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Peasant agency in Ghana's oil palm sector: The impact of multiple markets on food sovereignty

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the debate on peasant differentiation and market integration in the food sovereignty literature by examining the smallholder-oriented oil palm sector in Ghana's eastern region. Against the background of loosening entry barriers in global value chains, and through an analysis of farmers' different positions in palm oil's multiple markets, we witness peasant-like patterning of production and strategic market participation among well-situated non-contract farmers. We propose that such interface settings where commodity relations are present, but do not penetrate fully offer valuable entry points for revisiting the role of global markets in peasant reproduction in the Global South. We consequently argue the need to replace the idealized category of "peasant" with an analytical category that can recognize social differentiation and reproduction through partial engagement with commodity markets.

KEYWORDS

food sovereignty, Ghana, global markets, oil palm, peasant agriculture

1 | INTRODUCTION

A growing tendency for market-based solutions to poverty currently spearheads the process of agrarian modernization. Proponents argue that linking small-scale farmers to global markets through "inclusive business" and value chain

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models presents opportunities for greater productivity, income, and innovation capacity (Mitchell, Keane, & Coles, 2009; World Bank, 2008). The food sovereignty movement (FSM) rejects the pursuit of development through increased market integration because of the negative effects engendered on the right to self-determination and ability of local people to be autonomous in the food chain (Arthur, 2012). It calls for the re-localization of food systems wherein peasant agriculture is empowered. The current crisis of the food regime—manifested in its inability to feed a growing world population—has exacerbated the conflict between corporate agriculture intensification and the emerging alternative of food sovereignty (McMichael, 2014).

Although there is broad consensus among critical agrarian scholars on the adverse effects of globalized food systems on peasant agriculture, the ideological position of the FSM has come under scrutiny for its partial position on trade (Burnett & Murphy, 2014). Systemic approaches to “food empires” or “agro-food systems” have obscured the way smallholders sometimes actively and willingly engage with global markets (Castellanos-Navarrette & Jansen, 2018; Soper, 2016). More generally, the FSM and related agro-ecology alternatives insist on the contradiction between “external forces” of corporate food systems and peasant farming as “capital's other” (Bernstein, 2016, p. 642; see also Agarwal, 2014). Although empirically-inspired research has introduced a more differentiated notion of “degrees of peasantness” that may straddle capitalist and peasant modes of production (van der Ploeg, 2008), it remains problematic that peasants engaging in global markets are not afforded the same agentive qualities and choice as their presumed counterparts. In this paper, we aim to address this oversight. We argue the need to replace the idealized category of “peasant” with an analytical category that can recognize social differentiation and reproduction through partial engagements with commodity markets.

Oil palm in Ghana stands at the intersection of value chain models and the food sovereignty vision. A cash crop sourced by transnational corporations through contract farming schemes, is also characterized by a vibrant local artisanal processing industry and is an important ingredient in local cuisine. Struggling to meet milling capacities, transnational companies have opened up to non-contract farmers (Fold, 2008). This “loosening” of commodity relations owes to the historical trajectory of the Ghanaian oil palm industry and its difficulties to both remain globally competitive and meet domestic demand. It is further exemplified by a tolerance for “side-selling” and a reduction in benefits granted to contract farmers. Ordinary processes of adverse inclusion found in the global oil palm sector (Mohd Noor, Gassner, Terheggen, & Dobie, 2017, p. 5; see also Li, 2017) are partially offset by the nature of Ghana's differentiated sector. The different terms of engagement and variable security found in both markets, combined with smallholders' livelihood pursuits outside of the value chain, provide opportunities for well-positioned farmers.

In this context, we witness agentive, peasant-like patterning of production and strategic participation in multiple markets, despite the unequal distribution of opportunity structures. Integrating farmers in global markets through value chain schemes (in this case contract farming) entraps farmers in dependency relations; they are more dependent on global markets, oil palm farming, and external sources of credit for reproduction. However, this argument does not extend to all forms of global market integration, as a group of farmers independent of contracts include various strategies of distancing and inclusion as part of their autonomy.

We collected data for this case study through a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods in February to March 2016 and May 2017. This included a detailed survey of 60 farmers, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with farmers, and key informant interviews. The research area comprises three villages (Damang, Asuom, and Kwae) in the Kwaebibirem District of the eastern region of Ghana. We investigated different forms of contractual arrangements, including farmers that are “independent” of contract farming schemes (hereafter independent farmers), outgrower and smallholder contract farmers, and organic fair-trade certified contract farmers. This typology serves as the analytical entry point for characterization of farmer autonomy, degrees of commodification/peasantness, and room for manoeuvre in patterning production and market relations.

We aim to contribute to the debate on peasant differentiation and market integration in the food sovereignty literature by showing how smallholder agriculture in Ghana's oil palm sector challenges the presumed binary distinction between local and global markets. It is rather characterized by various socially-differentiated farming strategies produced by processes of commodification (see also Amanor & Pabi, 2007). The paper begins by revisiting debates on

peasant reproduction and differentiation, also providing an analytical approach to peasant-like production and market patterning. The proceeding section outlines the oil palm value chain, mapping out the recent development of the sector and presenting the categories of farmers based on different forms of market engagement. Next, the paper presents the socially differentiated production and marketing strategies of these farmer categories. The fifth section discusses the implications of our empirical results for the food sovereignty debate. The final section concludes the article.

2 | THE PEASANTIZATION DEBATE REVISITED: CHOICE, DIFFERENTIATION, AND MARKET ENGAGEMENT

The critical agrarian studies literature currently revisits the agrarian question of old: Will the capitalist system dismantle the peasantry and impose class relations? The (predominantly) unexpected survival of peasants, after predictions among academics that they would disappear, has engendered debates on the analytical and political utility of the category “peasant” (Bernstein, 2016; Kloppenburg, 2010). The “return of the peasants” (Perez-Vitoria, 2005) or “repeasantization” (van der Ploeg, 2008)—signifying the apparent increase in peasant numbers—is considered a direct response to the neoliberal market-led agrarian model (Borras, 2008). The FSM opposes this model and its value chain project, defined by contract farming and outgrower schemes, for the threat it poses to peasant agriculture. It is considered a tool designed to bind farmers into competitive global markets in return for inputs that “extract new value from producers via their products and centralize agricultural knowledge as ‘intellectual property,’ with increased exposure to debt and dispossession for producers, and reduction of local food security” (McMichael, 2013, p. 12).

These criticisms extend to global market integration generally, which tends to have a devastating effect on peasant farming. Numerous scholars (see, for example, Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; Khor, 2000; Shiva, 2000) show how the increasingly globalized and industrialized food system results in downward price pressure, dependence on volatile global markets, and the importation of cheap (often subsidized) produce from industrialized countries. This prompts the displacement of small-scale farmers from agricultural production, ultimately undermining livelihoods and food security. When we add the environmental and health effects of intensive livestock production, agrochemicals, and excessive “food miles” (to name but a few), it is easy to understand why the FSM advocates the re-localization and re-peasantization of food systems. Yet much ambiguity and even contradiction surrounds the movement’s position on international trade; what kind of trade would be acceptable in a food sovereign society remains unclear (Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Edelman et al., 2014). An important question that arises is how to deal with the millions of smallholders currently engaged in export production, some of whom do not necessarily want to exit global markets in favour of local markets (Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Finan, 2007; Soper, 2016; Vorley, Del Pozo-Vergnes, & Barnett, 2012). A group of scholars are thus calling on the FSM to reconsider their stance on international trade and extend the food sovereignty principle to include small-scale farmers’ choices to invest in the markets they value (Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Jansen, 2014; Ros-Tonen, van Leynseele, Laven, & Sunderland, 2015; Soper, 2016).

Empirical approaches to studying processes of class-differentiated agrarian change and re- or de-peasantization offer interesting entry points for considering choice and agency vis-à-vis the market. In examining these processes in Southern Africa, Cousins (2011, p. 94) asserts that smallholders are unable to reproduce themselves outside of commodity circuits. Yet, the process whereby well-disposed smallholders “graduate” from simple reproduction to surplus production (expanded reproduction) and enter into capitalist farming does not require the full commoditization of the farm or household consumption. This resonates with evidence of mixed agricultural and non-agricultural livelihood strategies that enable diverse categories of farmers to sustain themselves or even accumulate (Scoones et al., 2012). Reasoning from a more essentialist “peasant condition”—defined by historicized struggles for self-determination and a calculus that is not profit-driven—van der Ploeg (2008) similarly emphasizes the need to consider how forms of entrepreneurial, capitalist, or peasant farming may combine. A teleological notion of “the global market” as a determinant of livelihood outcomes and choice obscures the way peasants operate between various markets

and the agentive ways in which they construct new market relations by making connections between them (van der Ploeg, Jingzhong, & Schneider, 2012, p. 140; see also Paredes, 2010). Within such interfaces, “degrees of peasantness” emerge as analytical distinctions that signify various development trajectories and recognize the different forms of integration in markets and trade networks (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015, p. 529).

These approaches also emphasize the hostile environments within which peasants operate. This includes export markets, socio-technical regimes, and other conditions unfavourable to peasant farming. They enable us to examine how the decision to enter into commodity relations, and farmers' perceptions of this as choice or compulsion, depend on farm characteristics, social forces, options, and trajectories (Cousins, 2013; Masakure & Henson, 2005; Scoones et al., 2012). Stock, Forney, Emery, and Wittman (2014) describe how farmers' livelihoods are linked to country-specific trajectories of change in agri-environmental governance, with diverse social, ecological, and economic outcomes (see Fold, 2008; Whitfield, 2017). Such patterns of differentiation among farmers challenge the populist tendency that merges several class categories with different interests into the term “peasant” (Bernstein, 2014, 2016; Scoones et al., 2012). The FSM's portrayal of peasants as a unitary, abstract group and its creation of a binary between “vicious” capitalist industrial and “virtuous” peasant agriculture assumes that peasant farmers are agentic, whereas entrepreneurial farmers are compelled into external corporate food systems. However, virtues of peasant agriculture, such as autonomy, diversity, and cooperation, are not necessarily the result of choice, nor is entrepreneurial farming necessarily the result of lack of choice (Bernstein, 2014). Although both may be possible, knowing so requires an in-depth investigation of the structures of opportunity and constraint confronted by farmers. This underlines the need for a contextualized and relational analysis of class formation tendencies (Scoones et al., 2012, p. 519).

Rethinking the place of trade in the FSM requires a focus on the ability of peasants to shape trade and market relations “along food sovereign lines.” This view, put forward by Burnett and Murphy (2014, p. 1065), favours a more nuanced understanding of how peasants include various strategies of distancing and inclusion in global markets as part of their autonomy. By reshuffling the balance of commodity and non-commodity relations, farmers actively construct “spaces of resistance” in the face of the new constraints and opportunities posed by globalized food markets (Schneider & Niederle, 2010, p. 379). Autonomy is, here, a form of “actual autonomy” based on collective freedom rather than an individual liberty derived from neoliberal conceptions of autonomy (Stock et al., 2014, p. 413). Actual autonomy is based on van der Ploeg's (2008, p. 261) peasant principle; it focuses on family farming as a means of dealing with “the patterns of dependency, deprivation, and marginalization” entailed in the hostile environment of neoliberalism. Peasants purposely structure their labour, production, and marketing to avoid adverse inclusion in markets. This resistance is made possible by retaining elements of autonomous farming outside of commodity circuits, expanding production through skillful, locally-embedded practices, and building on extended networks and social relationships that differ in composition and exchange values from those found in capitalist markets (van der Ploeg, 2014).

Important strategies include (re)producing a self-controlled resource base, internalizing assets to the production unit (by, for example, diversifying income through pluriactivity and/or diversifying crops for use in commodity and non-commodity circuits), capturing added-value through conversion of produce into more refined products; and constructing alternative marketing networks (Hebinck, Schneider, & van der Ploeg, 2015; van der Ploeg, 2008, 2010). Schneider and Niederle (2010) show how farmers pursue strategies of de-commodification and internalization of resources through combining integration in conventional commodities markets with new market relations (in the case of pluriactivity and the direct marketing of processed foods). Patterning production and marketing in this way enables patterns of growth that are independent of main commodity markets for factors of production and non-factor inputs (van der Ploeg, 2010). Cycles of production use resources that were (re)produced during previous cycles or through socially regulated exchange, such as reciprocal labour exchange (see also Walsh-Dilley, 2013). This not only refers to the physical production of resources on the farm, as in the case of self-provisioning, but also the conversion of one's own resources (such as savings) into the required ones, as in the case of pluriactivity. There is an analytical distinction between the relatively autonomous peasant form of reproduction and the more market-dependent reproduction,

associated with entrepreneurial and capitalist farming, where all factors of production and inputs are commodified (van der Ploeg, 2008, pp. 44–45; see also Friedmann, 1980).

The co-existence and interrelatedness of local and global markets in Ghana's oil palm sector, indicates that patterning for greater autonomy does not only involve aspects like labour and technology but also restructuring of market relations. The patterning of markets along food sovereign lines has recently been elaborated through the concept of “nested markets,” which builds on the same essential attributes of peasant farming and struggles for autonomy (Hebinck et al., 2015; van der Ploeg et al., 2012). Enterprising farmers, who typically engage in pluriactivity and draw on commonly-pooled resources (including support from NGOs or the government), construct new market infrastructures and linkages that shorten distances between consumer and producer and bridge gaps found in commodity markets. Like the FSM ideal of local, high-quality, culturally-appropriate food markets, nested markets may reinforce multi-functional farming practices and income diversification. In European contexts, they are considered drivers of alternative rural development trajectories. Trust, reputation, and reciprocal exchange help define their distinctiveness (van der Ploeg, 2015). Although such agentive construction of market spaces is not typically found in most commodity-oriented agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, the concept helps illuminate whether reciprocal exchange relations exist and whether different quality criteria and price arrangements enhance smallholder options for patterning marketing and production.

We build on peasant-like strategies, which help us explain how risks and choice are unevenly distributed among oil palm producers and how autonomy may be obtained through resistance-like combinations of market inclusion and disengagement.

3 | THE GHANAIAN OIL PALM VALUE CHAIN

Oil palm derives its value as a crop embedded in global commodity markets in addition to local food and non-food markets. In Ghana's transitioning political economy, these markets lay out different terms of engagement that produce unequally-distributed constraints and opportunities for farmers.

3.1 | A differentiated sector: Private companies and the Kramer

Indigenous to West Africa, oil palm is an important ingredient in local Ghanaian cuisine. Harvested and processed locally since the 16th century, it remains an item of household production (Osei-Amponsah, 2013). In the 19th century, the abundance of wild palm trees allowed households to engage in “vent-for-surplus,” and small-scale farmers produced three times the local demand for palm oil. As they produced palm trees on inter-cropped farms, economies of scale did not develop. Traditional methods of processing near points of harvest were more advantageous than centralized mechanized methods, allowing small-scale processors to compete with companies in export markets (Maier, 2009). International markets have never succeeded in diverting palm oil from local markets; oil palm remains a crop produced predominantly by small-scale farmers for both outlets. Nationally, they tend approximately 87% of the land under oil palm cultivation (MOFA, 2011), despite numerous attempts from the government, multilateral organizations and private capital investors to scale-up the sector.

After Ghana's independence in 1957, the state embarked on an agricultural modernization project that was motivated largely by import substitution. This included several attempts at establishing large-scale oil palm plantations and processing industries in environmentally favourable regions. The promotion of private enterprise, World Bank-assisted government ventures and joint public-private projects followed a failed first attempt at launching state farms. Four large estates emerged in the wake of such policy change: Benso Oil Palm Plantations Limited (BOPP) and National Oil Palm Limited (NOPL, now Norpalm) in the western region; Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC) in the eastern region; and Twifo Oil Palm Plantations Limited (TOPP) in the central region. In the face of rising state indebtedness, declining global commodity prices and difficulties to acquire land, these companies were

further privatized during the structural adjustment era. They are now fully (GOPDC and Norpalm) or partly (BOPP and TOPP) foreign-owned (Huddleston & Tonts, 2007). The state regained interest in the sector in the early 2000s due to increased domestic and international demand for palm oil. However, they were unsuccessful in establishing effective public–private partnerships and prompting the revival of state-managed schemes (Fold, 2008; Ofosu-Budu & Sarpong, 2013). The ambitious 2001 President's Special Initiative on Oil Palm, aiming for self-sufficiency in palm oil and increasing global competitiveness, was partly successful in establishing nurseries on large estates but failed to develop more milling capacity and increase acreage under production (Asante, 2012).

The late 20th century also saw the growth of medium-scale private companies who dominate export and local industrial oil palm markets alongside their large-scale counterparts (Osei-Amponsah, 2013). As oil palm supply from plantations does not meet their milling capacities, medium- and large-scale companies rely greatly on sourcing from local producers through smallholder and outgrower contract schemes.¹ This is both an attempt to reap economies of scale and to manage the material properties of oil palm, which requires processing within 24 hr of harvesting. Small-scale farmers with access to suitable land, secure land tenure and adequate ability to cultivate oil palm qualify for outgrower schemes. Companies provide assistance in the form of soil preparation, agricultural extension, seedlings, fertilizers, and collection of fresh fruit bunches (FFBs; Oya, 2012). Smallholder contract farmers also receive land—part of the nucleus estate—on which to plant the seeds. Farmers are obliged, after a grace period of 5 to 7 years, to supply the company over a 25-year period with all their FFBs. The company deduces a percentage of the payment after each sale for loan servicing.

Private sector operations are under considerable strain. Domestic availability of palm oil is unreliable due to internal marketing and supply-side constraints as well as subsidies for commercial and food aid imports of competing vegetable oils (Ofosu-Budu & Sarpong, 2013). Companies struggle to meet national and international demand as well as their own targets,² and Ghana is a net importer of crude palm oil (MASDAR, 2011). GOPDC has adopted corporate social responsibility initiatives and certified organic production in a bid to gain a competitive edge (Fold, 2008). Whereas contract farming conditions were strictly organized 10 years ago (Fold, 2008), GOPDC no longer rigidly enforces contracts. They do not reprimand farmers for failing to meet production targets or for side-selling to other buyers, nor have they signed any new contracts since 2009. Instead, they try to entice remaining contract farmers to (re)sell to them with a bonus of 20 Ghana cedis per tonne (Outgrower Manager, GOPDC, personal interview 2016).

The partial disintegration of the contract scheme terminated contractual benefits such as free transport,³ financed inputs, and guaranteed prices. Diminishing raw material supply has forced companies to reduce entry barriers and trade with independent farmers. In contrast to contract farmers, independent farmers are self-organized, self-managed, and self-financed; no formal agreement binds them to a particular estate (Ofosu-Budu & Sarpong, 2013). Sourcing from independent farmers creates numerous logistical and pricing problems as planning and grading of FFB is impossible (Fold, 2008). Companies pay independent and contract farmers the same price per tonne of FFB,⁴ excluding the deduction and bonus pertaining to the latter. Determinants of this price are the world market price of CPO, the exchange rate, and the local Kramers' price (Outgrower Manager, GOPDC, personal interview 2016).

This loosening of commodity relations also owes to the presence of the local oil palm processing industry. Artisanal and small-scale processing mills (the latter slightly more mechanized than the former)—both locally referred to as the “Kramer”—account for 80% of crude palm oil produced in Ghana (Adjei-Nsiah, Zu, & Nimoh, 2012). The Kramer is largely separate from local industrial and export markets. It is characterized by low productivity, low-yielding oil

¹In 2004, outgrowers and smallholders contributed 55% and 7%, respectively, of GOPDC's total estate production, representing an increase of 340% since 1995 (Huddleston & Tonts, 2007, p. 275).

²In 2015, GOPDC expected 72,000 tonnes of oil palm from contract farmers, but received only 26,000 tonnes (Outgrower Manager, GOPDC, personal interview 2016).

³In response to low revenue, GOPDC suspended all transportation services in 2010. A subsequent sharp decline in supply from farmers enticed the company to reintroduce farm gate collection in 2014 and farmers now have access to subsidized transportation (Outgrower Manager, GOPDC, personal interview 2016).

⁴The price was 440 Ghana cedis at mill gate and 400 Ghana cedis at farm gate in early 2016 (Outgrower Manager, GOPDC, personal interview 2016).

palm varieties, and low quality crude palm oil by international standards (MASDAR, 2011; Ofosu-Budu & Sarpong, 2013). Local processors—predominantly female—produce palm oil for cooking, *Zoomi* (a higher quality cooking oil), and oil for soap-making (Ofosu-Budu & Sarpong, 2013). They use semi-mechanized processing equipment at a local mill, rented from (predominantly male) mill owners (Adjei-Nsiah et al., 2012). Few processors have had any formal training; they acquire local knowledge and skills from friends or family members (Osei-Amponsah et al., 2012). They sell produce in local markets and to traders who sell in Ghana's large cities or in neighbouring countries.

Prices of palm oil in local and regional markets, set by the buyers, are not stable. Processors receive a higher price during the lean season (August–December), paying a higher price in turn to farmers. Underestimating the weight of FFB by as much as 20% compensates for gluts of palm oil in the market during the peak season (February–May). In other words, not using weighing scales allows local processors to count more FFB per ton than is accurate.⁵ This has helped the small-scale processors survive in the face of competition from industrial companies (Adjei-Nsiah et al., 2012).

Local processors also enjoy access to the bulk of FFB produced by farmers because they accept both hybrid *Tenera* and local *Dura* oil palm varieties (Osei-Amponsah et al., 2012). Buyers assess oil quality in terms of colour, smell, and taste. They often prefer *Dura* fruit, which produce tastier oil that is deep red in colour (Osei-Amponsah, 2013; Head of social-economic division, OPRI, personal interview 2016). Its high content of moisture and free fatty acids, which make it low quality by international standards, are necessary properties for producing local soap (MASDAR, 2011). Moreover, the disregard for free fatty acid content renders immediate processing unnecessary. Unlike the companies, most local processors store fruits before processing them into oil. Storage time ranges from a few days for fruits to make *Zoomi* up to a week for regular palm oil and up to three weeks for soap-grade oil (Osei-Amponsah et al., 2012).

The Kwaebibirem District hosts GOPDC—who has contracted 7,000 outgrowers and 208 smallholders and planted approximately 13,000 hectares (within a 35 km radius of the nucleus estate) with GOPDC-owned seedlings—as well as a number of medium-scale companies and approximately 250 small-scale processing mills (Osei-Amponsah & Visser, 2016). There are over 13,000 small-scale oil palm farmers in the district (Osei-Amponsah, 2013). Our study involves 37 independent farmers and 23 contract farmers (smallholder and outgrower farmers with GOPDC and contract farmers with the organic and fair-trade certified company Serendipalm Group Ltd.).

3.2 | Farmer categories

The ongoing disintegration of contract farming schemes and opening up of global markets to independent farmers has led to changes in market relations. Our study identifies four categories of farmers, as contract farmers (CFs) and independent farmers (IFs) divide into two respective sub-categories based on their integration in global and local oil palm markets.

The first category comprises “faithful CFs” who, in respecting their contract, sells all oil palm produce to their contracting company (16.7% of farmers in our study). They are more financially successful and farm at a slightly larger scale than the other categories, holding an average of 8.4 hectares and gaining a monthly income of 4,139 and 1,325 Ghanaian Cedi during the peak and lean season, respectively. Faithful CFs often entered into contract arrangements after weighing the risks and opportunities involved and comparing with those of local markets: “I have a contract with GOPDC because, although payments are late, they can buy in large quantities and they are always willing to buy. Your money too is safe unlike the small scale buyers where farmers have to chase them for their money.” Having a contract is considered a means of maximizing benefits from relations with the companies, notably access to inputs. Although unhappy with the cutback in services in recent years, these farmers remain predominantly content with their contracts. They consider themselves better off than their independent counterparts: “I am happy with the contract because when I compare myself to farmers without a contract, I am far better than them in terms of finance and even farm size.”

⁵Processors judge 60–80 FFB as one tonne; often counting two or three small bunches as one, whereas companies weigh less than 60 FFB in a tonne (Outgrower Manager, GOPDC, personal interview 2016).

Serendipalm farmers are included in this category as they too are faithful to, and predominantly happy with, their contract. Unlike GOPDC CFs, however, they can have more than one buyer. Serendipalm has more CFs than necessary for supply in the peak season in order to maintain inputs during the lean season. When they reach processing capacity, they grant farmers permission to sell elsewhere, provided farmers keep a record: “[Serendipalm] is placed above any buying company. You can only sell to other buyers if the company has reached its maximum [and] you need to indicate in your monitoring book.”

The second category of farmers is CFs who sell to both their contracting company and the Kramer (21.7% of farmers in our study). They engage in side-selling despite the (perceived) risk of sanctions from the company. These “unfaithful CFs” hold an average of 5.9 hectares of land and earn monthly incomes of 4,182 and 819 Ghanaian Cedi during the peak and lean season, respectively. Many entered into contracts as a means of overcoming initial difficulties accessing resources: “I didn’t have money to start the farm by myself; it was through the contract agreement that I got the seedlings and inputs.” Some are smallholder CFs who received land as well as inputs for oil palm farming: “GOPDC gave me the land and the seedlings to plant. I was in need of it that’s why I went into the contract.” Contrary to the first group of CFs, these farmers tend to be unhappy with company relations: “I only sell to GOPDC because I have a contract with them. If I had the ability to sell to anyone of my choice I wouldn’t have sold to GOPDC.” They are especially sensitive to the changes in contract schemes and have become wary of contracts: “I would like to understand the terms and conditions of any company who would like to sign contract with me well before I enter into such agreement with the company so not to create any problem for myself.”

A third category of farmers includes IFs free to sell in both local and global oil palm markets (35% of farmers in our study). These “free choice IFs” receive an average of 2,181 Ghanaian Cedi a month during the peak season and 903 Ghanaian Cedi a month during the lean season. They have smaller farms than contract farmers, holding an average of 5.5 hectares. They are sometimes ex-contract farmers who preferred to keep their autonomy once their contract terminated. Others were enticed into oil palm farming by the plurality of market options available: “I chose to grow oil palm because there is always ready market for [it] due to the presence of companies and local processors in our community.” They purposely refrained from entering into a contract with a company in order to maintain autonomy in marketing their crops: “I want to have freedom over my choice of market.”

Finally are IFs who can only sell their oil palm to the Kramer, or process it themselves (26.7% of farmers in our study). Their lack of resources prevents them from selling to companies. This includes farmers who harvest in small amounts, cannot afford the transport costs involved in selling to the companies, and/or produce fruits that do not meet the companies’ quality standards: “I harvest in small quantities and I think it’s not advisable to send it to the company [...] because if I decide to trade with the company, I have to hire a vehicle for transport, which is also expensive. If I should subtract the transport from the money I will get, I will be left with nothing. This is why I sell for ready cash and that is the reason why I depend solely on the small-scale processors.” Such “marginalized IFs” hold four hectares of land on average, gaining monthly incomes of 1,548 and 526 Ghanaian Cedi during the peak and lean season, respectively.

4 | PEASANT STRATEGIES: PATTERNING PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

Farmers’ positions in markets determine how they pattern their production and marketing. Their perception of the risks and opportunities of oil palm farming and its markets also plays a role. We discuss these differences in practices and rationale for the four categories of oil palm farmers.

4.1 | Patterning production

Crop diversification is a major feature among oil palm farmers in the eastern region (Kolavalli & Vigneri, 2011; Ros-Tonen & Ataa-Asantewaa, 2015). Crop combinations in our study include oil palm-cocoa-food crops (42%), oil palm-food crops (42%), cocoa-oil palm (1%), and oil palm alone (15%). The main food crops grown are cassava, plantain,

maize, cocoyam, and citrus. Crop diversification spans the four categories of farmers, but is most common among IFs (81% of free choice IFs and 69% of marginalized IFs compared with 50% of faithful CFs and 46% of unfaithful CFs). 88% of farmers who grow food crops sell a portion. Free choice IFs are most likely to do so (71%), closely followed by marginalized IFs (69%), with unfaithful CFs (54%), and faithful CFs (40%) lagging behind. CFs therefore appear more financially dependent on oil palm than IFs. A weak but statistically significant relationship found between the proportion of income generated from oil palm and contract farming (Pearson's $r = 0.408$, $p < .00$) supports this finding, indicating that CFs are more specialized in oil palm production than IFs.

The rationale for crop diversification among IFs varies between the two categories. Marginalized IFs use it as "survival diversification" (Scoones et al., 2012, p. 517). The sale of oil palm alone is insufficient for meeting their consumption requirements, they need food crops for both subsistence and income: "I grow food crops mainly for subsistence and also to get additional money for survival." Their low income (see previous section) impedes marginalized IFs from buying implements; they manage with few, or none at all: "The total amount of insecticides and herbicides that I wish to buy I don't get to due to insufficient funds." Many marginalized IFs are unable to afford the hybrid Tenera seeds, purchasing the less expensive Dura variety sold locally by farmers and traders or reusing farm saved seeds (15%). Some do not know the variety of seeds planted; they test quality by fruit ripeness: "For me I don't even know the type of palm seeds that I grow. All I know is that when the palm fruits are ripe I harvest them for the Kramer." These farmers cannot sell to the companies who will not accept fruits of unknown variety.

Conversely, free choice IFs purposely use diversification to overcome constraints in accessing production assets. They re-invest the additional money earned in oil palm: "I grow [food crops]... [as they] provide me with some additional income to add up to the income derived from the oil palm production and I in turn invest some of the money into the oil palm production. I depend on these food crops so I can work on my oil palm farm." They too use food crops for consumption, but for self-provisioning rather than subsistence. Diversification is an active strategy to reduce monetary costs by engaging in non-commodity circuits: "If I don't grow these food crops the little amount of money I get from the oil palm production would be used to buy food, [now] I can save more and am able to cater for my family."

Both categories of IFs diversify crops to manage the temporality of crop markets. Crop diversification allows them to spread income and labour throughout the year(s), becoming more efficient in the management of scarce resources. It is especially important during the lean season or when palm trees are young: "I grow other foods since it serves as means of survival when the oil palm is not in its maturity stage." Some CFs also grow food crops when their oil palm is young, but they stop once space becomes limited. Smallholder CFs are explicitly restricted from doing so on GOPDC-owned land: "When [the palm trees] mature, you can't plant food crops in the farm [...]. I buy all the food crops I eat."

Contracts also prevent outgrower CFs from diversifying their crops through implicit pressures for high yields. Companies set a target of eight metric tonnes of FFB per hectare per year—much higher than IFs' average yield of three metric tonnes per hectare per year (MOFA, 2011). High targets help explain why CFs are more specialized in oil palm production and have higher costs of production (labour, fertilizers, etc.). Faithful CFs use the money earned from oil palm farming to meet these costs. Some also get loans from the bank or the company (in Serendipalm farmers' case); 33.3% of faithful CFs finance farming through loans (compared to 8.3% of unfaithful CFs and 0% of both IF categories). CFs are therefore involved in a relatively closed commodity circuit with most factors of production purchased or acquired on credit. This can help minimize production costs: "I also use my own vehicle to convey the fruits from the farm to minimize cost of transport." Their ability to mobilize more resources and the pressure for high yields from the company help explain why contract farmers are more likely to use fertilizers than independent farmers (91.3% of non-organic CFs compared with 52.8% of IFs).

To diversify their livelihoods, farmers also combining farming with off-farm activities—a strategy referred to as pluriactivity or "non-farm diversification" (Scoones et al., 2012, p. 519). Pluriactivity is common among all farmer categories; 56.7% combine farming with another occupation. It serves for both survival and accumulation (Scoones et al., 2012). Marginalized IFs and unfaithful CFs use it for survival: "Farming is good but it can fail you sometimes, since we depend on rain fed agriculture. I have a second job to supplement farming in times of financial difficulties." Free

choice IFs, conversely, hold a second occupation for accumulation, sometimes to mobilize the necessary factors of production for establishing a farm: "I was a licensed drug store keeper before I started growing the oil palm. It was out of the income raised that I managed to start the oil palm farming." This contrasts with the CFs who entered contract schemes to access start-up capital. Free choice IFs also use non-farm activities to subsidize their oil palm production: "I try to overcome the constraints mostly by using the money raised from my second job to buy seedlings, pesticides and others to support and overcome the problems faced in farming." Like crop diversification for commercialization, pluriactivity gives farmers other sources of income to draw on, especially important during the lean season.

Of the surveyed households, 16.9% engage in value-adding activity, 45.5% are free-choice IFs, 27.3% are marginalized IFs, and the remaining 27.2% are unfaithful CFs. Processing gives farmers a higher profit than selling FFB: "My wife processes some of my fruits into oil as the income gained from processing the fruits into palm oil before selling is higher than selling the raw bunches to the company." This presents a sharp contrast to CFs from whom value-added is captured by the company. Processing also reduces dependency on commodity circuits as it enables self-provisioning: "We get oil for cooking, we get the nut to sell, and the fibres we use as firewood." Some households maximize value creation by producing palm wine or *akpeteshi* (a spirit produced by distilling palm wine). Again, these by-products are used for sale or self-provisioning. Such value-added activities increase farmers' autonomy by incorporating family farming and artisanal processes into production.

It is worth noting that the repartition of tasks is strongly gendered; the head of the household typically harvests and the spouse processes. In 88% of households, men alone perform harvesting. In households also engaged in oil palm processing, women alone process in 40% of cases, and together with men in a further 50% of cases. Notwithstanding frustration among women generated by the strong male bias in the sector, both men and women feel that their distinct roles as producers and processors help promote the oil palm sector as they "make the business flow."

Free-choice IFs also organize labour in oil palm production within the family. Wives and husbands undertake tasks according to their different abilities and gendered perceptions of physical strength: "I carry out planting, applying fertiliser, and fetching water for my husband to do the spraying. I don't possess the physical strength to apply the chemicals using the spraying machine; what I can do effectively is fetch the water." Furthermore, free-choice IFs share labour through social networks: "we help each other as farmers; we normally seek for assistance from our neighbours to break cocoa pods after harvesting." Neighbours also share farm implements, such as knapsack sprayers and harvesting knives.

Free-choice IFs nonetheless employ an average of five wage labourers. As oil palm farming is labour-intensive, all four categories employ wage labourers faithful CFs hire an average of eight wage labourers. As opposed to undertaking specific farm duties, the farmer plays a supervising role: "My major task on the farm is to supervise the labourers working on the farm. I do this to manage the workers and also ensure that they pick all the loose fruits." These farmers are less likely to mobilize resources (either implements or labour) through their social networks: "I don't ask for help from other farmers or neighbours because I usually buy all things I need for farming and family needs."

Both marginalized IFs and unfaithful CFs struggle to meet labour costs and, like free-choice IFs, mobilize family labour to overcome this constraint: "I try to work with my family on the farm since I don't have money to hire labourers." Farmers hire labour solely for challenging tasks like harvesting. Marginalized CFs hire an average of four labourers. This can leave them producing at a loss: "I am a woman so I can't do the harvesting. I always hire people to do my harvesting for me and the charge is high. So in the long run you may be running at a loss because most of the income goes to the labourers since the price of oil palm fruits is low." With lower yields and income, unfaithful CFs hire less labourers (five on average) than their faithful counterparts.

4.2 | Patterning market relations

Faithful CFs consider that the benefits of selling to the company outweigh the risks. They consider relations with companies more substantial and secure than relations with the market; substantial because companies have the capacity

to buy in large quantities, secure because they weigh the fruits, document transactions, and pay through the bank (which helps farmers to access loans). Faithful CFs are suspicious of the Kramer precisely because it lacks regulation for trade: "the Kramer can tell the farmer after processing the palm fruits that he or she operated at a loss so he or she can choose to reduce the amount the farmer was supposed to get. Also, should anything bad happen to the Kramer, the farmer may never get her money." Kramer relations therefore contrast to the mutually accountable relationship between a farmer and company secured by a contract: "the company cannot cheat the farmer; neither can the farmer cheat the company."

Unfaithful CFs do not perceive this sense of mutual responsibility between farmer and contracting company. Contrarily, they feel the company does not respect their side of the contract as GOPDC no longer provides free transportation, financed inputs, or guaranteed prices to contract farmers. Contract farming has thus lost its validity: "There have been changes in the contract between us because the price at which the company buys farmers palm fruits is not fair at all. This has brought about a lot of changes in the relations between the farmers and the company such that some farmers sell their fruits to the women [Kramer]." Unfaithful CFs are more sensitive than their faithful counterparts to the risks involved in selling to the companies, notably the fluctuating price and the delay in payment after the sale of produce (despite stipulation in the contract that payment shall not exceed one week, delivery of payment can take up to a month). Unfaithful CFs lament that they cannot access the financial assistance provided by the Kramer without risking sanctions from the company: "if you don't harvest the palm fruits for [GOPDC], they may maltreat you and may even take the land from you. [...] you might need money to solve an immediate problem meanwhile your money is locked up at GOPDC."

Unlike GOPDC CFs in recent years, Serendipalm CFs have access to free transportation, financed inputs, and guaranteed prices for their produce: "the company uses its tractor to convey the fruits from the farm-gate after harvesting to be weighed at the factory for free and also give farmers seedlings to grow on [a] credit bases, to be paid off after harvesting." Delay in payment is not a problem: "I sell to Serendipalm because the price is quite okay and the time for payment is as fast as possible unlike GOPDC." In addition to these advantages, Serendipalm farmers appreciate access to constant certification trainings, a certification premium, and community developmental projects established by the company. Several Serendipalm farmers regret, however, the lower yields and higher labour costs of organic farming. They consider Serendipalm's premium insufficient compensation: "The premium they give us is very low. We harvest less palm fruits than the conventional so we expect them to give us a higher premium." Furthermore, Serendipalm's unreliable buying capacity deprives many farmers of this premium during the lean season. Although a constraint, farmers do not consider this "unfair" (unlike GOPDC contracts) as it was disclosed before farmers signed the contract. Many even appreciate the opportunity to sell to other buyers.

Free-choice IFs perceive contrary risks and opportunities in selling to the Kramer and to the companies. They respond by patterning their marketing relations to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of each. Like faithful CFs, they appreciate the relatively stable price, use of weighing scales, and absorption capacity of companies. Selling to them allows free-choice IFs to overcome some limits of the Kramer, notably the inability to pay significant amounts of money at a time, to buy in large quantities, or to accurately weigh fruits.

Some free-choice IFs sell exclusively to the companies; others sell to the buyer offering the highest price offered at the time of harvest. Most, however, exploit the comparative advantage of each market. After harvest (every 3 weeks), they sell the bulk of their FFB to the companies to benefit from their high price and absorption capacity. They sell the remainder to the Kramer, whose direct payment sustains them until the company pays: "I sell to both so that I can get financial assistance. If I sell to only the company, I would be in trouble because they don't pay ready cash. I sometimes sell to the processors so I can get ready cash to cater for my family." Other farmers generally sell all their oil palm to the companies and turn to the small-scale processors in times of financial difficulty, such as at the beginning of the school year or in the event of illness within the family: "I sell to the Kramer for financial assistance in times of need. For Obooma [medium-scale company], their price is higher and also fixed."

Free-choice IFs consider access to credit another major advantage of selling to the Kramer. Small-scale processors often pre-finance a farmer's harvest or grant them small loans. Repayment is arranged between the two parties and is

usually flexible due to their personal relationship: "She pays me instantly when she has money and [...] buys on credit when she doesn't have money, but even with that she pays me within a week's time. When I owe her too we negotiate and she deducts every harvest until the debt is cleared off. The deduction is not that huge. It's been done in a manner that will not affect the farmer too much." The availability of mutual financial assistance affords farmers and processors a sense of security, as they have a safety net for hard times. Free choice IFs also appreciate the higher price sometimes offered by the Kramer, especially during the lean season, and the role they play in increasing the companies' price.

Free choice IFs find different patterns of selling and processing, with timing again playing an important role. Capacity to store palm oil enables farmers to process FFB in the peak season for sale during the lean season: "I normally do the processing during the peak season and store the palm oil for market during the lean season. During the peak season the price of oil palm fruits is not encouraging and it is also difficult to get buyers [...] that is why I process some of the palm fruits so that in lean season I will sell the palm oil at a higher price." Here, farmers spread oil palm marketing throughout the year to avoid vulnerability in the peak season when prices are low due to increased supply.

As the Kramer bases quality standards on local, rather than international, demands, farmers have the opportunity to sell Dura variety fruits. Some free-choice IFs therefore combine oil palm marketing and palm oil processing according to the quality of their fruits, selling Dura fruits to the company and Tenera fruits to the Kramer: "I have the [hybrid] *Tenera* and *Dura* type on my farm. The company prefers the *Tenera* to the *Dura* because it has more oil." Others process Dura fruit into oil themselves, giving use and value to unaccepted fruits: "I process the loose fruits and the over-ripe fruits which my buying company doesn't accept." Farmers also sell palm trees to palm wine tappers or process the beverage themselves once they reach the age where produce is low and harvest is difficult: "I produce alcohol from the oil palm tree when it is felled."

Finally, marginalized contract farmers sell uniquely to the Kramer. Some choose to have only one buyer due to their personal relationship: "I have only one customer at the Kramer I don't see why I have to have more than one customer since she is able to provide for me in times of need." Others sell to any processor, their sole condition being direct cash payment. As the Kramer does not have the same absorption capacity as the companies, it can be hard for marginalized IFs to sell all their fruits in the peak season. Upstream buyers influence the price, which frequently fluctuates: "The processors also have customers they sell the palm oil to, so if the market is good for them then it becomes good for the farmer as well. So their market affects us indirectly. If the market is bad for the processors, it affects the farmers badly since we lose market for our palm fruits." Like their free choice counterparts, marginalized IFs resort to self-processing when this happens: "I only process the oil palm fruits for commercialization when I don't get ready market for my palm fruits." This constrains their agency and leaves them dependent on unpredictable local markets.

5 | SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND PEASANT-LIKE MARKET STRATEGIES

Although we find elements of peasant agriculture across all four categories of farmers, the extent and rationale differ greatly between categories. This has important implications for autonomy. Peasant strategies are the least prevalent among CFs who are the most specialized in oil palm production and the most likely to depend on external sources of credit (from contract schemes or loans) for factor inputs. Pressure to obtain high yields increases production costs, forcing farmers into closed commodity circuits. The better-off faithful CFs manage by using capital from their income or loans to mobilize assets that reduce production costs and increase yields. Unfaithful CFs, on the other hand, face constraints in accumulation. They rely at once on companies for obtaining access to productive resources and on local markets for providing a buffer against the monopsony of their contracts.

This contrasts to free-choice IFs, who avoid adverse inclusion in export markets by structuring labour, production and marketing in order to resist the full commoditization (notably through loans and contract farming schemes) of their production units (van der Ploeg, 2014). Although less financially well-off than CFs, they are capable of using their more limited resources to generate independent production of income and adapt to an ever-transitioning sector.

Internalizing factors of production, spreading income and labour through the year(s), maximizing value-added and mobilizing family labour and social networks enable free-choice IFs to construct relatively autonomous and resilient farms. This in turn allows them to actively expand and retract their integration in both local and global oil palm markets, further increasing their resilience. Distancing from commodity circuits is therefore only partial, and market involvement appears to present interesting prospects for this group. The case of marginalized IFs indicates that local oil palm markets alone are insufficient for generating adequate livelihoods. These farmers use peasant strategies for crisis management rather than expanded reproduction; money earned from crop diversification, pluriactivity, and processing is used for maintaining the household rather than investing in oil palm farming, which can leave them producing at a loss.

It follows that the free-choice IF is the only category of farmer capable of farming in a relatively autonomous and peasant-like way. The "peasant condition" in this case is dependent on the ability to partially integrate global markets. Two important implications for the food sovereignty debate emerge from this conclusion. First, it indicates that global markets provide opportunities that are not available in local markets and can therefore contribute to farmers' livelihoods and autonomy. Of course, our results must be seen in the context of a very particular case study wherein independent farmers have the opportunity to integrate a once strictly regulated value chain with relatively few conditions. Moreover, such global value chains are complemented by a local oil palm market that displays dynamics of nested markets as it is governed by reciprocal relations, local quality criteria, and family farming (Hebinck et al., 2015). We do not dispute the capacity of local markets to provide sufficient livelihoods, as it is important to bear in mind how the importation of cheap cooking oils grossly distorts the Kramer's prices. We do wish to highlight, however, the need for a more dynamic understanding of peasant agency that includes how farmers use different markets strategically to maintain autonomy. We believe that the FSM should not oppose the possibility, in certain cases, of a complementarity rather than a contradiction between global food systems and peasant reproduction. This incites a reflection on the broader question of how partial integration in multiple markets can allow farmers to resist the full commoditization of their social world and thereby ensure their viability within the capitalist system (Friedmann, 1980; van der Ploeg, 2010; Walsh-Dilley, 2013).

A second and related implication of our results arises from the social differentiation found among smallholders, which signifies a blind spot in the FSM's portrayal of peasants as a unified group. Rather than representing a distinct coerced capitalist farmer and autonomous peasant farmer, our results suggest that various "degrees of peasantness" emerge showing different ways of engaging peasant, entrepreneurial and capitalist agriculture vis-à-vis a "hostile environment", and different forms of agency within these. Contract farmers are naturally constrained in their agency by the binding agreement between them and a company (even despite weakened enforcement). However, they are not necessarily forced into these rigid commodity arrangements. Our results show that faithful CFs, unlike unfaithful CFs, decide to enter into contract relations after weighing the risks and opportunities of global and local markets, willingly giving up their autonomy to access the perceived benefits of a contract. The separation between faithful and unfaithful CF in this respect means entrepreneurial farming cannot always be considered a result of lack of choice (Bernstein, 2014). Similarly, the fact that marginalized IFs lack agency as they are resource-poor suggests that exclusion from global markets may not always be by choice. The binary between the "vicious" capitalist farmer and "virtuous" peasant hinders realistic evaluation of processes of reproduction, accumulation, and peasant patterning. We therefore suggest replacing the simple, idealized category of "peasant" with an analytical category that is socially-differentiated and includes various forms of agency and compulsion, wherein options, trajectories, and choices are given a more prominent position (Scoones et al., 2012).

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Ghana's bifurcated, smallholder-oriented oil palm markets provide an opportunity structure for peasant-like patterning by small-scale farmers. The export-oriented sector has undergone a major shift towards privatization and

concentration, with multinational companies assuming ownership over previously state-owned estates. To meet increasing demand and local estate processing capacities, companies rely on both contract schemes and sourcing from independent smallholder farmers. Meanwhile, artisanal processing remains a vibrant industry, showing distinct price structures and quality demands along with opportunities for “side selling” and organizing family labour, production, and marketing. Faced with increasing international competition and continued competition from the artisanal sector, large foreign-owned companies like GOPDC have loosened commodity relations with outgrower and smallholder farmers, providing fewer services and showing a higher tolerance for breach of contractual agreements.

In this paper, we described a typology of four categories of smallholders that differ in their relationship to both the commodified and artisanal oil palm markets. Their respective positions show that opportunities to express autonomy and control over production are not equally distributed. Terms of engagement in the export-oriented value chain, related to labour needs and quality standards, demand surplus production and forms of cross-subsidization from alternative sources of farm and non-farm income. Artisanal oil palm processing offers welcome alternatives, such as direct payment in full and accepting the local Dura oil palm variety, which is more suited for local oil production and soap making. This artisanal industry shows hallmarks of food-sovereign nested markets, displaying shorter links between consumers and producers and enabling farmers to add value by becoming processors. It also allows them to make use of commodity and non-commodity circuits for their reproduction, as witnessed by the organization of (gendered) family labour and drawing on reciprocal relations with processors to access micro-loans.

Peasant-like patterning of production and marketing was found across the four categories. All showed a propensity for pluriactivity, broadening household activities, and coordinating food and cash crops cycles to maintain resilient livelihoods and overcome constraints of spreading risks over the lean oil palm season. Unsurprisingly, our study found that the two categories of contract farmers are tied more intimately to companies, as shown by the higher levels of crop specialization and external sourcing of credit compared to their independent counterparts. A better off minority of farmers (the “faithful” CFs) showed a strong preference for this arrangement, whereas “unfaithful” CFs turn to local markets as a buffer against the strict commodity relations and related dependencies they engender. Free-choice IFs show high manoeuvrability between markets, capitalizing on their free choice of market to actively expand and retract their integration in both local and global oil palm markets.

These findings have implications for how we may reassess the role of trade in the food sovereignty debate. First, the case shows that such social differentiation questions the binary of disabling export markets and an essentialist “peasant condition” marked by agentive forms of market distancing. As also argued elsewhere, room for manoeuvre may differ according to the characteristics of farmers (e.g., land size, income, labour, and position in the value chain) and changing trajectories of the oil palm sector at large (Cousins, 2013; Scoones et al., 2012; Stock et al., 2014). By applying food sovereign approaches to peasant patterning and marketing (Hebinck et al., 2015; van der Ploeg, 2008), we show that certain farmers negotiate their uneven inclusion in global markets and produce new hybrid market spaces, more especially against the background of the aforementioned bifurcated market options and the loosening of entry barriers to global markets. We thus concur with the call to revisit and empirically reground “the peasant” category and its relation to global markets (Bernstein, 2014). We suggest that global markets, when tied to other commodity and non-commodity circuits in peasant-like strategies, offer opportunities for well-situated smallholders to reproduce themselves in autonomous ways.

In saying this, we acknowledge that the case selection shows exceptional degrees of smallholder manoeuvrability in comparison with other experiences of accumulation by dispossession in oil palm (see Li, 2017) as well as our limited emphasis on critical aspects of local political economies that may inform social differentiation. Yet, we propose that such interface settings where commodity relations are present but do not penetrate fully, and where diversification is rather the norm than the exception, offer valuable entry points for revisiting the role of global markets in reproducing peasants in the global south. Peasant reproduction in the context of multiple markets may only be successful in those cases where local markets retain the characteristics of “nested markets” (van der Ploeg, 2015) and are not absorbed into global markets. The large contribution of local processors to domestic consumption and the historical struggles of the Ghanaian oil palm sector to become globally competitive have militated against this. Understanding likely

future scenarios requires a deeper understanding of how such regional and local markets intersect with the global oil palm complex, notably in the face of new investment frontiers such as the green economy and “flexing” of oil palm (Alonso-Fradejas, Liu, Salerno, & Xu, 2016; Mohd Noor et al., 2017).

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