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Critical consumption and political emancipations: aproximation to the trajectories of the Community-Supported Agriculture in Brazil[1]

Abstract:

Brazil is, at the same time, a country recognized for the institutionalization of agroecology and is one of the largest world consumers of pesticides. The problem of concentration and land use is in increase. The amount of land used for grain cultivation that will be used for grazing and also for biofuels is increasing and contrasts with the areas for the daily cultivation of food for the population. In contrast, new forms of production and consumption emerge, and critical consumption is built. Given this, the objective of this work is to present the structure of research that is in progress whose objective is to answer the question: How do alternative forms of organization of production and consumption in Brazil articulate experiences of critical consumption with projects of political emancipation? To answer this, I will analyze the experience of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) in Brazil. The working hypothesis is that CSAs would articulate the critical consumption exercised by their actors, producers, and co-farmers, with political emancipation projects to respond to the impacts that the financialization of the agrifood system has caused. Through the forms of integration of the economy (Polanyi) (redistribution, reciprocity, and exchange) this articulation is strengthened and contributes to reducing the distances not only geographic but also of information about who produces and who consumes. These joints can be affected if the groups do not commit to sharing the risks.

Keywords: Critical Consumption, Community-Supported Agriculture, Financialization of Agri-Food.

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1. Introduction

This is a working paper and is justified by the interest in knowing in-depth some experiences of resistance to the advance of macroeconomic processes. In this sense, the concerns are about the relation between the process of financialization of food and the problem of land in Brazil leads to a deepening of the tendency towards landowning concentration and, consequently, to the intensification of conflicts between large landowners, social movements, and leaders of these movements (Michelotti, Siqueira, 2019). Another concern is the problem of the release of pesticides in the country, that proven to be harmful to human health and, consequently, the tendency for the Brazilian population to become ill (Gurguel et al., 2019). This, in addition to being morally reprehensible and certainly a source of increased public health expenses that could be avoided.

According to Borsatto and Souza-Esquerdo (2019), at the same time that Brazil is recognized as a pioneer in the institutionalization of agroecology, it is one of the world's largest consumers of pesticides and a major exporter of agricultural products. According to data available in the National Disorder Notification System (Sinan), from 2007 to 2017, 107,535 cases of pesticide poisoning were reported in Brazil. Of these 39,698 records, they correspond to pesticide poisoning due to agricultural use, which represents 52.8% of the total deaths related to pesticide poisoning in the country, revealing that the use of pesticides represents a serious public health problem.

In addition to the public health problem generated by the remains of pesticides (mainly herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides), the problem of concentration and land use is in increase. In the case of Brazil, the amount of land used for the cultivation of grains that will be used for grazing and also for biofuels is increasing and contrasts with the areas for daily cultivation of food for the population. According to Carneiro (2015) in Brazilian agricultural production (between 2002 and 2011), the areas cultivated for soybeans, corn, and sorghum

grew, while the same areas for planted foods remain for the daily consumption of the Brazilian population (for example, rice beans and cassava).

For the aforementioned concerns, among others, there is an appeal for more sustainable food systems, which according to Moragues-Faus (2020) and Blay-Palmer et al (2020), must be equitable, healthy, and decentralized, with characteristics that make the new more democratic food systems at all levels. As much as the COVID 19 pandemic has exposed how fragile and unsustainable the global food system is, it also demonstrates the resilience of local food initiatives and short supply chains (Mert-Cakal and Miele, 2021). Community-Supported Agriculture schemes have seen an increase in the number of consumers, while interest in the local box scheme has grown dramatically (Schmidt et al 2020, URGENCI 2020).

According to Mert-Cakal and Miele (2021), CSAs are an alternative food movement and are considered a bottom-up response to the problems of the dominant food systems. But they need to overcome barriers that prevent them from replicating, participating in policies and decision-making at the macro level, and scaling up. Given the above, my investigation aims to closely observe the work that CSAs have been doing especially in Brazil since 2011, and to analyze how they articulate experiences of critical consumption with projects of political emancipation. For this paper, I will only expose some theoretical contributions that helped me to construct the working hypothesis and some links to think about the analytical map proposed for my investigation.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

2.1 Financialization and characteristics of the current agri-food system

The consolidation of the neoliberal model in the 1990s brought a series of structural transformations that changed the physiognomy of agriculture in Latin America. Among the most important changes was the increased participation of the agricultural sector in the economy, which contrasts with its ability to generate livelihoods for the rural population.

Other transformations pointed out are the change in the dominant capital that drives the economic transformations of the sector, the transformation of the agricultural productive structure, new forms of insertion of rural producers in agribusiness, and new forms of reproduction and resistance of farmers to neoliberalism (RUBIO, 2008).

The transformations mentioned by Rubio in the previous paragraph are related to what is known as the financialization of agri-food systems. Financialization is the increasing importance of financial markets, financial reasons, financial institutions, and elites in the operation of the economy and governing institutions at national and international levels (Epstein, 2005, p.3). Now, thinking about the financialization of agriculture and food requires reflecting on what are the preconditions for this to happen.

Historically productive investments in food and agriculture were not the preferred choice of the financial sector, due to the risks and uncertainties associated with the climate, price volatility, among other factors. As a consequence, financial assets were being invested in real estate, shares and government bonds, and others. However, Lawrence et.al, (2015) present some reasons for explaining the new fascination of the financial sector in the agri-food sector. Among the main ones are four, the first is the decrease in the per capita availability of land, due to soil degreasing, land concentration, and urbanization; the second relates to land use. Lands that were used to produce food for direct human consumption or animal feed grains are being used to provide fuel to replace petroleum. Given this, governments are prescribing the amount of biofuel to produce and this has legitimized the priority in fuels and not in food. The third motivation is the growth of the middle class in countries like China, India, and Indonesia and with changes in food habits. Meat consumption has increased and companies that produce meat (be it beef, pork, or chicken) need a regular supply of grains (soybeans, corn, among others). A fourth motivation for investing in the agri-food sector is the opportunities that climate change is bringing, for example, the purchase of carbon bonuses to reduce greenhouse gases.

Given the previous motivations, we can have an idea of why financial investments are focused on this agrifood sector. In addition to the most important actors in the financialization processes in addition to the banks, there are the companies that work with trade in agricultural commodities. Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill, and Louis A Dreyfus, known in the market as ABCD firms by the first letter of their names. These companies also started to establish financial services and thus created financial arms to manage not only their risks but also other specialized derivatives of agricultural commodities to third investors (CLAPP, 2012).

After the 2008 food crisis, there is a better understanding of how speculative financial investments can exacerbate food price volatility. But there is still much to understand about how financialization has changed the dynamics of influence within the global food system and its impacts. The financialization of the agri-food system brings greater distances between producer and consumer (not only geographic) and this gives less and less agency power to both the one and the other. Ignorance of where and how food is produced and the increasing number of actors in the stages involved in global food product chains. The result of this growing distance is a weakening of the influence of actors on the results of the food system (CLAPP, 2012).

For Ploeg (2008), in addition to the dependence on fossil fuels, the current agri-food system is characterized by having a high number of intermediaries and a low diversification of products. This system is dominated by food empires, composed of large food processing and marketing companies that operate globally and exercise control and appropriate local markets and their processes. Food empires are also known as long marketing circuits and contrast with short circuits. According to Ploeg (2010) the advance of longer chains becomes a central feature of the agri-food system and results in less varied and healthy diets. These diets are combined with the intensification of ecological degradation and the rural exodus.

In Brazil, economic subordination to the agricultural products market is based on the expansion of monocultures, a model of land concentration based on the intensive use of pesticides and fertilizers, causing environmental pollution and human exposure. The Brazilian economy is based on the production of mineral products, such as oil and agricultural products, mainly soybeans, sugar cane, coffee, corn, and cotton. In recent years, the monoculture model has intensified, further increasing the consumption of poisons in the country, which occurs as a result of the environmental, economic, ethical, political, and social crisis affecting Brazil (GURGUEL et.al, 2019).

The current setback in public policies on Food and Nutritional Security is summed up in this scenario. According to the VIGISAN report (2021), the economic crisis, which had already reversed the success achieved until 2013 in guaranteeing the human right to adequate food, gained greater negative momentum in 2020 with the advent of the pandemic, despite the permanence of some social programs such as *Bolsa Família* and the creation of emergency aid to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on employment and income. The comparison of the levels of Food Security / Food Insecurity to the Survey of Family Budgets - POF 2018 and the present VIGISAN survey shows, the seriousness of the overlap of the economic crisis and the health crisis across the national territory, without an adequate response from public policy. There were 10.3 million people in severe Food Insecurity in 2018, rising to 19.1 million in 2020. Therefore, in this period, there were about nine million more Brazilians who had, in their daily lives, the hunger experience.

2.2 Crises and forms of economic integration

Today's crisis is multidimensional, and its severe character is due to the convergence of three dimensions. An ecological dimension is reflected in the reduction of non-renewable land resources and the progressive destruction of the biosphere. A second dimension is the financialization of the crisis, which is reflected in the creation of an underground and insubstantial economy capable of devastating the real economy. And a third dimension of the

crisis, the social one, is reflected in the exhaustion of the human capacities available to create and maintain human bonds (FRASER, 2014).

When perceiving these three dimensions of the crisis, the relationship between them and their nature could reveal possibilities for an emancipatory resolution. And Karl Polanyi's thinking would provide a promising starting point. In his classic work, The Great Transformation of 1944, he addresses an account of a previous crisis where he links ecology, political economy, and social reproduction. And the story that tells in the Great Transformation largely reflects the current situation and is considered by the author as a second major transformation (FRASER, 2014 p. 526).

In Fraser's interpretation, for Polanyi, society cannot be a commodity and the sphere of commodity production and exchange relations is only possible against a background of non-commoditized relations. In the case of the ecological crisis what is at stake are the natural processes that make life possible and that provide material resources for social supply. In the case of social reproduction, what is at stake are the socio-cultural processes, the product of solidary relationships, and social cooperation. In the case of the financial crisis, what is at stake is the ability to conduct exchanges across national borders, guide development and accumulate values for the future. In other words, what is at stake is the sustainability of capitalism on the one hand and of society and nature on the other.

Polanyi also helps in understanding the forms of integration of the economy: reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange. The forms of integration designate the institutionalized movements through which elements of the economic process, such as material resources, labor, transportation, storage, and distribution of goods, are connected. Reciprocity describes the movement of goods and services between corresponding points in a symmetrical arrangement, so the products of activity are shared with others through give-and-take movements. Redistribution is about distributing from a center. Centrality is of political or

religious power. The exchange would be the movement of exchange of goods for a certain price or value. These forms do not necessarily represent stages of development, they can present one or all together in society. For some, reciprocity will be more important and for others, exchange and redistribution (POLANYI, 1977, p.35-42).

For Buchala (2003, p.108) from the study of forms of integration, Polanyi intended to demonstrate that the principle of exchange was not always the guide for economic activities, just as the market did not occupy the central role in the economy of different societies. Thus the economy can be organized through incentives related to kinship, politics, religion and not just out of fear of hunger or simple profit.

This interpretation helps to think about what forms of organization of production and consumption would be a space where these forms of integration are attuned. Alternatives Agri-Food Networks (AFNs) are examples of these spaces, and examples of AFNs are box-schemes, farmer's market, solidarity purchasing groups, food cooperatives, and community-supported agriculture, among others. According to De Bernardi et.al (2020), these AFNs aimed at shortening the food supply chain by facilitating connections and interactions between producers and consumers.

2.3 Alternatives agri-food networks (AFNs) and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA).

AFN is used as a broader term and characterized as networks of short distance between producers and consumers, farming methods contrasting with large-scale ones used in agribusiness, commitment to sustainability, and some level of food purchase location (Jarosz, 2008). Some authors have contributed to understanding the role of Alternatives Foods Networks and shorts circuits in local economies (Sage, 2003; Sonino and Marsden, 2006; Van der Ploeg, 2008).

Short circuits appear as alternatives to long circuits or food empires, which are a form of trade based on the direct sale of products from family farming and agroecology. They reduce the intermediary between producer and consumer to a minimum, generate a lower average environmental impact and the products are not transported over long distances. Short circuits are also established with direct relationships between producers and consumers, such as fairs, baskets, producer shops, local markets, and initiatives that break the dynamics established by the large agri-food systems. This direct relationship and shortening of distances would be important to face in part the distance resulting from the financialization of the agri-food system.

The literature has identified some common point between the different kinds of AFNs, they are the self-governance, sustainability, cooperation, self-production and embeddedness (Renting et al, Whatmore et al, 2003). In this investigation, I am interested in a form of AFN, Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA). Henderson and Van En (2007) point out CSA as a possibility for small producers to face the risks of an increasingly competitive market. There is also a sharing of risks and benefits between consumers and producers. CSA represents a possible alternative to the corporate diet and agricultural concentration because it encompasses broad environmental, economic, health, and social justice initiatives in an attempt to provide farmers with better livelihoods and opportunities. Land and capital are accessible and have the security of a reliable and adequate income, in addition to risk management strategies and educational opportunities for the next generation of farmers (PAUL, 2018).

In CSAs, consumers or co-farmers buy products directly from the producer group but pay in advance. The producers produce according to the combined quantities, products without pesticides, mostly agroecological, and also bring a variety of products weekly. According to Eckert and Meira (2016), CSAs are characterized by the production of organic or agroecological food, carried out by family farmers in the following ways: weekly harvests - of

vegetables, vegetables, or fruits, always local and in season - and supply of baskets of fresh food for consumer groups, all previously linked to producers.

Community-Supported Agriculture are also an example of critical consumption. The organization of buying regularly from the same producers is a political act, as it promotes the overflow of the notion of politics in the field of collective participation. The direct relationship with the producer changes the perspective of the product: learning about seasonality; The food properties, varieties, and aesthetics of food and its production method. This characterizes this relationship as a consumer education experience, as it collaborates to promote the critical reflection of the people involved on the current consumption patterns adopted in our society (BENSADON et al, 2016).

For Portilho et al (2011), critical consumption can be understood as the perception and use of consumer practices and decisions as a form of participation in the public sphere. According to the authors, the concepts of consumption and consumer society are rethought by the social sciences, since categories traditionally attributed to him as individualism, insatiability, superficiality, and alienation are opposed to the empirical observation of proposals that associate consumption practices with values such as solidarity, social participation. As a result, consumption is no longer just a way of reproducing the existing social structures to become an instrument and a strategy for political action that incorporates values such as solidarity and socio-environmental responsibility.

Critical consumption in Brazil today means all those practices would involve building resistance through fairs, markets, baskets, exchange spaces. It would also have an impact on public policies to promote and encourage food security and sovereignty practices, to defend the rights of indigenous and environmental leaders.

3. Community-Supported Agriculture in Brazil and analytical scheme

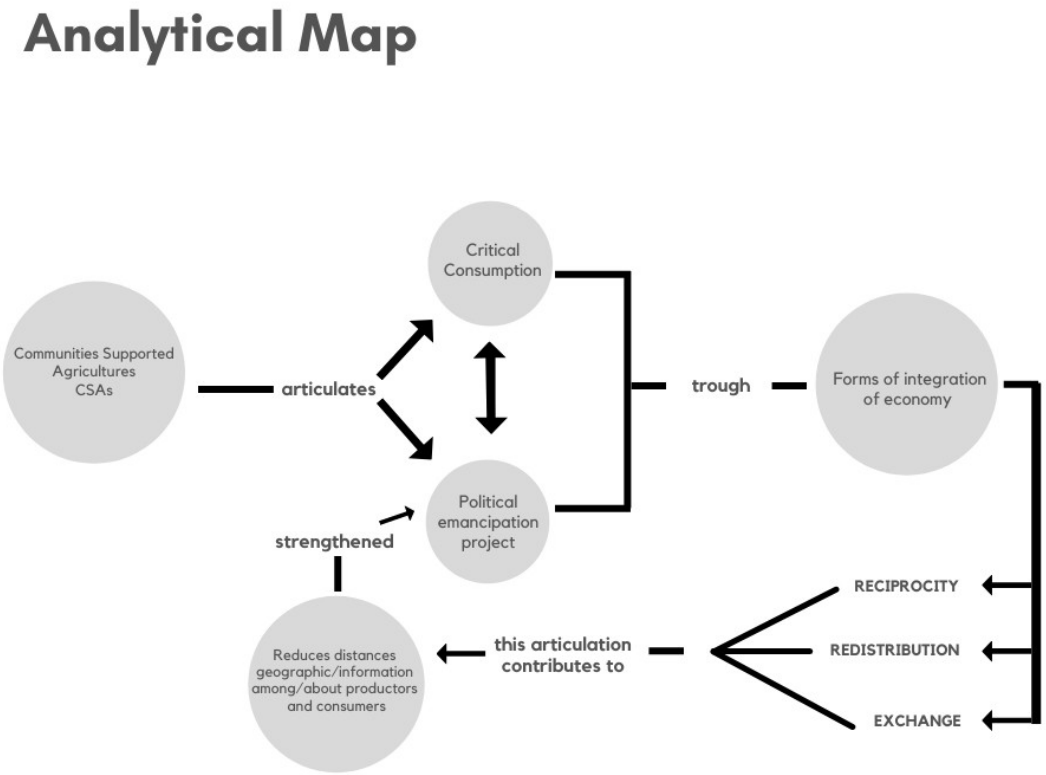
Marzembacher and Beira (2020) carried out a case study of a CSA in the State of Minas Gerais in Brazil (CSA Alfa) and find that the studied CSA pointed to the coexistence of numerous regulatory principles in a combination of market exchange and reciprocity. Also, it manifested a countermovement to the commodification of agriculture by enhancing the relative autonomy of individuals, which raised their social cohesion. For the authors, the CSA is not antagonistic to the system, but it maintains a critical distance from the conventional market for activating the principles of fair trade. When talking about countermovement, the authors use Polanyi's conception and understand that the concept proposes that no society has mercantile relations in its pure form without reacting to some extent to its negative effects.

According to the previous one and due to the specific characteristics that a CSA may have in Brazil due to the social, economic, and political context, it is in this proposal to analyze their trajectory. CSAs appear in 2011, in Demetria, São Paulo and today there are more than 100 initiatives across the country. The first CSA was based on the impulse given by the artist Hermann Pohlmann, the project started with 30 families, at the end of 2013 it had 300 members covering the cities of Botucatu, Ourinhos, and São Paulo (LENCIONI, et.al, 2018).

3.1 Proposed analytical scheme

Given the above, the following research question was formulated: How do alternative forms of organization of production and consumption in Brazil (Community-Supported Agriculture) articulate experiences of critical consumption with projects of political emancipation?. To answer that question I proposed the following analytical scheme to try to respond to the question.

Figure 1.



This analytical schemes represent the working hypothesis that is that Community Support Agriculture would articulate the critical consumption exercised by their actors, producers, and co-farmers, with political emancipation projects to respond to the impacts that the financialization of the agrifood system has caused. Through the forms of integration of the economy (redistribution, reciprocity, and exchange) this articulation is strengthened and contributes to reducing the distances not only geographic but also of information about who produces and who participates on the other side. These articulations can be affected if the groups do not make commitments to share the risks.

To answer the research question I am doing a bibliographic review and in follow I will begin the data collection with in-depth interviews, participation in CSA groups, participant observation in the CSAs training course. There will be three case studies, one in Demétria whose experience is best known for being the pioneer in Brazil. In addition to these two less

studied cases such as the CSA in Brasilia and the CSA in Salvador. The interviews will be in-depth, and with the main actors of the initiatives, in addition to documentary analysis of the material produced by the CSAs and studies related to the theme in Brazil.

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