Agrifinancialization and Transnational Agrarian Movements

Mauro Conti

Abstract

The food price crisis exploded in 2007/2008 with extreme price volatility and high prices, fuelling the Arab spring and other social riots. These extreme price fluctuations have been threatening global food security, increasing the number of undernourished people. The food price crisis shed light on the role of finance in agriculture and the ongoing process of financialization of agriculture. The neoliberal policies promoted by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, through Structural Adjustment Policies, gave rise to new Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAMs) and the food sovereignty claims. These new TAMs differentiated politically from the existing TAMs and Farmers Organizations that were oriented towards the production of commodities for export and for the international markets.

The research problematique addresses the interaction between financialization of agriculture, as a consequence of the end of Bretton Woods agreements, which, reshaping the countryside, also generates the rise of new TAMs claiming for food sovereignty: so the research question is how has the contemporary financialization impacted agriculture and shaped politically the contemporary political orientation of transnational agrarian movements?

The research assumes the Arrighian world-system theory, among the different theoretical frameworks, to understand financialization as part of the worldwide economic cycle generating the Bretton Woods crisis and the reshaping of the space of global governance, with a specific focus on agriculture.

The dissertation identifies how financialization in agriculture generated a dichotomy in the space of global governance (Intellectual Property Rights versus Collective Rights), where TAMs strategically entered claiming for food sovereignty and resisting any further penetration of capital in agriculture from within the production process and through policy dialogue for public policies with governments.

In the actual financialization phase, the hegemonic powers are trying to generate a new material expansion solving the dichotomy of the global governance of agriculture through the appropriation of world biodiversity, which implies deepening the capital penetration in the internal agroecological frontier, and mainly expand the external frontier including all the biodiversity (crop wild relatives, plants, animal and marine biodiversity) in the capital accumulation system.

The new TAMs are opposing this phase of financialization fostering a new material expansion based on agroecology and re-peasantization of the mode of production, which remunerates labour and natural resources rather than capital.

The site of the study situated in the UN Rome based Food Agencies, as space strategically selected by TAMs to re-establish the centrality of the Governments in defining the Agriculture policies and regulations, therefore confronting the neoliberal policies and the financialization processes. Therefore, the United Nation Rome Food Agencies are an essential space to understand the TAMs perspective and strategy, in the different processes and discussion that are relevant for the penetration of capital in the countryside and in the control of natural resources, even beyond the Rome processes themselves.