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**Book review: Toward deglobalisation and food sovereignty? : Walden Bello  
The Food Wars, Verso: London, 2009; x + 176 pp: 9781844673315, £7.99  
(pbk)**

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and an overview of world agriculture since the 19th century based on the food-regime



autonomous from political parties. A contrast with Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) movement is that the latter focused too much on its indigenous constituency, rather than framing the movement more broadly to appeal to all peasants and workers. The MST has also explicitly advocated what Hannah Wittman (2009) has called 'ecological citizenship', or an agrarian practice that turns farmers into guardians of the land, ensuring ecological equilibrium.

In sum, *The Food Wars* is an excellent book which I strongly recommend for use in undergraduate and graduate courses on the sociology of food and agriculture, regional geographies, development studies and other fields concerned with the nature of neoliberal capitalism. It is also accessible for a general public concerned with these issues. Yet I have some critical comments regarding conceptual lapses in the book, peasant essentialism in the analysis on China, at least one insufficiently substantiated assertion, and continued usage of the 'Global South' as a concept, as if it really existed in reality.

On the first point, Bello equates surplus value with profit in defining capitalism as 'the organization of production to extract surplus value or broadly, profit, from workers in the production process' (p. 19). Strictly speaking, profit is not directly surplus value, since not all capital is invested in the purchase of labour power: constant (or 'dead') capital must also be invested. Therefore, profit must be measured against the sum of both types of capital. A related lapse on the same page is the assertion that peasants produce principally for subsistence (which is right), 'but secondarily for *monetary gain* through the marketing of the surplus product' (p. 19, emphasis added).

By definition, however, the peasantry does not produce a surplus product, but only enough for simple reproduction. When/if they do produce a surplus product, several things may happen, namely: 1) in most cases it is appropriated by some dominant class or the state; 2) they may increase their standard of living, while remaining in a simple-reproduction mode; or 3) the surplus product could become the material basis for bourgeoisification, i.e. the systematic hiring and exploiting of the labour power of others beyond household labour (see Otero, 1999: Ch. 4).

These conceptual nuances are extremely important to strengthen Bello's food-sovereignty programme: if peasants, like capitalists, also pursued 'monetary gain', what would be the difference between them? The fact is that peasants have historically had to convert part of their production into money, not because it represents a surplus but because, in order to supplement their subsistence, they require other use values different from the ones they produce. For instance, coffee producers cannot live on this commodity alone. Even when peasants are diversified, they will require other use values, such as agricultural implements, clothing, etc. Thus, the logic of peasant production is geared primarily to ensure subsistence and replacement rather than monetary gain per se.

And yet, essentialism about the peasantry would be best avoided. In relation to China, Bello makes an excellent case about how the urban industrial economy has been built on the shoulders of peasants, and urban incomes were six times higher than rural incomes in 2000; and how increased taxes on the peasantry contributed to a great increase in the bureaucracy, etc. He laments the extent to which China has become dependent on cotton imports. But then again, cotton is not food. On the contrary, it could be seen as an indication that China is reversing the traditional centre-periphery relation in the world economy: importing a primary good to generate new jobs in

industry. While much of the peasantry has surely become a pauperised pool of surplus labour power for industrialisation, Bello never considers the extent to which former peasants have also been reincarnated into an urban proletariat, and perhaps part of the growing middle classes.

Bello quotes an alarming fact about modern agriculture: that it takes much more caloric-energy input than it produces in food. But there is trouble with the numbers and sources. On page 36, global industrial agriculture 'employs three calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of food energy' (citing a Sierra Club report); but on page 140, Bello cites another source claiming that 'between production, processing, distribution, and preparation, 10 calories of energy are required to create just one calorie of food energy'. Given the seriousness of these figures and claims, it would have been best for Bello to seek at least a few more sources and straighten up the 'facts'.

Finally, it seems inconsistent to speak of a 'Global South' in referring primarily to issues dealt with within inter-governmental institutions like the WTO, on one hand; and in proposing a deglobalisation and food-sovereignty programme to be promoted by subordinate groups and classes on the other. The elementary truth is that, besides ephemeral groupings like the 'Group of 21' at the WTO, the 'Global South' exists only in the minds of progressive scholars and activists. But apart from *Vía Campesina*, there are extremely few actual, sustained organisations that struggle in 'global civil society' – another myth (see Otero, 2004). *Vía Campesina's* main accomplishment has been to contribute to derailing WTO negotiations, but the most tangible – and positive – successes for its constituency must take place at the level of the state. Pedro Magaña Guerrero, a Mexican peasant whose organisation is a member of *Vía Campesina*, put it this way after praising militancy at the global level: 'The consolidation of alternatives rests completely on what is happening at the local level, it depends on the development of organisations in their [peasants'] regions, in their countries' (quoted in Desmarais, 2007: 135). Therefore, if we really want to work toward the deglobalisation and re-localisation of food production, it is best to put political priorities in their place: that is, bottom-up linkages, including international solidarity, but firmly rooted in the state.

In spite of these limitations, *The Food Wars* is an outstanding contribution to understanding neoliberalism and food, as well as an insightful guide to transformative action in search of a sustainable future. I recommend it enthusiastically.

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Gerardo Otero teaches sociology at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, and in the development studies doctorate course at Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico. His latest book is *Food for the Few: Neoliberal Globalism and Biotechnology in Latin America* (University of Texas Press, 2008; forthcoming in Spanish with M.A. Porrúa). His research has been on the sociology of agriculture and food, neoliberalism, indigenous movements in Latin America, and migrant workers in Canada.

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Alex Callinicos

*Imperialism and Global Political Economy*, Polity Press: Cambridge, 2009; 295pp: 9780745640464, £17.99 (pbk)

Re ● ● Eren Duzgun, York University, Toronto, Canada

Given the degree of devastation caused by the still-unfolding global economic crisis and the increasing propensity for already existing political fault lines to further break in the capitalist heartland, this book by Alex Callinicos could hardly have arrived in a more timely fashion. In it, Callinicos argues for the historical validity of the Lenin–Bukharin synthesis of capitalist imperialism in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the two distinct, though inter-related, forms of competition: the (geo)political and the economic. He holds that, once capitalist imperialism is conceptualised as the ‘intersection’ of these two forms of competition, ‘the interstate rivalries’ become ‘integrated into the larger processes of capital accumulation’, a process ‘which takes several centuries’ (p. 15). Also, since imperialism is now shaped by the indeterminate interplay of geopolitical and economic motives, this leads to a ‘non-reductionist treatment of imperialism’ which enables