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Access, Health, *Re-conhecimento*: Co-crafted Brazilian discourses on sustainable food

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1 INTRODUCTION

The public issues of food justice and food sovereignty have been widely studied in Geography, as have the discourses underpinning policy in these areas. Central demands have included recentring marginalized groups within food systems. However, it has been noted, for example by Herman et al. (2018), that it is an ongoing struggle to bring a greater diversity of voices to the academic debate on food justice.

Meanwhile, initiatives and practices of ethical food consumption have gathered pace over the past few decades as a means through which social and environmental justice issues are tackled (Barnett et al., 2011). Regarding scholarship on ethical consumption, over a decade ago Cotte & Trudel (2009) in their systematic review of literature on socially conscious consumption, showed that 90% of the studies focused on North American and European consumers. There have since been some efforts to publish empirical findings from a greater diversity of countries and context, but an imbalance remains. A further necessary step is to engage with theorisation and framings emanating from distinct cultural contexts on and in their own terms, rather than imposing Northern policy and academic discourses while collecting data in the South (McEwan 2014; Rhaguram & Madge 2006). Place and positionality matter in knowledge production, and geographers in particular have called for steps towards broadening the dialogue with a greater variety of voices, knowledges and research practices.

On the themes of ethical and sustainable consumption, much of the literature has focused on 'responsibilized' consumers who are positioned as agents of change in and by neoliberal contexts, where politics regarding environmental and social issues are expressed through the market and consumer choice (Barnett et al, 2011). Often, ethical and sustainable consumption in these settings involves the choice to purchase and use products bearing labels of environmental and ethical standards. However, there have been growing calls to look beyond

such narrow and explicit forms of ethical and sustainable consumption and to consider a broader range of consumption practices with dimensions of sustainability and, to paraphrase Gregson and Ferdous (2015), to embrace ordinary practice of consumption that might have ethical and sustainable effects.

These forms of consumption need to be understood in the contexts of everyday practices, discourses, institutional contexts, supply chain and retail geographies. In Brazil, scholars of consumption have particularly noted the politicization of consumption (Barbosa & Veloso, 2014), the cultural specificities (Portilho, 2008) and the specific institutional contexts and retail geographies (Ariztia *et al*, 2016). Brazilian discourses of sustainable food consumption are deeply entangled with discourses on food justice and food sovereignty.

Brazil represents a diverse socio-economic landscape, where 24.7% of its population faced poverty as of 2020 (IBGE, 2020). Throughout its history, addressing hunger and malnutrition has posed significant challenges, particularly for the most vulnerable segments of society. Notably, from 2003 to 2015, the government under the leadership of President Lula, and later President Dilma Rousseff, implemented the *Fome Zero* public campaign to combat hunger. Developing the earlier work of the National Council of Food and Nutritional Security – CONSEA - from the mid-1990s, it brought stakeholders from different sectors together around the key strategic policies of the government: zero hunger, food security and food sovereignty. Among the results, the CONSEA conferences resulted in the publication of The Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population (DGBP) and the related, co-crafted concepts such as *comida de verdade.* This created an institutional scaffolding to build a shared imaginative edifice for sustainable food futures in Brazil. The multi-stakeholder process was a new way of doing politics, and for the following decade, stakeholders from civil society, public policy, and sympathetic sectors of the business community (including retail, wholesale and restaurateurs), from academia and the media, jointly co-crafted joint concepts which were translated into ambitious policy initiatives. For a time, Brazil was world-leading in some aspects of its food policy. From the government side, all of this scaffolding was removed in 2019 after the far-right Bolsonaro government came to power, who even after the 2022 election which president Lula won by a small margin, still have strong support from a large proportion of the Brazilian population. This reinforces the current societal divide in Brazil which has a strong impact on food discourses.

Co-written by Brazilian and UK scholars, this paper speaks to these demands and aims to present part of the results of a larger project which analysed the levers for change towards more sustainable food consumption of middle classes[1] in three countries: Brazil, South Africa and China. At first, it sets out the academic work on sustainable food, food justice and food sovereignty as it pertains to Brazil, and links to relevant policy discourses on food justice and food sovereignty. After presenting the methodology, it discusses the findings from the interviews, identifying three main sub-discourses, and offering a further concept, *re-conhecimento,* to explain the confluence of different kinds of knowledge about food. It analyses

[1] The Brazilian debate about middle class is influenced by both the government definition of the Federal Government Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the economic consumption classification developed by the Brazilian Association of Market Research Enterprises (ABEP). IBGE includes in the middle class all the population with family earnings between 1 to 5 monthly minimum salaries. ABEP uses consumption criteria (income, consumer goods, presence of domestic worker, education and location) For ABEP, the middle class has salaries between R$ 1.965,87 to R$ 3.276,76 (2023).

the degree to which these three discourses chime with or extend the food justice and food sovereignty literature emanating from other parts of the world. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the lessons that can be learned from this example of an innovative and impactful multi-stakeholder dialogue process.

This paper offers three interrelated contributions. Firstly, it reports and reflects on thirty interviews with key informants on the Brazilian food system. It examines what current discursive framings are in circulation, finding three sub-discourses: access, health and *re-conhecimento.* Secondly, what emerged was a key empirical finding documenting the value of the multi-stakeholder dialogue processes which themselves generated new concepts. There was a surprising level of coherence between the visions of the different stakeholders and an echoing, not just of international food trends, but also of the specifically Brazilian food policy discourse and some shared concepts, as co-crafted in the processes. The paper's third contribution is a reflection on this as an example of investment in participatory, multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and the resulting benefits of a resilient, jointly achieved understanding of a key public issue, which for the time being survived even in the face of adverse political changes. In many countries the political landscape is increasingly polarized, and thus approaches that support continuity and resilience of key public discourses, as well as multi-stakeholder dialogue and learning about public issues, has broader relevance for other policy areas.

2 SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION AND THE BRAZILIAN FOOD SYSTEM

2.1 Framing sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption is an extensive interdisciplinary field of study, with related discourses on 'ethical', 'responsible' or 'conscious' consumption (Barnett et al., 2011; Jackson, 2010; Newholm & Shaw, 2017). Moving beyond the literature on individual consumer choice, scholars argue that both habitual and intentional ethical and sustainable consumption decisions are shaped by the political-economic and socio-cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Structural conditions shape choices and curtail or enhance the agency of individual consumers. Thus, true systemic change relies to some degree on awareness raising and behaviour change of consumers, and to a larger extent on reshaping these structural conditions. Thus, some scholars have proposed to shift the attention away from the consumer to the level of policy and regulation (Littler, 2008).

Regarding the ethical and sustainable consumption of food, studies have revealed the importance of analysing the 'ethical foodscape' (Goodman, Maye, & Holloway, 2010). Exploring the complex network of influences that impact what is understood to be 'good' or 'ethical' foods, this literature emphasises that such an ethical foodscape is contingent and it responds to a certain time frame. Scholars have discussed for instance retail food markets (Friedberg, 2004; Hughes, 2005), concerns about the quality and properties of products (Eden, Bear, & Walker, 2008) and different personal motivations that animate environmental and health concerns (Jackson, 2010).

This means that consumption practices are embedded in local food systems and retail geographies, as well as in culturally specific discourses and practices (Barnett et al, 2011). Food consumption is associated with material need as well as a means of identity formation (Jackson et al., 2009; Guthman, 2008). Further, consumption has an important affective dimension (Miller, 2013) and can express notions of love and care.

Thus, we can expect diversity between different parts of the world, and yet for decades the majority of studies on ethical/sustainable consumption still focus on consumers in the global north, in particular North America and Europe. A notable exception was a special issue in 2015 where Crang & Hughes (2015) argued for "globalizing ethical consumption" and contributions focused on craft consumption in South Africa (Daya, 2016), Fairtrade market creation in the Global South (Doherty *et al*., 2015), middle-class consumers in China (Deng, 2015) and South Africa (McEwan et al. 2015), and cause-related marketing in India (Hawkins 2015). Further, Neo (2016) discusses vegetarianism in Taipei, Taiwan.

Brazilian scholars have extensively explored the politicization of consumption (Barbosa & Veloso, 2014; Castañeda, 2012; Portilho, 2005, 2008) and the institutional context of consumption (Ariztia et al., 2014, 2016). They've shown how consumption intersects with politics, sustainability, and culture. For instance, Barbosa & Veloso (2014) scrutinized daily practices like energy use, cleanliness, and water consumption, highlighting the cultural significance of abundance and its sustainability challenges. Over catering, where excess food leads to waste, exemplifies this. Portilho (2008) explored an "unorganized" group frequenting a specific organic market, revealing organic shopping as a political act tied to group identity.

Ariztia et al. (2014) investigated public procurement policies and corporate social responsibility in ethical consumption, while in 2016, they challenged the "deficit discourse" applied to Brazil, arguing it misaligned with Northern sustainability perspectives. They unveiled a Brazilian understanding of sustainable consumption, emphasizing its connection to basic needs and health, particularly in the context of sustainable food as nutritionally beneficial (Ariztia et al., 2016). Brazilian scholarship thus illuminates the complex interplay between consumption, politics, and sustainability.

2.2 Food Justice

With a Gini coefficient of 53.9, Brazil often stands out as a country facing significant income inequality in Latin America (World Bank, 2018). In light of this inequality, it is appropriate to frame discussions about food also from a food justice perspective. Food Justice emerged as a movement in the United States of America in 1996 focusing on the process of fairly sharing the risks and benefits of where, what and how food was grown and produced (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). It is associated with community health (Gottlieb, 2009) in which both eating vegetables and fruits, as well as preventing diet related diseases, are encouraged. Reflecting on the US Alternative Food Movement's tendency to defend a specific idea of good food that is far from African American neighbourhoods' everyday struggles, Alkon & Agyeman (2011) and others (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014; Guthman, 2008) shed light on the "symptoms of unjust access to food within the food system, while simultaneously focusing attention on the insidious causes of these problems" (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014, p. 211). In analysing those insidious causes, the authors highlight the role of both market deregulation and the commodification of food, which, they argue, are both rooted in the neoliberal political economy. They examine the process of how food becomes commodified and argue that the invisibility of "who pays and who gains" when a food product is bought off a supermarket shelf assists in maintaining the existing unequal power relations between consumers, retailers, producers and wholesalers.

In this way, the food provisioning system relies heavily on the private retailers dictating food allocation and distribution. Exposing such structural power inequalities, these authors shed light on the failure of market forces in ensuring access to healthy and fresh food. They explicitly uncover how this mostly impacted on "racial minorities and economically disenfranchised communities" (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014, p. 219).

2.3 Discourses on food justice and food sovereignty in Brazil

In Brazil it is possible to find aspects of the food justice discourse embedded within the collective construction of the "Food and Nutritional Security" policy discourse at national level.

The concept of food security traces its roots to discussions in Europe after World War I about the ability of nation states to produce their own food. It was later embraced by multilateral organizations and global agri-business, creating a link between food security discourses, food production, and accessibility. In Brazil, the food security discourse stands in dialogue with the concepts of Human Right to Adequate and Healthy Food, included since 2010 in the Brazilian constitution, as well as the concept of food sovereignty (Silva, 2020). Key to this was a multi-stakeholder dialogue process that traces its roots back to the first half of 20th century, when a group of intellectuals from the Northeast- Josué de Castro (1946) being a key reference - first problematized hunger as a political problem in Brazil. Such discussion was fuelled by social movements and in 1993, as a result of pressure by social movements, led among others by Herbert de Souza (Betinho), the National Council CONSEA was created, involving different parties, business and civil society actors. In the following year, the 1st Conference on Food and Nutritional Security in Brazil (1994) with these multiple stakeholders was held, and the concept of Food and Nutritional Security was collectively discussed. In 1995, CONSEA was dissolved. It was reinstated only in 2003 when the left-wing Worker's Party came to power, with Zero Hunger as a key government policy. CONSEA resumed organizing multi-stakeholder conferences, reformulating, for instance, the concept of Food and Nutritional Security during the 2nd Conference (2004). It opened the grounds for the first edition of The Food Guide for the Brazilian Population in 2006 and for the development of the federal law (LOSAN) establishing the National System of Food and Nutritional Security.

In 2007, the 3rd Conference took place, leading to the formation of the Intersectoral Chamber of Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN). In 2003, Brazil initiated the Program of Food Acquisition (PAA), promoting flexible government food procurement with a focus on family agriculture. It involves buying from over 185,000 family farms, with fair prices and distribution to underserved populations (Brasil, 2003). In 2009, the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) mandated that 30% of school meal products must be sourced from family agriculture, improving school meal quality and supporting small-scale family farms. In 2010, the right to food was added into the 6th Article of the Brazilian Federal Constitution. From 2011 to 2014, the 2nd Edition of the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population (DGBP) was developed with CONSEA as the leading body and with the technical support of a group of Brazilian researchers.

These researchers were from the Centre for Epidemiological Research in Nutrition and Health (NUPENS-USP), and in addition to supporting the development of the re-edition of the DGBP in 2014, they have also devised a novel nutritional classification system. This system underscores the detrimental effects of ultra-processed foods and the powerful food industry on public health in Brazil. Ultra-processed foods undergo significant alterations, including the addition of various substances for preservation and enhanced flavour, resulting in long-lasting, intensely flavoured products like soft drinks, biscuits, and sausages. This distinction has had a profound impact on food discussions in Brazil. This included, studying the influence of supermarkets on ultra-processed food consumption; emphasizing the importance of school meal programmes and family agriculture in ensuring the right to adequate and healthy food (Teo & Monteiro, 2012); and revealing the connections between food industry lobbying,

excessive consumption, diet-related diseases, and unsustainable production practices (Monteiro & Cannon, 2012; Monteiro et al., 2018).

The long history, and memory, of hunger is reflected in how food sovereignty was understood in Brazil's policy discourses. In this way, the concept of Food and Nutritional security in Brazil goes beyond food access, defending the Brazilian way of producing and eating. The term food sovereignty is credited to the *La Via Campesina* social movement in 1986 and states that every population must have the freedom to define for whom and how their food is produced. They are critical of the mechanisms often created in the name of food security with focus on large monocultures, arguing that this devalues local food cultures and traditional agriculture (Via Campesina, 2003).

It was at the 5th Conference on Food and Nutritional Security (2015) that aspects relating to the understanding of food security and sovereignty in Brazil were knitted together in the collectively crafted, comprehensive concept of *comida de verdade* (true food). It considers that "true food" for Brazilians must be socially just, not (just) subordinated to market forces, and respectful and reflective of cultural diversity. The concept also reflects the diversity of the regional food cultures in Brazil. With relatively recent industrialisation, populations migrated to key cities and food intake adjusted to time-intensive work patterns. *Comida de verdade* carries the memories and histories of a traditional way of eating manifested in expressions such as "Grandma's food" or "homemade food". Considered a political term - rooted in the food sovereignty idea -, the *Comida de verdade* concept was officially defined in 2015, and captures the discursive resistance against the increased consumption of highly processed food.

> *Comida de verdade* is the safeguard of life. It is healthy for both human beings and the planet, contributing to reducing the effects of climate change. It guarantees human rights, the right to land and territory, and quality food in adequate quantity throughout the course of life. It respects the rights of women, the diversity of indigenous people, *quilombola* communities, traditional people of African origin and *terreiro* people, gypsy people, forest and water people, other people and traditional communities and peasants, from production to consumption. It protects and promotes food cultures, socio-biodiversity, ancestral practices, the management of herbs and traditional medicine, the sacred dimension of food (CNSAN, 2015)

Thus, this co-crafted term reveals how food security in Brazil was a national priority and linked to food sovereignty, which differed from the international mainstream use of the term "food security" as used by international organisations, governments and large corporations linked to agribusiness (Silva, 2020). This term reveals the social construction of a Brazilian way of eating that encompasses the affective and symbolic dimensions, identity, authenticity and heritage. It is not limited to nutritional needs, and also respects psychosocial, cultural and environmental requirements. However, after this success of generative discursive co-crafting, when the new administration of president Bolsonaro came into office in 2019, CONSEA was abolished once more. Our research thus documented a moment in time when the formal multi-stakeholder collaboration was interrupted. Table 1 shows the historical timeline.

Table 1: Timeline of the Food and Nutritional Security discussions in Brazil

Year	Event
1993	The National Council on Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) is created
1994	1st Conference on Food and Nutritional Security in Brazil (the collective discussion of the Food and Nutritional Security concept in Brazil)
1995	CONSEA is abolished
2003	Left-wing party PT and president Lula da Silva come into power
2003	CONSEA is established again
2003	Zero Hunger Program is established
2004	2nd Conference on Food and Nutritional Security is held and the concept of Food and Nutritional Security is reformulated
2006	1st Edition of the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population (focused on nutritional food recommendations for professionals) The federal law on Food and Nutritional Security (LOSAN) was approved (Lei 11.346/2006): creating the National System of Food and Nutritional Security.
2007	3rd Conference on Food and Nutritional Security; creation of the Intersectoral Chamber of Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN) with representatives of all Ministries with any food related agenda
2009	School Meals Program (PNAE) is updated to mandate that 30% of school meals products and ingredients must be purchased from family agriculture
2010	The right to food was added into the 6th Article of the Brazilian Federal Constitution
2011	4th Conference on Food and Nutritional Security (2000 participants)
2014	Brazil leaves UN World Hunger Map for the first time and 2nd Edition of the Food Guide of the Brazilian Population is published (NOVA classification/ Food sovereignty)
2015	5th Conference on Food and Nutritional Security: one of the key deliverables is a collectively crafted comprehensive concept of "*comida de verdade*" (true food)
2016	Left-wing president Dilma Rouseff is impeached
2018	Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro wins the presidential election
2019	President Bolsonaro takes office on 1st January and CONSEA is abolished on the same day
2020 - 2022	Covid pandemic and lockdowns in Brazil affect food availability and affordability
2021	Brazil returns to the UN World Hunger Map (which indicates the countries with the prevalence of more than 2,5% of the population facing hunger)

Source: The authors (2022)

2.4 The Brazilian food production and media landscape

The Brazilian food production landscape is marked by the tensions between two opposite models of rural development: agro-export business and family-farming. The first is based on large monocultures driven by international markets, with intense use of mechanization, irrigation and industrial inputs such as pesticides, genetically modified seeds and animal feed (CONSEA, 2015). The family-farming model is mainly based on small farms with diversified

production, focused primarily on the domestic market. The tension between those two models becomes evident in the frequently contradictory rural development strategies in Brazil. Numbers are contested, but in 2007 the government claimed, based on the 2006 census, that family farming is responsible for supplying 75% of food for the internal market. While 77% of agricultural establishments in Brazil are family farms, they occupy less than 23% of the total agricultural land (IBGE, 2017). It is the large monocultures, particularly soybeans, coffee, sugar and ethanol, that receive the largest credit lines/subsidy and government programs (Sencébé et al., 2020). Large-scale agribusiness represents 26,68% of Brazilian GDP (CEPEA Esalq/USP, 2021) and holds strong representation in parliament (known as the Ruralist Caucus).

Also influential are the large-scale food industry and the media, especially the mainstream TV channels. Monteiro & Cannon (2012) argue that transnational "big food" companies have a negative effect on both the protection of the traditional food system upheld by family farms and the legislative efforts seeking to control the ultra-processed food consumption in the country.

Regarding the media, Brazil is an example of the influence of television on people's consumption habits. 99% of the Brazilian population own a TV at home (Sawaia *et al*., 2016) and large audiences watch the Brazilian soap operas broadcast at prime time, as well as big sport events. Aware of such influence, 73% of total investment in advertisement in Brazil in 2017 was directed towards TV, with the food and beverage industry responsible for 8% of total advertisement investment in the same year (Kantar Ibope Media, 2018).

3 METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on a review of literature and published reports, policy analysis and thirty interviews with key informants from the Brazilian food system. They were identified after examining the authors of policy reports, key representatives, named leaders of civil society campaigns, business strategies, and cultural influencers including those on social media.

An interview guide for semi-structured interviews was developed and in 2018/2019, thirty key informants were interviewed: eight representatives of civil society organisations, eight government representatives, five pioneering restaurant owners (providing healthy and sustainable food at different scales, including sustainable catering, or consciously positioning their restaurant in the favela), five representatives of key retailers and wholesalers (linked to the leading retail chains and one specialising in health food) and four high-profile media personalities and/or celebrities. Interviews with representatives of the federal government were held after the presidential elections of 2018, with new office holders, including dissonant voices (e.g. from agrobusiness and family agriculture). Interviews with large retailers, food wholesalers and media representatives involved extensive access negotiations.

The conversations took place in person at the interviewees' workplaces, in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo. Interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, they were conducted in Portuguese, recorded (with permission), transcribed, anonymised, coded and analysed.

The interviews addressed, among other subjects, the emerging trends for the consumption of ethical and sustainable food. The questions focused on the role different stakeholders play;

the history of the discourses and policy in this area – at city, national and international levels; their perceptions of the Brazilian ethical/sustainable food system and not on pre-defined notions and schemes of ethical, sustainable or organic food. Further, they discussed cultural influences and trends affecting sustainable food consumption and how these were transmitted via traditional and social media.

In coding analysis, initially categories across the wider three-country study (South Africa, China, Brazil) were used. Public policy documents and retailer reports, documents and campaign brochures were collected, catalogued and analysed. It is important to highlight that the similarity between the official government documents on Brazilian Food Policies and the interviewees' narratives was only picked up during the data analysis. Emerging inductively from the data in Brazil were three specific intertwined discourses: access, health and *re-conhecimento.*

4 DISCOURSES OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION IN BRAZIL

This paper section explores key informants' perspectives on sustainable food consumption, uncovering three intertwined sub-discourses: access, health, and *re-conhecimento*. It investigates their connections and their alignment with existing literature on food justice, nutrition, and food sovereignty.

4.1 Access

When sustainable food consumption is discussed in the interviews, there is firstly the discourse on access and availability of food, which is linked to food supply and distribution, as well as income and purchasing power in such a highly unequal society. Although the discourse on access is not exclusive to Brazil, it is particularly salient here. Interviewee 1, from a government agency, immediately pointed out the historical inequality issues of Brazil. In their view, “good food in Brazil is the one that continuously reaches the table of all Brazilians”. This assertion resonates with Aritzia *et al* (2016), concluding that sustainable food consumption notions in Brazil are associated with food that meets basic needs. This quote also echoes the US food justice literature (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Agyeman and McEntee, 2014; and Guthman, 2008), as it sheds light on the “insidious causes of these problems” (Agyeman and McEntee, 2014, p. 211). In Brazil, deep intersectional income, class, race, and rural/urban inequalities are fundamental framing conditions to food discourses.

A civil servant (Interviewee 5) observed how economic/private interests and geographical location influence the price and availability of certain products in markets close to the consumer. When explaining the entanglement of structural inequalities and food access, they explained that.

> Irrespective of financial resources, food deserts are places where you can’t find a healthy option, even if you want to choose something healthier. We see this clearly in urban centres [...] The problem increases as income decreases due to the food swamp: low supply of healthy, minimally processed foods, high levels of advertising for unhealthy foods at lower prices (Interviewee 5, civil servant).

The term "food swamp" has been used in the literature to describe certain locations, often interspersed in urban spaces, where access to healthy food is scarce, and in parallel the supply of and advertising for ultra-processed foods is abundant (Aparecida Borges et al., 2018).

This argument is also found in the DGBP (Brasil. Ministério da Saúde, 2014), in a section where the authors seek to shed light on how the environment in which the food is sold has changed. It explains "how ultra-processed foods are on sale everywhere (…) natural or minimally processed foods get little publicity and are not even available close to people's homes" (Brasil. Ministério da Saúde, 2014, p.106).

Several interviewees explained that the food supply and distribution system in Brazil is driven by the private sector. This point was made by an interviewee who praised the fact that food distribution is driven and coordinated by private companies (Interviewee 4, civil servant) as well as by interviewees who pointed this out as one of the main reasons for the lack of state control in the provision of safe, healthy food in Brazil (civil servants - Interviewees 5, 6 -, and restaurateur - 27). Ultimately, they argued, it is the large wholesale and retail chains that curate what food is offered on supermarket shelves.

As an example of "unjust access to food" it was pointed out in several interviews that organic and agroecological food is expensive and difficult to find, and minimally processed food might be cheaper but difficult to find. One interviewee, a journalist from the traditional media (Interviewee 14), for example, points out: "Sustainable foods are more expensive foods, beyond the reality of many people", since, as Interviewee 10 (NGO) affirms, "people with less purchasing power have this perception that organic and agroecological foods are exclusively for those who have more money". This supports the results of research presented by Ariztia *et al*. (2016) who in addition to identifying that the term "organic" was used as a synonym for ethical, healthy, and sustainable foods, also presented frequent criticism regarding the cost and availability of this type of product. The specific point on how organic food is more accessible to certain social strata/neighbourhoods than others links to discussions on food justice discourse, including in the US (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Agyeman & McEntee, 2014).

4.2 Health

The health-related sub-discourse addresses health-driven consumption choices, food quality assessments, and their impact on preventive health behaviours, influenced by food industry marketing. Interviewees noted consumers' willingness to purchase heavily processed items marketed as healthy. Additionally, they linked organic and agroecological produce to sustainability, safety, and health in various interviews.

The terms "organic" and "agroecological" food were often used interchangeably as a synonym for ethical, healthy, and sustainable foods. Interviewees 23 (retailer & wholesaler) and 16 (celebrity & influencer), for example, reflected on how labour, agricultural practices and food quality are used to express the quality of organic and agroecological types of food.

> Organic is food that needs to be grown without harming natural resources. People who work in the fields have their labour rights guaranteed, they value the food harvest, the food is less packaged, so this would fit with the concept of sustainable, ethical, and healthy. (Interviewee 23/ Retailer & Wholesaler)

> An agroecological product, for me, sums up the synthesis of a safe, sustainable food. [...] It means a product free of poisons, a product grown responsibly in relation to the environment, and marketed fairly in relation to the producer. I think the basis for a safe, healthy diet should be vegetables, fruits, beans. They are foods that are good for your

> health, but when they're grown agroecologically they're even better. (Interviewee 16/ Celebrity & Influencer).

This is also evident in the DGBP (Brasil. Ministério da Saúde, 2014), which advocates a healthy diet based on fresh or minimally processed food. It is worth pointing out the particular role of beans in this discourse. Beans are a key staple food in Brazil – it is the third most consumed food in the country, behind rice and coffee (IBGE, 2010). Many varieties are available in large quantities in supermarkets (usually dried) and their iconic manifestation is in the Brazilian national dish, the *feijoada* bean stew.

Commenting on the influence of the food industry and media on the Brazilian population's health and sustainable consumption choices, Interviewee 6 (a civil servant working in this area for more than 15 years) pointed to the challenges caused by the differences in the media space (airtime) between government food education campaigns and food industry advertising. Interviewee 6 (civil servant) also argues that though television channels operated thanks to a government concession, the government still had to pay high prices for airtime for public health and nutrition campaigns, which prevented it from sharing quality food information this way. In addition to that, they pointed out that while the public messaging is struggling to be heard, the Brazilian population is overexposed to advertising, celebrity culture, and dominant television channels.

> The food industry is who's paying the media these days. Considering that the middle-class consumer, with all their limitations in life, routine and education, they think they're making the best choice of food, they can't see the other side to think about that. The reflective process becomes a little weak; you're inclined to one side only [advertised products]. (Interviewee 6, civil servant)

While this tone is jarring, marketing analyses do suggest that advertisement is effective, especially on TV (Sawaia *et al.,* 2016). Further, it is worth observing that the notion that government messaging is a benign force and an important counterweight to the messaging of large companies, dates back to the pre-2019 era, outlined earlier, in which sustainability campaigners worked closely within and with government.

This argument expressed by Interviewee 6 echoed what both the DGBP as well as Monteiro & Cannon (2012) discuss. The authors highlight the impacts on the Brazilian population's health caused by the large food companies increasingly controlling the production chain. They denounced the advertising and lobby power of the large food companies in shaping the definition of what healthy food means and, by extension, shaping decisions about what to consume.

Another point is how the interviewees trace lines of argument presented in the DGBP. With one chapter (5) dedicated to "Understanding and overcoming obstacles" (Brasil. Ministério da Saúde, 2014), the DGBP explicitly notes, among other barriers, the food industry's advertisement and misinformation about the level of food processing as obstacles to a healthy diet.

> The advertising of ultra-processed products dominates commercial advertising of food. It often conveys incorrect or incomplete information about diet and health (…) More than two-thirds of commercials aired on Brazilian television are for food products sold in fast food chains, or for 'snack packs' … which are all ultra-processed products. (Brasil. Ministério da Saúde, 2014, p.117)

Thus, in Brazil there is an important discourse linking health and sustainable food which is not dissimilar to other countries, however it is characterised by a particular concern about ultra-processed food.

Ariztia *et al*. (2014), Monteiro & Cannon (2012), and Monteiro *et al*. (2018) have all pointed to the strong link between food consumption habits and health discourses. In addition, many interviewees expressed their view of the importance of public policies. Mention was given to the PNAE, the DGBP, the Unified Health System (SUS) and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS). Interviewees 10 and 19 mentioned:

> [The DGBP guide] is our basis for talking about food and nutrition, (...). There are definitions in the Guide, the basis of the diet is fresh and minimally processed foods (...) The Guide also encourages the act of cooking, a facilitator of healthy eating, of healthy consumption. When we don't know how to cook, we are much more hostage to the food industry (Interviewee 10, NGO).

> The National School Feeding Plan - PNAE, for example, is an innovative public policy in the world. There is no place in the world that has used public purchase as a way to encourage this sector of the economy - the solidarity economy and that of the small farmer. When we go and talk about it, at an [international] congress, people think it's really cool (Interviewee 19, specialist).

In addition, several interviewees cited the importance of regulation of labelling, including the amount of sugar and salt, and open information on the use of pesticides in agricultural production.

4.3 *Re-conhecimento*

We use the term *re-conhecimento* to describe a third sub-discourse, which emerged in the interviews in different formulations. This term combines both an aspect of knowledge and of re-discovery, of re-knowing. It references the meeting of different forms of knowledge, the appreciation of traditional food culture, as well as the challenges and opportunities of access to food information, including, but not limited to "scientific information". It is important to mention that narratives evidencing the role of traditional food in Brazilian diet as well as the rise of ultra processed food consumption were observed during the interviews. References to the ideas advocated in the DGBP were explicitly and implicitly found in interviewees' points of view, particularly the ones related to the government, campaigners and specialists. In a country where industrialization in the food sector is fast, fierce, but recent, the interviews identify the need for more information, both on traditional and ultra-processed food, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive effort on re-discovering and re-knowing the Brazilian way of eating. Illustrating this sub-discourse, both the quote of a campaigner, Interviewee 10, and of a civil servant, Interviewee 5, explain the role of traditional food culture in a Brazilian way of eating

> …we see that Brazilians still consume more traditional foods, rice and beans, vegetables, etc. We still have a good food base, healthy and traditional foods, but this has been changing over the years, it is very visible. Traditional consumption is still higher, but it has been decreasing against what it was supposed to be. What we see as healthy eating, this is in the DGBP for the Brazilian Population, we work a lot with it, it is our bible {laughter} (Interviewee 10/ campaigner).

> Food is much more than ingesting nutrients, and this is the Food Guide's message… People want flavours, experiences, their own story; that's why food traditions are often addressed, why Granma's food is talked about a lot. It relates to the Food Guide's message, […] the choice of food as a political choice (Interviewee 5/civil servant).

"Diet is more than intake of nutrients" (Brasil. Ministério da Saúde, 2014, p.15), is the opening phrase of DGBP's Chapter 1. So, this interviewee is quoting, almost verbatim, one of the key messages of the Guide. The fluency of the interviewees in the language of the guide, reveals its influence on the thinking of various stakeholders today. It also echoes the co-crafted concept of true food (*comida de verdade*), in which it must be socially just, not subordinated to market forces alone, and respect the country's cultural and regional diversity (CONSEA, 2015).

The term "*re-conhecimento",* we propose, carries two meanings. The first relates to the availability of information and access to food - which together guarantee the citizen right of having a conscious and informed adequate food choice. The second is related to recognizing the value of the Brazilian way of producing, cooking and eating, which is embedded and expressed by the term *comida de verdade*.

Re-conhecimento refers, then, on both a cognitive and an affective level, to the combination of knowledges, but also to the feeling of valuing again the food memories that are still alive in many Brazilians' imaginations. The memories related to a less industrialised food, prepared by families in different parts of the country, respecting the food diversity and the simplicity of its cooking, as well as family agriculture. Knowledges of nutritional value (including about calories and artificial ingredients) combines with knowledges of food origin, ingredients, recipes and stories, a recollection of memories attached to shared food. Food here is embedded in relations of care and intertwined with nostalgia for a sense of family and regional belonging. The concept has an affective, symbolic and relational dimension, alongside a cognitive one.

While Interviewee 6 was pessimistic, Interviewee 5 is positive that despite the exponential growth in the consumption of ultra-processed foods in Brazil, the country still maintains its food culture.

> Brazil still maintains a large part of its food culture, but when we look around the country and at the speed of the increase in the consumption of ultra-processed foods, from the perspective of consumption trends, this concerns us (Interviewee 5/civil servant).

Although these aspects of *re-conhecimento* emerge from the interviews, there is also an acknowledgement of contestation. Several of our interviewees criticized how Brazilian food standards are increasingly shaped by the food industry. Monteiro & Cannon (2012) discuss the link between the lack of control over the lobbying power of the food industry with government and the increase in overconsumption, diet-based diseases, and unsustainable production practices. Several interviewees, like Interviewee 19 (food studies specialist), mentioned the need to defend food and nutrition education actions, alongside other policies that guarantee access to high-quality information on food, whether on the packaging or by regulating advertising to eliminate misleading or false information.

> I'm in favour of regulation, public investment, information. If we don't regulate, they will not do it […]. The owners of supermarkets, the big food industries, they control

everything. They always want the biggest profit possible. They want to sell and will push any product hard. (Interviewee 19, food studies specialist)

Access to high-quality information plays an important, though not exclusive, role in people's food choices and some key informants, such as Interviewee 27 (restaurateur), argued that this access to information is currently a privilege. They proposed that there should be a more rights-based approach to food information.

Others emphasised how the sustainable food discourse reinforces the social divide and Brazilian inequalities, since the types of food that are generally advocated are not the ones everyone can afford or have access to.

> The feeling is that there's a type of food apartheid, in which the food you defend is what you have at your house, not what I have at mine [...] The peripheries [low-income housing areas, informal settlements] and people are very close to understanding what's happening. And when they understand, it'll no longer go unnoticed. (Interviewee 27/Restaurateur)

The choice of the word "apartheid" here is not just chosen to shock, but also for its connotations of racism. Structural inequalities in Brazil run along class and racial lines and find expression in the spatial divisions between the peripheries/favelas and more affluent neighbourhoods. Food justice scholars such as Agyeman & McEntee (2014) give examples of how racial minorities and economically disenfranchised communities are the ones experiencing structural inequalities. They reveal how a multi-cultural approach needs to be applied to identify and tackle the insidious causes of food injustice. This will also be the case when steps are taken towards involving these groups in co-creating *re-conhecimento* as well as making *re-conhecimento* accessible to them.

In the Brazilian sub-discourse, which we label *re-conhecimento,* different knowledges, understandings and consciousnesses combine. These include cultural understandings, food traditions, scientific information conveyed on packaging and through labels, identity discourses and political awareness of the subtle way class and racial inequalities are embedded in food discourses, access patterns, food knowledges and practices.

Re-conhecimento as a concept thus applies to ordinary practices of food consumption, as Gregson and Ferdous (2015) have recognized. It is culturally specific (Portilho 2008) and recognized and celebrates the cultural diversity of discourses and practices (Barnett et al 2011). *Re-conhecimento* is an engagement not just with the food itself but with its role in personal and collective narratives, and with food as a means of identity formation (Jackson *et al*., 2009; Guthman, 2008). Further, just as Miller has argued that consumption has an important affective dimension (Miller, 2013) which is often insufficiently recognized, *re-conhecimento* of food goes beyond a purely intellectual knowledge of food to engage with an affective dimension of memory, nostalgia, *saudade,* as well as expressions and memories of relations of care.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This paper sets out the academic work on sustainable food, food justice and food sovereignty as it pertains to Brazil, and links to relevant policy discourses on food justice and food sovereignty. Then, it offers findings from thirty interviews with key stakeholders, indicating that the discourse and co-crafted concepts continue to be present in the minds and narratives of these respondents.

Our analysis unveiled three sub-discourses: Firstly, a strong focus on access, emphasizing food justice and the right to food, which is closely tied to Brazil's high levels of inequality and the recent experience of hunger among the poorest. Secondly, a health-related discourse influenced by global trends, notably highlighting concerns about nutrition. Lastly, we introduced the term *re-conhecimento*, representing the convergence of knowledge systems rooted in identity, memory, and cultural significance evolving concerns about the ingredients, the food provenience, recipes, cooking techniques and family meeting. This concept also encompasses an affective dimension exemplified by references to "Granma's food" and its connections to heritage, family, and regional belonging.

Throughout these sub-discourses reverberated the concepts and language that had been co-crafted in the long-running multi-stakeholder dialogue processes, bringing together food and consumer rights activists, government officials, academics and progressive retailers and restaurateurs in the CONSEA Conferences. This emerging discursive confluence developed over decades of dialogue, initiated in the mid-90s, coming into close dialogue with policy between 2003-2016 and then losing government support from 2018-2022, with a potential resurgence in the years to come. The concept of "*comida de verdade*", found in the DGBP, for instance, considers the techniques used to produce food, the labour rights and environmental impacts, but also the dietary contents and the economic access to food. These understandings and the emerging discursive confluence developed over decades of dialogue, arguably gave birth to some large-scale and progressive legislation and food programmes. This offers lessons for times of conducive policy environments.

A further crucial lesson here applies to challenging policy environments. Our interviews revealed that stakeholders engaged in ongoing dialogues tended to recall and endorse the DGBP, even after political support waned under a different government. When CONSEA and related structures dissolved, the enduring intellectual and normative legacy persisted, reflecting a shared collective discourse across stakeholders and also the groupthink of a progressive urban elite whose ideas shaped the DGBP. This highlights the resilience of co-created discourse in shaping collective imagination and sustaining commitments.

Thus, our findings show that just like you cannot kill an idea, it is hard to kill joint concepts once they have been carefully co-crafted by multiple stakeholders. However, we also argue that this discourse needs to evolve to include a greater diversity of voices, including more marginalized groups of people, in terms of region, class and racial background, which at the time of the research were not in any leading positions within the Brazilian food system. Furthermore, there is a need for future research investigating the impacts of the current societal divide in Brazil on the food discourses. A more inclusive approach, integrating more voices, may be one step in making food practices and policy issues unifying rather than divisive issues in Brazil today and in the future.

In terms of the wider literature on sustainable food consumption and food justice, the paper makes several contributions. It highlights in its three sub-discourses the interwoven nature of international (often focused on the global north) and specifically Brazilian concerns. Considering a broad range of values and discourses concerning food sustainability, including those three discourses, we see how food system sustainability and sustainable consumption can take on different forms and meanings beyond those centred on neoliberal models of food system sustainability and ethical consumption that tend to dominate the literature on ethical sustainable food consumption. The paper also explains the multi-stakeholder history behind some of the most progressive food legislation. It thus chimes with calls in the literature to move

away from just the individual consumer as the locus of responsibility (Littler, 2008, Barnet et al., 2011) and focuses on political and civil society actors operating at the food systems scale. In doing so, it contributes by going beyond critique, to show how transformation was actually achieved in Brazil, however imperfect, in discourse, policy and in some key areas of practice.

We need to broaden the dialogue and enrich the theoretical framings emanating from the global north by centring the perspectives from different countries, in particular from the global south, and doing so on their own terms, rather than starting with supposedly universal framings and then engaging in a form of mirror or deficit discourse. This is what this article has demonstrated, by centring the Brazilian discourses. It is a step towards broadening the dialogue with a greater variety of voices, knowledge and research practices. The Brazilian case demonstrates how a diversity of concepts will emerge, opening new horizons for research.

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