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BETWEEN FOOD ACTIVISM AND BRAZILIAN GASTRONOMY: CHALLENGES AND CONTRADICTIONS OF *SLOW FOOD* IN A COUNTRY OF INEQUALITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes food activism in Brazil, taking as its starting point the restlessness caused by the Slow Food movement and its contradictions in the face of the Brazilian reality. From a critical and interdisciplinary approach, the study does not seek to validate or refute the movement, but to understand how it highlights the limits of exogenous proposals in the face of the country's structural inequalities. The work is based on the concept of food activism as an intersectional and political practice, based on authors such as Counihan and Siniscalchi, Portilho and Schubert, and articulates it with the Brazilian context through the debate on public policies, traditional knowledge and social movements such as the MST. The research highlighted the centrality of community and popular experiences — such as those of quilombola communities and agrarian reform — in the field of food sovereignty, revealing that, although some of Slow Food's principles are close to these struggles, its actions in Brazil are still ambiguous and relatively distant from these practices.

Keywords: Food activism. Slow Food. Food sovereignty. Gastronomy. Popular movements. Quilombola communities. MST.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is a central element in the construction of societies, reflecting not only biological and nutritional aspects, but also structural, economic, political and cultural dimensions. In Brazil, food history is marked by colonial legacy, agro-export monoculture, and land concentration — factors that still influence eating habits, the distribution of resources, and forms of social exclusion.

In the face of so many complexities, gastronomy — as an emerging multidisciplinary field — has presented itself as a window of possibilities for new readings of food. Through it, more sensitive and hopeful looks emerge, focused on care, the appreciation of local knowledge and the celebration of regional and community cuisines. There is, in this field, the expectation that we can find solutions to structural and long-standing problems. However, in this same field, it is also clear to observe that the valorization of fresh and healthy food, for example, does not always solve, by itself, hunger, the intensive use of pesticides and their social and environmental impacts, predatory activities and countless other ills and problems that affect people who need to eat.

Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on how we assimilate discourses and practices that encourage certain attitudes towards what is eaten, how it is eaten, and what are the paths of the food chain in Brazil — a country of great cultural diversity, but also of deep inequalities. It was from this restlessness that the interest in understanding the assimilation of the *Slow Food* movement in Brazil emerged, based on food activism.

Although this movement proposes essential principles – such as "good, clean and fair" food – its penetration into Brazilian society seems limited. It is a model of European origin, often restricted to groups with greater purchasing power or cultural capital. Thus, *Slow Food*, more than a proposal in itself, has become in this work a starting point for inquiries about food activism and its possibilities for transformation in peripheral contexts.

From this concern, the need to investigate the history of food activism in Brazil also emerged, understanding them not only as consumption practices, but as expressions of broader social struggles. To this end, before presenting definitions proposed by Brazilian scholars such as Fátima Portilho and Maycon Schubert, we propose a more didactic introduction to the concept of food activism.

In a simple way, we can say that food activism is born at the intersection between different social and political movements, not always originating in the field of food. According to Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi (2014), food activism encompasses a wide range of actions — from individual attitudes to collective mobilizations — aimed at transforming food systems. Philosopher Jeffrey Raymond Sebo (2015), in turn, proposes an

intersectional and ethical approach: for him, food activism should be understood as part of a broader project, which articulates anti-racism, feminism, environmental justice, and animal rights. Food choices, in this sense, are not neutral: they are connected to systems of oppression and moral responsibility — both in relation to humans and non-humans.

In texts such as *Food Activism and the Ethics of Intersectionality*, Sebo argues that effective food activism needs to recognize the interconnections between the various forms of injustice, promoting alliances between struggles and avoiding fragmented solutions. This approach strengthens the understanding of food activism as a structuring political practice — and not just as a lifestyle.

This conceptual basis allows us to broaden the view of the contributions of Brazilian authors. Fátima Portilho (2020), for example, identifies two generations of food activism in Brazil: the first, of an institutional nature, focused on food security; and the second, aimed at the politicization of consumption and the valorization of food culture. Maycon Schubert (2023), on the other hand, understands activism as a daily social practice, which articulates food choices with political transformation projects.

Discussing Brazilian gastronomy from the perspective of food activism, therefore, allows us to understand how themes such as hunger, public policies, popular knowledge, and the struggle for food sovereignty are articulated. It is essential to recognize that, in Brazil, food activism goes beyond politicized consumption. Movements such as the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) and quilombola communities, as we will see, work for structural changes in food systems, linking production, culture, and social justice.

Therefore, this work starts from the restlessness caused by the *Slow Food* movement in Brazil, approaching it not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a starting point for reflecting on food activism and its developments in the field of gastronomy and popular struggles. We are interested in understanding how proposals that emerge in European contexts are articulated (or not) with Brazilian realities, marked by deep social inequalities and the centrality of traditional knowledge. The *Slow Food movement*, by gaining visibility in Brazil through the field of gastronomy — understood here as a space for the symbolic valorization of everyday food — reveals important ambivalences. Our objective is to investigate the limits and possible approximations between this movement and experiences such as those of the MST and quilombola communities, considering food sovereignty as a critical axis of analysis. The analysis is organized into three interconnected sub-items. The first presents the fundamental concepts of food activism, articulating national and international authors and discussing the ambiguous role of *Slow Food* in this field. The second examines Brazilian gastronomy from the perspective of historical inequalities, the

construction of food identity and the role of public policies and social movements, such as the MST and quilombolas. The third, in turn, deepens the criticism of *Slow Food* as a hegemonic movement of European origin and discusses possibilities for re-signification of this proposal in the Brazilian context, in the light of food sovereignty, social justice and the political experiences of the countryside.

METHODOLOGY

In this work, we adopted a qualitative approach, based on bibliographic research and critical analysis of secondary sources. The investigation was conducted based on the reading of books, academic articles and institutional documents related to food activism, Brazilian gastronomy and rural social movements, with an emphasis on the *Slow Food* movement, the MST and quilombola communities. The process of gastronomization is also considered as a key to understanding the symbolic incorporation of food practices in the field of gastronomy.

The methodology is organized into three main axes:

1. Conceptual and theoretical analysis: This stage is dedicated to the discussion of the concepts of food activism, food sovereignty and gastronomization. Authors such as Carole Counihan and Valeria Siniscalchi (2014), Jeffrey Sebo (2015), Fátima Portilho (2020), Maycon Schubert (2023), Josué de Castro (1980), Gilberto Freyre (1998), Jean-Pierre Poulain (2004) and Lívia Barbosa (2016) are used to understand how food systems reflect symbolic disputes, inequalities and political projects.
2. Historical and structural analysis: It seeks to understand the Brazilian context from the relationships between social inequality, public policies, land concentration and food exclusion. Authors such as Carlos Alberto Dória (2009), Neuro José Zambam and Henrique Aniceto Kujawa (2017), and Angela de Castro Gomes (2006) are used to discuss how these structures shape access to food and food culture in Brazil.
3. Critical analysis of *Slow Food* and its reception in Brazil: This part of the paper critically evaluates *Slow Food* as a movement of European origin, considering its potentialities and limitations in the Brazilian context. The contributions of Carlo Petrini, Ronen Shamir (2008), Ulrich Beck (2010) and contemporary critiques of the logic of ethical consumption are mobilized. A dialogue is also established with popular and collective experiences, such as those of quilombola communities and MST settlements, seeking to understand the contrasts between

different forms of food activism and the challenges of articulation between *Slow Food* and the struggles for food justice in Brazil.

Throughout the study, a comparative analysis will be carried out between the European model of *Slow Food* and Brazilian realities, highlighting the importance of traditional knowledge, community practices and the field of gastronomy as arenas in dispute for the definition of food political projects.

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF FOOD ACTIVISM AND THE ROLE OF *SLOW FOOD*

The debate around food activism involves different perspectives on the role of the *Slow Food movement* and its insertion in this field. Created in Italy in the 1980s as a reaction to the advance of *fast food* and the standardization of globalized food, *Slow Food* (Petrini, 2009) proposes the valorization of local gastronomy, food biodiversity and sustainable production chains. Despite the relevant dynamics it proposes, this work questions the extent to which this initiative can be considered an effective form of food activism, especially when its strategy of action is centered on the individual choice of the consumer, which can, paradoxically, reinforce the logic of the market instead of challenging it.

According to Portilho and Micheletti (2018), food activism is a "social phenomenon that seeks to modify agricultural, commercial, and food practices" through the construction of alternative markets and the formulation of public policies. Its goal is to transform the food system in a structural way, combining political engagement with conscious consumption practices.

From this perspective, the concept of political consumption becomes central. Consumption choices begin to express values and political positions, going beyond the economic plane. Portilho (2020) argues that this type of consumption allows individuals to exercise forms of political participation in their daily lives. However, Fontenelle (2023) warns that this engagement can also be functional to capitalist logic, by transforming products, lifestyles, and even social causes into commodities, realizing economic value from the affective and moral adherence of consumers.

This tension — between consumption as an instrument of change and its appropriation by the market — is visible in movements such as *Slow Food*, as well as in other initiatives such as fair trade, consumer cooperativism and political veganism. Although they use consumption as a vector of transformation, these strategies are often co-opted as lucrative niches by companies and corporations.

Santos and Colomé (2024) warn that the broadening of the concept of food activism may include practices that do not propose structural changes in the food system. In addition, they argue that conservative movements and strategic actors should also be analyzed in the food field, since they dispute meanings and influence policies that may contradict the principles of food justice. This concern echoes the reflections of Carlos Taibo (2021), who denounces the risk of *ecofascism*, understood as a form of authoritarian environmentalism that instrumentalizes the ecological crisis to justify policies of exclusion, repression, and population control, without addressing the social causes of environmental destruction. Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier (1995) had already demonstrated how regimes such as Nazism incorporated ecological rhetoric into racist and elitist projects, warning of the dangers of dissociating environmentalism and social justice. In contemporary contexts, these distortions are updated in moralizing and meritocratic discourses that empty the transformative potential of food activism and block its articulation with popular struggles

In this context, it is important to differentiate the concepts of "consumption ethics" and "ethical consumption". According to Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm (2005), the ethics of consumption refers to a moral critique of the capitalist production system, focusing on the reduction of environmental impacts. Ethical consumption, on the other hand, comprises the act of consuming as a form of political action — such as the preference for products from fair trade or small local producers. To make the concepts more understandable, we organize Chart 1 below, which summarizes them in a comparative way.

Table 1 - Distinction between "ethics of consumption" and "ethical consumption".

Concept: Consumer Ethics	Concept: Ethical Consumption
Definition: Refers to the moral criticism of the capitalist system of production, focusing on the reduction of environmental impacts.	Definition: Treats the act of consuming as a form of political action and social transformation.
Example: Campaigns to reduce meat consumption and minimize the ecological footprint.	Example: Buying fair trade products or from local producers with sustainable practices.

With the intensification of globalization, environmental degradation has become a priority agenda in food activism. Zambam and Kujawa (2017) argue that industrialization has led developed countries to outsource their production to peripheral countries, making

labor and the environment more precarious. This process contributed to the strengthening, from the 1990s onwards, of the "ethics of consumption" as a global environmental discourse (Portilho, 2005; Fontenelle, 2023).

For Ulrich Beck (2010), globalization imposes a logic of dependence on peripheral societies, shifting the responsibility for sustainability to the individual. This displacement is central to the critique of *Slow Food*, which, according to Ronen Shamir (2008), operates a "politics via markets", mobilizing consumers as agents of change without necessarily questioning the larger structures of the system.

In contrast, Laura Goulart Duarte (2020) argues that the alternative agri-food systems promoted by *Slow Food* can represent significant disruptions. Through the territorialization of production, geographical indications and the valorization of short circuits between producers and consumers, the movement proposes new forms of food sociability.

It is worth mentioning that the valorization of the origin of food dialogues with the concept of gastronomization, discussed by Lívia Barbosa (2009). For the author, this process transforms everyday eating practices into symbolic and socially valued experiences. Jean-Pierre Poulain (2004) also contributes by highlighting food as a space of cultural distinction and identity construction.

Thus, *Slow Food* inserts itself into the debate on food activism in an ambiguous way. On the one hand, it offers sustainable alternatives to the agro-industrial model; on the other hand, by relying on individual practices, it can contribute to the individualization of responsibility and reinforcement of the mercantile logic. This ambiguity requires a critical and contextualized analysis, attentive to the contradictions and possibilities of food activism in Brazil.

BRAZILIAN GASTRONOMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FOOD ACTIVISM

The relationship between gastronomy and food activism in Brazil crosses the social, economic and cultural formation of the country. Food, in addition to being a biological necessity, reflects historical inequalities, power structures, and practices of resistance. In this sense, food activism, by proposing changes in the systems of production, distribution and consumption of food through social and political mobilization, allows a critical reading of Brazilian gastronomy.

Francisco de Assis de Vasconcelos (2001) identifies two main currents in studies on food in Brazil in the 1930s: one biologically-based, influenced by international dietetics, focused on the clinical-physiological aspects of nutrition; and another of social orientation, influenced by the Argentine physician Pedro Escudero, concerned with the production,

distribution and consumption of food. The latter, closer to contemporary food activism, considers food as a structural issue.

Studies carried out outside the Rio-São Paulo axis, such as those developed in Pernambuco by Gilberto Freyre, Josué de Castro, Nelson Chaves and others, point to the decentralization of the debate on food and culture. Authors such as Câmara Cascudo and Freyre contributed to consolidating the idea of food as part of culture and national identity, bringing eating habits to the center of reflections on Brazil.

From this perspective, two main approaches can be distinguished in studies on food: the materialist (or structuralist) and the culturalist (Chart 2). The first privileges economic, political and structural factors; the second values the symbols, traditions and meanings attributed to food. Josué de Castro represents the materialist approach, treating hunger as a political and structural phenomenon. Gilberto Freyre, on the other hand, exemplifies the culturalist perspective, by analyzing food as an expression of social formation and miscegenation.

Table 2 - Comparison between different approaches

Aspect	Social Approach (Vasconcelos, Josué de Castro)	Culturalist Approach (Freyre, Cascudo)
Main focus	Hunger, inequality, public policies, access to food.	Food culture, identity, miscegenation.
Origin of the food problem	Socioeconomic structures, land concentration, ineffective public policies.	Historical construction of eating practices and their relationship with ethnicities.
Focus on food	Food distribution and nutritional impact on society.	Food traditions and cultural symbolisms.
Analysis example	The impact of hunger on the popular classes and the need for public policies for food security.	The adaptation of Brazilian cuisine from the mixture of indigenous, African and European influences

The idea that cuisine and eating habits are an integral part of culture, including popular cultures, emerged and was strengthened by intellectuals such as Luís da Câmara Cascudo and Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s. Both moved between the "academic universe and local erudition, bringing food to the center of discussions about national identity" (Poulain, 2016, p. 38).

Within food studies, a materialist perspective would focus on food production conditions, income distribution, market structure, and agricultural policies, while a culturalist perspective would highlight the values, symbols, and meanings attributed to food and cuisine.

Josué de Castro, with his emphasis on hunger as a structural phenomenon, is closer to a materialist or critical approach, while Gilberto Freyre, by exploring food as an element of Brazilian cultural formation, inserts himself in a culturalist field

On the other hand, the approach of Francisco de Assis de Vasconcelos (2001) can be characterized as social insofar as it analyzes food and nutrition from the perspective of structural inequalities and hunger as a collective problem. This perspective is close to the thinking of Josué de Castro, who treats hunger as a political and economic issue, determined by the unequal distribution of resources and by public policies that shape access to food.

On the other hand, the culturalist approach, as exemplified by Gilberto Freyre, emphasizes food as an identity element, formed by the interaction between social groups, ethnicities and traditions. For culturalism, eating habits cannot be explained only by economics and nutrition, but must be understood within a historical and symbolic construction. Gastronomy, in this sense, reflects the miscegenation and adaptation of different peoples, being a central element in the formation of national identity. Differences between these approaches can be better understood through a comparative table (Chart 2). Thus, while Vasconcelos and Josué de Castro approach food as an indicator of social and political inequalities, culturalists such as Freyre see food as an expression of Brazilian identity and social formation.

From the perspective of food activism, both approaches are relevant. In summary, it can be said that: the social approach is the basis of institutional and "welfare" activism, focused on food and nutritional security. While the culturalist approach contributes to activism aimed at valuing gastronomic traditions and food biodiversity.

GASTRONOMY, SOCIAL HIERARCHIES AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

In Casa-Grande & Senzala (1998), Gilberto Freyre proposes a reading of colonial food as a reflection of social and racial structures. Although some elements of his work value miscegenation as a component of Brazilian culture and cuisine, his perspective also naturalizes hierarchies and silences material and symbolic inequalities between whites, blacks, and indigenous people. The implicit suggestion of a 'food democracy', resulting from the coexistence between the groups, is questionable in the face of the asymmetries of power and the precariousness of the diet, including among the elites, as the author himself recognizes when describing the nutritional deficiencies of the time (Freyre, 1998, p. 41). Although Vasconcelos (2001) has suggested that Freyre, at times, seems to flirt with the idea of a supposed "biological inferiority" of the Brazilian mestizo, other elements of his

work show that the author values miscegenation as a constitutive factor of the country's culture and food formation. However, this valuation is not without ambiguity. By proposing a symbolic integration between the white, black and indigenous worlds, Freyre naturalizes relations of domination, suggesting, in an idealized way, a kind of "food democracy" that is not sustainable in the face of deep historical asymmetries.

Food in colonial Brazil, according to Freyre himself (1998, p. 41), was deficient from the nutritional point of view:

> The nutrition of the Brazilian colonial family, that of the mills and notably that of the cities, surprises us by its poor quality: by the evident poverty of proteins of animal origin and possible of albuminoids in general; for the lack of vitamins; calcium and other mineral salts; and, on the other hand, by the richness of certain toxins.

Although there was ample availability of food resources, the sugar monoculture and the unequal distribution determined the precariousness of the colonial diet. Even the plantation owner, by feeding his enslaved people with the objective of preserving the labor force, did not guarantee a balanced diet, but rather a functional one to the productive logic. Josué de Castro, in A Geografia da Fome (1980), argues that both the masters and the enslaved consumed large quantities of food, but without the essential nutrients for health. This nutritional deficit contributed to "pictures of avitaminosis, tuberculosis and other diseases in the slave quarters" (Vasconcelos, 2001, p. 325).

It is worth remembering that the relationship between food and social distinction dates back to the medieval European aristocracy, where the nobility asserted their status through the consumption of expensive and exotic products, while the popular strata fed themselves according to ecological availability (Poulain, 2016, p. 36). In Brazil, the colonial elite sought to reproduce European eating patterns, often to the detriment of native foods. Carlos Alberto Dória (2009) points out that colonial cuisine assimilated European elements, relegating indigenous and African techniques to the background, reinforcing cultural and social inequality.

> In countries with a colonial past, this process of building culinary symbols with the ability to unify the entire population around a menu rarely took place. The reason for this is that the respective bourgeoisie has not always been able to build a common cultural ground with the other strata/classes of the population. (Dória, 2009, p.17)

The construction of culinary symbols that unified the Brazilian population was hampered by the lack of a common cultural terrain between the elite and the popular strata. Dória (2009, p. 17) argues that this separation reinforced cultural duality and the exclusion of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian food practices.

FOOD ACTIVISM AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN BRAZIL

Brazilian structural inequality directly impacts access to food and food sovereignty. Neuro José Zambam and Henrique Aniceto Kujawa (2017, p. 79-80) associate this reality with "land concentration and the agro-export model, which has historically limited the role of the citizen as an active agent in society".

The 1988 Constitution and redemocratization boosted public policies aimed at food security, such as the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), the creation of popular restaurants and the increase in the minimum wage. However, according to Renato Maluf (2022, p. 11), "these policies do not always serve the most vulnerable groups, as those with greater economic power are able to influence political decisions on a larger scale".

In the context of food activism, as explained in the introduction, Fátima Portilho (2020, p. 414) differentiates two generations of this movement in Brazil. The first, of an institutional nature and associated with what is conventionally called "welfare", was focused on food security and the fight against hunger, being led by doctors, nutritionists and public managers.

It is important to make a brief digression to clarify the use of the term "welfare". As Ângela de Castro Gomes (2006) points out, welfare in Brazil has historically been articulated with populist practices, in which the State grants benefits in a centralized way, without collective mediation, with the objective of maintaining social order and reinforcing dependence. Antonio Luigi Negro (2004) complements this analysis by identifying, in the paternalistic discourse of the Brazilian elites, a strategy to deny the popular classes the recognition of their autonomous capacity for organization and struggle.

This logic is expressed, for example, in the way sectors of the media and public discourse often react negatively to the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) — one of the largest and most articulated social movements in Latin America. Although the MST proposes structural reforms based on collective mobilization, its actions are usually delegitimized precisely because of this discursive heritage that reduces public policies to practices of dependence.

Thus, it is worth clarifying two points here: (1) in this work, the term "welfare" is used to refer to the field of public policies aimed at food security; and (2) its use has become relevant in the analysis of food activism precisely because it shows how, in the Brazilian political debate, public policies are often disqualified — especially when proposed by popular movements — in favor of a liberal logic that privileges the market over people, individualism over the collective, reproducing the ills of colonialism.

Resuming the contribution of Portilho (2020), the second generation of food activism — more recent — is characterized by the politicization of consumption. She emphasizes conscious consumption, the socio-environmental impact of food and the cultural resignification of food. However, despite its transformative potential, this generation constantly operates on the threshold between systemic criticism and market reabsorption, running the risk of becoming yet another form of identity consumption compatible with the logic of capital.

Other points that are part of the agenda of contemporary food activism (Portilho, 2020) include the concern with obesity, the environmental impact of food production, and the erasure of traditional food practices. In these aspects, however, we understand that there is a lack of a more comprehensive and singular understanding that can integrate the popular classes. The struggle of the MST, for example, can be seen as a counterpoint to the welfare logic in the negative sense, as we have seen above, by claiming structuring public policies – such as agrarian reform, education and rural health – based on collective mobilization and self-management. Thus, contrary to the reductionist and stigmatizing view that associates it with clientelism and negative welfare, the MST must be understood as a political actor that challenges the dominant agro-industrial model and proposes concrete alternatives, built from its social base.

FOOD IDENTITY AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE

The formation of the Brazilian food identity resulted from a complex process of cultural adaptation and resignification, deeply crossed by relations of power, exclusion and appropriation. Gilberto Freyre, by highlighting the replacement of European ingredients by local products, as an example of the construction of a mestizo cuisine, offers an interpretation that values the confluence between cultures. However, this reading needs to be problematized. Although Freyre articulates race and ethnicity in his analyses, one cannot speak of equitable relations between the peoples who contributed to the formation of Brazilian gastronomy. Miscegenation, as conceived by Freyre, conceals structural asymmetries marked by slavery, racism and the expropriation of indigenous and African knowledge. A symbolic example of these tensions is the contrast between cassava flour — historically associated with natives and mestizos — and wheat flour, a symbol of prestige and European identity. This dichotomy shows how food also expresses social and racial hierarchies that were consolidated throughout colonial history.

Carlos Alberto Dória (2009) even questions the idea of "regional cuisines", arguing that this classification ignores the geographical and historical connections of Brazilian food.

For him, colonial cuisine was marked by the imposition of European standards, generating a cultural subordination that is perpetuated to this day.

The feijoada is an allegorical case of this dynamic. Although popularly associated with Afro-Brazilian culture, its popular history reveals layers of cultural resignification and dispute of narratives. Dória (2009, p. 31) points out that the notion that the enslaved ate the "worst pieces" of the pig reflects an aristocratic view of food, since in other cultures, even in the Portuguese, these parts are valued, therefore, the logic proposed for the invention of the dish does not make sense.

Currently, food activism has driven the appreciation of traditional ingredients and practices, such as the use of Non-Conventional Food Plants (PANCs). However, Rebeca Rose dos Santos Leandro and Fátima Portilho (2024, p. 6) warn that this movement can reproduce a utilitarian logic, without recognizing the knowledge of the Afro-indigenous populations who have always used these foods. The following is a brief proposal for substitute terms (Exhibit 3).

Table 3 - options to replace the term "PANC"

Alternative term	When to use
Underutilized food species	When the focus is on biodiversity and underexploitation.
Neglected traditional plants.	It emphasizes the loss of cultural use.
Alternative foods from biodiversity.	Useful when talking about sustainability and agroecology.
Non-domesticated plant-based foods.	If the focus is ethnobotanical or agroforestry.
Non-industrialized food resources.	When it is opposed to the logic of agribusiness.

Another important point is that the commercialization of food influences global food systems and is associated with the increase in Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), especially among low-income populations, who consume more ultra-processed foods due to their low cost (Monteiro, 2019), hence the concern with natural, fresh, or so-called "real" food.

In short, Brazilian gastronomy, seen from the perspective of food activism, reflects historical inequalities and power structures that have shaped the population's eating habits.

Food activism, by connecting consumption, identity, and public policies, emerges as an essential tool for the transformation of the food system, promoting social justice and valuing Brazilian cultural traditions.

SLOW FOOD AND FOOD POLICY IN BRAZIL: CHALLENGES AND CONTRADICTIONS

As we have seen, the *Slow Food* movement, founded in Italy in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, emerged as a critique of the homogenization of eating habits imposed by the global agro-industrial system. In opposition to the *fast food* model, the movement advocates a diet based on three fundamental principles: good, clean and fair. Food must be tasty and healthy (good), sustainably produced (clean), and accessible to both consumers and producers (fair). However, when analyzed within the Brazilian context, marked by structural socioeconomic inequalities, *Slow Food* raises important questions about its applicability and effectiveness as a tool for social transformation.

SLOW FOOD AND ITS HEGEMONIC PERSPECTIVE IN BRAZIL

Slow Food has established itself as an international, predominantly European movement, linked to a hegemonic vision of gastronomy. His ideal of valuing traditional cuisine and sustainable agriculture, although valid, is based on a perspective that often ignores the structural inequalities that shape the food systems of peripheral countries, such as Brazil.

In previous chapters, we discussed how food in Brazil was historically constituted within a colonial and slave-based logic, with strong land concentration and an agro-export model that impacted access to food. Josué de Castro, in The Geography of Hunger, demonstrates how hunger in Brazil is not the result of a lack of food, but of poor distribution and economic inequalities. This perspective is opposed to the logic of *Slow Food*, which emphasizes conscious consumption without necessarily proposing structural transformations in food policy.

In addition, the concept of gastronomization of food, as discussed by Lívia Barbosa (2009), can reinforce a social segmentation in access to quality food. *Slow Food*, by encouraging the appreciation of artisanal and locally produced products, may end up promoting an elitization of consumption, making access to these foods restricted to social classes with greater purchasing power.

In this way, the implementation of *Slow Food* in Brazil without a critical eye can result in a paradox: at the same time that it proposes the valorization of food culture and biodiversity, it can reinforce socioeconomic barriers to access to these foods.

SLOW *FOOD* IN BRAZIL AS A FOOD POLICY

In order for *Slow Food* to be incorporated within a food policy perspective, it is essential that its guidelines are contextualized for the Brazilian reality. Unlike in Europe, where the movement developed as a response to the massive industrialization of food, in Brazil the central challenge is still access to healthy food and overcoming hunger and food insecurity.

This division of food activism into two generations, as already presented based on Fátima Portilho (2020), differentiates an approach focused on fighting hunger from one that focuses on political consumption and the valorization of food culture.

Slow Food, in this sense, is part of the second generation of food activism, by emphasizing the environmental and cultural impact of food. However, to be a viable alternative in the country, it needs to be adapted to the logic of food sovereignty, which is not limited to the right of access to food, but to the ability of populations to decide what to produce and consume autonomously.

One way to make *Slow Food* a relevant food policy for Brazil is to integrate it with national food and nutrition security initiatives, such as the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) and popular restaurants, ensuring that quality food is accessible to vulnerable populations.

In addition, the incorporation of Non-Conventional Food Plants (PANCs) and the appreciation of family and quilombola agriculture are ways to align *Slow Food* with a more inclusive perspective. It is important to remember, however, that quilombola food activism cannot be reduced to sustainable practices. It is directly linked to historical resistance in the face of racism and colonialism, and to the construction of ways of life that articulate cultivation, territory, and ancestry.

As Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2015) explains, quilombola communities not only preserve their own ways of life, but also organize themselves politically around what he calls confluences - networks between practices, people and territories - that guarantee protection and autonomy. Collective cultivation, native seeds and the common use of the land express a cosmology that challenges the commodification of life. Collective cultivation, the selection of native seeds, traditional management, and the sharing of food are part of a cosmology that understands the land as a common good — and not as a commodity.

In this scenario, it is also worth highlighting the role of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). Unlike other grassroots food movements that are articulated around alternative production or the valorization of biodiversity, the MST is structured as a political

organization with a strong capacity for social mobilization. Its work goes beyond the production of healthy food: it involves the struggle for agrarian reform, access to land, education, health, self-management and organization in cooperatives.

Unlike more fragmented or consumption-oriented initiatives, the MST proposes a reconfiguration of the food and political system, starting from the countryside. This profoundly distinguishes it from both *Slow Food* — which focuses on the consumer — and more symbolic forms of food activism. The MST, thus, embodies a structural struggle for social justice and popular food sovereignty, directly confronting the contradictions of the agro-industrial model, without submitting to the logic of the market.

THE CRITIQUE OF NEOLIBERALISM AND *SLOW FOOD* AS A STRATEGY OF RESISTANCE

Slow Food can be interpreted from two perspectives: a critique of the agro-industrial model, promoting food autonomy and resistance to the large-scale production system; and a reproduction of the neoliberal logic, by transferring the responsibility for transforming the food system to the consumer.

Ronen Shamir (2008) points out that the emphasis on the individual choice of the consumer can depoliticize the struggle for structural rights, as it shifts the focus from the responsibility of large corporations and the State to the individual subject. Ulrich Beck (2010) also warns of this phenomenon, highlighting that, in the era of globalization, the responsibility of the individual for conscious consumption can camouflage broader structural problems, such as the exploitation of labor in agribusiness and the concentration of land.

Added to this is the phenomenon of gastronomization, which, although it values culinary knowledge and food traditions, can also result in food gentrification processes. The transformation of popular foods into gourmet products, often aimed at elite audiences, tends to exclude the very communities that have historically cultivated this knowledge. This occurs when food practices linked to popular territories and cultures are appropriated, resignified and reintroduced into the market with high added value, losing their original social function.

In none of these aspects popular and structuring movements such as the MST fit in. The MST proposes a political transformation based on agrarian reform, the democratization of access to land and the collective production of healthy food. While *Slow Food*, in its most liberal version, bets on the consumer as an agent of change, the MST works to build a fair agri-food system from the ground up, with a focus on collective organization, food

sovereignty and social justice. This difference reveals a structural mismatch between symbolic consumption practices and concrete political struggles.

For *Slow Food* to be a true instrument of food justice in Brazil, it is necessary that its discourse goes beyond individual accountability and is articulated with public policies that guarantee democratic access to healthy food — especially those that recognize and support the knowledge, ways of life and historical struggle of rural peoples. of forests and waters.

HOW TO BUILD A *SLOW FOOD* FOR BRAZIL?

Slow Food, as an international movement, carries fundamental values for the appreciation of food culture, biodiversity and sustainability. However, its application in Brazil requires a critical reinterpretation, anchored in the social, political, and historical reality of the country. In a context marked by hunger, land concentration and social exclusion, it is not enough to defend conscious consumption: it is necessary to confront the structural causes of food injustice.

For *Slow Food* to become a transformative food policy in Brazil, some guidelines are essential:

- Food accessibility: ensuring that the appreciation of local and artisanal food is not restricted to economic elites or gourmet circuits.
- Recognition of popular knowledge: to include, with protagonism, the knowledge of indigenous peoples, quilombolas and traditional communities, respecting their epistemologies and ways of life.
- Articulation with public policies: integrate with programs such as the PNAE, popular restaurants, and initiatives to support family and peasant agriculture.
- Confronting inequalities: acting against structures that perpetuate hunger and exclusion, such as racism, patriarchy, land concentration, and the financialization of food.

To this end, it is necessary for *Slow Food* to go beyond the aesthetic and symbolic discourse of "good, clean and fair" food and commit to a concrete political agenda, based on food sovereignty, social justice and support for popular struggles. Movements such as the MST offer an example of how food can be articulated with structural transformation, breaking with the logic of the market and with individual accountability.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Food is a mirror of social dynamics: it reveals inequalities, concentrations of power, but also practices of resistance, memory and care. In Brazil, this relationship is deeply marked by colonial history, agro-export monoculture, and the denial of the right to land and food for large portions of the population.

Throughout this work, it was possible to identify two generations of food activism in Brazil: one linked to the fight against hunger, structured in public policies; and another focused on political consumption and sustainability. However, the country's structural inequities require more than individual choices or adherence to lifestyles. It is necessary to understand food activism as a political project, which addresses the causes of hunger, racism and environmental destruction.

Analysis of the *Slow Food* movement has revealed its contributions, but also its limits. Although it proposes the valorization of local gastronomy, its original logic — strongly European — can reproduce forms of elitization of access to quality food. The appropriation of traditional knowledge and products such as Non-Conventional Food Plants (PANCs), when done under a market logic, runs the risk of making the communities that keep them alive invisible.

For this reason, a *Slow Food* for Brazil needs to dialogue with popular struggles, recognize the role of peasant, indigenous and quilombola agriculture, and integrate with public policies that promote the right to food. Above all, it needs to commit to the project of food sovereignty – the right of communities to decide their production and food systems.

The struggle for food justice in Brazil cannot be just a change in consumption habits, but a transformation of structures. In this sense, movements such as the MST demonstrate that it is possible to articulate food production, redistribution and culture from a popular and organized base, breaking with the logic of dependence on agribusiness and the global market. A food activism committed to Brazil needs to look at this experience and learn from it.

Finally, the reflections developed here show that the *Slow Food* movement, although it mobilizes a vocabulary that values food, time and local knowledge, still presents an ambiguous performance in the face of Brazilian realities. The research showed that the main agents of transformation in the field of food sovereignty are popular and community movements, such as the MST and quilombola communities. Rather than just incorporating elements of *Slow Food*, these experiences are organized around their own traditions and forms of resistance. Thus, we suggest that a critique of exogenous models of food activism

should consider local knowledge, struggles for land and autonomy, and ways of life that resist the homogenizing logic of globalized ethical consumption.

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