

Democratic Foodways: biocultural landscapes and cuisines

Focus and Context

We propose to focus on existing and past experiments in autonomous foodways in the interstices of the dominant food system. We hope to document, study and share traditional and emerging ecological knowledges and practices that cultivate balanced relations among plants, animals, people, and all our relations.

Autonomous food ways can be a point of entry to make explicit the three threads of democratic confederalism which are always intertwined — participatory governance, liberated gender relations, and respectful relationships between humans and other beings and flows in the landscapes they inhabit.

Landscapes are the joint creation of humans and nature. No landscape we can know is “wild” in the sense of untouched by humans. “Civilization” names as “wild” the places it dominates or marginalizes, from intricate management of ancient rice or potato terraces of Asia and the Andes, to management of grasslands by fire in what is now America and Australia. Autonomous foodways have shaped forests, grasses, marshes, coasts, lakes and rivers in ways that endure --- a better definition of “sustainable.”

Since at least the Roman Empire, and dramatically since colonial reshaping of places on earth, plantations have replaced complex, evolving landscapes and cultures of human societies with simplified monocultures.

Democratic, autonomous foodways are reconstituted to reflect and respect ecological boundaries, which are violated by the wars and treaties that create borders between national states. A democratic food system, which is the foundation of any democratic society, seeks to reorganize landscapes and cultures in bioregions defined by waterways and other features.

The work is already underway to build networks of autonomous foodways within and across borders of the crumbling national states. The people reshaping land and cultures use multiple types of knowledge and practice both to create what is new in changing landscapes and to resist appropriation (and simplification) by states and capitals. These are connected, for instance in global networks for food sovereignty, for indigenous renewal, and for emerging configurations of ecological sciences and practical, place-based knowledges of how to live well in each place.

Objectives

Document and connect autonomous struggles for the protection of life under pressure by global capital, state terror, climate chaos, desertification, and species death. It is to support a transition from ecocide to respectful ways of living with waters, forests, and other species, and to modeling societies not by machines (the market) but by ecologies, including social relations modelled on ecological relations across scales from streams to rivers to oceans.

Some Critical Questions

What is the breadth and scope of existing autonomous foodways and connections among them?

What are the historical practices of commoning, including indigenous management of lands and waters --- before emergence of the nation-state system? How did they work? What conflicts arose?

What are the current shared and unique challenges facing emergent autonomous foodways within and across bioregions?

How can Traditional Ecological Knowledges best be shared and updated? How are they combined with ecological sciences to restore what has been destroyed and to build durable biocultural landscapes?

Methods

Research historical practices of commoning, both before national borders and as part of emerging ways of living well with soils, waters, atmosphere, climate, and other beings.

Create a network of seed libraries in collaboration with the Mazlum Doğan Library and Archive.

Support ways to connect experiments in autonomous foodways across bioregions, through storytelling, visits, and more.

Document and propose ways to translate across cultures and across the divide between formal ecological sciences and practical knowledge.