

The food wars by walden bello

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Food insecurity is linked to various issues such as poverty, low income, poor infrastructure, inequitable access to land, water, credit and markets. Food security is also threatened due to natural disasters such as floods, droughts and further exacerbated by internal conflicts which can dislocate rural and farming communities. These issues and challenges are the normal and repetitive debates among the global community of practice regarding food security while the needs and necessities of the peasant farmers, who are responsible for the majority of food production around the globe, are not addressed.

In *The Food Wars*, Walden Bello presents the important and burning issues of the North-South power gap and hierarchy regarding food security. Bello depicts and argues the role of the Bretton Woods institutions influencing agricultural policies in developing countries, organizations such as the WTO designing rules and regulations that exclude developing nations and their smallholder farmers, while donor organizations such as USAID heavily persuade developing nations to adopt unfriendly domestic policies.

Most importantly, Bello closes the gap between the policies made by multilateral institutions, developing government ministries and their implication on the peasant farmer. The structural adjustment had massive implication and consequences in Mexico and the Philippines. According to Bello, the structural adjustment tore apart the traditional corn farmers of Mexico and turned a nation that was once the original place of corn domestication to a major corn importer. Furthermore, the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in an attempt to create liberalization of agricultural trade further displaced smallholder farmers.

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Policies imposed by the North have diverted the traditional farming practices of the peasant farmer that has existed for decades to commercial agricultural practices in an attempt to increase agricultural efficiency and strengthen food security. Following the structural adjustment and NAFTA Mexico experienced severe food insecurity while the young labor force from rural farms started migrating to the US. Bello also discusses the Philippines experience regarding the rice shortage. The Philippines once a major rice exporter nation owing to the government technical services geared towards peasant farmers became a major food importer due to the effects of structural adjustments. Philippines entry to the WTO increased the country's payment to its debts, extracting funds from various government services including towards peasant farmers while the nation's food insecurity increased. Bello states: " Today, the status of the Philippines as a permanent importer of rice and, more generally, a net food importer is implicitly accepted by a government that does not view the countryside as an essential element in the nation's economic development..."(Bello, 67).

Bello also discusses the impact of the structural adjustment in the African agriculture. In what Bello labeled " Destroying African Agriculture", he discusses the transformation of the African continent as a major exporter of food to a major importer. The aim of the structure adjustment in Africa was to loosen governments' involvement in rural agriculture such as subsidized fertilizers. The ultimate goal was to attract the private sector into the agriculture economy so that ultimately agriculture productivity increases through industrialized mode of agriculture instead of the peasant agriculture.

However, according to Bello, the private sector failed to step in to fill in the gaps. In the case of Malawi, the extreme influence over the government to adopt structural adjustment led the extreme food insecurity of the country and eventually led to famine. Prior to giving into the World Bank's and IMF's pressure to adopt to these adjustments, Malawi had a fertilizer subsidy program that provided peasants farmers with affordable fertilizers. After surrendering to the structural adjustment, the government of Malawi withdrew its support to peasant farmers with the hope of the private sector stepping in.

However, food production declined tremendously while the nation turned to aid. Malawi finally refused to abide by these adjustments and continued to provide subsidized fertilizer which was followed by three years of crop surplus. Furthermore, Bello emphasizes the contradicting approaches between the WTO and the structural adjustment of the Bretton Wood Institutions. While the World Bank and the IMF were forcing governments to abandon the various subsidies they have set up in place for the peasant farmer, the WTO failed to eliminate subsidies by the US and European governments.

Bello states: " Subsidies now account for 40 percent of the value of agricultural production in the European Union and 25 percent in the United States" (Bello, 76-77). Smallholder farmers were in no position to compete in such unfair marketenvironmentand thus the rise in food insecurity around the globe. Agrofuels were once considered the remedy to the massive consumption of fossil fuels and the green alternative. However, as Bello

mentions and debates: "...that US and EU agrofuels policies were responsible for three quarters of the 140 percent increase in food prices between 2002 and February 2008" (Bello, 123).

Agrofuels become an opportunity of major profit making for multiple multinational corporations. Government officials and development workers endorsed this magical solution with the hope of aiding their beneficiaries. However, the serious demand of agrofuel consumption and production led to extensive environmental damage, pollution and threats to biodiversity. Furthermore, the production of agrofuels failed to be sustainable for it exploits more energy than it produces.

However, corporate agriculture and various privileged politicians are the primary beneficiaries to agrofuels and the main drivers to projects and policies that are favorable to it. According to Shepard Daniel and Anuradha Mittal's article "The Great Land Grab: Rush for World's Farmland Threatens Food security of the Poor," the demand for land has driven investors from around the globe to the current land grab: "Attracted by this big demand and market, investors- mainly from the private sector and OECD member countries- are targeting vast tracts of land to produce crops for agrofuels in developing countries,..." (Daniel and Mittal, 4).

The land grab in various developing nations is not only coming from the usual "Northern" countries but rather from emerging economies of China, India, Saudi Arabia and UAE. Furthermore, pressured by the international institutions and foreign investors, developing countries governments fail to make the appropriate decisions that favors smallholder farmers. More and

more evidence is indicating that there is not much room for smallholder farmers in this global rush to massive land grabs.

Peasant farmers are being forced out of their lands, forced to work on industrialized agriculture while losing their family/ traditional values. The global land grab is not only eliminating traditional farming heritages but is also creating a severe food shortage and insecurity in the most vulnerable areas of the world. Walden Bello presents a holistic argument regarding international food insecurity as influenced by various global players of the North.

It offers an extensive analysis of the power hierarchy that exists between the North- South divide and its contribution to the various failed endeavors and attempts to achieving global food security. Bello also emphasizes on food sovereignty as the right of each nation and its citizens to sustain and advance its own capacity to produce basic food, while respecting environmental, productive and cultural diversity. Most importantly, the book emphasizes on the importance of the participation of peasant farmers in decision and policy making being key to achieving food security and healthy economic growth as a whole.