

Deconstructing José Bové:
Food, National Identity, and Globalization in France

by

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Introduction

When Americans think of France, several things come to mind: fine art housed at the Louvre, endless varieties of cheese, quality wine, carefully prepared food, monuments representing centuries of European history. These culturally emphasized or uniquely French attractions help to draw in the millions of international tourists who visit France each year (75.5 million in 2000) and who have made it the world's number one foreign tourist destination.¹ However, there are many things in the new, globalizing French culture that are not distinctly French: Coca-Cola, Disney World, McDonald's hamburgers and Levi's jeans, to name but a few. Some of these "American" cultural products, all of which are sold by large multinational corporations, are invading many other countries as well, but the response in France has been more vocal and, in many cases, more negative than in other places.²

One reason for this seems to be a persistent pride in French culture and a well-developed sense of national identity. Among the representations of French culture mentioned above, food stands out as the aspect of French culture that most deeply and frequently affects the lives of the French. It links the personal experiences of daily life to the political. In France, food is not a mere "alimentary necessity" or a "simple commercial activity,"³ but a deep, cultural experience with a rich history. As such, it forms one component of French national identity. In fact, food is a potent symbol all

¹ Direction du Tourisme de la France, *Chiffres clés du tourisme*, édition 2001. <<http://www.tourisme.gouv.fr/pdf/chiffrescles.pdf>> (19 Jan 2002).

² There is, however, considerable ambivalence toward the effects of globalization. This is discussed somewhat in Ch 1.

³ Alexandre Lazareff, *L'exception culinaire française: Un patrimoine gastronomique en péril?* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1998), 14.

over the world, though it clearly enjoys elevated status (and state support) in France.

Sangmee Bak indicates some reasons for the importance of food to collective

identities in the following passage, written in reference to Korean identity:

...In every society certain objects or commodities carry powerfully loaded social messages, much as cloth did in the context of Gandhi's resistance to British imperialism in the pre-1947 India. Foods, especially staple foods, often become intertwined with a group's identity. ... [Food] is literally subsumed into the bodies of human beings and, given that it is shared with one's family, colleagues, or friends, ... eating together unifies people. Consuming the staples that grow in one's native soil further reinforces the idea of oneness with fellow diners.⁴

It is therefore not surprising that food has become a particularly sensitive issue in the international debate over globalization and particularly in the movement against it.

Food provides a microcosm, which, upon examination, reveals important trends about the responses to globalization in France. One of the most visible of these responses was the August 1999 protest led by José Bové, a French sheep farmer belonging to the Confédération Paysanne, a union of small farmers. Following the US decision to heavily tax Roquefort cheese because of a trade dispute with the European Union, Bové and the Confédération Paysanne dismantled the construction site of a McDonald's restaurant being built in the southern French town of Millau. Their action put Bové, a longtime activist, in the international spotlight and made him a hero to many among the French, for a number of varied and sometimes contradictory reasons.

⁴ Sangmee Bak, "McDonald's in Seoul: Food Choices, Identity, and Nationalism," *Golden Arches East*. This statement is Bak's synthesis of arguments from other authors; I have removed references to them for clarity in the passage. They are Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3-63 and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993).

Chapter One of this paper attempts to provide contextual information about the importance of food to national identity in France, in the hope that an understanding of such issues will allow better comprehension of how the Millau action was interpreted. Chapter Two attempts to explain globalization from Bové's point of view, examining in detail the criticisms of corporate globalization that motivated him and his union to take the action against McDonald's. Finally, Chapter Three discusses the reaction to the Millau protest in its immediate aftermath (August and September 1999), exploring both the nationalist and internationalist interpretations of the event.

Chapter 1: Food and French Identity

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a context for viewing the Confédération Paysanne's action against McDonald's and the reaction to it. The historical role of food in France and the structure of French national identity provide an important preface to José Bové's interpretation of globalization.

Cultural History of Food

The history of food in France is closely associated with the history of the French nation and with the cultural identity of the French. French culinary history not only shows changes over time in aesthetic, dietary, and cultural habits, but it also shows the development of a "gastronomic patrimony."¹ In his book on the "French culinary exception,"² Alexandre Lazareff says that "In France, it has been a long time since we have eaten purely for nourishment; we give to the plate a portion of our souls."³ What follows is a brief history of French cuisine and an explanation of how food came to be so relevant to French identity.

Cuisine in France developed very little until the late Middle Ages. At that time, most of Europe did not eat well. The peasantry in particular suffered from a

¹ The phrase "gastronomic patrimony" is taken from the title of Alexandre Lazareff's book, *L'exception culinaire française: Un patrimoine gastronomique en péril?* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1998).

² The phrase "French culinary exception" is an allusion to France's "cultural exception" policy, which was formulated during the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations. The policy seeks to exclude audiovisual media (because of its cultural importance) from provisions in international "free trade" agreements. See UNESCO, "What do we generally understand by 'Cultural Exception'?", Culture, Trade and Globalization: Questions, n.d., <http://www.unesco.org/culture/industries/trade/html_eng/question.shtml> (25 Jan 2002).

³ Lazareff, *Exception culinaire*, 14.

rather limited diet of stews made from the day's harvest and hard, black bread; pork and, more rarely, other meats were occasionally added to break the monotony.⁴ The urban poor often did not possess kitchens of their own and were compelled to dine out locally. Restaurants did not then exist and the institutions which roughly corresponded to them had serious limitations. The most common dining option in France was the *table d'hôte*, a prepared meal offered for a fixed price by innkeepers or *traiteurs*.⁵ Among their drawbacks, *tables d'hôte* were only available at one or two specific times during the day; a single large meal was usually prepared for all the clients, so diners seldom got to choose their food; and meals were often served at a single table to all clients at once, so customers had to compete with one another for food. In addition, *tables d'hôte* were notorious among European travelers for providing unhealthy food in unpleasant circumstances.

The privileged few who did eat well during this period were usually those who could afford private cooks. This meant the King's Court, the nobility, and certain urban bourgeoisie.⁶ As with many other aspects of French culture, the prestige attached to cuisine stems from its initial association with the monarchy. Indeed, under the monarchy, "knowledgeability about cuisine — as about music, art, manners or horsemanship — could serve as one vehicle for display of social rank."⁷ What we might call "cuisine" began within the Court and gradually diffused outward,

⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁵ Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 7-9, 29-33. Spang indicates that *traiteur* has frequently been translated as "cook-caterer" or "public cook."

⁶ Lazareff, 25-26. According to Lazareff, monks and others in the Church also ate well, but this was because monastic farms functioned well and consistently produced surpluses, not because they employed private cooks.

⁷ Stephen Mennell, "Food and Wine" in *French Culture Since 1945*, ed. Malcolm Cook (Essex, England: Longman Group UK, 1993), 177.

propelled by the publication of various books. Le Viandier by Taillevent (c. 14th century), chef to kings Phillip VI and Charles V, is often cited as the one of the first books within this category.

The early history of cuisine is, in fact, a history of the publication of books such as these. The year in which the chef La Varenne published Le Cuisinier françois (1651) is often regarded as “the [first] recognizable beginnings of a French style of cookery,” because La Varenne’s book demonstrates a “clear break with medieval food.”⁸ This break is marked by a reduction in the number of ingredients used and an increase in the time and labor required for preparation.⁹ Sauces came into wider use for flavoring dishes, a technique that has remained important to *cuisiniers* ever since. In fact, the word *restaurant* initially indicated one such restorative kind of sauce, usually a bouillon of meat juices; the word kept this meaning until well into the 18th century.¹⁰ Collectively, these changes in cooking style were known as *nouvelle cuisine*—the first of several culinary movements to use that name.

By the late 1600s, books such as La Varenne’s Cuisinier françois and Nicolas de Bonnefons’ Jardinier françois (1661) had brought the fine art of cookery beyond the confines of the royal court into the private homes of the wealthy nobility, where it flourished under the supervision of prestigious cooks. Through some of these books, cuisine also became an ideological battlefield for the cultural war between defenders

⁸ Ibid., 176.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hereafter, italicized occurrences of *restaurant* indicate the restorative sauce; plain text occurrences denote some form of dining establishment. Spang, Invention of the Restaurant, 1-11.

of “ancient” and “modern” thought.¹¹ Books like La Chapelle’s Cuisinier moderne (1735), for example, widened the fissure between medieval and modern styles of cooking.¹² Rebecca Spang, whose Invention of the Restaurant thoroughly explores how restaurants came about, indicates that the *restaurant* (as bouillon) was “a symbol of culinary upheaval”¹³ (perhaps in the same way that McDonald’s might be perceived in certain societies today)¹⁴ representing the modern, innovative cookery then beginning to take hold. This struggle between Ancient and Modern, “the struggle between veal in white sauce and stewed beef with onions” was even dramatized in the play Blanquette et Restaurant, which told “the story of [a character named] Restaurant’s conquest of the charming kitchen maid, Blanquette.”¹⁵ The debate between Ancient and Modern lifestyles was to play itself out around the dinner table repeatedly over the course of the following century. As Spang puts it, “... the perceived conflict between old and new—be it simple meat juices versus *restaurants*, Homer versus Pope, or ‘primitive’ social contract versus the intricacies of absolutist court society—structured discussion of nearly every topic in this period.”¹⁶ Caught up in debates over modernity and the promises of enlightened progress, food was assimilated as a point of reference for discussing society. In turn, cuisine became an

¹¹ The debate between Ancients and Moderns was primarily a dispute over which of the competing cultural schools of thought (as exemplified by their authors) was superior: “ancient,” classical Greek culture, or “modern,” post-medieval culture. Within the domain of cuisine, however, “ancient” seems to have referred to medieval cooking styles rather than to those of classical Greece.

¹² Lazareff, Exception culinaire, 14.

¹³ Spang, Invention of the Restaurant, 42.

¹⁴ For a thorough exploration of how McDonald’s is and is not transforming life in East Asia, see James L. Watson, Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Spang, Invention of the Restaurant, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

icon of French culture; claiming the superiority of modern French food became a way to claim the superiority of modern French culture.

Some have argued that the medieval guild system limited the growth of restaurants (and therefore the diffusion of this *nouvelle cuisine*) under the Old Regime. It is said that legal barriers and royally sanctioned monopolies officially disallowed the existence of restaurants by restricting culinary professionals to the production of highly specialized and controlled products. Theoretically, a *restaurateur* had to confine himself to making restorative sauces; no one could sell such a sauce with a cut of meat and a glass of wine, as these three items were all produced by different guilds possessing monopolies on their respective products. However, Spang claims that “Quite the opposite of a commercial innovation made impossible by the Old Regime..., [the] first restaurateurs were, in fact, all supported by royal privileges.”¹⁷ Many beneficiaries of these privileges were upward-climbing merchants who purchased titles and who subsequently exploited the exemptions of royal privilege to operate outside the guild system. Furthermore, the fame and good repute that royal sanction conferred on them were valuable to the new restaurateurs in establishing their businesses. By the end of the Old Regime there was already a strong connection between the food industry and the government.

In the early 1800s, alongside the development of the restaurant came the development of “gastronomic literature as a genre,” which entrenched the idea of *gastronomie* into the minds of a broadening French public.¹⁸ Gastronomy is a category of literature oriented around food that incorporates “a brew of history, myth

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸ Mennell, “Food and Wine,” 182-3.

and history serving as myth.”¹⁹ The “myth structure”²⁰ of gastronomy places food and those who produce and consume it on a pedestal. The most significant contributions to this literary category were Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s Physiologie du goût (1826) and Alexandre-Balthasar-Laurent Grimod de la Reynière’s Almanach des gourmands (published annually for some years beginning in 1803). Brillat-Savarin’s book explored not only the physiology of taste, but the history and philosophy of cuisine as well as what passed for knowledge of nutrition at the time. Grimod set for himself the task of tasting and evaluating the food sold by “food suppliers of every kind” in Paris and publishing his seldom unfavorable opinions in the Almanach.²¹ Grimod’s Almanach is thus in some ways a precursor to the various restaurant guides that flourished in the 20th century. By the mid-1800s, the food industry in France had gained a strong ally in the French literary industry.

Enlightenment ideology further entrenched the notion of fine food within the national identity of the French, though considerable debate existed as to what defined such food. The Enlightenment provided “cultural recognition” for gastronomic matters through articles in Diderot’s encyclopedia, and the expressed dietary predilections of Voltaire and Rousseau.²² Voltaire, for example, made it known that he was no friend of the *nouvelle cuisine* which so dominated early restaurants. In a letter to the Comte d’Autrey, the great intellectual opined, “I can not stand the ham essences, mushrooms, pepper, and nutmeg with which they disguise dishes that are,

¹⁹ Ibid., 183-4.

²⁰ Spang, Invention of the Restaurant, 5.

²¹ Mennell, “Food and Wine,” 183.

²² Lazareff, Exception culinaire, 15.

left by themselves, perfectly fine and healthful.”²³ Rousseau’s idealized *Emile* prefers to live and eat simply in a rural setting and has little taste for the ornately decorated foods of urban, noble tables.²⁴ The stances of Voltaire and Rousseau on schools of cookery are not of such importance as the fact that they, as literary men and renowned philosophes, deigned to discuss matters of food and lend their enlightened voices to the debate. Even when they disagreed with new practices in the preparation of food, they showed in their writings that food was a crucial component of the nation’s identity and culture.

One of the reasons for the rising general interest in food throughout the 1800s, and for the success of *restaurants* and the *salles de restaurateur* that served them, was a preoccupation with health. Those of “delicate constitutions” (men of letters, the sickly, and apparently all women) and others who, for whatever reason, did not regularly eat dinner, were encouraged to visit the *salles de restaurateur*, where they could be “restored” with a simple and easily digestible *consommé* of bouillon.²⁵ Early restaurateurs “were participants in, and beneficiaries of, the enormous eighteenth-century marketplace of medicalized consumerism.”²⁶ By billing themselves largely as health-oriented “restorers,” restaurateurs distanced themselves from the rather bad reputation of many *traiteurs* of the late 1700s. Indeed, the “Seasonings” article of the *Encyclopédie* reflects this antipathy toward *traiteurs*; its author divides the world into two sorts of men: “cooks who work ceaselessly to kill us ... and doctors who try

²³ François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, letter of September 6, 1775, in Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, ed. Theodore Besterman (Banbury, Oxfordshire: Voltaire Foundation, 1973), vol. 113, pp. 287-288, in Spang, *Invention of the Restaurant*, 45 (apparently Besterman’s translation).

²⁴ Spang, *Invention of the Restaurant*, 58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

desperately to cure us.”²⁷ Thus, current French concern over food safety and nutrition issues has a precedent in the 18th century.

After the Revolution, culinary improvements made their way beyond the domain of the nobility and into the lives of the newly empowered bourgeoisie as well as those of the new urban masses of Paris. The political and social decline of the nobility and the power shift to the bourgeoisie forced many former cooks of the nobility to find new employers or take up their trade on their own as restaurateurs or traiteurs. Furthermore, the migration of masses of peasants toward Paris and other urban centers created a class of agriculturally nonproductive city-dwellers who were in some cases dependent on restaurants, *tables d'hôte*, and other “public” cooks for their food. Thus, these effects of the Revolution are contributing factors in the growth of the restaurant (in a more modern sense of the word) as an institution and in the central placement of food in the identity of French people of every class.

As noted earlier, the spread of restaurants also contributed to the phenomenon of guide books in the 19th and early 20th centuries. An outgrowth of gastronomic literature, guide books evaluated the food, pricing, and quality of service at restaurants and other food establishments. Following Grimod’s Almanach, a succession of restaurant guides were published over the course of the 1800s: Honoré Blanc’s Guide des dîneurs (1815; considered “the first real restaurant guide” by one author),²⁸ Gardeton’s Nouveau Guide des dîneurs (1828), Briffault’s Paris à table (1846), etc. This trend received its biggest boost in 1900, when the tire company

²⁷ *Encyclopédie*, art. “Assaisonnemens [sic Spang]” in *Ibid.*, 29 (Spang’s translation).

²⁸ Pierre L. Horn, “Food and Wine” in Handbook of French Popular Culture (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 102.

Michelin began publishing its restaurant guide. It was the first to implement a star system for ratings, a practice that has since become standard. Though it might seem odd that a tire company would care about recognizing quality food, Michelin's interest lies in the promotion of tourism; indeed, the Michelin guides are early evidence of the important "holy alliance"²⁹ between gastronomy and tourism. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, tourism is a huge industry in France, drawing in over 70 million visitors annually. Thus, for over a century, food has been a vital component not only of French identity, but also of the French economy.

Also around the turn of the century, a new culinary movement (sometimes uncreatively referred to as *nouvelle cuisine*) arose, creating another resurgence in the diffusion of French cuisine.³⁰ Like other movements before it, the precepts of this movement were outlined in a book, in this case Georges Auguste Escoffier's Guide culinaire (1903). Escoffier is credited with reorganizing the sequential menu into its current incarnation (going from *hors d'oeuvres* through dessert). On the basis of Taylorist principles of efficiency,³¹ the meal was to be organized "by type of operation and not by plate."³² Escoffier's style of cuisine consisted of using lighter dishes, expensive ingredients, and less elaborate preparation.³³ It spread through European capitals by way of the fashionable hotels where Escoffier and his disciples worked, once again demonstrating the important relationship between tourism and gastronomy. This means of diffusion was also wildly successful, as "it was in the

²⁹ Curnonsky [pseud. of Maurice-Edmond Sailland], Souvenirs (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958), 534 cited in Mennell, "Food and Wine," 184. Indeed, if one divides gastronomy into its culinary and literary components, one might be tempted to call it a holy trinity.

³⁰ Mennell, "Food and Wine," 179.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lazareff, Exception culinaire, 34.

³³ Mennell, "Food and Wine," 179.

Escoffier era that French *haute cuisine* achieved the undisputed international hegemony that it had begun to acquire since the Restoration.”³⁴

In the 1960s, a new *nouvelle cuisine* movement, probably the best-known of those with the title, arose as a reaction in some ways to the prescriptive approach of Escoffier and his contemporaries. The *nouvelle cuisine* of the 1960s was characterized by an experimentation with new techniques and an incorporation of diverse styles from elsewhere, including more French provincial dishes, but also more Asian influences (steamed vegetables, for example). The chefs of *nouvelle cuisine* worked to simplify many aspects of the cooking process. They typically reduced the number of dishes on their menus and introduced new, modern equipment to the kitchen, even including microwave ovens. Given the surface similarities of these characteristics to American fast food (menu of limited choices, use of technology), it may be tempting to conclude that *nouvelle cuisine* was a movement toward a kind of fast food *à la française*. However, its cooks were not zealous advocates of technology or standardization. They mistrusted frozen foods and emphasized the use of fresh ingredients because, according to Stephen Mennell, “many products had been bastardized and polluted by food technology and overproduction.”³⁵ *Nouvelle cuisine* may have been more minimalist in preparation, but it was not industrial and, as mentioned previously, was opposed to prescriptive standardization. *Nouvelle cuisine*, like Escoffier’s cuisine before it, was internationally renowned and a source of great national pride for the French. In 1975, President Giscard d’Estaing even bestowed

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mennell, “Food and Wine,” 180-81.

the Legion of Honor upon Paul Bocuse, one of the leading cooks of *nouvelle cuisine*, for his work in “spreading the art of fine French food throughout the world.”³⁶

The history related above should make it clear that food is a deeply ingrained component of French culture and identity. It should therefore not be surprising that, as globalization affects food production and distribution, it will also affect French national identity. The reverse is also true: if French agriculture chooses to fight globalizing forces in some respect, it is able to tap into the national identity of the French for broad support.

Threatened National Identity

An explanation of the state of French national identity is also important to understanding the reaction to Millau. This section thus describes how French national identity is being simultaneously attacked and strengthened by the forces of globalization.

As has been established, culture (food being an important component thereof) is very closely related to national identity. Culture also generally forms an important basis for nationalist mobilization, as Gregory Jusdanis says in The Necessary Nation: “Although the point of cleavage [class, race, gender, etc.] may differ from case to case, the stimulus and rationalization for mobilization are put in terms of cultural survival, as they always have been in the history of nationalism.”³⁷ Globalization therefore provides a special, though not unique, impetus for nationalist mobilization and the growth of national identity because the globalizing economy has increasingly

³⁶ Horn, “Food and Wine,” 99.

³⁷ Gregory Jusdanis, The Necessary Nation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 186.

challenged both culture—in this case, the local production and distribution of food—and the idea of national identity. Through its attacks on the sovereignty of nation-states and on the direct livelihoods of individuals, it gives strength to nationalism as a countervailing force and a source of stability. As Stuart Hall, a leading scholar of identity, has said, “we... [assume] that there is something which we can call our identity which, in a rapidly shifting world, has the great advantage of staying still. Identities are a kind of guarantee that the world isn’t falling apart quite as rapidly as it sometimes seems to be.”³⁸ Thus, identities, be they national, local (subnational), or international (supranational or transnational), have great appeal in a world that frequently seems like it is being pulled apart by globalization. The interplay of these three forms of identity is extremely complex and bears some discussion. Given the unique importance of national identity (as the basis of the nation-state), my focus will be on how national identity is affected by local and international forms of identity.

French national identity faces direct challenges from these other forms of identity, themselves products of globalization, that compete with it for allegiance. International identity is increasingly important in a world where trade liberalization policies, European integration and other such phenomena attempt to eliminate the economic and legal barriers that separate nations. The European Union and the United Nations are supranational institutions which many critics see as threats to the independence of nations and the autonomy of national institutions. But some people also identify with such international institutions, and such identification can be seen

³⁸ Stuart Hall, “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference,” in Radical America (Alternative Education Project, 1989), 10.

as a way out of particular nationalisms; the abnegation of local nationalism offers a way of expressing internationalism. As “citizens of the world,” those whose primary identity is international feel unbound by the parochialism of national identity.

Discussing the emerging European cultural identity, French foreign minister Hubert Védrine lists among its assets “its historical success in getting beyond nationalism.”³⁹

However, for those who are eager to toss off the nation-state entirely, he adds the following:

These people who think they are so clever and make fun of “backward” laws and “paper barriers” [referring to legislative efforts to defend French identity and the French language]—and who dream only of melting into the global village—are mistaken. They’re nothing more than froth and *risk provoking a backlash from an identity under threat*.⁴⁰

Thus, a nationalist backlash can lead to rising nationalism just as competition with supranational identity leads to nationalism’s decline. Using the European Union again as an example of this phenomenon, Benjamin Barber says that “the more ‘Europe’ [hovers] into view, the more reluctant and self-aware its constituents become.”⁴¹ Importantly, supranational identity does not have to be linked to international governmental institutions like the EU. The introduction of consumer society all over the world provides consumption as one avenue (though seriously limited) for the expression of identity. In Taiwan, for example, McDonald’s is an icon of the international world and, “to many consumers, McDonald’s represent[s] something new and different, a third option beyond the realm of the Chinese-versus-

³⁹ Hubert Védrine, France in an Age of Globalization, transl. Philip H. Gordon (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴¹ Benjamin Barber, Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 11.

Taiwanese competition.”⁴² A sense of global identity allows one to transcend, or maybe just to pretend to ignore, the many problems of the nation-state.

On the subnational level, regional identities are growing in importance, in France and elsewhere. France is in many ways an archetype of the nation-state: the French Revolution is widely regarded as the definitive starting point for nationalism as a force; the state has for centuries actively shaped, supported, and promoted the language and culture, and France, as a result, is culturally “very homogeneous.”⁴³ However, homogenization—whether coming from the nation-state or from globalizing forces—generates resentment that can provoke a resurgence of local or regional identities. The response can be violent, as in Brittany and the Basque territory, or relatively benign, as in Alsace, Lorraine or Provence. The most widely recognized and fundamental marker for these regional identities is language, but each of the regions mentioned above also has a particular cuisine associated with it: Brittany is known for *crêpes* and mutton; the Basque eat *tripochka* and *loukinka* (types of sausage); Alsatians, like the Germans (who they sometimes have been), eat more potatoes and are known for *patates à l’Alsacienne*; *quiche Lorraine* is probably the most well-known variety of quiche; and Provence is home to *aioli* (a type of mayonnaise) and numerous dishes that make extensive use of olives.⁴⁴ Collectively, these and other diverse foods comprise “French” cuisine and make it so well-known to the world. However, they individually identify their regions as well and can be seized upon as symbols of local identity when national identity begins to fragment.

⁴² David Y. H. Wu, “McDonald’s in Taipei: Hamburgers, Betel Nuts, and National Identity” in Golden Arches East (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 115.

⁴³ Védérine, France in an Age of Globalization, 20, 29.

⁴⁴ Thelma Barer-Stein, “French” section, You Eat What You Are: People, Culture, and Food Traditions (Ontario: Firefly Books, 1999), 149-163.

Regional identity can be a reaction to nationalism and/or to globalization, but it can also act in cooperation with either of these to work against the other. In discussing the strength of regional linguistic identities, Benjamin Barber says the following:

The French government ... now supports indigenous languages. Perhaps it does so because it appreciates that McWorld's global American-speak can use all the enemies it can get. ... Provincial dialects may threaten French centralist culture but they also constitute multicultural France and so are at once a weapon of French nationalism and a weapon pointed at integral nationalism's heart. Europe, France's rival for the affection of the newly legitimized localities, is also supportive. ... [Some] see in [the E.U.'s] work a subtle strategy of national deconstruction by which the European whole nurtures the subnational fragments, all the better to undercut the resistance to wholeness on the part of the nation-states. In holding French centralists at bay, Provence may thus welcome support from Europe.⁴⁵

While nationalism is in these senses being undermined, the perception of fragmentation also gives strength to nationalist claims of cultural threat. In short, many people see threats against the independence and unity of the French nation coming from both international and regional institutions or movements (including economic). The interplay of global, local, and national identities is extremely complex and the relative strength of each has been dramatically affected by globalization. The case of Taiwan is again illustrative. Chewing betel nuts, a Taiwanese cultural practice that predates the massive Chinese migration to the island, is seen as a way of affirming one's local identity (national or even subnational); as mentioned before, eating at McDonald's is regarded as an affirmation of global identity.

⁴⁵ Barber, Jihad vs. McWorld, 172-73.

The two symbols represent the need to be at once Taiwanese and cosmopolitan, to be of this place—the island of Taiwan—but also part of the world beyond. To outsiders (and to many insiders as well) the two modes of consumption—hyperlocal versus transnational—appear irreconcilable. But in today’s Taiwan, they coexist and, to a surprising extent, reinforce each other.⁴⁶

Thus, the Taiwanese, and the French as well, desire to express both a global and a local (national and/or subnational) identity; there is often a collective ambivalence toward globalization. This important irony is present elsewhere in France. To take but one example, while the government seems to embrace free trade measures and institutions like the WTO, even political elites like Védérine express doubts as to the viability and appropriateness of the current international system.

In short, national identity finds itself in an unusual place at the present stage of globalization. It is attacked from both above and below by competing forms of identity, all of which are working to undermine the nation-state and its institutions. National identity is both strengthened and weakened by these processes, leaving it in a volatile and fluctuating state. It is within this context that I would like to consider the action against McDonald’s in Millau, which attracted considerable support from various kinds of French nationalists despite the fact that it was initiated and guided by globally-conscious, internationally-oriented individuals. Identity, particularly national identity, is intricately and inextricably involved in the complex debate over globalization. Its persistent importance allowed the Confédération Paysanne to

⁴⁶ Wu, “McDonald’s in Taipei,” 135. Wu discusses Taiwanese cultural identity as a unique case, because of the particular politics of Chinese integration. However, I believe that his argument holds true for France and many other countries as well (though the perceived conflict of identities is arguably less intense elsewhere).

broaden its level of support and inform French people from a wide range of perspectives as to some of the effects of globalization.

Food is a major component of French identity, which is currently under threat from globalization. However, the local production and distribution of food is also being threatened by corporate globalization. A major factor in the warm public response to the Confédération Paysanne's action against McDonald's was the perception that challenges to traditional, small-scale agriculture are challenges to the French way of life and should thus be opposed by all French citizens regardless of political affiliation, sector of employment, or other social cleavage.

Chapter 2: José Bové, the Confédération Paysanne, and Globalization

Introduction

The cultural importance of food in France extends to the agricultural workers who produce the country's food. The agricultural sector is also very important economically to France, and agricultural unions are very active politically. The Confédération Paysanne is one farmers' union which has attracted the attention of the French public and the world through its protests, the most important of which was their "dismantling" of a McDonald's restaurant construction site in 1999. This chapter attempts to elucidate some of the history and ideas of the Confédération Paysanne and of José Bové, one of the union's founders. Their ideas encompass a wide-ranging critique of corporate globalization, a good understanding of symbolism and protest, and suggestions for humanizing globalization.

José Bové

Who is José Bové? Two conceptions of him tend to dominate press coverage and writings about him. Bové's harshest critics level many accusations against him, his supporters, and the anti-corporate globalization movement in general. They have caricatured him as an anti-American vandal who uses violence to agitate for protectionist laws to prop up his own inefficient production. The Center for Food and Agricultural Research, an industry organization that keeps track of "eco-terrorists" on its VandalWatch site, even goes so far as to cynically label him "a veteran activist

who *poses* as a French farmer.”¹ On the other hand, some of those sympathetic to him have reduced the discussion to hero worship and based their understanding of Bové and globalization on a very narrow interpretation of the McDonald’s action. The French press, for example, has repeatedly likened him to Astérix, the popular comic book hero who defends the Gauls (the Ancient predecessors of the French) from Roman invaders.² The nationalist implications of this comparison should be evident. However, Bové himself is not a nationalist. For the reasons discussed in Chapter 1, his attack on McDonald’s struck a chord within the French political mainstream and broadened support for his action.

José Bové was born in Bordeaux in 1953, the only child of two agricultural researchers. For three and a half years (from age 3 to age 6), he lived in Berkeley, California while his parents studied at the University of California.³ Having begun school there, he learned English at an early age. His early experience in the US may also have contributed to his attitude towards America. Contrary to what many assumed after the action against McDonald’s, Bové insists he is not anti-American. This claim is borne out by his actions in Seattle in 1999, when he took the opportunity of the anti-WTO protests to express solidarity with American small farmers, many of whom had helped pay his bail after the Millau action.⁴ Bové sees

¹ Center for Food and Agriculture Research, “Jose Bove [sic]: Vandal Par Excellence,” <http://www.cffar.org/vandalwatch/faces/bove.html> (10 Feb 2002). My emphasis.

² For example, “Astérix chez l’Oncle Sam,” *Paris Match*, n.d. http://www.parismatch.com/news/bove/page01_self.stm (Sept 2001).

³ Paul Ariès and Christian Terras, *José Bové: La révolte d’un paysan* (Villeurbanne, France: Éditions Golias, 2000), 6. Simon Hattenstone, “Pipe Dreamer” in the *Guardian* (London), July 11, 2000, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/globalisation/story/0,7369,504789,00.html>>.

⁴ Democracy Now!, “The Battle in Seattle: French Farmer José Bové Leads Protest at McDonald’s”, *Pacifica Radio*, 30 Nov 1999, <<http://www.webactive.com/pacifica/demnow/dn991130.html>> (23 Feb 2002). José Bové and François Dufour, *The World is Not for Sale* transl. Anna de Casparis (London: Verso, 2001), 30-31.

anti-Americanism as a distraction used by French politicians “to discard a problem as not being of direct concern to us, rather than to confront it.”⁵ He has a similar regard for nationalism as an obstacle to constructive problem resolution. Discussing the French ban on the import of British beef during the Mad Cow scare, Bové commented:

The embargo was purely political, and had nothing to do with protecting public health. To say that French consumers should be protected, but not British, was nonsense in a supposed European union [sic]. It did, however, rally farmers behind the government, and lent a helping hand to the FNSEA [a competing agricultural union] in building chauvinistic barricades. The FNSEA’s threats to boycott English meat simply encouraged corporatism and nationalism.⁶

Thus, José Bové is neither anti-American nor nationalist in his outlook.

José Bové is a longtime activist. In terms of his philosophical and ideological outlook, Bové has been influenced by theories of anarchism and civil disobedience. He considers his beliefs to be “closer to [anarchist thinkers like] Proudhon ... and Bakunin ... than to Marx.”⁷ He distances himself from what he considers the extreme left and calls the violent revolutionary approach of Maoists and others “absurd and curiously anachronistic.”⁸ Instead, he prefers a strategy of nonviolent direct action, as theorized by Henry David Thoreau and exemplified by Martin Luther King and Gandhi.⁹ His activism dates back to at least as early as 1968, when, in the midst of the national upheaval of May of that year, he was expelled from school for

⁵ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 13.

⁶ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 103.

⁷ Ariès and Terras, La révolte, 9-10, 33.

⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

⁹ Ibid., 10 and Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 34.

“irreligion,” having written a paper which offended the sensibilities of the church-run high school he attended.¹⁰ Though he did not return to school thereafter, he took the Baccalauréat exam in Economics and passed it *avec mention*.¹¹

After his departure from school, José Bové became involved in a number of interrelated anti-military, agricultural, union, and environmental struggles. These concerns animated him for much of the 1970s, when they converged in the social movements which took place in the Larzac plateau in the Aveyron department.¹² The Larzac is inhabited mostly by small-scale farmers and, in the early 1970s, it was the site of a French military camp which the government was seeking to expand. In 1970-71, Bové moved with his parents back to Bordeaux, where he helped set up a local support committee for the Larzac farmers.¹³ In 1973, he and others fasted in the Bordeaux cathedral in solidarity with Larzac farmers who were driving their tractors to Paris.¹⁴

In 1974, José Bové increased his involvement in the anti-military movement by applying for conscientious objector status. Recognition by the government as a conscientious objector would have exempted him from mandatory military service, but his request was rejected (having been judged “too political”)¹⁵ and he was called upon to report for duty immediately. To avoid imprisonment for refusing to perform military service, Bové went into hiding from authorities for a year while appealing the

¹⁰ Ariès and Terras, *La révolte*, 6-7.

¹¹ Ibid., *La révolte*, 7. The “Bac” is the major college-entrance exam in France. Passing *avec mention* indicates honors of some kind.

¹² France is administratively divided into *régions*, which are comprised of *départements*.

¹³ José Bové, “A Farmer’s International?” in *New Left Review*, vol. 12, November/December 2001 (London: Central Books, 2001), 89.

¹⁴ Ariès and Terras, *La révolte*, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

decision.¹⁶ He spent this time productively, hiding out on the farms of sympathetic organic and ecological farmers in the Midi-Pyrénées (the region which includes the Aveyron department).¹⁷ This gave him considerable farming experience and allowed him to strengthen personal ties with activists in the Larzac. When José Bové resurfaced in 1975, he and his wife Alice “wanted to live on the Larzac plateau, because it brought together the two things which motivated them most: the desire to live on a farm, and the anti-military struggle.”¹⁸ In February 1976, they joined with other radical farmers in squatting land that the military had purchased. He and Alice took over an abandoned farm in Montredon, where Bové continues to live today.¹⁹ The efforts of the anti-military movement finally came to fruition in 1981, when the new Socialist president François Mitterrand fulfilled a campaign promise and cancelled the proposed extension of the Larzac military camp.²⁰

Several of the farmers involved in the struggle then worked to set up collective management for the land that had been made available by the cancellation of the camp’s extension. Their efforts culminated in the 1985 creation of the Société civile des terres de Larzac (SCTL) as a legal entity to manage the land.²¹ The SCTL leases land to both farmers *and* non-farmers (to ensure that “life on the Larzac [is] properly balanced”). The land is leased to farmers on a lifetime basis (until death or retirement), but property is not transferable to descendants. A desire to promote farming and increase employment guides the SCTL’s leasing policies. The SCTL is

¹⁶ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 37.

¹⁷ Ariès and Terras, La révolte, 13.

¹⁸ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 38.

¹⁹ José Bové and Alice Monier divorced in 2001.

²⁰ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 40.

²¹ Ibid., World is Not for Sale, 131-133.

an example of the successful institutionalization of ideals of democracy and collectivism on a local level. Its implementation indicates that Bové and other activists are able to positively construct institutions, not just tear them down.

The Confédération Paysanne

While working on the collective land management project, Bové and others worked to implement their ideals on the national level through involvement with unions. Disillusioned with intensive agriculture,²² they preferred environmentally sound, sustainable approaches to farming. This put them at odds with France's only agricultural union at the time, the agribusiness-friendly Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles (FNSEA). In Bové's view, the FNSEA had serious limitations:

A vertically structured system, with membership practically mandatory, this organization, ... in the name of 'Farmers' Unity,' ... was the *only* union for farmers. All farmers, regardless of differences in status (landowners, farmers, tenant farmers, breeders), and regardless of the size of their holding and what it produced, were supposed to have the same interests, and were therefore best represented by a single organization. From this position, the FNSEA managed agricultural policy jointly with the government.²³

The FNSEA was, and continues to be, a strong advocate of intensive farming and industrialized agriculture. Dissatisfaction with the FNSEA led many farmers to seek alternatives to the single union. In 1981, the Confédération Nationale des Syndicats Travailleurs Paysans (CNSPT) was created. The following year, another union, the

²² "Intensive agriculture" is the term used repeatedly in the English translation of *Le monde n'est pas une marchandise*. The original uses the term *productivisme*. Both denote the increasingly capital-intensive farming practices associated with large-scale cultivation and agribusiness. See the section below on "what they say is wrong with corporate globalization" for more information.

²³ Ibid., 73. Emphasis mine.

Fédération Nationale des Syndicats Paysans (FNSP) was formed. Both of these unions regrouped farmers disaffected with the FNSEA's increasingly export-oriented policies. Finally, in 1987, the CNSPT and FNSP groups united to create the Confédération Paysanne.²⁴

The Confédération Paysanne is a union of small farmers that opposes intensive agriculture. They are not affiliated with any political party.²⁵ In their own words, the members of the Confédération agitate “for a sustainable agriculture of small farmers in a united world.”²⁶ More specifically, they work to promote the following: production based on quality rather than quantity, especially of quality-controlled “red label” or AOC (*Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée*) goods; increased employment of small farmers, with the aim of creating a society “balanced” between rural and urban areas; and farming methods that do not threaten the environment or public health, including but not limited to organic farming. The Confédération also recognizes that “the international dimension is at the heart of agricultural debates,” and consequently, the organization has worked as much as possible with groups in other countries.²⁷ Through the Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE), the Confédération Paysanne works closely with other organizations of small farmers in Europe to influence the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).²⁸ According to Bové, the CAP is “completely dominated by the interests of

²⁴ Union history comes from Ibid., 47-49 and Confédération Paysanne, “Origines et histoire de la Confédération Paysanne,” n.d., <<http://www.confederationpaysanne.fr/histoire.htm>> (17 Feb 2002).

²⁵ Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 92.

²⁶ Confédération Paysanne, “Qui sommes nous? La Confédération paysanne, un jeune syndicat pour une autre agriculture,” n.d., <<http://www.confederationpaysanne.fr/qs.htm>> (17 Feb 2002). Here I have translated *paysan* as “small farmers” to indicate the separation from large-scale farming.

²⁷ Ibid. A link at the top of the “Qui sommes nous?” page even includes a *présentation* in Esperanto.

²⁸ José Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 93.

agribusiness.”²⁹ The Confédération Paysanne also “allies itself with and works with farmers the world over” through Vía Campesina, which brings together small- and medium-scale producers from Europe, Asia, and the Americas.³⁰ Vía Campesina, currently based in Honduras, is an important link between the European farmers and farmers from developing countries.³¹ Vía Campesina “refuses [neo]liberalism in agriculture, which destroys men and land everywhere in the world” and it believes that “international exchanges should be founded on food sovereignty, which alone can best guarantee self-sufficiency and sustainable development in each country or group of countries.”³²

The global strategy of the Confédération Paysanne is very important. At the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle, the Confédération Paysanne sent four delegates (including José Bové) to protest the WTO and monitor the negotiations. These delegates “took along proposals for discussion with other farmers’ organizations in the *Vía Campesina*.”³³ They also stood in solidarity with farmers from the global South in demanding, among other things, an end to the export subsidies which privilege large-scale producers in wealthy countries.³⁴ Both the Confédération Paysanne and Vía Campesina promote the concept of “food sovereignty,” which holds that each country should democratically decide what food to produce and what food to import. The argument holds that most countries would prefer to produce

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Confédération Paysanne, “Qui sommes nous?” and Vía Campesina, “What is the Vía Campesina?”, n.d., <<http://ns.rds.org.hk/via/what-is.htm>> (18 Feb 2002).

³¹ José Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 93-94. The “coordinating executive” of Vía Campesina will be moving to Asia some time in 2002.

³² Confédération Paysanne, “Qui sommes nous?” See below for more information on food sovereignty.

³³ Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 152.

³⁴ Ibid., 154-55.

locally and on a smaller scale to assure the safety and quality of food, especially given the number of recent food scares linked to intensive agriculture and agribusiness. This is to the advantage of small farmers everywhere, because, according to Bové, “for the people of the South, food sovereignty means the right to protect themselves against imports. For us [the Confédération Paysanne], it means fighting against export aid [which goes to large-scale producers] and against intensive farming.”³⁵ Thus, the Confédération Paysanne works on an international level to promote fair trade policies which benefit small farmers everywhere.

What they say is wrong with corporate globalization

Given its international outlook, the Confédération Paysanne pays close attention to the relationship between global trade policies and their local effects. For the Confédération Paysanne, intensive farming exemplifies many of the problems of corporate globalization within the agricultural sector. These include the antidemocratic concentration of political power, the elimination of smaller producers, the consequent homogenization of products and diminishing consumer choice, and the disregard for public health and the environment. These problems extend beyond agriculture and affect other sectors of the economy as well. These wider economic patterns are important, but I will discuss these problems in detail as they pertain specifically to the interests of the Confédération Paysanne.

First, decision-making power within the realm of global trade policy is antidemocratically concentrated in the hands of very few people. As critics have noted, the nation-state has lost considerable power to multinational corporations

³⁵ José Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 96.

(MNCs) because “the ability of governments to pursue development, full employment, or other national economic goals has been undermined by the power of capital to pick up and leave.”³⁶ Furthermore, even in international institutions like the WTO, whose membership is ostensibly composed of states, only a few elite citizens have a direct say in who represents their country’s interests. The democratic structures of the nation-state, “democracy’s most promising host,”³⁷ have thus become completely divorced from international decision-making. For the Confédération Paysanne, this impotence within traditional systems has fueled the union’s strategy of direct action and civil disobedience. They have repeatedly targeted Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in particular by destroying fields of genetically modified (GM) crops at agribusiness research facilities. José Bové has personally led crop destruction actions at a Novartis site in January 1998, in Montpellier (home to a major agricultural research center) in June 1999, in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2000 (at the World Social Forum), and again in Montpellier in August 2001. Bové and the Confédération Paysanne are opposed to GM agriculture for many reasons (some of which are discussed below), but they have chosen to express their opposition through crop destructions because of the exclusion of citizen participation from the decision-making process. At his trial for the January 1998 action, Bové summarized this view in a statement to the court:

In acting as I did, I was aware that I [was committing an illegal act]. However, it was necessary [because] we had no other choice. The manner in which GM agriculture has been imposed on European countries left us with no other alternative. When was there a debate?

³⁶ Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, Global Village or Global Pillage (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), 29.

³⁷ Benjamin Barber, Jihad vs McWorld, 15.

When were farmers and consumers asked what they thought? Never. The decisions were made at the level of the WTO and the wheels of state were bent to the [will] of the Market.³⁸

This argument is in line with what William Greider calls the “politics of rude and crude”: in the absence of meaningful democratic processes (both within the nation-state *and* in the international system), concerned citizens resort to drastic measures to make their voices heard.³⁹ Such measures are inherently limited: typically, they can only *respond* to decisions being made or already made by powerful interests; because individuals have little or no power in the international order, they are seldom able to positively construct policy.⁴⁰ One critical limitation of protests in general is that they are merely a means of drawing attention to an issue, not articulating the nuances of it. This leaves them subject to (mis)interpretation, a topic which is addressed in Chapter 3. As concerned citizens, José Bové and the members of the Confédération Paysanne had no formal means to even express their grievances, so they chose to demonstrate in an effort to draw public attention to the issue.

The hormone-treated beef dispute is another example which illustrates the lack of accountability of international institutions to the citizens whose lives their decisions ultimately affect. At his trial for the destruction of the McDonald’s construction site in Millau, Bové made an argument similar to the one above, defending the Confédération Paysanne’s decision to dismantle the site by arguing that “the *only* way to make ourselves heard was to take direct action.”⁴¹ However, even if

³⁸ Ariès and Terras, *La révolte*, 47.

³⁹ William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People?: The Betrayal of American Democracy* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 161-182.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Greider’s book addresses problems of democracy within the US system, but many of his points are valid for the international system.

⁴¹ Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 181. My emphasis.

Bové and his sympathizers could have expressed their grievances less dramatically, it is highly unlikely that those grievances would have been addressed, since none of the parties relevant to the dispute were accountable to them as French citizens or consumers. The MNCs that buy and sell hormone-treated beef answer to stockholders and not consumers; the U.S. government, which filed the WTO suit against the European Union, answers to American citizens⁴² and not French ones; and WTO dispute resolution panels answer effectively to no one.⁴³ If these parties are entirely unaccountable to the French public, they are also largely unaccountable to the French government, which can bring only weak pressure to bear in an attempt to influence them. Individuals may be citizens within their own countries, but even their governments are spectators in the process of globalization. Confronted with the declining importance of national democratic structures and antidemocratic international institutions, frustrated citizens and concerned consumers are taking to the streets to reassert some measure of control over global processes.

One could argue that this lack of democracy and accountability would be inconsequential if the powerful based their decisions on furthering the public good. Indeed, the economically powerful often assert that increasing their short-term profits will somehow serve the public interest. However, critics of corporate globalization

⁴² It has been argued by many (both inside and outside America) that the US government does not answer to its own citizens either. Bové himself echoes this sentiment in one interview, saying that “Ralph Nader’s [2000 presidential] campaign highlighted the real nature of American politics... The system is entirely at the service of economic interests, which retain the real power” (José Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 98). The idea has also been expressed by many Americans. However, a meaningful discussion of this topic is well beyond the scope of this paper. For a lengthier study of the topic, see Greider’s aforementioned Who Will Tell the People?

⁴³ “A [WTO dispute] panel’s decision [is] automatically adopted within a fixed number of days unless every WTO member—including the initial complainant—votes to reverse it.” (Brecher and Costello, Global Village or Global Pillage, 59; not my emphasis.) Bové has referred to the WTO panels as “*véritable[s] gendarme[s] du commerce mondial, [qui] décide[nt] ce qui est bien tant pour les pays que pour les populations, sans droit de regard et sans appel!*” (Arriès and Terras, La révolte, 47).

are skeptical of such claims because, regardless of what sector they are involved in, all corporations have one fundamental goal that drives all of their actions: profit maximization. Critics argue that private profit maximization and public good have nothing whatsoever to do with each other and frequently even come into direct conflict. Agribusiness in particular is based on the quest for profit maximization in the sale of products that are essential for human survival. In discussing the use of GMOs in food production, José Bové disputes the claim that technology can help end world hunger by boosting productivity. He says that, rather than improving the supply of food to impoverished countries, the increased costs associated with GM crops and other technology actually eliminate local production and diminish food supplies where they are most needed.⁴⁴ William Heffernan's 1999 report to the National Farmers Union (an American organization similar in purpose to the Confédération Paysanne) makes this point even more clearly:

ConAgra [one agribusiness MNC] says its major mission is to increase the wealth of its stockholders. But, these firms are in [a] position to decide which people in the world will eat. Their decisions are based on whether one has the money to buy food. We hear a lot about the growing population of the world and how feeding the increasing millions will provide great opportunities for farmers in ["developed" countries]. The problem is that much of the population increase is in the "have-not" nations of the world, in countries where the people ... cannot afford to buy imported food! The global firms travel the world "sourcing" their products from those countries where they can get the product the cheapest and selling them into the countries that will pay the most.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 96.

⁴⁵ William Heffernan, "Report to the National Farmers Union: Consolidation in the Food and Agriculture System," 5 Feb, 1999, <http://www.nfu.org/images/heffernan_1999.pdf> (18 Feb 2002), 14.

If alternatives to corporate agribusiness are eliminated (as Bové and others argue is the current tendency), this situation has the potential to deprive millions of impoverished people of the food that they need to survive. Thus, despite corporate claims that the agribusiness model of food production can eliminate world hunger, many believe that it is in fact worsening the problem.

The Confédération Paysanne believes that the corporate fixation on profit maximization also disregards other important areas of public concern, such as public health. François Dufour, a spokesperson for the Confédération Paysanne, explains the Mad Cow disease public health scandal, in which 84 people died in Britain from Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), as a “logical consequence of [the] intensive farming” practices favored by agribusiness corporations.⁴⁶ Efforts to cheaply boost livestock production led farmers to increase their dependency on animal feed instead of natural pastureland. For British feed manufacturers, it was cheaper to make animal feed from “abattoir waste and the products of processing eggs, milk, meat and fish” than to import soy from the Americas.⁴⁷ Because “bags of animal feed do not detail the nature or the origin of their contents,” farmers unknowingly fed processed animal remains to herbivorous cows.⁴⁸ Furthermore, “in order to remain competitive, the British feed industry was allowed to break European regulations” governing proper heating of animal waste, so some of this waste was undercooked, making it possible for harmful bacteria to survive.⁴⁹ According to

⁴⁶ Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 99-103. The quote comes from page 99 and the figure of 84 deaths from page 101.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* For further background on BSE, see US Department of Agriculture, “Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy: An Overview,” Oct 2001, <<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/bse/>> (18 Feb 2002) and

Dufour, this appalling situation resulted from efforts to cut costs and increase profit margins without regard for possible repercussions.

Another problem many see with corporate globalization in agriculture is the increasing consolidation of production in the hands of very few companies. According to the Confédération Paysanne, this situation, where powerful “monopolies or quasi-monopolies” control production, “is incompatible with the notion of fair trade.”⁵⁰ This idea is also suggested by Heffernan’s report to the NFU, which summarizes recent consolidations and resulting problems in American agriculture. Heffernan says that agricultural corporations have integrated both horizontally and vertically to the point that, in the US, three main “clusters” of companies control huge percentages (usually over 50%) of every aspect of production.⁵¹ These arrangements are called clusters because, when one corporation does not buy another company or division outright, it often will form a partnership to share control of a needed aspect of production. Heffernan concludes that this results in a profound lack of competition within the system.⁵² In 1999, the three main clusters were Cargill and Monsanto; Archer-Daniels-Midland and Novartis; and ConAgra. Since then, Novartis has merged with Zeneca, a European agribusiness firm, to form Syngenta. Critics think a high level of consolidation and oligarchal

Eric Schlosser, “Afterword: the Meaning of Mad Cow” in Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 271-288.

⁵⁰ Confédération Paysanne, “Soumettre l’OMC aux droits fondamentaux de l’homme: Positions et propositions de la Confédération Paysanne sur les prochaines négociations de l’OMC”, November 1999, <<http://www.confederationpaysanne.fr/anapro/omc.html>> (28 Feb 2002). See also François Dufour’s statements in Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 154.

⁵¹ Heffernan, “Consolidation in Agriculture,” 4-10.

⁵² Ibid., 11.

collaboration in the agricultural sector has further concentrated economic power within a few hands.

The Confédération Paysanne also argues that large agribusiness corporations are able to use their colossal capital resources effectively to exclude small, independent producers from the market. One of the most powerful tools corporations use to this end is biotechnology. Of the three clusters mentioned above, two consist of companies with powerful processing resources (Cargill and ADM) that have partnered with companies established in the field of biotechnology (Monsanto and Novartis/Syngenta). The biotechnology industry has focused its energies in recent years on the development of Genetically Modified Organisms, crops which are resistant to disease and which produce high yields. As mentioned above, the issue of GMO crops is highly controversial and opposition to it is a key component of the Confédération Paysanne's platform for many reasons. Since GMOs are relatively new and research on possible adverse effects of their consumption has not been conclusive, part of the controversy stems from the aforementioned perception of corporate disregard for food safety and public health. Also, the Confédération Paysanne believes that the sale of GMOs amounts to "claiming a royalty on life" and "[imposing] patents on living things."⁵³

Regarding the problem of market exclusion, the Confédération Paysanne says GMOs constitute an obstacle for small farmers because they demand significant capital investment. The tendency toward increasing capital demand in agriculture has existed since at least the mid-twentieth century and the so-called Green Revolution,

⁵³ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 84 and Bové, "A Farmer's International?", 95.

when farmers began to use more expensive, mechanized equipment and fertilizers.⁵⁴ However, Bové argues that biotechnology worsens the problem by making technology an expense that continually demands greater expenditure. Biotechnology researchers have been working hard to imbue GMOs with so-called “terminator genes” which render all seeds produced by the first generation of crops sterile.⁵⁵ This makes farmers dependent on biotech firms for their seeds on an annual basis. The dependency is reinforced by the complementary integration of different technologies: Bové cites as an example a certain variety of rapeseed which “has been genetically modified in order to be resistant to a pesticide sold by the same company that sells the seed.”⁵⁶ Farmers often feel compelled to adopt GMO technology, in part because of the intense pressure of competing with much larger agribusiness. However, Bové adds that “the cultivation of GM crops precludes any other form of planting,” because “genetic pollution introduced by [a neighboring producer’s] GM crop makes it impossible for farmers to guarantee that their harvest is free of them.”⁵⁷ Thus, Bové and others believe that an oligopoly of a few large corporations excludes small producers by increasing the threshold of capital investment required to compete.

Bové argues that global trade liberalization further excludes small producers by facilitating the practice known as dumping. According to Bové, dumping is “a well-established tactic used to sweep a local agriculture out of the way.”⁵⁸ As developing countries reduce and eliminate their trade barriers (often under pressure

⁵⁴ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 63-66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 90 and Heffernan, “Consolidation in Agriculture,” 12.

⁵⁶ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 85-86.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁸ Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 95. The quotes here come from the NLR article, but the same points are discussed in Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 152-155. Bové also mentions dumping in discussing the concept of food sovereignty in Ariès and Terras, 66-67.

from international financial institutions), they remove the defenses which protect local agricultural production from powerful multinationals. At the same time, agribusiness MNCs from (over)developed countries are able to collect export aid and subsidies from the wealthy countries in which they are based. As a result, they are able to “flood a country with very cheap, poor-quality produce” and lower their prices well below the production costs of domestic farmers.⁵⁹ Once the local competition has been eliminated, Bové says, the MNCs are free to raise prices again. One example Bové cites of this phenomenon is “sub-Saharan Africa, [where] livestock herds have been halved as a result of the big European meat companies flooding in heavily subsidized frozen carcasses.”⁶⁰ Bové believes that dumping, an anticompetitive practice created by trade liberalization, allows MNCs from developed countries to unfairly dominate weaker foreign markets.

The Confédération Paysanne argues that another consequence of large-scale production and the exclusion of small producers is a reduction in the diversity of products. This is especially important in agriculture, where diversity of crops means *biodiversity*, which affects the health of the world’s ecosystems. To critics, diminishing diversity also means the homogenization of food, with important effects on culture (as suggested by the previous chapter). José Bové discusses the example of rice in Asia, where

140,000 varieties of rice are grown for their particular properties—height, the ability to thrive in different humidities, taste or texture; wild rice, long-grain, short-grain ... even medicinal varieties... The multinationals are working on only five or six strains of rice, genetically

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

modifying them for ... intense cultivation in areas where subsistence farming previously held sway. In some Asian countries, these five varieties now cover 60 to 70 per cent of the land planted with rice. We're witnessing the complete annihilation of a [self-sufficient] farming culture ... together with the distinctive social and cultural system this produced.⁶¹

The effect of food homogenization on culture is important to Bové's concept of *malbouffe*. Such "bad food" is cultivated on a large scale by intensive agriculture.⁶² Because of standardization and the heavy use of technology, it hardly matters whether such food is produced in France, the United States, Brazil, India, China or South Africa.⁶³ Because this food is made for the global export market, it does not take into account the preferences of local consumers or the culture that shapes those preferences. At the same time, the sheer size of agribusiness pushes out smaller, more culturally attuned producers, creating a tendency toward uniformity in the world food supply. Thus, critics claim that corporate globalization diminishes diversity in food production.

As I have tried to indicate, the concerns of José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne are not isolated to the French, small farmers, or agriculture. Their arguments have intersected with those of many other individuals and groups critical of corporate globalization. The lack of accountability in international institutions is one of the most important reasons for the huge presence of demonstrators from all walks of life—trade unionists, environmentalists, students, and ordinary citizens—at recent international gatherings of the global elite in Seattle (WTO), Washington,

⁶¹ Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 90-91.

⁶² Literally translated as "bad food," the term *malbouffe* was coined by Bové on the day of the McDonald's dismantling. It is also frequently translated as "junk food." Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 53-54.

⁶³ Concerned consumers may have important reasons for avoiding buying products from some of these countries.

D.C., and Prague (IMF/World Bank), Davos and New York City (World Economic Forum), Quebec (Free Trade Area of the Americas) and Genoa (G8). In fact, Bové himself has been present at many of these events, frequently speaking to express solidarity and to highlight the movement's importance to French small farmers.⁶⁴ Corporate power and citizen disempowerment have led to deregulation and privatization policies that have opened up new avenues for corporate profits to be made, many critics say, at the expense of public good. Outside the realm of agriculture, the Confédération Paysanne expresses alarm about the growing privatization of numerous public sectors. They cite as one example Vivendi Universal, a French conglomerate, which has major interests in "water treatment and management, waste disposal, communications, [and] hospital management," and which "endlessly increases its influence in Third World countries."⁶⁵ Indeed, critics say the interrelated problems of consolidation, market exclusion, and elimination of small producers manifest themselves on many levels and in many sectors ranging from news media (six corporations control the majority of America's news outlets)⁶⁶ to "sprawl mart" retail stores. In these two examples, consolidation has important consequences for diversity and choice. Several media monitors claim that consolidation leaves citizens with fewer places to get their news and, as a result, more

⁶⁴ He was present at the 1999 WTO talks and protests in Seattle; the 2001 and 2002 World Social Forums (the countersummit to the WEF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil; the Summit of the Americas (which sought to form the FTAA) in Quebec in 2001, and the 2001 demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa, Italy.

⁶⁵ Confédération Paysanne, "Soumettre l'OMC aux droits de l'homme." Vivendi also owns major subsidiaries involved in music, publishing, TV, and film.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Bagdikian, "Preface to the Sixth Edition," The Media Monopoly, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), viii-xxvii.

limited, watered-down perspectives on world events.⁶⁷ The diminution of independent stores from which to purchase leads to a reduction in the variety of products one can purchase.⁶⁸ Free speech activists point out that Wal-Mart, “the world’s largest CD retailer and, in some regions, the only place in town to purchase music,” famously refuses to stock CDs containing what they deem to be “objectionable material.”⁶⁹ Thus, the concerns of José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne coalesce with those of the wider movement against corporatism and corporate globalization.

Putting Their Critique into Action: McDonald’s

When the Confédération Paysanne took action against McDonald’s on August 12, 1999, they did so for many of the reasons mentioned above. They made their action relevant to the time by placing their arguments within the context of the US-EU trade dispute over hormone-treated beef. The European Union had banned the import of all hormone-treated beef since 1989, much to the irritation of the United States, where most farmers use hormones to boost beef production.⁷⁰ In 1996, the US asked the recently-formed WTO to set up a dispute resolution panel to settle the matter. By May of 1998, the panel had concluded that the EU ban was in violation of WTO rules because it was not based on scientific evidence. The WTO ruling angered

⁶⁷ Many have made these arguments, most notably Bagdikian (cited above) and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, (London: Random House, 1988). Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) is a left-leaning media watch group that devotes considerable energies to documenting limitations in the media’s perspective.

⁶⁸ Reuters, “KMart filing could leave some at Wal-Mart’s mercy,” 22 Jan 2002, <<http://www.forbes.com/newswire/2002/01/22/rtr489337.html>> (2 Mar 2002).

⁶⁹ PBS, “Wal-Mart Business Practices,” (n.d.) <http://www.pbs.org/storewars/stores3_2.html> (2 Mar 2002).

⁷⁰ This and most of the subsequent chronology comes from US Foreign Agricultural Service, “Chronology of the EU Hormone Ban,” 13 Dec 2001, <<http://www.fas.usda.gov/itp/policy/chronology.html>> (2 Mar 2002).

many in Europe because, according to Bové, the trade rules require that “the country or group of countries that refuses the importation of hormone-treated beef or genetically modified products must prove that it’s dangerous and not the reverse.”⁷¹ To Bové and many others, it seemed that the onus of proof should be on exporting countries to prove the safety of questionable products rather than on import-blocking countries to prove they present a danger. The WTO decision was all the more infuriating to many European consumers because Europe had recently undergone several food scares, most notably the rash of cases related to Mad Cow disease in the mid-1990s. As a result, the European public was hostile to the idea of being forced to import hormone-treated beef. In July of 1999, after the EU failed to comply with the WTO panel’s decision, the US imposed 100% tariffs on the import of numerous European *produits du terroir*.⁷² These included Roquefort cheese, on which many of the farmers in the Millau area depend for their livelihood. Many French perceived the tariffs as an unfair punishment for a popularly supported ban of potentially dangerous food.

Before the tariffs were even announced, the Confédération Paysanne had “already envisaged linking the issue of hormones and McDonald’s.”⁷³ McDonald’s was a logical target for the symbolic protest for a number of reasons. First of all, McDonald’s is “the largest purchaser of agricultural commodities in France,”⁷⁴ giving it significant leverage within the farming sector. Beyond that, “McDonald’s has regularly been accused of crippling established restaurants and ruining the French

⁷¹ Arriès and Terras, *La révolte*, 47.

⁷² *Produits du terroir* translates literally as “products of the soil,” though the term also implies a certain cultural importance. See Chapter 3, footnote 18.

⁷³ Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 4.

⁷⁴ Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 244.

sense of *bon goût*,”⁷⁵ whose cultural importance is not to be underestimated.

McDonald’s is widely regarded as a symbol of America and American cultural imperialism, a perception which it both encourages and discourages. The company often parades its American patriotism to “exploit whatever positive connotations America may convey abroad [in order] to sell ... merchandise”; at other times, it strenuously denies its American-ness to don the appearance of a “French” company.⁷⁶ Finally, “McDonald’s has become a saturated symbol, so laden with contradictory associations and meanings that the company stands for something greater than the sum of its corporate parts.”⁷⁷ McDonald’s was thus a juicy target for protesting hormone-treated beef and for drawing attention to larger issues of global trade.

Constructive Alternatives

Proponents of corporate globalization frequently charge that activists like Bové know only how to attack and destroy the current system and not how to construct alternatives. However, Bové and others have frequently shown creativity and flexibility in formulating new solutions. The SCTL (mentioned above), which leases collectively held land in the Larzac, is one example of a viable, alternative structure created by José Bové and others to implement their ideals. The Confédération Paysanne has also proposed solutions to some of the problems it sees with the current world order.

⁷⁵ Richard Kuisel, “Learning to Love McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, and Disneyland Paris,” *The Tocqueville Review*, Vol XXI, 145. “*Bon goût*” translates literally as “good taste.”

⁷⁶ Kuisel, “Learning to Love”, 131, 140.

⁷⁷ James Watson, “Introduction,” *Golden Arches East*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

Bové and the Confédération Paysanne see the WTO as the chief institutional enforcer of corporate globalization. Given the many faults they perceive in it (its antidemocratic structure, disregard for non-economic matters, etc.), it is not surprising that they should give some thought to possible alternatives. Bové suggests an International Trade Tribunal, to be founded under the auspices of the structurally democratic United Nations.⁷⁸ This Tribunal would examine trade agreements and assure their accordance with “the individual and collective rights to which UN members are signatories—the right to food, to shelter, to work, education, health.”⁷⁹ It would also allow “private individuals, groups, and trade unions [to] bring cases, as well as states.”⁸⁰ These provisions would address some of the major problems of the WTO while still providing a framework for the governance of international trade.

One key idea of José Bové and his colleagues in the Confédération Paysanne is allowing food prices to be determined by quality rather than purely by market forces. To implement this, they have repeatedly promoted the expansion and export of France’s *Appellation d’origine contrôlée* system (AOC; sometimes referred to in English as “red label” products). Organized as regional cooperatives of farmers, the AOC system is based on the specialization of particular products within quality-controlled areas. Roquefort is an AOC cheese, meaning that only cheese made from the milk of a particular kind of sheep, stored properly in a certain type of cellar, processed according to specified standards, and originating from the Midi-Pyrénées

⁷⁸ Bové, “A Farmer’s International?”, 95-96.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 96. The rights Bové cites are included under articles 23 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Notably absent from this list are corporations.

can bear the name of Roquefort.⁸¹ Customers who buy Roquefort therefore know where the product comes from and are guaranteed a predictable, high level of quality. For the farmers themselves, Bové says, “human-scale co-operatives such as these allow for both direct democracy and the practice of an agriculture linked to one product and one area.”⁸² France has thousands of AOCs in the food industry, particularly in cheeses and wines. AOC organization is a production model that incorporates positive values into agriculture and which, over the more than 75 years that it has been in use,⁸³ has been proven to be economically viable.

Finally, it is important to recognize that Bové and others like him do not oppose globalization itself, but its current trajectory, *corporate* globalization. As such, they see the growing links between groups across national borders as a means of developing and promoting alternative solutions. They revel in the strengthening of transnational bonds between people and ideas; indeed, international solidarity is what gives them the strength to fight the problems of the current global system. For José Bové in particular, the kind of globalization that he advocates is exemplified by his actions in the global arena, most particularly by his involvement with the World Social Forum (WSF). The WSF is a counter-summit to the World Economic Forum (WEF), which is an annual gathering of the world’s political and economic elite to discuss issues affecting their interests. The WEF normally meets in Davos, Switzerland (though its most recent meeting took place in New York City), and, in 2002, it attracted about 2,700 participants; the WSF, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, attracted

⁸¹ Democracy Now!, “Battle in Seattle.”

⁸² Bové and Dufour, *World is Not for Sale*, 77.

⁸³ The Roquefort *appellation* has been in existence since 1925. It was the first AOC cheese. Jean-Paul Besset, “« Mac Do defora, gardarem Roquefort ! »,” *Le Monde*, 14 Aug 1999, France.

about 50,000 participants by most estimates. The World Social Forum allows activists from groups like the Confédération Paysanne to discuss global issues with human rights activists, environmentalists, trade unionists from all sectors, workers from developing economies, and citizens of all countries. In many ways, the WSF allows its participants to stave off some of the limitations of “rude and crude” politics. In addition, their ability to draw media attention and cooperate on controversial issues builds momentum for their movement. The World Social Forum provides an opportunity to formulate arguments and proposals and to initiate the implementation of alternative solutions.

Thus, José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne have important grievances against the current process of corporate globalization and an idea of what they think globalization should be. While their interests and arguments are focused on farming issues, they share a criticism of globalization that extends to groups involved in many other issues and economic sectors. Their protest at the McDonald’s in Millau focused attention not only on the hormone-treated beef issue, but also on many of the problems of global trade which McDonald’s symbolizes. Finally, the Confédération Paysanne does not take action simply to complain about world trade, but also to create opportunities for public debate in which they can actually propose and promote constructive alternatives to problematic existing structures. As we will see in the next chapter, the arguments and actions of the Confédération Paysanne have attracted wide attention and support in French public life.

Chapter 3: The McDonald's Affair

Introduction

On August 12th, 1999, the Confédération Paysanne and the (partially overlapping) Société des Producteurs du Lait de Brebis (SPLB) held a rally at the construction site of a McDonald's restaurant in Millau, a town in the Aveyron department of southern France. The rally was to be a demonstration of opposition to the tariffs recently imposed by the United States on Roquefort cheese and other European *produits du terroir* as the latest round in the hormone-treated beef dispute (see Chapter 2). McDonald's was targeted for its immediately recognizable symbolic importance, and as an amalgamated representation of agribusiness, junk food, and the US. Given that the McDonald's was still under construction, symbolic property damage at the site did not entail violence against people or a legally serious disruption of business for McDonald's. To differentiate the action from petty vandalism or random mob violence, the organizers decided to dismantle the construction site in an orderly fashion; their objective was to have a "non-violent but symbolically forceful action, in broad daylight and with the largest possible participation."¹ According to Bové, the police were notified in advance as to the organizers' intentions to "dismantle the McDonald's," but they "deemed it unnecessary to mount a large presence."² So, on August 12th, 1999, the 300 or so farmers, townspeople and sympathizers who gathered before the Golden Arches used their own screwdrivers and wrenches to dismantle the site piece by piece, "taking down partitions, some

¹ Bové and Dufour, World is Not for Sale, 5.

² Ibid., 6.

doors, fuseboxes, and some tiles from the roof.” They then loaded the pieces onto tractors and drove down to the prefecture, where they “unloaded” (dumped?) everything.

Though no arrests were made during the dismantlement, four of the farmers who organized the event were called in for questioning the following day and subsequently imprisoned. The court set an unusually high bail of 105,000 Francs (about \$18,500) for each of the farmers, causing an uproar that drew the attention of the French press. José Bové himself was not at home when the police came to look for him (he says he had gone on vacation), so the court issued a warrant for his arrest. After a few days, Bové turned himself in to authorities. Once imprisoned, he refused to pay bail for his release, saying that the Confédération Paysanne had already paid more than enough for the other four farmers to be released; the high bail fines, according to Confédération Paysanne spokesman François Dufour, amounted to “trade-union repression.”³

Following Bové’s imprisonment, a bewildering array of groups and individuals issued statements of solidarity and demonstrated for his release. These included: political parties of the far left and moderate left, like the French Communist Party (PCF), the League of Revolutionary Communists (LCR), and the Greens; left solidarity organizations like Action against Unemployment (AC!), ATTAC, and Droits devant!!; unions, such as CGT and SUD-PTT, as well as an FDSEA group;⁴ the extreme right-wing National Movement (MN); politicians from all ranks and

³ Ibid., 27-29.

⁴ The Fédérations départementales des syndicats d’exploitants agricoles are the local affiliates of the FNSEA in each department. See Chapter 2 for more information. Eventually, even FNSEA president Luc Guyau called for Bové’s release.

parties, from conservative Gaullist mayors to Socialist government ministers; and French choreographer Maurice Béjart, who, in his 1991 memoirs, had written that he “hated” McDonald’s.⁵

Bové was released from jail when sympathizers from all over the world (including the US) sent in money to pay his bail. At the same time, agricultural unions involved in a separate dispute began to symbolically target McDonald’s to promote awareness of the unfair prices being paid to fruit and vegetable producers. The fruit and vegetable protests, led by FDSEA groups, dumped rotten nectarines on a McDonald’s restaurant in Montauban, “bombarded” another in Avignon with surplus apples, and took similar action elsewhere in France.⁶ Taken all together, the Confédération Paysanne’s protest, the rallies in support of Bové, and the fruit and vegetable fiasco seemed to constitute a full-blown “peasant revolt” (see Figure 1).

Though the Confédération Paysanne’s protest claimed to be making a statement about the hormone-treated beef dispute, the action against the Millau McDonald’s symbolically dramatized the group’s critique of corporate globalization (see Chapter 2). In the weeks that followed, the union’s action attracted national attention and opened up a debate within France on *produits du terroir* versus *malbouffe*. While the Confédération Paysanne intended for Roquefort cheese and McDonald’s hamburgers to represent, respectively, sustainable agriculture and industrial agribusiness, some saw them instead as icons of France and the United

⁵ “Béjart soutient Bové,” *Le Figaro*, 07 Sept 1999, La Vie politique.

⁶ S. Eco (with AFP), “McDo pris en sandwich par les agriculteurs: la chaîne victime de deux mouvements protestataires,” *Libération*, 23 Aug 1999, Economie. “Les opérations de soutien à José Bové se multiplient dans le monde agricole,” *Le Monde*, 30 Aug 1999, Dernière page. While the headline is about demonstrations for Bové’s release, the article talks more generally about “manifestations dans le monde agricole.” See also the photo for Gilbert Laval and Muriel Gremillet, “Les anti-McDo prônent l’exception agricole,” *Libération*, 31 Aug 1999, Economie.

States. This chapter attempts to assess the extent to which the Confédération Paysanne's arguments were absorbed into the framework of nationalism and national identity and to what extent their actual arguments about globalization resonated among the French public. It does so by examining the reaction to the Millau demonstration in August and September 1999 in France's "big three" daily newspapers, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, and *Le Monde*.⁷ Though some regard the three as politically neutral,⁸ they respectively represent, at least relative to each other, the left, right, and center of mainstream French politics. The political orientations of these papers determined to some extent how much they supported the action and whether they interpreted it as an assertion of French national identity or as part of the international movement against corporate globalization.

The Nationalist (Mis)Interpretation: America versus France

Given the strong links between food and national identity in France (see Chapter 1), it is hardly surprising that the Confédération Paysanne's action against McDonald's and *mal-bouffe* was interpreted in a nationalist context. I refer to this as the nationalist "(mis)interpretation," because it misinterprets the intentions of Bové and the Confédération Paysanne (see Chapter 2); at the same time, this interpretation broadened the group's audience and made their protest meaningful to many who would otherwise have no interest in their arguments about globalization. Supporters and detractors of the action alike saw it as an assertion of French national identity. Many people who subscribed to this interpretation saw McDonald's more as a symbol

⁷ Articles from *Libération* and *Le Monde* were found on microform reels. *Le Figaro* was not available in print or microform format, so my data for it comes from Lexis-Nexis searches.

⁸ Ministère des affaires étrangères, "Science, Technology, Culture and Media: The Media," n.d., <<http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/france/gb/edu/edu13.html>> (06 Apr 2002).

of America than of agribusiness. Some therefore denounced the action as anti-American, while others saw it as a defense of French culture and sovereignty against American hegemony. Many politicians and government officials who supported Bové did so because they saw a national struggle behind the Millau action.

Many observers of the Confédération Paysanne's action and of the subsequent protests over other agricultural issues expressed opposition to what they perceived as anti-Americanism. While the Confédération Paysanne did initially make some comments about fighting against an "American diktat," they quickly made it clear that they had "no intention of sinking to anti-Americanism."⁹ On August 19th, 1999, *Le Figaro* printed its first article about the action (a full week after it took place), choosing for a title "The king of hamburgers is the chosen target of angry farmers in France; McDonald's draws anti-American wrath."¹⁰ The article pits McDonald's, the "sign [and] symbol of America in all its splendor" against "French diehards" and portrays the protest primarily as just the latest example of French (or European) anti-Americanism. On the same date, the paper also ran a front page summary article which quoted a French academic as saying "those who attack McDonald's confuse globalization with Americanization.... McDonald's has become the ideal scapegoat for people who no longer know who to blame or who to defend themselves from."¹¹ An article by Princeton professor Ezra Sulieman in the September 29th edition of *Le*

⁹ Luc Bronner, "La mobilisation des syndicats agricoles ne faiblit pas," *Le Monde*, 03 Sept 1999, France. Jean-Paul Mulot, "Agriculteurs; l'affaire de l'Etat," *Le Figaro*, 11 Sept 1999, La Vie Politique.

¹⁰ Anne-Marie Revol and Eric Lecourt, "Le roi du hamburger est en France la cible privilégiée d'agriculteurs mécontents; McDonald's attire la foudre antiaméricain," *Le Figaro*, 19 Aug 1999, Notre Vie.

¹¹ "McDonald's cible d'agriculteurs en colère; les boucs émissaires de l'antiaméricanisme," *Le Figaro*, 19 Aug 1999, Une. It is, however, far from clear that globalization and cultural imperialism (Americanization?) are separable and distinct phenomena.

Monde echoes this sentiment, saying that “anti-American activism illustrates the discomfort of the French ... faced with (economic) transformations that they accept only with difficulty ... and for which they cannot identify those ‘responsible.’”¹² Thus, as globalization complicates economies and identities, people who feel threatened by the dramatic changes it entails find it more and more difficult to determine the identity and nature of their adversaries. Anti-Americanism is a way in which nationalists react to feelings of confusion and powerlessness in the increasingly complicated world order.

As Richard Kuisel has pointed out in his book Seducing the French, anti-Americanism has historically been endorsed by both ends of the French political spectrum: on the left, the opposition of French Communists to American capitalism fostered anti-Americanism in the 1930s; on the right, anti-Americanism stems from Gaullist resentment of US dominance in Europe after World War II.¹³ In addition to those who engage in “ideological” anti-Americanism, Sulieman adds a category for “practical” anti-Americans, who blame Uncle Sam in an effort to “obtain concessions and protections from their government” or to avoid addressing “problems which are largely French or European.”¹⁴ This assessment is more accurate for the demonstrations by fruit and vegetable producers than for those led by the Confédération Paysanne; a major demand of the FNSEA was increased subsidies from the French government and from the EU.¹⁵ However, “bonuses, subsidies and other compensations [were] not the reasons behind” Bové’s struggle, which received

¹² Ezra Sulieman, “Les nouveaux habits de l’antiaméricanisme,” *Le Monde*, 29 Sept 1999, Horizons.

¹³ Richard Kuisel, Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Sulieman, “Nouveaux habits.”

¹⁵ Daniel Tacet, “La FNSEA reprend l’offensive,” *Le Figaro*, 11 Sept 1999, La Vie Economique.

more prominent press coverage.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the press continued to make references to an “anti-American cultural combat” led by Bové.¹⁷ Thus, despite the intentions of the Confédération Paysanne, some segments of the French public associated the Millau action with anti-Americanism.

What some critics characterized as ideological or opportunistic anti-Americanism was seen by supporters as a defense of French cultural identity. The initial *Figaro* article condemning the action as anti-American also quoted an unidentified speaker as saying that “by taxing Roquefort, the US has [attacked] a symbol of European agriculture that is linked to the environment and to the [French] *identité du terroir*.”¹⁸ The American choice to tax *produits du terroir* seemed to many French like a symbolic assault on French culture itself. The Confédération Paysanne was therefore able to tap into French anxieties about cultural imperialism to broaden their audience (not to mention their support). In doing so, they made their own favorite issue, globalization, more relevant to the national audience. One Confédération Paysanne member wrote a letter to the editor of *Libération* explaining the homogenizing effects of globalization on culture.¹⁹ The author argues that the expansion of global (junk) culture is important to economic globalization because multinationals cultivate consumer loyalty by standardizing everyone’s individual

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Besset, “Une fièvre paysanne qui dépasse le corporatisme,” *Le Monde*, 01 Sept 1999, France.

¹⁷ Grosrichard, “Surenchères et défis.”

¹⁸ Revol and Lecourt, “McDonald’s attire la foudre antiaméricain.” The French word *terroir* translates literally as “soil,” but the identity attached to it encompasses rural life more broadly. An article in *Le Monde* refers to *terroir* as a “purely French concept” and suggests that it is difficult to translate to other languages and cultures (Christian Brodhag, “Retrouver les terroirs pour une agriculture durable,” *Le Monde*, 18 Sept 1999). I have therefore decided not to translate the term here or elsewhere in this chapter.

¹⁹ Roland Baille, “Manger le banal, parler de goût,” *Libération*, 25 Aug 1999, Courrier.

tastes. He concludes that “our food, our clothing, our leisure activities and our culture” will become “bland... if we don’t do something.”²⁰ This and other arguments by the Confédération Paysanne about *malbouffe* resonated particularly well among the French. One article in *Libération* explained this by saying that France was much more resistant to the “American food model” than other countries because of its well-developed “culinary identity,” which “hardly exists” elsewhere.²¹ In this manner, the Confédération Paysanne’s action was interpreted by many as a defense of French cultural identity.

The perception of the action as a defense of French culture and identity appealed particularly to *souverainistes* and rightwing nationalists. *Souverainistes* are a category of politicians who oppose globalization as an attack on French political and/or cultural sovereignty. One important subgroup of the “sovereignists” is the *chevènementistes*, named after former Interior Minister and Socialist party member Jean-Pierre Chevènement. One *chevènementiste* representative from Paris, Georges Sarre, joined with others from the right and the left in demanding Bové’s “immediate and unconditional” release.²² Chevènement himself did not officially approve of the action, but expressed support for the ideas he perceived to be behind it, saying to one

²⁰ While “our culture” could have been intended as that of farmers or Europeans, it was almost certainly interpreted to mean French culture.

²¹ Gilbert Laval and Muriel Gremillet, “Les anti-McDo prônent l’exception agricole,” *Libération*, 31 Aug 1999, Economie.

²² Gilbert Laval, “José Bové préfère la prison aux « chaînes » de la mondialisation,” *Libération*, 03 Sept 1999, L’Évènement.

Confédération Paysanne official “I understand your motivations.”²³ However, Bové believes that Chevènement and others like him do not, in fact, understand at all:

Chevènement thinks that the borders of the nation-state can serve as a rampart against globalization. I believe that is an illusion. Multinational corporations, multilateral accords on investment, [and] free-trade rules operate on quite another level, over and above national frontiers. To say one can have a strong state makes no sense in this context. It just gives people the mirage of a satisfactory form of protection. As Interior Minister, Chevènement was responsible for implementing the most restrictive immigration policies.... Closing the frontiers does nothing to resolve the fundamental issue at stake in immigration—the inequality between North and South.²⁴

Chevènement and his followers, who vocalized support for Bové and the Confédération Paysanne, represent a group of particularly nationalist individuals within the mainstream left, but Bové resisted their nationalistic interpretation of his actions.

The Confédération Paysanne’s action was also applauded, at least initially, by groups much further to the right. The far-right Mouvement National was one of the first groups to demand the release of Bové’s arrested comrades (on August 18th, a few hours after the French Greens had issued a similar statement), saying that “French [citizens] who denounce American reprisals against our *produits du terroir* are not dangerous terrorists, but authentic resistance fighters against the new world order.”²⁵

The leader of the Mouvement National, Bruno Mégret, was Jean-Marie Le Pen’s right-hand man at the fascist Front National until infighting led to his ouster in late

²³ “Je comprends vos motivations, mais, naturellement, vous n'attendez pas du ministre de l'intérieur qu'il approuve certaines actions.” “M. Chevènement: Je comprends vos motivations,” Le Monde, 2 Sept 1999, France.

²⁴ Bové, “A Farmer’s International,” 97-98.

²⁵ Revol and Lecourt, “McDonald’s attire la foudre anti-américaine.”

1998. Le Pen himself was apparently pleased with Bové's action, enough so to declare that Bové would be "welcome" at the Front National's annual ultra-nationalist *fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge*.²⁶ The Mouvement National and Front National are not concerned, as the Confédération Paysanne is, with the plights of small farmers in Brazil, Palestine, and the United States; they care only about people within French borders, and only about some of those. If they oppose the WTO, it is not because it is an *antidemocratic* international institution, but because it is an *international* institution. Their professed opposition to globalization stems from xenophobia and unrestrained nationalism. As with the milder *souverainistes*, the Confédération Paysanne's message was completely lost on the far-right nationalist parties, but these groups nevertheless expressed support for the Millau action because they interpreted it within a nationalist framework.

In a similar manner, many government officials also supported the Confédération Paysanne's efforts because they viewed the action against McDonald's as part of a national struggle. At the very top of the French political food chain, President Jacques Chirac seems to have implied some support,²⁷ among other things by praising French farmers for "defend[ing] *our* interests,"²⁸ and by declaring that "we are all farmers."²⁹ Chirac, a conservative, thus perceived the Confédération Paysanne's action as an expression of *French* interest rather than of the interests of

²⁶ "Blue, white, and red party" (named after the colors of the French flag). "Le Pen: Bové « bienvenu » à la fête du FN," *Libération*, 15 Sept 1999, Politiques. Jean-Paul Besset, "José Bové plaide pour une alliance des paysans et des consommateurs," *Le Monde*, 09 Sept 1999, France.

²⁷ Claude Belmont and Anne-Marie Revol, "Le fondateur de la Confédération paysanne a été libéré hier; José Bové : « Je n'ai pas l'âme d'un martyr »,» *Le Figaro*, 08 Sept 1999, Notre Vie.

²⁸ "Les agriculteurs se mobilisent; Le grand malaise de la France profonde," *Le Figaro*, 04 Sept 1999, Une. My emphasis.

²⁹ Grosrichards, "Surenchères et défis."

small farmers. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin also supported Bové, praising him as a national hero in a televised interview on France 2. “We remain a people of gallic origins,” he said, and Bové (referred to not by name but by one of his media eponyms, “Robin Hood”), is a “strong, vigorous personality who emanates something of our people.”³⁰ In October 1999, Jospin met with Bové and other farmers at an agricultural conference to discuss and plan the French position at the November WTO meetings.³¹ The same week, Bové was also invited to lunch by Environment Minister Dominique Voynet and the president of the National Assembly, Laurent Fabius.³² Finally, Agricultural Minister Jean Glavany also supported Bové, though he made a point of coupling expressions of support with condemnations of violence against property. On more than one occasion, Glavany stated that he “deplored” Bové’s imprisonment;³³ he later invited Bové to join the French delegation going to the WTO talks in Seattle.³⁴ The Agricultural Minister supported Bové and the Confédération Paysanne because, like the other government officials, he saw the Millau protest as a defense of all French agriculture against America and American companies. Seeing the “American diktat”³⁵ as the sole cause of the Confédération Paysanne’s anger conveniently absolved the French government of any responsibility for contributing to or remedying the negative effects of corporate globalization. The Confédération

³⁰ “On ne peut pas gouverner avec une perspective à un ou deux ans,” Le Monde, 15 Sept 1999, France.

³¹ Daniel Tacet, “L’offensive du monde agricole avant les négociations de Seattle; Les agriculteurs reçus par Jospin”, Le Figaro, 21 Oct 1999, La Vie Economique.

³² Ibid.

³³ Stephan Legras, “M. Glavany veut éviter toute faillite parmi les producteurs de fruits,” Le Monde, 27 Aug 1999, Dernière page. “Glavany « déplore » l’arrestation de José Bové,” Libération, 02 Sept 1999, Politiques.

³⁴ Besset, “Alliance des paysans et des consommateurs.” It appears that Bové ended up going to the counter-summit instead.

³⁵ Glavany himself adopted this phrase in early September. “La Confédération Paysanne attend la libération de José Bové,” Le Monde, 07 Sept 1999, France.

Paysanne's movement was thus much less threatening and more "comfortable" to the government than that of the fruit and vegetable producers.³⁶ Government officials and politicians at many different levels supported Bové because they viewed the Confédération Paysanne's action from a nationalist perspective.

Both opponents and supporters of the Confédération Paysanne's action against McDonald's interpreted it as an assertion of French national identity. According to this interpretation, the symbolic dismantlement of the Millau McDonald's was either a new episode in the saga of French anti-Americanism or a gesture of French defiance against American domination. Some of Bové's most important political proponents supported his cause because they understood it in nationalist terms.

The Global Perspective: Agribusiness versus Small Farmers

While representing problems of globalization as a battle between *produits du terroir* and *malbouffe* did open the Confédération Paysanne's protest to nationalist misinterpretation, it also allowed them to make issues tangible and meaningful to people who might otherwise have been apathetic. Despite the distortion caused by the nationalist perspective, Bové and others were able to harness media attention, channeling it into debates on the World Trade Organization, Genetically Modified Organisms, and corporate domination in France.

One major goal of the Confédération Paysanne was to provoke debate within French society about the WTO before the November 1999 "Millenium Round" of WTO talks in Seattle. Since the official impetus for the Millau action was the WTO-

³⁶ Jean-Louis Andreani, "Jean Glavany confronté au risque de surenchère syndicale," Le Monde, 09 Sept 1999, France.

approved US imposition of sanctions against *produits du terroir*, the WTO was a part of the Confédération Paysanne's arguments from the outset. *Le Monde's* second article about the McDonald's affair (prominently placed on the back page) said the protest was a "response to the economic aggression of the United States and the World Trade Organization, which act on behalf of multinational corporations."³⁷ The rhetoric became more dramatic when, at his indictment, José Bové told the court that he was a "hostage of the World Trade Organization."³⁸ Less than two weeks later, a group of associations representing Roquefort cheese, mustard, *foie gras*, shallots, truffles, and *biscottes* (all of which were subjected to the new, WTO-approved US tariffs) took up this phrase, saying they had been "taken hostage" in the hormone-treated beef dispute, a controversy to which they were "total strangers."³⁹ To these producers and to the French public, it seemed that *produits du terroir* (and, by extension, French culture) were becoming collateral damage in a WTO trade war.

Media attention became more focused on the WTO issue in early September, when *Le Monde* and *Libération* started to make mention of the upcoming round of negotiations in Seattle. In its September 4th-5th weekend edition, *Libération* devoted considerable space to the topic, giving a large headline to the "Woodstock against Globalization" that organizers promised for Seattle.⁴⁰ Though the associated article did not mention Bové or the Confédération Paysanne specifically, discussion of the

³⁷ Jean-Paul Besset, "Quatre militants de la Confédération Paysanne incarcérés après le sac du McDonald's de Millau; Le député Jacques Godfrain (RPR) condamne cette action," *Le Monde*, 20 Aug 1999, Dernière Page.

³⁸ Claude Belmont, "En soutien au leader agricole José Bové, incarcéré pour le saccage d'un fast-food; Le Monde paysan envahit les McDo," *Le Figaro*, 01 Sept 1999, Notre Vie.

³⁹ Jacqueline Coignard, "Echalote et foie gras contre-attaquent; Les producteurs des produits surtaxés par les Etats-Unis en appellent à l'UE," *Libération*, 11 Sept 1999, p 23 [section unknown].

⁴⁰ Vittorio de Filippis and Hervé Nathan, "Un Woodstock contre la mondialisation; les mouvements anti-OMC se donnent rendez-vous à Seattle," *Libération*, 04-05 Sept 1999, Economie.

topic was clearly inspired by their action: the “Woodstock” article shared its first page with an article on donations from America to pay Bové’s bail⁴¹ (as well as a large picture of a fallen Ronald McDonald statue covered in apples, the victim of an FDSEA protest); its continuation was juxtaposed with an article about the Confédération Paysanne getting its message out via the World Wide Web.⁴² A week later, another *Libération* article discussed the upcoming negotiations in greater detail, saying that the Confédération Paysanne “will soon have a planetary forum: the Ministerial conference of the 134-member World Trade Organization” in Seattle.⁴³ By the end of September, *Le Monde* was also consistently mentioning the upcoming WTO talks and, like *Libération*, discussed the opposition’s plans for Seattle. It sent a reporter to a meeting of the Coordination for Citizen Control of the World Trade Organization (CCCOMC); the subsequent article quoted Susan George, one of the group’s organizers, as saying that “Thanks to José and a few others, there is not a single French citizen who does not know what the WTO is.”⁴⁴ The Confédération Paysanne’s action and the subsequent media attention were clearly successful in opening up a public debate on the WTO.

A second major topic to receive additional media attention because of the Millau action was the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The subject had already been given significant coverage after the Confédération Paysanne’s earlier crop destructions in January 1998 and June 1999 (see Chapter 2), when,

⁴¹ Patrick Sabatier, “Afflux de cautions pour José Bové; en France et aux Etats-Unis, de l’argent est récolté pour sa libération,” *Libération*, 04-05 Sept 1999, Economie.

⁴² M.G. [Muriel Gremillet?], “Le web paysan autour du monde,” *Libération*, 04-05 Sept 1999, Economie.

⁴³ Vittorio de Filippis, “De Millau à Seattle, itinéraire d’une lutte; Les antimondialistes pèsent déjà dans les négociations,” *Libération*, 03 Sept 1999, L’Evenement.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

according to Bové, “the media [attention] really allowed us to widen the debate” on GMOs.⁴⁵ Given their belief that GMOs exemplify many of the problems of intensive agriculture, it would hardly be surprising that Bové or the Confédération Paysanne should continue to use GMOs as a point of reference. *Le Figaro* quoted Bové’s lawyer as saying that “José doesn’t want to [get bogged down in] this one problem of [bail payment]. For him, the most important thing is the basic debate about GMOs.”⁴⁶ However, there are few other actual quotes from Confédération Paysanne representatives regarding GMOs. Another *Figaro* article referred, without apparently quoting anyone, to Bové’s “battle against the WTO and GMOs.”⁴⁷ While the Confédération Paysanne certainly did not discourage discussion of GMOs, their focus following the Millau action was the WTO. Indeed, it seems that the newspapers were more interested in linking the Millau action to GMOs than the Confédération Paysanne was. In both *Le Monde* and *Libération*, GM foods were the subject of front page articles that had little to do with the recent Millau action, but which were clearly inspired by it. *Le Monde*’s front page summary article⁴⁸ for September 2nd was entitled “GMOs: resistance takes shape;” after a lengthy paragraph about GMO opposition, it includes a short paragraph tacked onto the end about demonstrations demanding Bové’s release.⁴⁹ *Libération*’s front page featured an ear of corn made to look like a grenade, with the title “GMOs, the worldwide war” (see Figure 2); though the front page made no mention of Bové, one of the associated articles mentions the

⁴⁵ Ariès and Terras, *La révolte*, 46.

⁴⁶ Claude Belmont, “Manifestations à la chaîne; José Bové: coup médiatique réussi,” *Le Figaro*, 04 Sept 1999, Notre Vie.

⁴⁷ Belmont, “En soutien.” Emphasis mine.

⁴⁸ *Le Monde*’s front page is formatted to include, above the fold, a political cartoon and a central article with subtitles and text discussing a series of related articles inside the paper.

⁴⁹ “OGM: la résistance s’organise...,” *Le Monde*, 2 Sept 1999, Une.

Millau action in passing.⁵⁰ Thus, while the GMO issue was only tangentially related to McDonald's, the subject received additional press coverage as a result of the Confédération Paysanne's action in Millau. This one protest action raised an extraordinary range of issues.

The issue of corporate dominance was also examined in the press as a result of the Millau action. This discussion manifested itself largely as competition between the Confédération Paysanne, representing small, organic farmers, and the FNSEA, which represented big agribusiness. After his release from prison, Bové called the FNSEA the "gravediggers of French agriculture,"⁵¹ because he felt that the corporate, intensive agricultural model was destroying the peasantry. Opposition to intensive agriculture is a fundamental principle of the Confédération Paysanne, and their action against McDonald's demonstrated such opposition: even Sulieman, who was critical of what he saw as anti-Americanism in the Millau action, recognized that "when the farmers of the Confédération Paysanne attack McDonald's restaurants or fields planted with GM products, they stigmatize at the same time the US and the 'big' French farmers, who furnish McDonald's with more than 80% of its supplies and who are clients of American multinational agribusiness."⁵² Thus, the Millau action put corporate agribusiness generally under greater scrutiny.

The media emphasis on the Confédération Paysanne's action also cast a spotlight on the fruit and vegetable producers' struggle, which directly attacked large corporate distributors for paying unfair prices to farmers. These farmers were

⁵⁰ Gérard Dupuy, "Le bon grain et l'ivraie," *Libération*, [section unknown].

⁵¹ "AGRICULTURE; Jose Bove : le combat continue," *Le Figaro*, 20 Sept 1999, Notre Vie en Bref.

⁵² Sulieman, "Nouveaux habits."

particularly infuriated after the French government approved the merger of Carrefour and Promodès, two major French distributors. Though the Confédération Paysanne was too busy demonstrating for Bové's release to expend great energy fighting the Carrefour-Promodès merger, they sympathized with the other farmers and recognized the relationship to their own battle against the WTO:

For its part, the Confédération Paysanne, at the forefront of the battle against the next round of WTO negotiations which will begin in October [sic] in the United States, is concerned about the ambitions of the new global number two of distribution. "What are the public powers doing?" asks François Bonhommeau, responsible for legal matters at the Confédération Paysanne. "They're celebrating mergers, while the WTO promotes the creation of giant private companies and the dismantlement of public politics as well as of [efforts by] the European states to [regulate] economic, social, environmental, or cultural domains."⁵³

Anger at large corporations was further inflamed towards the end of September, when Michelin announced that it would lay off 7,500 workers in Europe. In the midst of this new controversy, Georges Sarre, the Parisian *chevènementiste* who called for Bové's release, linked the struggles by saying that "the large popular support met by José Bové testifies to the will of people to see their political leaders and states retake the initiative against globalization."⁵⁴ These issues would undoubtedly have received considerable attention anyway, but the Confédération Paysanne's action helped place them within the context of corporate globalization and directed some of people's anger toward action against the WTO.

⁵³ Alexandre Garcia, "L'inquiétude croissante du monde paysan sur son avenir," *Le Monde*, 01 Sept 1999, France.

⁵⁴ Sophie Roquelle, "Sur les dossiers Michelin, Elf-Total, BNP-SG-Paribas; Les chevènementistes demandent une « prise de conscience », " *Le Figaro*, 23 Sept 1999, La Vie Politique. Bové would probably argue that it is not states and politicians, but concerned citizens who should take action.

As a result of the media attention devoted to the Confédération Paysanne's Millau action, issues related to the World Trade Organization, genetically modified foods, and corporate power all saw greater discussion in the French press. While successful manipulation of media attention by José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne was responsible for provoking the discussion of the WTO, other topics received attention because of the greater general questioning of corporate globalization in society fostered by the Millau action. As Bové stated upon his release from jail in early September, the Confédération Paysanne's action in Millau allowed "the debate on *mal-bouffe*" to be posed at the highest level."⁵⁵

Left versus Right? Different Interpretations in Different Papers

It is clear from the information above that the Confédération Paysanne achieved its primary goal of fostering debate on issues of globalization. One of the reasons for this success was the symbolism of their action against McDonald's, which was interpreted along both nationalist and internationalist lines. As a result of the action's symbolic universality, Bové himself enjoyed support from political groups of all persuasions, so much so that *Le Figaro* declared that "the cleavage between left and right is... a thing of the past."⁵⁶ However, my research into the "big three" newspapers indicated that the left and the right, while both supportive of Bové, were interested in his cause to different degrees and for different reasons. This manifested itself in the perspectives presented by *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, and *Le Monde*, which represent, respectively, the left, right, and center of the French political mainstream.

⁵⁵ Jean-Paul Besset, "José Bové devait être libéré après paiement de sa caution; Le dirigeant de la Confédération paysanne estime « que le débat sur la mal-bouffe est désormais posé »,” *Le Monde*, 08 Sept 1999, Dernière page.

⁵⁶ Ivan Rioufol, "Revendications; Un besoin de respect,” *Le Figaro*, 23 Sept 1999, Une.

Libération, the furthest left of the three papers, was friendliest to the Confédération Paysanne's action and usually reported on it according to the global perspective. It was the first to report on the action (publishing an article on August 13th, the day after the dismantlement)⁵⁷ and quoted Confédération Paysanne officials early on as saying that "the anti-American motivations [of some supporters] are not our own."⁵⁸ While it devoted fewer articles to the subject than *Le Monde*,⁵⁹ *Libération* gave several important articles about Bové prominent placement. On its September 3rd front page the paper featured a large photo of Bové just after his arrest, handcuffed but defiantly holding his fists up (*Libération* is published in tabloid format, with no full articles on the front page, so the photo takes up most of the cover; see Figure 3). *Libération* also printed two articles exclusively about José Bové himself; the first, which appeared in the edition with his cover photo, talked about his history as an activist and called him the "Righter of wrongs of 'bad food;'"⁶⁰ the second, which filled the entire back page of the September 17th edition, talked about his personal beliefs.⁶¹ Recognizing the broader importance, *Libération* printed several articles on the anti-corporate globalization movement, with titles like "The Woodstock against Globalization" and "From Millau to Seattle: Itinerary of a struggle."⁶² The paper was consistently supportive: indeed, the harshest criticism of Bové published in

⁵⁷ Catherine Coroller, "Les fabricants de roquefort se paient un McDo," *Libération*, 13 Aug 1999, Economie. *Le Monde*'s first report came on the 14th and *Le Figaro* waited until the 19th.

⁵⁸ Gilbert Laval, "Le meneur anti-McDo reste en prison," *Libération*, 21-22 Aug 1999, Société.

⁵⁹ My research, limited to articles published between August 12th, 1999 and September 30th, 1999, included 35 articles apiece from *Libération* and *Le Figaro* and 49 articles from *Le Monde*. Articles were of varying lengths, but were distributed fairly evenly among the 3 papers.

⁶⁰ Gérard Desportes, "Le pourfendeur de la « sale bouffe » Depuis le causse du Larzac, Bové a défendu toutes les causes," *Libération*, 03 Sept 1999, L'Evenement.

⁶¹ Gilbert Laval, "José Bové, 46 ans, éleveur de brebis dans le Larzac, mène tambour battant la jacquerie contre la mondialisation. A cause et à cri," *Libération*, 17 Sept 1999, Dernière page.

⁶² Filippis and Nation, "Un Woodstock contre la mondialisation." Filippis, "De Millau à Seattle, itinéraire d'une lutte."

Libération was confined to one letter to the editor by a Gaullist politician who accused Bové of anti-American “alimentary totalitarianism.”⁶³ *Libération* viewed the action from a global perspective and showed considerable support for Bové and the Confédération Paysanne.

Le Figaro, the rightmost of the three papers politically, usually presented Bové’s ideas in a nationalist context. It frequently emphasized the cultural aspect of the “battle against *malbouffe* and international trade.”⁶⁴ On September 29th, *Le Figaro* published a very long article devoted entirely to the importance of rural farming to French identity; it asserted that farmers, though a minority, retain significant political weight in France because they “structure our collective myths.”⁶⁵ For *Le Figaro*, globalization most often meant a foreign challenge to French traditions; one article said the “agricultural heritage” of the Larzac was being threatened by “*American* intensive farming.”⁶⁶ *Le Figaro* had less interest in the movement against corporate globalization. When it mentioned the WTO, *Le Figaro* usually coupled it with other concepts, rendering it into the “battle against junk food and the WTO” or against “the WTO and GMOs.”⁶⁷ The paper was, however, largely sympathetic to Bové’s plight. For example, reporting on Bové’s decision to stay in jail, regional correspondent Claude Belmont began and ended his article by describing Bové’s daughter sobbing

⁶³ “« Et si je voulais bouffer du McDo ? »,” Bernard Debré, *Libération*, 18-19 Sept 1999, *Courrier*.

⁶⁴ Belmont and Revol, “« Je n’ai pas l’âme d’un martyr ».”

⁶⁵ Dominique Reynie, Jean Viard, and Frédéric Rouvillois, “Paysans : les raisons d’une colère,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Sept 1999, *Etudes politiques*.

⁶⁶ Rioufol, “Revendications.” Emphasis mine. The author of this article also makes the dubious assertion that Bové’s widespread support indicates the end of left/right divisions (mentioned above), class war, and Marxism.

⁶⁷ Claude Belmont, “Montpellier; José Bové restera en prison,” *Le Figaro*, 03 Sept 1999, *Notre Vie*; Belmont, “En soutien;” Belmont and Revol, “« Je n’ai pas l’âme d’un martyr ».”

over the decision.⁶⁸ In another article, Belmont quotes Bové's lawyer as saying that Bové "is a man of convictions who keeps his ideas and his actions in agreement. He's an admirer of Gandhi."⁶⁹ *Le Figaro* thus supported the Confédération Paysanne's action while portraying it according to a nationalist interpretation.

Le Monde is the most centrist of the three papers and enjoys the largest circulation of the "big three." It is a prestigious paper that caters mostly to the urban intelligentsia, much like the *New York Times* in the United States. Its presentation of the Confédération Paysanne's ideas mixed the global perspective and the nationalist (mis)interpretation. One article from the August 22nd-23rd weekend edition discusses the "third world" orientation of the Confédération Paysanne and quotes an NGO spokesperson as saying that "one can consider the action of the Confédération Paysanne as a preamble to the anti-WTO mobilization."⁷⁰ This article interprets the Millau protest according to the global perspective, portraying it as part of the larger movement against corporate globalization. However, other articles followed a clearly nationalist interpretation, using the action as an example of growing nationalist *souverainisme*.⁷¹ The paper's interpretive ambivalence was also demonstrated by its regional correspondent, Jean-Paul Besset. He makes a point of characterizing Bové as an "internationalist of old stock" in one article,⁷² but, on another occasion, portrays

⁶⁸ Belmont, "Bové restera en prison."

⁶⁹ Claude Belmont, "Plusieurs manifestations ont eu lieu hier pour soutenir le fondateur de la Confédération paysanne; José Bové, stratège anti-« McDo-mination », " *Le Figaro*, 27 Aug 1999, Notre Vie.

⁷⁰ Caroline Monnot, "La gauche « mouvementiste » soutient la Confédération Paysanne," *Le Monde*, 22-23 Aug 1999, France.

⁷¹ William Abitbol and Paul-Marie Coûteaux, "Souverainisme, j'écris ton nom," *Le Monde*, 30 Sept 1999, Une.

⁷² Jean-Paul Besset, "José Bové, un opposant radical aux « multinationales de la sale bouffe », " *Le Monde*, 22-23 Aug 1999, France.

him as a “*national hero*” who reinvigorates French “ancestral nostalgia” for rural life.⁷³ *Le Monde* was also more critical of the Confédération Paysanne than the other papers, usually on issues of secondary importance. For example, it criticized Bové’s decision to accept release on bail after initially refusing it⁷⁴ and frowned upon the Confédération Paysanne’s continued demonstrations against Bové’s high bail after sufficient funds had been raised.⁷⁵ One editorialist criticized the Confédération Paysanne’s fight against *malbouffe* more generally, calling it a “battle lost in advance.”⁷⁶ However, most of the paper’s criticism focused on small issues;⁷⁷ on larger issues like the WTO and the hormone-treated beef dispute, *Le Monde* usually supported the Confédération Paysanne’s position. Regardless of its assessments of the McDonald’s action and its aftermath, *Le Monde* certainly gave considerable attention to the event and the issues involved. It printed more articles on Bové, agriculture, and globalization than the other papers⁷⁸ and placed several of these on the front page (most notably in its 22-23 Aug 1999 weekend edition; see Figure 4 and Figure 5). Overall, *Le Monde*, the most moderate and most attentive of the “big three,” was both supportive and critical of the Confédération Paysanne’s activities, which it interpreted according to both the global perspective and the nationalist (mis)interpretation.

⁷³ Besset, “Une fièvre paysanne.” Emphasis mine. This is not to say that both interpretations are not true, just that the characterization was not consistent.

⁷⁴ Richard Benguigui, “Des syndicalistes américains de l’agriculture proposent de payer la caution de José Bové,” *Le Monde*, 04 Sept 1999, [section unknown] p 29. Bové initially refused because he thought it ridiculous that the Confédération Paysanne should have to pay another 105 000 F after it had already paid 420 000 for the release of 4 other farmers. He also refused to allow the Confederation of Roquefort Producers to pay his bail. He changed his mind when money was collected from a number of groups and individuals from all over the world.

⁷⁵ “La Confédération Paysanne attend la libération de José Bové,” *Le Monde*, 07 Sept 1999, France.

⁷⁶ Alain Rollat, “Vive le roquefort libre!”, *Le Monde*, 09 Sept 1999, Communication.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that these small criticisms were completely absent from *Libération* and *Le Figaro*.

⁷⁸ See footnote 59.

Overall, it seems that France's political left and right supported the Confédération Paysanne's dismantlement of the Millau McDonald's for fundamentally different reasons: the former, because it connected the action to the movement against corporate globalization; the latter, because it perceived nationalist implications in the attack on McDonald's. The center vacillated between these two interpretations and between support and criticism.

As Confédération Paysanne spokesperson François Dufour said, the "debate on globalization" linked the Confédération Paysanne to groups "well beyond the farming world."⁷⁹ The Confédération Paysanne's action against McDonald's clearly resonated with the French public, drawing support from numerous points on the political spectrum. However, individuals with different political perspectives supported the action for different reasons: the right (and government officials) generally supported it as a defense of French identity, whereas the moderate and far left supported the action as part of the movement against globalization. Regardless of the reasons for their support, people of all political persuasions were to some degree receptive to the Confédération Paysanne's arguments about globalization.

⁷⁹ Monnot, "La gauche « mouvementiste »."

Conclusion

France is a country where food retains a special significance to national cultural identity. French food culture began to develop in the late medieval period and has grown and spread over the course of at least 500 years. Initially a preserve of royalty and the nobility, food culture became integrated into French culture via the Enlightenment and through the development of the restaurant as an institution. As the state developed into the nation-state, food culture became food identity, ingraining itself into French national consciousness. Now, national identity, along with the culture of food that is attached to it, is under direct attack from the process of globalization. Subnational and supranational forms of identity are displacing and destroying national identity, but they are also provoking its resurgence and creating a backlash. This volatile but still deeply rooted form of identity rises and recedes, seeking outlets within the acceptable French political mainstream to reassert itself.

At the same time, globalization also threatens the economic livelihoods of small farmers. The Confédération Paysanne is a union of French small farmers that fights the systemic problems of corporate globalization by using symbolic protest to provoke discussion of related issues. The Confédération Paysanne, like other groups in the movement against corporate globalization, opposes the current system's antidemocratic and unaccountable institutions, the corporate disregard for the public good, problems of consolidation and the elimination of small producers, and the consequent loss of diversity in food and culture. To remedy these problems, the Confédération Paysanne seeks to transform globalization from an exclusively economic and financial process into a cultural one, with economic systems that

promote small-scale production of cultural goods and goods of quality. The Confédération Paysanne dramatically put their critique into action in August of 1999, when they dismantled a McDonald's construction site in the rural town of Millau in southern France.

The Confédération Paysanne's dismantlement of the Millau McDonald's was interpreted primarily in two different ways: many, particularly on the right, saw it as a defense of French culture and traditions against American economic and cultural hegemony; others, mostly on the left, regarded it as part of the larger movement against corporate globalization. Though the Confédération Paysanne and its leader, José Bové, were not motivated by nationalism (they were actually opposed to it), the nationalist interpretation of their action widened their audience and allowed them to broadcast their critique of corporate globalization to ordinarily unsympathetic elements of the French political mainstream. At the same time, the Confédération Paysanne's action promoted the larger movement, priming the French public for the demonstrations that took place against the WTO in Seattle only a few months later.

The Confédération Paysanne's dismantlement of the McDonald's construction site in Millau resonated widely throughout France because it incorporated elements of French national identity, deliberately or inadvertently, into a critique of corporate globalization. However, their arguments about globalization have as little to do with promoting French nationalism as they do with celebrating the efficiency of industrial agribusiness. The model of globalization that José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne promote is opposed to both the homogenization of corporate globalization and the parochialism of chauvinistic nationalism. Bové and the Confédération

Paysanne believe in a world of increased cultural interaction, which xenophobic nationalists fear; likewise, they think globalization should not be guided exclusively by economic concerns, but should incorporate human values and preserve world cultures instead of working to destroy them. To respond to the threats of corporate globalization, they will neither succumb to the whims of powerful multinationals nor regress to the old world of nation-states; they will, rather, work on an international level to overcome problems that are now global in nature. José Bové and the Confédération Paysanne clearly illustrate at least one school of thought within the growing movement of internationalist opposition to corporate globalization.

Appendix of Figures

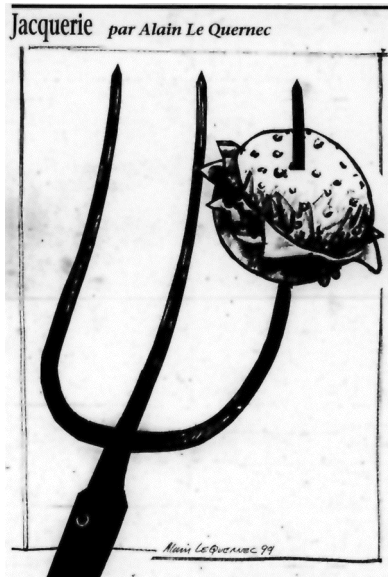


Figure 1: A political cartoon from *Le Monde*, 09 Sept 1999. *Jacquerie* means “peasant revolt.”



Figure 2: Front page of *Libération* from 21 Sept 1999. The title reads “Genetically modified organisms, the worldwide war.”

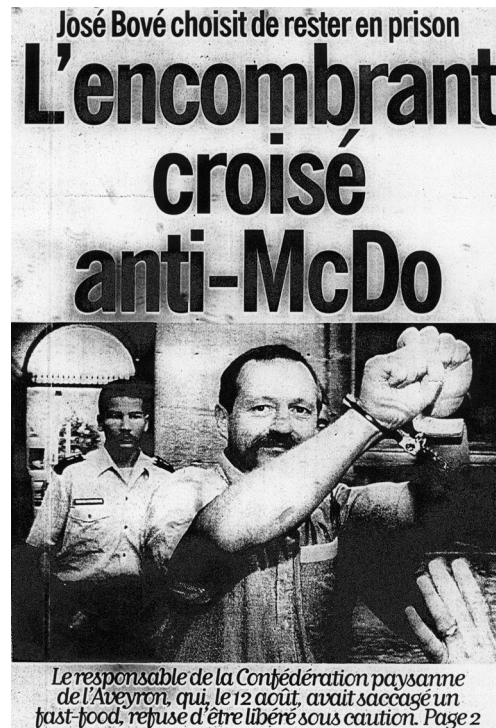


Figure 3: *Libération* front page, 03 Sept 1999. “José Bové chooses to stay in prison; The cumbersome anti-McDonald’s crusader: The Confédération Paysanne leader from Aveyron, who, the 12th of August, had sacked a fast food restaurant, refuses to be released on bail.”



Figure 4: *Le Monde* front page, 22-23 Aug 1999. “The great peasant disease.”



Figure 5: Political cartoon from the front page of *Le Monde* shown above. “We’re not actually going to leave farming in the hands of farmers!”

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