

'Made in Italy' will save us

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As the world plunges recklessly into the 'world war fought in pieces', as Pope Francis puts it, World Food Day was celebrated on 16 October, this time focusing on the importance of water and its rational use for food production. The numbers were reported by all the media, unfortunately partly obscured by the daily war news.

President Mattarella did well to link the war to the great problem of food production and distribution to everyone in the world, pointing out that the lack of access to water (as unfortunately happened in Gaza in these tragic days) and its waste or pollution (as happens daily in our towns) are the result of our decisions and are added to those of climate change.

The tragic reality is that, with the 'development' policies pursued since the 1960s, so-called 'world hunger' has changed its appearance and, while famine deaths have been reduced, the number of malnourished people has increased, thus diverting deaths into other statistical categories, but spreading a state of food poverty that easily turns into immune poverty, as shown by the epidemics of recent decades; as mentioned in another article ('Food security: a complex system difficult to control', <https://www.climateaid.it/2023/09/14/la-sicurezza-alimentare-un-sistema-complesso-e-difficile-da-controllare/>), it was these policies of first 'green revolution' and then 'adjustment' that exposed the countries concerned to food dangers. The real change in the number of deprived people on the planet has been brought about by the policies of China (off the UN agenda for decades), which from the 1950s onwards, with fluctuating trends due to internal political events, has lifted an important segment of humanity out of poverty and destitution.

For the African continent, the main focus of UN policies, the results have been very disappointing. Development policies easily turned into robbery and plunder, often due to a ruling class attracted by the privileges created by education and membership of elites that had fought for the independence of the various countries. In a beautiful book by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'Half of a Yellow Sun', the vicissitudes of a middle-class family (actually, those also experienced by her parents) during the civil war over the attempted secession of Biafra from Nigeria are narrated; war that transformed the richest and most affluent place in the great African country into a land ravaged by war and famine, and that changed, to the point of death from starvation and

destitution, the social and living conditions of entire families that had never faced these problems in previous centuries.

Even today in Europe, the stigma of hunger and poverty marks the citizens of the African continent with discriminatory and racist or, at best, paternalistic attitudes that characterise speeches and policies such as 'let's help them at home! When he came to play for the AC Milan team, George Weah, current president of Liberia since 2017, declared that it was only when he arrived in Europe that he knew he was a 'destitute' and that he had lived in a place where 'there was hunger' (which he had never seen or experienced).

Often difficult climatic conditions for survival (but this was certainly not the case in Weah's Liberia) do not cause famine: the resources of the land allow the organism to be fed in a balanced way and to live (not survive), albeit very soberly. But the mass of the population is now concentrated in mega-cities, where nothing is cultivated and people live on shopping. Thirty years ago, Serge Latouche, in his book 'The Westernisation of the World', highlighted the effects of the loss of local culture and economy: The absence of local production and the need to import foodstuffs to survive was combined with the loss of memory following the Western dream. The loss of traditional societies resulted in the end of traditional 'remedies', including drought foods, which would not only nourish (albeit to a limited extent) but also bring vitamins and trace elements that are generally absent in imported products. Imports consist of food of mediocre quality, and local plants no longer exist in the fields, weeded to grow products for export.

In today's globalisation, malnutrition is closely linked to people's living conditions, which in turn is a direct consequence of economic conditions. The poor eat little and badly, whatever some ministers may think, resulting in: among the well-off, widespread obesity (but also anorexia) and cardiovascular diseases, linked to overeating; among the poorer, the classic food and vitamin deficiencies and related diseases. The phenomenon, now spreading also in Italy where economic conditions have diversified a lot and the indigent have increased, presents itself in complex forms: one can eat a lot and badly with the generalised metropolitan lifestyle and have both phenomena at a social level and in the same families.

How do our authorities respond to the problem? If we were to look at the proposed initiatives, we would have to say that there is a fear of a (necessary) reduction in agricultural production among the most widespread crops in the country, generated by EU rules and not by the need to restore a more balanced environment after the senseless use of water, soil and technical means in agriculture, factors that have worsened environmental conditions in the peninsula and certainly not improved the economic conditions of most producers. The government's fear of rules that would cage producers is combined with an exaggerated optimism about Made in Italy, considered in the food sector as a sort of unsurpassable medicine, even a 'happiness supplement'; two attitudes that have never solved the real problems (perhaps they have aggravated them) and that do not address the causes of hunger and poverty,

even in Italy. In short, for the rulers, looking outside our productive enclosure is limited to assessing the expansion of our exports, perhaps sold in exchange for oil. That is all.

And what is being done to react to the deep-rooted motivations linked to war and social inequalities, mentioned by President Mattarella? Some, such as Coldiretti in its Food Village in Rome set up for the occasion of the day, think that the solution lies in the adjective 'Italian': Italian products and cuisine, good if made with those of the farmers associated (obviously, with the organisation). In the village at the Circus Maximus in Rome, guests are offered products from the Roman countryside, snacks under the banner of Italian hospitality, but without the customary final coffee because, in the proud initiative with an autarkic flavour, only national products are expected, even if harvested and sold by foreigners (but the pasta we eat every day, are we really sure it is made only of Italian wheat?).

We are in this situation.....

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