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Alessandro Bonanno and Douglas H. Constance, Stories of Globalization: Transnational Corporations, Resistance, and the State

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Alessandro Bonanno and Douglas H. Constance, *Stories of Globalization: Transnational Corporations, Resistance, and the State*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008 (336 pp.), ISBN 978-0-271-03388-4, US \$70.

Reviewed by Ariel Brovont and Emily Reiersgaard.

The driving force behind *Stories of Globalization: Transnational Corporations, Resistance, and the State* is to sound an alarm to the threat posed to democracy by the societal and economic conditions of globalization. Authors Alessandro Bonanno and Douglas Constance open with a summary of existing scholarship on globalization condensed into three major paradigms, which they then apply to eight case studies related to the agrifood sector. Through these case studies, they illustrate how transnational corporations (TNCs), the state, and resistance groups have shaped globalization and continue to do so in the post-Fordist era. The authors argue that the processes and consequences of neoliberal economic policies that have led to the phenomenon of globalization have erosive implications for democratic practice at all levels worldwide.

Bonanno and Constance mount a persuasive argument, albeit with certain limitations, by defining a theoretical framework and then reexamining a selection of their own case studies. Their analysis of globalization and its complexities is based on three overlapping paradigms used in the academic literature to explain globalization. The authors' case studies highlight the problematic interdependence of nations and TNCs and the challenges to democratic participation that result from the restructuring of social and economic relationships under globalization.

While their systematic review of the conceptual literature in the field develops an invaluable comprehensive analysis of the origins, characteristics, and impacts of globalization, the authors' exclusive focus on their own case studies lessens the credible scope and depth of their conclusions. The authors leave details of events occurring in the global South in the periphery of their analysis, despite identifying that hemisphere as carrying the majority burden of exploitation under globalization. This omission attenuates their argument of democracy under threat worldwide.

Bonanno and Constance open by grounding their argument in a socio-historical context. The democratic equilibrium of "High Fordism," achieved around the 1970s

with mass production, increased regulatory legislation, and the expansion of civil, social, and political rights, began to crumble as economic instability was compounded by countercultural and counter-hegemony movements in the U.S. and in the Third World, respectively. Globalization grew out of this crisis as nation-states attempted to resuscitate their local economies by adopting deregulatory policies. These policies allowed TNCs to emerge as dominant world actors, and in doing so, subordinate groups were further excluded from substantive participation in decision-making processes. Subordinate groups persisted, however, in organizing resistance to TNCs, sometimes with the involvement of the state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

To lay the conceptual foundation for their scrutiny of the interrelationships among these three actors, Bonanno and Constance examine and classify fourteen globalization scholars' arguments as supporting one of three theses: "grand durée," "corporate domination" and "contradictory dimensions of globalization." The "grand durée" thesis, evident in the work of Arrighi, Hirst and Thompson, Friedland, and Porter, posits that globalization has been an ongoing process for centuries, not a new dynamic, and that capital rests on the power of the nation-state. Only one case study supports the argument of "grand durée" in full, while another supports this thesis only when certain actions of TNCs are considered in isolation of others.

Significantly more evidence supports the "corporate domination" and "contradictory dimensions of globalization" theses. As with "grand durée," the "corporate domination" thesis can both support and critique the societal outcomes of globalization, and is derived from the scholarship of Sklair, McMichael, Dunning, Ohmae, and Rubner. Its main argument is that the global flow of capital frames the actions of local actors and institutions, such as the nation-state, and that transnational organizations appropriate these local bodies for their own purposes.

The "contradictory dimensions of globalization" thesis is a Marxist approach represented in the work of Harvey, Sassen and Pitelis, and Marsden. According to this thesis, the dominant social groups' pursuits of control lead to conflicting demands, which are a destabilizing force in society. According to Bonanno and Constance, these conflicts create space for resistance and democratizing efforts.

Chapter 2 marks the authors' shift from theoretical summaries to case study analyses in which they employ their conceptual framework to identify generalizable patterns and socioeconomic consequences. The first three case studies focus on the power of TNCs and the role of the nation-state (chapters 2, 3, and 4). They examine the enmeshed relationships between these two actors through the tuna-dolphin

controversy, the Ferruzzi scandal, and lysine price-fixing by Archer Daniels Midland.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, the authors investigate Sanderson Farms' industrial chicken operations, Seaboard Farms' hog production in confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and the logging of the Headwaters Forest by MAXXAM, with specific focus on the opposition that each industry provoked from local residents, environmentalists, and labor placed in context with government institutional involvement. Here the authors could have enhanced their argument by including case studies of peasantry-led resistance, such as the food sovereignty movements in the global South (McMichael, 2005) and in Eastern Europe (Juska and Edwards, 2004).

The authors then turn their attention to the emergence of NGOs that either resist globalization or fill the roles previously performed by the state (chapters 8 and 9). These include the cases of the Marine Stewardship Council's Safe Fish Certification and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment led by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In their conclusion, Bonanno and Constance offer a structuralist Marxist critique of neoliberal capitalism, citing globalization as the source of "socioeconomic decay, the increased polarization of rich and poor, environmental degradation, and the undermining of democratic forms of government" (241). Despite the dire picture painted, they argue that the power of TNCs is limited by inherent conflicts within TNCs and their contradictory demands on nation-states. These conflicts provide "historical possibility," which, as the authors emphasize, can be exploited by resistance such as "emancipated consumers ... [voting] with their pocketbooks" (264). This final appeal to consumerism neglects the triumphs and democratic entitlements of producer groups. Such a narrow consumer focus is surprising given their earlier criticisms of commodification in society as argued in the cases of MAXXAM and the Headwaters Forest, the tuna-dolphin controversy, and the Marine Stewardship Council.

As a whole, however, Bonanno and Constance craft an analytical framework that is both innovative and helpful. For those seeking an academic introduction to the subject, the book is a convenient graduate-level summary of the "theoretical and empirical aspects of globalization" (3), appropriate for introductory graduate classes across a wide range of disciplines. While undergraduates and others not familiar with globalization literature might find the book's complexities challenging to navigate, they may still find the authors' insights beneficial. Their book provides a

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useful sociological lens to view the repercussions of neoliberal economic policies and potential opportunities for resistance.

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