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The meanings of food from production to consumption in northwestern Argentina

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Abstract

The aim is to analyze discussions about food emerging from the field of food production self-sufficiency in northwestern Argentina, in the context of an industrialized and hegemonic production of foods that tends to globally homogenize diets. Therefore, cuisine broadly, involving the facets of production, distribution, preparation and consumption, was tracked and studied. The ethnographic research involved in-depth interviews and participative observation, taking as a case study a northwestern Argentina village. Among the results emerged, with gradations, the farmers' autonomy when producing food targeted to self-sufficient consumption, which have their own seeds, organic fertilizers, knowledge and skills to produce and prepare them, as well as trade and exchange networks among relatives and friends outside the distribution channels of the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere. The place of these foods in daily intakes is viewed as secondary in relation to the ones from the hegemonic sphere, although critical in certain seasons, and within numerous community meals in this region. Among the conclusions, the diversifier rather than homogenizer impact of the hegemonic food agribusiness production was considered. It is possible to see that the persistence of crops and raising animals for self-sufficient consumption can be accomplished by implementing several strategies, values, meanings and memories that move and allow the continuity of the production unit as well as its culture in a broader sense.

Key words: Foods. Food production self-sufficiency. Peasants. Hegemonic food agribusiness sphere. Cuisine. Argentina.

Introduction

Currently, virtually all societies of the world are influenced by the expansion of the hegemonic world food agribusiness industry, which includes all instances involving food production, distribution and supply. On the other hand, this influences the homogenization of food patterns of different social groups.[1] This global trend corresponds to the gradual retreat from traditional practices for the self-supply of food and the transition to the process of buying it, separating the act of eating from the need to plant, as well as to raise animals, and to a much lesser extent, to harvest and hunt.[2]

Most of these activities described, previously done in the kitchen, were transferred to the factory. Nevertheless, agricultural societies remain, inserted in the context of diversified domestic ecosystems, characterized by being located in a specific and regional environment, which depend, for the most part, on local resources available and on which are grown and produced in small land lots and in a domestic form several species that are part of the food consumed, which is supplemented by raising animals.[3]

In such cases, eating habits are linked to the cyclical nature of food, since the selection of food to consume is associated with the peculiarities of the environment and the seasons of the year, marking the periods of sowing, harvesting, etc., and the food distribution channels combine exchanges within social networks consisting mainly of relatives, friends and acquaintances.[1]

There are regions in northwest Argentina, as is the case of the city of Juella, and other locations where our case study was held, located in Tilcara Department, in the Quebrada de Humahuaca, a province of Jujuy (Figures 1 and 2), which have not escaped the current influence of the food agribusiness industry, which models, at different levels, their populations' diets. However, unlike other rural areas of Argentina, where food production was almost completely replaced by buying from the market, there are foods produced by smallholders. This term refers to a relatively heterogeneous set of agrarian subjects having in common the fact of being part of households targeting production and consumption.[4]

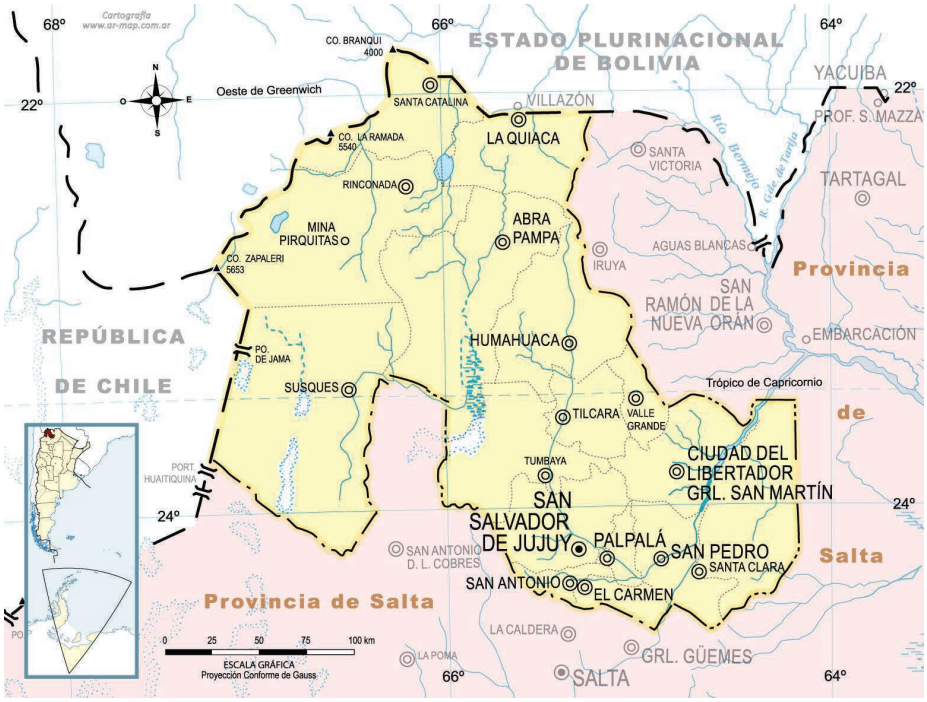

Figure 1. A map that locates the Argentinian Jujuy province in the context of provinces and countries with which it borders.

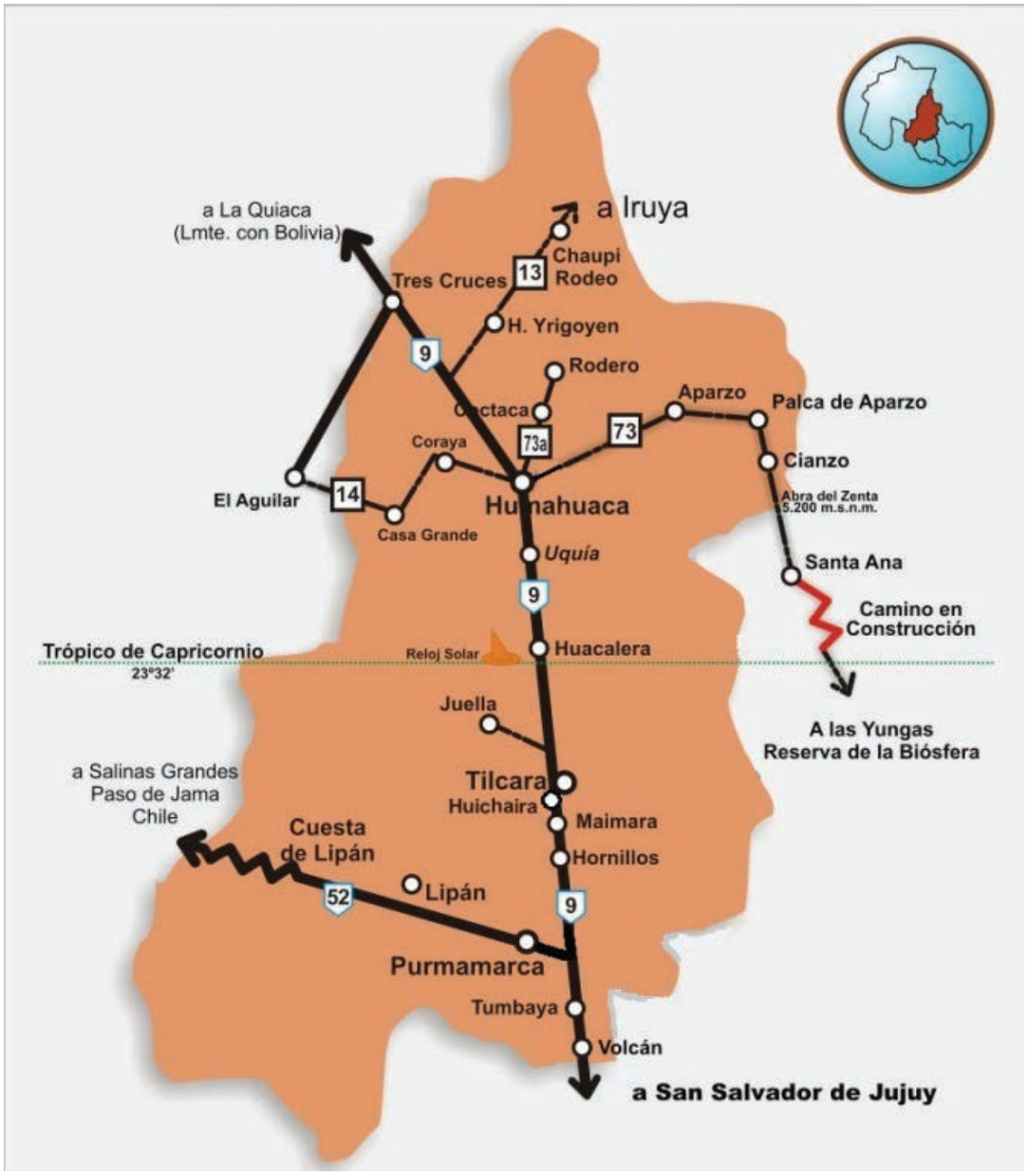

Figure 2. A more detailed map of the location of the villages where we have done our work, crossed by Route 9.

All this in a context crossed by peasant decomposition processes marked by the migration of members from domestic groups to urban centers since the beginning of last century to the present, from the period where regional economies withdrew due to the relevance acquired by some activities, especially the ones in the central region of the country, focused on the production of cereals for export. This has caused a rupture of regional production networks and market and non-market exchange in the region, changes that we have fit within the specific socio-historical processes of Quebrada, considering the provincial and national levels influencing the establishment of the current food system of the region.[5]

At this point, we wonder about the kind of discussions and tensions established among the foods from the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere, alluding with this to the process marked by modern industrial capitalism, in which food producers turn into giant corporations that determine that very few people participate directly in food production and most, globally, are transformed into "pure consumers," dependent on the industrial cuisine and industrialized agriculture, as well as the place where food that emerges from the sphere turned to food production self-sufficiency belongs, which we have recorded in the gastronomy of Quebrada.[6] Following the thread of these questions, we propose to explore the practices and meanings associated with food arising from self-sufficient production in some areas of Quebrada, as well as the social relations generated among people in the scenario we have described as a backdrop.

Conceptually, we follow the definition of meanings that distinguishes the inner meanings linked to the conditions of daily life consumption, of the external ones, subject to the conditions of the economic, social and political environments, whose reach transcends the individuals, as well as local communities, which, despite the importance that these factors have to everyday life, come from outside that sphere and in a totally different social action level.[7]

Also, to know the place and meanings of foods originating from the sphere of self-sufficient food production, or as we can interchangeably say here on, of the farm, we consider the larger process of production, preparation, distribution and consumption of food, closely linked to each other, which enables us to comprehensively approach the cuisine study in a broad sense.[8] This, in turn, understood as a set of practices, meanings, rules and regulations that integrate and characterize it through a gustatory complex that acts as an identifier to recognize and thus accept a culinary preparation.[9]

Following these notions, after explaining some methodological issues, in the next topic we initially expose some aspects about the type of foods that are self-sufficiently produced and then concentrate on the practices and meanings that we highlight for each of the aforementioned

instances of production, distribution, preparation and consumption, in this order, knowing that each of these facets is related and subject to the others. Then we will explain the local classifications that we found for the food. And finally we attempt a final interpretation and reflection, which aims to integrate the different aspects that emerge from the field work and the contributions by the authors who head our conceptual ideas.

Methodology

The article stems from our research for a PhD thesis, whose work, based on an ethnographic approach, was carried out mostly in the city of Juella and other villages such as Tilcara, Huichairas and Maimará, places where we visited some farms whose population we made contact with. It is equally important to note that Maimará and Tilcara, located in the lower part of Quebradas and at the roadside of national highway 9, are characterized primarily by having vast areas intended for commercial potherb production, unlike Juella and Huichairas, located in a little higher areas of Quebradas and away from the highway, where food production is destined mainly for self-sufficient consumption.

Fieldwork was conducted between 2006 and 2013 over 10 trips, lasting between 10 and 20 days. The interviews, in-depth and semi-structured, add up to 67, distributed as follows: 37 with producers aiming self-sufficient consumption; 9 with inhabitants who do not produce for self-sufficient consumption but whose family ties bind them to producers; 20 with (professional and nonprofessional) workers of the areas of Health and INTA (*Instituto Nacional de Tecnologia Agropecuária*; National Institute of Agricultural Technology) state institutions.

It should be mentioned that we had consent from all respondents, whose names we changed to preserve their real identities. Participative observation was another key tool that we used in all instances related to the thematic. Data analysis was based on the transcript of the records, in its subsequent analysis and categorization in conceptual axes, which we have interpreted with the help of the conceptual framework based on different authors in the field of food anthropology, the most important ones for our work, as indicated so far.

Why continue planting and breeding?

The type of food produced by the farmers which concerns us in this work is the one that was domesticated in the context of the macroregion of southern Andes by pre-Hispanic societies that lived and produced their food, from about three thousand years, such as maize, potatoes, quinoa, llamas, guinea pigs, etc.[10] Foods introduced by European conquerors, which became part of the Andean agricultural system, such as beans, peas, wheat, barley, carrots, fruits, were adapted and incorporated into the local production environment, and cows, sheep, goats, chickens, pigs, etc., raised by small farmers, unlike meat products (beef, chicken, pork, etc.), stemming from the massive marketing chain.[12] In this classification are not shorter duration crops such as vegetables and potherbs that are produced on an industrial scale in the localities of Maimará and Tilcara, as we mentioned in the previous section.

The small peasant farmers whom we refer to combine agricultural activities with different ways to obtain their extraordinary residential gains, and most of them live in rural properties they inherited from their families, with land between one and five hectares. They are characterized by: mobilizing almost all the necessary resources and supplies; being heavily dependent on local natural conditions to produce; being practically out of production dependent on the market, such as due to using seeds, the first step of the food chain, natural fertilizers, knowledge and practices in traditions which often vary relatively little in time, if we compare them with the constant "advancements" that are implemented in commercial agriculture.

Several of the products that none of these people will stop planting are the same as the ones the pre-Hispanic populations had been cultivating for thousands of years, among which, undoubtedly, stands out maize in its white and yellow varieties. Other prevalent varieties are *chulpe*, *overo*, *rosa*, *abati*, also called *auati* and *avati* (or, in Argentina, *"tremesino," "bolita," "culli,"* or *"volcanisto"*) (Figure 3). Also the cultivation of potatoes stands out, among which we find a range of varieties of less than ten, which include: *Criollo*, "*kollareja*" (*negra*; black), *"runa"* (bitter type), *cuarentilla*, "*tuni*" (purple), "*revolución*," "*chacarera*" (brown bark), "*ojos de señorita*," *désirée* (it is not Andean, but Dutch) and "*abajeña*," (Figure 4) that comes from the central part of the country, the area known as rich in potato in Argentina.

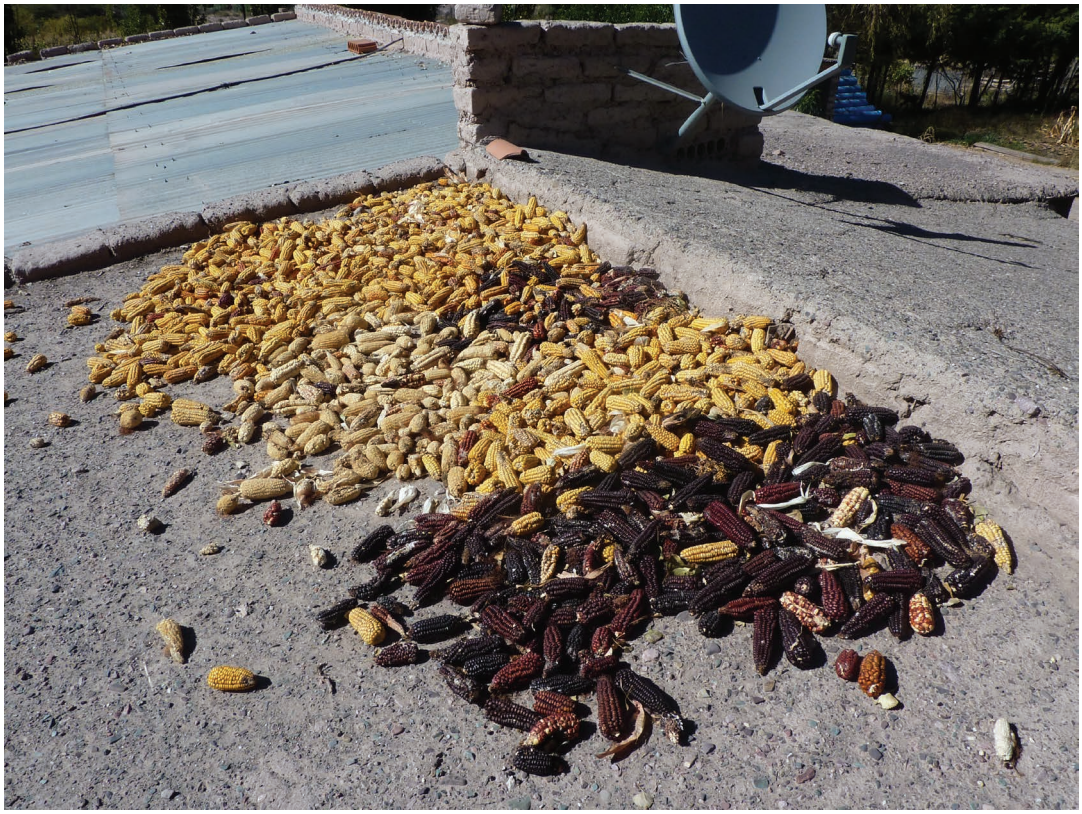

Figure 3. Different varieties of maize drying in the sun on the roof of a house.

Figure 4. Varieties of potatoes. *Photo courtesy Verónica Castellano.*

Many varieties of these crops have been lost over the past centuries, in line with the global trend of loss of varieties, but others have managed to survive.[12] Also cultivated are beans, peas and lettuce, along with fruit trees of apple, peach, pear and quince, pumpkin-*chila* plants – similar to a pumpkin of native origin – and many vegetables like onions, cabbage, pumpkin, lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage and garlic. In some cases, there is quinoa and, to a lesser extent, also amaranth.

In other words, there are "good practical reasons" that lead us to see what, why and how beans and many non-originating foods were turned into "Andean," that is, have become part of the food culture. On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify that the farmers do not classify foods as native and non-native when they sow. They combine reasons such as yield, the care that the crops require and the availability of water, which are critical.

As for the animals, mostly goats are raised, but there is no shortage of chickens and pigs. Some people also have some cows, which are raised in the nearby hills. As for amount of plants, this is very difficult to determine because they greatly vary among the various family groups. Furthermore, when asked about this, it is usually said: *"I have planted two little beds" or "three or four rows", or "twenty beds."* In the same vein, the amounts harvested are also variable; while some say that they have "obtained" six bushels (between thirty and forty kilos approximately), others say they have gotten 60 bushels of potatoes, maize or beans. As we were able to record, among the reasons for them to continue planting, one of the most relevant, is that it frees farmers from having to buy food because, as explained by one interviewee, "*suppose you are unable to buy, then you have all the goods at home.*" Similarly, one of the women interviewed, having small children and no family members with permanent employment in her family, reveals, by what she tells us, the importance of the agricultural practices that are put forward:

> *Plant the vegetables and you will not have to buy them. And if you want to eat, you have to buy and have the money, you have to work. Therefore, we say, "No!" If we have hands, why can't we can toil (work)?. You can avoid buying peas, carrots, potatoes, maize, chard, you are free from buying* (Ana, 35 years old, Juella, 2012).

In addition, it is noteworthy that some domestic producer groups, including the ones with lower income and higher amount of members, plan, at the time of sowing, to obtain a surplus to sell and then be able to buy goods such as rice, sugar, pasta and flour, that is, the staples for many of the daily preparations. Among other reasons, recurrently seen is the need to sow to have maize for August, the month dedicated to honor the (goddess revered by the indigenous people of the Andes) *Pachamama*; beans for November 1, the All Saints' Day; New Year, "for the *señalada*" (to brand), the celebration in which the farm's cattle is branded, etc., which points to the relationship among certain celebrations and the food to which they are linked. Because of all this, the strategy is to diversify the species, which is accompanied by the practice of alternating crops as a sustainable production method; employing goats' droppings, purchased from acquaintances in the region; and the use of seeds, most from the crops themselves, gifts and exchanges among friends, family, acquaintances, to which are added to a lesser extent, those from trade.

Another aspect that we want to highlight is the recurring appearance among our interlocutors of statements that relate to the valuation of the "naturalness" of foods that are grown, which are produced for the market in other nearby locations, such as Maimará and Tilcara, with the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which is another reason noted as advantageous at the moment of planting, as is expressed by some of our interlocutors, highlighting the difference between the market vegetables, full of "chemistry," and vegetables that are obtained without pesticides on their own farms and with which it is possible to have "all natural and without chemistry."

The case of these farmers, who claim that their way of producing food corresponds to standards of health and care for the environment, carries with it a concept that highlights the safety of modern techniques that are used in the production of commercial crops with the use of pesticides as standard practice, to which, however, they resort when there is no other option, at the risk of losing the crop. This proposal may be responding to the knowledge that many farmers have about the valuation, at present, of food production without chemical additives. These, however, are the conceptions promoted by many public bodies and NGOs which work with farmers and permeate, in our view, many farmers' valuations.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that, among the people of the region, no one believes that they are going "back to nature," as it happens in other contexts focused on agroecological practices that seek to generate a change in current modes of food production with techniques that, through the addition of pesticides, generate doubts as to their future sustainability.[13] In this context, food production practices have not changed much over time, and the farmers perceive it more as a continuum. This reflection also allows us to see that peasant farmers' traditional practices, so often undervalued by scientific systems that produce "cutting edge" agricultural technology, are today revalued by official bodies which question the agro-industrial proposal that sees producers as passive and empty receivers who need to be provided with products to "apply and forget." In this same sense takes place the follow-up action by technicians from different institutions, who support the peasants' production techniques and advocate initiatives such as "rescuing" the cultivation of certain foods that were failing to be produced. In this context, technicians from INTA, in their actions, distribute seeds among the farmers; for example, amaranth, quinoa, and chia (salvia hispanica).

The case of quinoa is more remarkable. Having disappeared from the woods for about sixty years, according to the discourses from our older respondents, it has reappeared in the last ten years. However, some of them tell us that producing quinoa requires a certain knowledge that not everyone has, as well as time and expertise to harvest it, because it needs to be forcefully ventilated so that small seeds be released from the plant and then separated from pollen and impurities. Regarding amaranth, related to the previous plant, with even smaller grains, we have recorded only very few cases, and the experience of planting it is in a more experimental stage, which is even more experimental in the case of chia.

As a final reflection on this topic, we note that, among the reasons to continue producing food, are the equations in which cost and benefit issues are combined,[14] and those related to decisions linked to aspects.[15] From our more inclusive perspective, accumulation of reasons in their entirety is highlighted, which leads us to see the multidimensionality that food has and the different factors in it, such as the biological, economic, ecological, symbolic ones, etc., are combined and interwoven, while at the same time the expectations from each domestic group, their life projects, as well as their various economic situations and life stages of the family group, are considered.

From the producer to the consumer, or on the distribution of food from the rural property

We have found a diversity and a combination of food distribution channels, as well as practices and meanings that interact and in which are discussed the hegemonic food production self-sufficiency agribusiness spheres, where food and meals are not thought by people as belonging to dichotomous categories of the "modern" – "traditional" types.

In this context, we find that the food from the rural property, after being stored for use in the kitchen, is distributed by means of family networks in which it circulates as favors or retribution – by the cash contribution received for its production, be it by helping planting, harvesting etc. It is sold on the market or to acquaintances close to the properties. Or else it is taken to the frequent farmer markets that take place in the region, where it is subject to monetary or exchange transactions for other products from the earth, produced by peasants from other thermal floors, such as from as the high end of the mountain range, which take food which they produce such as meat, jerky, cheese, etc.

The markets and fairs spaces, it should be noted, operate as socialization places where the peasant farmers share the same universe of meanings, different from the more standardized dynamics and without an increased generation of characteristics of identity belonging and possibilities of interaction among pairs, which take place in a trade linked to the hegemonic sphere of products supply.

On the other hand, we point out that when what is sold or exchanged is from the farms, the distribution channels are conditioned, to a large extent, to seasonalities marking the food availability. These may be distributed immediately after harvest, such as potatoes, which although being kept for several months, have an average "expiration date" of six months, as is the case for goat cheese, which is prepared in larger quantities in December, with the increase in milk production. Maize also has a relatively short time to be consumed, but it can be dried and stored for up to a year or so, in very good condition.

Another aspect that appears is the "trust mark" that the products related to the sphere of production aiming self-sufficient consumption have. That is, they are all appreciated for their particular characteristics of production, among which is highlighted the fact of knowing who produced them, where and what techniques were used, as in the case, perhaps more iconic, of the "Criollo" cow, i.e., raised by the peasants, and prized among the people because it contains no "drugs" nor is it fed "with grains" nor is it slaughtered "at six months of age," as one of our interlocutors said, alluding to the accelerated breeding, chemical substances applied to them and feeding techniques linked to the industrialized sphere within which are bred the "crossbred" cows, unlike the "natural", "with no pesticides" environment and food in which they are bred, under conditions that respect the natural growth cycles.

We could also note that the distribution channels through "contacts" sometimes take these foods to big cities, where they are also valued by these same attributes. This trust mark (reliability seal) is also used by producers to pass their products through advantageous economic operations, unlike what occurred at other times, which they remember when, as they would say, "potatoes were for pigs," and today they are revalued as geographically located "specialties", a process that occurs within the framework of the information circulating after the patrimonialization of Quebrada.[16] This along with the work that the technicians from different public institutions and NGOs have been performing with them from an approach in which one of the following lines is the "recovery" of the Andean crops and the recovery of agroecological practices.

Preparation and consumption: from the fields and supermarket to the table

The description of the meals and their everyday organization leads us to a number of aspects related to different spheres of food production, their times, techniques and cooking technologies, as well as the taste and the meanings attributed to food. In this sense, from our point of view, we classify the foods in "frequent" and "secondary," considering that the former are composed mainly from the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere, and the secondary ones come from production on farms.

Before focusing the characterization of each of them, we should highlight two aspects. On the one hand, if we compare this distinction with the households everyday reality during summer and fall, when there is more regularity in the supply of potatoes and maize from the fields to prepare the dishes, or it is time to slaughter cows and goats taking advantage of the fact that they are fat thanks to the availability of summer pastures, therefore these foods, by their place in the meals, become frequent. On the other hand, this classification of foods in frequent/secondary, and their relations with the different spheres of production, are not a conceptual operation of categorization according to which people are thinking of organizing their meals, but, and we highlight it again, it is indeed done by us for our analytical purposes.

In the decisions, an interwoven set of factors is also implied, among which are the availability of economic resources, time to cook, tastes and habits learned from an early age in the family environment, in the same rural area where they live or in close proximity, habits that correspond to the usual culinary traditions in Quebrada. Therefore, the foods can sometimes be integrated into a practical pattern in which coexist, without discriminatory operations, for example, *mote* (boiled maize; generic name for several varieties of corn grains boiled, consumed in many regions of South America), which comes from the property with pâté, a processed food, and also, following the same dichotomous combination, rice stew with jerky, spaghetti and *frangollo* (cut maize) soup, maize with sausages, etc., without differentiating culinary grammars for people, also constituting, one might say, other new ones.

Another aspect to point out is in some characteristics related to the kitchens equipment, as nearly all, in addition to having or not gas stoves, refrigerators and different appliances, have room for the stove, manual kneading tools, clay pots, and even, in some occasions, people retain the ones manufactured by grandmothers, manual maize grinders and some large stone mortar and pestles, from family heirlooms.

Below we focus on highlighting the most relevant characteristics of frequent and secondary foods, linking aspects of the preparation process and some of its consumption.

Frequent foods

Most of them consist of preparations whose main ingredients come from the market and whose development time is shorter if we consider the time it takes for the preparations of the second group, because many of their ingredients have been pre-prepared by the industry, such as noodles, rice, canned goods, sausages, etc. For this reason, the preparations, when it comes to homes that have gas stoves, are often made this way, unlike the slow cook on a wood-burning stove (or wood burner), which is a characteristic of the secondary dishes. The spices that are used and differentiate these foods are paprika, cumin, oregano and *ají* (a species of chili pepper). And among some cooking techniques stand out roasting macaroni and rice before boiling, as it is done in other countries in the Andean region, although it is different from most of the rest of the country's provinces, where rice and noodles are directly boiled. Although fat were customary before the massive influx of manufactured goods to the region some forty decades ago, presently the use of oil is very usual.

Another of the most notable features is that in everyday foods, although its preparation is largely left to women, in general all members of the domestic group can indiscriminately carry out some basic preparations, unlike what happens with secondary foods, which remain under the almost exclusive aegis of the older women of the house.

One aspect that seems very interesting to resume is the observation, among our interlocutors, of a predisposition to state that they consume a certain product strongly associated, as people say, to "what is eaten here," but that does not match the actual consumption. We have recorded this *décalage* [17] when, for example, we asked about the most consumed foods, and the respondents answered, "Maize, potatoes, mote," clearly referring to the production from their properties. But at the same time, they nevertheless admit, and that we could corroborate in our observations, that often, alluding to the lack of time to cook because of the work that is demanded for the care of animals and crops, "They make rice and pasta," implying that preparing these foods helps to free them from work. It is clear, by the hereby noted food *décalage*, that despite the people's representations of "what is mostly eaten" and "what is eaten here", in practice they admit that

"what is eaten here" does not exactly coincide with how quickly they need to juggle their work activities, whether in the field or others.

Another example is the *hulpada* drink "the poor cousin" of *chicha* (a fermented or non-fermented beverage usually derived from maize), as people say, made with roasted maize, fresh water and sugar. *Chicha*, we must clarify, is the "flagship" drink, not only in this region but also in the rest of the Andes. Although its preparation is falling into disuse, [18] there are still women who prepare them with maize, usually from their own farms. It has a very powerful ritual symbolism that refers to the "sacred" beverage intended to *Pachamama*.

As we said, *hulpada* is often mentioned by many of our interlocutors. However, in actual practice, it is seldom drunk. Apparently, it has been replaced by the consumption of carbonated drinks, and the favorite one is undoubtedly Coca-Cola. Effectively, it is what all our interlocutors most expected us to take to their homes when we were invited to eat, unlike the second brands of soft drinks, and the one that most circulates in community celebrations, from the wide range of products with the same characteristics that are offered by the market.

This situation recorded should be interpreted by the influence that the external significance of the spread of this drink has. Thus, the extensive distribution network in the region, from the improvement in communication networks, under the influence of advertising, had very little to do with the "choice" that consumers make. This is why the meaning that the Coca-Cola obtains in Quebrada, perhaps one of the strongest icons of the power of large corporations that produce "food" on a global scale and strong advertising of their brand, is understood with respect to concrete external meanings that affect the supply of this drink, along with the emergence of new possibilities to reorganize the experience and generate transformative practices.

On the other hand, it is found from the statement by Jesús Contreras[19] on the frequency with which food crops are not part of the new production context in which dietary changes emerge with packaged products in the industrial sector. And we have recorded it when they speak about "food from here," which in fact exist. This can be evidenced by native classifications discussed below, which continue to be prepared on the coexistence scenario of the different origins of food.

Regarding the order and textures of everyday foods consumed within the homes, as much as the festive and community ones, they have almost the same characteristics: the first course is always dry or relatively drier than the second one, consisting of a liquid, i.e., the indispensable soup that comes with every meal. Considering its "mandatory" presence, one might think that it is one of the totem [20] dishes of the region, i.e., one of the foods that condense the identifying signs related to them being recognized as (demonym) "*jujeño*," which encompasses and exceeds the region of Quebrada.

As for table etiquette, we have found virtually no difference among the situations related to everyday food and the festive ones. We see this reflected in the use of the same container, usually metal plates, glass or plastic (such as polycarbonate) glassware, according to the economic possibilities, as well as in table manners, involving, to mention the most notable features, thanking *Pachamama* by throwing some crumbs on the ground, serving the same portions to men and women, using the hands to eat the meat from the bones until leaving it completely clean, etc. In addition, there is a rule of "not wasting" and consuming what is offered on the plate. Likewise, hardly anything is wasted, either in the preparation process or in potential leftovers from the meals: everything is consumed at another time, recycled or given to the animals of the property.

Secondary food

One of the characteristics corresponding to the cuisine linked to diversified domestic ecosystems is that, over time, pre-preparation techniques were created and a certain internal knowledge of the local population was identified in order to prepare and preserve cereals, tubers, dairy, meat etc., characteristic and abundant in the specific region. In this context, we note that secondary foods are effectively linked to the farm products and the use of techniques, tools and characteristic ways of cooking, from which characteristic flavors result.

On the other hand, the foods seasonality deeply influence the possibilities of preparations because there are dishes whose basic ingredients are not available throughout the year. Subject to ecological conditions, another characteristic is the micro-regionalism of preparations and food, for as the cuisine is linked to the local production of each thermal plane, it is variable, although the distances do not exceed a few kilometers between one location and another. For this reason, although there are names of foods known in the region, differences in recipe are frequent, as they are adapted according to the ingredients to which the people have access and these rely on every cook, because, as we said, the special foods are under the "care" and umbrella of the adult women of the house.

Another distinction that emerges is that secondary foods are related, more than frequent foods, to activities that prior to the advancement of food industrialization were considered part of the cuisine, such as killing and dismembering animals, pre-preparation of maize before consumption etc., but in peasant societies such as those studied, they are not excluded. Pre-preparation is still used for various foods such as, among the best-known cases in the region, the production of dairy products (goat cheese, cream cheese) and maize, which is cooked with ashes for certain preparations (Figure 5), which adds to it certain chemicals (niacin), which nutritionally enrich it and make it biologically more useful to the body, [21]. Also roasting maize before preparing the flour to be consumed, which makes it more digestible.

Figure 5. Maize cooking process with ashes for obtaining the "*mote pela*" to cook the pungent stew *mondongo*.

As for the principles of seasoning and broth for cooking, unlike what happens with frequent preparations, as mentioned before, all these foods are often more seasoned (paprika, cumin, oregano, pepper, ground *ají*) and spicier, as highlighted by one of the interviewees, who tells us that she uses "few condiments" daily, but this proportion increases when she has to make "a typical food," for which indeed she also "uses" spicy *ají*, also called *locoto*, characteristic of other Andean countries.

Thus, secondary foods are those prepared with ingredients mostly from the food production self-sufficiency, require laborious steps of pre-elaboration, are usually cooked in a wood-burning stove (or wood burner) – due to the time it demands –, usually take more condiments and amounts of fat than frequent foods, and their recipes, with adaptations, were passed from generation to generation by the people who lived in the region.

Except some preparations, for example, the typical case of *humitas*, a dough made from fresh maize and various condiments, wrapped in maize husks, which in the summer can become relatively routine, but are almost impossible to prepare in winter due to the absence of adequate maize in the region. Or the case in which the domestic groups decide to eat certain dishes, for example, *locro*, the spicy tripe (a type of edible offal from the stomachs of various farm animals), quinoa stew, etc., without a particular date. Or because, resuming what some respondents explained, the money from these is insufficient for the purchase of food, in which case the estate products become central to providing ingredients for the meals. These cases excepting, secondary foods are strongly associated with different festive events of the year, organized into a vast calendar, all with their corresponding gastronomy related; and the movement of food, organized in community meals, occupies an important place in shaping the ritual environment that these events require, as well as the generation of meanings and relationships among participants. We were present in several of these meals and in fact the role that those that are prepared with local food production acquire became evident, and the case of the *Pachamama* celebration is one of the most important for the inhabitants and one where the dishes are intended to accommodate the diners, as well as the "mother earth."

Among these foods, some of the more typical stand out: *tamales* (traditional Mesoamerican dish made of *masa* (a starchy dough, usually corn-based), which is steamed in a corn husk), spicy tripe, quinoa stew, stuffed head, *yuspiche, tijtincha, empanadas, locro,* and the indispensable soup. These are identified as the food "from here," "the regional one," "the Andean," which has, as we found in the analysis that we carried out on the processes of production, distribution and preparation, a too strong symbolic and emotional value, which allows diners, when tasting and sharing them, to recognize themselves as belonging to the same social group. In this sense, we could say that the foods that circulate in the hands of the participants of these community events become what recharges the vital, mental and symbolic energy. It is possibly the soul food, the one that the former black slaves of America used to refer to the land foods which were torn and could be recreated in a new context.[7]

While keeping the big differences among the slaves and peasant farmers of this region of Quebrada, we can see that food identity, which gives "freedom," lingers in foods that are prepared with what the earth offers, following the recipes that people know and taste since childhood because their parents, grandparents and other people in the environment where they were raised also did the same or very similarly. We can also highlight the symbolic dimension of the incorporation of foods, then a founder of collective identity and distinctive brands towards "the others," those who have not been raised in these peasant contexts, which is why, in other words, food otherness also emerges.

Another aspect before concluding this topic is the place occupied in the community foods by the foods from the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere. According to our observations, the place of processed foods is peripheral, and the most common are rice, usually used to prepare spicy chicken, or noodles, used in soups. However, there is a drink, Coca-Cola, which in the context of the festivities emerges again with force. Or else the most economical brands of cola sweetened, carbonated soft drinks when access to that one becomes difficult. In all cases, the role of this soft drink is remarkable. Along with *chicha* and various alcoholic drinks, it is offered to *Pachamama* whom, it should be remembered, the people try to invite with the most esteemed foods, projecting on this offer the positive value of this drink or the ones that replace it. And it acquires for the population new inner meanings (Figure 6).

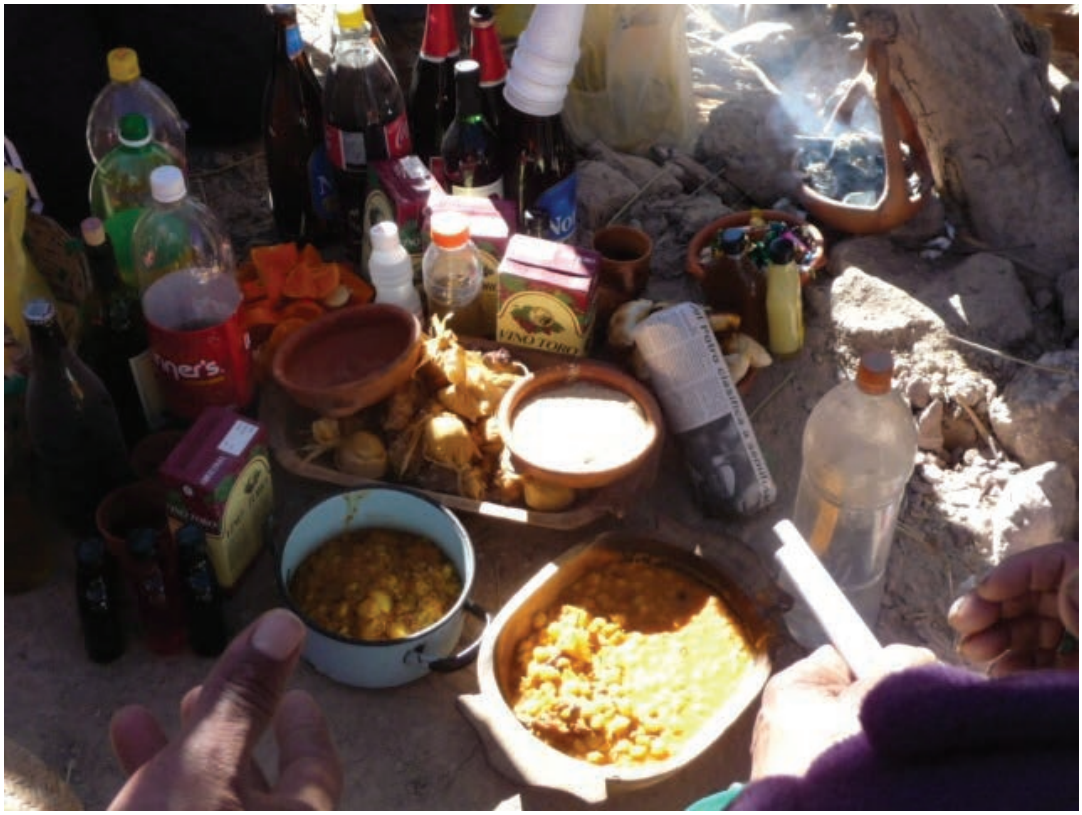

Figure 6. Foods for *Pachamama*, where the site emerges. Among the different drinks, the cola sweetened, carbonated soft drinks.

Local classifications: the bad and the good, the "substance" and "junk food"

After having presented the classification of the meals that we did according to the ingredients that compose them and the characteristics of their preparations, we then explain the local categories used to organize and classify foods. In this sense, a preference for food that meets the requirements of being "hearty," "heavy," "strong" and also "filling" emerges, which are at the same time considered "tasty" by the population. These characteristics coincide with the mention of foods such as stews and other dishes "from pots," in which the central ingredients, especially maize, come from production aimed to self-sufficient consumption and have the particularity of keeping the food juices and being prepared with considerable time for cooking, usually in wood-burning stoves (or wood burners). Let us examine what our respondents say:

> *Here we eat stew or tucos (type of sauce), because here the milanesa (a dish common in South American countries where generic types of breaded meat fillet preparations are known as a milanesa) does not feed, it does not take root; here we need to eat for sustenance, therefore here we never lack locros, yuspiches, the spicy, maize. Rare are those who say, "I do not eat maize."* (Susana, 54 years old, Juella, 2010).

> *[…] with maize that I cook on a firewood and wash I make buchada with mote – this one I cook it myself – and boil in the morning with the stomach and legs. This is a strong food for me, the food from maize, this one, quinoa, wheat; because rice only holds for a short time, makes me hungry, when I go to the farm it makes me hungry. When I'm very busy, I make a stew with toasted pasta, rice and sauce; these are fast foods for me.* (Belinda, 65 years old, Tilcara, 2013).

As stated by these women, the foods prepared with maize, potatoes, beans, quinoa, all unrefined ingredients having unprocessed germ, fiber and nutrients, to which they add different proportions of meat and vegetables with broth in which fat is an ingredient, are superior dishes in calories and satiety power compared to refined and processed products mentioned by people, such as rice, pasta, pizzas, including the *milanesas*, which are "dry," which "make you hunger" and so "they do not take root here," as one of our interlocutors explained. Therefore, the "foods from the field" are considered strong, which we have categorized as secondary, containing food valued by the population for their nutritional and invigorating potential, giving strength, energy and health. It is also observed, with respect to what we analyzed in the previous section, that the heartier foods are those that generally circulate within the multiple community events, in which the role they play as distinguishing the region identity is highlighted.

Conversely, mostly light, fast and "junk" foods are considered frequent These classification criteria are mainly related to the energy value of food and the use of the body, which is intense among those who deal with agricultural and livestock activities. This gives food a strong and invigorating sense of consumed energy, while considering, on the other hand, that it is a mountain

climate, prone to low temperatures during much of the year, which requires high calorie foods.

In addition, from this classification it is possible to see another opposition between what is "natural" and what is "artificial" because the hearty/from the field/strong foods match those considered "natural" because they are prepared with locally sourced food, with craft techniques which we have already mentioned and without the use of chemical additives, at least as a common practice in the production process. In turn, all of these foods differ from fast food/junk food/ those to which a dubious nutritional quality is assigned, as clearly expressed by one of the women interviewed:

> *[…] well, today I lacked maize. Well, you know, whether you have money or not and haven't gotten food from the farm, you have to buy food and make a stew with noodles [...] until recently we had potatoes and maize ears and roast lamb and today I made a simple stew with a frangollo [maize crumbs] soup* (Juana, 49 years old, Juella, 2012).

In this sense, a classification emerges, distinguishing "good" from "healthy" from "bad" foods as for their chemical content. Those which fit among the first ones are, for many, the ones from the farm, such as maize, potatoes, or as people say, "the ones form here":

> *[…] a healthy food is the majada [maize or wheat broth with meat] soup, at least maize, the spicy one which is how we call the buchada; wheat, quinoa, amaranth are the healthiest foods. These are the healthiest foods that are here. Those that come with chemicals... you go to the market to buy chard with chemicals, lettuce with chemicals, tomatoes, everything has them, nothing is natural, everything ripens with chemicals.* (Juana, 49 years old, Juella, 2011).

Within this classification, we have also included the local categorization that we have recorded for meat. Although the Criollo one enter the sphere of favorite foods because the products are from the farm, produced without chemicals and their origin is known, unlike the crossbred cow meat, from which is not known under what techniques nor where it was raised, as our interlocutors point out.

That is, there are meanings associated with natural food and its nutritional qualities, linked to the food agribusiness sphere aimed for self-sufficient consumption, markedly highlighted by our interlocutors, who, besides highlighting the meanings as distinguishing the farmers' identity, build a discourse shared and reinforced by technicians and professionals from public institutions or NGOs. Discourses that we relate to the importance given to this kind of regional food or geographically identified in the global context in which the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere is judged by its condition of "UEO" (unidentified edible objects) food and that constitute, as called

by Claude Fischler, the industrial food hell,[1] from which many of the effects on health are not known, given the amount of substances and processes to which they are subjected. On the other hand, other notions appear, presented by some of our interlocutors, indicating that poor handling of maize during the preparation process can cause stomach problems:

> *[….] one must be careful with maize when making "chilcan" because when it is not prepared with proper maize and by the due roasting process, it can be very stodgy. "The poor tourists then end up at a hospital" because people want to make it with any maize and it is not like that. […]. It is a type of maize. Now the one that came from Quebrada is that Bolivian maize, the one with big grains. You will eat one of these toasted ones and will die from colic, because it has much starch, like chicha. When my mother cooked, she would sow this small maize plant. Guess what she used She would not use the best maize. She would use the little ones, this maize, which had in the middle... what's its name?... the germ. This is oil. It is from there that one extracts corn oil. Then chicha is made and when processed with the same mash, it is foamy, as beer. And when it's badly made, chicha tastes like oil. And that's what comes out of small maize plants.* (Candelaria, 55 years old, Tilcara, 2009).

That is, food such as maize, recognized for its health benefits, can turn into something bad if one does not have enough knowledge to recognize its diversity and the corresponding preparation techniques for each recipe.

We have also identified the presence of some foods considered good, not only for their relationship with the sphere of production aimed to the local self-sufficient consumption, but also because among the people of the region it is known as being suitable for consumption with a curative purpose. Accordingly, one of the most mentioned foods is *calapi*, a soup made with maize flour and a small amount of slaked lime, whose intake is prescribed by elderly people to "clear the stomach, because it has lime; that is what our grandparents used to say"; *locoto* "for the bones"; quince for the throat; potatoes peel "from here" for vitamins; *chicha*, when it is not very fermented yet, to increase the amount of milk in women who are breastfeeding.

Also mentioned as good food or praised as such by specialized health systems: "Skimmed", alluding to dairy; lean meats (chicken without skin, nongreasy cuts); fruits; milk; vegetables; cereals. Considered "bad" are the "fatty roast," sauces, "fatty soup," soft drinks, sweets, fatty meat, chicken skin, butter, very spicy foods, sauces, fried foods. Clearly we can see that these last classifications are those that emerge from the specialized health systems to standardize diets, which are propagated by both the mass media broadcast as by the contact that people have with team members of the region public health agency. Here it should be made clear that professionals and nonprofessionals in this sector, while they value by their nutritional contributions and "natural" production forms, foods such as maize, potatoes, quinoa, among others, they also stigmatize the use of certain foods considered "heavy", in some cases for their fat content and the combination

of grain and proteins, as is the case of *locro* (which contains maize, beans, and various cuts and trimmings of pork and beef). This suggests a lack of criteria unification by the specialized health sector as for "good" and "bad," and otherwise it shows the existence of several opposing views, a theme that exceeds our article and certainly deserves another one.

Final thoughts

In this article we have attempted to account for the existence of regions such as Juella and its villager locations in northwest Argentina, where the cuisine is linked to the need to plant and breed animals, in which the social actors who carry out these activities, away from the backwardness and irrationality – if we judge them based on the modern scientific productive canons –, have sufficient performance capacity to mobilize a variety of resources such as seeds, natural fertilizers, labor, information and knowledge, whose efficiency is empirically supported by the agricultural productive logic used for millennia in the region, with their own methods of distribution and supply.

This leads us to the conclusion that the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere that focuses on the people's diet decisions on a global scale, as well as the homogenizing and standardizing effect that imposes, or in instances of production, distribution, preparation and consumption, has its limits, because its effect is conditional and not general. It also has a more diversifying than standardizing impact because, as we have seen, the cuisine considered in the broadest sense is not under constant pressure from this sphere. This idea is refuted by the various strategies, knowledge and activities around each of the processes of production, distribution and consumption, as well as the capacities of activity and self-management, which even leads us to think that, particularly with regard to community meals, when they are at the table what they usually eat is actually the soul food, and this gives to those who eat it the feeling of a certain degree of freedom.

Moreover, we can not but observe that the persistence of crops and livestock in an unfavorable context can be practiced by implementing different strategies that we have recorded, the values, meanings and memories that move and allow the continued production unit, and in this process continue the culture, not just for food, but at this point we dare say, in the broadest sense.

Finally, as a conclusion of these notes, we find it important to emphasize that studying food is a complex issue that allows us to access different themes that are relevant in terms of Anthropology, taking into account a thematic linked to ecological, political, economic and social aspects, besides symbolic ones. In this sense, both the subject development as the results point to the analysis revaluation of the different processes that make up a cuisine in a broad sense, as a necessary approach to explore in an interconnected fashion all the way through which food passes and the social relations produced among people.

On the other hand, it brings its potential for research of the link between the production forms using models that are alternative or subordinated today, aimed for self-consumption, along with knowledge and social networks that sustain them. It also contributes with its potential to think about the value that other models of production, distribution, preparation and consumption of food acquire, as well as to observe, within the framework of questions, inconsistencies and inequities that they generate, the current hegemonic food agribusiness model.

Anyway, this work is a first step in considering the importance of food systems, which, as the one of Quebrada, point to the interstices to imagine and think of other ways of producing and consuming food, different from what the hegemonic food agribusiness sphere offers us today.

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