



## FOOD, TERRITORY, AND DECOLONIZATION: A PROFILE OF THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT

### ALIMENTO, TERRITÓRIO E DESCOLONIZAÇÃO: UM PERFIL DO MOVIMENTO *SLOW FOOD*

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#### ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this article is to propose a reflection on the centrality of food and its bias in relation to territoriality as a path towards decolonization, for this purpose it uses an overview of the Slow Food movement, based on its main principles and actions for the valorization of the place and ways of doing and living. The study bases the triad: food, territory and decolonization and discusses the possibility of it forming a basis in the construction of relations of thought and actions capable of converging in processes of development and decolonization. The Slow Food movement, in addition to permeating the concepts of territoriality and decolonization, adds an element of contemporaneity between the “worlds” of the local and the market in a challenge to build a globalized reality, but based on the pluriversal, diversity and uniqueness as element of wealth, protagonism and foundation for integral development.

**Keywords:** Territoriality. Colonization. Food production. Diversity.

#### RESUMO:

O objetivo deste artigo é propor uma reflexão sobre a centralidade do alimento e seu viés de relação com a territorialidade como percurso para a descolonização, para tal utiliza uma visão geral do movimento *Slow Food*, com base em seus princípios e ações principais de valorização do local e dos modos de fazer e viver. O estudo fundamenta a tríade: alimento, território e descolonização e discute a possibilidade desta, formar uma base na construção de relações de pensamento e ações capazes de convergir em processos de desenvolvimento e descolonização. O movimento *Slow Food*, além de permear os conceitos de territorialidade e descolonização acrescenta um elemento de contemporaneidade entre os “mundos” do local e do mercado em um desafio a construção de uma realidade globalizada, mas fundamentada no pluriversal, na diversidade e na unicidade como elemento de riqueza, protagonismo e fundamento para o desenvolvimento integral.

**Palavras chave:** Territorialidade. Descolonização. *Slow Food*. Alimento.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The centrality of food in discussions about locality can be related to the very history of agriculture, humankind's fixation to the territory, as well as the emergence of communities, villages and even social relations. Humans' constant struggle for survival can be guided, from a certain point of view, by food and the movements surrounding it, which are points of cohesion within many analyses and theories. Such thought can be seen in isolation, with food as an element of physiological survival or, in a broader sense, with an agenda that deals with the consequences and objectives of eating.

This kind of analysis opens a range of possible and irremediably involved actors for each added element, placing food at the center of much broader discussions on economics, society, ecosystems and survival itself, which is when an individual action becomes a collective element. From such angle, relating food to the concepts of territory is laterally embedded in this range of factors and elements to be considered in the search for development forms that are not centralized on commodification. These formats lead to new fields of research, involve different actors and organizations, create different rules, promote relational networks, provide shelter and refuge to alternative thoughts, and end up providing new ways of living.

For Saquet (2006), territories - as a concept, beyond the geographic aspect, have as fundamental paradigms their territoriality, which are spaces for building relationships, ways of living, actions and pathways in social and historical aspects. It is where "power relations, circulation and communication networks, and identity" (MUSATTO; SAQUET, 219, p. 76) are the foundations of its characterization.

This and many other concepts were (and still are) being built and improved based on the historical context of humanity and its relations; however, one must single out a period of intensification of this search, based on questions raised after the Green Revolution, its framework of measures and mercantilist ways of producing food.

Questions on this model, concentrated in the 1980s, came from different sectors of society that have been devising alternatives and new ways to reconcile urban living, now dependent on rural living and vice versa. In this period, such environments assumed a certain polarity, sometimes seen as dichotomous spaces.

In building an alternative view, numerous social movements were formed, among which was Slow Food, which emerged in Italy in the 1980s to counter the way of life that distanced food production from its real function of maintaining life, that is, a human way of involving natural resources, connecting this to a social construction process able to drive it forward.

Salviano (2010) states the movement works to value food, with respect to those who produce it in harmony with the environment, in addition to seeking to reproduce knowledge maintained by local traditions. Slow Food has three prerequisites for a quality food item: it must be good, considering its criteria of taste and quality; fair, with a fair price for the producer and final consumer, considering the diverse production processes



and production and consumption relations; and clean, free of pollutants throughout its production chain.

In the last two decades, a broad view on this whole foundation can be seen through the lens of decolonization, which, more than a concept, is a proposition of analysis on what has been colonized in these narrated processes and for how long, historically, and to which depth and scope of sectors are they built.

Therefore, to understand the path proposed by decolonization, one must understand and admit its own colonization and reach in our current life structure. For Walsh (2007), thought and social construction themselves are the result of colonization, in which European values are seen as the best and correct for all the others to follow, listen, seek, aim for and obey. In this perspective, those who were colonized intrinsically understand the superiority of Eurocentric-Western knowledge as “the only rationality capable of ordering the world” (WALSH, 2007, p. 103).

From such concept, the relationship between man and food was also ordered by the colonized “Being”, who values the industrialized and the hegemonic, while producing to meet the rules of commodification and globalization proposed by this Western-European guiding axis.

The Slow Food movement circumvents this reality, proposing the valorization of what is local, as well as the ways of doing and living, and placing food again in this centrality, as something fundamentally within - not outside of - a production and consumption system, as well as the construction of relationships of thought and actions that converge in the development processes.

The reflection proposed here aims to unite the triad: food, territory and decolonization, within the “universe” of relations and foundations of the Slow Food movement.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1. Permeability of coloniality

It is important to have a basic understanding that the concept of coloniality is broader than that of colonialism; however, they are interconnected, complementary in their processes, and both can be thought of by their most abrupt marks considering the “European invasions of Abya Yala, Tawantinsuyu and Anahuac, with the formation of the Americas and the Caribbean, and the massive trafficking of enslaved Africans” (OLIVEIRA, 2017, p.2); however, the great navigations of the sixteenth century are still considered to be the starting point of the expansive process of colonization (ASSIS, 2014, p.613).

For Oliveira (2017, p.2), “‘coloniality’ is already a ‘decolonial’ concept, and decolonial projects can be traced from the 16th to the 18th centuries”. This corroborates with Grosfoguel (2008), when affirming that in colonial environments there are internal spaces that are not colonized. One could also argue that these spaces may be fragmented



or still interconnected, in the spheres of colonialism determined by Walsh (2007): of Power, Knowledge, Being and Nature.

To clarify the consequences of, and between colonialism and coloniality, Assis (2014, p.613) affirms that “coloniality transcends the particularities of historical colonialism and does not disappear with independence or decolonization”.

By cutting out the spheres proposed by Walsh (2007), one can visualize the subordinate view of the colonized impregnated in all sectors and spaces of life. Grosfoguel (2008, p.118) compiles this and at the same time expand the concept, calling it “patriarchal/capitalist/colonial/modern world system”. What the author points out in this denomination, in addition to the breadth of coloniality, is the hierarchical process that expands in the ways of life and in the very formation of society; the author states “Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender hierarchies, spiritual, linguistic, geographical and racial aspects of the patriarchal/capitalist/colonial/modern world-system” (GROSFOGUEL, 2008, p.118).

The hegemonic character of the ways of life preached by the process of colonialism is historically portrayed by Oliveira (2017), citing Armstrong (2002); his argument is that colonialism is reinforced in the transformation of knowledge in the 16th century from the “scientific revolution”, and that it proposed control over the environment and its commercialization. The author adds as a result of this process the “celebratory modernity” and complements the connection of this vision “the rhetoric of salvation and novelty”, however, he concludes that in this process, modernity centers human life itself as a commercial element:

Thus, hidden behind the rhetoric of modernity, economic practices dispensed human lives, and knowledge justified racism and the inferiority of human lives, which were naturally considered expendable (OLIVEIRA, 2017, p.4).

It is this modernity that is dragging on, restructuring and remaining in our current globalized world and life, so centered on mercantilization or on the “colonial power matrix” (GROSFOGUEL, 2008, p.121) and which reproduces its own coloniality in all actions, considering the past, the present and projections of the future.

Within the perspective of coloniality, the territorial component can be seen in Walsh's (2007) statement that globalization tendencies suppress the locality giving flow to universal monoculture. One could also propose that, with wide prospecting when carrying out the exercise proposed by Grosfoguel (2008), who asks us: why do we not see development based on the native and not the Western gaze? Thus, it would be possible to argue that this would shift the way we are subordinate to spirituality, language, capital, concepts of sexuality, and consequently the consumption options indicated by the “colonial power matrix”.

## 2.2. Territoriality and food in the context of coloniality

Furthering this discussion, we find a fundamental point of convergence between coloniality, territoriality, and food, to which Oliveira (2017) contextualizes:





“Coloniality” involved “nature” and “natural resources” in a complex system of Western cosmology, structured both theologically and secularly. It also fabricated an epistemological system that legitimized its uses of “nature” to generate massive amounts of agricultural “products”, first, and massive amounts of “natural resources” after the Industrial Revolution. The former was still the period of regeneration; with the latter, we entered the recycling period. The industrial and technological revolution also enabled the industrialization of agricultural “products” and the commodification of food and life (OLIVEIRA, 2017, p.8).

The concentrated Green Revolution in Brazil, between the 1960s and 1970s, impregnated food production with the intensive use of mechanization, external inputs, selection techniques for seeds and varieties, heavy use of chemical substances, opening up for increasingly specific and distant markets, assuming homogeneity in the relations of production, consumption and commercialization. The results were reflected in all aspects of life as previously known, whether human or from the ecosystem itself; rural exodus, indebtedness, seizing of land by banking systems, concentration of land, all factors that became constant in rural areas. Pollution, silting up of rivers, contamination and selection of plant and animal species, intoxication of producers and workers also came to figure in the very concept of rural production.

In parallel to this fact is the growing affirmation of eating habits that are by-products of the “power matrix” itself, of the capitalist, mercantilist universe, of life driven by work, for the urban, of fast food, seen in a certain analysis as a substrate for the functionality of a “system gear”, given the value of man as a commodity.

This “cofactor” of the system adapted the territories to produce *commodities*, monocultures destined for the “patriarchal / capitalist / colonial / modern world system” that processes the raw material and normally returns the by-products of the process as well as its version of how to consume them.

This form of rural production added to the “field” productivity, of soy, corn, milk, meat, among many other products and to the table added refined oil, long life milk and canned vegetables, even at the table of farmers, who started to appear as gears of the capital market.

Machado *et al.* (2016, p. 507) reinforce that food as a commodity was definitively validated, starting from the second world war, with the statements of insufficient food in different parts of the world, and increased hunger in the poorest countries, according to authors, these data were corroborated by international bodies such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank that emphasized that low agricultural productivity was responsible for hunger and poverty.

For McMichael (2016), the common point of the different diets developed from this view, has been the supply of low-cost food, which in addition to accumulation in the state system has the function of reducing wage charges, improving real wages, pacification of labor, appropriation of food resources, generation of dependence, costing



of debt and undercutting of producers, the author concludes by placing food as an instrument of dominance used for the exercise of power.

Situation that impels us to reflect on the role of the farmer considered to be inefficient, how he articulates himself to stay alive within this corporate food system, and how the consumer, on the other hand, assumes a fundamental role to keep this type of farmer alive today and active within this marketing policy adopted in relation to food.

Coloniality in this oppressive context comes to be seen as an obstacle to the proposed development format, and perhaps a first obstacle to be removed for the break with territoriality, factors that have as a substrate the transformation of food into a homogeneous product in the service of “colonial matrix”, a concept totally interconnected with the “celebratory modernity”, which Oliveira (2007) deals with, whose final product is the commodification of life.

### 2.3. Slow Food and the construction to “decolonize” it

It is in the questioning of society that the “cracks of resistance” appear in the movements that propose to decolonize and socialize the power matrix, to bring plurality to the discussion, the local, the good, clean and fair for the centrality of the food; figuratively, setting Slow Food in opposition to Fast Food.

Fast food, also known as convenience food or plastic food, can be defined as a ready-to-eat, cheap meal that is served immediately at the counter. This type of food basically includes: sandwiches, pizzas, soft drinks, hamburgers and fries. Fast food is very popular mainly with children and young people, however, consumption is growing among adults due to the fast pace of life that makes time to eat scarce. Generally, this food, in addition to being cheap and conveniently available, provides an injection of carbohydrates and fats, which, in the opinion of some scientists, relieve stress and cause a feeling of well-being (SOUSA, 2013, p. 2)<sup>4</sup>.

It was in this dichotomy that Carlo Petrini, Azio Citi and Giovanni Ravnale, in Bra, a village in the Piedmont region in northern Italy, idealized the Slow Food movement. The name was first used by Folco Portinari, a poet and intellectual, who wrote in 1986 a manifesto opposing the fast-food style. His manifesto contested the values that supported what was defined as “fast life”, criticized the confusion between efficiency and frenzy, and extolled the virtues of a slow life, based on the values and pleasures of the senses and wisdom (PETRINI, 2009). Today's international movement is formed from this base, based in Milan (Italy), which works to value food with respect to those who produce it in harmony with the environment, in addition to seeking to reproduce the knowledge maintained by local traditions (MANUAL DO SLOW FOOD, 2016).

Currently the movement integrates 1500 gatherings in 160 countries, 61 of which are distributed in Brazil. Such structures move different sectors of society around

<sup>4</sup> Author's translation.



production, distribution, consumption and mainly the concept of food (MANUAL DO SLOW FOOD, 2016). The small, the local and the slow are, according to Petrini (2005), fundamental principles of the movement that can be characterized respectively as the approach in terms of, scale, economy and ecosystem, of valorization of the local knowledge, environment and society, of the slowness addressing the quality of life, the pace imposed by daily life and tastefulness at the table.

Slow Food 's structure is made up of global and local bodies, with institutions interconnected by the foundation as a network. In the international sphere, the Slow Food International, the Slow Food Foundation for biodiversity, the Terra Madre Foundation and UNISG - University of Gastronomic Sciences all follow these guidelines. National associations give structure to local action by the movement and are responsible for the “*Convivium*”, which are local nuclei formed around different actors, activists and supporters of the movement. The word “*Convivium*” comes from Latin, and means “a feast”, a banquet; it is at the core of the movement's philosophy, where coexistence is shared and through it the pillars of slowness, actions, campaigns and relationships are built (SALVIANO *et al.* 2016).

The Foundation's actions are guided by projects, currently distributed in five specific axes, named as follows: fortresses, ark of taste, African gardens, land markets, food communities and chefs' alliances. Each of the projects has actions designed locally, discussed and optimized in a network.

In this structure, the Food Communities are the basis of all transversal processes and structures; they involve actors and products that represent a specific location, and include farmers, seed custodians, artisanal fishermen, collectors and extractivists, animal breeders, butchers, and co-producers, among many other actors involved. The Food Community can produce artisanal food according to the principles of good, clean and fair food, or work on building a model of sustainable production, distribution and consumption (MANUAL DO SLOW FOOD, 2016). According to the same guidelines, each community is linked to a specific territory, not only from a geographical point of view, but also from a social, cultural and historical point of view, considering that the connection of food with the territory is a fundamental element of identity and that quality products are manufactured, distributed and/or promoted by these communities.

Food Communities play a key role in rebuilding local production chains and promoting traditional systems for growing or processing products. The relationship of the Food Communities with the Slow Food chain is dependent on each community, that is, they may exist independently, or arise directly from the collaboration of a Community in its territory. Until 2016 there were 2400 communities identified by the movement worldwide (MANUAL DO SLOW FOOD, 2016).

In this context, the consumer is for Slow Food as the center of the power of choice, being in a certain angle “held responsible” for the consequences of themselves, understanding that for the participant of the movement these are not limited to the pleasure of consuming the food, but to co-production as a whole.



## 2.4. The triad: decolonization, territory and food in the context of Slow Food

The transversal relations from production to consumption, as well as the different actors in the network context, are aspects that can be related to what was indicated by Walsh (2007) when referring to the decolonization process, in every sphere previously expressed (Being, Power, Nature, Knowledge), to a collective construction and shared responsibility. It is also important to keep in mind Grosfoguel's (2008) analogy, which points to the need to change from closed systems, as a way of seeing social relations towards open systems, with the perspective of networks interspersed with autonomous domains.

In its characteristics of geographic breadth, permeability of markets, actors and sectors of activity, Slow Food's fundamentals refer to Bourdieu, which states that "the principles for classifying consumption are not static, they move in contemporary societies" (BOURDIEU, 1974, p. 19), and are feasible to knowledge and its capacity for judgment and can therefore be touched or modified. In this regard, Slow Food proposes "education for taste" and the location of the consumer as a co-producer of his own food, not necessarily in an effective way, but also by consumption.

This situation is analogous to the awareness of our colonized state, from which the reinforcements to the resistance and the construction of new forms of life and systems start; all of which can, like Slow Food, create environments of and in permanent construction, which allow the displacement of vision. of development proposed by Grosfoguel, from outside to inside; from the Western, to the native, to the local.

This value of locality approach places territory and territoriality as one of its bases (Figure 1<sup>5</sup>), a cyclical and feedback-based path that builds the reverse spheres for decolonization, of Being, of Knowledge, of Nature and of Power.

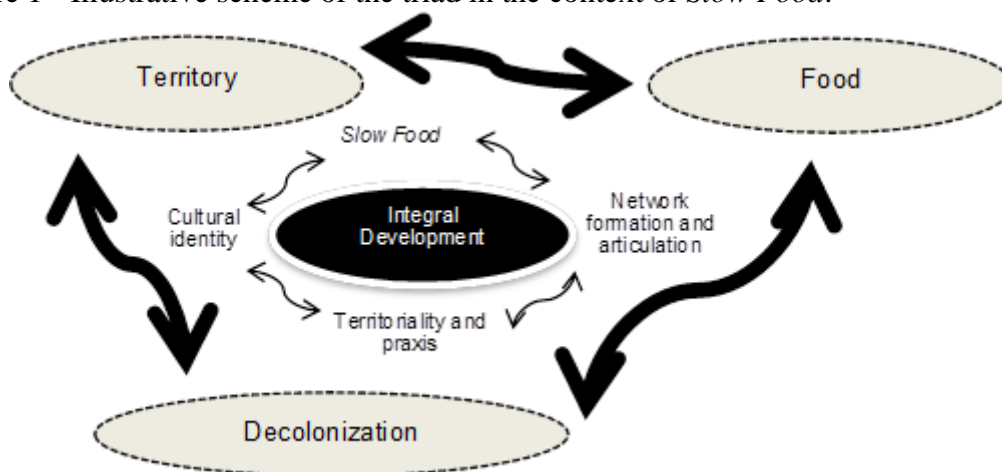
In Figure 1, it is possible to verify a new element complementary to those previously discussed in this text, "territoriality and praxis", contextualized in this focus as a scientific and popular construction process that develops in perfect harmony with the proposed complex, thus allowing for a "territorial adjective to praxis, as the territory contains, in this perspective now evidenced, the necessary content of mobilization, resistance and political struggle against the bourgeois state and the dominant agents of capital" (SAQUET, 2019, p.10) affirmed as tools of a hegemonic movement in the construction of integral development.

<sup>5</sup> Legend Figure 1: territory, food and decolonization are the basis of a cyclical and feedback-based construction that houses "territoriality and praxis", as a scientific and popular construction process as tools of a movement against hegemony, in the case presented, Slow Food, interconnected in the construction of integral development.





Figure 1 - Illustrative scheme of the triad in the context of *Slow Food*.



Source: By the authors.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The Slow Food movement is permeated by education for taste, and thus encourages tasting, visiting and monitoring production processes, and the very broad and complex sense of relationships involved in the designation of “food communities”, resulting in a series of actions capable of promoting the recognition of the local sphere, in a proposal to retake the styles and ways of life of the territories themselves through the understanding of eating as a political, social, economic and environmental act, in clear connection with the proposal to decolonize and modify the matrix of life built so far.

In another perspective, Slow Food does not defend a single food model; it defends the local, understanding the ways of living and doing, affirming, in Petrini's words, “That good is what is good for each culture”, to be built in local, territorial, and unique ways.

A contribution that must be deepened is the global articulation capacity of the movement, which adds an element of contemporaneity and even of connection between the worlds of the local and the market in a clear challenge to the construction of a globalized reality; however, it must be based on plurality, in diversity and uniqueness as an element of wealth and protagonism, to which must be added what Grosfoguel (2008) reminds us, that we always talk about a place of hierarchy and denying it is a permanent exercise.

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