

Politics on the Plate: Mob Wives, Seeds and Salt

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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How can we broaden our movement to appeal to and involve the majority of people out there who do not seem to be aware, do not seem to care or are just too apathetic?

This has long been an issue for many a campaign group or activist.

There are many groups who have been offering a credible analysis of how the world functions. But many of these groups use certain language and theoretical constructs whereby they end up preaching to the converted and make little headway in galvanising mass protest, action or resistance to capitalism, especially among more affluent or politically unaware sections of the population.

Take Syria, for instance. What is happening on the ground there is too abstract for many, too far away or seemingly too unconnected from their everyday lives to have much meaning (except when the issue of immigration rears its head, whose solution, according to the mainstream media, politicians and pundits, does not involve bombing Syria less but more). Similarly, Ukraine or Afghanistan is also often regarded as being too removed and any talk about empire or imperialism does not strike much of a chord with many people, who after a long day do not have the time, energy or inclination to sit down and do research into the machinations of empire, read Brookings Institute reports on [how to deal with Iran](#) or gem up on the [Project for a New American Century](#).

The problem revolves around how to raise informed awareness (not spoon-fed mainstream media narratives) of these and other issues and how to make the public connect world events with their everyday lives.

Gandhi knew how to connect everyday concerns with wider issues. In 1930, he led a 'salt march' to the coast of Gujarat to symbolically collect salt on the shore. His message of resistance against the British Empire revolved around a simple everyday foodstuff. His focus on salt was questioned by sections of the press and prominent figures on his side (even the British weren't much concerned about a march about salt), who felt that protest against British rule in India should for instance focus more directly on the heady issues of rights and democracy.

However, Gandhi knew that by concentrating on an item of daily use among ordinary Indians, such a campaign could resonate more with all classes of citizens than an abstract demand for greater political rights. Even though salt was freely available to those living on the coast (by evaporation of sea water), Indians were forced to purchase it from the colonial government. The tax on salt represented 8.2 percent of the British Raj tax revenue. The issue of salt encapsulated the essence of colonial oppression at the time.

Explaining his choice, Gandhi said that next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest

necessity of life. The prominent Congress statesman and future Governor-General of India, C. Rajagopalachari, understood what Gandhi was trying to achieve. [He said](#):

Suppose, a people rise in revolt. They cannot attack the abstract constitution or lead an army against proclamations and statutes...Civil disobedience has to be directed against the salt tax or the land tax or some other particular point — not that that is our final end, but for the time being it is our aim, and we must shoot straight.

With the British imposing heavy taxes on salt and monopolising its production, Gandhi felt he could strike a chord with the masses by highlighting an issue that directly affected everyone in the country: access to and control over a daily essential. His march drew not only national but international attention to India's struggle for independence.

Today, we find the issue of food in general playing a similar role in people's struggle for independence, but this time it is independence from the corporate tyranny of global agribusiness, and, for much of the world, independence from the US, which for a long time has been using food as a geopolitical tool to create food deficit areas, boost reliance on US exports and create dependence on oil-based chemical-intensive agriculture and ultimately the petro-dollar (see [this](#) and [this](#) and [this](#)).

[Vandana Shiva](#) draws a parallel between the seed sovereignty movement and Gandhi's civil disobedience 'salt march':

Gandhi has started the independence movement with the salt satyagraha. Satyagraha means "struggle for truth." The salt satyagraha was a direct action of non-cooperation. When the British tried to create salt monopolies, he went to the beach in Dindi, picked up the salt and said, "Nature has given us this for free, it was meant to sustain us, we will not allow it to become a monopoly to finance the Imperial Army... Nature has gifted this rich biological diversity to us. We will not allow it to become the monopoly of a handful of corporations... For us, not cooperating in the monopoly regimes of intellectual property rights and patents and biodiversity — saying "no" to patents on life, and developing intellectual ideas of resistance — is very much a continuation of Gandhian satyagraha... That is the satyagraha for the next millennium. It is what the ecology movement must engage in, not just in India, but in the United States as well.

With genetically modified seeds now a major issue, the debate on food has in recent years meant that the issues of food sovereignty and food independence have been given a sharper focus.

What the debate on GM has done is create increased public awareness concerning how food is produced, what is in it, who is controlling it and for what purpose. At one end of the spectrum, we have groups that were already highly politically aware about food and the geopolitics of food and agriculture. At the other end, however, there are people who may have not been too politically aware or attracted to politics or political issues but who are being drawn towards issues like the 'right to know' what is in their food and the need to label GM foodstuffs on supermarket shelves.

As a result, many are being politicised as they get drawn into the great food debate because, once they begin talking about the need to label, they soon begin to realise there

are powerful state-corporate forces preventing this. By delving into the politics of labelling and GM, people will hopefully be drawn towards wider debates about Monsanto and agribusiness and in turn to how these entities are shaping the global system of food and agriculture.

The basic 'right to know' could and should logically lead people to consider issues pertaining to seed sovereignty and patenting of seeds, petro-chemical farming and the role of oil, the destruction of indigenous agriculture across the world and corrupt trade deals like TTIP.

For too long, so many people in the West have acted like 'mob wives', displaying a willingness to remain blissfully ignorant while living well from the fruits of imperialism or knowing that something might be amiss but turning a blind eye because life (for them) is good. There is however a growing recognition that their food is not only [killing them](#) as consumers but [others too](#) and that this is part of an agenda to capture the food supply by a powerful cartel that [began many decades ago](#) and is still being played out in throughout the globe from [Africa](#) and [India](#) to [Ukraine](#) and beyond.

Protest and action against widespread oppression, violence and exploitation has to be focussed. As in Gandhi's time, it is again food that is playing a central role in raising awareness and provoking resistance.

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