Chapter 1
Issues in Global Food Politics and Options for Sustainable Food Consumption: A Critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews key issues in global food politics. The aim is to investigate the character and trajectories of the prevailing food system in the liberal international order and, in particular, explore implications of global food politics on sustainable food consumption. Dominant theorizations of food consumption leverage on a common assumption of its essentially profit-oriented character based on the capitalist appropriation, social construction of consumption, and value augmentation leaving behind the more pressing problem of sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

On February 6, 2019, Timothy A. Wise, Director of Small Planet Institute’s (SPI) Land and Food Rights Program released his new book; Eating Tomorrow: Agribusiness, Family Farmers, and the Battle for the Future of Food in New York. Wise briefly stated that; “The way we are producing our food, on chemical-intensive, industrial-scale farms, is quite literally devouring the natural resources – soil, water, seeds,
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climate – on which future food production depends” (Wise, 2019). The FAO (2017) report reveals that in 2016, the number of chronically undernourished people in the world is estimated to have increased to 815 million, up from 777 million in 2015 although still down from about 900 million in 2000.

Renewed academic interest in global food politics is informed by scant scholarship on challenges of sustainable food consumption within the logic of ‘food politics’ and the long term implications for sustainable development. Whilst Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “End hunger, achieve food security, improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” remains an issue of urgent policy concern, sustainable food consumption which could strengthen the attainment of this Goal, has not been given adequate scholarly attention. There is scant literature on how global food politics in the capitalist order supports or undermines such assertion and provides a more sustainable food system. Mainstream discourses lose sight of the challenging legacies of capitalist resource extraction, imperialism, the rise in consumer culture, megamergers and global power asymmetry resulting in food hegemony of the affluent societies of the North and concomitant inequality on food access which acerbates hunger and food insecurity among the poor societies of the South.

While there are increasing problems of food insecurity, inequality, health challenges associated with capitalist consumption-obesity, carcinogenic effects of Genetically Modified (GM) foods including cancer, heart attacks etc and issues of environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, food shortages, climate change vulnerability, global warming etc, there is dearth of critical perspectives with particular reference to findings of the neoliberal critiques of food consumption and appropriate means of attaining sustainable food consumption. These critical issues with respect to the contemporary global food politics have stimulated urgent scholarly interest regarding options for sustainable food consumption which largely underscores the basis for the present chapter.

BACKGROUND

In 2000, world leaders joined the United Nations in committing to meet eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015: the first of which was “to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.” In 2015, world leaders adopted a post 2015 development agenda namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 2 of the SDGs is to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030. Despite these robust initiatives, “an average person in North America consumes~ almost 20 times as much as a person in India or China, and 60 to 70 times more than a person in Bangladesh. It is simply
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