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# PROCESSES OF FOOD AUTONOMY RADICALIZATION IN UNBAN SPACES UNDER AUSTERITY MADRID

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### PROCESSES OF FOOD AUTONOMY

# Radicalization in Urban Spaces Under Austerity. Madrid

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The aggressive forms neoliberalism has taken against lives in the urban spaces under austerity, such in the city of Madrid, have triggered urban struggles to reproduce dignified lives and the radicalization of the forms of doing politics. Thus, radical urban struggles such as the processes of food autonomy triggered by the 15M movement, which since 2011 have enlarged the practice of autonomy and the prefigurative politics on the city of Madrid. Radicalization that has led to problematize the basic reproduction functions of food production and consumption and to embrace the radical practice of agroecology to regain food autonomy. Moreover, food autonomy being addressed not only by the production and reproduction of radical spaces and practices, but through the promotion of "agroecologist policies". Agroecologist policies to promote sustainable local agrifood systems designed and propose by the "new institution", "Plataforma por un Madrid Agroecologico" (Platform for an Agroecologist Madrid), to the new local governments triggered by the 15M movement since 2015. Therefore, radical practices, spaces and agroecologist policies that are dealing with the new needs arose in the city of Madrid since 2011, and that are currently reshaping the landscape and life reproduction on this city.

**KEYWORDS**: Madrid, Austerity, Urban (Food) Autonomy, Agroecology.



#### 1. PROCESSES OF FOOD AUTONOMY.

#### 1.1 Radicalization in Urban Spaces under Austerity. Madrid

#### 1.1.1. Introduction

The "debt crisis" within the southern European peripheries, induced by the neoliberal bodies such as the EU, ECB or IMF, after 2008 crisis to restore the unsustainable capitalist system (Kallis, et al., 2009; Fernández Durán, 2010; Herrero, 2013) through the implementation of the so-called austerity measures, triggered both, a crisis of reproduction of dignified lives and the emergence of new struggles to deal with it (Mayer, 2013; Stravides, 2014; Brenner and Schmid, 2015). A crisis which has formed impediments to meet even human basic needs, such as the access to food. In this case, new urban struggles for food autonomy have emerged, such as the processes set in motion in 2011 by the 15M anti-neoliberal urban movement (Pastor, 2011; Taibo, 2013; Martínez and García, 2015). Decentralized processes of food autonomy performed as insurrections with the "ordinary austerity-neoliberal" life spread throughout the multiple autonomous spaces, assemblies, social centres, settled by this movement in the various neighbourhoods of the city. These processes have recovered and amplified autonomy and prefigurative politics as political tools aiming to overcome the emotional and material difficulties of austerity on everyday life. In this paper we aim to analyze the creation and development of efforts toward food autonomy within the city of Madrid in the era of austerity. We are especially interested in the radical forms adopted within these processes, as they a embrace collective emancipatory political tools in order to deal with difficulties of reproduction under imposed austerity. The radical processes engaged by 15M released the outrage toward the violence neoliberalism has unleashed upon people's lives under austerity, while also meeting basic needs such as access to food in an autonomous and collective fashion. Emotional and material needs are nurtured by this "creando barrio" through the reconstruction of autonomous forms of living through everyday life practices, such as "self-governed" local and sustainable systems of food consumption, and, increasingly, food production in the city of Madrid. What have resulted on recovering and enlarging agroecology (Soler et al., 2010; Guzmán and Woodgate, 2013; Calle et al., 2013) as a radical theoretical and practical framework for the performance of food autonomy. Furthermore, the practice of (urban) (food) autonomy both intervenes in the "here and now" management of everyday life through producing and reproducing new radical places and practices, and establishes "new institutions" to promote "agroecologist policies". Hence, new political common spaces and forms of doing politics resulted from the new political process shaped by the 15M movement where confluences and articulations with various historical and new urban and rural movements, such as the agroecologist movement in Madrid (de Benito, 2016), and local governments have been built up.

Through an analysis of the 15M-processes of food autonomy, we explore in this paper new forms of doing politics, creating spaces, and engaged practices that have transformed the urban life and landscape of the city of Madrid during the last five years of austerity. To do so, we first briefly problematize access to food and the difficulties of maintaing a project of (food) autonomy in urban spaces under austerity. We introduce agroecology as a political tool used to regain food autonomy in urban spaces under austerity, and to contribute to dealing with the reproduction of autonomous dignified lives. Finally, we introduce the radical performances embodied in processes of food autonomy triggered by the 15M movement. We have explored and exposed these processes through two



years (2013-2016) of ethnographic research developed through in-depth interviews and participatory observation with the main collectives involved in the movement, as well as through literature reviews.

## 1.1.2. Industrialization of capitalist agriculture, what for? Agroecology as a political tool to re-gain (urban) (food) autonomy.

The industrialization of capitalist agriculture, the so-called "Green Revolution" (Gliessman, 2013), embedded within the overall project of modernization after the 1950s, led to the commodification of the basic means of survival, most significantly food. Specifically, it led to the commodification of the basic social reproduction functions of food production and consumption (Guzmán and Woodgate, 2012; Calle et al., 2013). Mechanisms of commodification that have been performed by the "rationalized and reductionist" processes of specialization and fragmentation, exploitation and appropriation. Processes that sustain the capitalist agriculture and impede life reproduction, such as the fragmentation of rural and urban territories and the relations of reproduction and production, food production and consumption. Furthermore, a capitalist agriculture that is being sustained by the exploitation of the countryside, appropriation of limited natural resources, by the cities, developing what Foster refers as the *metabolic rift* (Foster, 2000). Contradictions arose from a system of food production and consumption that, far from aiming to reproduce and sustain life, was instead "designed" by the agrifood industry to reproduce and sustain the global capitalist system (McMichael, 2007). What resulted is an agri-food system that impedes access to food (Lean, 2008 a, b) and the reproduction of autonomous dignity lives (van der Ploeg, 2009; Altieri, and V. M. Toledo, 2011). Moreover, it is a system which is nowadays increasingly under the control of transnational corporations (McMichael, 2007; 148; Altieri, 2009: 35; Guzmán, 2006: 164, Pérez-Vitoria, 2010: 226; Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011). Conflicts visible within the urban spaces under austerity, where the provoked increased unemployment rates, lower salaries, increased taxation over means of survival such as food, and the food production and distribution corporate control (supermarketization), are leading to a state of food emergency due to the increased economic difficulties of access to food.

Increasingly unsustainable and uneven urban territories have resulted from the various phases of capitalist restoration (Lefebvre, 1968; Naredo, 2000, 2002; Harvey, 2012; Peck et al., 2013; Brenner and Schmid, 2015), and the mechanisms and processes such as the ones derived by the development of capitalist agriculture described above. Capitalist development and capitalist agriculture have led to times of hardship, poverty, and hunger such as the one that is currently evolving within the urban spaces under austerity. In the 1960s, contradictions of life reproduction triggered the emergence of agroecology as a resistance to the industrialization of capitalist agriculture (Guzmán and Woodgate 1997; Altieri and V. M. Toledo, 2011; Gliessman, 2013; Calle et al., 2013), aiming to preserve autonomous (peasant) forms of living. Agroecology, as Guzmán and Woodgate (2012) argue, is a movement, a science, and a practice that problematizes the capitalist relations of production while preserving and promoting local, sustainable forms of managing natural resources through collective forms of social action (Guzmán and Woodgate 1997). Thus, agroecology is a political tool allows to regain food autonomy. We consider food autonomy as a project to re-establish local, sustainable, "self-governed" systems of food production and consumption. "Autonomous food systems" that negate the relations that impede social reproduction by dismantling power



relations of the agrifood systems and recomposing the rifts between rural and urban territories, and between production and consumption.

A practice of agroecology working toward regaining food autonomy and re-establishing "autonomous food systems" in urban spaces should confront not only the difficulties due to the lack of spaces for food cultivation in cities and its "dependency" on rural territories, but the limits of a project of autonomy in such spaces (Ouviña in VVAAs, 2011). Limits founded on the closer symbolic and material proximity to the economic, social, and political capitalist relations, proximity to state and market on the cities. Thus, limits arise as we consider autonomy as a project of collective (Katsiaficas, 2006) emancipation that entails "independence" beyond capital, state, and development (Bohm et al., 2010) negating any form of power relations over society and over nature (Holloway, 2002). A project of autonomy reproduced within the everyday, proposing horizontality and self-determination as the bases for new collective forms of production, distribution, and consumption, as well as economic and social relations that enable a world free of domination, oppression, centralization, homogenization, and monopoly (Castoriadis, 1991; Escobar, 2001; Katsiaficas, 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2006; Holloway, 2010; VVAAs, 2011; Martin Alcoff and Alcoff, 2015).

## 1.1.3. From the production of new places and radical (food) practices to the promotion of "agroecologist policies". The 15M processes of food autonomy.

The collective need to disobey the "austerity-neoliberal life" and autonomously recreate the reproduction of everyday life has arisen on the multiple squares of the city of Madrid since 2011, and the agroecologist activists have been contributing to spawn new imaginaries that produce new emancipatory practices, spaces, and forms of doing politics. Thus, imaginaries that have triggered processes of (food) autonomy, enlarged the practice of agroecology, and, by doing so, dealt with the increased contradictions to the reproduction of dignified lives, such as the increased economic difficulties involved in access to basic material needs such as food, and the increased control over food production and consumption by the agrifood corporations.

Agroecologist practices and agroecologist activists composing the already-existing agroecologist movement in Madrid. The movement arose at the beginning of the 1990s as the urban autonomist (anticapitalist-environmentalist) movement (VVAAs, 1998; Casanova, 2002; Martinez, Garcia, 2014) and the rural movement "Plataforma Rural"

(Rural Platform) established a confluence to promote "agroecologist consumption and production" in the city of Madrid (de Benito, 2016). Since then, urban movements, both agroecologist and autonomist, have been committed to the "revolution of everyday life" by promoting radical practices and spaces that not only facilitate the access to (quality) food, but that problematize capitalist relations of production and politicize basic reproduction functions such as food consumption and production. This has had the effect of raising awareness about what the agroecologist movement in Madrid name as the "corresponsability of (food) consumption-production,". This "Corresponsability" would lead to both, consumers and producers sharing the responsibility and becoming more involved in the functioning of the processes of food production, distribution, and consumption.

These processes of confluence have resulted, during the previous decades, on the set up of the integral cooperatives "Bajo el Asfalto esta la Huerta" (López and López, 2013) and "Surco a Surco," as well as on the establishment of the various communitarian



urban gardens and consumer groups. These spaces and practices are locally-based, as autonomist political struggles in Madrid have historically been aimed at a neighbourhood level (Casanova, 2002). This ecosystem of practices and spaces were able to gain cohesion due to the various internal coordination teams such as the agroecologists "Coordinadora de Grupos de Consumo Agroecologico" (Agroecologist consumer groups) between 2001-2005, the "Iniciativa por la Soberania Alimentaria de Madrid" (Initiative for Food Sovereignty in Madrid) formed in 2008, and the "Red de Huertos Urbanos" (Network of Urban Gardens) formed in 2010 (Llovera, 2014), as well as by the autonomist-anticapitalist coordination "Rompamos el Silencio" (Breaking the Silence). Autonomist coordination teams began organizing in the early 1990s and continued up to the emergence of the 15M movement, the yearly disobedient and direct action "Semana de Lucha Social" (Week of Social Struggle) (Roig, 2010). The week of social struggle involved the performing of specific "disobedient actions" to illuminate and promote all of these "reservoirs" of (food) autonomy.

Decentralized processes, practices, spaces, and coordination teams enlarged since 2011 as a result of the new political processes opened up by the 15M movement. These political processes, as laboratories of doing politics, are currently creating new confluences, establishing "new institutions," and designing and proposing new public policies. Confluences, then, were established between the various movements and collectives dealing with the reproduction of dignified lives in Madrid, and between them and the new local government triggered by the 15M movement in 2015. These served to reshape the radical features of the processes of (food) autonomy, and dealt with new everyday life needs, not only by setting up new radical practices and spaces, but by designing and proposing "agroecologist policies" to the new local governments.

Since 2011, different forms of the same processes of (food) autonomy have emerged simultaneously in order to address new needs as they arose, such as the increased rates of unemployment, the economic difficulties of obtaining food supplies, or the increased unsustainability of the austerity city. Hence, we can differentiate between radical performances of processes of food autonomy, i.e. "revolutionary," and more "institutional," reformist ones.

Radical performances of processes of food autonomy have been carried out through the collective efforts of the 15M assemblies and working groups, as well as various actors like agroecologists, autonomists, anti-foreclosure activists (PAH), the Social and Solidarity Economy activists, and the Back to the Land movements. These include collective efforts of setting up new working spaces or obtaining food supplies via radical practices and spaces approaching the basis of agroecology, thus, negating the reproductive relations of capitalist agriculture by recomposing communitarian bonds at a neighbourhood level ("creando barrio"), reconnecting directly farmers and consumers, and recovering spaces for food cultivation. Examples include the setting up of farmers markets ("Mercado Ecologico de Malasana"), groceries ("La Huerta del Sol", "Amores Berros"), urban gardens as working spaces ("Quinta Torre Arias"), or self-organized food banks ("La Villana", "Tetuan", "RDS-Eko", "Malasana"). These represent practices and spaces ruled by prefigurative politics, assemblearism, horizontality, and self-organization that are challenging both collective and individual emancipation. They are "radical mechanisms" which have recreated mutual relations and reshaped the landscape of the city to facilitate access to (quality) food.

The "institutional" performance, what is considered by the movements in Madrid as "reformist," it is currently dealing with the limits of the project of autonomy in an urban



space. This institutional performances not only have created occasional confluences with the local governments, but actually conformed to them. What resulted on illuminating the historical relations of the autonomist (Casanova, 2002) and environmentalist (Kousis, 1999) movements with the institutions, and to trigger the political process named as, "asalto a las instituciones" (institutions' assault). This process aimed to approach "libertarian municipalism" (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014), but finally resulted in creating "movements political parties", which participated in the municipal elections held in Spring 2015, and thus conformed to the local government structures.

A political process launched by the new political parties which in the previous months of the municipal elections set up various neighborhood and sectoral assemblies to rise the local and urban conflicts and conform a participatory electoral program.

Thus, sectoral assemblies such as the one related to the environmental unsustainability of the city of Madrid. Specific assembly where agroecologist activist took part and that finally led to set up in 2015 the "Plataforma por un Madrid Agroecologico" (Plataform for an Agroecologist Madrid). "New institution", social space, coordination of the various agroecologist collectives and coordination teams, urban and rural movements, which is aiming to be a "referent body to promote new "agroecologist policies" to transform the agrifood system model in a regional level by influencing the institutions". Policies such as the ones to intervene in the urbanization processes opening new spaces for food cultivation on the city, that led to legalize some of the already-existing communitarian urban gardens. Hence, policies such as to promote public, local governments "agroecologist consumption", which led to launch the "schools ecological refectories". Or policies for the better management of the organic residuals by the "Madrid Agrocomposta" (Agrocomposting Madrid) project.

From the new party Ahora Madrid neighbourhood assemblies,, that conforms the current local government, in the neighborhood of Salamanca, there are also processes to recover spaces on the neighborhoods for food cultivation, for community urban gardens.

Institutional performance that compromises the project of (food) autonomy and the reproduction of dignity lives triggered by the 15M movement. Compromises for the project of emancipation arose due to the complementary relation that the "movement institutions" and the radical practices and spaces triggered by the 15M movement are establishing with the local governments social infrastructures in the city of Madrid.

#### 1.4. Conclusions.

The processes of (food) autonomy performed by the 15M movement through the practice of agroecology to deal with the aggressive forms neoliberalism has taken against lives, has increased the radicalisation of doing politics on the austerity context of the city of Madrid. This radicalisation that has led to the recreation of local, sustainable, and self-governed agrifood systems via the practices of prefigurative politics, and to the increase in the politicization of basic reproduction functions such as food production and consumption in the city of Madrid. Thus, "autonomous food systems" have been spawned in the various neighbourhoods of this city through radical practices and spaces, such as farmers markets, communitarian urban gardens, consumer groups, food cooperatives, andself-organized food banks. These radical practices and spaces have not only facilitated the reproduction of dignified lives, but have negated and



impeded the relations which reproduce capitalist development and capitalist agriculture, such as the corporate control over food production and consumption.

The 15M processes of food autonomy aim to address the material and emotional needs of autonomy, and to meet the basic needs of sustenance. These processes are giving continuity to already-existing processes triggered by agroecologist together with autonomist (anticapitalist-environmentalist) activists working since the 1990s. Movements that have been reproducing the "revolution of everyday life" over the previous decades through such radical practices and spaces, have also established occasional relations with the local governments to address basic material needs for their purposes. Historical radical (revolutionary) and institutional (reformist) features of these

movements that have been expressed through the processes of food autonomy not only produce radical practices and spaces, but design and propose "agroecologist policies" to the new local governments triggered by the 15M movement.

This represents two forms of the same processes of (food) autonomy that have been performed simultaneously until today. Therefore, simultaneous performances that deal directly with emotional and material needs arose to reshape the landscape and the ways life is reproduced in the city of Madrid, but that compromise the project of autonomy and emancipation, against the "austerity-neoliberal" life reproduction on this city.

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