

Graduate Association for **Food Studies**

Title: Review of “Food Activism: Agency, Democracy, and Economy” edited by Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi

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fast food restaurants and then staging a leisurely picnic with farm-fresh food. Another common demonstration is a “crop pull,” in which demonstrators enter a GM crop field, uproot plants, and toss roughage into “hazardous material” bags. The movement’s most famous demonstration took place in 1999, when CP’s spokesperson, José Bové, was arrested while symbolically dismantling a McDonald’s under construction in Millau. When 50,000 demonstrators showed up in support outside Bové’s trial, the *paysans’* cause garnered international media attention. By detailing the *Confédération’s* stunt-like protests and powerful effects, Heller equips readers with the know-how to design their own protests that aim to subvert hegemonic logics.

Heller enlists an impressive array of social theorists including Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Donna Haraway to explain how *Confédération Paysanne* provoked a discursive shift and why their tactics prove so effective in swaying public opinion about GMOs in Europe. Yet unlike most scholarship that would use the movement as a case study to develop theory, Heller explicates abstractions like hegemony and Foucauldian discourse in refreshingly clear prose and applies them to CP’s campaigns so readers can conduct similar analyses of the movements they engage in and use their conclusions to foster more effective actions.

While it has become commonplace for social scientists to call for engaged scholarship relevant beyond the walls of the Ivory Tower, research products that communicate findings in accessible prose without sacrificing analytical rigor remain exceedingly rare. Chaia Heller’s investigation presents an encouraging example of scholarship that truly transgresses boundaries of academic/nonacademic writing. Offering more than a captivating read, this book will ignite conversations between scholars, students, and activists and sow the seeds to imagine and create more ecologically and socially just food systems.

BOOK REVIEW | JOHN C. JONES

Food Activism: Agency, Democracy, and Economy Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi

New York: Bloomsbury. 2014. 251 pp.

From the biodynamic viticulture of activist French win growers to the corporate sector-born Utz certification for global coffee trade, *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy,*

and Economy is a collection of ethnographic case studies collected and edited by Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi. The editors decided to assemble this book while conducting field research about the Slow Food Movement. Counihan and Siniscalchi take a broad view of food activism, defining it as “efforts by people to change the food system across the globe by modifying the way they produce, distribute, and/or consume food” (3). Their goal for *Food Activism* was fourfold: 1) to document examples of food activism across the globe; 2) to demonstrate the interconnected nature of global food activism; 3) to discuss tensions within food activist movements; and 4) to investigate the interaction between globalization and food activist movements. The editors achieved each of these goals by effectively weaving a holistic examination of food activism across the world. The case studies they have assembled individually suggest both diversity and uniformity within food activist movements across geographic, economic, political, and cultural boundaries. Taken collectively, the editors present a narrative of increasing awareness of self-determination in the face of globalization. This self-determination surrounding food is interconnected with other movements of varying scope across the world. This idea resonates within food system scholarship but also calls to the deeply primal relationship between food and humanity.

Food Activism’s chapters are easily readable for anyone with a basic understanding of food system theory and a solid social science background. Common themes include resistance, agency in the face of neoliberalism, democratic populism, local control of production, and the ritual space of food. Counihan and Siniscalchi present fourteen case studies in total, with each chapter of the text addressing one case. The chapter authors are a diverse group of anthropologists and sociologists from across the globe. This diversity extends across geographic location, level of experience, and research interests under the broad food system umbrella. The editors divide the book into three parts, each examining food activism at a different scale. The book’s ethnographies include five local cases, four national-scale movements, and five international movements. Chapter authors examine cases from both the Global North and Global South, including Canada, the United States, Egypt, France, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Columbia. The geographic diversity of the cases supports the editors’ central contention that food activism is truly an interconnected, multi-nodal global system.

Although most of the authors in this volume agree on the definition of food activism, divergent definitions

suggested by some authors offer readers a more complete, complex, and nuanced idea of food activism around the world. Two chapters highlight food activism as a unifying force against exterior power. First, Nefissa Naguib's chapter entitled "Brothers in Faith: Islamic Food Activism in Egypt" describes the activism of youth members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Accounting to Naguib, this "Islamic food activism" is rooted both in Islam's communal obligation to the poor and needy and in youth members' need to buck the authority of their superiors both within the Brotherhood and in the Egyptian state. A powerful example of youth activism is the impromptu, unauthorized inspection of local government-sanctioned bakeries to ensure bakers do not mix dirt into the flour used to bake price-controlled bread. Second, Teresa M. Mares's chapter entitled "Engaging Latino Immigrants in Seattle Food Activism through Urban Agriculture" presents the Cuban people's subtle resistance to state-sponsored food production. Confronted with decreased food accessibility due to a combination of the American embargo and the withdrawal of food aid from post-Soviet Russia, common people engaged in several indirect attacks against food produced by the central government, including rumors, discursive language, and boycotting consumption.

Conversely, two other chapters highlight food activism as resistance to external power, but from a divided position. First, "Food Activism and Antimafia Cooperatives in Contemporary Sicily" by Theodoros Rakopoulos demonstrates that unity in activism is not always universal by exploring the class conflict between the production and distribution sides of agrarian anti-mafia wine cooperatives in Italy. In this case, the cooperative's distributors possess an anti-mafia and organic production activism that is separate from their working-class counterparts. Second, in "Peasants' Transnational Mobilization for Food Sovereignty in La Via Campesina," Delphine Thivet casts the rural peasant movement Via Campesina and the movement's idea of food sovereignty in opposition to both neoliberal corporate interests as well as concerns over traditional food security expressed by established international bodies like the United Nations and the World Bank. For Thivet, Via Campesina is a bottom-up movement that supports the rights of farmers to produce food within their home countries, regardless of both neoliberal economic policies and hegemonic international organizations.

Readers may observe two minor issues with the work. First, the editors neglected to present any food activism specifically tied to anti-hunger campaigns, suggesting that an examination of food activism related to anti-hunger

initiatives would require its own book. This narrowing of scope is both logical as well as practical. The absence of anti-hunger activism from the work is not noticeable. Second, the work contains no concluding chapter. This is problematic, as a concluding chapter would provide the editors an excellent opportunity to revisit their central thesis with readers. Absent such a conclusion, readers must occasionally stretch to understand the interrelated nature of some of the movements mentioned in individual chapters.

A number of readers will find *Food Activism* useful. Students will find the work clearly written, with minimal use of jargon, as well as excellent material for in-class discussions and research projects. Food system scholars will find the nuance between the profiled movements intriguing, as it challenges notions of agency and control within food movements. Activists and food policy experts will find inspiration for their own initiatives and policies from the cases presented.

BOOK REVIEW | JESSICA LOYER

Hidden Hunger: Gender and the Politics of Smarter Foods Aya Hirata Kimura

Cornell University Press. 2013. 226 pp.

The "hidden hunger" to which Aya Hirata Kimura refers in the title of her critique of fortification-based interventions into the problems of hunger and malnutrition in the developing world is generally understood to refer to micronutrient deficiencies, or the lack of sufficient nutrients in the diets of the world's poor. According to prominent hidden hunger discourse, diseases and disorders caused by a lack of essential micronutrients, such as vitamin A, iron, and iodine, are often invisible to those who suffer from them. Therefore the "hunger" is hidden from them and requires expert intervention to cure it. But Kimura points out that something else is hidden in these discourses and practices: the voices of the very people who live with hunger, disease, and poverty, many of whom are women. The fact that these are the very people whose bodies are targeted by hidden hunger interventions increases the irony that their voices are silenced as the experts who constitute the international food policy community determine how best to improve their health and nutrition.

Drawing upon theoretical foundations in feminist food studies, agrofood studies, and science and technology