

**DOMINATION AND POWER RELATIONS IN BRAZILIAN
AGRICULTURE: A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF
ADEQUATE FOOD**

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ABSTRACT

The main subject of this paper is the concept of adequate food defined by the Brazilian Law No 11.346/06, whose implications are discussed through a gender – especially ecofeminist – lens. The Law defines the right to food that is also considered a fundamental right in the Brazilian Constitution. At the same time, the Brazilian economy is centered on crops production in a large-scale farming system for exportation. Based on that, the following question is addressed: is the concept of adequate food compatible with the economic privilege attributed to the massive agricultural system and to factory farms? The aim is to show that they are incompatible and the alternative is a defense of organic family farming and a plant-based diet, as it is presented in the “Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population” (2014). Another problem that arises from this issue is that agriculture in this large-scale dimension reflects structures of power and domination (Karen J. Warren) and animals used for corpse eating disappears, becoming absent referents (Carol J. Adams). It reflects the structure of a patriarchal society, where men have power over women, animals, and plants. The hypothesis is that in family farming women can participate more in the decision-making process, reflecting equality and justice in the private sphere. For that, the Special Reports on adequate food will be considered, mainly the one related to the mission of the Special Rapporteur to Brazil, whose analysis brings information on the gender category. This analysis draws attention to the situation of women in their struggles to fulfill the right to adequate food.

Keywords: Adequate food. Agriculture. Domination. Ecofeminism. Gender.

Introduction

The Brazilian economy is widely based on the exploitation of natural resources and on the production of cereals to exportation. Soybeans and maize are intended to feed animals such as chicken and pork in factory farms by intensive farming in Brazil and elsewhere. In turn, cattle are created by the extensively rearing method using a large extension of land. Consequently, rainforests are being devastated for decades – and continue to be, mainly in the area of Amazon forest. To obtain dairy products, restrictive forms of confinement are being introduced during the last years. The replacement of extensive with intensive farming in the case of cows is in progress under the pretext of increasing dairy quality and quantity.

Brazil is accordingly also an important producer and consumer of meat. Recent data shows that Brazil ranks second in the world cattle inventory preceded by India and followed by China. Roughly 64% of the world's cattle are in India, Brazil and China. 22,8% of cattle produced around the world are raised in Brazil, placing the country among the largest exporters of beef and veal. Inventory numbers are similar when it refers to swine and broiler production, with Brazil situated at the top markets of production, and consumption as well (FAS/USDA, 2015). The Brazilian government is planning to increase participation in international commerce by exporting cattle, pork and broiler meat. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture (2016), it is expected that until 2020 the national production of meat should supply 44,5% of the global market, ranking the country in the first place in the list of global meat exporters.

Raising up the production of livestock and poultry requires a large expanse of land. To every ox raised by extensive rearing method in Brazil, one hectare of land is used. Nowadays the country destines 200 million hectares of land for around 200 million cattle. In contrast, 60 million hectares are used in the production of plant-based food and cereals, much of which is processed into animal feed. Roughly 8 million hectares are reserved to beans, rice, and cassava crops – tree aliments directly eaten by Brazilians and that constitute the basis of our diet. Additionally, it is interesting to note that these dietary components are produced mostly in small rural properties; the opposite happens in the case of soybeans, corn, and sugarcane – prevalently cultivated in ample farms (MARTINELLI et al, 2010). Such information reveals a situation of inequality in land distribution that has been prevailing for centuries, despite agrarian reform policies.

An immediately result of the meat production system is pressure over the environment. On the one hand, there was at the beginning of this decade a discussion in the

National Congress about the restriction of environmental protection to expand agricultural areas. A group of deputies advocated this idea under the allegation that more land is necessary for the attainment of enough food to Brazilian population, implying changes in the Forest Code (Law No. 12.651/2012). However, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2014) shows that the availability of total food in Brazil has been increasing continually during the last decades: in 1992, 2.756 kilo/calories were available per person per day; in 2014, 3.269 kilo/calories were available per person per day. In addition, the “Guia alimentar para a população brasileira” (Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population, 2008), in its first version, determines that there is no lack of food to attend caloric necessities in Brazil. The only problem is unequal access to adequate food in sufficient quality and quantity. Thus, inefficiency in distribution generates issues related to food and nutritional insecurity.

On the other hand, environmentalists demand the reduction of deforestation and draw attention to nature exploitation. On the grounds of preserving forests to the future generation or due to the richness of ecological assets, environmentalists argue that growth cannot be achieved without sustainability. Amazon rainforest and its concentration of biodiversity is the main symbol of this struggle that acquired prominence particularly after the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992. Pádua (2012, p. 456-457) observes that the geopolitical significance of factors such as “the abundance of fresh water, the incidence of solar radiation and the capacity of the vegetation to store carbon” have guaranteed that the debate over the ecological importance of the Brazilian territory will continue unabated. Meanwhile, ecologists began to address the effects of an aggressive process of capitalist modernization in agricultural practices concomitant with “archaic practices in several regions, such as the large-scale slash-and-burn operations” (PÁDUA, 2012, p. 456).

In the context of agriculture and food production, two important factors suggested by Pádua (2012, p. 456) are directly related to environmental protection: 1) “The opening of new frontiers for ranching and farming in regions previously covered with tropical forests and other native ecosystems and occupied by traditional (oftentimes indigenous) populations with low demographic density”; and 2) “The conversion of areas of longstanding traditional agricultural practices, with established rural populations, into large-scale agribusiness operations based on the use of machines and agrochemicals”.

Based on this conflicting claims present in the public sphere, this article addresses some implications of the constitutional right to food. Although the Constitution was drafted in 1988, the right to “adequate” food was only included as a social right in 2010, by the

Constitutional Amendment N. 64/2010, after Law No. 11.346/2006 had established its concept and characteristics in relation to the agricultural system. It is then important to better understand the structures of power and domination bounded to the economic privilege attributed to the massive and monoculture farming system and to factory farms in Brazil that seems to be incompatible with the concept of adequate food. A system of organic family farming and a plant-based diet are more appropriate if one considers the interests of some specific groups under domination – like women and animals in the oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework, as suggested by ecofeminism.

The concept of adequate food in the Brazilian Law: historical genesis

Recognizing food as a right implies discussing hunger eradication, a social and political issue all over the world. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2014), despite the fact that the world hunger has decreased, between 2012 and 2014 there were about 805 million people under chronic malnutrition.

However, hunger is not a mere consequence of lack of food or fatality, such as climatic factors (ZIEGLER, 2007). That is what the General Comment No. 12, from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, also says: “Fundamentally, the roots of the problem of hunger and malnutrition are not the lack of food but the lack of *access* to available food, *inter alia* because of poverty, by large segments of the world’s population.” (1999, p. 3) So, the question of hunger points out to a social and political problem that comes from poverty and misery, associated to the lack of access to land and income, both needed for obtaining food (CONTI, 2007).

In Brazil, there is a social and economic background related to hunger, since European immigrants arrived in the 19th century, attracted by the promise of better living conditions. Nevertheless, Brazilian food standards presented levels of malnutrition and chronic hunger. Associated to that, there was an economic model of agriculture which privileged monoculture destined to exportation, instead of subsistence farming. This situation helped to maintain unproductive landholding, slavery, illiteracy, poverty, and hunger (CONTI, 2007).

According to the report of FAO, IFAD and WFP (2014), Brazil achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and decreased hunger and extreme poverty, especially throughout the program “Fome Zero”, a policy launched in 2001 with the main aim

of reducing food and nutritional insecurity. “Zero Hunger was the first step in translating the decision to end hunger into action, and introduced a new approach for the country that placed food security and nutrition and social inclusion at the center of the government’s agenda [...]” (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2014, p. 23).

However, the failure to carry out a comprehensive agrarian reform conflicted with the right to property and prevented the development of subsistence farming and food sovereignty. The latter has been claimed since the 1990s by social movements against neoliberal agricultural policies, associated to the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. According to the movements linked to the Via Campesina, which articulate peasant organizations in Asia, America, Africa and Europe, large-scale agribusiness operations and politics are responsible for raising concentration of land and income, which prevent the agrarian reform and other public services, such as basic sanitation. Alternatively, Via Campesina defends food sovereignty, which guarantees people the autonomy to define their sustainable mode of production, distribution and consumption of food, ensuring them to the entire population, while also respecting the cultural aspects (VALENTE, 2007b).

The notion of food and nutrition security (FNS) was established in the context of the First World War and raised after the Second World War, associated to the lack of food. So, originally, it is restricted to food security. In this context the Green Revolution took place and was presented as a solution to food insecurity. But the use of agricultural chemical, the replacement of creole seeds by hybrid high-yield seeds and the industrialization of food has had strong environmental, economic and social impacts, without eliminating hunger (VALENTE, 2007a). This concept of agricultural efficiency also arrived in Brazil, expanding agricultural practices all over the country.

Thereafter, by the end of the 1980’s and beginning of 1990’s, the nutritional and sanitary aspects were eventually included in the definition of FNS, trying to assure physical, economical, permanent and sufficient access to food for everyone (VALENTE, 2007a). Due to public debate and to the promotion of national conferences, the new concept was in a few years consolidated through the Law No. 11.346/2006:

Art. 3 The food and nutrition security consists on the realization of the right of everyone to regular and permanent access to quality food in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on food health-promoting practices that respect cultural diversity and that are environmentally, culturally, economically and socially sustainable.

By this definition, two dimensions may be identified in foreground: a) the first one is associated to the production, commercialization and access to food, it means, the processes of

its availability; b) the second one focuses on nutritional aspects, related to the choice, preparation and consumption of food, involving good health conditions (VALENTE, 2007a). It was from this conception of FNS that emerged, in the 1990's, the concern about a Human Right to Adequate Food, which also has two dimensions: a) the right to be free of hunger and malnutrition; and b) the right to adequate food. Beyond that, four aspects are aggregated to this notion of the Human Right to Adequate Food: a) availability, which involves conditions of plantations and acquisition of food; b) adequacy, which includes breastfeeding, absence of adverse substances and safe methods of preparation and consumption; c) accessibility, both physical and economic; and d) stability, which aims at assuring regular and permanent access to food (VALENTE, 2007a).

The Human Right to Adequate Food is directly mentioned on the second article of Law No. 11.346/2006:

Art. 2 Adequate food is a fundamental right of the human being, inherent to human dignity and indispensable to the realization of the rights guaranteed in the Constitution; the government must adopt policies and actions that are necessary to promote and ensure food and nutritional security of the population.

Based on this conception of adequate food, that goes beyond the idea of food access, food was included in the Brazilian Constitution as a social right. Besides being guaranteed by the Constitution and ratifying the international law, the right to food is also guaranteed by the National Program of Human Rights (PNDH-3), as a public policy, giving a practical content to the right established in article 2 of Law No. 11.346/2006. This inclusion may be considered an influence of the international law, especially from the Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted in 1966, that requires from States Parties appropriate steps to ensure the realization of the right “of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions”. It involves measures such as knowledge dissemination of the principles of nutrition and promoting efficiency of natural resources by reforming agrarian systems.

The General Comment No. 12 gave a broader definition of adequate food:

6. The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. The right to adequate food will have to be realized progressively [...].

In terms of definition, adequate food is usually associated to a minimum existential right and a theory of necessities, linked to universal and negative definitions. This implies the absence of disease to avoid damage to a person as a subject of rights. As the afore mentioned definition establishes, the right to food is not limited by “a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients”. But one question remains: what is implied in the concept of adequate food in its social, political and economic dimension that should be realized progressively?

Although an advance in the concept of adequate food can be noticed in the course of law evolution, it remains centered at the individual level. But for the purpose of this article, the concept of adequate food can only be correctly understood if the relations in the way food is produced are brought to the surface. In other words, food can only be adequate at the individual level if it does not seriously damage the natural environment and if its production does not result from injustice against human beings under social and economic marginalized conditions – such as women in a patriarchal society – or even from animal exploitation if one considers the arguments of animal ethics advocates in an anthropocentric world.

To better explain this point it is important to consider the recent document “Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population” (2014), led by Ministry of Health and the Center for Epidemiological Research in Nutrition and Health of the University of São Paulo (NUPENS/USP), with the support of the Brazilian Pan American Health Organization Office. The first version of these dietary guidelines was published in 2006 and reimpressed in 2008. It presents an historical evolution about patterns and changes of food consumption in Brazil and points out the necessity of recovering traditional food standards. The first edition refers to the idea of adequate food more at the individual level and fosters consumption of variety of food, with special attention to unprocessed and plant-based food to achieve a healthier diet.

The revised version of the document was launched in 2014 as a result of a participatory process with public consultation, including “health, education, social protection and agriculture, as well as researchers and representatives of civil society groups” (FAO, 2016). The intended audiences of these guidelines are people and professionals working on disease prevention and health promotion in Brazil. It aims to:

[...] support and encourage healthy eating practices personally and collectively and also to support policies, programmes, and actions whose purpose is to encourage, protect, and promote the good health and the food and nutrition security of the whole Brazilian population (DIETARY GUIDELINES..., 2014, p. 9).

Regarding these purposes, the document presents five principles that work as a guide: 1) Diet is more than intake of nutrients; 2) Dietary recommendations need to be tuned to their times; 3) Healthy diets derive from socially and environmentally sustainable food systems; 4) Different sources of knowledge inform sound dietary advice; 5) Dietary guidelines broadens autonomy in food choices.

The third principle recognizes the importance of environmental and social conditions under which food is produced, as well as the interdependence between a healthy diet and the social and environmental sustainability of the food system. “Dietary recommendations need to take into account the impact of the means of production and distribution of food on social justice and environmental integrity” (DIETARY GUIDELINES..., 2014, p. 16). Thus, food is adequate if it does not result from situations of social injustices and does not threaten nature and biodiversity.

In explaining this third principle, the Dietary Guidelines (2004, p. 18-19) goes further in clarifying the idea of social and environmental sustainability:

Factors affecting the social sustainability of food systems include the size and use of farms, the freedom of farmers to choose seeds, fertilizers and ways to control pests and diseases, working conditions and exposure to occupational hazards, the nature and number of intermediaries between farmers and consumers, the fairness of the trading system, employment generation and the sharing of profit between capital and labour.

Factors affecting environmental sustainability include the techniques employed for soil conservation, use of organic or synthetic fertilizers, the planting of conventional or genetically modified seeds, chemical or biological control of pests and diseases, intensive or extensive forms of stockbreeding, the degree of use of antibiotics, production and treatment of wastes and residues, conservation of forests and biodiversity, intensity and nature of food processing, the distance between producers and consumers, transportation, and the amount of water and energy consumed.

As it can be pointed out, adequate food became a complex concept that involves more than caring about food and nutritional aspects of an individual diet. It seems rather a collective concept tied to a fair distribution of wealth, protection of natural resources and the environment, generation of work opportunity and farmers independence of farm industry. It also puts into question the current agricultural system in Brazil, based on monocultures, large-scale farming and intensive and extensive animals rearing.

In addition to the five principles that define the idea of adequate food, the main content of the Dietary Guidelines (2014) are the ten steps to healthy diets, each of them discussed throughout the document: 1) Make natural or minimally processed foods the basis of your diet; 2) Use oils, fats, salt, and sugar in small amounts when seasoning and cooking natural or minimally processed foods and to create culinary preparations; 3) Limit

consumption of processed foods; 4) Avoid consumption of ultra-processed foods; 5) Eat regularly and carefully in appropriate environments and, whenever possible, in company; 6) Shop in places that offer a variety of natural or minimally processed foods; 7) Develop, exercise and share cooking skills; 8) Plan your time to make food and eat ; 9). Out of home, prefer places that serve freshly made meals; 10) Be wary of food advertising and marketing.

Although most pieces of advice are articulated with the prevention of processed and ultra-processed food in diets, some reasons given to justify this choice are related to social, political and environmental consequences of food choices. In relation to the advice number 6, for instance, it is suggested that one should whenever possible prefer to shop in municipal and farmers markets, or buy directly from producers, as well as “prefer vegetables and fruits that are locally grown in season” (DIETARY GUIDELINES..., 2014, p. 127). It is also stated that plant-based food can be socially beneficial when linked to family farming and local economies, and can promote biodiversity as well as reduce the environmental impact of food production and distribution. This seems to encourage socially and environmentally sustainable food systems, which contrasts directly with meat and crops production in large-scale farming.

In this way, another important contribution of the guidelines is that it states the preference for organic products and agroecological based foods rather than foods from intensive farming that “contaminate sources of water, degrade soil, increase pest resistance and reduce biodiversity” (DIETARY GUIDELINES..., 2014, p. 31). Although organic food and a plant-based diet is not indicated as the only legitimate way to eat – what is plausible if the very role of democratic institutions in a pluralistic society is considered –, at least it recognizes the importance of looking for alternatives that not only consider the individual health, but also attains to the consequences of choosing what to eat for the environment and for the lives of animals. Besides that, agroecological systems protect biodiversity, contribute to a fairer distribution of productive land, and improves workplaces.

The ten rules referred above make it for consciously eating through responsible food choices. As Marion Nestle (2015) explains, the guidelines are based on actual food, food patterns, and meals, not nutrients. Moreover, it considers appropriately the right to adequate food and specifies the conditions of its realization:

Adequate and healthy diet is a basic human right. This right implies ensuring permanent and regular access, in a socially fair manner, to food and ways of eating that satisfy the social and biological requirements of everybody. It also takes into account special dietary needs, and the needs to be culturally appropriate, and allow for differences in gender,

race, and ethnicity. Adequate and healthy diet should be accessible both physically and financially, and harmonious in quantity and quality, meeting the needs of variety, balance, moderation, and pleasure. Furthermore, it should derive from sustainable practices of production and distribution (DIETARY GUIDELINES..., 2014, p. 8).

In his presentation about the guidelines on the 2014 Dietary Guidelines Symposium, Carlos Monteiro, the Brazilian nutrition professor listed as the guidelines technical formulator, clearly indicates that the defense of “sustainable food systems promote social justice and protect natural resources and biodiversity” (MONTEIRO, 2015). Meals are not detached from the context where their ingredients are produced. When eating, it is possible to protect or harm traditional communities; to boost or block income distribution and generation of jobs; to expand the use of conventional seeds or diminish it; to promote soil and forest preservation or neglect it; and, finally, to contribute to the implementation of the right to adequate food, or the opposite. As highlighted in the Guidelines, in a positive dimension of the right to adequate food, eating and having meals become connected to a healthy life pattern related to other people and the environment. The right to adequate food is constituted within a network of social, political and ethical relationships.

The main ideas of the Dietary Guidelines (2014) are in consonance with the United Nation’s Report (2010) on the right to food. The report explores “how States can and must achieve a reorientation of their agricultural systems towards modes of production that are highly productive, highly sustainable and that contribute to the progressive realization of the human right to adequate food” (2010, p. 1). As a result of the investigation, the document recommends agroecology as a model of agricultural development strongly connected with the possibility of achieving the right to food. It also favors a broader economic development, not restricted to large-scale farming, reduces rural poverty and improves nutritional quality. Taking this into account, the main challenge is the creation of appropriate public policies, in order to implement such sustainable modes of production. According to the United Nation’s Report (2010), the dissemination of sustainable farms may lead to fair markets without decreasing productivity at field level.

In the right to adequate food as conceived in the Guidelines also prevails a critical perspective directed to food advertising of processed and ultra-processed food. To prevent unreliable information about food in advertisements, conscious and autonomous choosing should be promoted to protect consumer’s rights. The access to information can be translated into complete product labeling, including, for example, information about genetically

modified organisms, as well as public campaigns that focus on the importance of investigating the origins of food.

As will be addressed in the next topic, however, the proposals of the Dietary Guidelines (2014) seem to be incompatible with the economic privilege attributed to the massive and monoculture farming system and the raising of animals in large factory farms. The prevalent model of food production in Brazil is unfair with some social groups, like women, animals, and the environment as well. Social and environmental sustainability of the food system, including agroecological practices, does not receive enough attention in the current economic agenda. Consequently, it does not attend the demands of the very idea of the right to adequate food as defined in official documents.

Agricultural system in Brazil: power relations and domination

Agriculture is one of the main economic activities in Brazil. The system combines two basic forms of agrarian activities: family farming and large-scale farming. The first one employs the work of family members to cultivate in general a variety of food to the family, with the surplus being delivered in local markets. The second one is mainly responsible for the cultivation of cereals, grains and sugarcane mostly destined to supply international market. Large-scale farming is also at the top of land-use to cattle ranching operations that require large extents of pasture. Thus, large-scale agriculture in Brazil is basically a combination of two processes: large areas for crops plantation to exportation with the purpose of feeding the animals in factory farms in other countries; and large areas destined to extensive rearing of cattle that demand ample pasture areas.

Morton et al (2006) analyse the intensity of deforestation related to forest conversion into new pastures as well as the contribution of cropland expansion to current deforestation dynamics. Recent expansion of large-scale mechanized agriculture at the forest frontier, which runs through different States in Brazil, has introduced a potential new pathway for forest loss along the southern and eastern of the Brazilian Amazon. Although deforestation was previously more associated to cattle, nowadays the devastation destined to prepare new crops planting areas is increasing. As it is mentioned by Morton et al (2006), specifically in the State of Mato Grosso, “a shift in clearing dynamics occurred between 2002 and 2003 deforestation. The fraction of deforested area converted to cattle pasture decreased from 78% to 66%, whereas direct transitions to cropland increased from 13% to 23%”. In investigating reasons for this change, Morton et al (2006) indicates the favorable market conditions for

agricultural exports, mainly for soybeans, as a fact that influenced the patterns in land use after deforestation.

Martinelli et al (2010) shows that the area of export-oriented crops has been expanded significantly in the last decades, while staple crops like rice and bean – important ingredients of the Brazilian diet – have decreased. The area planted with cassava has been stable for the last four decades. Furthermore, investments in research and technology have been notably increasing the average productivity of export-oriented cultures while the productivity of rice and beans has barely improved during the last decades. At the same time, although intensive farming methods are used for almost the complete system of production of poultry and pork, with an expressive increase in its production and exportation, in the case of cattle, the expansion of production happens especially by deforestation of new areas destined to extensively animals rearing. This is remarkable in large rural properties, sometimes acquired by a non-legal process.

In relation to animal farming, it is useful to note that in family farming system, animals are normally created for subsistence. However, the numbers of small rural properties that adopt poultry and pork intensively rearing method as main activities is increasing. The State of Santa Catarina, for example, where 89,5 % of all farms have less than 50 hectares, occupies the first place in Brazilian ranking of intensive pork rearing and the second one in intensive poultry rearing (SANTOS FILHO; SOUZA, 2011).

Although Santa Catarina is characterized by a less unequal situation in land distribution, the occupation of Brazilian territory in different States, particularly in the countryside, is marked by an appropriation of large land areas – a process that has expanded over several decades, interrelated with migratory movements. As Martinelli et al (2010) explain, there is a deep inequality in the distribution of land in the country. About 80% of the number of landowners retains only 20% of the total agricultural area of the country. This inequality does not change for decades despite the fact that the country maintains an agrarian reform program. Additionally, this gap in land distribution is associated with the variety of food cultivated. In the case of rice, beans and cassava, the production is made mainly by small and medium-sized rural properties. The most striking example is that of cassava: more than 90% of the harvested area comes from properties with less than 300 ha. The opposite happens in the case of sugarcane and soybean, for which the primary responsible are large properties.

This mechanism of territory occupation in Brazil is characterized in its different historical phases by exclusion and exploitation. Its origin is situated in strategies of territorial organization and administration implemented by the colonizer – Portugal – during the 16th

century, that started distribution of large areas of land aiming at occupying, exploiting and dominating the territory. After Brazilian independence in 1822 land laws prohibited appropriation of free land and facilitated the acquisition of large land areas. Plantation areas were thereafter expanded through slave labour. In this case, defends Grynspan (apud VEZZALI, 2006), large rural areas, more than an extension of land, became a system of domination that held the power of its owner as a mechanism of social control, especially on those who find themselves inside these domains.

More recently, tax incentives and soft loans for the occupation of so-called agricultural borders has benefited the establishment of large rural areas for agriculture and livestock. On the grounds of reducing uninhabited areas on the countryside, the federal government invested expressive sums of public funds to build infrastructure such as highways and hydroelectric, also favoring large-scale properties. As Vezzali (2006) holds, these policies were frequently carried out at the expense on traditional communities like indigenous and longtime squatters.

Large-scale properties are nowadays justified by the argument that this system is required to ensure high productivity, covering it by an image of modern agricultural enterprise, whose profits drive the good performance of the Brazilian trade balance. Mançano (apud VEZZALI, 2006) suggests that the agribusiness image is an attempt to hide the predatory and exclusionary character of this system.” In part, this positive image is sustained by well-organized political representation in the National Congress, which is made up of a significant numbers of well-articulated deputies, sometimes farmers themselves, committed to the groups whose interests they represent. However, this well-portrayed image of modern agriculture prioritizes machinery instead of job generation.

Even with a socially oriented government during the last decades, which implemented some financial support to family farming, Brazilian agriculture is increasingly directed to monoculture, mechanization of agricultural practices and the plantation of genetically modified seeds. It counts on substantial investments and scientific research to increase the quality and quantity of production. With these advantages, large-scale farming was rapidly penetrated by capitalist relations and met the demands of domestic and foreign markets. International companies are suppliers of this market with high-yield seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and antibiotics. As Morton et al (2006) point out, recent innovations in the area under cultivation and the productivity of locally adapted crop varieties have made Brazil a leading producer of grains such as soybeans. The agribusiness sector accounts for more than one-third of the Brazilian gross national product. But little emphasis is placed on

research in public and private sectors toward major food items of the domestic market in order to contribute to the fulfillment of the right to adequate food.

A proper summary of the contemporary agricultural scenario in Brazil is given by the Dietary Guidelines (2014, p. 19) itself, as can be read:

Long established sustainable food systems that favors family farming, traditional effective farming techniques and soil management, intensive use of labour, intercropping of various foods combined with the rearing of animals, minimal food processing done by farmers and by local industries, and supply systems based on small traders and municipal and local markets, are losing strength. They are being displaced by industrialized food systems. These include monocultures, very large farms that produce one or a few crops as raw materials for the manufacture of ultra-processed foods or for the feed used in the intensive production of animals. These industrial systems demand more and more land, intensive technology and mechanization, heavy consumption of water and fuel, and use of chemical fertilizers, genetically modified seeds, pesticides, and antibiotics, and long-distance transportation. Such systems also have huge distribution networks that determine prices in ways that are unfair to producers and also to consumers.

This summary brings forward the main problem of inequality in power distribution that enables to large farms the domination of economy. As a well-structured system, it creates mechanisms to resist to current demands brought about by society, such as social and economic sustainable development and preservation of biodiversity. It also blocks itself against long-standing requirements related to human rights that condemn any labour conditions analogous to slavery.

This agribusiness scenario is part of a more complex reality structured under the lenses of patriarchal capitalism, as ecofeminism pointed out. Without the intention of exhausting all possible interpretations of the problem, ecofeminists bring to analysis the idea of domination, which pervades different kind of relations and is responsible for the exploitation of woman together with animals and the environment. So without understanding and overthrowing traditional forms of hierarchical dualism behind domination and its implied power relations, there is no way to liberate woman, animals and the environment from the destructive power relations in patriarchal societies.

In this context, it is important to better understand the structures of power and domination bounded to the economic privilege attributed to the massive and monoculture agricultural system and to factory farms. The social injustice behind the lack of land distribution goes beyond the specific problem of access to land. It reflects oppression structures that design society to favor some groups by exploiting the environment, animals and women. If one considers the interests of some specific groups under domination – like women and animals in the oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework, as suggested by

ecofeminism –, then inconsistencies between the right to adequate food and the Brazilian large-range agriculture can be identified.

Connections between different forms of domination

The system of large-scale agriculture in Brazil, focused on the use of land for monoculture, is widely dominated by men – mainly by white men of a certain class. Masculinity is an important trait for being the owner of a large rural area that is permeated by a single, homogeneous culture without diversity or dissension for long years. Very often a man becomes the ownership of these areas due to the right of inheritance that may result from invasion of indigenous areas by previous generations. In this way, it can be suggested that this system of large-scale agriculture is unjust – at least in part – in its origins.

It does not mean that women cannot own large rural properties, sometimes also due to right of inheritance; or that they do not reproduce the system of domination². However, men were historically considered subject of law and could have property rights. The recognition of women rights, including property ones, are very recent, and it helps us to understand why men have more properties than women. Even in situations where women are landowners, they can contribute to support the stereotypes about femaleness and can reproduce traditional gender roles. At the same time, these women can subscribe the exploitation of individuals of the same gender. Here is the point where sexism is connected to class and race: poor peasants and black women suffer with double exploitation.

The system of interconnected oppression is properly analyzed by ecofeminists. As Tong (2014, p. 255) describes, “ecofeminists focus on human being’s domination of the nonhuman world or nature”. In the Brazilian agricultural system this is what takes place when large-range agrarian activities and intensive farming with animal exploitation prevail while environmental preservation is overlooked. This is directly contrary to the content of the concept of adequate food, as foreseen in the Dietary Guidelines, according to which adequate food must be the result of fair relations in food production.

According to the ecofeminist perspective, to understand clearly the connections between different forms of oppression and domination is fundamental. Because women were historically and culturally tied to nature in the patriarchal society, there are “conceptual, symbolic, and linguistic connections between feminist and ecological issues” (TONG, 2014, p. 255). The oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework justifies and maintains relationships

of domination not just over women, but also sustains subordination in general. As conceived by Warren (2000, p. 46-47), this framework has five main features:

First, an oppressive conceptual framework involves *value-hierarchical thinking*, that is, “Up-Down” thinking, which attributes greater value to that which is higher, or Up, than to that which is lower, or Down. I may put men Up and women Down, whites Up, and people of color Down, culture Up and nature Down [...].

Second, an oppressive conceptual framework encourages *oppositional value dualisms*, that is, disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as exclusive (rather than as inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary) and that places higher value (status, prestige) on one disjunct than the other [...].

The third characteristic of an oppressive conceptual framework is that *power* is conceived (and exercised) as “power-over” [...]. In oppressive systems, power typically is conceived and exercised as power of Ups over Downs [...].

The fourth characteristic [...] is that it creates, maintains, or perpetuates a conception and practice of *privilege* as belonging to Ups and not to Downs [...].

The fifth and philosophically most important characteristic [...] is that it sanctions a *logic of domination*, that is, a logical structure of argumentation that ‘justifies’ domination and subordination.

The patriarchal society privileges men by establishing a system of dualisms: man/woman, reason/emotion, culture/nature, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, rich/poor and so on. Through this logic, there is an association by one side of the dualism against the other: man, reason, culture, white, heterosexual, rich. On the other side, there is the association of woman, emotion, nature, black, homosexual, poor.

Understanding this structure in terms of dualisms make it possible to comprehend how the systems of privileges works, valuing men and everything that is by their side higher. But it can be also perceived that if the man is not white or heterosexual, he will not be benefited by all privileges. It occurs due to power relations where patterns of discrimination are implied. That is why an inter-sectional approach is essential. It highlights how different forms of oppression are related and connected. In this case, it means that it is impossible to look only at sexism, because it works along racism, classism and other “isms” of domination. So, when morally considering non-humans and nature, speciesism will be included as a result of the logic of domination.

Seeking for relations between speciesism and sexism, ecofeminists explain that along all kinds of discrimination there is the same patriarchal framework. The logic of domination works to “morally justify” an action that should be unjustifiable. It makes it look like “normal” men being superior to women because they are supposedly more rational than women are; in the same way, it justifies the abuse of nature and non-human beings because they are not rational. Therefore, if one wants to promote justice and equality to women, it is necessary to address the whole system designed by the logic of domination that underwrites

patriarchy, and that determines the way society is organized – including the way it appropriate and exploit nature and animals to produce food.

Besides this conceptual connection, which explains the relationship between racism, sexism, classism and other “isms”, there is an empirical connection between women and nature. Through the dualistic structure of the logic of domination, if nature and animals are seen in a passive way and may be used and exploited, and if women are conceptually associated to nature and animals, then women may also be exploited and objectified. It means that, even if all people could equally suffer by environmental problems, such as the ones related to the lack of access to water and land, women actually suffer more, along with other vulnerable groups, such as children, poor people, black women etc. The ecofeminist Shiva (1993) observes that women and children are the most affected by environmental degradation due to economic development and they are permanently pushed to the end of the line of benefits.

When it comes about water shortage, for example, women and children are disproportionately affected, because they are responsible for walking long ways for bringing it home. Women are also responsible for at least half of the food production in the world, but their work is invisible, because women are associated to the work of reproduction (the unproductive private sphere), not production. Considering that the use of pesticides have been increasing significantly, the health of women working in the rural areas has been also more affected. Peasant women have been denouncing the high numbers of women with cancer and other diseases that may be associated to pesticides used in agriculture. Shiva (1993) likewise registers women’s struggle against environmental degradation in India, including water pollution, nuclear contamination and toxic hazards that deepen nutrition and food crises.

Additionally, there are different ways in which one can identify this framework of power and domination in Brazilian agricultural system. It is possible, for instance, to remark that large-scale agriculture is “up” while family farming is devalued. Genetic modified seeds and high productivity seeds in general are considered endowed with higher value than creole seeds – even knowing that direct food is produced by less mechanized, small and midsize rural properties, without the benefit of productivity-enhancing technological research. As political and economic arrangements ensure the supremacy of large-scale and mechanized agricultural structure, these dualisms behind the logic of domination are maintained.

Large-scale farming is a disjunction of male and scientific activity linked to instrumental reason and opposed to nature and female that belong to the other side of the dualism. This also supports the invisibility of nature and the unfair way in which it is

appropriated by large-scale agriculture. The objectification of the natural environment and its subordination is carried forward based on a supposed necessity of technological ways to produce food. Thus, the relationship that perpetuates the domination of nature as “Down” is justified by the higher valued part or the privileged “Ups” of the disjunction, namely, men leading agribusiness. Thereby, it becomes clear how agriculture in its monocultural dimension reflects structures of power and domination, as suggested by ecofeminist analysis.

Animals in factory farms do not escape this dualistic logic of power and domination. The consumption of meat is historically associated to male dominance and it constitutes the idea of virile maleness. This means that dietary habits do not just proclaim class distinctions, but they proclaim patriarchal distinctions as well – meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity. In many cultures, meat became the most valuable item in the cuisine – “meat is king”, writes Adams (2011, p. 57). So second-class citizens – black people and women, for instance – deserve second class food – vegetables and fruits. So, according to Adams (2011, p. 25) “to talk about eliminating meat is to talk about displacing one aspect of male control”.

Sanday (apud ADAMS, 2011, p. 59) found out information on ancient cultures that allows correlation between plant-based economies and women’s power and animal-based economies and male power. The first type of economies are more likely to be egalitarian while in the second type sexual segregation in work activities is identified, with women doing more work than men, but a less valued work. Moreover, under animal-based economies vegetables are seen as monotonous and passive.

The patriarchal framework also manages it so that animals are transformed into meat: in agribusiness meat, not animals, is produced. Adams (2011, p. 66) states that the act of butchering enacts “a literal dismemberment upon animals while proclaiming our intellectual and emotional separation from animals desire to live”. Through this act, animals in name and body are made absent referents. When alive, animals cannot be meat. But by butchering a dead body replaces the live animal and its meaning is undercut as it is absorbed into a different hierarchy of meaning, a human-centered one. Therefore, by the concept of absent referent, Adams (1994) identifies the process by which something disappear both literally and figuratively. Originally, she uses this concept to show how animals are transformed into absent referents so they may be seen as only “meat”. But the same concept is used by her to show how women are also transformed into absent referents when it comes to various forms of violence against women.

The experience of women can also become a vehicle for describing other kinds of oppression. Rape, for example, carries a potent imagery and the term is transferred from the

literal experience of women to a metaphorical use applied to other instances of violent devastation. That is why in ecological writings of the early 1970s, the expression “the ‘rape’ of the earth” was used (ADAMS, 2011, p. 68). Seeking this strategy, this idea of violation can be transferred to the genetically modified seeds, whose original power to generate life is undercut in scientific laboratories.

However, it is possible to rethink and redesign connections and relations between men, women, nature and animals, along with another use of land to produce food. Nature, animals and women do not need to be conceived as mere objects, subjected to use and abuse. That is referred as a possibility in the Dietary Guidelines when it promotes organic family farming and a plant-based diet. This document recognizes the importance of small farming properties for a fairer economic, social and environmental system. It conceives the environment, animals and women as individual subjects of respect and suggests that the necessity of food cannot be attended by exploiting objectified lives.

Aware of the consequences of all kinds of discrimination, many women have already been playing a central role against racism, sexism and the exploitation of nature. Conservation of creole seeds, the struggle for the land and for food sovereignty, for appropriate conditions of work and against contemporary slavery, the defense of organic and family farming are some examples of the struggle of women for justice, social and environmental sustainability. They are trying to give new meanings to relationships between human beings and the natural world.

Family farming: the central role of women

Although family farming is not completely inert to structural injustices associated do gender and class, for example, it provides a possibility to offer food consistent with a positive dimension of the concept of adequate food. This is also indicated by the Dietary Guidelines (2014) when the document recognizes that adequate food should be based on a great variety of natural, minimally processed and predominantly plant-based food. The document establishes that the consumption of rice, beans, potatoes and different kinds of vegetables and fruits stimulates, as a natural consequence, family farming and local economy. It promotes likewise a solidarity-based form of living and producing, therefore supporting diversity and reducing the environmental impact of production and distribution of food.

The importance of family farming is also strengthened by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food. Olivier De Schutter, on his Report about the mission to Brazil, in 2009, argues that:

Under Brazilian law, a family farm is an agricultural establishment that occupies up to four fiscal modules, employs family labour predominantly, and is run by family members. Family farming plays a vital role for the food security and economy of Brazil (as proven by the latest agricultural census), accounting for R\$ 54 billion worth of agricultural production. It outperforms large-scale plantations on land productivity measurements (R\$ 750 per hectare per year compared with R\$ 358 per hectare per year for large-scale plantations). (UNITED NATIONS, 2009, p. 15)

As it can be noted, family agriculture takes place into small rural properties, where the production is mainly controlled by family members. In general, work functions are fairly distributed between family members so that everyone can contribute to the management of local activities. This is also the mode of production behind few attempts to promote agrarian reform in Brazil.

Taking the positive dimension of family farming into consideration, Olivier De Schutter, in the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, recommends advancing in land reform, in order “to enhance access to productive resources for the poor and women.” The Report says that:

One of the most important challenges that Brazil is facing in the progressive realization of the right to food is the extraordinarily widespread inequality in access to land, which the country appears unable, under the current framework, to tackle effectively. Some 2.4 million farms (47 per cent of the total) with less than 10 ha cover only 2.7 per cent of the agricultural surface, whereas 47,000 large properties (>1,000 ha) — although constituting only 1 per cent of farms — cover 43 per cent of the land. (UNITED NATIONS, 2009, p. 16-17)

Gender perspective is not clearly mentioned in the Report, but when the importance of supporting family agriculture is explained, the Special Rapporteur pointed out that although 1 million families had access to rural credit since 2003, “large landowners owning only 1 per cent of rural establishments obtain over 43 per cent of all agricultural credit, while farmers with fewer than 100 ha (88 per cent of the total number of establishments) captured only 30 per cent” (UNITED NATIONS, 2009, p. 15). Due to the fact that men own more property than women, it is even harder for the last ones to have access to land and credit.

On this subject, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), aims to guarantee the rights of rural women:

Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and

women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

[...]

(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes [...]. (our emphasis).

Despite this legal framework, the Annual Report of the Special Rapporteur on The Right to Food (2015) recognizes that women suffer from poverty and hunger at disproportionate levels due to institutionalized gender discrimination and violence. The document also emphasizes the central role of women on food production:

[...] female farmers are responsible for cultivating, ploughing and harvesting more than 50% of the world's food. In Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, women produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs and in Asia women constitute 50-90 per cent of the labour force dedicated to rice production. Moreover, in many parts of the world majority of female farmers mainly engaged in subsistence farming. (UNITED NATIONS, 2015, p. 3)

In spite of their expressive role on food production, the situation of women remains less secure. That is why “closing the gender gap in agriculture requires development of gender sensitive policies.” (UNITED NATIONS, 2015, p. 20) For that, the necessity of reorganizing the agriculture system must be complemented with special programs and public policies to overcome the oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework that affects not just women, but all the “Downs” established by this same hierarchical structure.

Women have also an especial dominant role on seed saving. According to the Special Rapporteur on The Right to Food (2015), women produce, select and save up to 90% of planting materials used in smallholder agriculture, including seeds and germ plasm. “Seeds and seed banks are important for addressing the crisis of agricultural biodiversity, for ensuring sustainable livelihood solutions for food security, and for empowering women with a sustainable livelihood.” (UNITED NATIONS, 2015, p. 9-10)

But this protagonism of women conflicts with the intellectual property rights of seeds that would be otherwise saved and shared. Corporations related to global agribusiness and biotechnology earn billions of dollars with the seed market, constituting an actual barrier for women. These corporations have 73% of the world's seed supply, so it represents a dilemma to women: stop traditionally saving and exchanging seed or running the risk of being punished for intellectual property crime (UNITED NATIONS, 2015).

At the same time that climate change constitutes an ecological barrier faced by women in their fulfillment of the right to food, the Special Report (2015, p. 14) emphasizes

their participation in activities for sustainable agricultural development, “such as soil and water conservation, agro-ecology, afforestation and crop domestication and are vital to adaptation and mitigation policies.”

In Brazil, women are also protagonists of resistance actions against economic pressure from agribusiness. According to Paulilo (2010, p. 927), there is a growing concern about healthy eating and food sovereignty in recent years promoted in the Movement of Peasant Women (Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas – MMC), the earlier Movement of Rural Women Workers (MMTR), in southern Brazil. This movement started in the State of Santa Catarina in 1983, was later linked to the MMTR in 1995, and since 2004 is part of the MMC, affiliated with the international organization Via Campesina. The women in this context – although they do not denominate themselves as ecofeminists – are worried about the transformation of practices that maintain the oppression of the “Down” side of the dualism.

Ms. Adélia Schmitz, one leader of the MMC, expresses herself as follows:

[...] because monoculture kills biodiversity; under a eucalyptus forest not even the ants can live, it kills the land! It kills the life! Because the earth has life. Nor a bee, nothing survives these trees, and biodiversity, where is it? The amount of water absorbed by these eucalyptuses! Women defend life and they want future generations to have a decent living. The social function of the land is to produce food (SCHMITZ apud PAULILO, 2010, p. 933).

Through these words, it becomes clear how family farming is threatened by the lack of policies and the pressure of international agribusiness. International companies that control the research on technologies to produce efficient seeds, including hybrid seeds and more recently genetically modified seeds, ignore the necessities of small-sized rural properties. Due to that, it is not simple to maintain autonomy, nutritional security and food sovereignty. But women are trying to organize themselves in a way to acquire more independence in production and to overcome oppression in their daily activities.

When writing about agroecological experiences of peasant women in Brazil, Jalil (2015) highlights that there may be no agroecology without feminism. Thereby, the author emphasizes the role of women in this kind of activity as a mean of empowerment. Peasant women in Brazil, in their agroecological practices, produce to live with dignity: “they produce for life”, defends Jalil (2015, p. 11). There are plenty examples of women working on the preservation and care for local biomes, producing variety of food in small-sized properties achieving principles of food security and sovereignty, resisting against process of exclusion, symbolic and patrimonial violence.

In relation to promotion of gender equality, Serrano (2015) describes the experience of women in rural community, Borborema, in the State of Paraíba. The author emphasizes how agroecology is transforming women's self-perception and how they perceive themselves as part of nature. At the same time that women construct with nature a relationship based on respect, they also see themselves as human beings that must be respected by men, building a positive image with autonomy, freedom and security, and that struggle for the elimination of violence. This implies changing the local reality to obtain quality of life for the family and adopting a new idea of local development assented on the principle of respect for different forms of life.

Giordani et al (2015) emphasizes the way work organization in family farming contrasts with typical capitalist strategies. They create particular ways of life and culture in which food expresses a network of subjective and symbolic connections between people that goes beyond a mere piece in the productive chain. Nevertheless, capitalism as a historical movement changed relations in family farming as it affected territorial configurations and cultural organizations, and resulted in new understandings of space and time in rural areas. Without support of policies, argues Giordani et al (2015), many small farmers in Brazil have stopped to produce varieties of food and leased their land to monocultural production. From small farmers they are transformed in rural workers without land. Besides that, to the extent that they no longer produce food, they intensify the consumption of industrialized food.

Far more than bringing to the surface the debate about the social function of land and the complementary necessity of its fair distribution, family farming normally ensures opportunities to all family members. Their individual workforce is necessary to cultivate the land in different seasons during the whole year. This can be found in smallholder agriculture all over Brazil. Considering the weather – rain frequency and quantity, high or low temperatures –, different kind of plants, legumes, roots, tubers, vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts are cultivated. The excess of their activities is sold in small cities nearby the rural areas and even to large centers of consumption located nearby. In this context, it seems possible to put into practice the concept of adequate food, although the use of synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides and herbicides, as pointed out by Giordani et al (2015), occurs sometimes in an uncontrolled way at this context of agricultural production.

Even recognizing this problem, at the level of family farming it is possible to sustain heterogeneous production of food rather than homogeneous crop cultivation that prevails in large-scale agriculture. Furthermore, in family farming nature it not simply perceived as a resource to be exploited. It is thus in the context of family farming that both food sovereignty

and adequate food are possible, what makes the promotion of food security dependent on the support to organic family farming.

An environmentally responsible human diet – as it is foreseen in the positive dimension of the right to adequate food – cannot be built on the agribusiness system. The idea of safe food – directly related to the right to adequate food – involves both social and cultural fair relations that go beyond the modernization of Brazilian agriculture, which in most cases merely promotes private appropriation of natural resources. So, when struggling for their right to the land and their right to sovereignty over the means of working, women are part of a counter-hegemonic movement in food production fundamental to the realization of the right to adequate food.

Besides a main political problem related to injustice and inequality in large-scale agriculture, and the impossibility of realizing the right to adequate food in that context, the protagonism of women calls attention to the ethical perspective involved in relations of power and domination in food production. To put it another way, throughout their struggles for the fulfillment of the right to adequate food, women promote conscious food choices. This leads to ethical questions related to the right to adequate food, such as the moral right to access information about what you eat. The promotion of autonomy in food choices is essential to achieve the right to adequate food at the personal level.

As Singer and Mason argue, in “The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter” (2006), as long as food choices have an impact on others, it is important to ask questions like these: “Is the food grown without pesticides or herbicides? Are the farm workers paid a living wage? Do the animals involved suffer needlessly?” (SINGER; MASON, 2006, p. 4-5). But many people do not have access to the necessary information to make good choices. For instance, knowing that animals are raised in small cages helps people make a conscious choice about what they eat. This argument applies to the production of food based on genetically modified seeds in Brazilian large-scale agriculture. When people know the power structures behind this kind of product – such as the ones presented here – they can make better choices. Food can thereby become an ethical and political choice.

The same is recognized by one of principles of the Dietary Guidelines, that reports the importance of broaden autonomy in food choices:

Access to reliable information on characteristics and determinants of healthy diets contributes towards people, families, and communities increasing their autonomy in making good food choices; it also contributes to leading them to demand compliance with the human right to adequate food (DIETARY GUIDELINES..., 2014, p. 21)

As the principle points out, information must be reliable instead of sustaining exclusively the interest of food industry in selling products. By having this information, presumably acquired by different sources of knowledge, autonomy in food choices becomes possible as well as an ethical decision-making process in food consumption. Thereafter, a human being can turn him or herself into an agent of transformation in terms of food production and consumption.

But to develop such autonomy for healthier eating choices does not depend only on an individual decision or an ability to make choices and to govern life. The environment around the person also influences the attainment of autonomy. Cultural values and education as well as social organization can stimulate this autonomy, or the opposite. If people for instance live in a society in which consuming fast food is more valuable than learning how to prepare your own food or invite friends to dinner at home, then autonomy in food choice will decrease. On the contrary, living in areas where open markets with fresh fruits and vegetable are permanently available can promote conscious awareness about food. The same applies in the case of valuing large-scale agriculture instead of agroecological family farming. In this context, as recommended by the Dietary Guidelines (2014, p. 22), tools and strategies for food education should give people “the necessary skills to make decisions and transform reality, as well as to enforce the human right to adequate food”.

Although it is possible to enable human beings to expand their autonomy and make better choices for themselves, for animals and for the environment, what still prevails is that people generally do not think about the origins of food. They are just aware of what advertisers of the food industry want them to be aware of. Evidently, violence and information about systems of power and domination are not indicated as ingredients in packages. Only information about risks to personal health is frequently given. But what the system of massive and monoculture agriculture along with factory farming in Brazil shows, both of them addressed here, is that the extent of the danger is much higher. Women, animals as well as nature as a whole are being neglected. Plants, animals and biomes are disappearing. Soil fertility is being extinguished. In short, without addressing political and ethical implications in the current system of food production, effectiveness of the right to adequate food is impossible.

Conclusion

In this paper a characterization of large-scale agriculture in Brazil allowed the identification of some tensions between this system and the right to adequate food. This right was included in the Constitution as a social right in 2010, but Law No. 11.346, from 2006, had already established the concept of adequate food based on the idea of food and nutritional security. It also expanded the idea of adequate food to the dimension of food production, including considerations about the importance of biodiversity, sustainability and family farming. Aligned with other international documents, the right to adequate food ends up on the “Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population”, which brings forward the way in which food implies choices that have both social and political consequences.

It is, thereby, on the one hand recognized by the law and its related documents that there is a dimension of the right to adequate food that goes beyond the idea of access to a variety of qualified nutritional sources. This dimension refers to the necessity of fair relations in food production and the reduction of environmental damages by promoting family farming. On the other hand, political and economic arrangements in Brazil prioritize large-scale farming. Through that, social injustices in land access are maintained, under the justification that it is necessary to increase production by employing new technologies and machinery. However, this agricultural system produces basically crops for exportation by using high-yield seeds, and demands large rural areas for pasture destined to extensive cattle rearing.

Considering this scenario, it was argued that the economic privilege attributed to the massive and monoculture agricultural system as well as to factory farms cannot be compatible with the requirements implied in the right to adequate food. Alternatively, a defense of organic family farming and plant-based food was suggested with the potential for significantly reducing social, economic and environmental injustices. As a result, it is possible to obtain really adequate food for consumption, because an ethical and fair diet cannot be built on large-scale agriculture as it prevails in Brazil. Nutritional security and food sovereignty are beyond the conservative modernization of Brazilian agriculture that promotes private appropriation of natural resources.

With the purpose of better understanding the connections between different kinds of injustices reflected in Brazilian agricultural system, the ecofeminist approach was considered. The whole system of large agrarian property, which transforms nature and animals as mere objects of domination, is a result of the oppressive conceptual framework settled in patriarchal societies. The patriarchal framework justifies and maintains relationships of unequal power, based on a system of domination and exploitation, whose consequences affects particularly women but also pervades the nonhuman world. Like women, nature is historically seen as a

resource, whose meaning and significance depends on the needs of men. Under this interpretation, the liberation of women and nature must be a joint project.

Aware of the intersections between different kinds of discrimination and exploitation, women have already been playing a central role against racism, sexism and the exploitation of nature. Recognizing the importance of family farming in producing a variety of food, they struggle for the maintenance of creole seeds and better work conditions in rural areas. They also resist against the large-scale agricultural system in Brazil that imposes limited ways to produce food and threatens food sovereignty.

Because of that, the right to adequate food is not consistent with the large-scale farming system in Brazil that reflects the way a patriarchal structure organizes relations between humans and non-humans. This system is unjust at different levels: it denies access to land, exploits nature and animals and hinders women autonomy. In other words, under a patriarchal framework it is impossible to fulfill the right to adequate food.

Taking this into consideration, a better way to realize the right to adequate food is to seek out for organically produced food, to focus on agroecology and a plant-based diet based on a structure of small farmers. But this position demands environmental policies that support family farming. Political actions should be promoted by the government such as courses destined to family members in small properties about agroecology. Without information, it is difficult to change traditional behaviors and overcome oppression in the system of food production, including patterns of food consumption. Awareness-raising, when it comes to food choices, must be part of political actions that foster ethical consumption.

Notes

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² There is research that refers the issue of women as owners of land and slaves throughout history in Brazil. An example can be found in the work of Araujo (2008), who investigates the condition of women landowners in the period between 1713 and 1750 in farms on the countryside of the State of Minas Gerais.

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