Raj Patel: Stuffed and starved: the hidden battle for the world food system

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Author, journalist, and food-policy expert Raj Patel's last edition of *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* was written in 2012. It was and continues to be an essential contribution to the literature on the global food system. It serves as a jumping-off point for researchers, activists, or even the average reader.

Patel began the 2012 edition with the statistic that one (1) billion people are malnourished and 1.5 billion are obese worldwide. Then, Patel laid this strange dichotomy at the feet of the global food system controlled and operated by a handful of corporations (with the support and backing of various global organizations, governments, and non-profits). Additionally, government policies that support the global food system were designed to provide cheap food; thus, preventing public dissent. Specifically, Patel provided a thorough description of the inequities of the world food system created by the various corporate monopolies in the industrial agriculture complex (modeled on colonialism) and international policy decision-making processes.

Patel described a global market controlled by a small number of food corporations that set the terms of international trade agreements resulting in farmers having little choice about what to grow and consumers little choice in what they buy. He illustrated the equity disproportions by highlighting increases in farmer suicides, increases in migration from rural to urban areas, the rise of trade agreements, the influence of global organizations, and the new Green Revolution supported by biotechnology companies.

Patel's investigation into the marketing and manipulation of the consumer demonstrated how supermarkets push customers into buying more food by manipulating vulnerabilities like addiction and the lure of unhealthy products or ingredients such as high fructose corn syrup or lecithin, how supermarkets track purchases, and how retail giants who supply food to large proportions of the United States population are highly subsidized while simultaneously undermining small businesses.

Patel's analysis of the world food system presented a real-world, relevant assessment of the growing food system inequalities. He gave the reader a dynamic portrait to feel how the world food system impacted individuals, families, and nations. Patel provided data and personal stories and reflections that made his argument lively and meaningful. These narratives brought to life the quantitative data and the fundamental forces and outcomes of the world food system.

Patel's discussion of trade agreements, non-government organizations, corporate interests, obesity, and malnutrition was so all-encompassing that it could be overwhelming and contained an element of despair at times. However, there were tiny glimmers of hope as Patel briefly explained how the rebalancing of the food system could become a reality.

Upon deeper analysis, Patel gave few remedies that are global in scale and focused primarily on what individuals can do. He proposed remedies such as changing individual food preferences, eating locally and seasonally, supporting local farmers, and promoting farmworker dignity and living wages. Unfortunately, Patel's remedies were contrary to one of the main arguments. Ethical consumerism is not enough, and systemic change is needed. However, Patel did highlight that we have cause for hope due to social movements and the mobilizing of the masses to rebalance the global food system. Such recommendations are sound. However, populations may not adapt due to convenience, necessity, or lack

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of other sustainable resources, especially when there is no consensus on alternatives (to the global food system).

Altieri and Nicholl's most current focus on post COVID-19 agriculture expounds on Patel's argument and provides a more detailed global approach. They advocate for implementing widespread Agroecology, which is often initiated by social movements geared toward developing alternatives to the global food system (Altieri and Nicholls 2020, p. 526).

Since Patel's last edition (2012), COVID-19 has laid bare the fragility of the global food system through its effects on farming and the food supply chain and the need to implement global change. The pandemic created food shortages and price increases and demonstrated the urgency for transitioning to a more ecologically sustainable and resilient food system (Altieri and Nicholls 2020, pp. 525–526). Even though Patel illustrated how complicated the global food system is and how immense an undertaking it will be to make positive change, the element missing from Patel's work was an actionable methodology. His remedies were too vague and modest in scale. They did not address the history of colonialism, its post-colonial implications, and the continued outsourcing of the Global South.

Altieri and Nicholl's solution, Agroecology, increases biodiversity and resilience. Agroecology is the method missing from Patel's analysis. Agroecology "enriches the ecological matrix creating 'ecological' firebreaks' that may help contain pathogens from ecological release." It can increase small-scale farmer production, make landscapes

"less conducive to promoting epidemics," and increase urban agriculture productivity. It can provide rural and urban food security that is sustainable and equitable. Altieri and Nicholls also stress the importance of market economy shifts, including renewable energy changes and the overall movement toward cooperatives (away from corporations) as part of the universal implementation of Agroecology (Altieri and Nicholls 2020, p. 526).

Altieri and Nicholls' analysis of COVID-19's impact on food sovereignty and food security will make great additions to Patel's next edition and provide an impetus for changes in global food policy.

Reference

Altieri, A.A., and C.I. Nicholls. 2020. Agroecology and the emergence of a post COVID-19 agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values* 37: 525–526.

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