

CINEMA AND FOOD: the kitchen in the film *Chocolate*, by Lasse Hallström

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Abstract

The cinematic art has the power to address the sociocultural behavior of people as determined by values and principles established by a civilization. Given the ability of the cinema to reflect on culture, this paper aims to discuss culinary aspects of the film *Chocolat*, by Lasse Hallström, by emphasizing the notion of cooking as a cultural food system, mainly focusing on the meanings the movie characters attributed to chocolate and to the cook. We used the methods of Moving Image Analysis, and some scenes were selected and discussed. We listed the following four categories: cultural heritage, religion, commensality and pleasure. With the analysis of the film, it was noticed that the kitchen is not only a physical space but also a system where the chocolate ingredient and the cook effectively modified pre-established habits in the portrayed society.

Key words: Kitchen. Chocolate. Culture. Cooker.

Introduction

In today's society, we can see a separation between science and art. We must reflect on a possible dialogue between these fields of knowledge, because the answers to questions involving men, when provided by science, may be insufficient to tackle the complexity that such questions demand. Nutrition, for example, might take food into account not only from the technical point of view, which involves the biochemical and physiological context, but also based on food-related sociological, cultural, artistic and sensory aspects.

We believe, therefore, that the access to art could expand nutritionists' ability to understand the food phenomenon. According to this line of reasoning, the cinematic art behaves as a means of problematizing customs and cultural values, including the eating habits of a civilization. Edgard de Assis Carvalho refers to the cinema as total social phenomenon.¹ Similarly, the cuisine not only conveys expertise and dietary within a physical space, but also reflects the cultural heritage of a people, through, for example, the origin of the ingredients used and the cultural heritage transmitted by cooks.

Therefore, this paper sought to discuss aspects of the cuisine, namely, the cultural food system, featured in the film *Chocolate*, by Lasse Hallström, and also shed light on the meanings conveyed in the film for the cook and for chocolate.

Theoretical framework and methodological strategies

Two main ideas will be the theoretical basis of this study. One of them is the concept of cuisine presented by Claude Fischler in *The omnivore*, which sees cuisine as a cultural food system and, therefore, as a key to understanding culture.² Fischler constructs this notion based on the ideas of Lévi-Strauss in *Mythologiques*. The anthropologist, while researching aspects of the culture of the indigenous people of Central Brazil, stated that “the cuisine of a society is a language that unconsciously represents its structure, unless, also unawares, it is limited to reveal its contradictions of such society”³ [our translation].

The dialogue with art, in this case, is justified mainly by the idea presented by Morin in *La Tête Bien Faite*, when he says: “It shows that in every great work of literature, cinema, poetry, music, painting, sculpture, there is a deep thought about the human condition” [our translation].⁴ The cinema, for example, can play an important role in clarifying social phenomena. It provides “clues to the decipherment of cultural puzzles that coexist with us since we became homo sapiens sapiens demens [our translation].”⁴

Thus, understanding this cultural complex food system through art can be a way to understand cooking in its multidimensionality, since “those multidimensional dimensions of creativity are the ones that are present not only in filmmakers and actors, but in writers, poets and men of science” [our translation].¹

This research used a qualitative methodology, based on the analysis of the film *Chocolate* (original title: *Chocolat*), an adaptation of the novel of the same name by English writer Joanne Harris, released in the year 2000 in the US by Lasse Hallström. It is a romantic comedy film with running time of 105 minutes.

To conduct the research, we used methodologies of moving image analysis,^{5,6} which comprise the following:

- Compilation of basic information about the film (Portuguese title, original title, year, country, genre, length, credits, film theme).
- Transcription of the material (visual dimension and verbal dimension).
- Analysis and interpretation of relationships between these separate elements.

A description was made of 14 scenes that contained points of interest for reflection in this paper. The scenes were listed by the researchers in the order they appeared in the film. The results after the analysis of the scenes are reported below.

Results

In the film *Chocolate*, by Lasse Hallström, it is possible to realize the scope of the concept of cooking as going beyond the physical space of the kitchen, by means of the roles of both the cook and the ingredient whose name serves as the title of the film, in the social and cultural relations of the plot.

A peaceful French town is bustling with the arrival of two Mayan descendants: Vianne and her daughter Anouk, who bring with them the secrets from the Mayan culture for cocoa. Because it is a largely Catholic environment, Vianne makes enemies when she decides to market tasty chocolates at Lent. As reported by the cook, such sweetmeals produced different effects and were suggested to customers based on their personality and needs. The sensations evoked in people who ventured to try the products of the chocolaterie really produced unimaginable changes in whom one would least expect: the rapprochement between family members (Luc, Armande and Caroline) and the restructuring of the rigid concepts of a mayor (Count of Reynaud) are some examples.

In the film, the cook and the chocolate have two opposing facets that show various representations, with food being a trigger to communication.

Food conveys human feelings and meanings, as a support for communication of feelings that comprise social relations. It is by purchasing, preparing, consuming, and by dietary practices in general, that mere nutritional compounds become group-specific cultural symbols; and denote multiple representations, structures and dynamics built by man.⁷ [our translation]

The art of cinema was able, to a certain extent, to encode the symbols of power, and take them to the screen with all the complexity of the topic. By focusing our analysis on the figure of the cook and the chocolate ingredient, the following categories emerge as a result: cultural heritage, religion, commensality and pleasure. First, however, we believe it is important to briefly describe the ingredient that gives its name to the film and its protagonist, the cook.

An overview: the chocolate and the cook

Ingredient for the senses: chocolate

As we noticed in the film, chocolate is a product from the Americas. The cocoa beans are the fruit of the cocoa tree, which grows primarily in Central and South America, where it stems from.⁸ The cocoa tree is a plant that belongs to the Sterculiaceae family,⁹ and today it is grown in West Africa, where it was later taken by Europeans.

The first name of the cocoa tree was *Amygdala pecuniariae*, which means “pecuniary almond”, due to its importance as a trading currency. However, it was Carl von Linne who made the first botanical classification of the tree and called it *Theobroma cacao*, meaning “cocoa, the food of the gods” [our translation].⁸

Chocolate is derived from the Aztec word *Xocolatl*, meaning “frothy water”, a term which was used by the Olmec (1500-400 BC), the Aztecs (1,400 BC) and later by the Mayans (600 BC).¹⁰ The Mayas, about 600 BC, also knew chocolate and established the first cocoa plantations.⁹

The history of chocolate came to prominence alongside these peoples: the Mayan and Aztec civilizations. In Mexico, the Aztecs worshipped the god Quetzalcoatl, who embodied wisdom and knowledge and was the one who gave them, among other things, chocolate. The Aztecs believed that Quetzalcoatl brought cocoa seeds from heaven to people and that one day he would return after being destroyed by a rival god.⁹

In these civilizations, chocolate highlighted the differences between social classes and the status held by people. For example, between the Maya and Aztecs, only nobility could afford the usual use of chocolate. In the year 1519, chocolate was reserved only to Governors and soldiers because it was believed that, in addition to aphrodisiac powers, chocolate gave strength and force to those who drank it.¹⁰

Over time, several stories about chocolate have been told. One of them remains true until our days, as shown in the movie *Chocolat*: the ingredient is associated with the sin of lust, due to its aphrodisiac nature. The product releases a substance called “endorphin” – also present during orgasm – which is linked directly to love, as suggested by the film by Hallström. The chocolates sold by Vianne were black and had a mystery whose discovery required trying them and feeling them slide all over one’s mouth, as seen in the scene where she tries to convince Yvette, one of her customers, to taste a given food preparation containing chili, so that her hidden feelings were aroused. In addition, the cook also offered another product to be consumed by her customer’s husband, so that Yvette could realize that food caused changes in her husband as he was tasting the chocolate.

You need three peppers: a dash of chili pepper ... to reduce the sweetness, spicy, bold. (Vianne, when talking to her customer).

And these are for your husband. Unrefined cocoa from Guatemala. To ignite your passions. (Vianne).

You obviously don't know my husband. (Yvette).

You've obviously never tasted it. (Vianne).

When her customer’s husband eats the chocolate brought by his wife, his desire is awakened and so is a caricatured restructuring of their bonds of love and passion with his wife. Therefore, one of the magic powers that chocolate accounted for this couple was perceived. In Aztec mythology, chocolate is related to Xochiquétzal, Aztec goddess of beauty, flowers, love, pleasure and love of the arts.¹¹ In fact, she was the protagonist of the first sexual act in history, according to Aztec mythology (and also the first birth delivery). In view of the ability of chocolate as an aphrodisiac, which also contains phenylethylamine, a neurotransmitter that acts on libido,¹² the ingredient may influence the senses individually or together, and their most important receptors are: sight, hearing, smell and taste.

When solving the mystery – the awakening of good feelings, caused by the feeling of well-being, people smile without knowing that it transmitted, simply, a message of love. That feeling makes chocolate, until today, one of the best-selling delicacies on Valentine’s day and at Easter, for

example. Because it is a natural product chocolate that awakens the mood and sensuality through its substances, with pronounced acceptance by people in general – which gave it the status as one of the most coveted delicacies in the world – chocolate, in recent decades, has been explored in commemorative dates, in advertising, in the film industry (in movies and novels) in commercial products and even in sex shop products.

Cook or witch? Vianne's magic and sensuality

Is regarded as a social phenomenon basically composed of three elements: acts, agents and representations. We consider as magical only the facts that society deems as such and that belong to tradition. The existing rituals in magic acts are capable of producing something beyond conventions: they are eminently effective; they are creators.¹³

The above concept relates to what was termed Shamanic complex, which consists of three inseparable elements, observed to some extent in the film under discussion: first, the shaman's own experience, if his vocation is real (and even if it is not, only by practice), he begins to experience specific states of a psychosomatic nature¹⁴ a fact that occurs when Vianne suggests achocolate to a customer. She believes, based on her experience, that the product can change the condition of the sick individual. This can be seen on the scene described above, in which she offers unrefined cocoa from Guatemala to “ignite passions” between husband and wife. That is, there is the belief of the one who claims to be a sorceress, that its power is real.

Another element is the experience of the sick person who experiences a recovery. The person, a target of remarks made by the protagonist, believes in a way that the ingredient will bring to his life what Vianne had stated. This event is seen on the scene where a wife returns to the chocolaterie to purchase some products that previously helped her to get back together with her husband. She believes in the power of the sorcerer.

Finally, there is the experience of the audience, which also participates in the process of healing, by validating the Shaman's performance. Before discussing this last element of the shamanic complex, it is necessary to emphasize that initially there is a kind of distrust of the cook, as if the citizens were testing Vianne's power. Such distrust can also be linked to another account of Lévi-Strauss,¹⁴ when in *The sorcerer and his magic* says that shamans themselves are submitted to tests, in order to validate their craft towards the population. However, as days went by, the owner of the chocolaterie gathers more customers because of the success of her chocolates indelighting the senses of the town dwellers. Similarly, the sorcerer portrayed in the work *Structural Anthropology*¹⁴ convinces the population to “materialize” the disease which he is willing to heal. The confessional

scene already described is an example, in which the characters share their thoughts aroused by chocolates manufactured by Vianne.

In Europe, during the modern age, shamanism (witchcraft) was seen by most people as something negative because shamans could manipulate individuals who were the target of their spells. This was seen on the scene where the Mayor, despite his strict self-control not to eat chocolate, goes into the chocolaterie and, after trying the first chocolates, cannot control the urge to continue eating them.

On Easter's eve, Mayor Reynaud feels angry because Vianne has not left town and all the dwellers are eating her chocolates. He had the idea of going to the chocolaterie while everyone was sleeping to destroy all the chocolates she had made (meanwhile, the setting is grim, suspense soundtrack is heard, and Reynaud puts on a bored expression). Much to his surprise, however, he succumbs to temptation and eats everything he sees in front of him, thus discovering the true power represented by the chocolate made by Vianne. The religious sacrifice that preceded his entry into the store is replaced with the discovery of the satisfaction provided by the chocolates; his senses are heightened to try the delicacy. The formerly serious attitude changes, and as if he were bewitched, his appearance now is of a frivolous man surrendered to a carnal desire. His conscience begins to weigh in remorse, his fidelity to Lent and, consequently, his religious commitment, are defeated.

Cooks, and similarly, healers and midwives (duties most commonly performed by women) were the most likely to be accused of witchcraft, especially cooks, because they had the ability to lure by food, and to bewitch by carnal desire. They could also transform herbs into "magic potions" and ointments, a justification of the stereotypical image of the witch with her cauldron.¹⁵ Vianne can be compared to a witch because of her posture, as well as the image attributed to the Mayan descendant by the other characters in the film *Chocolat*. This view of seduction and desire is represented in the scene where, after tasting the chocolate brought by Yvette, there is an incentive for the reappearance of passion between the couple.

Discussion

The development of a cuisine of pleasures? Maya origin and local Catholic culture

In general, the cuisine of a colonized country is constructed from large population displacements and the resulting exchanges. When people migrate, they carry along a whole set of cultural food practices, whose background contains several elements, techniques and ingredients, but also values, preferences, requirements and prohibitions using local elements, to create food systems with

new cuisines.¹⁶ This cuisine can be exemplified in the film, especially in the scene where Vianne, the protagonist, tells her daughter about the story of her parents, depicting the characteristics of her mother, a wanderer of Mayan descent who went from one town to another and prescribed ancient cocoa remedies.

One night, they offered her whole cocoa with a hint of chili. The same drink that the ancient Mayans used in their sacred ceremonies. Mayans believed that cocoa had the power to release hidden desires ... and reveal destinations. (Narrator).

Emphasizing this idea in the book *Food as culture* [our translation],¹⁷ the author asserts that immigrants maintain bonds with their cultural background, establishing a paradox between the tradition of their ancestors and today's culture. This can be seen on the scene where Vianne offers hot chocolate with pepper to Armande, who drinks it. In this event, Mayan cuisine was strongly present in the approach to chocolate and preparations based on it, which are enriched by elements of this civilization.

I got the right thing for you. (Vianne)-Vianne prepares chocolate...

-Your cinnamon looks rancid. (Armande). It's not cinnamon, it's a special type of pepper. (Vianne) Pepper in hot chocolate? (Armande, with a mocking expression). "It will cheer you up. (Vianne)-Armande drinks the chocolate.

- It tastes like ... I don't know ... (smile of remembrance ...).

After he drinks the chocolate made by Vianne, Armande starts to see things differently, treats Vianne better and feels in a good mood. Just like the Mayans had pepper-spiced hot chocolate to combat fatigue and believed that cocoa was a symbol of physical strength and longevity, Vianne uses it for therapeutic purposes, passing on her Mayan customs to Armande. Chocolate, even with a previously unknown taste, awakens thoughts and feelings in Armande that were previously overlooked. It makes him revive the good times he had had in life. It brought up memories that he had long forgotten.

By these means, the cuisine inserted into the culinary system translates the cultural principles of a people, as well as Lévi Strauss underscores that the cuisine of a society is a language where people unconsciously express their structure.³ Such a claim is also enhanced in the book *The omnivore*,² which points out that the act of eating goes beyond foods and their metabolic action only, but also encompasses their representations.

Just like cultural background influences a society's cuisine, local culture also plays a role in building the notion that people have about food. On the one hand, it strengthens a sense of belonging to the original group (Mayas-chocolate); on the other hand, there is a negotiation and construction of new meanings with the culture which they interact with at present (local-chocolate). A set of eating practices determined over time by a society, which starts to identify it and often becomes rooted and then is considered a cultural heritage: this is what happens to *tortilla de patatas* and *spaghetti al pomodoro*, dishes which have Spanish and Italian origin, but whose main ingredients are corn and tomato, unknown in Europe until the 15th century.¹⁸

Chocolate, also American, was consumed in the local community under discussion, but with some restrictions of the local culture, imposed, in this case, by the Catholic Church. In this way, the rules dictated by the Catholic religion during Lent, followed by people in the town depicted in the film, heavily influenced the selection of foods for those individuals, as seen on the scene in which the boy Luc and his mother visit the chocolaterie and are hosted by Vianne, who offers the boy some chocolate; however, he is immediately unable to accept it because his mother is keen to remind him that they were at Lent and fasting should be respected. On this scene, Vianne and Anouck receive their first potential customers in their settled confectionery, Luc and his mother Caroline. As a rule, Anouck rotates the symbol used by his mother to find out the boy's favorite chocolate and asks him to tell her what he sees. Meanwhile, Caroline observes.

“What do you see?” (Anouck). “I see ... I see blood ... a skull” (Luc). “Very bleak. Bitter chocolate. It’s his favorite.” (Vianne). “You will have to wait another 5 weeks, Lent. Thank you.” (Caroline-Luc’s mother).

Caroline is a Christian faithful to the commandments of God and of Mayor Reynaud. According to these commandments, chocolate, a delicacy often considered as a great source of pleasure, was forbidden during the period of Lent. It was seen as lust, sin. This event is also emphasized on the scene where the Mayor of the town talks, in a beauty parlor, to some town residents about the fact that Vianne had opened a chocolaterie right at Lent, which is considered something audacious because it breaks the rules imposed by religion.

Have you seen the new shop on the square? (Reynaud) The chocolaterie? Yes. (the widow). A shame, isn't it? How daring this woman is. Open a Chocolaterie at Lent. She is insolent. (Reynaud)

Religion was a great rival of the chocolaterie, because it was opened at Lent; people avoided eating sweets, as they were heavily influenced by Mayor Reynaud, who followed the laws of religion strictly and, therefore, wanted to destroy the chocolaterie before Easter.

In addition, the fact that the local population reject the chocolate marketed by Vianne at first, on the scene discussed above, shows that some of the cultural rules of a society enforce mutual exclusion of food classes, for various reasons. In the film, these reasons were religious, since this is a period when Christians mentally and physically refrain from pleasures.² Feeding behavior in societies follows religious, medical and ethical rules, depending on moral or value-based judgments.¹⁹ With regard to religion, every more or less articulated belief system or religion contains some kind of food prescription.²⁰ In *The omnivore*, Fischler² adds that certain foods – such as chocolate, an outstanding food item in the film - are only taboo in certain circumstances and/or for some individuals or groups of individuals.

Food taboos control, in a way, food consumption and dietary behavior, relying on previously established classifications, which are internalized by individuals unconsciously.² Food rules serve as rituals that establish disciplines by means of self-control techniques, seeking to avoid the pleasure provided by food. Thus, overcoming this temptation means taming oneself. That is why the religious technique of fasting is so important; the outcome also allows a state of consciousness that promotes well-being.²¹

The presence of Vianne and the chocolaterie in town managed to show how vulnerable the residents are to their wishes, causing them to question the standards through the confessions made to the priest, on the scene where they express their concerns by failing to resist the mystical and seductive power of chocolate. In the confessional, people with expressions of grief and despair, confess to the priest of the town that they cannot resist to chocolate made by the cook, and feel guilty about that.

Every time I say it's the last time. But then I feel the aroma of hot chocolate ... of chocolates. Oh my god. Those chocolate seashells. (Luc).

[...] so pure and innocent ... I think just a little won't hurt. But they're stuffed with a sinful cream ... (Unknown).

Melting, God forgive me ... melts slowly on your tongue. Torture of pleasure (unknown).

Because they are under a “no policy”, they feel extremely guilty if they enjoy small and simple moments of pleasure, feelings of guilt that are reinforced by the rules of the Church. It is judged as harmless and even as a source of virtues, in the case of Armande and his grandson Luc. In the warm atmosphere of chocolaterie and with chocolate, Vianne helped restore the family links of these characters, as seen on the scene where Luc meets his grandmother at the chocolaterie. The boy wants to do a portrait of his grandmother after a long time without talking to her, because his mother Caroline had prohibited.

Grandma. Good morning Granny. (Luc is startled when he enters the Chocolaterie and sees her, then he greets her).

Can I ... would you like a cup of ...? (Armande is eager to embrace him but disguises the anxiety).

No, thank you. I'm just here to do a portrait (Luc, addressing Vianne now).

Of whom? (Armande, looking at Vianne, surprised).

Yours, of course (Vianne).

Is the light ok? (Vianne addresses Luc).

I have something for you, boy. I've been keeping it since your birthday. It's a book of poems (Armande).

Thank you. (Luc, approaching his grandmother).

Despite the conflicts and oppositions initially imposed by the local population in the town portrayed on the scene which shows Armande's birthday party, most guests were Catholic and yet were delighted with the chocolate preparations, and failed to follow their religious customs.

At Armande's birthday party, the food and especially the chocolate made the guests feel freed from cultural differences. People were angry at the presence of Vianne at the beginning of the party, but that feeling passed as they proved every dish served at the table. The facial expressions changed completely: they were happy and satisfied. Most diners, including the birthday girl, were Catholic and happy even though they were having a meal prepared by someone they considered to be pagan, and with a traveler that was very discriminated against by the followers of this religion. The setting shows a table full of preparations and guests with great pleasure, which resembles scenes from the classic *Babette's Feast*.

The scene shows that the cuisine brought by Vianne interfered in the way – even though on a microscale at that moment – people lived their religious traditions, when they say “the cuisine of the settler is adopted by the local population to the detriment of traditional practices, leading to a radical transformation in their eating habits”.¹⁶

Gluttony-Lust: the Cook and the stimulus of the pleasures of the flesh

Excess pleasure of eating, to date, is seen by the Church and by a great deal of society governed by the precepts of the former, as one of the deadly sins.

The transgression of the determination imposed by religion consists in the act of sinning. The Church created the notion of “cardinal sin” – which are seven and consist of vices or serious faults cataloged during the middle ages: avarice, envy, wrath, lust, pride, gluttony and sloth.²²

As seen throughout the film *Chocolat*, when consuming this ingredient, Christians can commit two sins, which go hand in hand: infernal duo of carnal vices: Gluttony-Lust.²³

Chocolate awakens, according to the local Christian community, impure thoughts that were considered as unfit for those who wish to follow the commandments of religion strictly. Whoever dared to touch this “nectar of the gods” with their lips was disapproved of, and deemed as a sinner. However, this “forbidden fruit” triggers people to awaken their inner desire and try it.

In this context, the infernal duo of carnal vices complement each other, leading to the feeling of guilt that haunts the guilty and the innocent. This fact is noted on the scene where the Mayor, perhaps tired of his own rules, surrenders to the aphrodisiac taste of chocolate, and feels delighted while feeling gluttony, pleasure, and is later struck by the feelings of guilt and shame. “Gluttony is one of the most direct paths to lust and, if we move a little further, to the destruction of the soul”.²⁴

Society, although not in general, seeks means by which it can circumvent the desires that lead to sin, with the purpose of purification of the soul and acceptance in the kingdom of heaven. “The experience of satisfaction, which includes feeding, is therefore the main link between pleasure and desire”.²²

Angelina Nascimento, in her book “*Food: pleasures, joys and transgressions*” [our translation]²², addresses the following concept of pleasure: “pleasure” consists of a pleasant, harmonious sensation or feeling, which serves a vital propensity; joy, contentment, satisfaction, pleasure. Another concept is also brought by the author: in a dictionary of psychology, “pleasure” is defined as an emotional state characterized by the desire for continuity. A kind of sensation (or fusion of sensations) that stems from internal organs, though diffuse and without specific location, perhaps with substantial contribution of external genital organs, and characterized by its pleasantness.

Currently, doing something with pleasure or for pleasure has been much more discussed, although it still faces opposition from Church, as some people who refuse to discuss the subject. In the film *Chocolat*, feeling pleasure while eating chocolate was something prohibited by the Church and the Mayor, a faithful Shepherd of morality, as a forbidden act, against what was advocated by religion. This is why the town dwellers, when tasting the food, felt guilty even though they enjoyed

the sensation, as is seen on the scene where the characters make a confession. What in fact was preventing people from indulging with Vianne's chocolate was the fear of feeling something they had never experienced before. Sensations such as freedom and happiness about doing something without feeling guilty afterwards.

Commensality

Men, when living in society, express gestures to perform the act of eating that represents meanings assigned to food; thus, food is not seen only as a nutritional substance, but as the inclusion of everything that revolves it. As noted on the scene where there is a feast to celebrate the birthday of a lady (Armande), whose guests are people of different religions and yet, everyone is satisfied and happy, a sign that food sharing can be a strong point in bringing people closer together.¹⁶

Such idea is confirmed by Contreras & Arnáiz,²⁰ who claimed that the "common table" – i.e. the meal eaten in communion, establishes a symbol of equality where everyone enjoys the same rights and has the same duties. Individuals that share a common table, whatever their social class is, acquire the first sign of belonging to a certain group.¹⁷ Another point worth of notice is that the table, where commensality takes place, is one of the most fundamental references of human familiarity. Family relationships are effectand continually re-effected at the table.²⁵

On one of the scenes of the film, the owner of the chocolaterie (Vianne) is about to take one more trip to another town, but her friends convince her to stay in town. The scene took place in the kitchen of the Chocolaterie, with people around the table preparing various recipes with chocolate and well committed to their duties. With the mission of disseminating the chocolate culture elsewhere, Vianne plans such a trip and the lovers of her delicacy, now her friends, try to dissuade her from leaving in the same way she convinced them to eat chocolate during Lent. Chocolate and Vianne's cuisine communicated feelings able to rekindle family ties and demystify the exclusive presence of woman in the kitchen, established in the culture of the town.

The conquest of otherstake place through cooking, which rebinds the affection and the pleasure of eating together. The purpose of banquets is not only to promote physiological satisfaction or even gluttony, but the need to exist socially.²⁶ Eating habits and practices of social groups, distant or recent, are likely to constitute culinary traditions; therefore, the individual often considers himself as inserted in a sociocultural context, which gives him an identity, reaffirmed by the memory of taste.²⁷

The differentiation in human feeding behavior occurred only by the invention of cooking, but also by commensality— that is, the social function of meals. Cooking food has favored social interactions, and became very important at this level. Thus, fresh meat, fermented beverage, salt and olive oil have become characteristics of parties and relationships of coexistence, and symbols of friendly relationships. At the beginning of the third millennium, eating and drinking together with others, not only strengthens friendship between equals, but also reinforces relations between Lord and vassals; even trade agreements among merchants were concluded in a tavern, opposite a “saucepan”.²⁸

Conclusion

We have used the cinema to, through dialogue, discuss the meanings of the cuisine depicted in the movie *Chocolat*, by Lasse Hallström. We focused our analysis on the figure of the cook and on chocolate. We developed the discussion based on four categories of analysis: cultural heritage, religion, commensality and pleasure. Cultural heritage is represented through cuisine, which reveals the cultural principles of people by conveying language which symbolizes a culture of its own and that can influence other local cultures. This shows that the cuisine does not involve just the act of cooking or eating, but also a set of their representations, while pleasure sought by many and avoided in every way by others, for fear or shame of the comments of others or the feeling of guilt during and after eating, which is often referred to as “sin”. However, in many cases, fear stems from the concept formed about the unknown, an idea which is clearly defended and explained in the film.

In this way, eating together is, above all, a pleasure to be shared. In addition, commensality is essential for individuals to resolve their differences and be properly inserted in the social context. Religion dictates rules, including feeding rules, which influence behavior and can be modified by the insertion of new traditions or beliefs that transform the local culture, bringing new meanings to what previously seemed to be strange.

Therefore, the art transcends aesthetic manifestations, and can transmit other types of knowledge, often revealing socio-cultural aspects of a population. With this ability to address features of a society by emphasizing its various representations, the film allows the perception of a magnified view of a culinary system, and shows that this is not based only on the importance of nutritional food, but also on the meanings imparted by them.

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