

June blog
Fabio Gomes



For me this is a month of special memories. As said by the ‘Common Man’ (*Homem comum*) of the great Brazilian poet from our North-Eastern state of Maranhão, Ferreira Gullar:

I'm a common man (*Sou um homem comum*)
of flesh and of memory (*de carne e de memória*)
(...)
I'm like you (*Sou como você*)
made of remembered things (*feito de coisas lembradas*)

The third day of this June marks the fourth year since my father left this planet. His lessons and his stories will always stay with me. Here we are in the picture above, minutes before our lunch, a 10 kilogram *tilapia*, took the bait. (Fishermen's tales, but true, true). Born in the northern state of Amazonas, fish were one of his main passions – fishing, and preparing, cooking and eating fish, in good company. When others were the cooks, he could tell the name of the fish with his eyes closed, just by tasting it. You could not serve him a *pescada* saying it was a *badejo*. *In memoriam* of my father I start my column this month with one of his stories that combines tradition, culture, the culinary arts, the family and simple things – all aspects of public health nutrition.

Culinary tradition
What my parents have taught me

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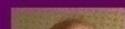
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Geoffrey Cannon





I believe that in good societies we learn from our parents, who have learned from their parents, and from the resources they had. Part of what's meant by a good society is such unbroken family links. This does not imply that people need not think for themselves, but that awareness of and respect for who and what have come before, are part of the joy of life. And some of the most profound links are those that are most simple – like the production (and catching) and preparation, cooking and enjoyment of good food.

There is a delicious traditional dish in Brazil called *bobó de camarão*. There are several variations of the recipe throughout the country. In my opinion the most delicious one is the simplest. It is a mixture of *moqueca de camarões* (shrimp *moqueca*) with mashed manioc. You just need tomatoes, onions, shrimps, lime, coconut milk, manioc, and plenty of herbs (coriander and chives) to prepare this feast (1). See me in the picture above, minutes before diving into this delicious and beautiful *bobó de camarão* made by my mother.



My father told me that in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas, when a party was organised to celebrate someone's birthday, there was no cake or soft drinks on the table. Birthday parties were celebrated around an earthenware pot full of *bobó de camarão* accompanied with regional fresh fruit juices, such as those of *cupuaçu*. When you visit Brazil you must savour and taste cupuaçu, shown in the picture above. *Lanchonetes* (snack bars) serve it as drinks and ice-creams.

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Human rights

Water™. What's next, air?

Obvious and fundamental things are often not naturally or easily recognised as essential. Societies need laws to say that people have the right to live and, as a result, the right of access to public goods. Safe water is a clear example of



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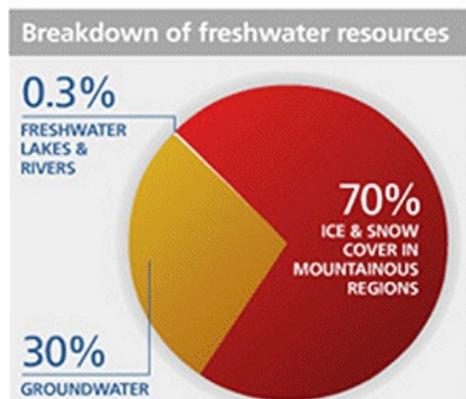
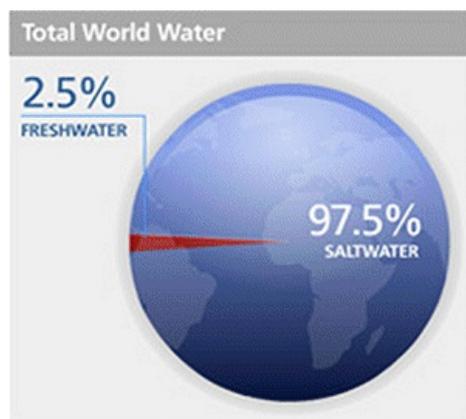
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something essential for life that we still need to defend as a human right. We have to keep fighting day by day for the obvious.

In a world still dominated by political and economic brute force, something essential is often not seen by the most powerful as a public good, but as something we depend upon and therefore a source of great profit and indeed more power – economic and also political and even military (1). The most powerful even have the power to decide who have the right to rights.

Here is an example, and you can see and hear for yourself. Here is Nestlé's CEO the Austrian national Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, speaking in the documentary *We Feed The World*, by Erwin Wagenhofer (2,3). He was asked his opinion on water privatisation. He said: "There's that lovely old Austrian folk song: "the dear cattle need water, *bollera, bollera*", if you remember. Water is of course the most important raw material we have today in the world. It's a question whether we should privatise the normal water supply for the population. And there are two different opinions on the matter. The one opinion, which I think is extreme, is represented by the non-government organisations who bang on about declaring water a public right. That means that as a human being you should have a right to water. That's an extreme solution. And the other view says that water is a foodstuff like any other, and like any other foodstuff it should have a market value. Personally I believe it's better to give a foodstuff a value, so that we're all aware that it has its price, and then that one should take specific measures for the part of the population that has no access to this water, and there are many different possibilities there'. Be warned.

According to United Nations statistics the volume of freshwater resources is only 2.5 per cent of the total volume of water on Earth. See the diagrams below from the UN Environment Programme. And the total usable freshwater supply for ecosystems and humans is less than 1 per cent of all freshwater resources (lakes, rivers, ground water, ice and permanent snow covers) (4).



The waters that have flowed into our rivers and groundwater basins are now being diverted into pipes and stuck into bottles, for profit A human right, a source of life, is being privatised. This means that the most rich and powerful people are gaining the power to decide who will enjoy the right to something that belongs to all, a patrimony of humanity. So our right now has been transformed into a duty as well. The duty to protect our rights! Watch 'The Story of Bottled Water'. This shows very clearly the views and strategies of Big Drink, including a quote from PepsiCo's Vice-Chairman: 'The biggest enemy is tap water!' Laugh and cry (5).

References

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Fabio Gomes



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4. http://www.unwater.org/statistics_res.html
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Joke of the month

Science and news for whom?

From now on, this column will include an unbelievable story. You know, those stories that make you pause and say: ‘What!? Are you kidding me!?’ Dear readers, I introduce you to the ‘Joke of the month’.



The story this month stars Helio Gurovitz, the Chief Editor of *Época*, one of Brazil’s leading weekly news and feature magazines. The splendid recent cover shown above, advertised a feature about an experimental study concluding that high fat foods can be addictive; as addictive as cocaine and heroin (1). The issue also included advice from Michael Pollan, billed as you may see on the cover as ‘the guru of healthy food and the champion of the cooking of our ancestors’.

Sr Gurowitz evidently disliked the implications of this coverage in his own journal, and devoted an editorial to his own thoughts. He attacked advocates of food regulation and said they were perverse. ‘They (the militants of food regulation) apparently judge us (the population in general) as victims of a malevolent industry’.

Well, that’s a fairly standard line of the ‘ultra-right’, who are against any form of regulation, presumably including of guns, cars or drugs. Colleagues in Europe tell me that public relations firms hired by food manufacturers have stuck labels on them such as ‘Food Leninists’ and ‘Food terrorists’, dedicated to tearing down the fabric of society, biscuits, burgers and all, in favour of revolutionary socialism.

Sr Gurovitz went on to say that in these times, it’s fashionable to invent imaginary victims. Real victims, he said, are those of atrocious crimes, and such criminals are rightly punished. However, he said, if you eat a lot of high fat food that’s your fault. Then he went further and said that if you have no land or house to live in that’s your fault too, and you should pull yourself together and sort yourself out. So why has the Brazilian tobacco control strategy worked? Nothing to do with regulations, he said, that has been all about individual will-power. Presumably he would say that anybody in any way addicted had only themselves to blame for letting themselves get addicted in the first place. Good news for the pushers of crack cocaine outside school gates! Then, back to food. What about the producers of high fat food and alcoholic drinks, which he agrees are harmful? They are the real victims, he said. Say no more! Time for a laugh!

References

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Next month:



Urban Jonsson

The rise and fall of paradigms in public health nutrition

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This column is reviewed by Geoffrey Cannon. I acknowledge my father for the stories of culinary tradition, my mother for preparing the bobó de camarão, and give thanks to my family that has taught me to fish as well as to eat fish. I thank my colleague Carlos Monteiro for sending me the video on bottled water. My thanks also to Jan Rofekamp who sent me a copy of the documentary 'We Feed the World'.

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