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Comments

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Alana Mann. *Global Activism in Food Politics: Power Shift*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014. \$90.00 (hardcover).

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Through the lens of globalizing processes, Alana Mann examines the interplay between local and global food politics, and assesses the long-term effects of neoliberalism on food producers, distributors, and consumers. She employs the concept of food sovereignty as a framework to situate the reader in the covert landscape of industrial agriculture, and points to larger structural constraints as well as the expression of the self through individual agency to describe the competing individual and institutional forces that motivate food policy. For Mann, structural change is understood pragmatically, through an examination of the meaning that is attached to socially constructed norms and values, which, in turn, drive individual and corporate behavior. The author centers the narrative on a transnational grassroots organization, La Via Campesina, that aims to empower food producers and consumers to reclaim control of the industrialized food system through democratic processes that are embedded in local and sustainable food practices.

Mann elegantly describes the inherent cultural continuity of food production and practices by examining the individual dispositions and structural forces that come together to create collective action, while focusing on the indigenous culture intrinsic to local food systems and the threat that industrial-scale food production creates not only to the food system, but to the socially constructed identities of the natives. Importantly, she uses context-specific discourse to illustrate how the conceptual framework of food sovereignty is constructed to fit both the individual and organizational needs of those employing this model as a motivational tool to provoke social action.

For Mann, a shift away from local, indigenous farming practices toward standardized, in-

dustrialized protocols involves a proportionate and fundamental shift in cultural identity. On the consumption side, the passive, modern consumer only possesses a limited knowledge of the origins of her or his food, and this practice significantly diminishes one's stake in the food system that ultimately sustains her or his existence. This outcome of indifference places producers at the will of the food conglomerates and policymakers who value profits and greed over agricultural worker rights and cultural identities. However, Mann's central claim that the grassroots efforts of organized agricultural workers are shifting power to the consumers and producers, which will consequently lead to a change in domestic and international food policy, rings somewhat unconvincing, given the progress made thus far. Moreover, the magnitude of both individual- and structural-level progress that is cited as necessary for transformative change in the current food system may be overreaching, given that it centers on consumers' involvement and on international change in food politics.

The author incorporates several case studies from Chilean, Mexican, and Basque agricultural workers who participate in transnational collective action to empower the food producers who are often overpowered by the deep pockets and profit-driven incentives of the giant food producers. Although Mann situates her narrative into the contextual and historical framework of each respective country, the mixed methodological approach she employs, in order to convince the reader that the concept of food sovereignty can be used to elicit large-scale change in food policy, does not reach far enough. Her ethnographically driven discourse at times assumes the reader will infer her intention with ease. However, given that Mann's network-based narrative requires the reader to know the historical record, as well as to understand the regional, cultural, and contextual varieties of these records, the author walks a thin line between over- and underinterpreting her sources. Although Mann is thorough in her assessment and presentation of the underlying issues faced by food producers and consumers, her thesis would be strengthened if she more readily acknowledged the limits of her arguments. For example, although regionally based strategies driven by local member organizations can influence the domestic or foreign politics that drive decisions on climate change and food prices, it may be a leap to indicate that these complex, global issues can be resolved through transnational social movements. With that being said, however, grassroots social movements did place women's rights and racial discrimination on

the agenda as political topics, both with feminism and the U.S. civil rights movement.

In sum, through her examination of food sovereignty in production, distribution, and consumption practices, Mann uses local realities and collective action to understand the individual and structural forces driving change in food policy. Her interchange of individual and institutional theoretical systems is necessary, because an agency- or context-only model does not realize the complex symbiosis between the individual and the structure. *Global Activism in Food Politics: Power Shift* is an inspiring and thorough book that will prove useful to scholars and students alike. Mann's narrative is essential for social activists and food policymakers who are working to solve one of the most pressing domestic and foreign policy challenges: creating an environmentally sustainable food system.
