Int. Jrnl. of Soc. of Agr. & Food, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 108–121

Local Organic Certification in Northern Thailand: The Role of Discourse Coalitions in Actor-Networks

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[Paper first received, 30 August 2009; in final form, 29 August 2010]

Abstract. An actor-network approach is used to analyse a local organic agriculture network in Northern Thailand. This network is centred around local organic standards developed by discourse coalitions with similar social concerns about organic agriculture. Local standards were developed through the translation of existing, international standards into production processes directly addressing the social concerns by discourse coalitions of farmers, retailers, and consumers, leading to the establishment of the Northern Organic Standards Organization (NOSO). The standards are communicated symbolically to consumers through labels and logos. When applying for national recognition as an organic certifying body through the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS) of Thailand, NOSO found that local standards must comply in total to all International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) standards for accreditation. The impasses between local concerns and international policies led to what I call a reflexive translation of the appropriateness of international accreditation for the local organic certifying body, resulting in new policies supporting local concerns addressed by the existing body of local organic standards.

Introduction

This article will analyse the development of NOSO, the Northern Organic Standards Organization, a certifying body located in Chiang Mai province, Northern Thailand. The analysis will seek to answer two key questions in reference to the established organic agriculture commodity networks operating in Thailand, and specifically those operating in Chiang Mai province:

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ISSN: 0798-1759 This journal is blind refereed.

- How are organic standards translated into a local, certifying institution?
- How are organic standards communicated to consumers?

To answer these questions, the article presents a new methodology for the analysis of organic commodity networks through the concept of 'organic certification'. It is regarded as an ensemble of standards mobilized into a new commodity network by efforts of discourse coalitions of producers, distributors, certifiers, and consumers organized around particular social concerns. The objective will not be to determine what is or is not organic; instead, it will demonstrate that the standards behind the certification, whether they be represented as a label, logo, or specific marketplace addressing consumers' perceptions of the meaning of organic produce, are enough to maintain a local, organic, commodity network. Thus, it is the standards that link the farmer to the consumer, thereby completing the commodity network.

The situation in Northern Thailand allows for a unique method of assessing certification strategies because the problem is about exclusion from the dominant national and international organic certifying bodies by way of incontestable, international organic standards. Unlike situations more suited for analysis with methods such as 'exit–voice–loyalty', the Northern Thai actors involved were not part of an existing institutional network nor were their 'voices' acknowledged by the existing framework of institutions (Hirschman, 1970). In addition, there was no process, neither economic nor political, by which these actors could participate in the existing institutions (Hirschman, 1970, p. 19). The only option available was to join and accept the rules or to be excluded.

It has been well documented that unequal power relations presented by global forces or national governments dominate and, at times, overwhelm local initiative. Often, local communities have few options to assert their wants and needs to the government and its institutions. These communities turn to other forms of local resistance, usually referred to as the 'weapons of the weak'. These are practiced as non-cooperative activities and other alternative methods of resistance (Scott, 1986; Hirsch, 1997; Rigg, 1997). Other studies have shown that communities may empower themselves through a participatory approach, working within the laws, regulations and other forms of governmentality of the nation state (Gupta, 1998; Anan Ganjanapan, 2000; McKinnon, 2003; Agrawal, 2005; Li, 2007). These latter studies describe how local communities can utilize technologies of government made available to them to achieve their own ends, even when the particular technologies have been provided as means of exclusion (Anan Ganjanapan, 2000, p. 195). Whereas these studies demonstrate how government technologies establish and promote unequal power relationships, and how local communities contest these technologies through various forms of co-operation or resistance, they do not explain, however, how new local institutions may arise from contested regulations. Research in political science has found that local power may be found when government regulations are unclear, ambiguous, or inapplicable. It has been proposed that, while institutions have 'the power to define and make definitions stick', ambivalence with institutional directives can 'confound choice', creating a situation whereby individuals will come together to support their own propositions (Hajer and Law, 2006, pp. 252, 257).

This research will apply the actor-network theory to demonstrate how groups of individuals congregate around mutual social concerns, thereby establishing new institutions by identifying specific flows of power between local organizations and government agencies. Actor-network theory is useful to this research because actors become defined through their relationships with each other, and particularly through the intermediaries put into play, these being the technologies, standards, rules, and concerns circulating within the network (Callon, 1991, p. 135; Thrift, 1996, p. 24). Organic farming can be seen as an ordering concept, a 'way of seeing', or interpreting a given phenomenon. An organic commodity network is the mobilization of social concerns, production processes and standards necessary too complete the transaction of agricultural produce from farmer to consumer. The social concerns are framed into a particular discourse though which actors associate themselves and form a coalition. The resulting 'discourse of concerns' becomes an 'identifiable set of practices', these being 'embedded routines and mutually understood rules and norms' by a coalition of actors (Hajer, 2005, pp. 299–302). In this case, social concerns are seen as the discourse (the ensemble of concepts and categorizations) guiding actors in their support for organic farming and agricultural standards (Hajer and Law, 2006, p. 261). Discourse coalitions are defined as 'the ensemble of particular story lines, the actors that employ them and the practices through which the discourse involved exert their power' (Hajer, 2006, p. 45).

This analysis contributes to the above research by applying actor-network theory to explain how a new alternative agricultural network emerges from the mobilization of social concerns of actors dedicated to the establishment and promotion of community-based standards. The use of actor-network theory allows this research to understand how the constellation of statements and rules defining a specific set of organic regulations are framed by a coalition of actors and then translated into institutional practice (Forsyth, 2003, p. 99). Local, certifying institutions, such as the Northern Organic Standards Organization (NOSO), create agricultural commodity networks framed by standards reflecting local values and beliefs concerning safety, security, environment, and social responsibility and set into practice through specific agricultural production processes (Forsyth, 2003). The commodity network organizes around practices arising from discourse.

Contested organic regulations can be identified as specific discourses made up of many individual standards. Organic standards will be treated as 'network objects' in relation to the actor-network theory. These standards will be treated as non-human actants exerting power through their influence on discourse coalitions.

> 'Actants, such as objects, statements, rules, and even institutions are part of the associations and displacements within a network of practice. Actants can be substituted or associated with other actants in the network. Over time, the original intents or purposes constructing the actant may be completely transformed through continual displacement and re-association' (Latour, 1991, pp. 106–110).

In this study of local organic agriculture regulations in Thailand, local communities around Chiang Mai have established community-based, organic standards for mar-

keting to local consumers, as well as to markets in the wider nation and abroad. The organic commodity network in Chiang Mai can be conceptualized as an assemblage of forces interacting as circulations of power. Power is seen as coming from the organic discourse – that is, from the social concerns of the coalition, the ideals and beliefs supported by the participating actors.

Actor-network theory has been widely used to identify the roles of specific actors in agricultural commodity networks (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997; Raynolds, 2004; Marsden and Murdoch, 2006). However, these analyses have often neglected the role of organic regulatory standards as non-human actants influencing the network – that is, they do not address the power originating from agricultural concepts such as organic production standards and food safety, power that binds people together into actor coalitions. Unlike economic analysis, which monetizes commodities into values such as transaction costs, consumer demand, and price, this analysis envisions the organic commodity network not as objects reduced to simple monetary values, but as social values embedded as agricultural practice into the commodity itself. These commodities are framed as actions, conceptions, production, and circulation by the actors throughout the network (Callon, 2005, p. 186). This is possible because the organic agriculture commodity network is built on specific agricultural practice based on a codified set of standards. The commodity has value because of the discourse embodied in the product. In this case involving Chiang Mai, the market exists because of social concerns promoted by a community coalition of actors for safe agricultural commodities.

A set of rules, such as organic farming, is the result of the mobilization of many human and non-human actants around a set of specific social concerns. The actors develop discursive affinity around many of the standards, upholding each other's arguments and beliefs to support a discourse of agricultural practice acceptable to everyone (Hajer, 1993, p. 47). The social processes involved in framing organic networks include the language used to express concerns, social groupings, the contexts in which they are used, and political power (Forsyth, 2003, p. 91).

Agricultural regulations in Thailand are encumbered by the persistent ambiguity regarding the meaning of the term *organic*. Both third-party certified and unsubstantiated claims of safety, pesticide reduction and chemical-free agricultural products are represented with the same authenticity and authority by producers and distributors in the marketplace. Claims are almost always accompanied by a logo and consumers routinely not only assume that the different certifications are equivalent, but that uncertified products with logos claiming health and safety are also equivalent (Roitner-Schobesberger, 2008, pp. 28, 31–32). Furthermore, studies examining contract relations between producers and distributors, consumer awareness of organic production, or the government's role in expanding organic agriculture do not address the complexity of power relations in organic networks and simply conclude by calling for increased enforcement and better government co-ordination (JICA, 2002; Ellis et al., 2006; Shepard, 2006; Roitner-Schobesberger, 2008). Since Thailand's emerging organic products market is, at best, miniscule in proportion to the

industry as a whole, with less than 1% of Thailand's farm land certified as organic (ITC, 2008), the problem receives little government concern.

Agricultural Commodity Networks

In production-related theories, distribution and consumption of commodities vary from linear analysis to sophisticated multi-scalar approaches examining horizontal as well as vertical linkages (Raikes et al., 2000). Most non-linear theories subscribe to an actor-network approach and describe the influences of differential power relationships between linkages (Goodman and Watts, 1997). Non-linear commodity networks share other commonalities, such as an emphasis on economic and regulatory barriers to control or deny access to markets. What I am suggesting in this article, however, is that organic commodity networks are organized by discourse coalitions supporting the same social concerns. It is through the discourse behind these concerns that power is put into the organic commodity network through practice.

Organic regulations control the production process from the farmer to the consumer (FAO, 2001). Third-party certification establishes the authenticity of compliance. Consumers become informed about certification through labeling and other discursive devices used to communicate the messages and meanings behind the production processes applied. A wide variety of social concerns becomes inscribed into the certifying logo (Vandergeest, 2006). The labeling, and the associated logos, are a direct form of communication between farmer and consumer, representing values such as pesticide and chemical-free production, support of biodiversity, fair trade, and social justice. All of these meanings are codified into the organic standards and given authenticity by certification. The practices used by the various discourse coalitions, verified by a certifying body, are communicated to consumers at the marketplace where powerful network objects (standards), are symbolically represented, and fulfill social, emotional and intellectual needs of consumers.

There are more than 364 different certified organic production standards worldwide. Most of these can be described as locally developed regulations, researched and codified by groups made up of informed consumers, farmers, and academics, as well as government and NGO leaders (Rundgren, 2003). The actors came together to establish discourse coalitions around a set of concerns, beliefs and ideals relating to organic agriculture. Many different standards circulate between the various coalitions, building affinity, binding the actors together through their desire to endorse them. The most important concerns are operationalized when all of the actors involved agree on a set of organic production standards, leading to the establishment of a new, institutionalized, organic commodity network with a locally recognized set of production standards and process of certification and verification. The resulting product enters into a marketplace where conscientious consumers assess the qualities of one organic product with another by comparing the organic agriculture production processes represented by the label. Organic commodity consumers are unique insomuch as they are willing to pay a premium because of their concerns about per-

sonal health issues as well as their support to particular social concerns (Ellis et al., 2006).

Case Study: The Establishment of Local Organic Standards

In a previous research, I analysed the establishment and acceptance of organic and pesticide reduced standards in Chiang Mai province, Northern Thailand. This situation was intriguing because my preliminary field investigation showed that most Thai people do not distinguish between organic, pesticide-reduced certifications, or even uncertified, surreptitious labeling (Vitoon Panyakul, 2001, 2008; Roitner-Schobesberger, 2008). However, my research in Chiang Mai, as well as other research conducted in Bangkok, showed that consumers perceive the different certifications to represent healthy and safe production processes, though most consumers are not aware of the actual production processes, distinguishing one form of certification from another. Issues of health and safety are important to Thai consumers because of the many reported cases of pesticide contamination of fresh vegetables in Thailand (Vitoon Panyakul, 2002; Shepard, 2006; Wyatt, 2010). As part of this author's filed work, a consumer survey was performed during the months of June and July in 2006 to assess consumer preferences and attitudes about organic and certified safe produce at seven different market venues in Chiang Mai. The market venues represented a cross-section of hypermarkets (Carrefour and Tesco Lotus chains), supermarkets stores, fresh (wet) markets and community markets. A total of 324 consumers were surveyed, ages ranging from 18 to senior citizens. The results of this survey were as follows:

1. Cleanliness
2. Origin
3. Logo
4. Price
5. Taste

Consumers ranked taste and price as much less important as cleanliness, origin and logo, with 76% of consumers ranking cleanliness as the most important attribute of purchasing vegetables (Wyatt, 2010). It should be noted that the term 'origin' (literally translated as 'where it came from') is important because of the dubious quality of vegetables from China, as well as consumers' understanding that some locations produce relatively higher quality vegetables, and thus better flavour. When the same consumers were asked to rank their trust in the government 'Safe Vegetable' logo, the 'Good Agricultural Practices' logo, and the label of the Royal Project Foundation (the largest organic producer in Northern Thailand), there was virtually no difference, with 59%, 58% and 60% of consumers giving high rankings respectively. The ambiguity of the meaning of the term *organic* has allowed many different regulatory standards to be supported by the government, all of which allow limited applications of pesticides (Wyatt, 2010).

Pesticide contamination has been an important issue in Thailand since the early 1990s. Sometime in the mid-1990s, the International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM) became active in organizing a series of conferences in Bangkok to promote organic standards and certification. Many Thai civic groups organized to take part in the conferences, including a small group of concerned consumers from Chiang Mai. Thailand's Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) developed as an umbrella organization to help coalitions concerned about all methods of organic agriculture. The coalition group from Chiang Mai became registered as *Northnet*, to act as the northern umbrella supported by AAN. Members of *Northnet* set out in many directions, relating social concerns and environmental issues to farming practice. Out of all of these efforts came NOSO, led by a medical researcher at Chiang Mai University, which focused specifically on the development of organic agriculture regulations.

Through NOSO, the concerns of consumers, NGO groups, and academics in Chiang Mai became institutionalized. Organic agriculture standards from around the world were evaluated for their applicability to the environmental settings, social concerns, and practical farming needs of Chiang Mai. The coalition kept minutes and published their findings in two annual reports (Maneelert, 1999). Standards for agricultural production processes from each of the external networks were used to create a new set of regulations. The following organic standards were reviewed while establishing NOSO (Thiprad Maneelert, 1999):

- Sweden (KRAV)
- Vermont Organic Farmer of USA (VOF)
- Nova Scotia Organic Growers Association of Canada (NOGAS)
- Independent Organic Inspectors Association in Minnesota, USA (IOIA)
- Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA)
- Japan Organic Standards (JAL)
- Regulations developed by Northnet, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- Royal Project Foundation or Thailand's standards
- Standards under development at Chiang Mai University and Mae Jo University in Northern Thailand

The emergence of NOSO can be explained using Latour's conceptualization of object translation. Standards from existing regulatory networks were borrowed, translated and then mobilized into practice.

The combination of exclusionary policies, ambiguity of meaning, and overall relevance to local consumers made the dominant discourse of standards promulgated by international certifying bodies inappropriate for local producers and consumers. It was not that the legitimacy of the standards was in question, but rather the need for outside approval by an external, presumed 'higher authority' became doubted. Once the need to be qualified by an external institution was rejected, the coalition behind NOSO began mobilizing those standards deemed important to establishing an organic commodity network. The actions of NOSO reinforce the concept of network stability through discourse affinity as outlined by Latour:

> 'And still, we regain the durability of social assemblage, but it is shared with the non-humans thus mobilized. When actors and points of view are aligned, then we enter a stable definition of society that looks like domination. When actors are unstable and the observers' points of view shift endlessly we are entering a highly unstable and negotiated situation in which domination is not yet exerted' (Latour, 1991, p. 129).

Some standards are naturally incontestable for the establishment of international organic standards, such as the use of any toxic chemical pesticides. But many other issues are debated within organic agriculture, such as the types of fertilizers that may be applied, or whether or not to support biodiversity, particularly with the use of non-discriminatory insect and pest traps as practiced by integrated pest management techniques. The discourse coalition that organized around NOSO operationalized its objectives and translated selected external standards pertaining to the use of pesticides and fertilizers, support for biodiversity, fair trade, and social justice.

The standards that most concerned NOSO farmers were those addressing outside contamination through overspraying and irrigation water. The small field size of many farms, ranging from 400 to 3,200 m^2, made issues such as 2 meter buffer zones untenable (note that a 2 meter buffer zone on an 800 m^2 plot would result in a loss of 14.5% of productive area). Furthermore, the intricate maze of irrigation canals also made it impossible to prevent the possibility of contamination from irrigation water. In addition, it was determined that consumers were not interested in international, certified regulations concerning pesticides. This appears to have been evidenced more informally than through structured surveys, being based on the opinions and perceptions of the community leaders involved (Thiprad Maneelert, 1991). However, time has proved these perceptions to be accurate insomuch as the Institute for Sustainable Agricultural Communities (ISAC) community market, established in 1993 and based on NOSO standards, continues to serve a diverse cross-section of Chiang Mai (Wyatt, 2010). Instead, they just wanted assurance that the vegetables produced were safe to eat. Once the standards were approved by the various coalitions involved in 2001, NOSO became chartered as the Northern Organic Standards Organization and began disseminating its regulations for organic farming throughout Northern Thailand through different affiliates, such as ISAC (Chomchuan Boonrahong, 2008). The successful translation of external standards into the local discourse of concerns established 'a shared space, equivalence and commensurability' (Callon, 1991, p. 145). Once the standards were accepted and put into practice, their translations established the network.

NOSO certification gained market share through direct communication with consumers in specialized community markets. At the community markets, where products are sold to costumers unpackaged, NOSO standards are not symbolically represented by labels. Instead, the local concept of 'organic' is communicated directly between farmer and customer through face-to-face interaction across tables filled with bulk fruits and vegetables. The NOSO logo is displayed at the farm gate of participating farms. ISAC uses these locations as part of its community outreach programme for field trips, and uses pictures of the farms (and the NOSO signs) in its

literature, sign-boards and web site. ISAC also uses its own logo as part of its labeling of processed organic products, such as seed-oil, soap, honey, and dried foods sold at local retail outlets.

From large-scale commercial , such as soybean farmers and tangerine growers, to small fruit and vegetable farmers, ISAC trains farmers in organic production processes leading to NOSO certification and makes consumers aware of those processes. ISAC presents lectures, cooking demonstrations, and sign-boards on Saturdays at the ISAC community markets. ISAC offers community lectures and reaches out through newspapers, radio and television, promoting its vision of organics, based on NOSO standards. ISAC also engages in international outreach to demonstrate the equivalent of NOSO regulations with known international standards by inviting prospective buyers to see for themselves groups of farmers practicing organic techniques. At the beginning, trust and reputation alone were enough to maintain and extend the local agricultural network. However, everything changed when NOSO approached the Thai national government for international accreditation.

Power and Acceptance

Ambiguity, exclusion, and the pressing need to address local concerns have led to a worldwide proliferation of many different certifying bodies and organic standards. Each standard recognizes a different set of environmental circumstances, and different community and farming practices. Issues such as chain of custody (the ability to trace a product from producer to consumer), land tenure, and overspraying can be controlled through tough corporate purchasing policies and rigorous enforcement. Internationally certified, corporate, organic commodity networks exist within markets capable of paying the high cost of systematized, large-scale, bar-coded production shipped over great distances through elaborate cold chains (Humphrey and Memedovic, 2006). International organic standards, such as the Japanese Organic Standard (JAS), and United States Department of Agriculture assume production processes at a scale far above the capacity of individual farmers or farm groups in Northern Thailand. International organic compliance is practiced in Thailand mainly around the Bangkok area where issues of scale can be overcome by the large agro-industrial infrastructure that has developed and expanded around the metropolis (Eischen et al., 2006; Ellis et al., 2006). Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand (ACT), the organic accrediting body operating mostly in Central Thailand, had received accreditation from the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS) by conforming to all of IFOAM's standards and has been pressuring ACFS to create a uniform standard throughout Thailand (ACT, 2003).

Northern Thai farmers, although certified under NOSO standards, have been excluded from large-scale, international and national markets insisting on international certification or equivalent. The most common forms of certification in Northern Thailand are BCS, KRAV, Ecocert, ACT, or their equivalents (Ellis et al., 2006), and these production processes are practiced exclusively by large-scale farm operations. The discourse coalitions active in the commodity network established around NOSO

standards came to believe that equivalence with IFOAM would provide more opportunities for their farmers. Thus, they urged NOSO to apply for accreditation from ACFS, Thailand's national certification board. After several years of negotiation NOSO and ACFS reached an impasse. Though Northern Thai farmers can control their own practices, they cannot control the practices of those surrounding them. Neither can they afford special labeling, such as bar-codes, and processing practices, such as refrigerated storage, to assure a custody chain. For the local farmers, bar-coding their vegetables and documenting harvests before going to the local fresh market were deemed unnecessary, and the additional expense would not be tolerated by their customers. The standards practiced by Northern Thai farmers and accepted by local consumers were not accepted by ACFS.

ACFS refused to grant NOSO recognition as an organic accrediting body until NOSO conformed to all IFOAM standards. The discourse coalition behind NOSO was placed into a conundrum. Farmers had made it clear that they were unwilling to follow certain regulations, especially the regulations concerning land restrictions, buffer zones, and to wait two years prior to becoming certified organic producers, meanwhile being excluded from the organic community markets. It was also clear that consumers were not willing to pay the extra premium, nor were they concerned about the extra precautions imposed by IFOAM for organic compliance, nor did they want to wait two years for their favorite farmers to become certified organic.

This research uncovered that a decision was made by the board of directors to no longer seek accreditation through ACFS during a structured interview with the current director of NOSO. The international standards promoted by ACFS, mandated by international distributors of organic foods, were no longer considered to be important for network practices. I will call this process *reflexive translation* to describe the influence of rejected network objects on a discourse coalition. This term was inspired by Ulrich Beck's notion of the confrontational aspect of reflexivity (Beck, 1994, p. 6). Networks have the freedom to critique the standards of the dominant institutions, going so far as to reject them, resulting in social change, such as the establishment of local organic standards (Lash, 1994, p. 116). Reflective translation can lead to the acceptance of the complete antithesis of the original proposition, either through policy changes to reject the proposition or through standards effectively nullifying it. Reflexive translation extends Callon's idea of durability and robustness of networks by offering an alternative process for the establishment of network objects, in this case the establishment of organic policies and standards (Callon 1991, pp. 150–151). Previous research on actors working inside an institution demonstrated that individuals working within an institutional framework can act reflexively by evaluating an alternative discourse (Hajer and Law, 2006, p. 261). NOSO reassessed the importance of obtaining AFCS accreditation in light of the responses from both farmers and consumers. The goal of being ACFS certified and internationally recognized as organic producer, though appealing, was unnecessary to establish and maintain a local organic commodity network.

By declaring national accreditation untenable, NOSO made a policy decision to no longer validate government endorsement. Instead, NOSO would continue on its

original path of community recognition and independent validation through personal relationships. New policies were implemented by self-promotion of the now emerging NOSO organic standard. The act of rejecting the standards promulgated by ACFS was a reflexive translation of the international standards. The other allied coalitions, such as ISAC, supported the Board's decision to reconsider the relevance of IFOAM certification. The proposed IFOAM standards were then translated, through a process of rejection, into a new proposition. First, NOSO policy would be responsive to the needs of local farmers and consumers, and, second, NOSO would continue to act as an independent organic certification body outside of the existing national and international frameworks.

Local consumers in Chiang Mai were not concerned about international standards. Instead, they want assurances that the food is safe to eat. They accepted the local community standards. Also, neither NOSO, nor ISAC, promoted the sale of foods or vegetables to commercial retail chains insisting on national or international organic certification. The primary goal of ISAC had been to support locally grown organic foods and vegetables sold at community markets. International accreditation was determined to be unnecessary to meet this goal. It was only under pressure from other, competing organizations, such as ACT, and the possibility of accessing larger markets, that NOSO had ever considered international conformity.

NOSO's actions represents a form of the mobilization and displacement of organic standards whereby rejection of international standards catalysed an unexpected response. The reflexive action of the discourse coalition resulted in the formation of new institutional policies. The 'displacement' caused by the negative, reflexive decision of NOSO led to acceptance by the coalitions constituting the local organic commodity network that the local interpretation of 'organic' would be based on community-supported standards. The presumed power of state or international standards had been subsumed by the willingness of local consumers to trust a community based, organic certified body entirely independent of external accreditation or approval.

Conclusion

In conclusion, organic standards are translated into a local, certifying institution through the affinitive actions of discourse coalitions working together to construct an organic commodity network. In the case presented here, the resulting set of local organic standards was assembled from many different sets of existing internationally accredited organic standards. The discourse coalition selected standards applicable to the market and the farmer, standards that could establish successfully a viable organic commodity network. The translation and mobilization of the standards emerged not as a synthesis of an existing network, but as the establishment of an entirely new institution with a hybrid set of standards.

Local, organic standards are communicated to consumers through the organization, promotion, and production processes of the discourse coalitions constituting the organic agricultural network. Through third-party certification, production

processes, adhering to a set of standards, extend their meanings into the marketplace through logos, labeling, or the creation of specialized market spaces. The symbolic representations of label, logo and space communicate the authenticity and reliability of the organic network to the consumer.

By analyzing the specific flows of power between international organic accreditation institutions and local discourse coalitions, this research demonstrated how local community organizations can re-evaluate the legitimacy of international and or government-sponsored discourse, and choose to accept or reject the legitimacy offered by those institutions for the local marketplace. In this case, the act of rejection led to an affirmation of existing local standards and new policies endorsing the long-term support of maintaining community-based organic standards.

This approach differed from other approaches, since the actors were never part of a dominant institution and their political influence was rejected out of hand. NOSO's rejection of the body of international standards, although originally desired, brought about reflection on the mission, goals and objectives supporting it. The resulting reflexivity on the appropriateness of international accreditation led to questions concerning the reasons for initially examining it, such as: why was the object considered important in the first place; what circumstances gave credibility to the network of origin; or how does co-operation with other networks, by assuming their objects, advance the purposes of the members of the network? The rejection of a translated object influences the practices of a network and, through the institutionalization of defiance by network discourse coalitions, promotes and validates the credibility of the network while disempowering the authority of the dominant network acting upon it.

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