

Sources for the history of food and food heritage: the column “Let us prepare delicacies,” in the *Jornal das Moças*, 1950s

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Abstract

Since the end of World War I, the idea that women should devote themselves exclusively to household tasks, including the roles of housewives and mothers, became strong. Women should fully devote themselves to taking caring of home and children. Although not adopted by the entire population, the ideal family, encouraged by the ruling classes, became the parameter. Now, matters relating to private environments raise a discussion on issues such as gender, social classes, clothing, housing and food. These aspects take place within households, where in the first half of the twentieth century women had greater responsibility and functions. As a proposal for this work, the examination of historical sources was chosen, namely, the “Let us prepare delicacies” columns in the women’s magazine *Jornal das Moças* in the 1950s, during which the family pattern was the “sweet home,” where family members were under the protection of the house, a space where women should reign as sovereigns, housewives and mothers. The aim was to demonstrate the potential of the sources in order to instigate reflections on the historical and cultural construction of food standards and understand these patterns in relation to women’s role in this period.

Key words: Food History. Food Heritage. Historical Sources.

Introduction

Food is essential for humans to live, that's obvious. But even if at first glance this appears to be an issue that means common sense, going a little, but very little beyond the surface a complex universe is shown. Food is much more than simply eating. It is part of the identity, it is heritage, it is culture, it is history. But access to it is the market. That is what Ziegler¹ says in the first paragraph of the preface he wrote for the work, "The human right to adequate food."

*For a banker from Wall Street or from Zürich, a rice bushel is a commodity like any other. Its price (which includes shipping, insurance, storage and others) is determined by market rules, more specifically the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), where daily prices of almost all foods that exist on the earth are fixed. **Instead, for the hungry, the food that assures them a psychically healthy and safe physical survival is a matter of life and death.** (No emphasis in the original).*

Thus we see that the food issue is not confined to the economic sphere, though the public policies that result in increased job opportunities and salaries wish, in most cases, to allow greater access of the population to quality nutritional food. In this sense, the subject needs to be related to actions that are effectively conducive to social equity and equality in the conditions of access to food. However, hunger can not be reduced to its economic dimension or biological impact, it is a much broader phenomenon. Hunger and food incorporate dimensions related to history, culture, and psychological and religious factors, encompassing all that concerns calling "dignity," both as nutritional deficiencies and spiritual, symbolic and cultural needs. The question should not be solely related to amounts of food, such as the calculation of daily calories, but especially the quality of what is eaten, and anything that involves the act of eating.

Accordingly, females occupy a prominent position when it comes to food, because even with all the historic changes throughout the twentieth century, food management and preparation, home maintenance, children's care and education in many Brazilian homes are roles still considered "naturally" feminine.

Significantly, when women more effectively entered the world of work in the western public space, there were changes in relation to family models. Yet most people still see men as providers and women as house managers, although most women economically contribute to support the family.

When the subject falls on family health and nutrition, women are the ones usually responsible for the welfare of the other members of the group. Brazilian culinary records throughout nineteenth and twentieth centuries were almost exclusively directed and/or produced by women. During this period, they circulated among female's private spaces, the cooking area, kitchen, pantry and

dining room, creating identities among mothers, daughters, granddaughters, nieces, domestic workers, extended family, godchildren. The intention is to develop this article from this premise, as throughout history women were seen as critical in food shortages processes, both with regard to the biological condition during pregnancy, as to the condition of feeding children and family in general.

This work is part of a larger research that involves surveying, organizing and summarizing all the material about food contained in the Brazilian magazine *Jornal das Moças* (Ladies' Journal) from 1914 to 1961, its circulation period. In this study, it was especially chosen to speak about the "Let us prepare delicacies" column in the time frame of the 1950s.* It aims to present the initial stage of research and demonstrate the potential of sources in order to instigate reflections on the historical and cultural constructions of eating patterns and understand these patterns in relation to women's role in this period.

In view of the above, it is important to consider that this research is in its infancy, with the collaboration of students in scientific research. It is in the phase of reading and deepening the theoretical framework on the issue and the survey of sources.

Development

Brazil in the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century experienced a period of intense transformation of a political nature. Since 1889, it had abolished monarchy and established a republic. Socially speaking, it faced new goals and challenges, results of the urbanization process that accelerated the need for adjustments and which carried out social practices developed by federal and state governments in order to promote a direct intervention in order to adjust the public administration to the new demands of a society being formed, instructed by rational conceptions of "progress," "science" and "civilization."

Such conceptions, except for specificities, were trying to follow the reformist thinking that would inspire big cities throughout the nineteenth century. The ideology of the Western world in this period was imbued with a sincere belief in progress – a myth based on the significance of improvement, especially for elements of elites who benefited directly from the effects of modernization. Nisbet,² when focusing on the various meanings of progress throughout Western history, argues that the concept of progress from the Middle Ages began to comply essentially with three criteria: "respect for reason, knowledge and science."

* *Jornal das Moças*. 1950-1960. All of its more than 2,000 volumes are available in digital form through *Hemeroteca da Biblioteca Nacional* (National Library Newspaper Collection).

This premise is illustrated by the construction of cities which, according to Mumford,³ follows “a rigorous concept of mathematical order,” because it was necessary to fight against the consequences of a city environment that would grow amid disorder and destruction. It became indispensable, in addition to building the infrastructures based in an order, to respect the science that would ensure health and hygiene, which at that time were rare, not only in poor areas, but also in the elite housing. Therefore, it was necessary to strategize a counterattack to the results of “progress,” starting with the “art of sanitation and public hygiene.”

These new ways of thinking that permeate the world of the nineteenth century have their bases in the Age of Enlightenment of the second half of the eighteenth century, which brought the idea of progress linked to the development of science. According to this philosophical movement, scientific advances would be fulfilling successive stages, and this is how progress would relate to the idea of civilization. Then a concept of civilization is extracted, connected to technology, to the increase of the body of scientific information in general, the evolution of customs, and why not, women’s formal or informal education.

And in Brazil, by following the spatial transformations of cities, the elitist values in the socio-cultural field were also steeped in civilizing ideas. Reordering the values of good living in society was sought, guided by civility standards based on the European way. The townspeople, who every day had their number increased, needed to urbanize, needed to learn to live in this city environment, based on education rules, civility rules. Then, with the rationalization of spaces, there is also a modeling of behavior in general.

Behind every social project based on civilizing elements, there was a larger project to preserve the “feminine soul” from the world’s ills. And, through it, to ensure the entry of principles and values in many homes.

For Léa Archanjo,⁴ in the late nineteenth century Brazilian society had undergone a series of social changes. Formal female education, for example, through public education, became identified with “a means of creating conditions to regenerate society.” Even if the vision of the woman was still very conservative, the social roles as mothers and wives had become more valued. Also, according to the author, hygienist doctors had a speech which recognized the importance of the family and its influence on the construction of society. Therefore, it was necessary to educate women for them to have conditions to perform well the functions that society expected from them.

Whatever their school of thought, Freemasons, positivists, Catholics, would release in the newspapers their ideas, each with their own special way of valuing women’s attributes. They agreed on emphasizing the defining characteristics of femininity: “wife, mother and housewife.”

According to Scott,⁵ at the end of the nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery, Proclamation of the Republic, increased immigration process, together with the shift by urbanization and industrialization influenced the construction of new organizational models in the country. Amid all these modernizations, new family models were recommended. Family values expressed were based on a bourgeois order and romantic love for the choice of spouses. Intimacy would be praised and home came to be seen as a haven from a harsh world. This “new family,” according to the author, needed a “new woman”, a mother devoted to raising children, organizing the house, and submissive to her husband, but not completely voiceless. Relieved from the “productive” work outside the home, women should go back to the family environment. Men, in turn, should be the only, at best, or the main family’s provider.

An observation by the same author is interesting. In the second half of the nineteenth century women and children accounted for 76% of the workforce in the factories; in the 1950s, that number dropped to about 20%.⁵ Did these women leave the labor market to devote themselves solely to home in an attempt to put into practice the bourgeois models of family constitution? Admittedly it was not the only motivation, but this is not essentially the theme that is aimed to be addressed in this study. The large number of women who returned home to devote themselves to their children and husbands should be taken into account here.

Therefore, these women should be “prepared” for the administration of a “new home.” This would take place both at the level of school education as of an informally disseminated education by oral traditions, and also from the women’s presses – here in particular magazines.

For the school environment, Bastos & Garcia⁶ claim that women’s education intended, “to prepare them for the tasks to which they were designed in society, that is, to make each student a real housewife. This model image forged by the Brazilian example would be given by the domestic economy.” In Brazil, it appeared in the schools with the first law for the National Public Instruction, on October 15, 1827, which stated that teaching “housewifery” would be related to the principles of the domestic economy. At that time, such education would cover needle work, embroidery, sewing and music. Later, these were joined by knowledge related to cooking, clothing maintenance, house cleaning, hygiene.

These educational airs directed at women, either through schools or through treatises or magazines available and willing to build “the queens of the house” would forge models and instigate the desire to serve them. But a housewife’s work is not merely manual or technical, but also intellectual and emotional. It is work in which a good amount of creativity is necessary, but most of all decision making. Thus, female education, formal or informal, aimed at “home science,” aims at a better life with more dignity and to mitigate the problems caused by the daily routine of managing the family environment.

It is clear that these values have not acquired the same importance in the life of all Brazilians and their families, remarks Scott,⁷ but this model of family training and functioning stimulated the desire of the entire population, making it a parameter. In search of the ideal family, wives, inexperienced or not, resort to help that women's presses could offer. Women's magazines had the most valuable tips on taking care of the house, husband and children. Full of advice on the preparation of meals, hygiene and organizing the house, and even how to please and satisfy their husbands, this is how they would help women become model wives.

Marriage happiness seems to depend increasingly on women's activities and care within the home. A wife who did not know how to properly handle household management, as well as her husband's and children's images, would seriously risk not having a happy marriage.

Love between spouses is considered an important ingredient, but not enough to guarantee a "harmonious marriage." And magazines aimed at women bring ready-made recipes for something more sustaining for marriages, within the ideal of happiness proposed as unique and universal, according to Bassanezi:⁸

In Jornal das Moças, the housewife is considered the ideal wife. In this magazine, "marital bliss" is clearly linked to the idea of the wife simply keeping her husband. This can be achieved, among other things, by good female performance in domestic activities, especially those which can get more easily male recognition, such as cooking and making the house orderly and cozy.

Jornal das Moças was a weekly magazine published in the city of Rio de Janeiro between 1914 and 1961, which had a national circulation. It was sold every Wednesday and could be bought at newsstands or by subscription. It was founded by Agostinho de Menezes and belonged to Brazilian publishing house Editora Jornal das Moças Ltda. It had around 70 pages and featured subjects of interest for women of its day: fashion, news from the world of cinema, cooking, chronicles and even art history pages (this in the 1950s). In all issues, the magazine would feature on its front page a picture of an entertainer who the publishers considered prominent, someone from Hollywood or Brazilian industries. It would follow with news about music, Brazilian and international cinema, which did not necessarily appear at the beginning of their issues. There was no set criterion order for the reports. They were always about the same issues, news about society, a little about politics. In all issues there was a column for short humorous pieces of literature, the "*Troças e Traços*" (Jokes and Traces), the short story of the week and radio news. Together with the issues there was a kind of section called "*Jornal da Mulher: Revista Semanal de Figurinos e Bordados*" (Women's Journal: Weekly Magazine of Costumes and Embroidery), which especially brought the world of fashion, with images of trends in that area, sewing template patterns, drawings for "dressing" not only women, but also their homes, with figures for embroidered dish towels, for example.

The methodology used for summarizing the sources was by grouping into Microsoft Word word processor files the scanned pages of the editions of the *Jornal das Moças* from the 1950-1959 period, which had in their content a reference to issues related to nutrition, hygiene and home maintenance. These aspects were found in the sources in different subject approaches, such as in children care, household appliances cleaning, dietary tips, cooking recipes, food preservation, etiquette code of behavior, how to organize receptions at home, the correct way to serve food, food tips that could help or hinder digestion, among many other approaches in which food and eating were present.

Clearly when it came to food, *O Jornal das Moças* had a column called “Let us prepare delicacies”, which would be published almost every week, and seldom an issue would not have it. However, it is interesting to note that there was not a right place for it, that is, as already noted above, the magazine not always had an order for the presentation of its columns. In some issues, it would appear in the very first pages; in others, it would be in the “*Jornal da Mulher*” (Women’s Journal) section. But even if there was no specific place for it, its themes were similar in nature. In it we always find candies and snacks recipes, as well as “things that housewives should not forget.” In March 1950, in an issue where this column was published, an advertisement for (U.S. Royal Baking Powder Company) baking powder was published close to it, whose title was “There is cake today,” also bringing every month different cake recipes. However, the issue around food is not restricted to this column or advertisements from (American multinational companies) Royal Baking Powder Company or Fleischmann’s Yeast (presently Nabisco Brands, Inc.) or (Brazilian branch of cooking oil) *Saúde*, but throughout the text there are references to food, with advice, proverbs and even recipes for favorite dishes of Hollywood’s entertainers. Examples: in the February 8, 1951 edition, we find an article entitled “Weight management diets,” which features women as the main planners of domestic eating and their own diets.

The lady who does not comply to a perfect weight management diet falls into a major disaster, which the whole world finds out and talks about... sometimes with some sarcasm.

She clashes with the world in general and particularly her family. Moodiness helps her forget that chocolates should not be in her diet. But a few weeks later she remembers again when a dress is tight for her body or when her husband looks at her with criticism.⁹

Regarding advice on household management and women’s responsibility to preserve and maintain food and “make it last”, we realize that this is often a prominent reference in 1950, when two columns appear in the magazine, one called “*Pequenos truques para o lar*” (Small tricks for the home) and another one called “*Conselhos úteis e práticos: mágicas domésticas ao alcance de toda dona-de-casa*” (Useful and practical advice: home tricks at hand for every housewife).

As for the object of this paper specifically, which is to present some contents from the “Let us prepare delicacies” column, some remarks: in every issue, it presents a similar design, the title with some prominence, but not always in the same place (sometimes it is above the news, sometimes in the center of its contents, often beneath a large picture of delicacies). It also brings miscellaneous recipes, and there is not necessarily a separation between candies and snacks. In the March 8, 1951, no. 1864 edition,¹⁰ the column brings recipes of “vinaigrette loin,” “mussels soup” and “egg yolk donuts”, and nothing indicates that they collaborate in the organization of a ready-made menu. It appears to be a contribution for the housewife to freely use them and develop her own menu from the recipes that are presented to her.

Along the recipes, are also always presented domestic saving tips and advice in the field of good manners and/or table setting, dishes presentation, cleaning, food preservation.

In the May 27, 1954, no. 2032 edition,¹¹ just below a beautiful image of a roast-beef with chickpeas, we find its recipe with ingredients and preparation directions, as well as instructions for its presentation – a kind of written description of the image that was first presented. Just below, on the left side, the focus is on a small “little square” with the title “Blessed be!”

Blessed are those who, imbued with their duties and perfect listeners of their consciousness, tirelessly inspect the manufacturing systems of the materials necessary for our food. May their hands not ache when they punish by spanking those who poison us.

They should take their holy purpose not only to the legalized factories but mainly to these thousands of street vendors without licenses of any kind who infest the city. Be them the so-called baianas (street food vendor women from the Brazilian state of Bahia), popcorn street vendors, dry-roasted peanuts street vendors, ice cream street vendors, cocada (Brazilian coconut candy or confectionery) street vendors, pastel (Brazilian fried pie) street vendors, etc.

Man’s heart is often in anguish due to many who practice such functions to provide for their families, but the heart of the people’s health advocates is more anguished due to the disasters that such goods, often unscrupulously made, cause in their consumers, especially when it comes to children, who constitute a majority.

In this snippet we can glimpse, besides the variety of the column, great concern about health at a time when scientific views on food hygiene, preparation and sale advance. Also some kind of appeal to the State is perceived, which should not only monitor, but properly punish those who “poison,” even if these are related to the field of the street food tradition, such as the “baianas” or “cocadeiros.” It is interesting how such a situation shows what our society thinks about health surveillance inspections and also the guidance from science in terms of intake of fat or even the dangers of food contamination.

Health concerns also appear, among other issues, in the year of 1957¹² in a short article entitled “Overcoming anemia,” which highlights animal liver consumption because “according to an opinion by a great French scientist,” it is what constitutes a real element for combating this disease. As well as other foods – spinach and lentils –, it contains enough iron, such as horse meat, even if the news alerts that eating this delicacy appreciated by the French lacks tolerance among Brazilian eating habits. Then stands out advice such as “Housewives must not forget it,” warning that “animal liver-based dishes, as all fried preparations, must be made with very fresh viscera.” If its thin coat is not moist and shiny, its tissue when cutting appears opaque and bleeds, it is better not to buy it and refrain from eating it.” That said, it is possible to see a general concern with the commitment and responsibility surrounding purchase, selection, preparation, presentation and consumption of “delicacies.”

In June 1954,¹³ there is a theme for the column whose focus is not on the title, which incidentally appears as a frame, in small letters circling all two pages, that reads: “The sea provides us with delicious dishes.” In the center is a picture which depicts a beautiful arrangement of seafood that are the news object, crustaceans such as crabs and crayfish, and mollusks such as oysters. The report brings health advice, both in relation to how to buy such products, as also ways of preparation. It highlights what it calls “crustaceans calories,” drawing attention to its high nutritional value, saying that oysters are rich in lecithin, and mussels in albumin. As for preparation, depending on the product, simplicity is highlighted for some, next to the sophistication of others. Therefore, for mollusks there is a recipe that is said to be “in brine.”

Always discard, in every way, mollusks full of sand. Pick and carefully wash the others in water with some vinegar. Then put them to soak in a container. Mollusks open and leave their waters. Then let them boil for 3-4 minutes. Strain the water and let them warm up with some chopped onion and parsley. Serve the mollusks in a large dish with a good sauce in a sauce boat.

Other three recipes follow this one, one called “*poulette*,” another one “Spanish-style” and another one simply called “with cream.” Just below is a recipe for “American-style crayfish,” which may not be sophisticated, but rather “labor-intensive” in its preparation.

Take them to be cooked in plenty of salted water. Let them cool. Remove the tails and, in a pan, prepare a sauce with minced onions and garlic. Drizzle with sweet olive oil and melted butter. Pour some dry white wine and sprinkle some cayenne powder, salt, chopped parsley and fresh tomatoes. Cook for fifteen minutes. Then add a spoonful of brandy, let them sear and heat their tails in this sauce. Serve hot and place sprigs of parsley and half lemon slices on the edge of the dish.

When it comes to good manners, the column also often provides guidance on the care we should have when we are at the table. Therefore, we have in March 1959¹⁴, among recipes of “lamb chops,” “golden rice” and “unusual donuts,” a highlight for “table manners.”

Table manners are a habit that must be acquired in childhood because they not only reflect the upbringing received as they are convenient to health.

Seated for the meal, you should have your body in a comfortable but correct position. The body should be aligned to the lower limbs, well rested on the chair. The head must be kept raised and the arms kept as close as possible to the body without however forcing these to be stuck to the body.

Cutlery should be used in such a way that those who use them don't nudge the companions of right or left. Thus, the knife should be held by the handle, not too close to the blade, and the fork and spoon over the hand palm facing up.

The good habit of sitting at the table, together with other habits of mental nature, add up to a good acquisition not only for the individual's health but for their social reputation.

In the pieces of advice, tips, tricks, recipes. In short, everything that surrounds home management, specially a strong focus on food. A wealth of flavors and tastes is revealed, as well as a legacy of refinement, hygiene and food preservation, sensations, emotional ties, memories recorded as recipes, and then reflect on women's responsibility in all this. Thus, the study of the records contained in these materials provides the retrieval of regional and local cuisine values, full of history and food culture. It can bring us the opportunity to reflect on the social interactions revealed from the transcript of culinary knowledge, indicating certain eating patterns. The narrative within a recipe brings us situations, spaces, feelings. Feelings of joy, party, pleasure, celebration, sorrow, welcoming, all surface. In short, opportunities for rapprochement with the intangible heritage. On the other hand, the flavors also denounce the material heritage, ways of preparation, utensils, ingredients, temperatures, etc.

Final thoughts

Surveying and summarizing the sources is an essential factor when deciding to examine all editions of a weekly magazine. Summarizing facilitates visualization and its subsequent systematization, making it faster.

In each edition, when we observe the permanence of some columns and the disappearance of others, we see symptoms of a society that has permanence and small changes. It is from the 1960s

that the emergence of oral contraceptives (OCPs) allow women to choose motherhood or not, but they will also gradually provide greater possibilities for her to decide to have a professional life outside the home. In the magazine, in all the years analyzed, there are many tips about sewing and fashion, bringing sewing template patterns, models and measurements for making clothes. This way, women who could develop such activity would have the option of having an income without the need of leaving home. Or else work at home and at the same time she could take care of home and family.

In the 1950s, the view that women should be “prepared” for managing a “new home” was strong in Brazil. This would take place both at the level of school education as of an informally disseminated education by oral traditions, and also from the women’s presses – here in particular magazines. Much of the female world was full of guidelines covering needle work, embroidery, sewing and music, as well as the knowledge of issues related to cooking, clothing maintenance, house cleaning, hygiene.

Since the late nineteenth century, with regard to formal education, public schools have adopted the treaty *Noções de vida doméstica e noções de vida prática* (Domestic life and practical life notions), by F. Ferreira. At this time, according to Bastos & Garcia,¹⁵ school classes on the so-called “housewifery” should contribute to a moral reform, disseminating order and hygiene. Thus, education should not be restricted to an elite, but being of interest to everyone, it should be allocated primarily to the popular social classes.

These educational airs directed at women, either through schools or through treaties or magazines available and willing to build “the queens of the house” would forge models and instigate the desire to serve them. But a housewife’s work is not merely manual or technical, but also intellectual and emotional. It is work in which a good amount of creativity is necessary, but most of all decision making. Thus, female education, formal or informal, aimed at “home science,” aims at a better life with more dignity and to mitigate the problems caused by the daily routine of managing the family environment.

Thereby recognizing that cultural, social and psychological factors influence food choices – its preparation and consumption – but also other tasks related to a housewife’s role, such as hygiene and management of expenses, it is possible to undertake this analysis, attempting to recognize food as an important element in the composition of the construction of the female model, especially in the 1950s.

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Received: March 15, 2015

Revised: May 11, 2015

Accepted: June 29, 2015

