

The soya tour: I'm getting off. How about you?

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The global agrifood model is leaving a trail in its wake. If we were to follow the trail left by soya in Paraguay we would soon be faced with poverty.

'They came in the night and put my grandchildren, my husband and myself in the truck. My chickens and pig were running all over the place... My son was agitated by the commotion and he was shouting. They hit him in the chest with the butt of a rifle. There were many others in the truck. I was crying. From there they took us to the third line in Tekojojá (one of the three roads which make up the settlement), where many blows were metered out. I could see smoke in the distance and I asked my husband if it was our house. He said it wasn't, that it was further away. After this, they took us to the district attorney, and that is when we found out that they had shot Ángel and Leonicio dead. I can still remember how his mother wept, she was old...'

Rafaela recounted her memories of the third round of evictions on the 24th of June 2005 of over 50 families from her peasant community in Central Paraguay. During these evictions, 150 persons were arrested, 56 homes were burnt down, several hectares of crops were razed to the ground, and two unarmed persons were shot dead by a soya farmer called Opperman. Rafaela is in her sixties. She is a landless peasant and has no landtitles for her land. This is the case for around 400.000 rural inhabitants, in a country where 2% of the population owns approximately 75% of the land as an inheritance of past colonialism and favours from the recent dictatorship of General Stroessner.

For the past five years, Rafaela and her family have lived on a plot within the community of Tekojojá, which they took over, along with the Movimiento Agrario Popular (MAP – the Social Agrarian Movement), on land that had been earmarked for landless peasant families. This land had been sold illegally to businessmen to be used for large-scale soya monocultures. Those responsible for this are public institutions, and even rural inhabitants who acquired their plots during the Land Reform. When Brazilian businessmen arrive with a few million guaranies in their pocket, the peasant farmer who has never seen this much money in one place and feels abandoned by the administrative process, sells his plot and moves to

* Alvaro Porro wrote this article after a trip to Paraguay and the visit of Jorge Galeano to Catalunya. All the people and situations mentioned in the article are real.

the town. The problem is that there is no work in the town and the money runs out in a year or so. Living in the town is not like living in Tekojojá. Without money there is no food, no wood for the fire, no house, no water. Then comes the street peddling, the prostitution, and soon we find that, just like the areas surrounding Asunción more and more peasant farmers are gathering in hovels with no hope for the future, other than begging or prostitution. Meanwhile, the land they sold in Tekojojá has been planted with soya, and sprayed with poisonous chemicals. The same is evident in the other plots that other peasant farmers have sold further down the road, leaving the families in between them unable to resist the money put on their table, once their cow had died from the effects of poisoning and their house is sprayed with agro-chemicals. In the end, they give up and leave for the town. Little by little the network of the community is dismantled. This story is told to us by Jorge Galeano, one of the MAP leaders, who also lives in Tekojojá. He talked to us about the character of poverty: the relation between the expansion of soya and the growth of areas of marginalised people around the edges of towns.

Two sides of the stream: the clash between two agricultural models.

Soya arrived in Paraguay and other Latin American countries like a bull in a china shop. The difference is that soya destroys people, families, communities, ways of life and ecosystems. The main reason for the accelerated growth in the global demand for soya is intensive livestock rearing. In six years, soya cultivation in Paraguay has risen by 83.7%, and the crop currently covers half of the country's agricultural land. Both the Government and Local Authorities promote this growth, as they view soya as the key export which will rescue Paraguay's gross GDP and thereby turn this forgotten Latin American country into a soya enclave. Within this vision of growth, the peasant communities which make up almost 50% of the rural population are viewed as an 'obstacle to progress'. They are portrayed as ' idlers and loafers who are holding up progress'. Nevertheless, some of the emerging factual information, such as that from Tekojojá, questions this type of development and its association with the agro-export model. The five Regions that have seen a major expansion in soya cultivation are those with the highest index of poverty, population evictions, and the greatest concentration of investment.

MAP became aware of the situation in Tekojojá and resolved to denounce illegal sales of public land, which should be destined for agricultural reform, to middle- and large-scale soya producers, who are mainly

Brazilian in origin. But given the lengthy and deceptive processes followed by the Paraguayan justice system, rural families like Rafaela's, occupy their land 'illegally'. To date, the justice system has been on their side, but the powerful judicial and media machines of the soya model have been able to slow down the sentencing for watertight cases through the appeals system. This has meant that three illegal evictions of families from their plots, such as described above by Rafaela, have taken place through the use of para-police forces made up of soya farmers with their armed security men and corrupt policemen who give the process an air of legality.

Tekojojá consists of three parallel dirt tracks lined by family plots spaced every 150 metres: the houses in the front and the smallholding behind. On the other side of a small stream at the end of one of these tracks the landscape changes dramatically: kilometre upon kilometre of soya has turned the landscape into what has become known as the green desert. Nothing grows between the endless rows of soya, not even weeds. The glyphosate sees to that. Glyphosate is Monsanto GM soya's best friend. This green desert feeds two grain silos (one belongs to the local leader, Arcadio, and the other to Cargill, the multinational corporation). From here, thousand of tonnes of soya will begin its global journey. Within twenty metres on either side of that stream one can see the clash of the two agricultural models: on one side, the agro-exports and the global market, and on the other, peasant agriculture and food sovereignty. The former wants to take the land and the water which belongs to the latter. In order to face up to this challenge MAP proposes that land should be communally owned and managed. They also propose that there should be a programme of awareness-raising and training on organic agricultural production methods which prioritise self-sufficiency and guarantee a balanced diet without the need for seed imports, chemicals, machinery, etc. Any surplus produce could be sold collectively in local markets.

With the arrival of industrial agriculture and the distribution companies, rural inhabitants, are finding it increasingly difficult to gain access to local markets. As my journey continued towards Ciudad del Este at the eastern borders of Paraguay, some hundred kilometres from Tekojojá, we visited a local market. This market had been brought back to life by a number of organisations that became concerned about the importance of local trade in the face of the advances made by the agro-export model. This local market attempts to take healthy, cheap and varied produce from different rural communities in the region to urban consumers who are sceptical of the supermarket culture that has become established in Paraguay. At the

market, José and his colleagues from the Central de Productores de Alto Paraná (the headquarters of the Producers from Alto Paraná) told us how they have found a profitable outlet for their produce (carrots, different varieties of beans, cheese) that allows them to purchase oil, salt, school books, soap, and the occasional lightbulb....

Josep, Alí and Jorge: Three stories with a single thread.

After my visit to Paraguay, Jorge Galeano, the leader of MAP travelled to Catalonia to take part in the Tribunal Popular de la Soya (a public hearing on soya). Spain is the fourth largest importer of soya: 5.5 million tonnes in 2004, of which 92% was destined for animal fodder, particularly for pig farming.

We travelled to Plana de Vic (Barcelona), an area which has abandoned its cattle farming traditions in order to become a pig fattening enclave for the global market. We visited Josep's installation. In order to survive, Josep and his son have invested a great deal to modernise their business (400 pigs for fattening and a herd of 80 dairy cows). Very few businesses of this 'small' size remain. Josep tells us that many of his neighbours have 'closed down' their farms: of the fifty dairy farms that existed before only three have survived. They know that if they don't grow and modernise they don't stand a chance. Josep does not know whether to be sad or happy that his son wishes to continue farming. Jorge and I are surprised when we see the way that the industrial feed (with a high soya content) comes out of the store and is transported through a tube right to the feeding troughs. 'By pushing a button you can feed as many pigs as you like', Josep tells us. He has asked for another loan to build the slurry tank that the Generalitat insists upon. The high concentrations of animals in the industrial farms of Plana de Vic has made contamination levels in the soil and groundwater rise substantially.

The following day we visited La Gleva, an agro-ecological cooperative in the neighbourhood of Gràcia, Barcelona to take part in a discussion. Jorge explained the situation created by the soya cultivation model used in Paraguay, Alí, a representative from the Afro-Colombian community of Cacarica, told us how his community has been evicted and suppressed by paramilitaries for a period of three years, so they can grow the African palm for export. It is almost obscene to observe the similarities between the stories told by Alí and Jorge. Two stories of agro-exports and global markets closely bound to our diets, rich in cholesterol and the resulting heart problems: due to the use of palm oil containing harmful cholesterol

which is the main ingredient of industrially prepared cakes and fried foods, and because of the consumption of meat products full of saturated fats. This is a link from the seed to final consumption which cannot be said to be life enhancing.

Beyond the victims and those who are to blame: participants in the transformation

Jorge and Alí want to find out more about the agro-ecological cooperative. Alex, a member, explains: *"we have organised ourselves so we are able to access healthy food that tastes good, and have set and agreed social and ecological criteria. We look for local produce that has been grown under agro-ecological conditions and which come from family farms... we try to establish direct links with farmers. The day to day running of the cooperative is far removed from soya or palm oil. The cooperative favours fresh vegetable produce from local growers and reduced consumption of meat, dairy produce and industrially prepared food. The provider of dairy produce (Mas Claperol) produces their own fodder and does not use industrial feeds containing soya. The cattle of the meat provider (Assumpta Codinachs) graze and follow a system of transhumance in the Pyrennean district of Pallars. Furthermore, the cooperative's premises is more than a foodstore. It is also an association where discussions take place, such as the one being held today, where videos are shown, parties and concerts are held... they have organised a three-monthly exchange market in the street which has become very successful, they take part in actions for social change..."* Jorge reflected out loud: *' what attracts me to your initiative is that it goes beyond consumer issues. It also attempts to build an alternative society'.*