
H-France Review Vol. 14 (September 2014), No. 149

Chaia Heller, *Food, Farms and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agricultural and Genetically Modified Crops*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013. xiii + 333 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$25.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8223-5127-6.

Review by Alessandro Stanziani, EHESS, CNRS.

Chaia Heller is an anthropologist and political activist, author of several articles and a monography on peasants' life, biotechnology and food quality. In this book, she studies the French Confédération Paysanne, one of the largest farmers' unions in France, and its fights against genetically modified organisms and hormone beef. The author analyzes the union's strategies and discourses and claims its importance in enhancing nowadays post-industrial world and anti-globalization movements. The introduction discusses the definition of industrial and post-industrial agriculture, the former being identified, among other features, with extensive/intensive farming methods; chemicalization of farming, mechanization, monocropping, governmental subsidies and the development of fast food, frozen food, etc. Post-industrial agriculture is defined by production of staple crops (such as wheat) in the global North, dumping in commercial policies, biotechnology, development of organic food, abandon of rural areas and alter-globalization discourse. Of course, there is no single postindustrial agricultural condition insofar as this condition responds to specific local environmental and cultural conditions.

Yet in this era, small holders find increasing difficulties to survive in both the Global South and the Global North. Small holders thus develop multifunctional activities, such as farming, agro-tourism, and engagement in public works. At the same time, since the 1970s, these difficulties have also provoked increasing resistance. Groups like the Confédération Paysanne call for a new world built out of a different logic, one that is neither preindustrial nor industrial. This book seeks to understand this movement, examining actors' understanding of the problems and solutions associated with the postindustrial condition. In the mid-1990s discussions focused on risk (genetically-modified organisms [GMO], Mad Cow Disease, etc.), while in the following years the accent was put on solidarity (among small farmers all around the world, consumers hostile to MacDonald's and industrial food). The author acknowledges the important overlapping between these two principles; for instance there is often a dimension of solidarity in discussions related to GMO risk; in turn, the Confédération Paysanne while stressing the principle of solidarity makes also appeal to the precaution principle. Would this mean that risk and instrumental rationalities are capitalistic while solidarity is not?

Heller rightly answers that while all capitalism is instrumental, not all instrumental activity occurs within capitalist framework. In this context, while the French case tends to demystify scientific expertise, it also celebrates forms of knowledge, such as peasants' savoir faire. Chapter two analyzes the new peasant movement. It distinguishes a period of "peasantification" of France between 1870 and 1945 from what occurred between 1945 and 1975. It was only in this last period that French agriculture industrialized. A new powerful union was created, the FNSEA (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats Exploitants Agriculteurs, National Federation of Agricultural Unions), which is still today the first agricultural union in France, the major opponent of the Confédération Paysanne. At the turn of the 1960s and the 1970s new trends appeared: the emergence of post-industrial agriculture was accompanied by the emergence of part-time farmers and an emerging logic of solidarity.

In 1973, the so-called Larzac movement emerged (named for the Causse du Larzac plateau, in southern France, where the expansion of a military base put in danger the local production of Roquefort cheese). New tensions added in the late 1970s-early 1980 around the use of hormones in beef. In this context, many farmers felt increasingly disillusioned with the FNSEA accused to defend industrial agriculture. Chapter three enters into the details of the political origin of the *Confédération paysanne*. This chapter, like the previous one, suffers nevertheless from a lack of context. The evolution of agriculture, its different paths according to the products and the regions and its impact of the European politics are briefly mentioned. Yet they are essential to understanding the emergence of the new union given the fact that the dynamics of prices, politics and the whole economy was not the same in wheat, wine or milk producing regions.

The same can be said for the members of the movement: the author presents sketches about its main leaders; however we do not know who the members are; we just find sudden statements such as “most” of the union members made high school, “most” identify themselves as working class (!) and so on and so forth. We have no idea of how many people she interviewed nor what does it mean “small farmers” to her and, above all, to the actors themselves. We do not know neither from which regions of France they come from, nor what they produce. Now all these information would have been essential to understand the social, political and economic motivations to adhere to the movement.

Part 2 and 3 look more solid, in particular chapters five through ten. This is the real core of the book, in which we learn a lot about anti-GMO positions in France, the defense of the Roquefort, and the connection of the French movement with the global south on the one hand, with the anti-globalization movement on the other hand. In all these pages, the complexity of the French and the international movements are vividly depicted, as well as the background of highly media's events such as the Seattle conference. We also find detailed pictures of José Bové and René Riesel, the two leaders of the French movement, with personal souvenirs of the author which perfectly integrate the description of their political activity. The book is also extremely useful when it stresses the different perceptions of hormones, GMO, Bové's acts in the USA and in France. In the former, according to the author, people could not even correctly understand French and Bové's attitudes in particular that they interpreted according to the American perception of violence, protest, food and production. These chapters also help explaining the passage of the Confederation discourse from risk to solidarity and, starting from this, nowadays discussions on the political philosophy of the economy. In particular the accent economics and economic policies put on productivity and efficiency is contrasted to anti-global and solidarity oriented attitudes.

The last chapter discusses alter-globalization, water and food concerns in the 2000s. Thus in 2001, building on the momentum of the growing alter-globalization movement, an informal alliance of groups from around the world came together to create an annual counter summit to the World Economic Forum. A World Social Forum was created and it made appeal not to workers but to peasants, landless, indigenous people, and women. This met another movement, *La Via Campesina* which in 1996 formally adopted the term food sovereignty to replace food security. This was not just rhetoric: the aim was to transform actors from the global south into active voices. The problem therefore was not so much how to solve problems of scarcity but how to reach this goal through active development of the global south. Therefore, by moving from discourses on food security to sovereignty, subaltern actors made visible their right to produce their own food rather than simply receive aid from the North. “Food sovereignty points to the human right to feed communities by using local land areas” (p. 267).

Yet this claim had to face not only national sovereignty but also supranational institutions such as the *Codex Alimentarius*. Since the WTO was formed in 1994, the *Codex* has served as the sole body charged with evaluating a country's claims against importing foodstuffs they consider problematic. According to many voices within the anti-globalization movement, the *Codex* has become an undemocratic body that protects the interests of corporations rather than people to be fed.

The conclusion focuses on four main points issued from this study and from the particular experience the author lived. First, activists need to cultivate discursive reflexivity, that is, awareness

of the ways actors and political activists themselves construct their political and social claims. In other words, peasants, farmers, etc., should develop a critical knowledge able to put under discussion notions such as capitalism, state, or food security. Otherwise, according to Heller, they would never be able to get free from hegemonic knowledge. The question one can raise is whether one single hegemonic knowledge exists, whether an alternative definition of, saying, capitalism, can overthrow it and how the boundaries between hegemonic and subaltern knowledge are identified. For example, most of the notions put into evidence by the subaltern studies were already developed by the British colonial power. It was not an anti-imperial but a perfect colonial knowledge.

The second conclusion the author draws is that food-related social movements needs to be located within the postindustrial condition. This is necessary to identify counterstrategies; Heller quotes her own experience on GMO: "Once I viewed GMO as postindustrial artifact, I came to understand how agricultural biotechnology came to be used by so many farmers when there is so little data indicating that they provide long-term benefits". This point is interesting and powerful for it allows to understand social movements without any shortcoming and taking history into due respect. It is one of the best qualities of this study.

The third conclusion deals with "the French contradiction" between anti-GMO and anti-globalization on the one hand, and industrialization and post-industrialization of society, on the other hand. It is a difficult point to deal with; we would need a complex historical, political and anthropological analysis of the French society during the globalization era, which, unfortunately, does not make part of this study.

The fourth conclusion: "toward an anthropology of instrumentalism" expresses the most militant side of this book: the author advocates the importance of the movement and claims for its major political and social importance.

This is a very well written book and it offers in particular a well-documented report on social movements in agrarian France; its best chapter are those (mostly the second part of the book) where the author relates about her attending to the meetings, their atmosphere, and adds personal souvenirs and details. The book is weak, however, when it enters conventional scholarly debates; several theories are briefly sketched (pp. 58-64) and put one after the other without a real discussion: political ecology, the actor-network theory, Bruno Latour's and Michel Callon's sociology of science and public action, not to forget Alain Touraine's theory of social movement. All these approached are briefly mentioned without being really used to discuss the emergence and evolution of the peasant movement. Other theories suddenly appear page 107 when the author seeks to solve the philosophical problem of the tension between nature and culture in the western civilization in one page.

The second weakness concerns the empirical analysis and data on the evolution of politics and the economy in France, Europe, and the whole world. It is certain that discourse makes part of politics and the dynamics of real world. At the same time, it seems difficult to ignore or just very shortly mention the political, social economic trends underlying the object of this study, that is, the Confédération Paysanne. The meat market was under a very important evolution during all the studied period: was this relevant?

European politics and subsidies to agriculture were also a crucial stake and so it was the adhesion to the euros: is it a chance that José Bové had his own best glory moment precisely when the euro was under discussion? To which extent did this process contribute to the national political relevance of José Bové at this moment and his relative eclipse after that?

In short: a militant, interesting book, with insight into the anti-globalization movement, closer to a chronicle than to an anthropological study; the academic sights of it are probably the weakest sides. However, put aside the first hundred pages, this is an important book to understand the reaction of some part of the French society to globalization.

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ISSN 1553-9172