

Capital Appropriation of Slum Dwellers' Food Consumption: Evidence from Metro-Manila

Author: Heriberto Ruiz Tafoya, Institute of Social Theory and Dynamics (ISTAD)

ABSTRACT

The paper unveils how the capital is appropriating of the slum populations' food consumption, which is their main personal and collective asset considering their lack of means of food production. Specifically, this paper extends the concepts of 'appropriation' used by Marx in *Das Capital* (1867) and applied by Goodman et.al, (1987) to explain appropriation of rural labor, nature and biological human consumption. In specific, the paper highlights the modus operandi of food manufacturing corporations in order to penetrate and appropriate slum dwellers' food consumption via Corporate Packaged Food (CPF). The arguments supporting the appropriation of food consumption thesis are based on ethnographic observation of 88 days in three slums of Metro Manila and critical revision of corporate literature and business practices.

It is argued that the process of *appropriation*—including the inherent process of substitution of rural products for manufactured food—requires the simultaneous action of *conquering* slum dwellers' market spaces and minds. On the one hand, industrial capital has been appropriating nature and rural labor since the 1820s and during the twentieth century food science and technology largely extended the capital's domination of food industrial practices (Goodman, et.al, 1987 and 1991). On the other hand, in a different level of abstraction, 'to conquer' the market and minds, food corporations implemented BoP (Bottom of Pyramid) marketing strategies synthesized in the tripe A: *Affordability, Availability and Adaptability* and complemented with consumer education practices and activities seeking to "include" marginalized people (Payaud, 2014).

Using Metro Manila as a case of study, the paper discusses the political economy circumstances under '*Neoliberalism*' that set the ground for the appropriation of food consumption while diminish domestic rural foodstuff production and open arms to foreign food, including foodstuffs and packaged foods. Next, there are examples of the triple A strategy (Affordability, Availability, and Adaptability) in Metro-Manila and, there is also mentions of Nestlé's programs of their "creating shared value" campaign that promotes "self-entrepreneurship" and "educate consumers."

Finally, there is a reflection on the political impact of CPF consumption. The main argument is that slum women's the common sense—the conception of the world as Gramsci explains—is completely distorted and it contributes to spread the idea that processed food consumption is natural and unchangeable. Inherently, this phenomenon hinders the construction of solidarity links with other classes involved in social movements for emancipation.

Keywords: appropriation, corporate packaged food, consumption, BoP marketing, urban bottom, slums, Manila, unemancipation