

## **Bio-Luddism in France, Germany, and Spain. Uneven Diffusion and Context<sup>1</sup>**

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This article deals with the transnational diffusion of Bio-Luddism, i.e., the radical critique of modern biotechnology that resorts to the radical protest method of GMO field trial vandalism. It investigates Bio-Luddism in France, Germany, and Spain by discussing the varying political effects of this form of radical activism and reviewing empirical evidence for the method's transnational diffusion and the reasons for its political success or failure under different national circumstances. I use various forms of materials to illustrate the issue empirically: protocols from participant observation in Bio-Luddite meetings in Germany and Spain; a quantitative data set that covers the period from 1995 to 2009; and various materials from national newspapers, movement newsletters and the like. In a first chapter, I explain the hypothesis according to which the relationship between nation state and new social movements is undergoing change due to a economic globalisation and political and legal intergration at levels above the nation-state. In the next section I explain the term Luddite and Bio-Luddite. Herupon I review concepts of transnational diffusion.

The empirical part begins with a review of national anti-biotechnology movements in France, Spain and Germany, which represent poles on the general European anti-GMO movement. The French movement constitutes an extreme case the typical manifestation of Bio-Luddism with a radical farmer association, activist networks denouncing neo-liberal globalisation and the charismatic peasant leader José Bové as its leading actors. Conversely, Spain represents the permissive end of the spectrum in Europe's agri-biotechnology landscape. Its anti-GMO movement, comprised of some farmers' associations and environmental groups is weak and little effective. The German anti-biotechnology movement occupies a position in the middle range. Even though it is among the longest standing in Europe, it reluctantly gained sway in the big European controversy of the late 1990s. Only in recent years have segments of the German movement radicalised, with some activists embracing the Bio-Luddite tactics of the French movement by attacking field trials and seeking public acclaim through staged court cases.

In the next empirical section I review the diffusion of French-style Bio-Luddism to radical activists in Spain and Germany. Spanish Bio-Luddism is limited to one single case: a radical group thrashed a field trial in Catalonia. At the subsequent legal trial, the threat of a huge payment of compensation and the relative lack of social allies and public support brought the group to abandon the direct action method. In Germany, by contrast, French-style Bio-

Luddism was adopted by radical activists with somewhat more success. From 2005 to today a series of attacks on fields were conducted in the open public and were followed by legal sanctions.

We find that activist groups in both countries adopted the direct action strategy that had so successfully been applied by the French Bio-Luddites. Direct activism as pioneered by the French Bio-Luddists, however, has not proved as effective in those countries to which the concept has travelled, nor has it met with the same success in Spain and Germany. For one thing, this is evidence proving the initial hypothesis according to which national states and national socio-political contexts still have a decisive influence on the structure, evolution and impact of a social movement. Beyond that, it raises the question how this uneven diffusion processes observed in Germany and Spain are to be explained.

In addition to the level of state repression and responsiveness, respectively, we identify the lack of allies and a rooted constituency and as key factor for adopters in both Spain and Germany. In Spain, both state repression and the lack is of support within the national movement and society at large are more pronounced than in Germany. We also recall that the original Luddites constituted a distinct socio-economic group of people who were existentially affected and threatened by the introduction of the weaving machinery. Only in the French group of radical farmers opposing agri-biotechnology do we identify such a group, organised as a political entity and capable of acting. Neither in Spain nor in Germany can Bio-Luddites rely on the support of such a group.

## **Notes**

1. Extended abstract. A more detailed version of this paper is provided on the Conference Proceedings CD)