

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Teresa Cunha

Despite the great narrative propagated by the capitalist food industry, according to the World Food Programme, in 2019 one in nine people in the world suffered from hunger and/or chronic malnutrition. The intensive agriculture megaprojects – which are only viable with the deforestation for monoculture agriculture –, the systematic use of poisons (agrotoxics) and the indiscriminate use of water, are seriously putting at risk ancestral forms of life and the access to drinking water and food of the majority of the people in the world.

Furthermore, the way food is managed has led to the privatisation of biodiversity and the emergence of various diseases that are closely related to processed food, such as diabetes, high blood pressure or even cardiovascular diseases. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between food sovereignty and the very liberal idea of food safety. Food safety does not question the conditions under which food is produced, nor does it claim a structural alternative to the capitalist system of its production, processing and commercialisation. The urgency to achieve food sovereignty is made even clearer by what Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain call environmental colonialism. It helps us to understand how the exploitation and extraction of the so-called natural resources, including food, is based on a colonial political economy.

The idea of food sovereignty contradicts this logic of endless appropriation and exploitation of the Earth. It is based on an intense attachment to the territory and implies self-determination. This means the power to decide, on their own terms, what people want for their lives – in the present and in the future; how they want to feed themselves and how they want to reproduce their way of living in its most diverse aspects. The food sovereignty movements claim much more than the individual right to food, because they proclaim the necessary devolution of decision-making power to communities and collectives. This means to have the capacity to decide over what should be planted and what food is, with respect for the land, the water, the identities and the cosmovisions that know that Mother-Earth is not, and cannot be, a mere commodity. It is also a question of recognising that small-scale agriculture feeds the majority of the world's population and that it is able to adequately tackle anthropogenic food crises.

Food sovereignty is achieved in different ways: cooperative forms of food production based on the needs of the populations and their territories; enhancement of low-food-mile/local circuits of food production, processing, and trade and barter; tax protection for the production and marketing of poison-free food and small-scale production; an agrarian reform that ensures the right to land for all.