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Published on H-Environment (March, 2023)

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Corporate control over global agriculture is of increasing concern, given the reoccurring food price crises and the loss of rural livelihoods from nearly every corner of the globe. While most scholars have long recognized the troubling trend of multinationals' increasing presence in the sector, few have looked at how agribusinesses have harnessed the power of legal instruments to continue this trend. Karine E. Peschard's *Seed Activism* does just that. Refreshingly, her book goes beyond “studying up,” or looking at those with (increasingly more) power in globalized agriculture: multinational corporations. It also goes beyond the often-studied political economy of biotechnology and the associated geopolitics of intellectual property (IP). *Seed Activism* offers an in-depth analysis on how IP regimes are contested on the ground with respect to local, national, and global spheres of political and economic interest.

The book draws primarily from two national cases: Brazil and India. As Peschard mentions, these two cases are among “the top GM-crop [Genetically Modified] producing nations in the Global South” and are both “biologically ‘megadiverse’” as well as “important repositories of traditional knowledge” (pp. 13-14). She also contends that their differences are as important as their similarities. Brazil and India have drastically different agrarian structures and histories. But, most important, it is in these two countries where the frontlines of legal disputes are being fought over IP rights to agro-biotechnology. Throughout the book, Peschard presents ethnographic accounts of who is involved in these battles, how they are fighting them, what they have at stake, and why it matters for farmers around the globe.

It should be stated from the outset that the book is thin in its ethnography. Indeed, the book is under 140 pages without references. That does not mean that it lacks juicy details on how legal battles are waged between parties with unequal access to legal and financial resources. Readers will appreciate how the cases of Brazil and India are a window into how the power of multinationals is continually being undermined by groups of people with less money and national political con-
nections but arguably with more at stake. As agrarian scholars have witnessed throughout history, rural producers mobilize and resist to ensure their livelihoods and to remain on the land. Peschard shows us how the law can be yet another weapon for resistance.

The case of Brazil draws on the highly visible battle over Monsanto’s right to collect royalties from farmers over their use of “RoundUp Ready” soybeans. As the notorious agribusiness giant fought through approval of their flagship IP in Brazilian patent courts, they resorted to working privately with local grain elevators to collect royalties on the harvested soybeans at sale, instead of when selling the seeds for planting. The local farmers union in Passo Fundo, located in southern Brazil, organized a class action lawsuit, which became headline news. Over a lengthy court battle across multiple judicial jurisdictions, Monsanto inevitably won the right to collect royalties due to a successful and dubious patent claim. However, as Peschard notes, the Passo Fundo class action case was a lesson in how organized farmers “spurred the development of IP expertise among soybean growers, farmer union representatives, lawyers, public servants and even judges” (p. 56). Several small legal wins throughout the battle indicated to farmers and their lawyers not only that they need to have legal expertise but also that using such expertise to fight multinationals in the courtroom was perhaps more strategic than fighting them on their farms.

For the case of India, Peschard gives us a more detailed account of how national and state politics shaped the legal battles over Monsanto’s IP rights to Bt cotton. Monsanto signed agreements with private Indian seed companies to develop, market, and sell Bt cotton. Through these agreements they were able to expand their reach to India’s numerous small farmers, in contrast to Brazil, where unequal land tenure has resulted in fewer and much larger farms. Bt cotton royalties in India were collected at the point of sale. The legal challenge was initially to the exorbitant seed prices—far above prices in other countries—being charged by Indian seed companies. Farmers’ organizations in Andhra Pradesh challenged these prices in court and found favorable results. But Monsanto’s troubles in the country were only starting. Other private seed companies in India began to challenge the company’s IP claims through their own agreements.

Ultimately, as in the case of Brazil, the ruling came down to a decision by the Indian Patent Office, which ruled in favor of the national companies. Monsanto suffered heavy financial losses and almost left the country entirely. Indian courts were bolstered by legislation from the right-wing nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has controlled congress since the mid-2010s. Once Bayer AG acquired Monsanto, they settled out of court to continue operations in the country and were able to finally acquire patent rights. Ultimately, despite nationalist political discourse, the global IP regime that started under the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) prevailed.

Bt brinjal offers another compelling case of why the use and material of crops is unique for IP in food and agriculture. Peschard walks the readers through the controversy of how Monsanto used similar agreements with both private and public actors in India to find access to markets in the agricultural sector. In the current context of heated negotiations within the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), countries from the Global South are arguing for tougher restrictions on multinational control over their genetic sovereignty. Public agricultural research is facing an ever-increasing reliance on partnering with the private sector to provide funding. Bt brinjal is a cautious tale of how such partnership risks eroding away genetic sovereignty through so-called biopiracy.
Peschard lays out a case for a “new legal common sense” that should challenge extending IP to seeds and plants (p. 103). Drawing on the food sovereignty movement, she rightly acknowledges not only that these battles are being played out in different stages—from political mobilization and legislative activism to seed saving and land occupations—but also that litigation is time consuming and expensive. Legal battles, while important, should not overshadow questioning the fundamental assumptions that plants and seeds can be patented to begin with.

There are a few shortcomings that should be raised in this review. I admit they are a bit beyond the scope of the book. The first is the empirical details on each of the cases. Seed Activism offers a wide-ranging comparative study that weaves together a diverse range of actors and geographies. In doing so, experts from one region or one topic might be wanting more. For example, as scholars of Brazil are aware, the judiciary is a powerful public sector ripe with political controversies and charges of corruption—from the local up to the national level. Seed Activism does not offer more insights into the details of how judges made their decisions outside of the formal legal system and perhaps why. Perhaps such rich ethnographic work is still to be done, and Seed Activism provides a plethora of examples that future ethnographers will explore in great detail. Scholars of agriculture and agrarian studies will undoubtedly find the book to be extremely useful in expanding their understanding of the complicated world of global IP regimes. Furthermore, Peschard’s grounded analysis in Brazil and India offers an in-depth look at how litigation is yet another contested arena where the powerful have resource advantages but collective action from marginalized rural populations is quickly gaining ground.

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