

(G)local Activism and the 'Biotechnology Project'TM

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Ruivenkamp's argument about bio-power

Global food system being transformed by an emerging system of 'bio-power' rooted in the development of biotechnology

Involves a shift of the political system into the social organization of production as researchers embed new knowledge and production control directly into the seed, enabling "control at a distance;"

Presumed to become hegemonic

The concept of hegemony refers to domination which is so strongly embedded in social life that it is not queried anymore; not even by those who are subject to it. It concerns a domination that has the force of culture behind it (Feenberg 1999). One can speak of *hegemonic biotechnology* when the bio-power system is based on assumptions which seem so natural and obvious that these assumptions lie below the threshold of conscious awareness. (Ruivenkamp 2005)

The 'Biotechnology Project'TM

A political, economic, & ideological project designed to produce a global agricultural order based on corporate control of agriculture, strong private property rights, technologies that facilitate 'control from a distance', and supportive regulatory frameworks

Key features of the Biotech Project™

Represents a complex of interests: agribusiness, state, agricultural research institutions, some research scientists, 'development' organizations

Two vectors of control: technology and private property rights

- Also important to note that the private sector plays the leading role in technology production and dissemination in the Project

Ideological dimensions of the Project

- ▶ Public good comes from private gain
- ▶ Technology is separate from society
- ▶ 'There is no alternative' (...to solve world agricultural problems, to meet human needs)

Ruivenkamp suggests that the ideological function of the 'pro' and 'anti-' biotechnology forces ('the splitters') is to strengthen this emerging system of bio-power, or what we call the Biotechnology Project'TM

Our argument:

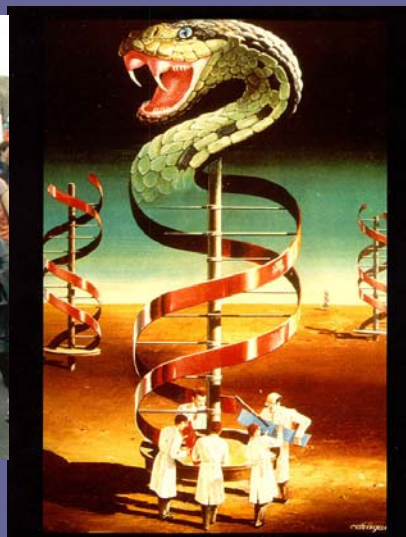
The 'anti's' have *not* moved us toward a hegemonic system of bio-power
Instead, their role has been more complex and variegated
Through their activism, they have destabilized the 'Biotechnology Project', thereby *forcing open* the future of agriculture, rather than ensuring that a hegemonic system of bio-power will obtain.

Constructed an alternative interpretative framework

This framework challenged dominant discourses on biotechnology, which painted it as a technology that would revolutionize many sectors, and produce new medicines, raise agricultural productivity, stimulate economic growth, etc.

The alternative framework constructed by the activists offers a strong counterperspective, and has stressed:

the unknown risks and impacts to health and environment



The responsibility of the state to regulate not promote



Consumers' right to know and choose what they will eat

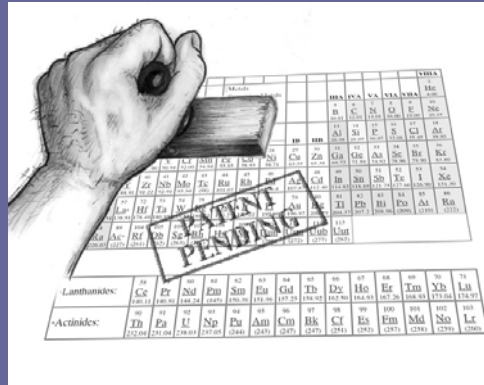


The profit-driven character of the Project and its roots in US agribusiness interests.

MONSANTO



**NO FOOD
SHALL BE
GROWN
THAT WE
DON'T OWN**



Effect was to politicize the technology at a local and global level...

- ▶ turned some against GMOs
- ▶ led others to wonder whether this technology would improve the quality of life and be worth the risks.
- ▶ for a third group, raised an inchoate concern about the safety and quality of the food supply

All in all, activists subjected the Biotech Project to a level of political scrutiny unprecedented in the modern history of technology transfer/diffusion.



Effects of activism
in Europe

Effects of activism in Europe

- Raised consumer consciousness and concern about GMOs; turned public against ag biotech
- Pressured supermarkets into a race to reject GMOs
- Pushed the 'state oversight' question and pressured national governments to play more serious regulatory role
- Worked at EU level to obtain process-based regulatory system and used system to stop the flow of crop approvals (moratorium)

Effects of activism (con't)

In sum, activists helped close European markets to (new) GMOs

As a side effect, they drove supermarkets to develop new sources of GMO-free agricultural products

Impact on the global South

Pushed gov'ts to tighten regulatory oversight and carry out more stringent biosafety testing

Drew new constituencies into regulatory debates

Increased transparency of regulatory process

Decreased ability of science professionals and biotech companies to write their own 'regulatory tickets'

In effect, they slowed down the technology's deployment and opened up the political moment

How this happened in Africa

There's the impact of activism elsewhere as well as locally..

Global: importance of Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; rebound effect of Europe (trade)

Food aid crisis in Zambia focused attention on absence of regulatory regimes as well as potential threats to biodiversity

Local: emergence of anti-GM networks who have expanded range of social groups involved in debates over biotechnology

- Activists have pushed states on the responsibility to regulate and citizens' right to decide what to eat and what to grow.

Three major effects

1. brought the construction of regulatory systems to a virtual halt in many countries, making it difficult for the Biotechnology Project to move forward
2. Increased scrutiny of MNCs, forcing them to elaborate their claims about the social benefits of the technology
- 3.. opened up new possible directions for agricultural technology development and deployment.