

Interdependence between Food Sovereignty, Ecologism and Biological Human Ecology

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Food Sovereignty

Food Sovereignty began as an international farmers' movement in the 1990s.

Farmers claimed that the people who produce the food should control its production and distribution.

This was in opposition to the control of food production and distribution by global multinational capitalist corporations.

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable cultivation, and their right to define their own food and systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems. It is a strategy for resisting the current corporate control of food production by empowering local farmers and prioritizing local economies and markets.”

The idea is now being promoted by some Western governments because of the declining capacity of industrial agriculture to produce cheap food.

Cheap food is necessary for capitalist to make profits - if food is cheap then wages can be low and capitalist can make higher profits.

The industrialisation of agriculture was promoted by Western countries as a way of producing cheap food, but today the ability of industrial agriculture to produce cheap food is declining because of the environmental damage it is causing to the land and climate.

Some Western governments are now supporting the idea of Food Sovereignty because they see it as a way of producing cheap food so capitalism can continue to make profits.

Hopefully, farmers can take advantage of this dependence of capitalism upon them and work towards taking control of their local food production system.

Ecologism

The word 'ecologism' can be used for the way of thinking based on 'the logic of interdependence' – especially when thinking about the relationship between humans and the rest of nature.

The dominant way of thinking in modern Western society is that humans are separate from nature, and this is the root of environmental problems such as global warming, loss of biodiversity, etc. that are now threatening the world today. When humans see themselves as separate from nature, they think that they can exploit nature and use it for their own unlimited purposes. Ecologism is the view that human wellbeing and the wellbeing of nature are interdependent, and that by destroying nature they destroy themselves.

Ecologism is a holistic world-view. It sees all aspects of human life – spiritual, social, economic, political as interconnected; and all aspects of nature – soil, forest, plants, animals and insects, etc. as interconnected - and all aspects of human life as interconnected with and interdependent upon all aspects of nature. All of nature, human and non-human, is interconnected in a network or web of interdependence.

Bio-Human Ecology

The theory of 'bio-human ecology' is a form of ecologism: it sees human communities as interconnected with their natural environments, which are in turn managed socially and culturally by those human communities.

'Bio-Human Ecology Theory' is based on a structural analogy of human societies and the biological cell: Both can be represented by three concentric circles. In the case of the biological cell, the inner circle represents the cell's nucleus; the first outer circle, its cytoplasm; and the outer circle, the cell's membrane. The nucleus is like the cell's 'command centre'. It sends instructions to the 'factories' contained in the cytoplasm which produce the enzymes, hormones, etc. which are necessary for the cell functioning. The membrane acts as the outer wall that protects the cell but allows interactions with others. In the case of a human society, the outer circle represents the observable behaviour of the society's members. Inside that we find the institutional zone; the formal and informal rules of behaviour – the laws, customs, norms, etc. that make up the society's institutions. The inner circle (equivalent to the cell's nucleus) represents the 'core values' of the society.

From the point of view of understanding another society, the interested observer first encounters the behaviour of the society's members – the type of clothes they wear, the type of houses they live in, the food they eat and how they eat it, the type of work they do and how they conduct themselves in that work. At first, the behaviour may appear strange, different from that in one's own society. It may even seem chaotic, without apparent order or rationality. But over time the observer will begin to recognize certain patterns and regularities of behaviour, and come to realize that there exists specific rules and norms of behaviour which govern what people do. The different forms of behaviour can now be seen as 'customary' in that particular society. After studying the society further, the observer will come to see that behind the rules and regulations governing the peoples' behaviour there lies certain 'core values' which the society's institutions are designed to uphold and protect. Not until one has understood these 'core values' and how they structure the society's institutions can you say that you understand the society.

This model of society functions to help us understand the process of social change typical of when a small-scale indigenous society is brought into contact with a more dominant one. Just like a biological cell, a human society is surrounded by an environment in which there are 'outside forces'. In the case of the human society, these may be religious, economic and political forces emanating from other societies. When a society comes under the influence of these forces, the first thing to change is people's behaviour. The people may change their style of dress, abandoning their traditional dress for more 'modern' forms. They may adopt a new language to use when interacting with people of the 'outside' society. They

may even adopt some of the 'outside' society's types of food and ways of eating. These changes are superficial and do not affect the society's 'core values', or even their social institutions. Sometime, however, an 'outside' society can assert sufficient power to make another society change its ways of organizing itself – e.g., change its customary forms of leadership and ways of working. These changes do not necessarily destroy the original way of life, or the people unique identity so long as they can be adopted without damaging the society's 'core values', for it is the 'core values' that are the basis of the society's identity and way of life. But often the powerful 'outside' society will deliberately set out to undermine and change the other society's 'core values' in order to disempower it, or to make it the same as them, so it can more easily take control of its land and labour to exploit.

When a society's 'core values' are changed everything is lost: The people's culture, their way of life, their traditional livelihood, their land, their pride, their self-respect, and even their own identity. In order to preserve a society it is necessary to preserve its 'core values'. Many things can change, such as various aspects of a people's behaviour, and even the form of its institutions, without the society losing its 'core values'. These types of changes are called 'adaptations'. But if a society's 'core values' are attacked and undermined, and the people give up their 'core values', then the society as a whole is lost. It loses its identity and becomes something else.

In biological terms, attacking a societies core values is like introducing a disease. If a biological cell is attacked by a powerful virus, it can withstand the attack so long as the virus does not penetrate the nucleus containing the genetic material that governs the cells' functioning and reproduction. If the virus penetrates the nucleus then genetic mutations occur and the cell starts malfunctioning. It starts producing the wrong material; it becomes distorted and poisonous; it becomes a 'cancer' growing out of control and destroying what existed before. In the social context, this is what happens to indigenous societies when modern Western capitalist values are forcibly imposed upon them.