

## FOOD, from page 4

**R.P.:** Yes, we have been ever since the 15th century. I don't use the term "corpocracy" although people say, "we are governed by Monsanto," "We are governed by Bayer and Nestlé," and I don't know if it's strictly true. However, before colonial adventurers began to govern (and administrate) parts of the world, there had already been links between governments chosen by financiers; making fusions, supporting wars and colonial adventurers. There were also corporations and financial institutions which were already buying and transforming nature as we knew it. There were always three parts: financial institutions, governments and corporations – all of whom were buying and selling commodities. They needed each other. To think that today we buy and sell genetic material and, through agreements and laws, snatch away the seeds and knowledge of producers and farmers!

**M.F.:** What role does gender play in the food system?

**R.P.:** A study published by the Quarterly Journal of Economics about women and harvesting revealed different countries' opinions on whether men should have priority access to food during shortages of work. In Iceland, 3.5 percent said yes, compared to 99 percent in Egypt. This could be due to religion or the availability of resources. However, what seems to be constant is the presence or absence of harvesting. In what way does this contribute to shaping the attitudes of society towards women?

When you introduce harvesting to a society (and the same can be said for modern, industrial agriculture), you modify household roles and property rights due to harvesting working on a large-scale and you change the rhythms of who does and who doesn't pay. Men are the ones who pay, and the women are confined to their homes so that they can dedicate themselves to reproduction and cooking.

It's interesting to observe how industrial, capitalist, modern agriculture and their technologies are intertwined by their relations to power within the home. This is something which social movements keep very much at the forefront of their minds. La Via Campesina says that food sovereignty is a means of eradicating all forms of violence against women. Why do they say this? It's not just domestic violence, but structural violence and exploitation that is built into capitalism across its history.

**M.F.:** What do you want to highlight about your experiences of food sovereignty?

**R.P.:** Capitalism is just a temporary fix. The big agricultural reforms by the state – like those that took place in Korea and Japan after the Second World War – were extraordinary for creating equality and making it possible to imagine different ways of making use of the land for the majority. Some examples of agricultural reform and collectivization in China in the 1980s are very interesting because they allow farmers to have the access to, and control over, their land. I like what's happening in Cuba with urban agriculture: the agroecologic crops for the people of La Habana now feed the



PHOTO BY JAN STURMANN

tourism industry because the receptiveness of the economy can bring about the end of food sovereignty. The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network was an interesting experience. I've also had the privilege of working with the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities group in Malawi, an incredible organization, which even teaches men to cook.

**M.F.:** How strong is consumer power?

**R.P.:** For me, the idea of "consumer power" is very dangerous.

If we believe that all we have to do is to buy certified things – which still counts as participative certification – because we believe that liberation will come from the shopping bag, we are limited to our own choices and we allow capitalist violence to continue. I buy fair trade and I'm interested in participative certification schemes, but this isn't the only way that the food system controls us. The issue isn't just to do with the supply chain; it's also about the creation of individuals – of people obsessed with their weight and worried about brands and the nutrients in their food. The food system has changed us into navel-gazers and we believe that the source of our well-being comes from our wallet.

However, if we start to believe that a society is transformed by its market forces, its corporations, its states and its financial institutions, then we can work in the most intelligent and comprehensive way. In this era, people are fed up with being dominated by corporations and have embraced nationalism. However, this is not the way forward: collective character is what really matters. If we think of collectiveness as a term relating to place, we are damned because I don't believe that the concept of "nation" is big enough to enrich our ideas of the potential of collectiveness. The idea of food sovereignty, along with the equality of women as a key component, combined with indigenous towns and diverse communities is very different to the idea of "I do not agree with your liberalism," and, consequently, "we are heading towards

fascism," "enlarging the nation again." Therefore, consumer power is dangerous because it's also collective power. It can all be dangerous. If we don't try to imagine our communities in a different way, we'll stay stuck within capitalism until the end of the world.

**M.F.:** What comes next, in terms of trade policies and intellectual property rights, after Trump withdrew the USA from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)?

**R.P.:** One of the biggest worries surrounding the TPP was the dispute settlement mechanism. This is a little technical, but it's important that we understand it: When two countries enter a dispute over business practices, there are lawyers who are generally within a revolving door with the corporations involved in these disputes. The TPP was there to create a new layer of these lawyers in the shadows. However, we still have

these lawyers in the World Trade Organization (WTO), which is happy to make a decision in a dispute; for example, to discern whether something is considered "knowledge" or "property" or not.

Everything seems to indicate that things will continue as they are. As for Trump, I believe that he will be pressured by more bilateral agreements. This is nothing new. After the failure of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), there was an explosion of bilateral negotiations, particularly on the part of the USA and the European Union, who reached out to various countries. If you go to [Bilaterals.org](http://Bilaterals.org), you'll see these agreements. The rewards that are foreseen are much more direct in terms of the exercise of power and do not dissimulate, they don't even seek lawyers who want resolutions in favor of their bilateral agreements, where a state says, "I am more powerful than you, therefore this is what is going to happen."

**M.F.:** Do you believe that ultra-processed products are designed to be addictive? Does milk formula contain the same ingredients as

ultra-processed products so that children are hooked as soon as possible and so that businesses can count on their loyalty as consumers?

**R.P.:** Absolutely. The marketing and advertising aimed at children is designed to get them hooked onto certain ways of thinking about and wanting food. Just look at the McDonalds' Happy Meal as an example. With regard to addiction, cereal and food companies are fully aware that sugar is addictive. The billions of dollars that are spent each year on shaping the minds of children and their perceptions speaks of the urgency with which companies want to control this new market. It has become increasingly clear that sugar is addictive and that the recommended daily allowance must be reduced to 2 or 3 percent because of its impact on oral health, for example. However, the industry is pushing for the recommended daily allowance to be 20 percent.

**M.F.:** Do you have any advice for readers?

**R.P.:** Organize, organize, organize! We all have felt like there is nothing we can do. This feeling, this claim, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you think that you are just one person, then yes, there is only little you can do. Yes, you can buy organic products at the market, but if you get stuck thinking like this, then you are heading straight for failure. This is why I promote organization. If, for example, the global epidemics of obesity and diabetes in children motivate you, start working towards a ban on advertising aimed at children. It doesn't always have to be negative: it can also be positive, such as involving yourself in the quest to bring healthy foods to schools. This is the first step.

While researchers state that it is beneficial to have healthy foods in schools, it is during the night, at weekends and during the holidays that relationships with food are crucial. If the child's parents are poor, there's not much they can do, so we should fight to increase workers' salaries, for example.

The Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil fights on every front, which means that there are a lot of people involved who are fighting the government, corporations and bankers. The principle is to discover where the path leads within your town and to discover people who think like you do.

Where do we start? There is an excellent group in Detroit called Cook, Eat, Talk. They meet every week to make a favorite meal of one of those around the table, and friends and strangers eat together and talk about the problems that they want to solve. Another thing that the food industry does is transform us into individual consumers of pleasure. However, if you consider the fact that the best food you've ever had was always shared with other people, then you realize that food is a collective experience. As long as we understand that we are not agents of misery, but of happiness and justice, we will recognize that this pleasure must be democratized.

*Marcos Filardi is a lawyer who is an expert in food sovereignty. Translated from Spanish by Amy Merson. Courtesy of Hecho en Buenos Aires / INSP.ngo*