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AGRI-FOOD UNDER THE AFFECT OF GLOBAL NEOLIBERALISM

KEY WORDS

Agri-Food Neoliberalism Food Regime

INTRODUCTION

I will explain the difference of pre-neoliberal and neoliberal age by three periods of agri-food politics named “food regimes”: colonial-diasporic food regime, mercantile-industrial food regime, corporate food regime. “Food regime analysis – first introduced by Friedmann (1987) and later elaborated by Friedmann and McMichael (1989) – combines political economy, political ecology and historical analysis to explain how particular relations of food production and consumption are central to the functioning and reproduction of global capitalism. The basic definition of a food regime is a rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale“ (Holt-Gimenez, Shattuck 2011: 110).

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The first, colonial-diasporic food regime (1870–1930s), emerged by means of increasing wheat market in Europe. It gave railways income from freight, expanding states a way to hold territory against the dispossessed, and diasporic Europeans a way to make an income (Friedmann 2005: 232). Colonial-diasporic food regime is defined “cheap food and raw materials from the tropical and temperate settler colonies fueled industrialization in Europe” (Friedmann and McMichael 1989, 100).

The second, mercantile-industrial food regime (1950s-1970s), was characterized by “the flow of food from South to North as a transfer of US agricultural surpluses to the South began in the form of food aid” (Friedmann 2005: 232-3). U.S. sold its agricultural surpluses abroad as dumping and by the Green Revolution for production of a few cereals. And fertilizers, pesticides and mechanization became widespread in the South.

The third, corporate food regime (1980s to the present), emerged from the global economic shocks of the 1970s and 1980s ushering in the current period of neo-liberal capitalist expansion: “During the 1980s Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) broke down tariffs, dismantled national marketing boards, eliminated price guarantees and destroyed national agricultural research and extension systems in the Global South. These policies were embedded in international treaties through bilateral and international Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, and its Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), institutionalized the process of agricultural liberalization on a global scale by restricting the rights of sovereign states to regulate food and agriculture.” (Holt-Gimenez 2011: 111)

McMichael summarizes the process well: «In the first place, the U.S. introduced a redefinition of food security as “best provided through a smooth-functioning world

market” into the Uruguay Round (1986-1994) in order to secure a competitive advantage for U.S. agribusiness via the GATT, and subsequently the WTO’s (AoA). Second, and related, the WTO retains this mercantilist imprint in managing asymmetrical agricultural relations, founded in an unequal state system. Third, corporate agriculture’s trajectory is governed by historic divisions of labor and current financial mergers that centralize agribusiness capital. Unlike industry or services, the capitalization of agriculture retains important spatial dimensions, expressed politically in Northern agribusiness lobbies and farm sector policies geared to producing (and dumping) food surpluses» (McMichael 2005: 277). And all these process made agri-food policies dependent on transnational corporations (TNCs).

By the strong support of IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, developing countries started to product high-value cash crops instead of domestic food production (Aydin 2010: 151). And it destroys local knowledge via agro-industrial monocultures.

At the neoliberal age, agricultural biotechnology is progressing rapidly and it is supported by intellectual property regimes. “From the perspective of international policy, the ownership and use of plant genetic material is governed by complex legal and policy agreements dealing with patents, plant variety protection and the free-exchange of seeds” (Lee 2012: 227). And the corporate ‘gene giants’ already account for more than one-third of the global seed market and 100 percent of the transgenic seed market (Shiva 2000: 9).

Farm land grabbing is also a type of neo-imperialism at the neoliberal age. In formal words, foreign land deals refer to large tracts of productive lands in the poor countries via purchases or long-term leases by rich countries and their corporations, which need resources to produce crops either for food, feedstock, or biofuels in commercial and export quantities (Farmlandgrab, 2011). In other words, “the acquisition (lease, concession, outright purchase) by corporations or states of large areas of farmland (>10,000 ha), in another country and on a long-term basis (often 30-99 years), for the production of basic foods that will then be exported” (GRAIN 2011).

CONCLUSION

At the neoliberal age, governments serve just for infrastructural investments to attract TNCs’ investments. And agri-food policies of almost every states, especially in Third World, have transformed into an area in which TNCs realize their aims freely. As a result of this global conjuncture, whole ecological system (people, animals, flora, soil, water, air, climate, ect.) is suffering. And farmers also weaken in front of TNCs. But this situation is not sustainable and agri-food is imperilment.

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