

Social movements as agents of change: Fighting intersectional food inequalities, building food as webs of life

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Abstract

What does the diversity of social movements and food initiatives tell us about processes of social change? I argue that they offer a productive analytical lens to observe social change because they identify injustices and dynamics of inequalities in the food system and are actively engaged in transforming these. Alternative local food initiatives react to the environmental impacts of globalized food relations; food sovereignty movements highlight class inequalities and power asymmetries in the food system that affect people's rights to culturally appropriate foodways; food justice movements denounce institutional racism; feminist movements fight persistent gender inequalities from food production to consumption; vegan movements defend animal rights. These are often mapped onto different world regions, with food justice movements more present in the US; food sovereignty movements louder in the Global South; feminist food movements more active in Latin America; and local food movements commonly in the Global North. This article brings together diverse strands of activism and research on social inequalities related to food under the conceptual umbrella of food inequalities. In addition to concept building, it contributes to a sociology of food studies by mapping the geopolitics of knowledge about social change behind the growing mobilization around food issues.

Keywords

food inequalities, food movements, intersectionality, social inequalities, social movements

Introduction

Social stratification, social distinction, difference and inequalities through food are established research agendas in social studies on food. Novel processes of social change are taking place as food issues become more and more politicized. Food reaches daily

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mass media and public conversations, and increasingly becomes a marker of political positioning, especially amongst the youth, such as in recent debates about meat consumption and climate change. Citizens are not only talking about food and changing their individual eating behaviours due to political and ethical considerations, they are establishing collective ways of promoting alternative relations of food production, distribution, preparation, consumption and waste. In addition, social movements with varied constituencies, goals and strategies mobilize to challenge the structuring forces that generate and reproduce inequalities in the food system.

Peasant movements fighting class inequalities in access to means of production such as land, credits and production policies have taken up issues of food cultures and agroecological food production under the banner of food sovereignty (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). Often consumer-driven, alternative food initiatives aim to reconnect solidarity networks between production and consumption in local food systems and community-supported agriculture (Allen, 2010; Goodman et al., 2012). Feminist movements have taken up the issue of food sovereignty, whereas peasant movements have been responding to gender inequalities within their structures (Aguiar, 2016; Conway, 2018; Masson et al., 2017; Siliprandi, 2015). Food justice movements have denounced white privilege in food movements and institutional racism in the food system, such as the lack of access to nutritious food in non-white and poor communities (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Guthman, 2011; Slocum, 2007). Decolonial struggles fighting for territorial rights for indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendent rural poor, incorporate food sovereignty discourses to denounce food insecurity and deprivation of culturally appropriated foodways (Santos, 2020). Animal rights and vegan movements are speaking for interspecies justice, and analyses follow suit by incorporating multispecies food relations of resistance and care (Beilin & Suryanarayanan, 2017; García, 2019). Veganism emerges as a new practice amongst urban feminists, black soul movements and ecofeminists (Carmo, 2019).

Social innovations and mobilizations around food form a privileged instance to observe social change because they are actively engaged in transforming food relations and the food system. In addition, they provide exceptional lenses to identify key dimensions and dynamics of social inequalities, as they identify injustices related to food and construct solutions to overcome these. In this sense, to follow the agendas and struggles from social movements as well as collective action in food alternative initiatives offers valuable insight into social change through the prism of food. Research has focused on one or another aspect of these dynamics of change, either by following one type of movement or alternative food initiative, as seen in the literature cited above. The diversity and multiplicity of food movements and initiatives, however, merit a more systematic approach in order to take stock of their aggregate impacts on the dynamics of transformation of the food system. The transformation toward a fair and ecological food system, as argued throughout this article, is a complex endeavour. It is a task in which varied organizations and movements within civil society have been engaged, each focusing on specific axes of injustice, sometimes also thematizing intersecting inequalities and building alliances and solidarities. In order to assess their relative contribution, a conceptual framework must do justice to this complexity.

This article aims to make a twofold contribution to understanding the processes of social change at play in the growing politicization of food relations. First, by developing the concept of food inequalities, it organizes the literature on food movements and initiatives according to their emphasis on different axes of inequalities in an intersectional analysis. More than an analytical framework, an intersectional approach that does justice to its origins in black feminist struggles must retain its critical and normative underpinnings vis-a-vis its emancipatory goals. Thus, grounded in feminist epistemologies and political commitments to social change, the concept of food inequalities should also serve as a guide to assess exclusions and potentials for solidarity building across these movements. The concept of food inequalities draws further on a global entangled inequalities framework (Jelin et al., 2017) and seeks to incorporate: (1) multiple structural forces (socioeconomic, sociopolitical, socioecological and cultural), producing hierarchical orderings in relations of food production, commercialization, preparation, consumption and waste; (2) a multi-scalar and relational perspective, focusing on the interdependencies between phenomena at macro, meso and micro-levels, from global historical trends to local negotiations, bridging urban and rural spatialities; (3) plural and intersectional inequalities, affecting social groups categorized across many axes of differences; (4) dynamics of transformation.

Second, the article attempts to contribute to a sociology of knowledge in the food movements literature, by bringing together studies from the Global North and the Global South that have been talking past each other. In devising a feminist food studies agenda, Sachs and Patel-Campillo (2014) have denounced the paradox of the increased role of women in food movements versus the absence of a feminist awareness within these movements. However, their conclusions are based on empirical observations only within the USA, ignoring the mushrooming feminist food movements elsewhere. In Latin America, popular feminisms have productively interpreted the expansion of commodity frontiers on female and subaltern bodies in intersectional terms, articulating anti-capitalist and socio-environmental struggles, gender justice and food sovereignty agendas (Gago, 2020; R. Motta & Teixeira, forthcoming). Often, different studies are mapped onto different world regions, such as food justice movements emerging in the US (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011), food sovereignty movements stronger in the Global South (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014), feminist agrarian movements more active in Latin America and South-East Asia (Agarwal, 1995; Deere & León, 2001), agroecology stronger in Latin America (Altieri & Toledo, 2011), and local food movements more common in the Global North (Goodman et al., 2012).

Building knowledge about transformations in the global food systems is a challenge to be tackled as an ongoing collective agenda that clearly goes far beyond the aspirations and possibilities of this article. It implies collecting various partial perspectives from different parts of the world, in different social positionings; in particular, subaltern voices (Haraway, 1988; Kilomba, 2010). This means not only situating and decentring the social subject of food systems and food movements as these are not unmarked bodies, but also the knowledge construction thereof. Following transformations taking place in political debates, in which each speaker is called upon to disclose their positionality and take responsibility for it, we scholars must follow suit. My own positionality is that of a

cis-female (non-subaltern) migrant scholar situated geopolitically in Northern Europe and doing research predominantly, but not exclusively, in Latin America.

Due to my current research focus on Brazilian food movements, I aim to contribute to this endeavour by bringing Brazilian voices and, when possible, other Latin American experiences, with no (unrealizable) claims of comprehensiveness or representation. The article is based on a literature review on social movements and food. A keyword search was conducted in English of the databases Scopus, Web of Science, Jstor. To move beyond the limitations of the geopolitics of scientific knowledge that disadvantage research conducted in the non-English-speaking Global South, searches were conducted in Portuguese and Spanish. Both languages were chosen for the practical reason that I am fluent in these, and for the importance of Brazil and Latin America in transnational networks of food and rural activism. The following databases were used: Scielo, Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDBT), Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações (Capes), Latindex, Clase, Red de Bibliotecas Virtuales de Ciencias Sociales de América Latina y el Caribe (Clasco) and Google Scholar.¹ All abstracts were read and articles that more clearly dealt with the topic of social movements addressing food inequalities were selected for reviewing. For reasons of scope, some were deemed exemplary but not all could be quoted. I also drew on my own long-standing research on food movements (R. Motta, 2016, 2017; Teixeira & Motta, 2020). The research and analysis are exploratory and qualitative.

The article is structured as follows. It starts with an explanatory note on the varied social movements and initiatives that will be considered under the (imperfect) umbrella ‘food movements’. Then, it analytically proceeds according to the main axis of inequality thematized, namely: (1) class, (2) gender, (3) race, (4) the colonial urban–rural difference and indigeneity, and (5) more-than-human categorical differences with ecologies and interspecies. In each category, I call attention to the intersections with other categories of inequalities and to the exclusions that are present. Next, building on the intersections between categories, I elaborate on the concept of intersectional food inequalities and on the contribution of the article to understanding social change through the lenses of food movements.

Food movements

Peasant movements, alternative food networks, feminist food sovereignty alliances, food justice movements, agroecological movements, veganism: all these mobilizations and initiatives that address inequalities in the food system will be brought together, for the purposes of this article, under the umbrella term ‘food movements’. This denomination does not exhaust their agendas and histories; on the contrary, some of them have only recently and marginally taken up the issue of ‘food’, though they have been long engaged in fighting intersectional inequalities affecting food and agriculture or building up alternative worlds in which food is seen as webs of life. I will briefly review the main social movements and initiatives considered here.

Movements from the rural poor constitute one of the most active sectors in challenging the agrifood system. They are ‘a highly heterogeneous social category, . . . includes small owner-cultivators, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, rural labourers, migrant workers,

subsistence fisherfolks and fish workers, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, peasant women and pastoralists' (Borras et al., 2008, p. 1). They form the grassroots bases of La Via Campesina, the largest transnational social movement, present in all world regions. Their main banner of struggle is food sovereignty, which defines food as a right, and addresses questions of power and autonomy. They have been fostering alternative human–environmental relations in food production, in a shift from an exploitative logic to a logic of care and maintenance, which has been identified as agroecology. A social change is taking place, namely, 'repeasantization' or the reconstruction of peasant territories through agroecology, a process that should be understood in the context of struggles against capitalist industrial farming. Agroecology forms a counter-hegemonic discourse as well as a set of knowledges, techniques, practices and relations.

Feminist and food sovereignty agendas crossed at the transnational level through the collaboration between La Via Campesina and the World March of Women, a transnational popular feminist alliance that has as its foundational focus the fight against hunger, poverty and sexist violence. This alliance is partially explained by the influence of Brazilian and Latin American leadership within both transnational movements (Conway, 2018; Masson et al., 2017). A feminist vision of food sovereignty can be attributed to such collaborations, and is best seen in the Nyéléni Declaration of 2007. This resulted from the World Forum for Food Sovereignty, when 500 delegates from all continents met in the village in Mali from which the declaration takes its name:

Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations. (<https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>)

Alternative food movements and alternative food networks (AFNs) include efforts to establish direct connections between producers and consumers, such as farmers' markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA); the marketing of distinguished food products such as organic, local, quality, premium, artisanal, Fair Trade; the preference for localizing food relations, for example in local food systems, among others. Alternative food initiatives can also be found in state policies that create institutional markets to foster producers and regions, including farm-to-school programmes and food banks. Goodman et al. (2012) question the conflation of the local as the alternative by criticizing the essentialization of scalar categories such as the local and the global. Instead, they rely on critical theorization to assess issues of social justice and sustainability. In a similar vein, Allen (2010) highlights the need to include social justice and democratic participation in all efforts at localizing food systems, but cautions against dismissing their possibilities *tout-court*. Despite their structural constraints to change national and global dynamics, local AFNs 'provide excellent opportunities for imagining and incubating greater equity in the food system' (Allen, 2010, p. 298). Social change in the global food system can thus emerge from the growing experimentations within a myriad of local initiatives.

The food justice movement is growing in the USA, drawing on the legacies of the civil rights movement's struggles against racial segregation in public spaces and services, and from environmental justice movements denouncing chemical contamination

in low-income and non-white communities (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). It expands the agenda of environmental justice movements, restricted to food issues such as chemical contamination by pesticides, contextualizing injustices within a wider critique of industrial agriculture (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). Drawing on the same alternative food initiatives (e.g. farmers' markets, community gardens, CSA), food justice movements localize these within low-income and communities of colour. They aim to improve access to healthy, fresh, diversified food, therefore increasing food security; to support local farmers, and create stable and meaningful jobs, thus promoting social justice; to increase green space and leisure possibilities.

These are all and each important struggles and the challenge lies in looking for alliances, solidarities and articulations. The transformation of the food system in the direction of a fair and ecological alternative is not an easy task (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011) and 'requires recognizing and addressing the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship related to food inequalities' (Sachs & Patel-Campillo, 2014, p. 409). However, food movements have indeed been looking for such intersections and articulating with other struggles, stretching out from their original or main programmatic agenda. The next sections will analyse food movements according to their predominant focus on one axis of inequality in the agrifood system, while also briefly addressing how these movements have expanded their solidarities and agendas – in an intersectional fashion – by engaging with other axes of inequalities.

Transnational consumer classes, class privilege in AFNs and transnational peasant solidarities

Class inequalities are at the heart of debates on the main drivers of transformation in the food system. On the one side, there are alternative food movements, often but not exclusively situated in the Global North, with demands for local, healthy and organic foods, thus embedded in class-blind practices and discourses. On the other side, there are agrarian movements from the rural poor across the globe, in class-framed struggles against land dispossession and for state support for family and peasant farming. In contrast to the historical focus on production within social sciences, there is growing scholarship and activism related to consumption, including political activism in food issues (Portilho, 2020). Class privilege is, however, a marker of such type of activism, and has informed analyses on the emancipatory possibilities of these food movements in building an 'alternative' food system. Two questions arise in relation to this: To what extent are these efforts alternative? Who is benefiting from them, and who is excluded?

Goodman et al. (2012) identify in alternative food movements a qualitative turn, a shift from the industrial world, based on conventions of price and standardization, to a domestic world, based on conventions of trust, tradition and place, as well as to a civic world, anchored in values of social justice and sustainability. The authors review scholarship on the North American efforts to embed food networks in sustainable ecologies, finding that these have privileged green consumerist and individualist relations and neglected the moral economies of social justice, such as the working conditions of farm labourers, their vulnerable citizenship status, questions of race and gender, and of equal

access to nutritious and quality food. There have been instances of reactionary, neopopulist ‘defensive localism’ marked by conservative politics and nativist sentiments. Reviewing the Western European experience, Goodman et al. identify AFNs as means of revitalizing rural livelihoods through niche markets, rural tourism and territorialized value chains. Yet, there is little critical scrutiny of power relations within these AFNs related to working conditions, gender inequalities in property structures, and division of labour within the household as well as at the farm level. Finally, within globalized AFNs, including transnational organic, Fair Trade, certified products and networks, the authors point to the generation of inequalities within communities and the power asymmetries involved due to external auditing, but also the bolstering of local capacities and the building of solidarity networks, resulting in tensions between market and civic worlds.

Despite their intentions, the proliferation of AFNs might generate perverse global dynamics. As Friedmann (2005) points out, growing demand for quality and green food can have the unintended effect of generating a class-divided food system instead of alternative food systems. For Friedmann, social movements’ claims for ecological and healthy food production were transformed in a privatized social change strategy: consumer demand for quality products. A new corporate-environmental food regime has emerged, underscored by green capitalism, which selectively appropriates pressures by social movements that maximize profit opportunities. Two differentiated food supply chains cater for two transnational classes of rich and poor food consumers. Private capital bypasses national regulation by establishing private standards in a myriad of certifications regarding quality, origin and production methods to meet demands of privileged affluent consumers, both in the Global North and the Global South. New forms of social distinction are enacted through novel trends in political and ethical consumption. ‘Good food’ becomes associated with access to knowledge and income. Elitist practices within alternative food movements establish distinctions between those who eat good food and others who are ‘industrial eaters’ (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). The further commodification of food, in turn, systematically creates food insecurity for groups at the intersections of gender, class, racial and citizenship inequalities.

Contrary to Friedmann, for McMichael (2005) it is not class differentiation in food consumption but class struggle related to food production that constitutes the main disputed transformation of the food regime, which he calls the corporate food regime. The growing corporate concentration of land, capital and control over all nodes of the global agrifood chain, from seeds, chemical inputs, to the transport, commercialization, processing and retailing, happens under the auspices of state-led multilateral free trade agreements, in which the neoliberal state is actively invested, on the one hand, in deregulating policies that once protected small farming, and, on the other, in crafting regulations on both intellectual property rights over seeds as well as lax health and environmental policies. Accumulation by dispossession underlies the logic that counterposes ‘productive’ food systems and subsistence food systems, the latter devalued together with the knowledges, practices and peoples engaged in agrobiodiverse, peasant food cultures. This is legitimized in the name of development, which constructs the urban consumer modelled after Western patterns while sending peasant ways of living to the dustbin of history. In this context, food sovereignty movements, led by the transnational peasant movement *La Via Campesina*, emerge as the key agents of emancipatory transformations

in the food system, countering the dynamics of capitalist accumulation by demanding land reform. In many regions, peasant movements have a strong class-identity and identify their struggle mainly as anti-capitalist.

La Via Campesina is the largest transnational grassroots peasant movement, with strong claims of representation for those actually working on the land, or producing food in diverse modes of living, such as fisherfolk, pastoralists, forest dwellers. It distinguishes itself by a combination of direct action and critical negotiation with multilateral institutions, having played a key role in challenging the hegemony of the free trade regime (Borras et al., 2008; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). The ambivalences of La Via Campesina and the food sovereignty agenda are under fierce scrutiny in debates on how to reconcile the defence of family farming with the fight against gender inequalities (Agarwal, 2014); on how important it is not to dismiss technology outright and instead shape the development of technology for emancipatory purposes (Kloppenburgh, 2014); and on the need to engage with international and domestic markets, as well as with the state to shape an alternative agrarian development model that responds to global challenges (Edelman et al., 2014). Next to the centrality of land reform and rights, there are a number of instances in which peasant movements address other dimensions of inequalities, assuming feminist and ecological agendas, and experimenting with new market possibilities, such as by pursuing alliances with urban consumers.

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST), for example, became the main producer and exporter of organic rice in Brazil. It innovated in establishing cooperatives and agro-ecological food production as forms of resistance (Pahnke, 2015). De Carvalho (2020) reconstructs the transformations in the agenda and repertoires of the Movement of Small Farmers (MPA), from the initial focus on access to credits and rural housing programmes in the 1990s to the articulation of a peasant identity in the 2000s. This contrasts with the previous identification as family farmers in small-scale capitalist farming. As members of La Via Campesina, they developed a Peasant Plan that hoped to bring food to the tables of all Brazilians. Both movements have adopted alternative food initiatives such as farmers' markets, food baskets and the establishment of shops in urban centres, like the *Armazéns do Campo* from MST and *Raízes do Brasil* from MPA (Tanaka & Portilho, 2019). Niederle and Wesz Junior (2018) narrate how agroecological networks and peasant movements successfully included in the Brazilian legislation on organic farming two processes of participatory certification – as an alternative to conventional external auditing, often very expensive and exclusionary – and developed certifications of agroecological and biodynamic production methods in addition to those that recognize the political subjects that produce the food, peasant farming or indigenous products.

In my own research, I have participated in plenaries and seminars in which leaders from MPA and MST stated the importance of establishing solidarity with urban workers and with politicized consumers through food networks and agroecology, while highlighting that the political subject of food sovereignty is the working class. Such efforts of moving beyond classic issues of class struggles point to the importance of an intersectional approach to food inequalities. Class inequalities might be politicized by peasants as the main problem in the agrifood system as well as used as an analytics to assess the inclusive character of alternative food movements, namely, to what extent these are intertwined with class privilege in their discourses and strategies. Class analysis within

food regime debates overcomes the methodological nationalism and static character of most analysis of social determinants of food security by identifying class inequalities and dynamics from a global and transnational perspective. However, for a long time and in many class-informed movements, the focus on class has foreclosed the politicization of other axes of inequalities.

Gender inequalities, feminist food movements and feminist food studies

Historically and in many world regions, gendered nutritional inequalities have been documented, with women and girls receiving lesser portions of food (Beardsworth & Keil, 1996; Patel, 2012). Beyond the focus on women and food consumption in the household, a gender-theoretical analysis of the food system unveils power inequalities also at meso and macro-levels. At a macro-level, the concentration of power in corporations along the supply chain underscores hegemonic masculinities, with profit-driven logics and externalization of social and environmental impacts (R. Motta, 2017; Patel, 2012). A systematic bias conditions public credit on the purchase of proprietary seeds and chemical inputs, while women's agroecological knowledge and practices are invisibilized and left without technical support (Siliprandi, 2015). The dissemination of processed food is at heart of the political economy of obesity/NCDs (non-communicable diseases). However, the state eschews regulation of corporate power and instead responsabilizes individuals for their diets, on the one hand, and mothers for nutritional education, on the other. Many authors agree that the solution lies in addressing gendered power inequalities in decision-making that affects agriculture and food policies (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Patel, 2012; Sachs & Patel-Campillo, 2014). This also applies to the meso-level of organizations and social movements, in which women form the rank-and-file, but they rarely reach political offices whereby they could influence state policies.

Allen and Sachs (2007) classify gendered perspectives on food in three domains of feminist theorizing. The first is corporeal and relates to women's tormented relationship with eating due to social expectations concerning their bodies. A second domain is socio-cultural and discusses women's responsibility for food-related care work at home. Middle-class women might transfer care work to other women in precarious jobs, instead of renegotiating the gendered division of labour. Even though women are typically more engaged as political consumers, scholarship in political consumption consists of gender-blind research. The third domain is material and refers to food work in farms, food processing and retailing: women are more likely to be hired in seasonal, flexible, part-time and lower-echelon jobs; as de-unionized workers and undocumented migrants, they receive lower wages for the same job and are vulnerable to sexual harassment. By contrast, men concentrate in leadership and managerial positions in agribusiness corporations and in agricultural sciences (versus the feminized domain of nutrition).

Despite women's active participation in food movements, Allen and Sachs note 'a curious absence of feminism per se in women's efforts to create change in the agrifood system, with the exception of corporeal politics' (Allen & Sachs, 2007, pp. 13–14), as women do not consciously challenge gender inequalities, and rather often reinscribe these in social movements by assuming more invisible tasks and not leadership positions.

Feminist body politics, while exceptional, do not take up gendered unequal divisions of labour, such as food work, a trigger of domestic violence and an established topic within feminist movements (Allen & Sachs, 2007).

Going beyond the empirical referents of the works quoted above, and moving south to Latin America, there is in fact a mushrooming of feminist, bottom-up food movements. In the 1990s, women's organizing for land ownership took up issues of power inequalities within agrarian and indigenous movements (Deere & León, 2001).² In Brazil, feminist organizing within agrarian movements has achieved some policy changes such as joint land titles, and labour rights such as pension and maternity leave. Within urban and rural unions, the implementation of parity rules begun in the 1990s (Aguiar, 2016; Cardoso Pimenta, 2019). La Via Campesina movements have also included gender in their agenda, though there was initial reluctance due to a fear of displacing the focus on class struggle (Deere & León, 2001). The Movement of Peasant Women, also part of La Via Campesina, emerged as an autonomous movement and an alternative to strategies of advancing gender equality within mixed movements. In 2000, the MST implemented a gender committee in all its sections, and has recently also taken up the issue of LGBT rights, but it was only in March 2020 that it organized the First National Meeting of Landless Women. In 2003, the MPA organized the First National Meeting on Gender Relations, Power and Class (de Carvalho, 2020) and later published a book on Peasant Women in collaboration with academics (Pessanha Neves & Servolo de Medeiros, 2013). There is an ongoing discussion on the limitations of parity rules within agrarian movements. The challenge is to go beyond having women merely occupy offices in gender, youth and education sections; and instead recognize their contribution to broader discussions on land, agrarian development and food policies.

Feminism is also a mobilizing force within the National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA), a network of agrarian and urban movements and alternative food initiatives founded in 2002. Within ANA the slogan 'without feminism there is no agroecology' gained strength, to denounce how agroecology involves not only transitions to ecological farming but also social change in gender relations. Women activists within La Via Campesina staged important protest actions on 8 March across Brazil (Menegat & Silva, 2019), associating a key date in the feminist calendar with demands for transformation in the food system. In parallel, feminist organizing within rural unions has led the national protest march *Marcha das Margaridas*, which has had six 'editions' since 2000, bringing between 20,000 and 100,000 women to Brasilia (Teixeira & Motta, 2020). The *Marcha das Margaridas* emerged in alliance with a number of rural and feminist movements, among which the World March of Women.

While popular feminist and food sovereignty agendas articulate class and gender inequalities, there is an absence of a clear anti-racist positioning in these movements (Conway, 2018). Popular feminist movements in Brazil, however, have fiercely rejected the discourse blaming women's insertion in the labour market in the last decades of 20th century for the obesity epidemic, not only with the feminist demand for an equal responsibility for care work, but by denouncing the class and racial privilege embedded in such a narrative. An anti-racist agenda has been at the core of food justice movements, to which we turn next.

Food justice movements: An explicit anti-racist critique

Alternative food movements have come under criticism for their class and white privilege, which imbricates their narratives, lifestyles and main strategy: the purchase of local and organic food as a means to foster economic, environmental and social change in the food system (Guthman, 2008, 2011; Slocum, 2007). Anti-racist approaches and class-informed analyses converge here in highlighting the structural inequalities in the political economy and institutional racism of the food system, which build the context for food choices: ‘the racialized political economy of food production and distribution meets the cultural politics of food consumption’ (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, p. 13). Rejecting the individualist framework of choice, scholars highlight instead socioeconomic and cultural constraints and possibilities that a food environment offers. Concepts such as food deserts and food swamps help to explain the higher prevalence of food insecurity, malnourishment and obesity amongst low-income and non-white groups. The lack of access to a diversified, nutritious, well-balanced and affordable diet is related to institutional racism in urban planning that, intentional or not, creates spatial segregation that systematically disadvantages non-whites.

Reacting to that, the food justice movement aims to strengthen local, fair and sustainable community food systems. It seeks to expand discussions on such food systems to explicitly include equity considerations (Allen, 2010): these must be just and fair, addressing racial and socioeconomic injustice; health and environmental benefits of local food systems must be accessible to all marginalized communities as well. These initiatives emphasize grassroots mobilization, community-based organizational dynamics and access to decision-making power in policies and matters affecting their communities. A cautionary note is necessary at this point. The definition of the community as a political subject of emancipatory food systems must be accompanied by the caveat that communities are not harmonious, power-free entities, and might reproduce patriarchal inequalities. In fact, the lack of consideration of intersections with gender in food justice movements has been observed by a number of scholars (Alkon, 2012; Smith, 2019).

In Brazil – a country often compared to the USA in debates on racism for its much higher percentage of black population – institutional racism in the food system shows similar structuring orderings, but anti-racist activism is very different. Food justice is not a common expression and denomination for movements, but there is a growing engagement of black activism with food issues, seen in a proliferation of public events, engaged artistic work, podcasts, social media groups. Urban black movements and black activists have been using the term ‘nutricide’, borrowed from the US activist Llaia O Afrika (Ribeiro, 2020). It refers to the degradation of black people’s health as related to the change in food diets and culture due to the increasing role of corporate power in promoting industrial food. Afro-vegan, peripheral vegan and black vegan feminist activism is growing louder in social media and organizing events, thus countering class and racial privilege in vegan feminist movements (Carmo, 2019). There is one documented instance in which black movements have engaged in food security and sovereignty debates during the World Social Forum in Salvador, Bahia, in 2018, whereby the topic of black women’s access to food as a human right was raised (Hidalgo et al., 2020).

The adoption of a strong anti-racist critique in Brazilian social movements organized to challenge injustices in the food system remains a political challenge. In the peasant movements mentioned above, there are scarcely any alliances with black movements. Despite the demographics of their grassroots, composed in their majority by non-white members, peasant movements have failed to address racial inequalities, in contrast to gender agendas – an absence that has been noted by activists and scholars. Provocatively, one activist-scholar calls attention to the absence of intersectional feminist organizing within agroecological networks: ‘if there is racism, then there is no agroecology, nor [is there] feminism’ (VD Motta, 2020, p. 3). In the official documents of the Marcha das Margaridas, intersections of class, gender, race, ethnicity are mentioned, but there is a long path towards the adoption of a clear anti-racist stance. De Souza (2017) interviewed MST leaders in Bahia, the state with the highest proportion of black populations, in order to enquire as to why the MST did not take up the racial issue. Drawing on key sociological works articulating class and race, and considering that social inequalities in rural areas are structurally intertwined with slavery and racism, Souza makes a strong case for considering the agrarian question and the racial question as co-constitutive. He considers it a mistake that peasants and black movements choose to focus on only one of these issues instead of articulating both struggles; social change will not be complete unless this is addressed.

Interestingly, such separations evolved historically from within black movements. *Quilombos*, namely black rural communities formed by runaway and ex-slaves, have focused on territorial rights. Quilombolas’s resistance shows how anti-racist struggles are part of decolonial struggles (Santos, 2020).³ Territorial struggles have historically fought for sovereignty over a specific piece of land, for autonomy to develop culturally appropriate and ecological food practices. Newer historical accounts about slavery and resistance in the colonial times across the Americas have rejected victimized accounts of slaves, recognizing their agency in building a variety of dynamic food systems and mercantile economies beyond accounts of isolated escapes and survival economies. In point of fact, food production by enslaved peoples were decisive in contexts of chronic food scarcity such as monocultures. Santos (2020) affirms that food sovereignty struggles must adopt the racial agenda due to the coloniality of power in the food system.

The coloniality of the urban–rural difference and indigenous peoples’ food sovereignty

A decolonial perspective on food inequalities opens the analytical lens to different histories of racialization beyond the construction of blackness and whiteness that is so central to the US case. In Latin American, discourses of *mestizaje* have complexified dichotomous racial categories, with enduring effects in legitimizing inequalities; this poses significant obstacles for resistance. As a consequence, many decolonial struggles do not take up anti-racism as central, despite the constitutive role of racism in their subaltern condition. In the Brazilian case, the political category of traditional peoples and communities has emerged out of struggles and alliances between indigenous peoples, rural black communities, and many other categories of the rural poor who do not identify themselves in primarily racial categories, but are by and large, non-white. The core of

decolonial struggles is the fight for the territorial rights, since colonial violence included not only the genocide of indigenous communities but the ongoing dispossession of their land and possibilities of cultural reproduction. In Latin American struggles against the coloniality of power and the coloniality of gender, rurality constitutes a category of colonial difference that emerges in solidarity building. Far from an established category in intersectional analysis, rurality might inform other struggles in a global context of increasing violence in areas of commodity extraction, such as in mining regions and agrarian frontiers (R. Motta & Teixeira, forthcoming).

The coloniality of the urban–rural difference is an axis of inequality that intersects with race. Black farmers’ organizations in the USA have denounced systematic racial discrimination in the access to land, credits and technical assistance. Immigration laws guaranteed access to land to European groups while denying it to Asian migrants (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). Migration policies in nation-building processes in Latin America were also informed by scientific racism. Land was distributed to incoming migrants from Europe and Asia but never to black peoples. In Brazil, according to 2017 census data in 5 million rural properties, black farmers make up 74% of properties with less than 5 hectares and decrease in participation in land ownership in larger properties, with white farmers owning 70% of properties larger than 1000 hectares (Fonseca & Pina, 2019). There is an intersection of racial categories with citizenship rights that can also be observed within migrant communities in many parts of the world. Racialized, undocumented, poor migrants are more likely to be exploited as farm workers. Considering the different histories of racialization in other places, an important research agenda for a global sociology of food would be to unveil how institutional racism plays out in different parts of the world.

Land dispossession and cultural discrimination impair the possibilities of indigenous and traditional peoples to produce and consume culturally appropriate food. Traditional food becomes a symbol of decolonial resistance. The world’s rural poor are most affected by food insecurity (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] et al., 2020), including indigenous populations (Bertoncello, 2019). In the US, Norgard et al. (2011) explain that higher poverty and food insecurity amongst indigenous populations are attributable not only to past histories of colonial conquest, but to the persistent violations of land rights and autonomy in contemporary state infrastructure projects, such as the building of roads and dams. These are racial projects, in the sense that they lead to forced assimilation and hamper cultural environmental management practices that have shaped food gathering and production within indigenous populations.

In addition to territorial struggles, indigenous and traditional peoples have been actively shaping an alternative, counter-hegemonic food system. Some indigenous movements have taken up the food sovereignty agenda and also form part of *La Via Campesina*. Indigenous women have been mobilizing for their rights, articulating political agendas of body politics, territorial rights and popular feminisms. In 2019, 3000 indigenous women camped and marched in Brasilia and later joined the *Marcha das Margaridas*, in Brazil (Teixeira & Motta, 2020). New food initiatives can also serve to create a safe space for indigenous women. In a bakery cooperative, Zapatista women exchanged experiences of oppression, such as domestic violence, and developed friendship and feminist solidarities, bypassing their isolation in kinship ties (Eber, 1999).

Forms of indigenous resistance also engage market relations. In Mexico, furthermore, Hernández Castillo and Nigh (1998) studied how Mayan coffee growers – the Mam people in the region of Chiapas – have incorporated principles of agroecology, cooperativism and Fair Trade in their relations of production and commercialization, as a response to the threats posed by the entry into force of NAFTA. Countering essentialized notions, Castillo and Ny describe how the Mam have participated in workshops led by the Catholic Church and learned from European cooperativism, which resonated with their traditions of communal work. In turn, agroecology offered an adequate response to their problems with pesticides and soil degradation, while also resonating with their reconstructed memories on farming knowledge and traditions. They achieved direct access to a global market of European green consumers of organic agriculture.

It is not always the case that indigenous peoples benefit from the marketization of their food cultures and products. In new Peruvian cuisine, *mestizaje* became a (market) value. After centuries of erasure of indigenous elements, Peru is experiencing a celebration of a fusion multicultural cuisine that incorporates indigenous food in processes of nation-building, but which, according to Matta (2017), relies on neoliberal constructions of entrepreneurial subjectivities that do not actually foster social inclusion of subaltern indigenous peoples. García (2013, 2019) looks into the subaltern of this culinary nation-building process, bringing invisible indigenous and non-human worlds to the analysis of the supply chain of the culinary nation. The colonial history of violence goes beyond the genocide of indigenous people and is present in the coloniality of power that oppresses their epistemologies and cosmologies, including food cultures. García connects histories of racialization and animality by which mastery over races and nature was established in colonial processes; in entanglements in human–animal violence. Indigenous cosmologies are non-dualist, involving more-than-human relational ontologies that recognize political agency in various relations in the webs of life.

More-than-humans: Agroecology, animal rights and matters of care

There are at least two important strands of food activism and research that go beyond human-centred categories of inequality to include human–environmental relations and more-than-human beings. First, as shown in all previous sections, different movements and initiatives use agroecology as a counter-hegemonic discourse, farming practice and political movement. A key ‘movement form’ of agroecology is the Cuban method *campesino-a-campesino* or farmer-to-farmer, in which there are horizontal exchanges for problem solving in farming. Researching movements in Brazil, the Andean region, Mexico, Central America and Cuba, Altieri and Toledo (2011) speak of an ‘agroecological revolution’ in Latin America, which consists of epistemological, technical and social pillars. Agroecology draws on traditional peasant knowledges and techniques and on contemporary science to produce healthy, diverse food with low inputs while rescuing and conserving soil and agrobiodiversity. It is also a political movement that empowers peasant organizations, with a potential ‘to promote broad-based and sustainable agrarian and social change’ (Altieri & Toledo, 2011, p. 587). Martínez-Torres and Rosset (2014) argue that the growing adoption of agroecology amongst organizations within La Via

Campeſina results from their political and pedagogical practices that further a *diálogo de saberes*, a dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing from different rural cultures across the globe, including peasant, indigenous, farmer, pastoralist and rural proletarian traditions. Members from La Via Campeſina participate in agroecology and political leadership training that takes place in peasant schools and faculties.

A second perspective is found within the environmental humanities, a new transdisciplinary research field much inspired by Donna Haraway's path-breaking work on companion species. Based on the recognition of human beings' structural interdependence and entanglements with other species, her work was extremely influential in bringing attention to anthropocentrism in scientific categories. Learning to notice, think and feel with more-than-human others (Tsing, 2015) is equally a challenge for food movements. Intersectional food inequalities must incorporate more-than-human others in identifying situations of injustice, developing solidarity networks and taking responsibility for them.

Reconstructing the history of mobilization for animal welfare and animal rights, Heltosky (2012) argues that these had measurable impacts on ideas and behaviour about consumption of animals and animal products. Contrasting to culinary traditions which had been much the focus of food studies, this is a case of culinary change not as adaptation to resource scarcity or necessity, but out of choice. Vegetarianism and veganism grew out of two broader discussions that emerged in the 1970s in the Global North on the consequences of one's diet: ethical debates on the subjugation of animals for human purposes (speciesism) and the environmental consequences of meat-based diets in a world of scarce resources. During the 1990s, public attention to factory farms grew due the mad-cow-disease epidemic in Europe. Since then, feed practices and medical treatments of animals – including the use of antibiotics and hormones – raised issues of cruelty and food safety. In the wake of global justice movements, protests in Europe also targeted the McDonaldization of food, that is, the global homogenization of food cultures spearheaded by the transnational food industry. Heltosky contrasts these movements to unintentional vegetarianism to which the world's poor were forced until at least the 1950s, when there was a rise in mass meat consumption.

However, such social change in diets – or nutritional transition – must be situated within the Global North (Beardsworth & Keil, 1996), and even in affluent societies, these trends will look differently according to class, race, gender, citizenship. In the Global South, meat and processed food are symbols of upward social mobility and their consumption has only begun to be more accessible to broader sections of society in the last two decades. This is not a reliable process and data point to the rise of food insecurity in contexts of economic crisis in Brazil, and with the COVID-19 pandemic (Galindo et al., 2021). As noted above, there is growing vegan activism within black and peripheral movements in Brazil, but there is a need to investigate how vegan movements take up issues of class, racial privilege and alterity. The dissemination of vegan practices and repertoires within Brazilian feminist movements has been studied by Carmo (2019) under the concept of feminist gastropolitics. She investigates the emergence of new meanings, values, embodiments and political subjects at the intersection of political grammars between veganism and feminism. The author argues that veganism furthers the process of politicization of the private sphere and becomes a feminist political sign in which gender and sexual conventions are contested. By including interspecies

relationships, it expands on debates about hierarchies and oppressions over (edible) bodies, human and otherwise. Feminist gastropolitics shows the plurality within both veganism and feminism. Aware of racial and class exclusions, she also notes the absence of issues dear to rural women's struggles, which she attributes to the urban-centred and individualist character of vegan activism. But there is also a growing black vegan feminist activism in the USA and in Brazil.

Research has also taken up speciesism as an analytical category to investigate food inequalities. In her multispecies ethnography on the new Peruvian gastronomy boom, García visits guinea-pig (*cuy*s) farms, which have been re-signified from associations with poverty and racism to aspirations of cosmopolitanism in the new Andino cuisine. Having witnessed a dying pregnant guinea pig, she interrogates 'who counts as a subject? Who is made killable, or grievable? Who lives, and how?' (García, 2019, p. 358). Challenging the indifference to the violence exercised on confined, instrumentalized for-profit and deemed-to-death female *cuy* bodies, García raises productive possibilities of grievance and compassion. From an ethics of care, she believes that we can learn to feel responsible for those lives. A 'heartbreak may make us more open to more radically encompassing forms of justice that do not depend on the predictable collectivities of family, nation, race, or species and leave room for the "unpredictable we" that crosses those lines' (García, 2019, p. 368).

Interspecies food justice is not only about veganism and animal farming. Inspired by Haraway's work and Tsing's (2015) call to cultivate arts of noticing in her research with mushrooms, I have observed – in my research on agroecological transformations in household gardens and small family farming – changes in the discourses and practices to deal with 'pests' and 'plagues'. Instead of combating ants or running away from them (de Carvalho Cabral, 2015), I saw participants of workshops speaking of 'coexisting with ants' and the dissemination of consortia planting as a means to create diversified food-spaces that also feed insects. Instead of an instrumentalized vision of gardens operating uniquely in the service of human food, people practising agroecology acknowledge the need to feed and care for more-than-humans. Beilin and Suryanarayanan (2017) have equally incorporated other species in alliances against industrial agriculture in Argentina, using the concept of multispecies resistance to this end. Seen as a plague for soy producers, amaranth becomes an ally for communities fighting the expansion of soy monocultures and associated environmental contamination with pesticides. A more-than-human approach to food as webs of life include other biological kingdoms such as fungi (Tsing, 2015) and soil bacteria (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015). In the permaculture movement, Puig de la Bellacasa looks into human–soil relations alternative to exploitative and instrumental, unilateral relationalities of dominant food production regimes. From a feminist perspective, she understands care as involving ethical-political, practical and affective dimensions in food relations. Care politics in food production invites farming that maintains and repairs soil, 'foodweb-friendly' soil care techniques. Interestingly, while these are innovative practices for some food movements, their practitioners are aware that these are 'a thousand years old, integrating knowledge from contemporary indigenous modes of re-enacting ancestral cosmologies' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 708). Following Puig de la Bellacasa, a care approach always begs the question of who cares for whom? In other words, who is the political subject of food care politics?

It is thus problematic when more-than-human or posthuman perspectives expand theorizing inequalities and resistances to incorporate non-human others but do so by forgetting to decentre humans. For example, living with worms and composting can become a trend for affluent and knowledgeable individuals pursuing green lifestyles in urban centres, but it is necessary to situate this experience and contextualize various inequalities involved in food waste; in many parts of the world, there are people feeding themselves from dumping grounds. Decentring speciesism in activism and research on food inequalities runs the danger of treating the human species in undifferentiated ways. Following Braidotti's (2013) feminist posthuman perspectives, not all are equally affected or share the same responsibility when it comes to global issues such as climate change and food security. As such, critical food studies must face the challenge of incorporating many axes of inequalities, including more-than-human others, such as animals, plants, insects, fungi, bacteria and ecologies. By the same token, movements focusing on animal rights must also be critically assessed by their ability to feel with other human beings suffering injustices in the food system.

Intersectional food inequalities

Based on a review of research on social movements fighting varied dimensions of food inequalities, this article has sought to contribute to existing scholarship in two ways. First, with the development of the concept of food inequalities as an intersectional analytical tool to make sense of different axes and dimensions of inequalities, in various scales, as well as their dynamics of reproduction and change in the food system. The concept suggested here draws on a global entangled inequalities framework (Jelin et al., 2017). Firstly, this means acknowledging the multidimensionality of food inequalities, given that the structural ordering of food relations combines the political economy of agriculture, the cultural politics of food, gendered macro-politics of the food system, the institutional racism and coloniality of power in the food system, and structural oppressive human–nature orderings. Second, global entangled food inequalities must be understood following a multi-scalar and relational perspective, in the sense that inequalities were observed in the levels of bodies, households, within communities, in national social movement organizations, in transnational movements and alliances, and in their relationalities to global dynamics of the food system. Third, food inequalities are not only multidimensional and multi-scalar, they are intersectional, affecting different groups in different ways. The literature on food movements was structured following the analytical categories class, gender, race, rurality, indigeneity and the more-than-human, which represent the most visible faces of injustice and activism. The discussion revealed intersections with other categories, in order to build a framework in which these do not add up, but rather are assessed as they include or exclude other categories in intersecting ways. This must be expanded to include many other categories of inequalities, such as disabilities (Gerber, 2007; Williams-Forson & Wilkerson, 2011), sexuality (Smith, 2019), and others to come. Fourth, the discussion aimed to identify dynamics of change in food relations, including new activisms, new alliances between food movements and other movements, and how issues cross-fertilize between them. It further examined the limitations in emancipatory struggles when, for instance, agroecological transitions or the

building of community food systems are not accompanied by the discussion of power and gender inequalities within movements. The concept was built inductively, following social movements' claims against injustices in the hegemonic food system as well as their prefigurative politics of building alternative foodways. Concomitantly, the concept can serve as an open analytical lens to take stock of emerging struggles and invisibilized inequalities.

A second goal of the article was to contribute to efforts to decentre food studies by reviewing works not published in the English language and the major indexed scientific articles, or by academics based in the Global North. The article engages in debates from food activists and scholars working on Latin America, with a stronger focus on Brazil, and contributes to building a global sociology of food. This is an incipient effort, considering the strength of food activism and scholarship in Latin America and the need to expand such endeavours to include other world regions and languages.

This overview also revealed two open debates regarding the dynamics and directions of change in the food system that deserve further research. One debate concerns the lines of conflict and coalition building within/between these movements. Although there is consensus regarding the need to reform the global food system, there are a number of divides that prevent coalition building to transform food relations towards fair and ecological practices. There is disagreement vis-a-vis the leading role of different movements in shaping the direction of change, such as movements for healthy and green consumption versus those concerned with social justice; as well as between reformist and radical movements (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). A second open debate relates to the emancipatory potential of social innovations arising from these movements. Does political consumption substitute politics and collective action and create new inequalities such as class-divided diets? Do local markets and community supported agriculture create new exclusions along racial and class lines?

Future research agendas on food and social change might take up these open debates on food movements, bridging between contestation and experiments of alternatives, guided by a conceptual framework that accounts for various dimensions and intersections of inequalities addressed by different movements, such as the concept of food inequalities presented here. Food inequalities are conceptualized from a pro-social justice, feminist, anti-racist, decolonial and posthuman epistemological stance. This is a political and theoretical desideratum, a principle that might never be fully realized, but which orients theoretical and analytical efforts. A pro-social justice perspective is attentive to new dynamics of class formation at place in the food system and class-privilege in many food movements and alternative food initiatives for building sustainable food systems. A feminist food studies agenda would include identifying relations of oppression and inequalities in food production, distribution, preparation, consumption and waste; visibilize efforts to change them as well as power relations within food movements; visibilize food-related care work; visibilize knowledge and practices in agroecological systems as contributing to the reproduction of life; and finally, adopt an intersectional approach through, for instance, an understanding of gender as always classed, racialized, and intersecting with other differences. A decolonial perspective brings to the fore the constitutive role of racial hierarchies and integrates the '*question of the Other*', *the subaltern*, *i.e. who is included, who is left out?* A posthuman ecological perspective goes beyond the

categorical differences within the human species to include more-than-human others, such as animals, plants, bacteria and ecologies. The concept of food inequalities embraces an open-ended intersectional approach and a politics of care that conceives of food not in instrumentalized ways for the purpose of human nourishment alone, but looks at it as webs of life to be cherished and maintained.

Such a concept might inform analyses of social and political experimentations that address inequalities currently undermining food justice and food sovereignty in their potential to build fair and ecological food relations. For instance, a class-based peasant movement might protract decisions to take up gender issues more directly; feminist rural movements might not tackle racism; and local alternative food movements might be uncritically class-exclusive. There is a great heterogeneity also within these denominations, with peasant movements in different localities advancing more or less in non-class-based demands. While it appears unproblematic that social movements will have political priorities and strategical alliances, from an analytical perspective it is important to openly discuss clear criteria to map various cases, and to assess emancipatory potentials and limitations of social movements and alternative food initiatives as agents of social change. Alternative and counter-hegemonic food systems will require the building of class solidarities, inter-racial coalitions, new gender orders and respectful interspecies coalitions.

Author's note

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Notes

1. The combination of keywords used in English was: social movements AND food; social movements AND agricultural OR agrarian; social movements AND rural; social movements AND consumption; inequalities AND racism OR race; inequalities and feminism OR gender OR women; inequalities AND class; inequalities AND environment; inequalities AND animals OR vegan OR vegetarian. In Portuguese: alimentação AND movimentos sociais OR movimentos camponeses OR movimentos sociais rurais; alimentação AND ação coletiva OR ação política; ativismo alimentar; movimentos sociais AND soberania alimentar; alimentação AND consumo OR politização do consumo; alimentação AND mulheres OR feminism OR gênero; alimentação AND raça OR questão racial OR antirracismo OR população negra;

alimentação AND povos e comunidades tradicionais; alimentação AND povos indígenas; alimentação AND quilombolas; alimentação AND desigualdades sociais OR classe social OR pobreza. In Spanish the same words were used as in Portuguese. The search included results published up to August 2020.

2. Deere and León (2001) are in a conversation with Agarwal's (1995) research on land tenure and gender inequalities in South-East Asia.
3. At the same time, the agenda of territorial rights from quilombolas is legally and institutionally located, within Brazilian politics, under the auspices of the racial question and not the agrarian question. The Brazilian Quilombola Plan includes actions to foster food sovereignty, including governmental purchase of their food for public school meals. Quilombolas have formed a commission within the then National Food Security Council and have organized National Meetings on the Food and Nutritional Security of Black Populations and Traditional Peoples (Santos, 2020).

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