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FOOD SYSTEM GOVERNANCE AND SUBORDINATION OF SMALL-SCALE FOOD RETAIL TO CORPORATE "SUPERMARKETIZATION" IN BRAZIL

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This research addresses the challenges of global food system governance by examining the spatial dynamics and power relations within Brazil's food retail sector. It seeks to investigate how the "supermarketization" process, orchestrated by corporate global governance, reconfigures local food supply and affects the survival of small-scale food retail firms. The study employs a multi-methodological approach, integrating a theoretical framework based on Milton Santos' "Theory of the Two Circuits of the Urban Economy". Quantitative analysis is conducted using national firm databases (RFB/CNPJ and RAIS/MTE) to map the spatial distribution of 357,284 food establishments and track business dynamics between 2000 and 2023. Qualitative insights are gathered through semi-structured interviews with key actors from supermarket associations and small retailers. Preliminary results indicate that while large-scale retail (Upper Circuit) exerts structural dominance through selective modernization and financialization, small food retail (Lower Circuit) maintains a significant presence, representing 92% of active establishments. However, a

dialectical relationship exists: small retailers increasingly depend on "Atacarejo" (cash-and-carry) structures owned by global and large national corporate retail for provisioning and restocking, which subordinates them to global corporate food regimes. This governance failure manifests in "food monotony," where both large and small retailers prioritize ultra-processed products, impacting food security and dietary quality. The research highlights the resilience and adaptive capacity of small retail while exposing its subordination to the power dynamics of global food retail. It suggests that current food governance lacks inclusivity, highlighting the urgent need for polycentric frameworks that empower small-scale actors and local urban-rural linkages against corporate hegemony. "This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001".

Palavras-chave: food system governance; food supply; supermarketization; small-scale food retail; spatial dynamics.