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The contradictions of resistance to neoliberal agri-food

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Introduction

Since the late 1970s, neoliberalism has characterized production, forms of governance, ideology, and culture worldwide. Technocrats who advance policy analysis are heavily invested in neoliberal discourse – i.e., technical and normative assumptions that undergird causal claims about socioeconomic dynamics – and the internalization of these ways of thinking and talking about socioeconomic dynamics by large numbers of citizens, voters, and investors occupying widely varying structural positions lends substantial power to these ideas. While not homogenous and quite often contradictory, neoliberalism is endowed with key characteristics that are consistently visible across social formations, production systems, and consumption processes. These characteristics find some of their most significant roots in the justifications and practices of reducing, and often eliminating, barriers to the free circulation of capital, commodities, labor, and ecosystem services that have resulted in the contemporary spatial and political reorganization of capitalist social relations. The current neoliberal global regime has forever altered the system of regulated capitalism that dominated the thirty years following the end of World War Two. Defined by the social economist Thomas Piketty (2014) as the *Trente Glorieuses*, the thirty post-war Fordist years proposed a system of regulation of capitalism based on the shifting of the control of the economy from the market to the state. The state – and specifically the nation-state – was endowed with the tasks of steering the economy and organizing society in ways that could control the unwanted consequences of the free functioning of the market. In this system of accumulation of capital, and the accompanying ideological worldview and political structure, the evolution of the economy and development were defined through state planning supported by a tacit yet effective pact between relevant social forces (Schmitter 1974). In this context, agri-food became one of the symbols of *regulated capitalism* with state intervention defining virtually all aspects of processes of production and consumption (Bonanno, Busch, Friedland, Gouveia, and Mingione 1994; McMichael 1994).

The crisis of Fordism that became acute in the 1980s provided support to the now dominant view that state regulation is one of the major obstacles to

socioeconomic growth and that freeing capital to be as mobile as possible is the primary recipe for global development. At the production level, the ensuing hypermobility of capital has resulted in the development of global networks that, transcending national sociopolitical spaces, labor pools, and ecological limits, have engendered unprecedented levels of transnational production of agri-food commodities and services (Bonanno and Constance 2008; Howard 2016). Neoliberalism is fundamental for the existence of global networks of production, for they thrive on the free circulation of capital and the constant neoliberal efforts to enhance its hypermobility. Supported by the deregulation of markets and financial systems, agri-food consumption also functions through transnational networks. Largely centered on global supermarket chains and global advertising, these networks have created a highly sophisticated system of food mass consumption that, however, is presented as based on freedom of choice and diversity of content (Lawrence and Dixon 2015; Wolf and Bonanno 2014).

The often unchallenged ideological and cultural dimensions of neoliberalism are instrumental for the development of networks of production and consumption (Wolf and Bonanno 2014). Stressing the importance of individual action and individual social and political responsibility, neoliberal ideology has stigmatized the public sphere and the concept of social interdependence. Social policies designed to support disadvantaged communities are now popularly characterized as inefficient, ineffective, and misguided. The ideology of the individualization of politics has not only promoted the privatization of public processes and domains, but has also endorsed the desirability of individual solutions to socioeconomic problems. The many crises of agri-food are largely defined in terms of individual choices, and solutions are framed in relation to actions of “responsible” individuals (e.g., make healthy eating choices, buy local, choose organic, seek out certified products, avoid excessive packaging, do not waste food. . . .). The result is a thorough depoliticization of socioecological problems and the revival of the concept of *individual meritocracy*, the view that individuals make their own history and that inequality is the result of individuals’ unequal efforts and the just outcome of competition (Swyngedouw 2015). Popularized by mid-twentieth century Functionalism and supporting the legitimacy of the rule of elites, this posture has been reaffirmed despite strong empirically based critiques.

Free market competition is offered as the instrument that not only produces the best possible allocation of all resources, but also effectively replaces discredited expert- and public-based decision-making processes. Competition is proposed as the antidote to the claimed *institutional crisis* that is described as the primary factor for the lack of growth of economies and societies around the world. Public institutions, and in particular the state, are depicted as inadequate to address current problems. Deregulation and freedom in markets are prescribed for all spheres of society. The idea of governance is transformed from a concept that refers to public debate linked to actions of public agencies into a fully distributed, thoroughly heterogeneous, and very weakly integrated set of practices of private handling of decision-making over public affairs. For

neoliberals, individuals are to be equated with capital; they need to invest in themselves and prepare for competition. Stressing the classic proposal of Gary Becker (1994[1963]), individual action is the key variable in the explanation of socioeconomic phenomena and the instrument to be used to develop alternatives. Communities are also individualized, reduced to capital, and asked to compete in order to exist and grow. *Social capital* is heralded as the condition that boosts groups' ability to compete and that when deployed leads to development. Concepts such as interdependence, reciprocity, solidarity, and collective action are either set aside or, at best, translated into strategic competitive resources. At the same time, land and natural capital more broadly are redefined as fungible, mobile assets (Robertson 2012). At the core of newly created accounting conventions and transactional approaches to governance lies an assertion that increased fluidity opens up new potential to allocate resources and realize new heights in "best and highest use."

As often pointed out, neoliberalism is not a homogenous ideological construct, and its economic and social applications feature discontinuities and contradictions (Mirowski 2014; Wolf and Bonanno 2014). Classic calls for the maintenance of a fair system of competition are countered by theorizations of the desirability of a different type of competition in which the concentration of capital, its efficiency, and the existence of monopolies and their power are viewed as legitimate and desirable qualities (Friedman 1982[1962]; Brown 2015). Similarly, identification of the state as promoter of the well-being of all citizens is countered by arguments that stress the aggregate value of the deregulation of corporate actions. Additionally, arguments in support of the free functioning of the market are silenced when, in periods of crisis, state intervention is advocated to shore up failing private corporations and modes of regulation/accumulation. The US government bailout of imperiled financial institutions during the economic crisis of 2008 can be interpreted as a pragmatic response to extreme circumstances, and it can be understood as an instance of advocates of neoliberalism changing their tune when it suits their interests. Both explanations raise questions about the nature of neoliberalism, its reach, and the analytical weight the reference can support.

Through its existence as an ideology and a general framework for governance, neoliberalism has created a host of problems that have engendered resistance. The rising socioeconomic inequality and the accompanying concentration of capital, the subordination of the state and polity to corporate hypermobility, the suspension of democracy and transparent processes of decision-making, the commodification of life, and the accelerated degradation of the environment are among the often-cited consequences of the implementation of neoliberal policies. These and other problems are reflected in the evolution and current organization of the agri-food system. As argued in the introduction to this volume, the *erosion of the standard mode of democracy* that characterizes the neoliberal era invited novel forms of opposition. These new modes of resistance have emerged as central because they do not rely on established forms of struggle made ineffective by the transnationalization of socioeconomic relations, growing ambiguity

attached to science and professional expertise within decision making contexts, and the neutralization of class and labor-based opposition. This book specifies the logics of these new modes of resistance and advances a critique based on theoretical and empirical arguments. Attention to the dialectical relationship between neoliberalism and resistance positions us to investigate the foundations of the new frontier of resistance and the limits and contradictions to which it is subject.

The critique of resistance to the neoliberal regime of agri-food

Beginning in the late 1970s, the challenge of proposing and practicing new forms of resistance has been answered by the appearance of a number of oppositional movements and forms of struggle that have characterized the evolution of agri-food. In this context, the central question that this volume addresses refers to the extent to which these modes of resistance are effectively contesting the nature and characteristics of neoliberalism and the groups that support it. As indicated in the introduction, this task is developed with reference to the classic sociological notion of *critique* that explores the ontological boundaries of historical processes. Stressing the limits of current resistance but also its impact and potential, we propose a trifold analytical organization of the forms of resistance discussed in this volume. These ways to theorize resistance are to be understood as *ideal types* or heuristic abstractions that stress key constituting aspects of resistance but that do not necessarily reflect all of its many, complex and often contradictory empirical manifestations.

Variegated resistance

The first ideal type refers to a theorization that stresses the variety of ways in which resistance is understood and practiced. It underscores the *multi-dimensional character of resistance* through which neoliberal agri-food is ideologically and practically opposed. It emphasizes that there are numerous ways in which resistance is conceptualized, organized, and implemented. This perspective rejects a simple, oppositional dichotomy involving a clearly delimited oppressive system of production and exchange on one side and a specified alternative on the other. Rather, resistance is understood as taking a variety of pragmatic forms of implementation, responding to a complex set of understandings and visions, and involving a variety of groups that only mistakenly can be conceived as endowed with a sufficiently relevant degree of homogeneity (Brislen, Chapter 13 in this volume; Sankey, Chapter 10 in this volume; Gonzales-Duarte, Chapter 11 in this volume; Tilzey, Chapter 4 in this volume; Vansteenkiste, Chapter 12 in this volume). These spatially and problem-based actions fuse historical, economic, cultural, ideological, and biophysical traits that not only define different strategies of opposition and goals, but also display discontinuities in the specification and contestation of domination. Some actors are not even aware of – and

their actions are not understood as countering – neoliberalism, as coherence and specificity are often lacking. Within these sites of resistance, sociocultural manifestations of local/personal identity are transformed into conscious but also ambiguous processes of collective opposition to transnational neoliberalism that find their strength in their novel ways of proposing resistance. Simultaneously, they include large deliberately planned, professionally staffed projects and instances that spontaneously unfold in the varied spheres of everyday life (Vansteenkiste, Chapter 12 in this volume; Brislen, Chapter 13 in this volume; Sekine and Bonanno, Chapter 7 in this volume). This variety, and the diverse bases from which resistance efforts access resources and erect barriers to the current status quo, are a core source of strength, and an essential focus for theorizing and engaging resistance.

While we are faced with resistance that is conceived, interpreted, and executed in a multiplicity of forms, we also see that it is directed to adversaries that are not necessarily understood consistently. The complexity of neoliberal forms of development and, more importantly, the flexibility with which transnational agri-food corporate actors search for profitable forms of investment and production, engenders conditions in which the actors involved in struggles are also different. This structural diversity is augmented by the different interpretations that animate opposition at the local level. Accordingly, we learn about the diversity of the peasantry in Latin America and the complexity of their understanding of situations, opponents, and ensuing struggles (Sankey this volume; Pahnke, Tarlau, and Wolford 2015). But we also know of the different objectives, languages and forms of struggle of community-based rural and urban activist organizations (Brislen, Chapter 10 this volume; Vansteenkiste, Chapter 12 in this volume). While there is a tendency to ascribe coherence and unity to resistance efforts, in many cases there is marked diversity. Applied to the specific issue of what is contested, dispossession, inequality, imperialism, loss of personal autonomy or community sovereignty, lack of transparency, poor health, cruelty to animals, various dimensions of ecological degradation, and more are relevant applied to individual motivations and collective visions. This diversity within and across sites of resistance is a source of strength, but also a potential liability. Lack of shared commitments can limit individuals' engagement and result in fragmentation of strategies and resolve.

These complexities and discontinuities, however, do not diminish but stress the essential rejection of neoliberal agri-food proposed by these forms of opposition. This is the case for at least two reasons. First, these initiatives and movements of resistance refuse neoliberal ideology.¹ They reject key neoliberal messages such as those that stress the superiority of free market relations, the desirability of industrial of agri-food, and the effectiveness of the corporate economy and capital concentration. They dismiss the rampant exploitation of the environment, communities, and labor. In various ways, a high level of consciousness motivates the actions of these groups that find their *raison d'être* in attempts to reverse the logic of “marginal utility” and the practices of “industrial agri-food” and “food from nowhere.” Second, this level of consciousness is

translated into the deliberate search for alternative ways of producing, distributing, and consuming food. It is praxis that defines the existence of these initiatives that not only offer new language to express the way agri-food “ought to be,” but also propose the active construction of alternative forms of agri-food. For some of their participants, these are initiatives that rest on frequently difficult, laborious, and personally costly ways to practice opposition (Som Castellano, Chapter 5 in this volume).

These initiatives represent the rebirth of resistance that emerged from the crisis of the Fordist democracy and its labor-based forms of opposition (see the introduction in this volume). The post-World War Two Western democracy evolved through patterns that were based on the domestic strength of unions, their identification with parties and ideologies of the left, and the availability of established avenues of contestation. The latter frequently consisted of strikes, street demonstrations, and company/product boycotts, and they were also shaped by negotiations framed by the existing management-labor pact. In parallel, the resistance engendered by the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s and expanded scientific understanding of ecological and human health implications of industrial agriculture rested on scientific information about risks and established avenues of opposition. Lawsuits, demonstrations, and professionally produced critiques grounded in data were directed toward patterns of subsidy, trade policy, orientation of R&D, and other dimensions of state-supported “modernization” of agriculture. When globalization and neoliberalism eclipsed Fordism, resistance had to be reorganized and made plausibly effective again. These actions and movements of resistance embody that historical effort and the aspirations of those who wish to fight domination.

Despite these people’s genuine desire to oppose aspects of neoliberal agri-food, many of the forms of resistance that they carry out do not transcend the sphere of market relations. More importantly, they do not go beyond individually and consumption-based actions and processes of individual responsabilization that constitute parts of the neoliberal ideology and political message (Brislen, Chapter 13 in this volume; Sankey, Chapter 10 in this volume; Gonzalez-Duarte, Chapter 11 in this volume; Vansteenkiste, Chapter 12 in this volume). Often, they refer to local processes that generate spatially, politically, economically, and ecologically limited alternatives to the current structural conditions and the power of transnational corporate agri-food. As discussed earlier (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume), individually and consumption-based forms of resistance can, at best, offer the establishment of more humane and egalitarian forms of capitalism. They do relatively little to alter the systemic exploitation of human and natural resources and diminish the power of corporations. Ultimately, these forms of resistance rely on the very market mechanisms that generated the problems they attempt to solve. The ensuing vicious circle of employing capitalism to transcend it denies the structural contradictions embedded in the market system and accepts conditions that make the de-commodification of food impossible. In a market system, food is always a commodity that requires the existence of private entities

that produce and administer it for sale. The problematic nature of market-based resistance rests on the attempt to democratize a system without altering its privately held control and addressing the issue of power relations. To be sure – and despite these limits – projects aimed at the democratization of market relations remain pragmatic alternatives to the current, corporate controlled, market capitalism. As such, these market-based solutions do offer progressive forms of reorganization of agri-food. Importantly, because mechanisms of appropriation and concentration remain fundamentally unchecked, these reformist programs should be understood as part of a “treadmill” of resistance. Awareness of the contradictions and limitations and acknowledgement of what they can and cannot accomplish position analysts and practitioners to resist with their eyes open.

In this context, the co-optation of alternative market-based initiatives remains the single most effective way through which corporate power has been able to address challenges coming from activist groups (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume; Tilzey, Chapter 4 in this volume). Co-optation not only allows corporations to claim membership in alternative movements, but also de-facto neuters these movements by blurring the distinction between dominant and oppositional groups (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume). Simultaneously, market-based resistance fails to engage state power because the individualization of resistance shifts contestation from the public domain into the private sphere. While the state has historically been an institution that not only depends on the expansion of market relations, but also supports the interests of dominant groups, its contradictory historical evolution has allowed the concomitant existence of emancipatory forms of state action. As the capitalist state developed into a contested and contradictory terrain, it has been employed to advance struggles against neoliberal agri-food (Carneiro dos Reis, Chapter 6 in this volume; Sankey, Chapter 10 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume). Yet, the individualization and privatization of resistance embedded in market-based and technocratic opposition obfuscates a critical and public evaluation of state action. The resulting social protections serve to simultaneously contain denunciations of the state as an agent of repression and the potential for mobilization of the state in the role of emancipatory actor.

The downplaying of the structural dimension of domination is further reaffirmed through the moralization and localization of resistance embedded in market oriented forms of resistance. The moralization of resistance refers to processes that address change in terms of abstract *categorical imperatives*. These are constructions that separate behavior from the historical conditions that contextualize it and transform it into an exclusive voluntary act. Rather than in the sphere of power relations, the act of resisting is contextualized in self-contained behavioral models that find in reason, consciousness, and understanding their sources of existence. Accordingly, the production of “better food” becomes a goal that is considered achievable through morally appropriate behavior that transcends the consideration of the relations of production that shape the current agri-food system. More specifically, the overcoming of the contradictions

of industrial neoliberal agri-food is viewed as if it depends exclusively on the will of participants rather than the structural conditions that define it. While the moral justification of actions provides legitimacy to resistance, it is not a substitute for the struggle against economic power.

Localization of resistance refers to the tendency to focus on local efforts to produce new ways of food provisioning. While highly practiced and practicable, these strategies of resistance and many of the analyses that probes their characteristics and existence tend to ignore broader social relations and contexts. They are conceptualized and viewed as if they could exist and prosper in isolation from the conditions and characteristics of socioeconomic system as a whole. Additionally, there is a tendency to depict community-based organizations and alliances as unified fronts battling corporate neoliberal agri-food. Yet, as these very analyses also demonstrate, communities are not necessarily homogenous. Not only do they differ in terms of political postures, world-views and interests, but also, more importantly, their members occupy different structural positions within society. Accordingly, while these groups/movements often maintain sufficiently high levels of solidarity to cement differences and generate political strength, it is equally the case that they display fragmentation, incoherence, and frictions that reduce and also undermine their effectiveness and in some cases existence.

The essential limit of consumption-based forms of resistance is their inability to address structural and systemic conditions. In other words, they are unable to provide strategies that could address change in the overall system of production. In their attempt to create often locally based alternative forms of provision of agri-food, they adopt voluntarist approaches that underplay the relevance of power relations and broader socioeconomic forces. By avoiding to address the contradictions of capitalism, these strategies often take an escapist turn that open the door for corporate co-optation and new and more sophisticated forms of domination.

Resistance through the state

The second ideal type refers to a view of resistance in which opposition to the neoliberal regime of agri-food is carried out through actions directed by and/or associated with *the nation-state* (Carneiro dos Reis, Chapter 6 in this volume; O'Neill, Chapter 8 in this volume; Sekine and Bonanno, Chapter 7 in this volume). In various ways, the state is theorized as having emancipatory capabilities and as an actor capable of promoting processes that not only diminish corporate power but also offer substantive alternatives to industrial agri-food. It responds to an understanding of resistance that calls for the establishment of a new form of regulated capitalism or neo-Fordism (Bonanno 2017). For the three immediate post-War World Two decades, regulated capitalism offered a stable and relatively democratic form of economic expansion that shaped the evolution of agri-food (Bonanno et al., 1994; McMichael 1994). The establishment of a regulated form of capitalism was aimed at controlling the unwanted consequences

of capitalism in the wake of prolonged and recurrent economic crises (i.e., the Great Depression) and the adoption of totalitarian forms of resolution of these crises (i.e., Fascist and Communist regimes). It involved state-directed planning and the concomitant political identification and pursuit of socioeconomic goals. In many developed and developing countries alike, state management of spending and direct investment shaped agri-food development.

This classic Fordist system was, however, declared unsustainable and opposed by neoliberal corporate forces that stressed its ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and, above all, its inability to generate sufficient rates of profit. Criticisms to Fordism came also from left-leaning groups that were dissatisfied with the unmet promises of shared benefits of economic expansion, adequate job creation, and sustainable community development, as well as the expansion of top-down bureaucratic control of everyday life. Caught between the demand for higher profit and less paternalism, Fordism ended and was replaced by neoliberalism in the late 1970s. Its demise, however, never eradicated hopes that the state could guide socioeconomic development. After all, and despite neoliberal claims to the contrary, state regulation is essential for the functioning of capitalism (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). While the tension between the need for state regulation of capitalism and calls for its reduction will hardly end in the foreseeable future, state action is employed to oppose, but also support, the neoliberal agri-food regime.

To be sure, this intervention is, by definition, nation-based. It involves, first and foremost, the actions of the nation-state. However, it would be a mistake to translate this nation-based dimension of state action into exclusive domestic intervention. Nation-states have been essential institutions in the creation of global neoliberalism primarily through the deregulation of international markets and the establishment of trade agreements and global trade organizations such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization. Yet, the ability of the nation-state to direct socioeconomic development has historically been linked to relatively closed national economies. This has been the case under Fordism when production and consumption as well as the classes involved in these processes were primarily – albeit not exclusively – domestic, as under Fordism it was possible to identify companies and products with nation-states. Global neoliberalism has forever changed this condition precisely because it proposed a system designed to break the domestic-based equilibrium (and pact) between capital and labor. The transnationalization of production, and the creation of global networks that it entails, cannot be controlled by institutions whose spheres of influence and political jurisdictions are not global. The hypermobility of capital that defines global neoliberalism is based on the ability of capital to bypass nation-state control. Often mistakenly theorized in terms of the lack of relevance of the nation-state, neoliberal corporate forces have employed the nation-state to enhance their power and defeat opposition.

Accordingly, rather than being “ineffective,” the nation-state has been a vehicle for the neoliberalization and corporatization of the economy by advancing policies of domestic and international deregulation that have defined the

evolution of capitalism since the 1980s. This historical evolution of the relationship between the nation-state and the economy supports the view that stresses the contested nature of the nation-state and the centrality of class in structuring political conflict (Bonanno and Constance 2008; Streeck 2016). The nation-state is a complex entity with various components that do not necessarily work in unison. While its existence remains dependent upon the continuous accumulation of capital, state legitimacy is obtained through support that it receives from the citizenry. This condition mandates mediation among conflicting social classes as well as actions that support subordinate groups and alleviate the socio-economic consequences of crises. The state, therefore, is not simply an instrument of the ruling class (Fletes and Ocampo, Chapter 9 in this volume; O'Neill, Chapter 8 in this volume). It is also capable of supporting the struggles of subordinate groups and those advocating for public goods. It is this emancipatory dimension that has been employed to counter the neoliberal regime of agri-food. The wealth redistribution and reforms conducted by the Brazilian state (Carneiro dos Reis, Chapter 6 in this volume), the processes of collectivization promoted by the Kenyan state (O'Neill, Chapter 8 this volume), accountability demands advanced by the state focused on how agri-environmental conservation payments are awarded to farmers (Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume), and the attempt of the Japanese state to regulate markets to the advantage of small local producers (Sekine and Bonanno, Chapter 7 in this volume) are all instances of state-directed resistance.

This view of the emancipatory dimension of state action is tempered by at least three problems. The first refers to the limits of classic Fordism that remain unaddressed in neo-Fordist proposals. More specifically, the issues of the fiscal crisis of the state and the crisis of legitimation are renewed in neo-Fordist forms of resistance. The fiscal crisis of the state finds its origins in the finite nature of state funds, their dependence on the often-resisted taxation of private actors, and the political and ideological opposition that the state encounters when funds are spent in support of subordinate groups. All these conditions have historically created gaps between the financial requirements of emancipatory programs and the financial resources that are actually mobilized. The crisis of legitimation is a direct consequence of the fiscal crisis of the state and attempts of the state to manage the economy. It specifically refers to the inability of the state to justify its actions and to satisfy the contradictory demands of the citizenry. While complex, this process can be captured by two forms of dissatisfaction. The first refers to unattended demands of subordinate groups. The negative consequence of continuous processes of concentration of capital can hardly be met by state intervention even when most advanced processes of wealth redistribution and reorganization of production and consumption are implemented. The result is a situation in which unmet requests regularly surpass accomplishments. The second form of dissatisfaction comes from the ruling class that finds actions in favor of subordinated classes damaging to the accumulation of capital and economic growth, constantly wasteful, and embodying the harmful power of bureaucracy over individual freedom.

The second problem of neo-Fordist proposals refers to public attempts to control an economic system that remains under the direction of private actors. Regardless of the extent of state intervention, the control of the economy is carried out by private actors that, in mature capitalism, are predominantly large transnational corporations and the global capitalist class that owns and controls them. In this context, the nation-state is faced with political, economic, and social challenges. Politically, the nation-state needs to maintain systems of wealth generation that not only remain subordinate to the generation of profit but that also require a significant level of compatibility to corporate interests. They need to be palatable to the global corporate class. Economically, the nation-state is faced with the ability of corporations to take flight and bypass state actions and, de facto, neutralize state policies that do not conform with their designs. Simultaneously, the nation-state needs also to respond to corporate requests of assistance that, if unattended, would affect the performance of these economic giants and associated sociopolitical consequences (i.e., the “too big to fail” problem). In this category we find not only military and diplomatic actions, but also direct economic actions such as those of that characterized the corporate bailouts in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Socially, concessions to corporations and the capitalist class are resisted at the popular level. In the absence of an organized and conscious class opposition – as it is the case in the late 2010s – this opposition translates into the development of populist movements/protest that destabilize state actions without limiting corporate power.

The third issue faced by neo-Fordist programs involves the difficult relationship between local initiatives and the broader global economy. Because of their overall dependence on capital accumulation, the economic profitability of local economic initiatives often involves the insertion of these initiatives in global circuits of production and/or consumption and their exposure to the – difficult to oppose – co-optation by corporate forces. Simultaneously, state support of these initiatives requires funding that is also often dependent on global economic initiatives. The case of Brazil, and similar emerging economies, offers a useful example. The powerful process of wealth redistribution and democratic restructuring in agri-food in Brazil (Carneiro dos Reis, Chapter 6 in this volume) has been accompanied by state-sponsored programs that created transnational food corporations (Musacchio and Lazzarini 2014). These corporations have been established with public funds but are privately managed. Accordingly, they operate like any large transnational corporation with relatively limited engagement with socially oriented political goals.

Artificial negativity and unidimensionality

The third ideal type involves a theorization of resistance that sees it as ultimately *controlled by the very corporate forces and neoliberal impulses* that it supposedly opposes. This mode of resistance gives the illusion of the existence of opposition, but in reality these critical expressions function as part of a process that supports the neoliberal corporate regime. This type of simulative politics can serve

to maintain cognitive dissonance and the legitimacy of socio-material relations that are understood to be irretrievably flawed (i.e., unsustainable) (Blühdorn 2007). The corporate co-optation of resistance, resistance that does not alter the market-based character of agri-food, and resistance that is proposed through neoliberal ideological constructs, are all empirical dimensions of this ideal type (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume; Som Castellano this volume; Tilzey, Chapter 4 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume). The organization of the neoliberal system conceals the fact that contemporary resistance remains based either on market-based social relations and/or on the actions of the bourgeois state. This situation implies that the various attempts to democratize agri-food production and consumption do not transcend the sphere of capitalism and are class-based nature. It further stresses that, as resistance remains contained under the sphere of capitalism, it can propose only those changes that do not transcend the ability of corporate forces to control the economy and society.

The notion of artificial negativity captures the essence of this theorization. Originally formulated to complement the theory of unidimensionality of mature capitalism (Marcuse 2002 [1964]), it stresses the false dimension of resistance. According to the theory of the unidimensionality of mature capitalism, the growth of capitalism – and the associated improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the social groups that form it – is achieved through the standardization of behavior. The standardization of behavior maintains the illusion of freedom, while in reality it mandates the repression of all forms of action that do not conform with the requirements of the accumulation of capital. The theory of artificial negativity adds to this classic construction by stressing the corporate-constructed character of opposition, for it is in the interest of the reproduction of the dominant system to maintain a visible yet ineffective form of resistance (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume). In its original formulation, artificial negativity referred to regulated capitalism and the claim that this process of concealed domination was orchestrated by the nation-state. Under the neoliberal regime, the corporate ability to control and manipulate resistance transcends the public sphere to involve processes that are located in the civil society and the market. In both cases of regulated capitalism and neoliberalism, however, artificial negativity represses freedom and consciousness by providing ineffective and ultimately false forms of opposition. This condition is instrumental for the exercise of corporate domination, as it legitimizes representations of diversity and contestation in a context in which absolute domination prevails. In this sense, resistance is a functional requirement of systemic stability (Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume). Beyond giving a false impression of meaningful dissent, sponsorship of resistance allows hegemons to capture information and learn from the environment (Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume).

Effective resistance to the neoliberal regime in agri-food requires the unmasking of artificial negativity. As stressed by the earlier mentioned chapters of this volume, the unmasking of artificial negativity remains difficult particularly in a situation in which resistance is not counter-hegemonic (Tilzey, Chapter 4 in

this volume). Yet, three particular instances can be viewed as generating some possible optimism for the future. The first refers to the contradictions of the neoliberal agri-food system, the second refers to the existence of an ongoing debate on resistance, and the third focuses on new patterns of connection between academia and socioecological problems. As far as the contradictions of neoliberal agri-food are concerned, their high level of unsustainability constitutes a constant reminder of the need for change. As change is required, its execution is transformed into a contested terrain in which space for counter-hegemonic action could materialize. However, as it is currently the case, change can be equally characterized by corporate control and corporate friendly ways to manage contradictions (see below). As for the existence of a debate on resistance, the development of a broader conversation on what constitute effective counter-hegemonic resistance provides, at a minimum, a constant reminder of corporate power and its negative effects on agri-food and society. Simultaneously, however, it could be turned into an escapist way to express opposition by uncritically dwelling on the existence of ineffective forms of resistance. In terms of new modes of academic engagement, the emergence of public sociology and public scholarship, more generally, points to an important shift to which we attach some optimism. There seems to be a general understanding that to participate in substantive resistance and in order to step out of a pattern of development in which research and teaching in higher education serve to deepen structural problems, academics must articulate new relationships with new publics (Asara, Otero, Demaria, and Corbera 2015). Within the domain of agri-food studies, Friedland's (2010) proposal to create a platform for engaged scholarship, "Alternative Agri-food Researchers Without Borders," stands as the most ambitious expression of this thinking. While Friedland's vision has not materialized, we perceive that these new relationships and new modes of scholarship are increasingly institutionalized through provision of incentives and changes in culture in some spaces within the academy.

Conclusions

One of the key aspects that emerges from the instances and theorizations of resistance presented in this volume is that current efforts are unlikely to produce lasting effective change. They, more likely, will tend to mitigate rather than drastically alter and/or end the patterns of domination of people and nature that characterize contemporary agri-food. This can still be seen as an emancipatory result and the expression of the fact that neoliberal corporate agri-food is constantly opposed and through this opposition modified. However, it can also be viewed as a situation in which many, if not all, the existing forms of resistance dwell on those very individually based actions that constitute the essence of the neoliberal organization of society. The lack of counter-hegemonic power of individual- and community-based initiatives is undeniable, along with the fact that individual spending and esoteric forms of production-consumption are often controlled by corporate forces and transformed into instruments of

corporate expansion. Given these conditions, the task of defining the meaning and strength of resistance not only emerges as a fundamental charge, but it is also a question that should occupy center stage in future debates. The call is to critically and constructively interrogate the boundaries of current resistance rather than uncritically stressing the emancipatory will associated with the present expressions of opposition to corporate domination.

While absent from the cases presented in this book and requiring a treatment that the space allowed for this discussion does not permit, the food sovereignty movement stands as a global initiative that tackles structural conditions and that it is not consumption based. As indicated in the introduction, however, its problematic dimension remains and, as a promising initiative, it invites support but also scrutiny. By challenging the commodification of food and conceptualizing access to food and land as rights, it has emerged as, arguably, the most relevant contemporary counter-hegemonic resistance to neoliberal agri-food. Simultaneously, the pre-capitalist approach of peasant initiatives, the localist dimension of urban food councils, and the overall sectorial character of its claims make it an area that should be the subject of critical evaluation.

The systemic character of neoliberalism

In this context, the systemic nature of the neoliberal regime has emerged as a defining sign of the time (Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume, Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume, Tilzey, Chapter 4 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume). Neoliberalism is not simply a dimension of agri-food: It is a characteristic of mature capitalism. Accordingly, alternatives that are introduced and pursued at the sectorial level are destined to remain incomplete and unable to challenge the totality of the corporate domination of society. They may satisfy the conscience of some of the actors involved and can generate some tangible results, but, they also do very little to address the overall organization of society. It follows that agri-food activism as well as its related scholarship must transcend sectorialism and widen its scope. While this remains an unmet objective, calls for broader alliances and visions clearly emerge from the analyses presented in this volume. The importance of linking agri-food with environmental struggles (Gonzalez-Duarte, Chapter 11 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume), socioeconomic development (Fletes and Ocampo, Chapter 9 in this volume; Carneiro dos Reis, Chapter 6 this volume; Vansteenkiste, Chapter 12 in this volume), gender emancipation (Som Castellano, Chapter 5 in this volume), international political economy (O'Neill, Chapter 8 in this volume; Tilzey, Chapter 4 in this volume), and broader political initiatives (Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume; Sekine and Bonanno, Chapter 7 in this volume) is understood and stressed. Similarly, these contributions show the limit of the common tendency to award too much centrality to food and agriculture in a context in which processes of neoliberal domination have gone beyond the simple sphere of production and consumption (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume).

The limits of a sectorial approach to resistance involve also the question of locality. It is certainly the case that neoliberalism in its global domination manifests itself at the local level. It surfaces in forms that assume specific connotations accordingly to characteristics of local social relations. This is a fact that is made evident from the analyses presented in this volume. However, the importance of local social relations cannot be confused with a justification of the desirability and effectiveness of exclusively local forms of resistance and with a dismissal of the global nature of neoliberal capitalism. The opening of markets and the hypermobility of capital that defines the implementation of neoliberalism worldwide are constitutive elements of contemporary society. They cannot be simply ignored to stress local initiatives and solutions that contemplate the exclusive emancipation of local actors. Activism and scholarship are asked to confront the issue of locally based forms of resistance and address the global character of neoliberalism.

The agents and instruments of resistance

The limits of individually and locally based forms of resistance mentioned earlier beg the questions of the identification of effective agents and instruments of resistance, or put differently, the social forces that could oppose neoliberal capitalism through successful means. The oppositional role that the labor movement played in the past and its leadership vis-à-vis other twentieth century movements (i.e., civil rights, women, students) have not been renewed and replaced (Streeck 2016). Moreover, the instruments of struggle that it successfully employed have been made ineffective by the neoliberal transnationalization of social relations and frontal attack on unions and ideologies of the left. This crisis of the labor movement and its struggles has been followed by the development of consumption- and community-based forms of resistance that, as indicated earlier, are largely centered on individual initiatives, views that do not question capitalism and replace the idea of collective action with personal resilience. These new instruments of resistance downplay structural dimensions to propose individual efforts to cope with change and the evolution of the market.

While these instruments allow consumers and local residents to express their opposition to the neoliberal regime, they also represent a rather comfortable and safe mode of resisting that does not challenge corporate domination but, in fact, often allows corporations to create and control more – and frequently more affluent – new markets. This is an individualization of resistance that permits the shifting of political and cognitive energy from the arena of public contestation to the sphere of individual market based governance (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume). As these forms of resistance flourish, the growth of global neoliberalism continues to be based on the rampant exploitation of poor segments of the labor force and natural resources. Relevantly, as labor exploitation grows, discussions about labor are left at the margins of conversations about opposition. In this context, the exploitative dimensions of capitalist production have

been either dismissed or, at best, redefined in terms of production efficiency, consumer convenience, cost reduction and compliance with minimal “consumer accepted” but corporate managed private standards. Ultimately, twentieth century struggles for the de-commodification of food have been replaced by discussions about food quality and its commercial value and availability.

As alternative consumption and community-based forms of resistance are co-opted by corporations and, simultaneously, exclude large segments of the world population that cannot participate, the limits of the instruments of resistance employed are evident. This is not simply an outcome of the implementation of contemporary forms of resistance. Perhaps more significantly, it is a dimension of the power of neoliberalism. The emergence of the phenomena of individualization and responsabilization, the decisive use of psychological forms of control as illustrated by Foucauldian biopolitics, the limits of public institutions to control corporate global hypermobility, the wide acceptance of the logic of the market and its notion of individual accountability, are all important components of the strength of neoliberal domination (Bonanno, Chapter 2 in this volume; Busch, Chapter 1 in this volume, Tilzey, Chapter 4 in this volume, Sekine and Bonanno, Chapter 7 in this volume; Wolf, Chapter 3 in this volume). In essence, as resistance has not taken a counter-hegemonic form, corporate power has expanded in ways not experienced in the past.

The instability of mature capitalism is also evident. The rampant environmental and climate change crises, the instability of financial and economic markets, and the crisis of communities domestically and abroad – among other things – have made dissatisfaction with the current status quo one of the most explicit phenomena of the twenty-first century. Accordingly, calls for change are widespread. In the absence of projects and social actors that propose a systemic transformation and address structural issues, however, reformist proposals emerge as the most plausible alternatives. These are initiatives that do not alter the overall organization of contemporary capitalism. Moreover, and given the power of corporations, the most probable form through which reforms will be carried out is through a corporate-directed process. In effect, as part of the expansion of corporate power, corporate actors have already understood and acted upon the importance of reforming mature capitalism by including some of the demands stemming from resistance movements/groups into their agenda. In the case of agri-food, the demands for food quality, consumer satisfaction, and actions in protection of the environment are recognized by corporate actors and viewed as items that could expand market shares and profit. Further, investments in securing value chains in relation to sociopolitical and ecological risks reflects the demands of the investment marketplace.

Accordingly, corporate actors have initiated a process of “pseudo democratization” of their actions that unfolds without altering existing power relations. This change from above allows corporations to control alternative proposals and, in so doing, to counter resistance in ways that largely neutralize it. This neutralization of resistance is further reinforced by the continuous acceptance of market-based forms of production and distribution of agri-food items and

the concomitant emphasis on individual actions and the downplaying of the centrality of structural factors. It has been contended that this situation entails some emancipatory outcomes nevertheless as claims concerning better quality food, a safer environment, and better socioeconomic conditions of producers are kept in the public debates and in some cases – albeit partially – addressed. It can be equally argued, however, that because of the lack of substantive opposition, these concessions can be reversed at any time. As past instances, such as the case of the crisis of Fordism, have eloquently demonstrated, the inability of subordinate groups to substantively oppose dominant forces leads to changes and conditions that advance the interests of corporate actors. As this situation is likely to continue, this is one more reason to critically explore the theme of resistance to neoliberal agri-food.

Note

- 1 This is the case even in the frequent occurrence in which actors are not familiar with the concept, scope, and characteristics of neoliberalism. Their understanding of resistance is often directed at specific circumstances as they contest lack of access to food, its quality, environmental degradation, inequality, imperialism, violence, lack of personal sovereignty, lack of transparency, and more.

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