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abstract | *In this paper, I discuss the controversy surrounding the emergence of quinoa as an internationally traded product. In the wake of the quinoa boom, hundreds of articles were published in the mainstream media regarding the ethicality of the transnational quinoa trade. I evaluate the rationale behind and the accuracy of these pieces, and I argue that the media's focus on simplistic dichotomies of good/bad and exploitative/not exploitative obscures more legitimate concerns regarding environmental degradation and socioeconomic inequality. I conclude with a discussion of the solutions offered by the media, and provide guidelines for reforming the quinoa production system to ensure ethical consumption.*

keywords | *quinoa, food sovereignty, export markets, international trade, superfood*

INTRODUCTION In 2013, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) proclaimed 2013 the "International Year of Quinoa."[1] Over the past four decades, quinoa has transformed from a little-known grain of the rural Andes to a coveted "superfood," dominating the diets of Americans and Europeans alike.[2] Quinoa production has skyrocketed in response to this increased demand, growing by 385 percent in 2011 and continuing to rise at a rate of over 20 percent per year.[3]

Despite this meteoric rise in popularity, the boom quickly faced an ethical backlash. Between 2012 and 2016, a slew of articles emerged, from The Guardian's "Can Vegans Stomach the Unpalatable Truth About Quinoa?" to Time magazine's "Quinoa: The Dark Side of an Andean Superfood," that challenged the rise in the Western demand for quinoa, claiming that it was unethical for Western consumers to take the "grain of the Incas" away from the Andean farmers who produced it.

For the majority of consumers, the mainstream media—articles, blog posts, and radio broadcasts—serves as their primary source for information regarding the ethics of the transnational quinoa trade. They seek a succinct answer, to buy or not to buy, that these articles dutifully provide. Yet the media's tendency to overgeneralize and oversimplify proves problematic in the case of quinoa, aggrandizing some ethical concerns while entirely obscuring others in the race to publish a catchy headline.

This paper takes four parts: in the first, I explore and problematize the critiques of the transnational quinoa trade, focusing on the food sovereignty-based criticism dominant in the media. I survey articles published in popular outlets such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and Time magazine to better understand how popular media characterizes the quinoa debate. I then analyze the scholarly literature surrounding quinoa to determine how these portrayals compare to the reality of the situation. In the second section, I examine the arguments for transnational quinoa consumption, as published in similar sources. In the third section, however, I problematize the debate itself: why do we think that buying (or not buying) quinoa is the best way to fix the system? What other solutions are obscured by this philosophy? In the final section, I provide recommendations for how to eat quinoa in a more ethical manner.

As a whole, I argue that while food sovereignty serves as an effective platform to debate the ethics of quinoa consumption, the mainstream media's application of a reductive, good/bad rhetoric obscures the more relevant concerns of environmental degradation and socioeconomic stratification. The latter two concerns, although overwhelmingly ignored in the media's discussion of quinoa, genuinely constitute ethical reasons to avoid consuming quinoa. Additionally, this simplistic rhetoric narrows the scope of potential solutions, favoring a simplistic neoliberal mandate—to buy, or not to buy—in lieu of critical structural reform.

HISTORY OF QUINOA Quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*) is a pseudocereal, a non-grass grain with similar properties as a typical cereal grain.[4] It is one of the world's most adaptable crops and can be grown in areas with relative humidity from 40 to 88 percent, from sea level to 4000 m, from -8 to 38°C, and from 100-200 nm of precipitation.[5] The majority of the world's quinoa is produced on the southern Altiplano, an area that covers much of western Bolivia and southern Peru. The Altiplano has famously saline soils, low

rainfall, and severe temperature fluctuations that render the land inhospitable for most crops. As a result, quinoa has served as the primary grain crop in the region for hundreds of years.[6]

Given quinoa's critical role in the Andean diet, it held (and continues to hold) considerable cultural importance amongst the Altiplano's indigenous communities. The Incas called it chisaya mama ("mother of all grains"), featuring the grain in myriad ritual procedures.[7] Although Spanish rule drastically reduced levels of quinoa production, quinoa remained a dietary staple and local commodity throughout colonization.[8] Therefore, when the West flooded the market with cheap imports during the Cold War, and the demand for quinoa plummeted, these farmers formed producer organizations such as the Asociación Nacional de Productores de Quinua (ANAPQUI) and the Central de Cooperativas Agropecuarias Operación Tierra (CECAOT) to reassert their role in the domestic urban market by improving the efficiency of the supply chain, reducing transaction costs, and linking farmers with larger suppliers. The development of these producer organizations allowed quinoa production to survive Western importation, with production control largely remaining in the hands of the farmers. [9]

In the late 1980s, technological innovation allowed farmers to produce quinoa on an international scale. CECAOT developed a mechanized debittering machine that removed the bitter saponin coat from the outer skin of raw quinoa, which was traditionally a painstaking process accomplished by hand.[10] This reduction in time and labor costs catalyzed rapid growth. By 1992, organic production standards were established, and both CECAOT and ANAPQUI began exporting their processed quinoa to Western nations.[11]

SOURCES OF WESTERN DEMAND According to the FAO, the Altiplano's total area of quinoa production did not exceed fifteen thousand hectares in the 1980s. Yet by 1990, acreage had jumped to forty thousand hectares, and by 2009, over eighty-three thousand hectares of land were devoted to quinoa cultivation.[12] This spike in production did not occur organically; it was catalyzed by an immense surge in Western demand. This demand stemmed from three crucial factors: quinoa's status as a health food, an exotic food, and more specifically, an indigenous food.

Quinoa received praise for its health benefits from a variety of scientific and governmental organizations, including NASA and the FAO. In its "Master Plan for the International Year of Quinoa," the FAO claimed, "Quinoa is the only food that provides all the essential amino acids."[13] While testing the grain for interplanetary use, NASA reported that "quinoa has an excellent balance between oil, fat, and protein," calling its levels of amino acids "very close to the standards set by the FAO for human nutritional needs."[14] While NASA's motivations may have been purely scientific, Paula Capodistrias suggests that the FAO's praise resulted from intense lobbying by the Bolivian government, who sought to broaden the potential market for their crops.[15] Regardless, once these authorities lauded the health benefits of quinoa, the grain became wildly popular—taking on the status of a "superfood."

While "superfood" is a relatively recent term, it builds upon the earlier idea of "functional foods." In "The Rise and Fall of Superfoods," author Whitney Kimball notes that Coca-Cola pioneered the concept in the late nineteenth century, marketing its products as "intellectual beverage[s]" that could serve as stimulants, nerve tonics, and headache medicines.[16] She contends that in recent years, the term has evolved to include almost any possible health benefit that a food can (allegedly) provide, ranging from curing heart disease, burning fat, or increasing metabolism.[17]

Gyorgy Scrinis concurs, arguing that functional foods and their resulting superfood ideology became a key marketing strategy in the health foods sector. He cites the "nutritional anxiety" that marketers ingrain in consumers, creating artificial demand by convincing them that without superfoods, they lack the nutrients they need to survive.[18]

On top of quinoa's purported health benefits, it also received a status boost due to its "exotic" characteristics. In Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer, Lisa Heldke suggests that quinoa evokes "cultural food colonization,"[19] which she defines as the West's tendency to seek out exotic food for the sociocultural capital it bestows. She contends that consuming exotic foods such as quinoa allows consumers to earn cultural capital, by projecting both their knowledge of "trendy" foods and their ability to afford them.[20]

Quinoa's status as both a superfood and an exotic food is further reinforced by its status as an indigenous food. In "'The Food Nature Intended You to Eat': Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Primitivist Philosophy," Christine Knight develops the concept of "nutritional primitivism," the West's idealization of "ancient," "native" diets as a rejection of processed foods' modern production systems.[21]

For a time, this superfood, exotic, indigenous rhetoric superseded ethical debate, decontextualizing the grain from its sociopolitical and ethical context. Yet amongst the liberal media, the recontextualization of quinoa was swift. Between 2013 and 2016, hundreds of articles were

published debating the ethics of quinoa, with almost every major news outlet taking a stand.

Why did this debate receive so much media attention? Heldke cites our cultural obsession with ethical eating, contending that a notable concern for food ethics grants the consumer the cultural capital of a "moral consumer," someone with the intelligence, compassion, and resources to only eat "moral" foods.[22] Barnet et al. agree, citing our desire for "moral selving:" the "mediated work of creating oneself as a more virtuous person through practices that acknowledge responsibilities to others."[23] Given this desire to only eat what is moral, there was a large market for the media to provide guidance as to what "moral" really means.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS A CRITIQUE In their discussion of morality, these critiques overwhelmingly focus on food sovereignty. La Via Campesina, a network of farmers and organizations across the globe, developed the term "food sovereignty" in 1996 to encapsulate their anti-neoliberal campaign against power asymmetry in the global food system.[24] In a general sense, the movement resists inequality by encouraging local, sustainable, and autonomous initiatives.

La Via Campesina defined food sovereignty in its 2007 "Declaration of Nyéléni," identifying its three major components: "(1) the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food, (2) produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and (3) their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."[25] As the movement grew in scope and recognition, it became the gold standard amongst food scholars for ethicality. If a system of production did not meet the requirements of Nyéléni, the system lacked sovereignty and was therefore unethical.

While neither La Via Campesina nor food sovereignty is always explicitly mentioned, the ethical violations cited by the media are overwhelmingly breaches of the Nyéléni standards. Yet in lieu of evaluating all three components of Nyéléni equally, the rhetoric largely focuses on the first qualification: "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food."[26] Critics of the transnational quinoa trade argue that by buying quinoa, Western consumers incentivize Andean farmers to sell their crop rather than keep it for subsistence—which deprives farmers of the nutrient-rich grain so significant to their heritage and their health. While there exists minimal scholarly literature regarding why the debate has taken this form, it makes practical sense. It fits into a universal, simple, Robin-Hood-esque narrative of rich and poor, while providing catchy, easily comprehensible headlines that offer a feasible solution: stop eating quinoa.

In contrast, the latter two concerns of Nyéléni are far more nuanced, less catchy, and require far more substantive change than buying or rejecting quinoa. As a result of their complexity, they are overwhelmingly absent from the mainstream debate. Therefore, while the mainstream approach sells magazines, it misrepresents the true ethical concerns behind the transnational quinoa trade. In contrast, in the following sections, I analyze all three components of Nyéléni's definition of ethical food. I evaluate each condition in turn, to provide a more in-depth explanation of quinoa's relationship with food sovereignty and argue that, while the former receives far more media attention, it provides the least compelling ethical case for avoiding quinoa.

"HEALTHY AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOOD" The most commonly cited criticism of the transnational quinoa trade claims that Western consumption robs impoverished Andean communities of their staple crop, leading to the loss of a culturally significant good and a resurgence of malnutrition. Critics contend that the presence of international demand incentivizes farmers to sell their quinoa rather than consume it, and that while farmers may receive increased profits as a result of this trade, they lose the nutritional benefits that quinoa provides. They note that the Western imports that farmers often consume as a replacement grain, including white flour and rice, lack quinoa's protein and amino acid content. An article in Time magazine, entitled "Quinoa: The Dark Side of an Andean Superfood," epitomizes this concern, noting that according to the Bolivian Agricultural Ministry, domestic consumption of quinoa has dropped by 34 percent since 2006. Furthermore, it cites a "worry of malnutrition" in quinoa-producing regions that consume "processed 'city' foods."[27]

In addition, critics argue that domestic prices have skyrocketed as a result of international demand, making it difficult for urban Andean residents to purchase quinoa at a reasonable price. As noted in the The New York Times's "Quinoa's Global Success Creates Quandary in Bolivia," multiple studies from Bolivia's agricultural ministry have reported fears of chronic malnutrition in regions that grow quinoa, as farmers forgo the pseudocereal for cheaper, processed imports. They attribute this shift to the rising price of quinoa, given that the cost of a two-pound bag has risen to $4.85 (compared to $1.20 and $1.00 for a comparable quantity of noodles and rice, respectively).[28]

Overwhelmingly, the mainstream media characterizes the transnational quinoa trade as a resurgence of economic colonialism, a system that provides quinoa to those who do not need it—as most wealthy Americans do not lack appropriate sources of vitamins and minerals—while depriving those who genuinely require its nutritional benefits.

One of the most iconic anti-quinoa articles, The Guardian's "Can Vegans Stomach the Unpalatable Truth about Quinoa?" extends this argument even further. Author Joanna Blythman contends that the international quinoa market is a "troubling example of a damaging north-south exchange, with well-intentioned health and ethics-led consumers here unwittingly driving poverty there."[29] She further epitomizes the consensus behind the "robbing the poor of their staple crop" critique: that healthy, affluent Western consumers should not incentivize poor Andean farmers to produce quinoa for an international market, for it deprives rural and urban residents alike of the basic nutrients they require to survive. But, is any of this true?

In a theoretical sense, yes. Throughout history, developed countries have utilized colonization, globalization, and neoliberalism to appropriate the resources of their developing counterparts, impoverishing the residents of these countries in their wake.

Yet in the case of quinoa, this claim is relatively unsubstantiated. First and foremost, transnational trade cannot "rob the poor of their staple crop," if quinoa is not in fact a staple crop in the region. According to Sergio Nuñez de Arco, CEO and general manager of Andean Naturals (one of America's largest quinoa importing companies), quinoa is widely considered the food of the poor in urban areas—a lasting legacy of Spanish colonialism—and is rarely consumed by urban residents. When questioned about the "robbing the poor of their staple crop" critique, Nuñez de Arco responded that it only applied to poor rural migrants who had recently moved to urban areas, who could no longer afford to purchase the quinoa that they had previously grown independently. He posited that the myriad journalists making this claim used their interviews with this population to generalize about an entire community with the intent of sensationalizing a story for mass production.[30]

Furthermore, the reduction in urban quinoa consumption is not due to the development of a transnational market alone. As noted by Winkel et al., globalization has westernized the diets of local communities through trade and cultural assimilation throughout the last century.[31] Therefore, these changes cannot be solely attributed to the exportation of a single crop, especially considering that donations of Western food to the Andean region began as early as the 1960s.[32]

Additionally, Capodistrias notes that as people move to urban areas such as La Paz, Bolivia, or Cuzco, Peru, and obtain demanding jobs, they consume less quinoa because it takes far more time to prepare than other grains.[33] Compared to the minimal time and effort required to cook pasta, quinoa requires a thirty-minute soaking period and a twenty-minute stirring period before it can be consumed.[34] For families in which parents work multiple jobs and have little time to prepare food, quinoa consumption has declined independently of its rising cost.

It is also important to note that the Bolivian government has instituted protections for poor rural migrants who cannot afford quinoa. The government has developed a variety of nutrition programs to subsidize quinoa for those who need it most, integrating it both into school lunch programs for children and into supplements for pregnant mothers.

In an interview for KUT's The Secret Ingredient podcast, noted food scholar Tanya Kerssen suggests that the media also makes false claims regarding rural quinoa consumption. She cites the release of The New York Times's "Quinoa's Global Success Creates Quandary at Home" as a watershed moment for this erroneous media representation. Given that this article was one of the first published in the mainstream media, she argues, it became the factual basis for those that followed. Yet as a result, the factual errors and misguided assumptions made in the Times piece were then replicated on a massive scale, the most significant of which was the "robbing the poor of their staple grain" critique. She debunks the statistic that rural residents are now eating less quinoa, noting that while the media correctly claims that farmers are saving a smaller percentage of their quinoa for personal consumption, the actual quantity of quinoa that they retain has not changed.[35] A 2014 FAO study corroborates Kerssen's claim, reporting that despite increased exports, the majority of farmers in rural regions still consume quinoa two to four days per week.[36] This subtle difference, overlooked by many outlets, effectively refutes the foundation of the media critique.

Overall, the substantive research contends both that quinoa is not a "staple crop" (in urban areas) and that it is not being "robbed" (in rural areas). Therefore, this critique, although frequently cited by the mainstream media, is relatively unsubstantiated.

"ECOLOGICALLY SOUND AND SUSTAINABLE METHODS" While Nyéléni's condition of "ecologically sound and sustainable methods" has received far less media attention, the environmental degradation wrought by the expansion of quinoa production provides one of the most compelling reasons to eschew transnational trade. As noted by Kerssen, the demands of mass production catalyzed a transition from cultivation on hillside terraces to flat, wide plains.[37] Yet these plains previously served as grazing areas for llamas, the primary providers of quinoa fertilizer. Without these llamas, farmers must either use less fertilizer or implement synthetic fertilizer, both of which prove extremely harmful to the land.[38]

Furthermore, Kerssen contends that monocropping quinoa without fallow periods, as increased demand incentivizes farmers to do, leads to increased soil degradation.[39] Farmers who previously let their land lie fallow for up to eight years between uses now cultivate it constantly, leaving very little time for soil recovery.[40]

In other contexts, farmers can intensify their operations and shorten fallow periods while managing the environmental ramifications—yet this is generally accomplished through intercropping, planting multiple species simultaneously. In this way, farmers can use the biological properties of one crop to balance the damage caused by another. Yet due to the fact that the Altiplano can sustain few other crops besides quinoa, farmers have minimal opportunities to heal the damage caused by intensive cultivation, leaving the soil susceptible to severe degradation.

The effects of this degradation are already evident. According to the Bolivian government's Ministry of Rural Development and Land and the Concejo Nacional de Comercializadores y Productores de Quinua, the quinoa yield dropped from 0.64 ton per hectare in 1999 to 0.46 ton per hectare in 2008.[41] In addition, Capodistrias reports that due to the intensification of farming, the Altiplano region has already experienced higher saline levels and a loss of vital soil nutrients.[42]

Even Sergio Nuñez de Arco, who has a serious interest in convincing consumers that there are no adverse side effects to quinoa production, concedes that the soils in Bolivia face severe degradation as a result of increased mechanization.[43] To make matters worse, given that the Altiplano cannot sustain most other crops, farmers will have little to grow if the soil becomes too depleted to cultivate quinoa. This environmental degradation will be long lasting and will decimate the farming ability of small communities. This threat of environmental degradation clearly contradicts Nyéléni's call for an "ecologically sound and sustainable form of production."[44]

"DEFINE THEIR OWN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS" The media also overwhelmingly neglects the third condition of Nyéléni, the right to "define their own food and agriculture systems."[45] Yet the socioeconomic stratification that increased trade has created significantly threatens small farmers' right to food sovereignty.

Created by farmers, and for farmers, producer organizations such as ANAPQUI and CECAOT have genuinely sought to improve the livelihoods of quinoa farmers in the Andes and were successful for decades. Yet in the wake of massive (and ongoing) globalization and Westernization, it is crucial to ask: can these organizations continue to accomplish their goals?

In the case of small farmers, the answer is no. As noted by Aurélie Carimentrand and Jérôme Ballet, the use of tractors has allowed more affluent farmers to expand quickly and farm the plains, restricting their poorer counterparts to the hillsides. This expansion especially exacerbates the distinction between rich and poor, they claim, given that according to indigenous law a farmer becomes legally entitled to land once they have cleared it.[46] Now that richer farmers can clear land more quickly, they can monopolize the remaining land and effectively squeeze out poor farmers who could not expand rapidly enough to stake their own claims.

Furthermore, the rapid expansion of the market has promoted large scale buying quotas and mechanical innovations that smaller producers cannot afford to implement.[47] Neither ANAPQUI nor CECAOT have implemented policies to favor purchasing from these poorer producers, meaning that with time, they will be eliminated from the market altogether and will not receive the benefits of international trade.[48]

The media often promotes Fair Trade as the solution to these problems of socioeconomic inequality that harm small-scale farmers. Pledging to secure fair prices and empower disadvantaged communities, Fair Trade uses a stamp of approval to reassure consumers that they are making ethical choices. Yet in the case of quinoa, Fair Trade fails to adequately address the concerns of small farmers, as it neglects to provide an appropriate definition for what "small farmer" actually means. According to Capodistrias, its definition refers neither to income nor to size, but instead requires that the farm is not "structurally dependent on salaried labor," and "mainly us[es] their own labor and that of their family."[49] However, the seasonal labor

that larger producers hire annually does not constitute "employment" under Fair Trade certifications, meaning that these organizations retain the title of "small farms" despite their increased size and labor force.[50] Therefore, buying Fair Trade quinoa does little to address growing socioeconomic stratification, leaving small farmers vulnerable to losing all control of their means of production.

Finally, it is important to note that the growth of this system, however autonomously controlled from the Southern side, is still entirely driven by Western demand. This has led analysts such as Hayato Wantanabe from the World Policy Journal to worry that propping up a developing country's economy on a single crop, especially a superfood-style crop that will likely be replaced when new fad foods arise, could lead to economic catastrophe.[51] If there exists such high potential for the market to collapse, which is entirely dependent on external demand, Andean farmers are not "defin[ing] their own food and agriculture systems."[52]

As the above evidence shows, the media's fear of "the rich robbing the poor" is relatively unwarranted compared to the serious threat that the transnational quinoa trade poses to the other two components of food sovereignty. Kerssen suggests that the mainstream media underrepresents these issues for a variety of reasons: they are more complicated, less trendy, and require the consumer to think critically about the global food system. By focusing only on the simplest, most popular issues of the time, the media ignores the complexity of the debate and therefore limits the validity of its analysis and recommendations.

While the media has made many errors, they were right about one thing: consumers should have serious ethical concerns about the transnational quinoa trade. While the first condition of Nyéléni may not have been violated, the remaining two—the right to ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right to define one's own food systems—are certainly threatened by the system in its current form.

THE RESPONSE TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: ADVOCATING FOR TRANSNATIONAL TRADE While the majority of the media's response to the transnational quinoa trade is negative, it is important to note that the consensus is not unanimous. Arguments that favor mass export question sovereignty as the basis of ethicality and instead suggest that, if profits from transnational trade make farmers richer and happier at the expense of their sovereignty, who are we to tell them which values should take precedence? However, I argue that because this increase in prosperity occurs at the socioeconomic expense of the smallest and most marginalized farmers and threatens an environment shared by the entire community, it does not provide a sufficient ethical defense for consuming quinoa.

Sources such as NPR's "Your Love of Quinoa is Good News for Andean Farmers" and The Associated Press's "Popular Quinoa Energizing Bolivian Economy" extoll the extensive financial benefits gained by some farmers as a result of the quinoa boom, which allowed them to rise above the poverty line and pursue a better life for themselves and their families. This rhetoric dominates the media, for it so closely parallels that of the American dream. American consumers love to read about a small Andean farmer pulling himself up to the middle class through hard work and dedication. Even more, they love the cultural capital associated with being partially responsible for his ascension.

The economic boon provided by quinoa is incredibly useful in alleviating some instances of rural poverty. In 2011, Bolivia was the poorest country in the Andean region, with 40 percent of its total population and 80 percent of its rural population living below the poverty line. In S.-E. Jacobsen's study of quinoa, he credits transnational trade for beginning to heal Bolivia's economy and improving the livelihoods of Andean peasants.[53] Doug Saunders, writing for The Globe and Mail, concurs:

The people of the Altiplano are indeed among the poorest in the Americas. But their economy is almost entirely agrarian. They are sellers—farmers or farm workers seeking the highest price and wage. The quinoa price rise is the greatest thing that has happened to them.[54]

At first glance, data from export countries corroborate Saunders's claim. In 2011, Bolivia's deputy minister of Rural Development and Land, Victor Hugo Vasquez, reported that "[i]n 2000, Bolivia exported 1,439 metric tons valued at $1.8 million. In 2009, exports totaled 14,500 tons worth more than $25 million."[55] Considering such statistics, many proponents of the quinoa trade argued that consumers had a moral responsibility to support an industry that could alleviate rural poverty on such a large scale.

The transnational quinoa trade empowers small farmers and raises struggling peasants above the poverty line, but these gains are made upon the backs of even smaller, more impoverished farmers. As the system is currently structured, with richer farmers able to rapidly expand and mechanize, one cannot succeed without squeezing others out. Currently, the socioeconomic consequences

counterbalance any potential ethical gains.

The transnational quinoa market could be restructured to empower farmers without marginalizing others. However, these changes may not lie with the Western dollar, but rather with Western advocacy. Until this point, all of the discourse discussed has attempted to answer one question: should we buy quinoa or not? In the next section, I problematize the premises behind this question and then explore the possibilities for ethically eating quinoa that encompass far more than spending or abstaining.

THE VIABILITY OF CAPITALIST SOLUTIONS Almost every article I researched for this piece asked the same question: in order to be the most ethical consumers, should we buy or avoid quinoa? Very few stepped back and asked the larger, more critical question often posed by scholars such as Tanya Kerssen: is spending (or not spending) the most effective means of reform?

Kerssen attributes the persistence of this capital-centric rhetoric to two factors: it is easy to disseminate in short media blurbs, and it does not challenge systems of capitalism, globalization, or neoliberalism. Compared to the idea of advocating for agrarian reform, buying a package of fair trade quinoa or cage-free eggs is far easier, and it is the kind of solution that has been encouraged by leading public health advocates. Michael Pollan, whose groundbreaking book The Omnivore's Dilemma sold nearly two million copies, strongly endorses this concept. Rather than encourage readers to call on corporations to reform their products, Pollan suggests that they opt out of the industrial food system through alternative food pathways. For the consumers who can afford to buy the organic, Free Trade products that Pollan recommends, believing in the power of buying or not buying grants them an easy way to feel like they are working to change the system; for them, neither more thought nor more reform is required.[56]

Scholars such as Power agree, adding that these recommendations allow both corporations and the government to shift responsibility for fixing unethical food systems to consumers and obscures corporations' responsibility to provide ethical goods.[57] Overall, the Western tendency towards capitalist-centric ideology has shaped the very nature of how we have viewed the quinoa debate: it was nothing more than a question of spending more or spending less, with more complex and less traditional systems of reform pushed to the margins of the debate.

CONCLUSION In the past few months, quinoa's popularity has begun to fade. Consumers now seek the new fad food, abandoning the craze that has forever changed the Andean economy. Yet even though the craze is ending, understanding its impact is vital—the cycle of "superfoods" will continue for as long as Western culture values healthy, exotic, and indigenous products, and understanding how we conceptualize them will prevent us from making the same flawed generalizations in the future.

While the quinoa craze is waning, it continues to play a significant role in Western diets, and our demand continues to influence the Andean economy. As a result, it is still crucial to reform this system in the interest of both the environment and the socioeconomic status of the farmers who depend on it.

While flawed, consumer choice provides some solutions. For those who still wish to buy quinoa, it is crucial that they source it through corporations actively working to combat the consequences of large-scale production. Corporations such as AlterEco and Andean Naturals include environmental and social protections within their own codes of corporate conduct, with AlterEco's promising that "each farmer is required to own at least seven hectares of cultivated quinoa to provide manure," and that the organization is committed to "planting thola and other native trees and shrubs around the parcels to protect the fields from the wind which is responsible for a large part of the erosion of the desert soil."[58] Quinoa production must also remain organic, given that organic cultivation both keeps harmful chemicals off the land and prevents farmers from becoming dependent on off-farm inputs, a factor which pushed many American farmers into debt during the industrialization of the U.S. farm system.

The most viable forms of reform, however, exist outside of the consumerism bubble. As a first step, Kerssen recommends campaigning for agrarian reform, which would redistribute land from the wealthy to the poor and prevent the smallest farmers from getting squeezed out of the system.[59] It is also crucial to campaign for reform in Fair Trade certifications, to ensure that any product receiving the Fair Trade label truly benefits the small farmers it pledges to protect.

If food sovereignty is to remain the standard of ethical food production, it is also crucial that nations create laws promoting Nyéléni-esque guidelines. As noted by Hannah Wittman, some Andean nations have already begun this process. Article 13 of the Ecuadorian Constitution affirms that "[p]ersons and community groups have the right to safe and permanent access to healthy, sufficient and nutritional

food, preferably produced locally and in keeping with their various identities and cultural traditions," and states that "the Ecuadorian State shall promote food sovereignty."[60] Article 16 of the Bolivian Constitution asserts that "All people have the right to water and food, and that the state has the obligation to guarantee food security."[61] Continuing to promote laws such as these will encourage a crucial mindset of food sovereignty amongst both governments and farmers and will ensure that both quinoa and other local production systems will progress in the most ethical manner possible.

Finally, it is crucial to reform our own attitudes—more specifically, our proclivity for simple, black-and-white solutions. To truly eat ethically we must remain skeptical of the simple answer and instead think critically and challenge the notions of neoliberalism, imperialism, and capitalism that so markedly shape our ideas about food today.

ENDNOTES

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