

Nostalgia does not nourish and generates algorithms

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In Japan, for months, an unprecedented crisis has been hitting rice. First the drought of 2023, then the massive return of post-pandemic tourism, finally geopolitical tensions and fears for new natural catastrophes: the sum of these factors has dried up stocks and made prices soar. Rice cannot be found, or it costs too much. An Agriculture Minister had to resign after boasting of receiving some as a gift. A young traveling cook, famous for his onigiri, had to suspend production. The scarcity of rice has become a political, cultural, and identity fact.

One always begins from a lack. Of rice, in this case. But it could be water, copper, or indeed sense. In Japan, the scarcity of *kome* has generated something more than a food crisis: it has

awakened a cultural obsession, an identity rhetoric, and a narrative machine that does not concern only food, but power. Rice, like carbonara for us, like couscous elsewhere, is not only nourishment. It is an algorithm of belonging. And when the field does not produce, the nation huddles around the narrative. Borders are no longer traced by walls or seas, but by sensory grammars: a flavor, a texture, a gesture that distinguishes an “us” from a “them”.

In a country where artificial intelligence is already an integral part of agricultural management, food logistics, and identity infrastructures (from school canteens to nationalist festivals), the shortage of rice is not only a system dysfunction. It is a bug in the story of self.

Even food, like language, like identity, must perhaps become something else. No longer a brand of purity, but an occasion for plurality. Instead of strengthening a unique, centralized, monitored, and nostalgic food identity, we should start thinking about a food ecology inspired by *noodiversity* and biodiversity: that welcomes, mixes, contaminates, adapts. A gastronomic ecosystem that reflects the hybridization of the world and the multiplicity of cultures that inhabit it. Because every identity menu, if imposed, is an algorithm of exclusion. While every open kitchen is a living archive of encounters, errors, fermentations, and possibilities.

And as always, the system runs for cover: more data, more sensors, more predictive models to stabilize the supply chain and reassure the population. But not to open a political question on who decides what is indigenous, who tells the past, who writes it in the code.

Gastronationalism is what happens when a material crisis, like the lack of rice, is absorbed inside an identity story and transformed into political leverage. The problem is no longer access to food, but the defense of “our” cuisine. The daily gesture of eating becomes an act of belonging, and the collective narrative stiffens into a selective memory, where only what confirms an idealized past is celebrated. In this process, AI is not a neutral spectator: it is already the engine of selection, a tool of amplification, a filter of legitimacy. It is she who establishes what is authentic, what is worthy of being recommended, cooked, celebrated.

Food, in this scheme, is no longer a relationship but a border. It is no longer sharing but symbolic marking. Rice, a primary good, national symbol, object of famine, thus becomes the battlefield on which an entire algorithmic grammar of recognition is projected.

The national AIs that read sentiments in comments, track consumption, and prepare patriotic campaigns based on onigiri are not technical tools: they are ideological devices. Manipulable oracles, which return exactly the type of security we want to hear: “our rice, our land, our history”. Not because it is true, but because it sounds good inside the algorithm of fear.

But the alternative is not eating Indian rice or inserting cultivated meat into school *bentos*. It is not even pitting tradition and innovation as if they were two battlefields. The alternative is changing language, shifting the stakes: no longer defending identity as if it were a relic, but building it as if it were a living network of moving relations.

If AI continues to be trained to recognize the similar, the known, the authentic encoded by those who have a voice, then it will continue to reproduce the same zones of exclusion, the same algorithms of suspicion. But if we rethink it as an ally of the margins, of contaminations, of diverse communities that do not ask for recognition but space for expression, then it can become another thing: a form of culinary diplomacy between territories, a grammar of care between differences, a porous intelligence, which is hungry not for roots, but for intertwinings.

It is not a matter of replacing rice with something else, but of rewriting the gesture itself of cooking. No longer belongings that exclude, but practices that include, that cross cultures as fire does in shared pans. The intelligence that is needed is not the one that replicates the genealogy of a codified taste, but the one that recognizes in contaminations a form of intimacy. No longer roots to defend, but rhizomes to cultivate: foods that tell stories, that migrate, that also make mistakes. An AI capable of learning from what ferments at the margins, not only from what has already been packaged as true. Because cooking, like thinking, is never a solitary act. And no recipe can survive without new hands that rewrite it.

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Fonte: <https://www.ruralhack.org/en/nostalgia-does-not-nourish-and-generates-algorithms/>