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Food Sovereignty in Latin America: a gendered and multiescalar perspective[2]

Introduction

This article aims to analyze how the concept of food sovereignty in Latin America has been constructed as a political tool for peasant women. In addition, it examines the practices found in this everyday life construction, by drawing on a multiscale perspective (Martin, 2004)[3] stemming from feminist political geography.

With regard to peasant women, or rather, transnational networks of peasant women, it is necessary to take into account where their demands come from and how they lead women in one region to create networks with other women movements in the world in order to achieve their goals. In Latin America, the life of rural women in agriculture revolves around family care and food production (FAO, 2013a) at the local scale, and also at the regional scale. Women experience different forms of

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[3] The multiescalar perspective from the political geography is a form of analisis that lets us understand the connection between diferent spatial scales.

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violence (by state, transnational companies, partners, etc.),[4] and their consequences are perceived in everyday life. What occurs at the local scale is reflected in other scales, such as the state, the region, and the global. Peasant women are capable of recognizing their demands as women, particularly as peasant woman, which allows them to identify a point of convergence with women from different places in Latin America, sharing demands within the region since scales are mutually constitutive (Cabezas, 2012).

In this vein, the multiscale view from the perspective of feminist political geography allows us to better understand how these women are organized at different geographic scales, seeking to break with the classic state centric vision, and also valuing the local scale, where the daily lives of these women is built.

In the next section, I will sketch this theoretical perspective by shedding light on the discussion about some differences and tensions generated around the concept of food security as it has been presented by the FAO and the contraposition of this concept/model proposed by the Via Campesina as food sovereignty in 1996. I will then point out how food sovereignty has been performed to include gender claims and to influence power spaces from peasant women. Lastly, I offer some final thoughts about the way these gender claims are being carried out throughout the region and why these political processes should be studied in depth from a multiscale perspective.

Food sovereignty versus food security: a multiscale view

Several studies have examined food issues in Latin America as a contention not only among social actors but also among spatial scales—here, we are talking about geographic scales as local, national, regional, global, etc. In this way, these embody demands that not only have to do with the local scale, where the production of food

[4] According to the pimer about violence against la vía campesina (the way of life of peasant women), gender violence is not only understood as domestic violence but also the lack of public policies (in the case of the satate), the concentration of lands, and the production of transgenic seeds, among other factors. This primer was produced in Brazil: Vía Campesina, Cartilla: Basta de violencia contra las mujeres, 2012.

takes place but also at scales that involve states and regional and international organizations. An example that epitomizes this process is the debate between food security and food sovereignty, how this has been considered by social movements, and the extent to which both elements have come to the fore.

A brief description of the context in which these terms can be understood as concepts, models and practices is required to understand why they develop in different ways and serve different political needs. The world experiences the aggravation of a food crisis that continues to this day as a result of the dominant economic development model (Rosset, 2008) based on the opening of peripheral markets, import and export of consumer goods and raw materials, as well as the emphasis on privatizing public enterprises of several services. In response to this, FAO (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) created the concept of food security after World War II (Trauger, 2014) with the aim of ensuring that governments have a responsibility to provide food for all citizens, in an attempt to eradicate hunger. As Trauger (2014) suggested, an important issue is that in a context of economic restructuring, as in the case of Latin America during the 1980s (Schneider et al, 2010), and parallel opening of markets, the concept of food security can no longer guarantee local development since it does not imply an obligation for developing local markets or local production, even within states, without affecting domestic agricultural production and structure (distribution of land, promotion of familiar agriculture, etc.).

According to Rosset (2003), food security can be a way for states to continue implementing business agriculture, increase exports, and ease the pressure of countries such as the United States over others by encouraging free trade treaties. In this same vein, Trauger argues that "many of those in the developing world are landless former peasants or farmers struggling to live off the commodity exports to the global North." (2014: 1132).

The concept of food security is clearly based on a state-centric geopolitical view (Agnew, 2005), in which other spatial scales are not considered beyond the global and State; this classic view ignores the subjects of these policies, social movements, and their repercussions in people's daily lives at the local scale.

The concept of food sovereignty developed in Latin America, however, was presented in 1996 by La Vía Campesina (LVC) at the FAO World Food Conference in order to counteract the previously proposed concept of food security (Trauger, 2014). The argument carried forward by LVC, aimed to show that the origin of food and its forms of production also matter, especially for the countries considered in development (Pimbert, 2009), as in the case of Latin America countries.

The meaning of food sovereignty itself has changed over the years (Agarwal, 2014), changes which have been largely driven by women who are predominantly responsible for feeding families and are often responsible for seed conservation and subsistence farming (Desmarais, 2007). Therefore, this concept directly concerns women who are responsible for producing 60-80% of food in developing countries (FAO, 2001). Paying attention to what occurs at the local scale and breaking with a hierarchical view of spatial scales is thus also a way of making women visible (Staeheli and Kofman, 2004). Among the notable differences between the two concepts, their origin marks the difference in relation to gender. Food sovereignty allows greater visibility of women and their work, since it starts from a vision of "local to global", rather than the other way around.

The last definition of food sovereignty, adopted at the Nyéleni conference in 2007, prevails until now. In this declaration, not only is the importance of food production highlighted, but aspects of ecology and sustainability are also emphasized. Accordingly, local peasants find in food sovereignty a form of resistance and opposition to the current model of development, positioning themselves against free trade treaties and corporatism, placing the needs of small farmers and local markets above companies and international agreements:

> It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. […] Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal-fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social

> and economic sustainability. […] Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes, and generations (Nyéléni, 2007).

The comparison of models by Rosset (2003) makes clear that both have different objectives, starting from different perspectives. On the one hand, one we could call "bottom-up", i.e. from the social movements and organizations and their demands stemming from daily life, and at the other, one that comes from the "top" of the United Nations in which the State and global markets are the main protagonists. These differences between models are mainly marked by the points of view we have about food and its relation to the market. In the case of food security, alimentation is understood as a product, a commodity, and on the other hand, food sovereignty is understood as a human right, as well as its production (Rosset, 2003). In the same vein, Trauger (2014) argues that the differences are related to the actors involved in both and to their respective scales. While one is about the states, the other is about people and small producers. This also means that public policies are viewed from different perspectives and the model of food sovereignty puts more emphasis on the local scale when defining how it is produced, emphasizing also the control over territories, the distribution of lands, etc. (ibid.).

Since food sovereignty is a concept that draws on peasant social movements, daily life is central. The local scale becomes indispensable to understand this demand. In everyday life, the gender role assigned to peasant women is directly related to food production. Therefore, it becomes difficult to speak of food sovereignty without understanding how women are able to appropriate this demand, finding in it the opportunity to jointly launch other demands related to gender, which stem from transnational practices that effectively enable them to increase their participation in political spaces in a way to focus on public policies at different spatial scales.

The State is also very important as a scale of analysis, despite transnational networks. For women, the goal is to apply pressure at the State scale, so that governments adopt policies that strengthen smallholder agriculture and ensure some basic rights for rural

population (health, education, retirement, etc., see Schneider, 2010). Another frequent objective for rural women is to impede free trade agreements that treat food as a commodity and often include the commercialization of GM seeds. In Latin America, one of the most popular demands is related to land reform as well. In consequence, to pursue the aim of food sovereignty, LVC affirms that it is necessary to have policies that enable the production of agroecological food and restrain large scale monoculture (CLOC – Vía Campesina, 2013).

As shown above, both models focus on one particular scale, respectively, rather than analyzing how different scales are constituted through contention and imaginaries in and of themselves. Instead of focusing on one closed scale, in this work the spatial scales are not understood as containers, isolated elements, or mere administrative levels (Brenner, 2001; Agnew, 2002); nor does it prioritize one scale over another. Instead, the understanding put forward here is that they are all political constructs of equal importance for analysis (Marston, 2000). For these reasons, I first suggest a multiscale view, in which the scales are simultaneously constitutive (Howitt, 1998, Marston et al, 2005), going beyond the institutional, and in which their importance does not depend on the "level of geographical resolution in which the conflict is analyzed" (Brenner, 2004: 9) to define the scale but also the way each affects the public policies of where and for whom, related to food sovereignty.

Second, part of the analysis of feminist geography is to move between different scales (Gilmartin and Kaufman, 2004: 122) to better understand the underlying power relations as well as how scales are related to each other and how they are present in women's lives. From this perspective, the transnational networks of peasant women are constructors of spatialities and scales too. The production of scales here is understood as the tensions between the structure and the actors, being constantly negotiated and produced through social and political dispute (Marston, 2000, Harrison, 2010, p.; Herod, 2010). In this vein, I draw on the concept of 'boomerang pattern' (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), which refers to the practice within organizations to take a demand from one scale to another, whether regional or global, as a form of pressure and resistance against the State, and within the same organizations, as an expansion of their demands in the domestic sphere. Here, this concept is useful to

understand how women construct and create their demands within different spatial scales alongside transnational networks, and how these demands can be key to their empowerment. Being nationally and internationally organized, peasant women are constantly moving between local, regional and global networks, and this helps to sustain their demands and grant them recognition.[5]

Therefore, organized rural women's organizations use the "jumping scale" (Haarstad and Floysand, 2007; Smith, 1996; Brenner, 1999; Cox, 1998) this way to achieve their objectives. That is, from their articulation in transnational networks, they pressure states to adopt public policies which prevent free trade agreements, or protect against open markets that would foster transnational agribusinesses based on monoculture (soy is an example), often supported by organizations at the global scale, such as the FAO, or at the regional scale, as in the case of MERCOSUR (Butto et al, 2014).

Women and the food sovereignty claim in Latin America

In Latin America, rural women account for the majority of food production in their countries (FAO and IDB, 2016). In this report, only women active in agriculture are included. Although women with non-agricultural labor constitute an important part in many countries, they do not enjoy decent labor rights, and the social movements of rural women are all related to agricultural labor (FAO, 2013b).

At a global scale, in the sense of the total of the global food production, women represent at least 50% of the food production (Senra and León, 2009: 11). According to the "Political Note about Rural Women" (2013) by the FAO, in South America

[5] For instance, the very political space of the Vía Campesina could be seen from this point of view. Since women movements carry out local collective demands, running through the movement on a larger scale as the purpose of lobbying the proper motions (Brochner 2014: 95), this space allows women to have a double incidence, affecting everyday life and regional policies, moving and returning among scales as 'a boomerang'.

women represent more than 50% of those dedicated to agricultural work, while in Central America they are less than 50%. These percentages help to understand why these women use the claim for food sovereignty as a tool for the introduction of gender-related demands, in particular the South American peasant women's organizations. Despite producing food, rural women in Latin America represent a minority of household heads, and are also a minority of landowners (FAO and BID, 2016; FAO, 2013b; Deere and León, 2002). For Latin America, they represent between 8% and 30% (FAO, 2013a: 1).

In short, women still do not occupy power spaces and are not broadly involved in relations between States and socio-economic policies (Roberts, 2004, Negar, 2004); however, the decisions made and policies applied by the state directly affect women, indicating that when analyzing food policies on a local scale, we must also consider the different scales that intercept and interact by combining different structures and discursive practices in different places (Negar, 2004: 47). As mentioned earlier, women are the main producers of food, and therefore many aspects of food sovereignty are related to the gender roles attributed to them (Senra y León, 2009). In fact, much of the knowledge required for food sovereignty to be put into practice comes from peasant women. For example: food care, cultivation and seed care (Ramos and Drago, 2013, Pimbert, 2009b).[6]

In addition, within the framework of the Coordinator of the Field Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean (CLOC), rural women who participate in the organization have different ethnic origins, while considering themselves as peasants. Nevertheless, they are also partly black and indigenous, thus having a class component as rural women and peasant communities. This allows them to be able to divide up spaces of struggle, create networks and develop transnational practices. Their class identity can be seen when they relate their gender demands to their demands as peasants, for example, identifying capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism

[6] In this regard, the testimony of women related to the experience of food sovereignty linked to food production establishes the relationship of ownership of seed to food. Also, to reinforce what has already been said, these women feel responsible for the preservation of biodiversity and ecological production, and reproduction of resources (Ramos and Drago, 2013:143).

as the main source of their problems and their inequalities (Garcia, 2014: 99). If we think of Nancy Fraser's (2008) concept of social justice, gender is a two-dimensional category. These women do not only seek recognition, in the case of rural women, in recognition of their knowledge and their work (García, 2014) but also redistribution due to the problems faced by family agriculture that are more acute in the case of women (ibid.).

The demand for food sovereignty started to become appropriated by women in Latin America with a project of La Vía Campesina called "Peasant Women on the Frontiers of Food Sovereignty" at the beginning of the 2000 decade (Desmarais, 2007). The statement of the Fifth Assembly of Women of CLOC - Vía Campesina (2015) affirms:

> It was our knowledge that started agriculture, we have continued, through a history that we have made possible, the continuity of food for humanity, through which we create and transmit much of the knowledge of ancestral medicine, and today we are those who produce most of the food, despite the usurpation of land and water, and the multiple policies and programs that persistently discriminate and attack us. [...] We will have no rest in our struggle against all forms of appropriation of Nature, food sovereignty and the defense of our seeds.[7]

In sum, I argue that women find in food sovereignty a form to influence and participate in power spaces and in building political leadership as they appropriate the claim by connecting both gender and specific peasant demands. This conjoint demand marks a new regional agenda for peasant women, who through the organization of women from different collectives manage to exert pressure to have greater political influence and put gender issues on the table. Indeed, the gender claims of peasant women for food sovereignty are related to gender violence but also to political participation and equity (Brochner, 2014).[8] These are the two main

[7] Translated by the author.

[8] In the primer against violence against women, as well as in the declaration of the Fifth Women's Assembly of the CLOC, they relate to diferent forms of gender violence with their everyday life including the production of food.

vindications from peasant women in Latin America, and they can in fact be combined. If women don't participate in the process of food production, agroecology and sustainable production cannot come about, and the increase of their political participation and leadership are central to take it forward.

Through the women's statement at the Fifth CLOC Women's Assembly, cited above, it is possible to see how women recognize the different spatial scales involved in the process as relational: on the one hand they speak of their daily life, placing relevance on their knowledge, regional and global, such as water scarcity, and on the other, of transnational companies, which produce genetically modified seeds, such as monocultures.

With respect to transnational corporations, peasant women understand that not only State violence represents gender violence, for example through the lack of adequate public policies. In reply, they actively seek to influence in the creation of public policies, for example with regard to the use of genetic modified seeds, agrotoxins, etc. (Vía Campesina, 2012). They struggle against these transnational corporations that are recognized as a principal enemy, because of the consequences they experience in everyday life regarding their access to land and credits but, most importantly, to agroecological food production (Desmarais, 2007, Senra and León, 2009). Organized peasant women not only vindicate a gender identity but also a class identity that defines their relation with large scale production as they oppose the capitalist structure of production (Siliprandi, 2014).

In this case, transnational networks become used as an empowerment strategy to pressure mechanisms at different scales, from local to global and vice versa. Women's demands, the fight for their gender demands, undergo several scales, from the local, bridging the regional scale to reach the global scale, in this case the LVC, which, at the same time, turns their claims into multiple shares, returning to the local scale, where empowerment takes place.

Overall, the claim for food sovereignty can be a key for the empowerment of peasant women, promoting the value of women's tasks that have long been considered of minor importance. Another aspect to highlight is that food sovereignty is based on

principles such as autonomy, respect, sustainability and equality, which are also tools for women to have the perception that gender equality is ensured across all facets of food sovereignty (Sepúlveda, 2012: 79). In addition, the demands that are intertwined with food sovereignty are accompanied by questions about the distribution of power and gender relations. All of these issues are brought into the agenda through transnational networks as a political tool for peasant women. From a multiscale view, food sovereignty is therefore not only about the local scale, but rather a political weapon, which, by running from a scale to another in intertwined contention, serves to put forward multiple claims of women in the whole region.

Final Thoughts

From a multiscale perspective, this contribution has analyzed how the concept of food sovereignty has expanded as a political tool for peasant women in Latin America, critically engaging with and discussing the food security concept proposed by the FAO. While food security focuses on the recognition of agricultural production from a state-centric vision that allows reproducing business agriculture, food sovereignty emphasizes, at a first glance, the importance of daily life and local production. In addition to this, I argued that a multi-scalar analysis, drawing on a feminist geopolitical perspective, allows us to understand how demands are first generated and then taken to other scales, with the objective of influencing public policies within the State and regional and international organizations. In this sense, the analysis dimension of the social and political reference scale also differs and with it the impact of public policies linked to food sovereignty in the region. Thus, while in the case of food security, there is a hierarchical and state-centric scalar perspective—determined by the needs of a 'global' mercantile scale—food sovereignty emphasizes the reverse movement and explains how the local scale and agricultural production based on daily needs, not merely commercial ones, can effectively influence state, regional and/or global public policies.

From this perspective, peasant women have taken the struggle for food sovereignty as a beacon, thus forming transnational networks and combining various gender demands, to act also as a tool for gender justice. The identification of women in this movement relates to the valuation of their work and their knowledge, which strengthens the question of recognition as well as the search for autonomy and respect. This, in turn, relates to participation in power positions and also to action against gender violence. This represents an empowerment that brings together more gender-related issues and demands, causing women to adopt a feminist stance that questions their established social roles and their position in power distribution on different scales.

Women manage to work within transnational networks, from local to global, and vice versa, allowing them in their daily lives to enact transformations and contribute to gender justice, while creating new meanings and forms of organization to pressure different supranational institutions and organizations at the regional and global scales, by applying what I identified as the "boomerang pattern" (Keck and Sikkink, 1999) of multi-scalar movements.

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