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# FOOD ACTIVISM: THE LOCAVORISM PERSPECTIVE

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ELAINE DE AZEVEDO<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This article conceptually explores Locavorism, a food movement that has gained increasing attention in the last six years and that incorporates the concepts of food miles<sup>i</sup> and local food. Food miles is a term coined by Tim Lang at the beginning of the 1990s and refers to the distance travelled by food during its production process and the environmental impact of this process. A locavore<sup>ii</sup> is a person interested in buying and consuming locally produced food.

These concepts permeate discussions of sustainable agriculture and food consumption and decolonial processes. They also inform perspectives that address the territoriality of eating habits and gastronomy based on contemporary ecosocial trends, which view the consumption of local cuisine as a strategy for reinforcing cultural identity and for promoting family agriculture.

Locavorism was received with enthusiasm by North American food activists and, according to Rudy (2012), remains one of the most vibrant contemporary social movements. Rudy believes that Locavorism reconnects American citizens with the most basic and essential resource for sustaining life and transcends the issue of the distance travelled by the food in food miles. Locavorism is concerned not only with the location of food production but also with how it is produced and sold and by whom. Several of the movement's manifestations include farmer's markets and pick-your-own farms, which are trade fairs organised by farmers near cities or on farms where consumers can buy products or harvest or collect food themselves. Through such means, the movement seeks to tighten relationships between consumer and farmer and, implicitly, between urban and rural environments, developing the "face-to-face trust" discussed by Portilho and Castañeda (2011) in a study conducted at an organic fair in Brazil.

Furthermore, according to the premise of journalists John and Karen Hess (2002, p. 8) that the "history of American food is the destruction of its taste", Locavorism proposes to recover the pleasure of eating. In addition,

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[Locavorism...] isn't really only about location; rather, it points to a hope and shared dream that we can regain a balanced relationship with nature through our food choices. (RUDY, 2012, p. 28, brackets added by the author)

While not claiming to address all of the issues shaping a movement that purports to be so comprehensive, the goals of this literature review are to present several significant concepts and relationships influencing this provocative discussion and to stimulate empirical research on the subject, which still receives little attention in the Brazilian academic community.

This article begins by addressing the concept of local food and strategies for Locavorism viabilisation. This discussion relies primarily on two American governmental reports prepared by Martinez et al. (2010) and Johnson, Aussenberg and Cowan (2013). Next, the article presents the socio-environmental and economic issues that affect the movement; discusses concerns about the quality of and risks associated with local foods; and describes the relationship among Locavorism, Vegetarianism and Feminism. Several concepts implicit in the terms 'one's place' and 'another's place' that tend to be conflated were also analysed by exploring the works of authors from diverse fields of study discussing Locavorism and its socio-economic impacts and cultural dimensions. Authors who address the issues of rural development, regional cuisine and food quality were also included. A significant portion of the material presented here is still only available on the Internet, primarily in lay texts available on the websites of institutions and non-governmental institutions (NGOs) dedicated to food activism.

## Exploring the Local

Since the 1990s, several authors and fields of study have begun to broaden the concept of 'local' beyond the context of physical space and a simplistic political-operational perspective. These more inclusive conceptualisations treat the ideas of place and territory as constructed categories of social analysis. In these spaces, social and cultural interactions, fairer economic relations, processes of empowerment and cooperation among individuals, affective and personal experiences that promote values, the collective construction of citizenship, and civilising processes occur (RAFFEATIN, 1993; SOUZA, 2002; HAES-BAERT, 2002; BONNEMAISON, 2002; SEN, 2004; AKERMAN, 2005).

No definitive description of local food has been established. There seems to be no consensus even with respect to the maximum geographical distance that can exist between the place of production and consumption for a food to be considered local. Johnson, Aussenberg and Cowan (2013) show that American consumers perceive local food to be produced on small properties in their neighbourhoods. Some definitions use distance as a reference, typically defining local food as food produced within a 160 km radius, but this limit can reach 440 km. In Europe, Ilbery, Watts and Simpson (2006) define local food as food produced, processed and sold within a 48 to 80 km radius from its origin. Another concept defines local according to the geographic boundary of the state and yet another

to regions that include several states. A study by Dunne et al. (2011) demonstrates that the concept also varies significantly among retailers that sell local products.

Though the profiles of the locavores studied in the US differ, their motivations for buying local food are similar. Several studies cited by Martinez et al. indicate that locavores have varying levels of education and income. Other studies have found that local American consumers have higher incomes and educational levels than the average consumers. Individuals who like to cook, grow home vegetable gardens, frequent natural product stores and buy organic food also tend to seek local food. The quality of fresh and little-processed food was the main incentive for purchasing local food among the individuals surveyed. However, environmental concerns, the ability to trace products, and support for local farmers are motivating factors for local food consumption in all of the studies.

A study conducted on chefs and restaurant owners who buy local products revealed that they considered this type of food to be fresher and of superior quality. In addition, the respondents believed that using local food differentiated their businesses because it was more appealing to customers and supported local farmers (PAINTER, 2008). The institutional market, which includes schools, prisons and retirement homes, has also been analysed. Starr et al. (2003) suggest that these institutions focus on the quality of local foods, whether the foods are free of pesticides, and, in the case of the schools, the health of the children. Price did not constitute an obstacle in this market.

The effort to define the markets for local products minimises the difficulty of defining local food. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) assumes that local and regional food systems are those in which foods are sold directly to the consumer and to restaurants, institutions, schools or local retailers and those in which foods are sold through systems of trade in which information about the food's origin is somehow preserved (farm identity-preserved marketing). The local food market is almost always limited to small farms located near metropolitan areas (JOHNSON; AUSSENBERG; COWAN, 2013; MARTINEZ et al., 2010).

Locavorism is supported by the belief that local food is fresher and more flavourful; that its production should preserve the dignity of family farmers and promote urban agriculture, sustainable agro-food systems and animal well-being; and that it stimulates the local economy through direct sale to consumers. In addition, the movement endorses the practice of eating less meat and more seasonal vegetables and promotes the appreciation of homemade food, thus intersecting with the vegetarian and feminist movements. The concept of local food can also be extended to those who produce the food, incorporating concerns about the personality and the ethics of the farmers and their lifestyles and issues of social rootedness, social connection and trust. These factors constitute the "story behind the food", according to Thompson, Harper and Kraus (2008, p. 4).

Focusing on food producers also leads to discussion of the democratisation of food consumption by removing it from the monopolising control of large retailers and considers Locavorism a form of resistance to the process of globalisation. Finally, Halweil (2003) cites the Canadian NGO FarmFolk/CityFolk, which argues that the movement's additional benefits include increased fuel economy, reduced traffic, and reduced food risk due to the ease of tracing production.

Local food markets are sustained by family farmers (generally younger and more educated than other producers in the same region), diversified production and short distribution circuits in which farmers assume roles in all areas of the agro-food system: production, storage, transport, distribution, sales, and advertising (HUNT, 2007; MARTINEZ et al., 2010).

The lack of a uniform definition of 'local market' or 'local food' and the ambiguity of the term sustainable agriculture can create opportunities but may also lead to opportunism and fraud in the process of commercialisation.

In Brazil, no studies focusing on local farmers or local markets have been conducted. The basic data for exploring such markets is found in studies on the impact and effectiveness of two public policies: the National School Food Program and the Food Acquisition Program, whose guidelines include directives for strengthening local farmers.

There is also a lack of information about the environmental, social and economic impact of the local food system, which has been the object of study of two recent reports produced by the US government.

Data from these reports show that 5% of American farmers participate in local food systems and that the number of school lunch programmes being supplied by local farmers grew five-fold between 2004 and 2009. Local markets are statistically small but have grown significantly in the US's agricultural sector. In 2007, direct sale to the consumer provided the greatest financial return to family farmers, surpassing other forms of business exploitation in rural areas, such as organic farming and rural tourism. The reports also indicated a substantial interest in seafood and locally produced meat, which, in addition to organic foods and healthy children's meals, are growing food trends capitalised on by large food retailers in the US. Consumers who buy local food are concerned about the quality and nutritional value of their food, the agro-food system's impact on the environment and the well being of farmers. The barriers to the expansion of the local food market include production constraints on small farms; lack of distribution systems for bringing local food to conventional markets; limited research; lack of training and information about consumers that could promote sales; and uncertainties about the standardised requirements established by health and safety regulatory agencies that could affect local food production (JOHNSON; AUSSENBERG; COWAN, 2013; MARTINEZ et al., 2010).

Johnson, Aussenberg and Cowan (2013) present several proposals to support the survival of local producers in the US market. Their ideas include alternative sales channels and institutional or associative support. Federal, state and local government programmes have diversified to support local food initiatives. These initiatives include financial aid programmes for local farmers, the promotion of farmer's markets, programmes that stimulate the sale of local foods to public schools cafeterias (farm-to-school programmes) and support for many forms of urban agriculture (community gardens and school gardens). Other important initiatives include community-supported agriculture (CSA), food hubs and market aggregators and mobile slaughter units (MSUs).

Briefly, CSAs, which began to be implemented in the 1960s in Switzerland and Japan, are associative agreements between local producers and consumers. In these agreements, local consumers agree to assume the costs and risks of farmers' production

during the planning phase in exchange for a portion of the annual farm yield. Food hubs and market aggregators are warehouses or facilities provided by local governments that are located near farms. The facilities aggregate the food from local farms and process some of the products (i.e., package, pre-wash, pre-cook, and cut) to make them ready to be purchased by wholesale customers and other consumers. This system is also beneficial to farmers, who are already burdened by the extensive range of activities related to production, because they do not have to assume the marketing costs. In some cases, to promote agricultural entrepreneurship, food hubs may offer farmers a range of educational, technical, assistance and extension services, including food safety certification and training through partnerships with extension projects sponsored by local universities. Local farmers may also be able to take advantage of mobile slaughter units inspected by state health surveillance agencies. MSUs travel to producers who wish to sell their meat in the local market on a small scale but do not have access to distant slaughterhouses or do not have the resources to transport animals. MSUs can serve several small producers in areas in which slaughter services are impractical or unavailable.

The goals of Locavorism tend to be ambitious, and the movement is inevitably fraught with controversy and is frequently the subject of polemics, as the next section reveals.

## Socioeconomic and environmental locality

Journalist Michael Pollan (2007) states that between seven and ten calories of fossil fuel are used to produce one calorie of food energy and that only 1/5 of those calories are spent during actual food production. The remaining calories are expended during food processing and transportation.

Halweil (2003) writes that falling gasoline prices facilitated the expansion of transportation, tripling the value of the international food trade since 1960 and quadrupling the volume of transported food in the US. In the United Kingdom, food now travels 50% longer distances than two decades ago.

Mittal (2008) also shows that the increase in the use of fossil fuels in the dominant agro-food system contributes to the growing cost of food production. However, the author argues that transportation cost is only one of the factors explaining this increase; the costs associated with mechanisation, irrigation and heating systems in greenhouses and, on ranches, the use of fertilisers and inputs in general and of plastics in greenhouses also contribute to the problem. Mittal therefore discusses incentives for local family producer markets and the stimulus offered by several proposals for sustainable agriculture among the policies and state incentive recommendations designed to mitigate the food production crisis.

Several authors cited in a New Zealand report by Saunders, Barber and Taylor (2006) agree that food miles is too simplistic a tool for measuring the environmental impact of an agro-food system. Instead, the total energy expenditure involved in all production stages should be considered in such an analysis.

Several authors argue that food groups and diet compositions may have environmental implications for the agro-food system. Stănescu (2010), for example, discusses

what he calls the ‘myth’ of Locavorism from the perspective of vegetarianism. This vegetarian activist disagrees that food transportation is the primary determinant of costs and environmental impact. He argues that animal production creates the greatest environmental impact in the agro-food system and criticises the consumption of so-called “happy meat. This term, cited in Rudy (2012 p. 28), is used ironically by vegetarians to criticise the act of tracking the handling and slaughtering of animals destined for consumption. This practice, typically performed on local farms, has been adopted by some chefs and foodies (people with expertise in gastronomic, food, beverage and restaurants trends). Stănescu also questions the position of locavores who claim that “having a vegan diet is more damaging to the environment than eating animals slaughtered locally” (2010, no page no.). His criticism is directed at local farms that raise animals and use them in an instrumental manner, as if they were objects rather than subjects.

Weber and Matthews (2008) show that although the distances travelled by food in the US are long, the food production phase contributes to 83% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In contrast, transport-related emissions account for only 11% (4% are related to final delivery processes). The study argues that the production of beef, pork and mutton requires higher energy expenditure than the production of chicken and fish (150% more GHG emissions). It also claims that transitioning to a predominantly ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet, with the occasional consumption of meat, would more effectively reduce the carbon footprint than local food consumption. This proposal, which has socio-environmental implications, has been publicised in campaigns such as “Meatless Monday”<sup>iii</sup> and through claims made by vegetarians in social networks and vegetarian NGOs and associations.

Clearly, empirical studies have yet to reach a consensus on the environmental impact of local systems. Some studies show that these food systems are more efficient and that distance is an important factor in determining the environmental impact of transport. Other studies endorse the conclusion discussed earlier that distance is not an appropriate or relevant impact indicator because transport is responsible for a relatively small portion of energy consumption and GHG emissions in the food system. A USDA report also indicates that total energy expenditure and greenhouse gas emissions are affected by differences in production practices, the use of supplies and fertilisers in each segment of the food chain, and crop yields (Martinez et al., 2010).

Other environmental appeals made by Locavorism assert that local foods preserve the genetic diversity of food species and promote environmental quality because local farms are the farmers’ living spaces and therefore have an ecological rationality unique to certain segments of family agriculture. This logic reflects the complexity of the rural environment and emphasises the role of the environment in the construction of farmers’ identity.

Ikerd (2005) argues that the expansion of local food systems can facilitate the maintenance of social capital in a community and limit the development of high-density urban areas, preserving rural areas that would otherwise be used for urbanisation. Martinez et al. cite several authors who defend local systems and the consequent elimination of multiple actors and intermediary processes between the producer and consumer. Ikerd



(2005) states that, for example, the elimination of packaging and advertising costs alone can make foods up to 20% cheaper.

The direct purchase of local food is perceived as a process of food democratisation — a declaration of independence from the supermarket empire, in which half of the 30,000 available items is monopolised by approximately ten transnational corporations, the czars of the contemporary era. A portion of these companies influences global food production policy, which favours the interests of large nations in the northern hemisphere to the detriment of poorer countries. According to economic-environmental logic, maintaining the diversity of local culture and production reduces reliance on inputs and machinery produced by large companies. Furthermore, it has a positive effect on food diversity, auto-consumption, and food and nutrition sovereignty and security (HALWEIL, 2003).

The slogan “local food, local money” espoused by Halweil, which argues that Locavorism generates wealth and local jobs, is another (controversial) economic issue that informs the movement. Halweil (2003) asserts that money invested locally is not diverted into transportation, storage and fees for intermediate agents. This is important to the extent that farmers who operate locally and who produce food for consumption do not receive the same share of state subsidies as major producers that supply the agribusiness export market.

To defend his argument, Halweil (2003) cites a study by the New Economics Foundation<sup>iv</sup> in London, which shows that every ten pounds spent at a local retail food store, the equivalent of twenty-five pounds is returned to the region. When this same amount is spent in a supermarket, the value that returns to the area is only fourteen pounds. These results suggest that a dollar, a pound or a real spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy.

Several studies produced and supported by Co-operatives UK, an English trade agency that promotes and develops cooperatives, demonstrate that spending money locally does not automatically generate income for the region. For money spent locally to become ‘sticky money’, it is essential to consider where those who receive this money reinvest it. As the study reveals, it is essential to spend the money in local trade cooperatives. Another study supported by the same organisation shows that every 100 pounds spent in a cooperative generates an additional forty pounds for local suppliers, customers and employees, providing a significant contribution to the local economy (SACKS, 2012).

Although Locavorism is, from an economic perspective, associated with democratising factors, the practice of consuming local food is still considered exclusivist, elitist and restricted to the portion of the population that can afford to purchase local food. Critics attest that a significant portion of this food is destined for wealthy urban individuals and interferes with the local farmers’ own consumption (JOHNSON; AUSSENBERG; COWAN, 2013). It should be noted that the organisation of the local food trade in Brazil has not yet been studied and that this analysis therefore cannot be applied to the Brazilian context. The concept of local food is not widely used in Brazil, and the idea of elite food intersects with the concept of organic food.



## Local Risks

This article does not intend to deepen the discussion of dietary risks explored by previous authors. Some food-associated risks have accompanied mankind throughout its history, such as food shortages and biological contamination. Contemporary risks have also emerged, including global risks resulting from chemical food contamination and from the use of new technologies applied to agricultural production and food processing (AZEVEDO, 2011; GUIVANT, 2001).

Despite the claim that local foods tend to be less contaminated, some risks are still present. Risks related to genetically modified organisms and chemical contaminants, such as pesticides, fertilisers, synthetic additives and veterinary drugs, are relevant to Locavorism unless the movement proposes to promote organic production.

A study by Peter et al. (2008) argues that local foods are less exposed to a risk of biological contamination because it is easier to trace them and because food that travels many kilometres is more likely to be exposed to contamination. However, industrialised foods produced in modern agro-food systems are controlled by regulatory agencies for food safety, whose standardised rules and procedures help produce safer food.

The impact of food technology should also be addressed in this discussion. The biological view that microorganisms are invisible demons now dominates the production of food, which, to be considered safe, must be sterilised, pasteurised, irradiated and filled with additives. Such treatment could create poor quality according to several indicators because it leads to nutritional imbalance and chemical contamination.

The steps needed to resolve this controversy transcend the scope of food health safety and require investigation into the true definition of food safety and quality. At present, these two concepts incorporate various parameters in addition to nutritional value, including chemical and biological toxicity, durability, vitality, freshness and sensorial food characteristics and environmental and cultural factors (CONSEA, 2007; AZEVEDO, 2012). The discussion of food quality becomes more complex when individual needs are considered. For example, for a vegetarian, a good diet must be free of meat, and for someone who is worried about obesity, a low-calorie diet may be qualitatively superior.

## Locavorism, Vegetarianism and Feminism

The Locavorism movement implicitly advocates a return to origins and a renewed esteem for the domestic preparation and consumption of food. This idea is criticised by Stănescu (2010), who argues that such demands could be regressive in the field of feminist rights. Stănescu worries that the proposal to reinstate women in the kitchen and assign them the responsibility for the family's healthy nourishment could be disadvantageous. Such a demand seems to revive traditional gender roles and the heterosexual couple in which the man works outside of the home, dedicating his time to agriculture and livestock, while his wife assumes the household duties, especially cooking. This would reinstate the "idealised bourgeois division" mentioned in Belasco (2002) that separates "the female sphere of consumption from the male sphere of production" (p. 7).

This criticism may be valid, but there is no consensus that one of the goals of Locavorism is to force women back into the kitchen. The movement notes the importance of preparing food at home, for those able to do it, because the impact of frequently eating meals away from home and the effect of processed foods on human health is well known.

When discussing processed foods, Catalan chef Santi Santamaria mentions the pasteurisation process, a form of food standardisation that excludes farmers, fishermen, butchers and artisans. Santamaria also addresses the political aspect of cooking, suggesting that a return to the practice of eating at home is a form of resistance to globalisation and the market economy, thus establishing the social function of the cook<sup>v</sup>. Santamaria is alluding to the importance to the future of gastronomy of resurrecting the ‘mothers, grandmothers and neighbours’ who cooked.

Rudy (2012) uses a broader theoretical basis to discuss the issue of local food, especially meat, within the context of the feminist and vegetarian movements. The author mentions two philosophers—Val Plumwood and Donna Haraway—who defend Locavorism but question, for different reasons, the practice of removing meat from the diet.

Plumwood proposes the dissolution of the boundary between the human and animal kingdoms. For her, both belong to the latter and are subject to the same laws and forces. The human being is just one species among many and, therefore, can either eat other animals or be eaten by them. In other words, human beings are included, without privilege or bias, in the food chain under the assumption of equality between the kingdoms. Haraway argues that it is not possible to free human beings from the inexorable cultural determinism that led them to hunt, domesticate animals and prepare meat in culturally different ways. According to Haraway, no ethical arguments can overcome established and accepted cultural practices. However, both philosophers advocate responsible methods of raising and slaughtering animals, rejecting the industrial meat complex and siding with modern agro-pastoral systems supported by Locavorism (RUDY, 2012).

## Someone else's place

Hughes et al. (2007) states that most of the discussions about local food systems have not been subjected to a rigorous analysis using the tools of regional science, a field of study in the social sciences dedicated to analytical approaches of specific rural, urban, or regional issues. They attribute the ambiguity plaguing Locavorism to this oversight.

The discourse surrounding Locavorism tends to merge the categories of ‘one's own place’ and ‘someone else's place’ and also treats categories such as ‘local food’, ‘food with a local identity’, and ‘traditional food’ as if they were homogeneous. This practice ultimately contributes to the controversy surrounding the subject of locality.

Though the term local connotes something positive and inclusive, anti-locavorism activist Stănescu (2010) warns that this movement could inspire xenophobic and exclusionary arguments against what “comes from abroad”, providing the basis of a movement he considers “conservative and provincial” (no page no.). It is not yet clear how this dimension of the movement is associated with the appeal of gastronomy, which allows one to adopt ‘someone else's place’ through a fascination for so-called ethnic foods.

Contemporary gastronomy has begun to incorporate the spices, foods and typical dishes of specific localities, a trend common among chefs and diners and perceived as valuing the local. However, what is 'local' when the subject is ethnic foods?

In the interview cited previously, chef Santamaria mentions that using local ingredients minimises the homogenisation arising from globalisation and promotes the association between contemporary cuisine and sustainable agriculture, incorporating additional dimensions into the practice of appropriating 'someone else's place'. Many questions emerge from such a statement: From which location or region must sustainable gastronomy use local ingredients? Eating tacacá [a typical Brazilian food] in Europe strengthens which location? Such questions could be addressed to the emerging political chefs.

The US government is studying ways to include foods with a local identity (e.g., 'queijo minas' [cheese from Minas Gerais, a state in Brazil] and Camembert cheese) in local systems. Such foods are directly related to a specific region and are associated with positive values, such as 'cultural embeddedness', and with a particular expertise. However, they may be sold in locations far from their origins. Hughes (2007) cites the example of a partnership between the US state of Florida's state government and a supermarket chain in Ireland that promotes fresh food from Florida ("Fresh from Florida").

To resolve the confusion between local foods and foods with a local identity, Holt and Amilien (2007) cite Laurence Bérard and Philippe Marchenay, who define foods whose brand is associated with a particular region but are sold in foreign markets as 'locality foods'. These authors highlight another concept associated with this category: traditional foods. Traditional foods have the potential to establish links and stabilise traditional communities by providing continuity. Searching for traditional foods can lead to the reinvention of tradition.

Blytman's (2013) discussion of quinoa is a polemic against the use of 'another's place'. Quinoa is a grain celebrated by health food lovers and vegetarians. It is considered 'the miracle of the Andes' for its high protein content. The story of quinoa has an unhappy ending that may be replicated in other locations. After achieving great popularity among consumers worldwide, the price of quinoa went up; it has tripled since 2006. This price increase had disastrous consequences for those who planted and consumed the grain locally. The appetite of foreign consumers influenced the food prices so drastically that the poorest Peruvians and Bolivians, for whom quinoa was once affordable, can no longer afford this traditional food. Today, imported junk food is now cheaper for local residents. In Lima, for example, a kilo of quinoa now costs more than a kilo of chicken. In rural areas, the scenario is equally perverse. Driven by external demand, local farmers are being pressured to transform their land. Farms that once produced a variety of foods for the farmer's self-consumption are now practicing quinoa monoculture. In Brazil, a similar situation has transpired with soybean and tobacco monoculture. Blytman notes that the enthusiasm surrounding quinoa is another example of a harmful food exchange between the northern and southern hemispheres. Consumers concerned about their personal health, animal welfare and the reduction of their carbon footprint purchase 'the local food of other places' without being aware of the social and environmental interference produced by this everyday act. The quinoa example indicates the need to engage in more rigorous

discussion about countries' food and nutritional security (and sovereignty). It also shows the importance of reducing dependence on imported food and instead seeking food that can be grown or raised nearby. Blytman (2013) subtly criticises English vegetarians who, in their hunger for meatless protein, reject local milk and meat, creating problems far away in 'someone else's place'. However, this critique offers a warning to any consumer, omnivorous or vegetarian, and is applicable to other contexts. For example, the international interest in açai and other fruits and nuts from northern Brazil may cause similar problems as those experienced in Peru.

The case of quinoa is an example of "cultural food colonialism", a term proposed by Heldke (2001) to refer to Westerners' fascination with ethnic food. This fascination was already apparent in the search for "increasingly new and remote cultures" undertaken by early anthropologists, explorers and colonisers. This apparently innocent fascination, which, according to the author, is sometimes used as a "way to make oneself more interesting", threatens to become a negative intervention in someone else's place (p. 176-77).

Movements such as Fair Trade and Slow Food, which promote fair market conditions between consumer countries and producers in developing countries, are relevant to the issue of food colonialism.

The Fair Trade movement came into existence in the late 1980s. Its aim is to promote activities that raise awareness among consumers and governments about regulating fair access to disadvantaged farmers' markets (KUHLMANN, 2006). The Slow Food movement, created by Italian Carlo Petrini in 1986, questions homogenisation and the effects of fast food. It seeks to rectify the disappearance of regional culinary and agricultural traditions and the people's disinterest in their food, its origin and taste. It protests the pace of urban life, which it claims has an influence on health and on the quality of one's diet. It warns individuals that their food choices can affect the environment and the lives of farmers. The Slow Food movement promotes ecogastronomy, associating the pleasure of eating with conscience and environmental responsibility, establishing a relationship between "the plate and the planet"<sup>vi</sup>.

In these movements, the planet is considered a single ecosystem in which 'there is no outside' and where a local action can generate a global movement. Their propositions stimulate reflection on potential risks and depict a world in which democratic environmental actions affect everyone—some individuals immediately, some in the medium- and long-term.

## Final Considerations

The controversies, enthusiasm and sectarianism surrounding Locavorism and many other food activism practices are not new. Similarly, there is no novelty in the practice of adopting dietary practices to discriminate or to distance oneself from another group. However, these practices may also serve as a way to strengthen essential collective values.

Because local systems do not seek and are unable to achieve the same level of animal production as the conventional system, one of the consequences of disseminating and adopting Locavorism is the reduction of the daily consumption of meat. This practice

is recommended by some nutrition experts concerned with the negative impact of the contemporary hyperproteic diet on health. However, this also constitutes a politicisation of eating habits that requires consumers to assume more social and environmental responsibility.

Unlike the situation in some places in the northern hemisphere, the proposals of the Locavorism movement have not been formally pursued by food activism groups or governmental authorities in Brazil. Brazil has a large land area and serious environmental problems. Its population suffers the effects of deficient roadways and inadequate family farming, which produces food for 80% of the population. In such a context, the study of Locavorism is important and demands further attention and future studies. These studies may vary greatly in topic and scope. They could analyse the profile of consumers and producers of local foods; the perceptions of local food producers, consumers, retailers and specific groups (students, chefs, etc.); data on the production and availability of local food in each state; the environmental impact of transporting food throughout the country and of local food production as a whole; initiatives and conditions that help promote or prevent Locavorism; regional impacts arising from the marketing and export of local foods in Brazil; the proposals of regional gastronomy and their impact on local food production; the impact on nutritional value, health safety and local food quality; and the various dimensions of the impact of government programmes that support the use of local foods. Future studies could also determine whether the guidelines and the principles of Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Brazil already encompass the demands and aspirations of Locavorism.

In fact, the concept of local food is already linked to the principles and guidelines of Agroecology, Organic Agriculture and several public policies. Therefore, the dissemination and strengthening of this concept per se could improve family farming and all forms of sustainable agriculture. It could also promote public policies that recognise the importance of strengthening territories and localities, which would generate positive socio-environmental and cultural impacts.

Finally, the idea of rescuing local foods from one's own region should not interfere with the exciting possibility of creating bridges with other cultures through access to and consumption of exotic dishes and foods, a practice adopted by almost every society since the beginning of the great sea voyages. The entry of exogenous foods allows cultural hybridity; a variety of possibilities, meetings and opportunities; and the acceptance of differences. Hall (2002) argues that the rescue of the local could only begin when the global began to become expressive; today, globalisation accompanies the strengthening of local identities. Instead of thinking of the local as a substitute for the global, or vice versa, it could be more productive to imagine a new interaction between these two categories.

## Notes

i The term food miles first appeared in 1994 in "The Food Miles Report: The dangers of long-distance food transport" by Angela Paxton. Information available at <http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=191> Accessed on: Jun 1st, 2013.

- ii The word locavore (or localvore) was selected by the Oxford Dictionary as the word of the year in 2007. This word was created in the USA by Jessica Prentice (RUDY, 2012).
- iii See "Meatless Monday" campaign at [www.meatlessmonday.com](http://www.meatlessmonday.com) (English website) or <http://www.segundasemcarne.com.br/> (Brazilian website). Accessed on: June 10th 2013.
- iv The New Economics Foundation was contacted and declared that this result cannot be generalised and that these data are related to a specific case. The Foundation also stated that the results depend on how the money is spent and subsequently circulated in a given location.
- v From an interview with Santi Santamaria in the newspaper Folha de São Paulo. O filósofo da Gastronomia [The philosopher of Gastronomy], 2013, in: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs0602200506.htm>. Accessed on: February 6th, 2013.
- vi Informações e citação disponíveis em: <http://www.slowfoodbrasil.com> Acesso em: 5 Jun 2013.

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# FOOD ACTIVISM: THE LOCAVORISM PERSPECTIVE

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ELAINE DE AZEVEDO

**Resumo:** O artigo apresenta um estudo conceitual sobre o Locavorismo, sua dimensão socioambiental e econômica, as discussões sobre qualidade e riscos dos alimentos locais e a relação entre o movimento, o Vegetarianismo e o Feminismo. Serão abordadas categorias como 'local próprio' e 'local alheio', 'alimento local', 'alimento com identidade local' e 'alimento tradicional' que aparecem como homogêneas. O Locavorismo pode ser uma estratégia de promoção da agricultura familiar e evidencia práticas alimentares que dialogam com os princípios da sustentabilidade. O estudo aponta a necessidade de se desenvolver estudos empíricos que possam investigar novas formas de articulações com o local.

**Palavras chaves:** local; ativismo alimentar; Locavorismo; agricultura sustentável

**Abstract:** The article presents a conceptual study of Locavorism and discusses its economic and environmental dimensions; debates about the quality of and risks associated with local foods; and the relationship among Locavorism, vegetarianism and feminism. Categories typically presented as homogeneous, including 'one's own place', 'others' place', 'local food', 'locality food' and 'traditional food', will be analysed. Locavorism can be used as a strategy to promote family farming and food practices that are in dialogue with the principles of sustainability. This research indicates the need to develop empirical studies that can investigate new ways to relate to one's locality.

**Keywords:** local, food activism; Locavorism; sustainable agriculture

**Resumen:** El artículo presenta un estudio conceptual sobre lo Locavorism, su dimensión social, económica y ambiental, las discusiones sobre la calidad y el riesgo de los alimentos locales y a relación entre el movimiento, el vegetarianismo y el feminismo. Serán tratados categorías que aparecen como homogéneas como "lugar propio" y "lugar de los demás", "comida local", "alimentos con identidad local" y "comida tradicional". El Locavorismo puede ser una estrategia para promover la agricultura familiar y sus prácticas de alimentación señal un diálogo con los principios de sostenibilidad. El estudio apunta a la necesidad de desarrollar estudios empíricos que puedan investigar nuevas formas de articulaciones con el local.

**Palabras clave:** local, activismo alimentar; Locavorismo, agricultura sostenible

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