Cuba,
which it does through the creation of regular and recurrent themes in its articles. Although the
findings presented below would challenge the claim that Granma succeeds in creating hegemony, at

---

4 Asociación Cubano de Técnicos Agricultores y Forestales.
least when it comes to agricultural philosophies, the point stands that the newspaper strives to present coherent ideologies and create a uniformity of thinking about economic and other issues among the Cuban people.

To assemble this body of data, I used the Google-based search engine available on the Spanish language Granma site to search for all articles containing the word *agricultura* (agriculture) and then refined my search to show articles dated from February 2008 to November 26, 2011. I chose February 2008, when Raúl Castro officially assumed the presidency, as a rough marker of the beginning of the current political period, while recognizing that Raúl Castro’s assent to power has been a gradual one. (He assumed acting duties as president in 2006 and was not elected as leader of the Communist Party until 2011.) November 26, 2011 is the date at which this data collection was carried out. I pulled every fourth article displayed by the search for analysis, with a resulting sample of 43 articles. It should be noted that the body I drew these samples from was not a complete set of all articles printed regarding *agricultura* during this period, because the search engine excluded some articles deemed to be “similar.” Because the metrics of the search engine played a role in my selection of a final body of data, I should note that my sample of articles cannot be considered a random sample from a set of all issues of Granma during the time period. Nonetheless, the sample includes a variety of discussion and topics while still demonstrating clear repetition of themes. It includes reports on recent events both domestically and internationally, as well as speeches and transcripts from government assemblies and addresses.

I used an inductive approach in my analysis of both sets of data, noting and tagging prominent ideas that emerged as I read through the data (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 for a list of the ideas that I coded for). Upon completing the coding process, I arranged these lists of codes by prevalence, and began to analyze them in relation to each other and to central themes.
THE AGROECOLOGY DISCOURSE: FRESH FOOD AND ECOLOGICAL RATIONALITY

Although the manuals and training booklets varied in the extent to which they discuss the details and philosophy of agroecology, as a whole the discourse they contain is crafted around ideals or methods resulting from the agroecology movement. It is clearly centered around the goal of reaching and maintaining a production level that will satisfy the demand of the Cuban people while preserving natural resources and achieving sustainability. This set of discourse is largely predicated on the importance of understanding the natural relationships and harmony between living organisms, and the importance of utilizing inherent, productive properties in complex natural systems in achieving this goal.

I identified five major “arguments” in the discourse that support the need for the establishment and maintenance of sustainable production:

1. Getting regular, fresh food to the Cuban table
2. Supporting a healthy, diverse diet for Cuban families
3. Continuing the political trajectory and goals of Cuba
4. Moving beyond the problems associated with conventional agriculture; and
5. Creating a rational and efficient food economy

In terms of establishing production goals, the discourse is concerned first and foremost with benefitting public health by consistently supplying fresh food that will also constitute a nutritious diet. Several of the materials analyzed explicitly grounded the methods or guidelines they outline in this objective. A manual for intensive gardens and organopónicos, for instance, concludes by establishing the importance of fruit and vegetable gardens in regard to public health. It features a food pyramid with fruits and vegetables as the base, and argues that achieving this healthy diet is essential for achieving health and preventing diseases. In a special bolded text box separated from the main body of the page, the manual notes the following: “Health is not simply the absence of sickness, it
depends in grand part on our food.” (INIFAT 1999:70-71). The “Guidelines for the Subprogram on Urban Agriculture” are grounded in the same goal through an introduction that explains that, after the 1990s, Cuba began to develop a system for production that could “contribute to the maintenance of a public health according to the goals of our country” (Grupo Nacional de Agricultura Urbana 1999:1).

In its guidelines for pork production, it describes this endeavor as a means to supply the amount of protein necessary to feed families.

Through references to Cuba’s recent or more distant history, the discourse presents sustainable production as a natural development in the trajectory of the Cuban political project. For instance, the quote from the “Guidelines for the Subprogram on Urban Agriculture” cited above follows a reminder to the reader about Fidel Castro’s attendance at the Summit of the Earth in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s, and his enthusiastic support for sustainable food production following that event. Some materials in the data set tell the story of Cuba’s agricultural history since the Revolution, explaining that while achievements were made in the agrarian sector before the 1990s through the creation of rural infrastructure, the collapse of the Soviet Union and resulting Special Period highlighted the tenuousness of the industrial style of agriculture that was being practiced. In these narratives, agroecology is presented as a necessary progression in Cuba’s history. Its feasibility is also contextualized in the Revolution’s success at educating and training many people in scientific and agricultural research, which can now be harnessed to benefit agroecology.

In the discussions of Cuba’s past with input-intensive production, and in other commentary peppered throughout the materials, the myriad of problems associated with industrial agriculture are often mentioned and used as a rationale for a movement into agroecology. Large-scale, industrial agriculture is associated throughout the documents with problems such as soil compaction, deforestation and overgrazing, and sometimes with products that were of a poor quality by the time

---

5 *La salud no es sencillamente la ausencia de alguna enfermedad, ella depende en gran medida de nuestra alimentación.*

6 *Contribuir al mantenimiento de una salud humana acorde con las metas de nuestro país.*
they were transported into the cities. One document explains that although high-input agriculture can achieve some gains in productivity, its methods are ultimately not economical, ecological or sustainable (Funes Monzote 2001c:67).

Additionally, high-input, industrial agriculture is presented as “irrational.” Re-appropriating the language of “rationality” and “efficiency” that is most often used to discuss free-market economics and the neoliberal global economy that they have inspired, this discourse presents the idea that an agricultural system is rational if it makes the most efficient use of energy and the natural characteristics of ecological systems. Mathematical tables calculating “calorie in-calorie out” serve to demonstrate the “irrationality” of industrial agriculture dependent on heavy fossil fuel inputs, and agroecology is argued to be the best method for contributing to a rational economy. In the prologue to “Livestock-Agriculture Integration with an Agroecological Basis: Plants and animals in harmony with nature and man,” the subdirector of the Institute of Pasture and Forage Research writes that, “it is essential to develop sustainable systems of livestock production with low external inputs, costs and expenses of operation and to adapt the general principals of the state program for livestock development for the economic situation of the country” (Ruiz Pierrugues 2001b:6). In passages such as this it is clear that sustainability is not only code for environmental stewardship, but also for economic sustainability.

To a lesser – but still noteworthy – extent, the impact of agricultural methods on the campesino family are also discussed. In the manual “Sustainable Tropical Bovine Production,” the authors of one chapter write that by implementing integrated agricultural-livestock production instead of industrial agriculture, there is the possibility of impacting the social, cultural and economic rights of the campesino family and strengthening its ability to support itself (Monzote and Funes-Monzote 2001:44). At another point the document notes that continual increases in work should not be the

---

7 *Es imprescindible desarrollar sistemas sostenibles de producción ganadera con bajos insumos externos, costos y gastos de operación y adecuar los principios generales del programa estatal para el desarrollo de la ganadería a la situación económica del país.*
goal, as once a sufficient and sustainable level is reached, farmers should have enough free time to “nourish the spirit” (Funes-Monzote 2001a:54).\(^8\)

This “spiritual” element of agricultural systems is mentioned in several places throughout the data, indicating that the discourse presents the goals of a successful agricultural system as more complex than mere production numbers. In the guidelines on urban agriculture, the production of ornamental plants is discussed as important to the overall production system because “The spiritual side of man is nourished [by flowers]” (Grupo Nacional de Agricultura Urbana 1999:10).\(^9\)

In terms of methodology for achieving sufficient, sustainable production, a heavy emphasis (as mentioned previously) is put on the understanding and on-farm replication of natural, complex systems. As Funes Monzote writes in one of the materials, when we see the “innumerable services”\(^{10}\) that plants and animals provide for each other in natural systems, we realize that we are living in “a complex world” (2001b:7).\(^{11}\) This awareness of complexity becomes the basis for an explanation of systems, which are discussed and described in great detail in two of the manuals. In “Livestock-Agriculture Integration with an Agroecological Basis: Plants and Animals in Harmony with Nature and Man,” systems are explained as consisting of several principal characteristics, including synergy, recursion (the idea that each system is formed by other subsystems) and hierarchy (Funes Monzote 2001c).

The interconnectivity between all organisms is the basis for the synergy in systems, and this interconnectivity is stressed throughout the discourse - even in places where the theoretical concept of complex systems is not explicitly mentioned – as crucial in understanding agricultural systems, and

\(^8\) “…nutrir el espíritu.”

\(^9\) *El lado espiritual del hombre estaría nutrido [por las flores].*

\(^10\) *Innumerables servicios*

\(^11\) *Un mundo complejo*
making them function. For instance, the “Manual for Organopónicos and Intensive Gardens” says in regards to plant health and pest management:

The fight against pests and diseases in urban agriculture will be implemented through Integrated Management of each cultivar, in which all of the factors affecting plants are integrated in a harmonious form: substrate, irrigation, pests and sickness, natural biological controls and the climate among others (INIFAT 1999:48).

This interconnectivity is presented as derived from our likeness with other organisms. In the introduction to “Livestock-Agriculture Integration with an Agroecological Basis: Plants and Animals in Harmony with Nature and Man,” Funes Monzote writes: “All the plants, animals and microorganisms, like humans, carry out identical functions: they are born, they eat, they grow, they reproduce, and they die” (2001:7b). Drawing on this likeness and interconnectivity, we are presented as all living together in harmony – as long as our natural systems are allowed to exist. In order to maintain this harmony, the materials present extensive information on the biological properties and cycles of plants and animals, as well as on their biochemical processes. For example, the manual on organopónicos gives detailed information on plants’ utilization of and reaction to elements in the soil, and two manuals describe the gut processes of ruminants in digesting nutrients.

By understanding all of these elements, the discourse presents that idea that growers can use energy rationally – making use of what already exists in natural systems rather than bringing in external inputs and wasting money on fossil fuels, commercial feed, etc. The manual on “Tropical Sustainable Bovine Production” discusses livestock production as potentially inefficient in light of the fact that the animals must convert the food they eat into food (meat or milk) that we can eat. It explains that nutrients and calories may be lost along the way. The author writes that evidence from

12 La lucha contra plagas y enfermedades en la Agricultura Urbana se realizará mediante el Manejo Integrado de cada cultivar, donde se integren de forma armónica y balanceada todos los factores que inciden sobre las plantas: el sustrato, el riego, las plagas y enfermedades los controles biológicos naturales y el clima entre otros.

13 Tanto las plantas, los animales y los microorganismos, como el propio ser humano cumplen funciones idénticas: nacen, se alimentan, crecen, se reproducen y mueren.
around the world indicates that we must decrease subsidies in order to find “real efficiency” (Ruiz Pierrugues 2001a:6), perhaps suggesting that the reigning constructions of “efficiency” in neoliberal systems are “false,” and that a truer one can be found through taking stock of life cycles and inputs.

Figure 1. “Relaciones entre los componentes de un sistema integrado ganadería-agricultura.” Trans: Relations between the components of an integrated livestock-agricultural system. Figure credit: Funes-Monzote 2001a:50.

---

14 *Eficiencia real*
Even in documents where the scientific and ideological rationale for avoiding inputs is not discussed in detail, self-sufficiency (*autoabastecimiento* or *autosuficiencia*) is often underscored. A prominent goal presented for livestock production is for the animals to live off the resources on the land, taking advantage of harmonious relationships between plants and animals, so that external inputs (as feed) do not have to be paid for or brought in. The idea that municipalities or provinces should achieve self-sufficiency by creating a local system that makes use of all available resources to satisfy local needs is also expressed.

In order to achieve sustainable, sufficient production, much technical information is presented regarding the use of organic materials as fertilizers on farm, the use of biological compounds to prevent diseases in both plants and animals, the creation of rich compost from available organic materials, and, especially, the creation of a healthy soil. The materials explain how soil must be cultivated to contain the appropriate level of living organisms and other elements, and also to contain enough tilth to support good root growth and water drainage. One manual instructs the reader to see

---

**Figure 2:** “Flujo energético en la naturaleza.” Translation: Energetic Flow in Nature. Figure credit: Funes-Monzote 2001b:52.
soil “like a living entity, and not like another production input, or only like something that sustains plants” (Funes Monzote 2001c:8).\textsuperscript{15} Methods for soil cultivation, fertilization and composting are sometimes contextualized in scientific or historical proof of their efficacy. For instance, the “Manual for Organopónicos and Intensive Gardens” describes that compost has been made for centuries in Asia (INIFAT 1999:64).

The application of science and technology is stressed in the discourse, but it is clear that the authors intend this to mean research into techniques fitting with agroecology and it conveys that not all conventional western philosophies are intended to be upheld in the practice of “modern science” for agroecological purposes. As one manual says, the Cartesian principle, and the idea of “atomism,” which has influenced much of western science, is insufficient for understanding complex systems—such as those related to agriculture (Funes Monzote 2001a:46). Further, there is an emphasis on collaboration between researchers and farmers, encouragement for information exchange, and a recognition that the popular movement for agroecology has been responsible for deploying the relevant scientific knowledge (Grupo Nacional de Agricultura Urbana 1999:33). Though not emphasized as heavily as “scientific research,” “traditional knowledge” is occasionally mentioned as an important factor in the success of agroecology. Participation of the people is stressed, particularly in the guidelines for organic agriculture, which call for the involvement of the people in cultivating their own food, even in the cities.

Within sustainable agriculture, various types of production are encouraged, including urban organopónicos and personal gardens, integrated animal and plant production in urban and rural settings, and small-scale rice production. The importance of biodiversity and preservation of land and natural resources are discussed as important across the areas of production.

\textsuperscript{15} Como un ente vivo y no como un insumo más de la producción o solo como sostén las plantas
Figure 3. Concept map of themes in the discourse presented in the manuals (size of bubbles proportional to prevalence of themes in data)
THE PRODUCTIVIST DISCOURSE: NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH INCREASED PRODUCTION

In contrast to the discourse from the manuals discussed above, analysis of the *Granma* articles reveals that mainstream state-mediated discourse on agriculture is almost exclusively centered around a productivist ideology. The term “productivism” has been used in a variety of contexts in academic literature to refer to ideologies or policies that support increased production as a benchmark of economic growth and progress. In 1958 John Galbraith (1998[1958]) pinpointed the productivist system in post-World War II America as the reason why the county’s private sector continually grew, while the public sector remained impoverished. In his work on future radical politics, Anthony Giddens defines productivism as “an ethos where work is autonomous and where mechanisms of economic development substitute for personal growth, for the goal of living a happy life in harmony with others” (1994:247). While Giddens’s definition highlights the ideology’s impact on individuals and their relationships with others, it is also useful to explain the term in relation to the structures that enforce it. In relation to British agriculture, which has widely been discussed in terms of productivism, Lowe et al. write:

By productivism we mean a commitment to the intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity. The concern [of British agricultural policies] was for ‘modernisation’ of the ‘national farm,’ as seen through the lens of increased production. By the ‘productivist regime’ we mean the network of institutions oriented to boosting food production from domestic sources, which became the paramount aim of rural policy following World War II. These included not only the Ministry of Agriculture and other state agencies but the assemblages of input suppliers, financial institutions, R&D centers, etc., which facilitated the continued expansion of agricultural production (1993:221).

Achieving a certain level of productivity is certainly also a goal of the agroecology discourse. The guidelines for the Subprogram in Urban Agriculture use quantitative measurements of output as the indicators of success in the different areas (types of crops) in which they work. Plus, the imitation of natural relationships between plants and animals on the farm is described in “Livestock-Agriculture Integration with an Agroecological Basis” as a means to increase the productive
capacities of the farm (2001). However, it is not seen as an increase in production without end. It is an increase within the limits of the system; to the maximum potential that the natural system can reach. As Funes Monzote writes in relation to low-input systems in the same manual mentioned above, they have: “The objective of obtaining economically reasonable levels of production, before the maximum biological levels possible (2001b:24).” Later in the same document, he goes on to explain that it is not necessary to increase the yields of everything, only to make optimum use of the system so that we have enough (48).

In the Granma discourse, however, the need to increase production comes up over and over again, without caveats. It presents abstract ideological justifications for these increases, though they are discussed much less frequently than potential means for doing so and problems presumed to be standing in the way. The discourse heavily emphasizes the need to increase production in order to substitute imports, and to create enough excess for exports. This positive trade balance is presented as a means to achieve the ideological goals of national sovereignty, national security, food security and sustainable socialism. For instance, Raul Castro explains in a December 2009 speech to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the “triumph of the Revolution,” that the creation of a stable agricultural base, one that can supply the needs of the people and also produce enough excess for exports “will be capable of making socialism sustainable, an inevitable guarantee of our independence and national sovereignty.” He goes on to say that agricultural development is a matter of “national security.” In this discourse, it becomes clear that economic achievement trumps environmental stewardship in conceptions of sustainability.

Although both food security and food sovereignty are mentioned in the discourse, it never (at least in my sample) directly stresses the need for healthy, diverse meals, or discusses food sovereignty.

---

16 El objeto de obtener niveles de producción económicamente razonables, antes que los máximos biológicos

17 Será capaz de hacer sostenible el socialismo, garantía insoslayable de nuestra independencia y soberanía nacional

18 Seguridad nacional
in any concrete terms beyond national sovereignty and Cuba’s independence. In fact, the concept of food security or sufficient food for people to eat is often eclipsed in the discourse by the political goal of substituting foreign food products with domestic products. For instance, while *Granma* reported that food security was of concern at the 2010 Congress of Campesinos, the speech by Marino Murillo Jorge, minister of economy and planning, to the Congress included a call for increased production in a great variety of crops, and then related these goals back to the need to replace imports and produce an excess for exportation. In a 2011 speech to the province of Ciego de Ávila, communist party leader Jorge Luis Tapia Fonseca nodded to a variety of ideologies in saying:

The success reached by the people has a special connotation, as it occurred during the year of the VI Party Congress, whose center of analysis was the battle for economic efficiency, the rational use of resources, the reduction of importation, the increase in our exports, in order to achieve food sovereignty, preserve the gains achieved and guarantee the history of the Revolution.\(^1\)

Both Murillo and Tapia’s rhetoric switched emphasis away from improving the diets and eating practices of Cuban people, and focused instead on the idea that sovereignty or other benefits will accrue to the nation of Cuba by eliminating imported food. This elimination is never painted in terms of achieving better food quality, sovereignty over food choices or other direct benefits to Cuban individuals that might be achieved by local food production.

The *Granma* articles repetitively call for increases in the production of practically all crops. During the 2010 speech by Murillo, he called for increases in the production of rice, beans, corn, milk, meat, coffee and fruit, and then went on to say that production of grains for livestock feed must also be raised. During an October 10 visit to the Isle of Youth (a province off the coast of mainland Cuban), the first vice president of the Council of States and Ministers, José Ramón Machado Ventura, was reported in *Granma* (Zulueta 2010) to have encouraged the province to increase the production of

---

\(^{1}\) El éxito alcanzado por el pueblo tiene una connotación especial, pues ha ocurrido en el año del VI Congreso del Partido, cuyo centro de análisis fue la batalla por la eficiencia económica, el uso racional de los recursos, la reducción de importaciones y el aumento de nuestras exportaciones, para lograr la soberanía alimentaria, preservar las conquistas alcanzadas y garantizar la continuidad histórica de la Revolución.
animal feeds (sorghum and sunflower) in order to also increase the production of meat, eggs, and milk. In his aforementioned speech, Tapia also called for increases in eggs, milk and fruit.

But it is not only increasing food crops that the *Granma* discourse supports. The sugar industry is also a major object of interest due to the economic benefits the discourse suggests could be achieved by its revival. An article (Puig and Martínez 2010) summarizing the proceedings of the Project of Political, Economic and Social Guidelines of the Party for the Revolution in November 2010 mentions that a morning was spent discussing the sugar industry and the opportunities for increasing its output. The following year, in August, during Raul Castro’s address to the VII Legislature of the National Assembly of Popular Power,\textsuperscript{20} he cited the successful halt of the sugarcane industry’s deterioration as a major economic accomplishment the country had achieved that year. The history of the sugarcane industry and its role in Cuba’s development is also peppered into the discourse. In an article celebrating the anniversary of the city of Cienfuegos, the director of the Office for the Conservation of the city is quoted as tracing the development and flourishing of the city back to the rich agricultural lands primed for producing sugarcane, and the development of the railroad and port which enabled the province to “extract these riches” (Sáez Chávez 2009),\textsuperscript{21} and succeed in developing a sugarcane industry.

Increasing efficiency is seen as crucial to both the sugarcane and general agricultural sector. The first secretary of the Communist Party in the town of Villa Clara brings up efficiency in a speech published in *Granma*. He says: “We need to produce more with a sense of rationality and efficiency in order so that we can reduce imports” (Lima:2010).\textsuperscript{22}

Although the concept of efficiency may seem to mimic a trend in the agroecology discourse, efficiency does not seem to represent the same idea here. In this discourse it has mainly to do with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} *La VII Legislatura de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular*
  \item \textsuperscript{21} *Extraer esas riquezas*
  \item \textsuperscript{22} *Tenemos que producir más y con sentido de racionalidad y eficiencia, de modo que podamos reducir importaciones*
\end{itemize}
eliminating flaws in operating systems (not ecological systems) in order to function more effectively. In some places, better integration of science and technology are presented as a means for improving this efficiency. For instance, low yields of beans in the province of Granma were blamed on misapplication of science and technology. The exact role that science and technology could have played in improving yields is kept mysterious though, and is not clearly spelled out. A speech by the party leader for the province of Ciego Ávila also hits on issues of efficiency and technology in his discussion of the sugar industry:

The sugarcane industry should improve its efficiency indicators to improve, in the coming campaign, the maximum potential use of the cane, improve the system of repairs by reducing the time lost for avoidable breakage, ensure the quality of maintenance, the training of human potential and the technological discipline, to make a more significant contribution to the country’s economy (Tapia Fonseca 2011).

As demonstrated in this quote, calls for improvements in efficiency and other aspects of agricultural production often touch on perceived flaws in the workforce or other parts of the system. Granma writers and the political figures it quotes are not shy to critique these problems. Problems with roads used to transport food and difficulties in selling food to the tourism industry on account of the two currencies used in Cuba are brought up several times throughout the discourse, but the bulk of the criticism is directed toward workers/growers. For instance, in an article regarding a political meeting in the province of Granma, one speaker attributes failures in milk production to the fact that the “worst” workers were often responsible for feeding the animals: “Because many times, the worst worker, the most unstable or the last to reach the baseline in productivity, is the one who is given the

23 La industria azucarera deberá mejorar sus indicadores de eficiencia para lograr, en la venidera campaña, el óptimo aprovechamiento del potencial de la caña, perfeccionar el sistema de reparaciones en función de disminuir el tiempo perdido por roturas evitables, asegurar la calidad de los mantenimientos, la capacitación de su potencial humano y la disciplina tecnológica, para realizar un aporte más significativo a la economía del país.

24 In Cuba there are two currencies: moneda nacional, the domestic currency which has a very low exchange rate, and convertibles (CUCs) which are roughly equivalent to U.S. dollars and must be used by foreigners.
task of feeding the animals” (Luis Virelles Barreda as quoted in Reyes 2011). In a 2010 discussion of the political, economic and social guidelines of the Party, the minister of the food industry brought up the problem of growers failing to supply milk that was consistent with the quality parameters for which the state was paying them (Puig and Marínez). Further, in a 2011 article (Batista) regarding an assembly in the province of Las Tunas, a document is mentioned that outlines the failures in organization and management of work in the fields. In other articles, growers’ failure to comply with quotas, disobedience of land use regulations, and the aging of the rural workforce are all brought up as serious concerns. Throughout the discourse, growers are seen more as workers in the state economy than as farmers and gardeners with individual agency, creativity or needs.

In some speeches, Raúl Castro focuses blame on the entire nation, including both the government and the people, for failing to increase the agricultural base and improve the economy. In an August 2011 speech, he says that ongoing failures in the food and agriculture industries are the fault of poor planning. He stresses that it is not Imperialism (as is often suggested) that is Cuba’s biggest enemy, but rather, “our [Cuba’s] own errors.” He goes on to specify that psychological barriers are at the root of Cuba’s failures in these areas, creating an inertia and preventing the Congress’s goals from being achieved: “It is the psychological barrier formed by inertia, inaction, simulation or double standards, the indifference and insensitivity …”

The discourse also reflects frequently on the need to make use of all idle land, and, in some cases, failures to do so. The party leader in Santa Clara declared “We cannot be satisfied while a single hectare of land exists that is not utilized” (Lima 2010), and a section of an article on the

---

25 …Porque muchas veces el peor obrero, el más inestable o el último que llega a la base productiva, es a quien se le da la tarea de la comida animal

26 Nuestros propios errores

27 Es la barrera sociológica formada por la inercia, el inmovilismo, la simulación o doble moral, la indiferencia e insensibilidad…

28 No podemos sentirnos satisfechos mientras exista una sola hectárea de tierra sin empleo útil
Congress of Campesinos discussing the need to use all land is titled “Make the Land Produce” (Rodríguez 2010). The importance of granting land out in usufruct is stressed as a means to get more land into cultivation, although the discourse reflects a concern that land is sometimes given out to people who do not use it sufficiently.

The Granma discourse does not give as explicit support for particular methods of agricultural production as the agroecology discourse of the manuals does. Some overlapping methods are nodded to in the Granma discourse, including the importance of biofertilizers, farmer exchanges of knowledge, and, most prominently, the role of urban and suburban agriculture. In this discourse, urban and suburban agriculture are seen as crucial primarily in that they are able to increase overall production levels in fruits and vegetables, and because they provide resilience against unexpected climate patterns, including regular weather events and climate change. Self-sufficiency in the provinces is also discussed in the Granma articles, perhaps even more so than in the agroecology discourse, as a means to reduce imports.

Finally, in order to increase the flow of domestic goods to Cubans’ plates – an important part of reducing imports – the discourse brings up issues of distribution and market access. New policies allow growers to sell directly to consumers in some instances, a change which is presented as a major step forward in meeting the government’s goal of a robust, self-sufficient food system.

---

29 Hacer Producir la Tierra
Figure 4. Concept Map of themes in Gmma discourse on agriculture (size of bubbles proportional to prevalence of themes in the data)
SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis of these materials makes clear that para-state groups (such as the Organic Agriculture Group) and the agencies associated with them have crafted a discourse that not only encourages agroecological practices, but also supports a deep philosophical and ethical commitment to them. This discourse reflects the importance of creating harmony between people, animals and plants so that the Cuban people have enough healthy food to eat and the environment is preserved. It stresses that this balance must be found not only among organisms and in the environment, but also in the lives and cultural needs of people, whom it presents as resources in the achievement of sustainable and sufficient production. It gives respect to campesinos’ need to live spiritually and socially satisfying lives. While it also instructs growers on the technical aspects of agroecology and methods for creating good soil and choosing the right plant varieties, it goes far beyond this to create a moral and philosophical justification for these practices.

The Granma discourse, on the other hand, provides no such philosophical discussion of agroecology, and although it does mention urban farming and the use of biofertilizers, it never explicitly discusses or supports agroecology. Rather, it presents a goal of unending growth in production, and discusses the increased flow of domestic agriculture to Cuban people as an intermediary goal in achieving economic success and sovereignty. It suggests that the only important need is that of improving the Cuban economy and implies that national prosperity and success (and everything else) will fall into place once that is achieved. It depicts workers as necessary resources that must be better managed in order to meet the national objectives, and does not treat farmers as creative agents for change.

While the lack of support for agroecology in Granma’s productivist discourse does not reflect a complete withdrawal of state support for agroecology (as we know since groups like the Organic Agriculture Group continue to operate under state auspices), it does reflect a waning interest in
agroecology, and lack of commitment to its philosophies, which could foreshadow a withdrawal of material support in the future. As Premat (2005) describes in her aforementioned analysis of the depiction of urban production in *Granma*, withdrawal of explicit support for personal plots preceded an actual withdrawal of support by some government bureaus, and an eventual decline in their prevalence.

It is also important to keep the 1999 government shut down of the Cuban Association of Organic Agriculture in mind as a reflection of the state’s discomfort with elements of the agroecology movement, and also to consider that it was quite possibly reopened as the Organic Agriculture Group under the auspices of the state only because the state recognized that the group’s work did help to support its goals of food security, national sovereignty, and economic stability. It may have wanted to take advantage of these benefits while keeping a watch over the group’s activities. This prompts the questions of whether agroecology remains inline with the state’s goals – as demonstrated in *Granma* – and what will happen if and when they are not.

Clearly these discourses reflect differing imaginaries about food, society and the environment, and project different views on what is urgent and important for Cuba’s future. But what does this difference really amount to? On the one hand, the production goals of the two discourses as analyzed above do not necessarily constitute current, direct conflict on a material level. If the productivist discourse is generated to cultivate or reflect a goal of increased production – to the maximum extent possible – and to reduce the need for imports, then agroecology has worked for the past two decades to partially fulfill this goal. At one point, the complete lack of external inputs meant that agroecology truly was the only option. Even now, low-input production is the only option for many growers, which would appear to be the reason why the state has continued to condone and support the agroecology discourse whilst simultaneously projecting a “productivist” discourse in *Granma*.

However, the productivist goal is lofty. Though *Granma* presents it as a means of achieving “sovereignty” and “security,” it goes beyond this. It aims not only to satisfy the needs of Cuban
citizens, but ultimately to profit from exports. It purports a future vision of socialism in which the political system not only succeeds at taking care of itself, but wins in the global system of trade by achieving a trade surplus. Whether Cuba could ever achieve this goal – even through industrial agriculture – is doubtful. The history of industrial agriculture would suggest that even if this was achieved, it would not last for long. However, what might appear quite clear to the “productivist” is that agroecology, even if it could feed the population, will never succeed in producing large amounts of exportable surplus, and certainly not in creating a major sugarcane industry. In this way, the discourses, despite some superficial overlaps in production goals, are ultimately centered around conflicting economic goals and ethical commitments.

Premat (2009) and Nelson et al. (2009) indicate that both state and non-state actors played significant roles in supporting alternative agriculture during the periods of their research. This analysis, however, indicates that while para-state (which we can liken to non-state) actors are central in supporting agroecological practices and philosophies, the dominant state discourse is now marked by essentially different philosophical underpinnings, which may foreshadow an increasing withdrawal of state support for agroecology.

This leads us back to our considerations of discourses and the importance for farmers’ identities and levels of commitment to agroecology. There are still significant limitations in available research on the cultural worlds of Cuban agricultural producers. Future ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation is needed to truly understand how these farmers’ construct a sense of self and construe the social and ethical relevance of agroecology. Through the content analysis that I’ve done on two samples of discourse, combined with the small body of existing research and social practice of identity theory, I am not able to make definitive conclusions on these matters, but I am able to make more refined hypotheses about whether Cuban farmers have formed a commitment to agroecology.

I hypothesize, based on the observations discussed above, that agroecology discourses are more likely than productivist discourses to have contributed to the figured worlds of Cuban farmers and influenced their intimate identity formation. The agroecology discourse not only speaks more
directly to facets of many growers’ lives, but also appears more likely to be employed in farmers’ local spaces of practice and interaction. This discourse stresses the importance of collaboration between farmers and researchers, thus indicating an ideology that gives value to spaces in which growers have the opportunity to contribute to and engage with knowledge on agroecology. Although it is unclear what proportion of Cuban farmers have access to training or opportunities to attend meetings, we know through Premat (2005 and 2009) and Nelson et al.’s (2009) work, as well as through documentation of events by various organizations and agencies, that some farmers and gardeners do frequent these local spaces of education and interaction. Whether it is at events held by the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Man, workshops led by agricultural universities, meetings with visiting agronomists and international partners (as a brochure written by ACTAF, the agency under which the Organic Agriculture Group exists, makes clear there are many) or meetings organized by the Movimiento de Campesino-a-Campesino, some growers have the opportunity to be exposed to and engage with agroecological philosophy during live meetings and interactions. These meetings are the “local spaces of practice” and the “active engagement[s] with the world” that Holland et al (1998), Escobar (2009) and, in effect, Agrawal (2005) stress are so important in the formation of intimate identities.

While it is certainly possible that various state agencies could create local spaces of practice around elements of the productivist discourse – for instance, in meetings regarding application of science and technology to production, or trainings on improved efficiency – no such activities are ever mentioned throughout the articles and transcripts. These documents indicate that the primary spaces of local practice in which these ideas are engaged are assemblies of politicians and prominent party members, not gatherings of farmers and gardeners. My personal observations indicate that large conferences such as the 2011 Meeting on Rice and Grains may also bring these discourses into local spaces of practice, but that the participants in these types of events are relatively elite researchers or the few large-scale growers who can travel into major cities for meetings.
In addition to being more prevalent in local spaces of practice, I hypothesize, based on the results of this paper, that the agroecology discourse is more relevant and salient to the everyday practices of farmers, and to goals that might appear more immediate to them. In this discourse, all the difficult work of establishing fertile soil, maintaining a healthy gut in ruminant livestock, choosing the right cultivars, *et cetera* that farmers and gardeners must perform on a regular basis is directly addressed. Not only is it discussed, but it is also presented as a means to feed one’s family and ensure that they are healthy; ends that growers must certainly be concerned with already. In addition, the agroecology discourse frames the practices mentioned above as means to create “harmony” between plants, animals, “nature,” and man, and even to ensure that there will be enough time for them to “nourish the spirit.” After establishing itself as relevant through discussion of familiar practices and meaningful concerns, the discourse may draw growers into its larger philosophical underpinnings. By suggesting wider achievements that growers can find pride in through completion of their regular work, it could align farmers’ senses of self with the ethical commitments of agroecology.

The productivist discourse, on the other hand, seldom mentions everyday practices that farmers would find familiar. Although it mentions regular inadequacies or failures of growers to carryout their state-mandated production tasks, it is quite unlikely that growers would find these negative depictions to be familiar with their own lived experiences carrying the work out. Further, the productivist discourse offers fewer ideological underpinnings that growers would be likely to find motivation, or justification for their work in. Although the discourse discusses goals like national sovereignty, national security and sustainable socialism (ideologies which growers could potentially take pride in working toward), the discourse positions these ideologies as abstract goals and relates them to government actions and policies, rather than to growers’ direct actions. Because the productivist discourse does not offer farmers and gardeners any means to connect the ideological goals of the discourse to the problems that they are directly confronted with, and because it does not circulate in local spaces of practice frequented by farmers, it does not directly connect to farmers and gardener’s lived experiences or cultural worlds.
CONCLUSION

Although Cuba is seen by many as an example of success in and complete support for sustainable agriculture, there are actually two very distinct discourses on agriculture existing in Cuba today: one centered around agroecology and the other around productivism. Based on an analysis of these discourses coupled with previous research and the use of social practice of identity theory, it seems that the agroecology discourse offers farmers, gardeners and other growers a more meaningful set of cultural resources from which to craft their senses of self and establish ethical commitments. However, the conflicting productivist discourse that encourages increasing production as the ultimate goal is generated from within the center of state power, and likely reflects upcoming withdrawal of political support for the agroecology movement. Based on Escobar’s (2008) point that identity involves ethical commitments in political situations, the evidence provided by Dudley (2000) and Bartlett (2006) that farmer sensibilities shape action, and Satterfield’s (2002) documentation that identities can lead to resentment and political activity when threatened, I suggest that this withdrawal of political support will undermine the ethical commitments that the farmers who have been engaged with agroecological philosophy have developed. This undermining will have consequences for the social and personal satisfaction of farmers and for their support of government policies. The extent of these consequences, and those on Cuba’s environment and economy, remain to be seen.
## APPENDIX 1: MANUALS USED FOR ANALYSIS OF AGROECOLOGY DISCOURSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lineamientos Para Los Subprogramas de la Agricultura Urbana (Guidelines for the Subprograms in Urban Ag.)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Grupo Nacional de Agricultura Urbana (National Urban Agriculture Group)</td>
<td>Ministerio de Agricultura (Ministry of Agriculture)</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integración ganadería-agricultura con bases agroecológicas: Plantas y animales en armonía con la naturaleza y el hombre (Livestock-agriculture integration with agroecological basis: Plants and animals in harmony with nature and man)</td>
<td>F. Funes Monzote (with prologue from R. Ruiz Pierrugues)</td>
<td>Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (National Association of Small Farmers) And Instituto de Investigaciones de Pastos y Forrajes (Institute of Pasture and Forage Research)</td>
<td>Ministerio de Agricultura</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTAF (general brochure)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales (Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians)</td>
<td>Ministerio de Agricultura</td>
<td>~2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

42
Affecting the life of the campesino
Applying Science and technology
Biodiversity
Connections to Cuba’s history
Composting
Efficient and rational use of energy and systems
Establishing a healthy diet for the populations
Exchange of information between farmers or through extension
Feeding the family
Getting a fertile soil mixture
Getting fresh food to the table through the year
Growing as much as works for the system
Harmony
Importance of medicinal herbs
Importance of relationships between researchers and farmers
Interconnectivity
Making use of systems and their natural complexity
Participation of the people
Problems in conventional/industrial agriculture
Need to produce more seeds
Organic fertilizers
Production through organopónicos
Restoring the land and resources
Self-sufficiency in provinces
Self-sufficiency on the farm
Spiritual side of man
Sustainable systems will help the economy
Understanding biological cycles
Using organic materials
Using farmer knowledge
Agricultural problems in other countries
Climate issues in Cuba
Distribution of food
Embargo
Efficiency
Errors or problems in the food/agriculture system
Exchange between farmers
Importance in granting out land in usufruct
Industrial development
International agricultural news
Issues with the workforce
Livestock
Market access
Natural fertilizers
National security
National sovereignty
Need for Variety
Need to increase crop production
Need to use idle land
Place of farmers in society
Psychological barriers to production
Rice production
Science and Technology
Self-sufficiency
Social Justice
Sugarcane
Sustainable Socialism
Trade balance (exporting and importing)
Urbana/suburban agriculture
Young people
WORKS CITED

Agrawal, Arun.

AFP.

Bartlett, Peggy F.

Batista, Valdédz.

Benjamin, Medea and Peter Rosset.

Castro Ruz, Raúl.
2009. Es preciso caminar hacia el futuro, con paso firme y seguro, porque sencillamente no tenemos derecho a equivocarnos. Speech made to the Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular on December 20. Printed in Granma (Havana), December 21.

Castro Ruz, Raúl.
2011. El mayor obstáculo que enfrentamos en el cumplimiento de los acuerdos del Sexto Congreso es la barrera sicológica formada por la inercia, el inmovilismo, la simulación o doble moral, la indiferencia e insensibilidad y que estamos obligados a rebasar con constancia y firmeza. Speech made to the VII Legislature of the Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, August 1. Printed in Granma (Havana), August 2.

Corrigan, Philip and Derek Sayer.

Crane, T.A. et al.

De Schutter, Olivier.

Desmarais, Annette Aurélie.
Dudley, Kathryn Marie.  

Edelman, Marc.  

Escobar, Arturo.  

EFE.  

Fairweather, Jack and Christina Asquith.  

Foucault, Michel.  

Foucault, Michel.  

Foucault, Michel.  

Franks, Jeff.  

Funes-Monzote, Fernando.  

Funes-Monzote, Fernando.  

Funes Monzote, Fernando.  
Galbraith, John Kenneth.

García, Luis.

Giddens, Anthony.

Gonzalez, Roberto.

Grupo Nacional de Agricultura Urbana.

Hall, Stuart.

Hall, Stuart.

Holland, Dorothy et al.

INIFAT (Instituto de Investigaciones Fundamentales en Agricultura Tropical).

Kellner, Douglas.

Leger, Alexandre.

Lima Corzo, Julio Ramiro.
Lowe, Philip et al.

Monzote, Marta and Fernando Funes-Monzote.

Murillo, Marino.

Nazarea, Virginia D.

Nazarea, Virginia D.

Nelson, Erin et al.

Nova, Armando.

Ortíz, Fernando.

Paige, J.M.

Pottier, Johan, A. Bicker and P. Sillitoe, eds.

Premat, Adriana.

Premat, Adriana.
Puig Menesen, Yaima and Leticia Martínez Hernández.  
2010. En este proceso quien decide es el pueblo. Granma (Havana), November 15.

Reyes Rodríguez, Dilbert.  

Richards, Paul.  

Rodríguez Delis, Livia.  

Rodríguez, J.L.  

Rosset, Peter Michael, Braulio Machín Sosa, Adilén María Roque Jaime and Dana Racío Ávila Lozana.  

Ruiz Pierrugues, Raul.  

Ruiz Pierrugues, Raul.  

Saez Chavez, Armando.  

Satterfield, Terre.  

Schneider, Sergio and Paulo André Niederle.  


