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Domesticating neoliberal foodscapes: An everyday approach to understanding food system transitions in Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract

The persistence of neoliberal food systems has often been explained with reference to political economy dynamics or the market and political activities of agri-food companies. This article approaches the issue from a different level of analysis and asks: *how do the everyday lives of people sustain neoliberal foodscapes?* The article utilizes an Everyday Political Economy approach, combined with Smith and Rochovská's (2007) concept of 'domesticating neoliberalism', and applies this to the study of the sale of ultra-processed foods by small corner shops (*tiendas*) in the southern Mexican city of Oaxaca de Juárez. The article argues that *tienda* owners respond to the increasing power of UPF corporations by maintaining neoliberal foodscapes as they seek to support themselves in challenging socio-economic circumstances. This perspective is important in advancing thinking for solutions to transition away from commodified, profit-orientated and ecologically destructive food systems because it situates the everyday as the site for intervention and calls attention to the broader material conditions of people's lives as they are forced to 'make do' within neoliberal worlds.

Keywords

Everyday political economy; food systems; ultra-processed food; neoliberalism; Mexico

1. Introduction

In 2020, the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca made headlines for banning the sale of ultra-processed junk food to children and adolescents (Agren, 2020) in response to increasing levels of obesity and type 2 diabetes (Ramírez-Díaz *et al.*, 2023; Seiglie *et al.*, 2021). Although heralded globally as a success story of government efforts to constrain the rapid spread of health-harming and ecologically damaging ultra-processed foods and beverages (UPFs), enforcement of this law has proved to be a challenge, especially in the informal food sector. Despite modernization in recent years, the Oaxacan retail food environment is still dominated by informal food vendors (Denham, 2020, 2024), including *tiendas* (small corner shops), which are key outlets for the distribution of UPFs (Pérez-Ferrer *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). In interviews with the author, *tienderos*[2] (people who operate *tiendas*) demonstrated a strong awareness of the numerous harms associated with UPFs, from the negative health impacts of over-consumption, the addictive qualities of these products (especially for children) and the aggressive marketing and distribution activities of UPF corporations, to the potential they have for displacing local alternatives. However, despite this awareness and the new ban on UPFs, *tienderos* continued to sell ultra-processed junk food to children. This article argues that to understand these dynamics, it is important to engage with how UPF corporate power is experienced and navigated in everyday life. Doing so

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[2] The feminine version of *tiendero* in Spanish is *tiendera.*

allows for a deeper understanding of how and why *tienderos* contribute to sustaining ultra-processed foodscapes in Oaxaca.

Research on the political economy of food systems has analyzed the dominance of ultra-processed foodscapes by focusing on the macro-level institutions, structures and processes that characterize the neoliberal food regime, as well as the market and political activities of UPF companies that ensure its continued dominance. To complement this research, the article approaches the question from a different level of analysis and asks: *how do the everyday lives of people sustain neoliberal foodscapes?* The article argues that in the face of increasing UPF corporate power, *tienderos* may respond by maintaining ultra-processed foodscapes as they seek to support themselves and their families in challenging socio-economic circumstances. Through adopting an everyday lens, this analysis demonstrates how power is experienced and navigated in everyday life. This enables us to better understand why resistance often does not manifest in situations of inequality and hardship and why efforts to change food systems can be undermined by everyday practices that may contribute to the continuation of corporate-dominated foodscapes. This perspective is important in advancing thinking for solutions to transition away from commodified, profit-orientated and ecologically destructive food systems. It situates the everyday as the site for intervention and calls attention to the broader material conditions of people's lives as they are forced to 'make do' within neoliberal worlds. In doing so, the research seeks to advance political economy and political ecology research on the possibilities and barriers to food system transformations.

The article begins by outlining the background and methodology of the project. The following section outlines the analytical framework. It begins by situating an everyday approach within the political economy of food systems (PEFS) research, before describing the Everyday Political Economy approach used herein and synthesizing it with Smith and Rochovská's (2007) concept of 'domesticating neoliberalism.' This conceptual framework is then applied to the case study in the final section to understand how and why *tienderos* contribute to sustaining ultra-processed foodscapes in Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico.

2. Case study

Project background

This work is part of a doctoral project that seeks to understand how ultra-processed food companies' power is diffused, experienced, and navigated in everyday life, with a focus on foodscapes in the southern Mexican city of Oaxaca de Juárez (hereafter, Oaxaca). UPFs are created using a series of industrial processes that fractionate whole foods, usually from a narrow range of high-yield plants like corn, wheat, soya, cane and beet, into generic industrial components, such as sugars, oils and fats, which are then combined with cosmetic additives to create an almost endless variety of products (Monteiro *et al*., 2019). UPFs include snacks, such as soft drinks, chips, chocolate, and candy, as well as dietary staples, including breakfast cereals, packaged supermarket breads, and instant noodles. UPF corporations, such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Unilever, Mondelez and Kraft Heinz are some of the largest, most powerful and profitable companies in the world (Monteiro & Cannon, 2019). This project contributes to a growing body of literature that has emerged over the last five years regarding the power of UPF companies (e.g., Gómez, 2023; Ruiz Tafoya, 2023; van Tulleken, 2023) and responds to calls from political ecology scholars for a greater focus on the influence of the food industry (Barca & Bridge, 2015; Coplen, 2018; Galt, 2013; Köpke, 2021; Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017; Sharp, 2016). UPF companies also pose a major challenge to the vision for post-growth food systems, as UPFs, by their very nature, concern growth and commodification. UPFs are designed to be highly profitable (low-cost ingredients, long shelf-life, captivating branding), convenient (ready to consume), and hyper-palatable products that displace unprocessed and minimally processed foods (Monteiro *et al*., 2019, p. 936).

Our current food systems are plagued by numerous intersecting social, health and environmental crises (Crippa *et al*., 2021; Leighton, 2021; Swinburn *et al*., 2019). These food systems were born out of a neoliberal food regime, characterized by the deeper integration of transnational capital, global sourcing, deregulation, financialization and trade and investment liberalization (Otero, 2012, 2018; Pechlaner & Otero, 2008, 2010). The neoliberal food regime has caused social and ecological disruptions, including the displacement and

marginalization of smallholder farmers, the "triple burden of malnutrition" represented in growing global hunger and the simultaneous increase in obesity and micronutrient deficiencies, along with the depletion of soils and growing greenhouse gas emissions (Magnan, 2012, p. 13; Swinburn *et al*., 2019). Despite significant efforts by civil society organizations and social movements to shift the current trajectory of food systems, neoliberal food systems have proven very resilient (Béné, 2022; Swinburn, 2019).

Mexico was selected as the focus country for this project because its food systems and dietary patterns have changed rapidly over the last three decades as a result of trade and investment liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and land reforms (Baca, 2019; Martínez & Aboites, 2015; Otero, 2011; Popkin & Reardon, 2018). Mexico's neoliberal reforms set the stage for the significant growth of UPF companies and the spread of their products, which has transformed foodscapes in many Mexican cities, including Oaxaca (Baca, 2019; Clark, Hawkes, Murphy, Hansen-Kuhn, & Wallinga, 2012; Gálvez, 2018). Research has highlighted how UPF companies' market and political activity has shaped food policy and food environments (Baker *et al*., 2021; Mialon, Swinburn, & Sacks, 2015; Moodie *et al*., 2021; Wood *et al.*, 2021), as well as the health and environmental impacts of UPF products (Chen *et al*., 2020; Elizabeth *et al.*, 2020; Pagliai *et al*., 2021; Seferidi *et al*., 2020). However, little attention has been paid to how communities experience and navigate UPF companies' influence on foodscapes. It is this gap that the project seeks to fill. It utilizes urban retail foodscapes as the entry point for analysis because UPF corporate power is manifested through the sale and consumption of UPF products. A foodscape approach draws attention to the everyday practices of buying, selling and consuming food and the social relations and power dynamics in which they are embedded (Joassart-Marcelli, 2021, p. 18).

Methodology

The author undertook two-and-a-half months of fieldwork for this project in late 2023. Fieldwork involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 54 participants. Twenty-three participants were from institutions (17 non-governmental organizations, 2 government, 2 private sector, 1 journalist, 1 university), and thirty-one participants were from the community (6 local community members, 6 UPF vendors, 19 traditional food vendors).[3] Research participants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by the author and a local research assistant. Although this research was not an ethnography, the author adopted what other Everyday Political Economy scholars have termed interviewing 'with an ethnographic sensibility' (Killick, 2022; Hansen, 2018; Pader, 2015). This involved living with a local family during fieldwork, interviewing people in community spaces and workplaces, and engaging in unstructured participant observation of foodscapes in Oaxaca. Interview data was transcribed in Spanish with the aid of software and translated into English. The author undertook an inductive approach to analysis (Evans, 2018) and coded interview data based on themes (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Interview data was triangulated with detailed fieldwork notes as well as secondary data gathered from a literature review (Flick, 2018, p. 786). The secondary literature analyzed for this project included corporate literature of major UPF companies operating in Mexico (e.g., annual reports, investor presentations and press releases), market analyses from market research and consultancy companies on topics such as the retail food environment in Mexico and consumer trends, as well as a category of general documents, which included government documents and databases, reports from civil society organizations and media articles.

This article was born out of insights from fieldwork. The author planned to investigate how UPF companies shape foodscapes through the extensive distribution, marketing, and pricing of their products and how communities resist such transformations. However, during time spent in Oaxaca, it became evident that in some cases, the lived experience of UPF corporate power did not lead to resistance but instead to local people *sustaining* ultra-processed foodscapes. The law banning the sale of UPFs to children created a space for

[3] While participants are divided into categories for the purpose of explanation, in reality there was an overlap between participants. For example, all of the UPF vendors, many institutional interviewees and most traditional food vendors were also local residents. Furthermore, many interviewees, despite not being *tiendero/as* themselves had family members who had operated *tiendas* and could speak to the dynamics of these small stores.

resistance by providing a justification for *tienderos* to not sell these products. However, despite the law, *tienderos* continued to reinforce ultra-processed foodscapes. As a result, government and civil society efforts to curtail the power of UPF corporations and transition to healthier foodscapes were hampered.

3. Analytical framework

Situating an everyday approach in the political economy of food systems literature

Scholars from a variety of disciplines, including geography, sociology, political science and public health, have contributed to research on the political economy of food systems (PEFS). To understand how and why neoliberal foodscapes persist, research has focused on the role of trade and investment liberalization (Baker *et al.*, 2016; Cowling *et al*., 2020; Friel *et al*., 2013; Milsom *et al.*, 2021), as well as corporate concentration across different segments of the food supply chain (Clapp, 2023; ETC Group, 2019, 2022; Howard, 2021; IPES-Food, 2017). Recently, a rich body of scholarship has emerged on the power of UPF companies to shape food systems through their marketing and political practices (Baker *et al*., 2021; Gómez, 2023; Huse *et al*., 2022; Igumbor *et al*., 2012; Mialon & Gomes, 2019; Moodie *et al*., 2021; Vandenbrink, Pauzé, & Potvin Kent, 2020; Wood *et al*., 2021). UPF companies utilize a range of strategies to shape both food policies (Slater *et al*., 2024; Swinburn, 2019) and food environments globally (Greenberg, 2017; Hecht *et al*., 2020; Moran & Roberto, 2020; Sacks *et al*., 2013). This has been a particularly acute problem in Mexico (Carriedo *et al*., 2021; Crosbie, Carriedo, & Schmidt, 2022; Gómez, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023; Hawkes, 2002; Mialon & Gomes, 2019; Ojeda *et al*., 2020; Pedroza-Tobias *et al.*, 2021). Literature has also drawn attention to the uneven power dynamics between UPF companies and small grocery store owners (Ayala *et al*., 2017; Chew *et al*., 2024 ; Gittelsohn *et al*., 2018; Laska *et al*., 2018). These analyses provide invaluable insights into the macro-level dynamics shaping neoliberal food systems but have engaged less often with how these dynamics manifest on the ground.

A growing body of political economy scholarship has complemented macro-level PEFS analyses by approaching food systems through the lens of the everyday. This strand of literature has tended to focus on household consumption and smallholder production (Curiel, 2017; Hansen, 2022; Ngcoya & Kumarakulasingam, 2017; Nichols, 2015; Stevano, 2025). There is, however, a growing focus on *retail* foodscapes, with scholarship adopting an everyday perspective in relation to street vendors (Eidse, 2023; Hayden, 2021) and small corner stores (Coen, Ross, & Turner, 2008; Hippert, 2017). Research on urban food environments has also focused on how everyday people *resist* neoliberal transformations in food systems (Figueroa, 2015; Granzow & Shields, 2020; Siebert, 2020). This study complements this literature by focusing on how everyday people can also *sustain* neoliberal foodscapes. An everyday level of analysis can enrich macro-level PEFS analyses through 'grounding' the analysis in particular places and times and illustrating how broader political economy processes and power dynamics manifest in everyday life (Yates, 2022, p. 146).

The everyday political economy

To understand how everyday practices can sustain neoliberal foodscapes, the article utilizes a conceptual framework based on an Everyday Political Economy (EPE) approach, combined with the concept of 'domesticating neoliberalism' (Smith & Rochovská, 2007). Everyday life has long been the starting point for sociological analyses aimed at understanding politics and consumption (for an overview, see Yates, 2022). This research, however, draws from a different critical tradition of EPE scholars that have utilized the concept to critique how *power* and *resistance* operate in everyday processes (Gardiner, 2000).

Interested in how everyday people can reproduce corporate-dominated foodscapes through their daily practices, I draw on Lefebvre's (1991, 2002, 2023) approach to everyday life, which concentrates on the logic of discipline that permeates daily activities. For Lefebvre, everyday life is characterized by the "atomization of relations, commodification, bureaucratization, labor specialization, urbanization and separation of work from leisure" (Nunes, 2020, p. 149), all of which are intrinsic features of capitalism. However, these capitalist social

relations are often normalized and rendered invisible as part of daily life, and it is only at the everyday level that we can better understand how capitalism is reproduced (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 89, 167). For example, concerning urban foodscapes, an EPE analysis is attentive to how neoliberal processes, including urbanization, gentrification, and touristification, have led to shifts in food consumption patterns, which are linked with changing temporal and spatial rhythms in daily life. Stevano (2025) highlights how the scarcity of formal, regular employment has forced people into precarious and financially unstable working arrangements, intensifying the temporal dynamics of everyday life. At the same time, work and family life have been spatially fragmented due to rural-urban and transnational migration (Stevano, 2025, p. 10).

While UPFs can be seen as responding to changes in daily rhythms, they also contribute to such transformations. UPFs are engineered to be cheap, convenient, durable and hyper-palatable, making them well-suited to modern, fast-paced and on-the-go lifestyles. At the same time, the ubiquitous availability of UPFs has transformed modalities of consumption as these products are associated with more individualized consumption outside the home rather than family- or socially orientated practices (Andrade *et al.,* 2020; Colozza, 2022). An everyday lens allows us to better understand how broader neoliberal processes unfold on the ground and the way that such shifts have changed people's daily lives, including in relation to food.

EPE is also interested in how power relations are *embodied* and *experienced* in daily life. The PEFS literature discussed above draws attention to how UPF companies exert power through their market and political practices to shape food policies and food environments. This literature highlights the uneven power dynamics that favor UPF companies and allow them to influence behavior by limiting the options available to people. In the case of urban foodscapes, people are constrained by the products that are available, accessible, and affordable for them. An EPE analysis complements this perspective by providing a 'bottom-up' view of power to understand how power is *embedded within* everyday life (Elias & Rethel, 2016, p. 9). An EPE approach draws attention to how *tienderos* experience and respond to UPF companies' distribution and retailing strategies within the socio-economic context in Oaxaca. While acknowledging that power *constrains* people's choices, EPE also sees power as *productive*, in that it promotes particular ways of being and living. Corporate power can be used to shape people's desires and aspirations through advertising campaigns that situate UPFs as being associated with 'modernity' and a higher-class status in the Global South (Aguilar-Rodríguez, 2020; Nichols, 2017). Companies also exert material power in a capitalist context by determining how people provide for their daily needs, including food, housing and education. In the case of *tiendas* in Oaxaca, UPF companies have changed how *tienderos* operate their businesses by determining product ranges, product placement, pricing and advertising.

Domesticating neoliberalism

In order to understand the role of daily practices in sustaining neoliberal foodscapes, Smith and Rochovská's (2007) concept of 'domesticating neoliberalism' is useful. Their framework was designed to address a lacuna in theorizations of neoliberalism, which tended to focus on a 'neo-liberalism out-there', either through conceptualizing it as an all-powerful global and hegemonic project (e.g., Harvey, 2007) or as a more local, geographically differentiated process (e.g., Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2007). Neither of these approaches, however, explored how everyday lives can *construct* neoliberal forms. Smith and Rochovská were inspired by Creed's (1998, p. 3) anthropological work on 'domestication', where he argued that people were able to transform an oppressive and intrusive politico-economic structure into a tolerable one by "doing what they could to improve their difficult circumstances", thereby sustaining the system. The idea of a 'domesticated neoliberalism' builds on this argument to understand how household economic practices and social reproduction *contribute* to neoliberal transitions as people seek to 'make life tolerable' (Smith & Rochovská, 2007; see also Stenning, Smith, Rochovská, & Świątek, 2010). This concept helps to explore how the everyday lives of people can domesticate neoliberal foodscapes, contributing to their perpetuation.

An understanding of the domestication of neoliberal processes yields two important insights for this analysis. First, this concept sees a neoliberal foodscape not just as something created by governments or companies, but also as something that can be sustained through daily activities. This perspective shifts the

focus solely from regulating harmful corporate activities to being attentive to people's everyday lives and seeking to understand how they experience and respond to corporate influence. It also situates the everyday as the site for interventions to create change for sustainable food systems. Second, Smith and Rochovská's (2007) framework directs our attention to not just *how* people might contribute to sustaining neoliberal foodscapes but also urges us to consider *why* people behave in certain ways. Often, their life circumstances mean that they depend on the status quo to survive, and have few alternatives. Utilizing the concept of domesticating neoliberalism encourages us to inquire into why *tienderos*, for example, maintain close relationships with UPF companies despite being aware of the harms caused by UPFs in their communities. Such a perspective helps to unpack why many top-down policies, such as banning the sale of ultra-processed junk food, might not be effective if they fail to consider what is happening on the ground in communities. For policymaking to be more effective in influencing people's everyday practices in a sustainable direction, it must attend to the root causes of people's behavior.

4. Results and analysis: *Tiendas* in Oaxaca de Juárez domesticating neoliberal foodscapes

This section demonstrates how everyday people can domesticate neoliberal foodscapes by engaging with the daily experiences of *tienderos* in Oaxaca. It draws from interviews with *tienderos* as well as other Oaxacan residents, many of whom highlighted the role of *tiendas* in local food provisioning. By describing the relationship between UPF companies and *tienderos*, it explains why *tienderos* respond to corporate power through continuing UPF-dominated foodscapes rather than resisting UPF companies.

Tienderos described how UPF companies essentially provided them with a 'ready-made business' by not only delivering the products directly to the store at very short notice (usually next-day delivery), but also providing refrigerators, shelving, signage, and marketing materials. This allowed one corner store, which opened 18 months ago, to be up and running within a couple of days. It is important to understand these benefits in light of the social context in Oaxaca. Many *tiendas* in Oaxaca are small family-run businesses that operate out of the front room of people's homes, often staffed by family members who may be the third or fourth generation to run the store. Participants described how, for many people who migrate to the United States, their dream is to return to Oaxaca and open a small *tienda*; and for those who remain in Oaxaca but have family members in the United States, one of the most desired ways to use foreign remittances is to open a *tienda*. This is consistent with the findings of other scholars who found that between US$5,000–$10,000 could outfit a *tienda* (Gálvez, 2018, p. 91). For locals in Oaxaca, it is much easier and less costly to open a *tienda* with the help of UPF companies, who essentially outfit the entire store for them and ensure a reliable and consistent supply of popular products.

One *tiendera* described how UPF corporations deliver products on a 'pay later' basis, meaning that the *tiendera* does not have to pay upfront for the products. At the end of the week, when she has sold her products, the UPF company representative returns to the store; the *tiendera* pays the purchase price for any goods sold, the company collects the unsold products and pays a commission for any products sold. In addition to the commission, the difference between the purchase price and the selling price is the profit margin for the *tiendera*. This is in comparison to other products that the stores sell, which need to be sourced and paid for in advance from wholesale markets or local suppliers. UPF companies also enable businesses to grow, with another *tiendero* describing how the shop used to be very small and cramped, but as they began selling more UPFs, the companies provided them with bigger shelves that perfectly fit the space, which eventually allowed them to expand the store and improve its appearance and street appeal. This *tiendero* also reported that a soft drink company upgraded the fridges they provided every two to three years with more energy-efficient models, which is especially important as electricity is one of the biggest costs for small *tiendas*.

Many *tienderos* reported that UPFs were their best-selling items and that they began to stock such products in response to customer requests. These products are often placed at the front of the shop to lure in customers – especially children. The attractive packaging of UPFs and eye-catching advertising provided by the corporations is also important in an increasingly competitive retail food environment in Oaxaca. One

tiendero described how fifty years ago, when their *tienda* first opened, they were the only corner store in the neighborhood. Fast forward to the present day, and there are not only numerous *tiendas* scattered throughout the neighborhood, but also a *mercado zonal* (neighborhood market), two chain convenience stores, and a large supermarket four blocks away. While some *tienderos* reported that their businesses thrived on personal relationships with neighbors, this *tienda* is dependent on thoroughfare pedestrian traffic due to urban planning changes that resulted in their shop being on a major transitway. Placing attractively packaged, popular, and convenient products such as 'Sabritas' and 'Coca-Cola' at the front of this store was a way for the *tiendero* to keep his business operating in an increasingly competitive retail environment. Another elderly *tiendero* described himself as 'enemy number one' of UPF corporations but felt helpless in the face of customer requests for these products and the desire to keep the family business operating.

The benefits of UPF companies' quick and easy ordering mechanisms (often done through WhatsApp or a specialized phone app), next-day door-to-door delivery services, and durable products have also significantly changed the way *tiendas* operate. *Tienderos* described how, in the past, corner store vendors would need to travel to the *Central de Abastos* (local wholesale market) to purchase bulk quantities of dried goods and perishable products such as a small selection of fruits and vegetables and fresh *tortillas* and *pan* (bread), which they would then re-sell in their stores. This can be a time-consuming and challenging endeavor, with the owner of a local bakery reporting that it recently took him three hours to buy five products from the sprawling and often overcrowded *Central de Abastos.* As the climate is hot and humid, there is also a high risk of perishable foods spoiling before they are sold. Given these factors, selling UPF products was often framed by *tienderos* as an improvement in the quality of their lives and businesses. The alternative to opening a *tienda* for many people is to have a small street stand or a market stall. The benefits of UPF companies' assistance can also be appreciated when compared to other kinds of informal food businesses in Oaxaca. For example, *vendedores ambulantes* (street food vendors), and market stall holders told me that they routinely wake up at 2 am or 3 am each morning to make their products from scratch, transport them to the local markets, and set up their stalls for the day.

This case study illustrates how and why *tienderos* domesticate ultra-processed foodscapes in Oaxaca. *Tienderos* often do so to make life tolerable within a broader socio-economic context characterized by inequality, a lack of government support, and a capitalist market in which they feel compelled to collaborate with powerful multi-national UPF companies or else risk their businesses and livelihoods. Academic literature and civil society campaigns tend to assume that once people are aware of and experience the harm of ultra-processed foodscapes, they will resist the influence of UPF companies. However, this case study has illustrated that we cannot assume that resistance will organically emerge at the everyday level. Rather, people's way of responding to UPF corporate power can be to support the status quo, thereby domesticating neoliberal foodscapes. People must be presented with viable alternatives to sustain their businesses and livelihoods before we can expect them to transition away from current neoliberal food systems.

5. Concluding thoughts

Finding ways to transition food systems in a direction that is better for human and planetary health is one of the key challenges of our time. Scholars and activists have rightly focused on the need to resist the commodification and corporate domination of food and instead create, or re-claim, different modes of living in relation to food. However, we cannot assume that resistance will organically emerge at the everyday level as people experience the harms of neoliberal food systems. Rather, this analysis demonstrates that everyday practices may *perpetuate* corporate-dominated foodscapes as people seek to survive in situations of hardship.

While *tienderos* in Oaxaca understood, and in some cases experienced, the harms associated with the extensive distribution and consumption of UPFs, they continued to engage with UPF companies as a way of keeping their businesses running in increasingly competitive, uncertain and challenging economic conditions. The support provided by UPF companies was what enabled some *tienderos* to open businesses in the first place, while others relied on these companies to help fit out their stores, provide advertising, and deliver products door-to-door on a regular basis. As UPFs are formulated to be hyper-palatable, quasi-addictive, and

aesthetically pleasing, they have also become some of the most popular products stocked in *tiendas* and a reliable source of income for *tienderos*. The consequence of this reliance is that *tiendas* have become key outlets for the distribution of UPFs. These dynamics have persisted in the face of civil society campaigns and laws banning the sale of ultra-processed junk food to children and adolescents in Oaxaca.

This analysis is important because it provides a 'bottom-up' view of how UPF power is experienced and navigated in everyday life. Rather than people experiencing the harms of UPF-dominated foodscapes and *resisting* UPF companies' influence, this case study illustrates that in some cases, people *sustain* UPF companies' influence by continuing to partner with them and sell their products in the face of limited other options. As such, if we want to transform food systems, then we must attend to the intersecting social, economic, and food crises affecting the quotidian livelihoods of people that hinder alternatives to neoliberal food systems.

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