



# The natural kitchen as place to re-enchantment of the female body

## A cozinha natural como lugar de reencantamento do corpo feminino

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### Abstract

The present study aims to problematize the emergence of natural cuisine in contemporary times based on an ethnography dedicated to the corporeity of holistic therapeutic practice, and its requirement for a specific natural diet. It is presented a small clipping which aims to account for a modern socially structured culinary context in the figure of the chef who is the central character in the historical process of naturalization of animal protein in the human palate and in the de-substantialization of the female soul. The redefinition proposed by natural kitchen plays an important role in the understanding of complex human body sensitivity to the modern carnivorism, experimented throughout the alternative practices (healing and alimentation) performed at the therapeutic center. The non-governmental institution “AFYA – women therapeutic center” located in João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brasil, symbolizes the effort for recognition of the emancipation of the female body, evidencing cooking site as a special locality for re-enchantment of the female body, based on the legitimacy of vegetarianism as empowering device to resignification of feminine soul.

**Keywords:** Natural kitchen. Ecofeminism. Carnist society. Embodiment. Holistic Health.

### Resumo

O presente trabalho visa problematizar a emergência da cozinha natural na contemporaneidade com base em uma etnografia dedicada à corporeidade da prática terapêutica holística (sn.

naturalista, integrativa) e sua exigência por uma alimentação natural específica. Apresentamos um pequeno recorte que almeja dar conta da moderna estruturação social culinária centrada na figura do *chef*, carnista e masculino, que figura como personagem central no processo histórico de domesticação do paladar, onde há uma naturalização nos valores ligados à proteína animal e uma sensível dessubstancialização da alma feminina, à qual uma cozinha ‘inferior’ é remetida. Observa-se, através da corporeidade agenciada durante a prática de cura terapêutica, em um bairro da periferia da capital paraibana, a emergência de um vivo processo de construção identitário no qual a *experimentação* de saladas, o cultivo de plantas medicinais e as práticas de cura assumem papel relevante para a compreensão da constituição de um *saber* culinário. Aludimos à condição fenomenológica na qual Comer é, ‘imediatamente’, Ser, significando o grau mais íntimo no movimento da exceção do *dever*, reconhecendo a prática do vegetarianismo, realizada no centro terapêutico Afya – Centro Holístico da Mulher como um legítimo esforço de um projeto de emancipação do corpo feminino. O recinto culinário se torna um espaço de reencantamento social, empoderando o corpo feminino e suas práticas: derivadas da articulação de um conhecimento da nutracêutica baseada em plantas.

**Palavras-chave:** Cozinha natural. Ecofeminismo. Sociedade carnista. Corporeidade. Cozinha moderna. Saúde Holística.

## Introduction

Investigation of food history in the Western world implies observing the set of foundational factors with regard to scientific systematization and categorization between ‘ingredients’ and ‘products’ that populate the esteemed site that provides the art of food preparation. Contemporary situations that typical or traditional uses of certain ingredients no longer represent isolated (ecological or cultural) uses but rather a lively and complex process of hybridization of cooking culminates in forming confused contemporary tastes. “Modern diners literally do not *know* what they eat anymore,” as wisely noticed by Claude Fischler.<sup>1</sup>

This analysis shall be made around critical theorists who conceptualize modernity and problematize it as a human condition lost between the scientific distinction of ontological instances Society/Nature.<sup>2</sup> The present writing is dedicated to the presentation of Natural Cuisine (NC) in its plurality. Although usually referred to as an “alternative,” it certainly has a very profound political

field about which we would like, throughout the present text, to open theorizing on about a specific phenomenon of knowledge and recognition aiming to broaden the horizon of analysis initially brought by works that bring cooking under a contemporary environment of epistemologically overcoming the dichotomy Nature/Culture.<sup>3</sup>

The situation found in the field from some ‘salty’ search for vegetarian food has brought us to the formulation of a text that searches the forces applied in extending a social corpus, which is the female body, in its ecological dimension<sup>4</sup>: its constitution and relations, also paying attention to a theoretical-historical development which is Feminism. We prefer the native use of the local term (natural) in rejecting the use of the term “vegetarian,” since locally built cuisine, based on the diet of vegetable and non-industrial processed foods, engenders a healthier lifestyle that less rigidly complies to determined culinary prescriptions or procedures than to figuration as a field in construction open to improvisations, creations and intuitions based on an *attentive, continuous and integral* reading of the body itself. Thus, we include the natural meaning in a broad lively way, expressed in the very body of the therapist-cooks with whom we have interacted.

Observing women at Brazilian non-governmental institution Afya – *Centro Holístico da Mulher* (a women’s holistic therapeutic center), we have given relevance to details and some aspects present in the adoption of a naturalistic practice (sn. Integrative, holistic, complementary), whose meaning is linked less to a social-functionalist system than, properly speaking, to the pure intuitive dispositions developed and found in the field, conforming a plural and living autochthonous sensibility. First of all, I realize that the construction of a vegetarian cuisine does not end only with the fulfillment of the exclusively vegetable fruition, since, as in most cultures, food derived from animals and even smaller animals is seen as acceptable due to being considered ‘mild’ (such as fish and birds in our culture). More serious, however, has been to consider the term veganism as an exclusive reference to a diet and not to the total, modern and complex form that configures a habitus of human life occupied in avoiding the exploitation of any kind of life, *including* animal life. We point out our interest in understanding the diversity of behavioral dispositions, for which, as the group researched does not adopt a diet with total exclusion of animal products, the use of said terms was not shown to be appropriate. Vegetarianism, therefore, we readily point out, presents itself as an interesting focus of research in the field of Anthropology.

At Afya, nutrition covers all local practices conveyed. The mere willingness to keep my feet in direct contact with the soil at the time of growing and harvesting medicinal plants and even during the preparation of food (I call them “barefoot cooks”), founds more than a moment of ‘socio-spiritual’ transcendence. It attests to the territorialization of some culinary knowledge that infinitely crosses them, pluralizing them, and propitiates some continuous poietic revival of the senses originating from the feminine in free formation in the culinary art. Denatured, they experience the paths of a bold language: they no longer speak about meat.

We can figuratively situate, on the one hand, foods in their natural state, and on the other, their human developments: foods that deceive the mouthfeel and which, as attested by the aforementioned Fischlerian maxim, appear as hybrids of difficult *identification*. Industrially produced, they proliferate as a commodity unilaterally destined to the satisfaction of a consumer market designed to mitigate the development of the (sensible) sense of *eating*.<sup>5</sup> The body, whose modern reading is tripartite between body, mind and spirit, builds a “human” world of low resilience, weak, sterile, impotent to perform the most important food choice operation. The tripartite body is the victim of a power struggle on the ground of the mouthfeel. The “*gastroanomic*” individuals suggested by Fischler emerge in this (modern) social framework shredded by the game of forces that takes their corporeality – which implies all the tasting, the enjoyment in knowing how to discern ‘good’ from ‘bad’ food. Knowing by themselves, as a tool of the mind, is not enough, when the question hovers on the issue of taste, therefore, a place inscribed in the body, related to experimentations and developments but also alienation.<sup>5,6</sup>

The detailed understanding of the modern culinary context in which natural cuisine diners live constitutes an exercise that can contribute to the anthropology of nature, which seeks to overcome modern dualisms (body/spirit, individual/environment). In Csordas’<sup>6</sup> perspective, “Corporeality is an issue of meat, shared, mutually involved and never completely anonymous.” Thus, the sense of responsibility of an individual inserted in an industrialized and globalized food culture – which forms the current state of social paranoia –, which is framed by an illusory unlimited omnivore and remains in crisis in view of a variety of foods on which it is incapable of qualitatively discerning is approached.

Starting from such assumptions, which concern the Ecology of the culinary subject,<sup>7</sup> we seek to investigate the cuisine environment through some daily practice of healing, in which some socialization is directly mediated by the production of specific *tastes*, constituents of a plural ‘embedded’ knowledge, mobilizing the body as a whole, some corporeity that takes into account the set of affections that compose a specific and modern culinary landscape, according to what is made explicit by Carlos Alberto Doria<sup>8</sup> about (French sociologist) Marcel Mauss and his openness to studies on the body:

He would lament the absence of systematic studies on body techniques in the same way as we can regret even today the exclusion of this dimension in the study of cuisine making. But of course the techniques can also be analyzed according to their performance or dexterity and we end up generating norms of human training as we do with animals. The transmission of the technique aiming at its outcome or dexterity includes a series of non-observed details and therefore it would be necessary to look at them from the education of children. What is fundamental is this long process of engaging the body, as if it were a simple instrument or a sophisticated tool in carrying out an idea or design of what is edible. (Id., p. 268).

We point out the identification of a modern sense of commodity applied to food, then marked by a destination in satisfying a social sense of *consumption* as opposed to a (sensible) sense of eating, according to (French social scientist) Claude Fischler, attentive to the ecology surrounding the modern culinary body.

Food, as an incorporeal element of the eater subject, attracts special attention when its power of action and control over the territory of the mouthfeel is thought of, in a situation in which the human organism, made weak in its capacity to realize the discernment of ‘good food,’ is victimized by a problematic tasting that irretrievably condemns our humanity. The sacrifice of nonhuman animals for our food shall always have its dereliction from the world’s humanity, as already shown by a well-known article by Lévi-Strauss on bovine conditions in modern societies. From the perspective of the culinary practice as corporeality, a relation of individual-environment<sup>9</sup> continuum opens up, which makes the understanding of the phenomenon as post-social, so to speak, acquiring a dimension from which broader questions are directed to the Anthropology of Food, covering gender issues<sup>10</sup> and even a reflection on the history of the relationship between humans and ingredients.<sup>11</sup>

The extensive field research begins with the presentation of the researcher as a volunteer at a community action project for the construction of an agro-ecological based vegetable garden linked to the missionary work founder of a healing home on the outskirts of the capital of the Brazilian state of Paraíba. As part of a team called “*Projeto Artemísia*” (Artemisia Project) this was the form of entry into the field of research that ended in building bonds of affection sheltered by the Afya – *Centro Holístico da Mulher* house of healing where therapeutic care would be provided and “natural food” would be served, constituting the organization’s women’s daily hasty activities.

In collective talks *during* and *between* lunches, meals and therapeutic practices, we obtained reports about the beginning of the therapeutic projection in the life of each one of those women, some material that served as a matrix to interpret a world that resists the new corporalities developed around the Afya culinary practices. The simplicity of some bare feet culinary practices is symbolic of a process of liberation of these women’s bodies, whose horizons and personal perspectives would be largely given to hopelessness and violence engendered in the cities outskirts social landscape.

### Kitchen incorporated: formation and meeting of ethos in the NC

Afya was born as a psychosocial help group coordinated by a missionary work that for 15 years has been assisting women in overcoming their personal problems. Currently the institution consists of about 20 women who work to promote “natural and holistic therapies,” preventive medicine,

food awareness and care for the environment. They are especially active in offering alternative medical treatment on the outskirts of a metropolitan area, attracting people from neighboring states and the flow of missionaries and holistic therapists from all over the world.

Euphrasia Joseph Nyaki (Efu), a missionary at U.S.-based congregation Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc.<sup>a</sup> and founder of the institution, demonstrates being aware of good eating and its importance for constituting human health. Through therapeutic practices, Efu combines her training as a biologist to her religious and spiritual dedication in spreading techniques leading to the sensitization of the body as a tool base in the perception and performance of the world. The knowledge brought about by Efu is easily recognizable, demonstrated through what can be defined by some knowledge of the whole body, mobilized in a certain constant way, in a certain subtle way, that arises at moments of commensality, when she teaches one to *feel* the food.

Efu suggests posture. Disposition. Fluidity. Intoning words, mantras or phrases with the purpose of purifying the food are welcomed, as symbolic of some georeferenced knowledge: a map of points and lines that cross human animals' bodies, meticulously referenced within small movements carried out under discreetness. "Lokah, Samastah, Sukhino, Bhavantubb" (field notes, May 2013).

In the kitchen conviviality, in the amalgamation of conversation, laughter, jumping, cries of joy that seem to purge the evil spirits of a sacred precinct, cooks seem to gain strength through some form of direct contact 'with their roots' – their feet in contact with the earth ensure the flowing of energy rivers which intermittently flow into a pulsating, living kitchen where feelings are transmuted into good food. The food does not come premade as portions idealized beforehand but they receive their due treatment there.

*Many people have never eaten stems from beetroot, turnip, carrot, broccoli leaves! [...] Here we enjoy everything we can, you know. Out there 'they' throw everything away. It is possible to make juice from the pineapple skin [...] Carrot greens are good for braising [...] Beetroot and radish stems, broccoli and cauliflower leaves (field notes, Afya kitchen, with Ms. Lourdes, kitchen leader, 75 years old).*

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- a Maryknoll is a group of three Catholic organizations based in the United States, which are: Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc. and Maryknoll Lay Missioners. Their objectives are: to combat poverty, provide health, build communities and encourage peace and social justice in places of social vulnerability. They promote Catholic Church mission through services such as: health and social welfare, sustainable agriculture, economic development, human rights and youth citizen education. (Source: <http://www.maryknoll.org>)
- b I quote a little Hindu prayer to refer through words of power the lines of power that pass, often unnoticed, in the form of codes, gestures, gazes, which, with a certain subtlety, configure the intersubjective space. The therapeutic training undertaken by sister Efu involves training in Reiki, Floral Therapies, Pranic Cleansing, Family Constellation, among others.

They are fruits and vegetables prepared in a simple way, cooked in a gentle way, in steam or grated raw, according to a diverse combination, which aims at satisfying a wide range of dietary requirements. The dish aesthetic also comes as a fundamental factor, enchanting visitors by the simple and free arrangement of cucumber slices surrounded by the colors of carrot, beet and watercress, in circular and mandala shapes.

The NC organization converges to what are nowadays considered common MC (Modern Cuisine) mistakes: fried foods, red meat, processed foods, spices, flavor enhancers and pesticides. Pesticides sneakily continue in modern menus. Equally fundamental, and not exactly obvious in a cautious enclosure par excellence, good humor is often not kept, and deserves widespread sharing, in an apparent opposition to MC's aseptic prerogatives. Here, laughter guarantees an aura of harmony that also gives a special taste to food at the time of meal.

In NC, stems or leaves are not discarded, which, by the way, are not even available on supermarkets shelves. Cooks at Afya (led by above mentioned Ms Lourdes) take advantage of the food to the maximum of its potential, giving meaning to peels and remains that would previously be discarded and now serve for the preparation of juices. And dark green vegetables stalks are used to fill loaves and cakes made with the fibrous skins of bananas or pumpkin seeds. What is no longer used in the kitchen receives some concerned destination, being now taken by one of the therapists to their backyards and deposited in the garden itself in order to recover the natural cycle of the earth. These are properly technical operations which are opposed to MC calisthenics and serve as a wide denunciation of the mechanics of asepsis, hypercooking and total energy waste in relation to some care relationship with food.

To accompany the emergence of such subjects, in the company and in the aid of the cooking preparation, in the moments of recollecting the material destined for composting, washing dishes, in the identification of medicinal plants, in providing and accomplishing the healing practices, the ethnographer was inserted in the intersubjective field of the development of feminine therapy, from which we were able to account for the centrality of *natural food* in the process of empowerment in which they would gain in healing power concomitant with a confrontation of the "traditional" (local and modern) logic of living, eating, being, cooking.

At Afya, diners (patients and therapists) are welcome to the table already aware of the foods they are supposed to try to eat, having a list of their own personal and non-transferable proper and improper foods obtained through a bioenergetic examination from the patients' "psycho-biophysical" conditions. The local difficulties stated by the diners, who seek to follow the bioenergetic prescription indications, meet the difficulties of the therapists themselves, turning mainly around a certain resistance to the practice of eating "meat."<sup>12</sup>

The formation of a meat-eating *habitus*<sup>c</sup> takes place amid reified behavioral dispositions in the form of specific *tastes* directly related to a set of moral structures intensified within the family context. In general, it involves the requirement of a ‘strong’ diet that gives the very masculine social condition<sup>13</sup> used as some justification for the adoption of a diet that, in modernity, culminates with the formatting of general practices, techniques and dispositions that legitimize dietetics promoted by *haute cuisine* chefs.<sup>14</sup>

Gender conflict is latent in the field, visualized through many testimonials that have contributed to the verification of acceptance/nonacceptance of plant-based food in their homes. The testimonies reveal true personal dilemmas pertinent to the formation of a subject, cook and feminine, and the legitimacy of her *expertise*. A complex context of power relations therefore hovers about women’s bodies: separated from experiencing their daily lives, in which they are currently ‘free,’ or ‘found’ according to what they themselves say, and the past of suffering, resistance and struggle in an environment unfavorable to the feminine spirit spontaneity. Today they are matured, empowered from a mutual help group that gives them voice and form an efficient therapeutic team that, however, faces some rough indisposition even to less radical forms of vegetarianism, such as that practiced at Afya. According to Adams,<sup>13</sup>

for women in a patriarchal culture, additional concerns arise. *For us, we are devoured and devourers.* We are consumed and consumers. We are those whose stomachs do not listen and we are those who seek to be heard from within stomachs that do not listen. Eating animals acts as a mirror and representation of patriarchal values. Eating meat is the re-inscription of male power throughout every meal. The patriarchal vision does not see the fragmented body of a dead animal but an appetizing food. If our appetite re-inscribes patriarchy, our actions with respect to animals shall reify or challenge this culture established. If meat is some symbol of male dominance, then the presence of meat proclaims women’s disempowerment (Id., p. 24, our translation and emphasis).

The ecofeminist perspective<sup>15</sup> illuminates the description of a modern context that very closely approximates the local condition of confrontation of (modern and natural) kitchens, that has as an arena of dispute the mouthfeel and, as a bonus, the conquest of the feminine body. Some social individual devoted to everyday cooking, the relations of force that operate on their bodies is apparently experienced in a double sense: in the ‘internal’ sphere, in the contest of tastes in forming their own taste, and in the social sphere, where they are women, mothers and wives and some carnivorous predilection crosses their bodies according to a hierarchy of *tastes* sent to the *chefs* of modernity.

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c Meat-eating is an expression used as a reference to any practice related to or derived from animal-based food, usually understood as an ideology aiming to provide moral justification for the consumption of products derived from animal exploitation (cf. ADAMS, 1990, FELIPE, 2012).

From the bodily experimentation of a borderline state between an identity of housewives on the one hand and a new identity of holistic therapists on the other, the male ideologizing of MC contextualizes the sociological values and dispositions present in their homes and seems to offer not much more than a deep unwillingness to the (ecological and feminine) discoveries carried out in their therapeutic maturation process. Conservative on food changes, MC eaters require the presence of animal meat through some set of means to control the culinary practices, immediately related to the control of their companions' bodies, who are cooks in daily life. According to Carol Adams,

eating meat is the most frequent way of interacting with animals. Butcher shops are the quintessence of legitimizing the act of eating meat. They legitimate some literal dismemberment of animals concomitant with the proclaimed intellectual and emotional distinction of animal desires. Carnage as a paradigm also provides input for the understanding of a profusion of imaged cultural overlaps (Id., p. 66, our translation).

The control of female bodies thus seems legitimized by some reified practice, some *habitus* that denies the decentralization of meat as food, in a consequent demand of the cook for submission to an essentially violent system<sup>16</sup> distanced from the relational, responsible,<sup>17</sup> sensible practice built on a deeper critique of the reflexivity and the new signification of the *quantum* of life in humans and nonhumans<sup>18</sup> – which at Afya experiment it (or else, *internalize* it) among leaves, flowers and fruits of the medicinal garden that they *care for*. It is the principle of care, not the requirement that takes the stage. It is the satisfaction of a sincere desire linked to perceptions that are created while cooking and not maintaining some fault, given as structural.

Maintaining the discourse of delegitimization of the vegetarian practice thus displaced because the very field of possibility of female *becoming*, which is performed there through an intense, intimate, nurturing, reflexive, deuterio-learning movement<sup>19</sup> condemned to satisfying the condition of finding healing and emancipation of an *anomic* state, which characterizes *chefs'* cuisine, which has become popular and conventional, and essentially *sick*. Following the cooks' reports about their husbands and families, it was through the expression of their work that their husbands were also encouraged to seek therapeutic treatment. No longer anonymous, they re-charmed their husbands in passing. Afya today serves men and women independently but there is some much greater demand from the female audience.

Briefly, here we introduce our research in exposing the motifs found in the field that propelled the theoretical-methodological perspective adopted. Such motivations concern attention to the way in which learning is embodied: according to some *continuum* in culinary-therapeutic training, essentially linked to “attention of attention,” so to speak, articulating the experience of exploring the material world to the development of some new sensibility inevitably linked to retrieving the female soul.

The personal participation in the training courses offered by the institution (Bioenergetic Therapy, Phytotherapy and Natural Food) has served for an experience increasingly close to some deeply demanding knowledge of *awareness*. The process of ‘natural formation’ mediated by the institution takes place through some dedicated *calibration* of the body in the use of a common term among them, therapist-cooks, who have *attention* as an essential tool for some accuracy in reading a world full of significant signs, marks and clues – a world that is invisible in the eyes of the initially insensitive neophyte-researcher.

Deeply turned towards reflective attention, body sensations and ‘internal’ emotional states, the therapists firmly criticize some ‘knowledge for knowledge,’ that is, without some practical activities, as some dedication on emptiness. They believe that it is only through careful engagement in the world, in the care of patients, in the constant exchange of hugs, gazes, dedication to uttering words ‘of power’ or by feeling their feet in direct contact with the soil that they develop some satisfactory stabilization to translate the signs of an eloquent world.<sup>8</sup> A careful observation of the signs of the world allows them or rather leads them to discern important messages in a living environment which is rich in information, as suggested by Ingold<sup>5</sup>

Learning to see, therefore, is not a matter of acquiring schemas for a mental construction of the environment, but acquiring skills for an effective perceptual engagement with their constituents, human and nonhuman ones, animate and inanimate ones (Id., p. 55, our translation).

As a continuous process of redeveloping itself in an active involvement with the environment, nutrition represents some literal form of identity construction, integrally mobilizing (mind and body) in the field of Fischlerian *anomie* – a condemned condition of the modern *consumer-eater*, nourished by some meat-eater *chef*. Attentive and dedicated to being constituted as “good eaters,” that is, capable of calibrating their bodies so as to enable them to distinguish good/bad food. “Approaching subjectivities”<sup>17</sup> here provides a broader ecological scope, raising a break with ontological matrix barriers of some traditional and anthropocentric anthropological perception. In order to better understand the new trend of epistemological change which falls here as an ecological requirement of the field of food, of the relation of eating to others, Ingold’s<sup>20</sup> conception of ecology seems appropriate:

I’m going to explain how my kind of ecology differs from [...] “Recognizing only human organisms in their material environment (be it natural or artificial) and focusing individual states and mental processes of these organisms and physical-environmental causes and effects of these mental things” [...] In contrast, a properly ecological approach, in my view, is that which treats the organism-in-its-environment not as a composite of internal and external factors but as an indivisible totality. This totality is, in fact, a developmental system and ecology deals with the dynamics of such systems (idem, p. 25, in footnote).

Developed from a personal and (inter)subjective interaction of articulation of a specific body immersed in a living environment, *taste* is presented as some quality intrinsic to its own conditions of formation of a body. Directly responsible, it offers a new framework of interpretation at the disposal the meat-eater mouthfeel taking place as some kind of *habitus*, predating the individual's own rational choice.

This unconscious dimension of the "*habitus*" is that it operates in the explanation of resistance to change in diet. According to Doria,<sup>20</sup> MC structured according to its own mechanistic operation requires technical demands according to protocols such as lightening, slicing, choking (depriving of oxygen), freezing, bathing, covering, frying, watering, marinating and scalding:

They are *compulsory* commands on cooking. From them are removed the intention of "cooking for others," the intention to seduce, of *approaching subjectivities*, which can only be inscribed in the product of this set of actions by the chef's *finalist command* (Id., p. 216, our emphasis).

A protagonist of the culinary creation in MC, the *chef* incarnates in an evident way the process of corporal preparation developed from the profusion of food products, substantially constituted of the patriarchal configuration that disqualifies cooks of day to day<sup>8</sup>. Naturalization of human mouthfeel is considerably nourished by the reified meat eater projection observable in the foods prepared by MC, in the investigation of a meat-centrism socially connected to maintaining some masculine *ethos* of virility:<sup>16</sup>

Eating meat has been the dominant norm for centuries in the Western world. It is the nature of the dominant norms to be unquestionably accepted. Moreover, when people become vegetarians, they are always asked to explain their dietary choice [...] Meat-eating, as well as heterosexuality, is seen as a compulsory institutionalization that is imposed, organized, propagandized, and strengthened in order to maintain the right of access from a predominantly male society to non-humans and their meat [...] Just as women are seen as incomplete (in the heteronormative system) in the absence of a man, so are vegetarian foods, seen as incomplete without the addition of meat. [...] Eating meat is a biological activity but it is also some practice instilled in culture and encoded with symbolic meanings (Id., p. 329-330).

At Afya, some first immersion has induced us to think that the therapists' husbands would be responsible for maintaining the meat eater's predilection through an explicit demand for "strong food." Taste for meat, however, was also an expression of some affection shared by themselves, in an explicit and conscious "incoherent" attitude from the perspective of the therapeutic-naturalist training. The finding of this apparent ambiguity has demanded a resumption in the interpretation of local mouthfeel formation, considering the presence of *tastes* in a system in dispute, inscribed in the therapists' bodies, which has provided figuration of a context in which the meat eating

practice works first of all before and after the rationalization of their own actions. Afya cuisine opens space for reconstituting the *ex situ* feminine soul of the culinary site, enabling natural and feminine practices in free experimentation and re-signification of their own ground of constitution of alterity, their bodies, the mediators themselves in the horizon of relations of transhuman sociability, from a creative, idiosyncratic cuisine, devoted to others as some form of self-discovery and in expansion, after all, according to Carlos Alberto Doria:<sup>20</sup>

The feminine cuisine, domestic, is the cuisine of idiosyncrasies, of specificities, because it cooks “for others,” which is always another concreteness, known in its subjectivity and, therefore, singular. The cooking of mothers and grandmothers is of undeniable value [...] Cooking is much more about knowing how to engage the body in culinary work [...] than “following” any recipe, since it shall never replace their particular skills when seeking specific results and enjoyment for who cooks (Id., 220-221).

The present section points to an intransigent modern epistemic-sociological meat-phallogocentric load, which attests nothing less than the historical meddling of *chefs* in the culinary area. Under the corporeality perspective, a paradigmatic proposal for thinking about the social phenomenon of the body as a synthesis element, in which ‘subject’ and ‘object,’ ‘knowledge’ and ‘self-knowledge,’ ‘I’ and ‘others’ are articulated for the sake of a cultural “incarnation” movement that constitutes human beings in an “ontology that gives precedence to the processes of formation rather than the final product and to the flows and transformations of materials rather than the states of matter.”<sup>3</sup>

This question reappears in a set of different theorizations that converge in the search to characterize the emergence of the ecological subject and their differentiating potentiality from their forms of relationship in the world. It is therefore important to appreciate this particular way of doing cuisine as an engaged process of world experience. Gastronomy has, par excellence, the innate condition of aggregating senses that, outside the dishes, become a “universe of categories,”<sup>20</sup> of which however a deserved investigation is possible through the perspectival view of a “feminine universe” represented as a powerful heuristic tool that allows us the experience of an attentive thought to what may not be good to eat.

## The ecological insufficiency of Modern Cuisine

The present text inspires some form of Anthropology dedicated to the dimension of affections of the anthropological field as some life experimentation, more or less indistinct, whether biological or cultural. Having been trained as a biologist, I have faced the arduous exercise of recognition and dismissal of some form of naturalizing knowledge of life forms.<sup>2,7</sup> In the permission of some laborious re-enchantment related to the experience of (re)presentation to the natural forms

(minerals, plants and animals) that previously seemed so intimate, we aim to contribute to the best possible capture of the motivations that lead women from some city peripheral community to adopt a cosmological system that indiscriminately deals with the ontology that distances living matters from inert ones, the mental from the spiritual, and launches itself to the univocal understanding of some sense of *life*, pointing to some kind of philosophical “vitalism” in which life is immanent to the things of the universe, which Ingold<sup>9</sup> tries to exalt. According to this author, on the ontology of terrestrial organisms:<sup>18</sup>

Are trees objects? [...] Where do trees end and the rest of the world starts? [...] If we decide that insects that live in the bark belong to the tree as much as the bark itself, then there is no reason to exclude its other inhabitants, including the birds that build their nests or the squirrels for which it offers a labyrinth of stairs and trampolines. If we consider that the character of this tree is also in its reactions to the wind currents in the way its branches sway and its leaves rustle, then we could ask ourselves if the tree would be but a tree-in-air (Id., p. 28-29, our emphasis).

Such examination is the gateway to a complex worldview in which life seems to traverse our unscathed humanistic constitution. “Nothing, to tell you the truth, is more inaccessible to us than this animal life from which we are the result,” as reiterated by (French intellectual and literary figure) Georges Bataille in his *Theory of Religion*. To enter a world of relations of ‘intraspecific socialization,’ in ethnography among the plants of a garden of medicinal herbs, nourished by a strong revaluation of the substantive of a plurality of *things* (inanimate beings, plants and nonhuman animals) with respect to the recognition of their participation in “our” social world, that is, exclusively human.

Marvin Harris<sup>21</sup> would already point out that eating habits have important cultural dimensions, although they operate on the distinction between economic and ecological reasons, in the consideration of cost and benefit calculations that are behind preferences and avoidance of specific foods, including the long-term consequences of that type of food production. According to him, “Food is not only the source of nutrition for most, but also wealth and power for a minority.” And if (American anthropologist) Marvin Harris highlights the role of food producers and their agricultural processes, (British anthropologist) Mary Douglas,<sup>22</sup> addressing food interdictions from the structural and classificatory use of *purity* and *pollution*, may help to think of preferences and prohibitions in the field of NC.

Contextualizing the NC means paying attention to the way modern cooking brings, under seductive casings silencing the real nutritional composition of food, exposed under the fetishized arrangement of carbohydrates, sugars and proteins – ingredients and products typical of MC, driven by a single physiological destination: sweetening the palate. The palate, therefore, is inscribed in

human bodies through a litigious context of the emotions managed by specific *tastes* linked to the individual's cultural memory. Resuming studies by Claude Fischler,<sup>23</sup> we recall that:

The modern commercial strategy no longer rests solely on the seduction or intimidation operated by the seller or by advertisement abuses but on a carefully orchestrated silence [...] The new eater-consumer no longer knows how to recognize the edible from the non-edible, eventually barely *recognizing themselves* (Id., p. 205-206, our translation and emphasis).

Claude Fischler, when proposing a sociological perspective of human competences between Eaters or Consumers, opens the way to a clear dispute of territorial power where the conquest of the mouthfeel is what is at stake. If the *eater* subject suggests the figure of a 'conscious consumption,' we think of the *consumer* idea as some kind of shallow eater, of an addicted mouthfeel, deluded, alienated by industrial products – dead, empty of nutritional sense. Turned into "pure consumers"<sup>1</sup> of MC, a profusion of bodies is dehumanized, reduced by dietetics of the nutritional standards that naturalize the human mouthfeel.

MC, essential in mathematical relations of molecular nutrition,<sup>20</sup> contributes to the loss of the notion of ownership and impropriety in the act in which it engenders, swallowing it all down, frozen foods, precooked, pre-baked, canned, immediate, incorporating reluctance of an awareness, as it takes place at Afya, where a clear dispute seems to oppose organic, healthy, ecological, green forms in that *momentum* of sociological construction, lining percentages of the diet of an ideal human being. Fictitious tastes, aimed at inscription on the human mouthfeel, contribute to the naturalization of some numerical nutrition split between sugars, fats and desired quantifications of "iron," "micronutrients," "fibers," "amino acids," "vitamins" and "proteins." However, research in the sociological field seeking to highlight the relevance of the formation of the mouthfeel of the aforementioned "modern eater" is incipient in the consideration of the reactions that are of the order of their own formation as an Ecological Subject (sn. *organic, whole, natural*). As warned by studies already considered classic such as investigations by Mintz,<sup>24</sup> without however paying attention to the emergent ontological turn of the eaters-ingredients relation as really constitutive, subjects acting in human social life:

Daily, prosaic foods that we tend to consider common hide complex social and economic histories. The place of vegetable protein in the world's future can become a significant political problem (Id., p. 39).

The denaturalization of a *carnivorous habitus* reinforces the practice of natural eating as an experience in which to live on 'impromptu' represents an authentic form of coping with the 'stable' relational forms that prioritize the state of life of humans over nonhumanity, according to Ingold:<sup>3</sup>

What the cook, the alchemist and the painter do is not to impose form on matter but to gather different materials and combine and redirect their flow, trying to anticipate what shall emerge. [...] Ceramics are no more stable than bodies; they are built and held in place within flows of materials. Left unattended, materials flee from control. Jars break, bodies disintegrate. *Effort and vigilance are needed to keep things intact, be them jars or people.* [...] (Id., p. 36, our emphasis).

Ingold's perspective allows us to create an understanding of 'alternative' food practice as a real reformulation of one's own gastronomic motivation through some perception of nutrition taken seriously, proximally, and supported by some subjectivity collectively experienced through bodily practices linked to some *socio-trophic* relationship among plants, animals and humans. The adoption of such repositioning in the relation among subjects resumes the modern nutrition project in a process recognition, in an apparent energy inversion in the local cosmo-ecology that organizes between human and nonhuman ones immersed in a *relational environment*.

## Final thoughts

*How about the weekend, folks? How was it like? – Gosh, it was good, Fabinho. What about yours? There was a party [...] somebody made some chicken stew... Oh, you don't like it, right?*

*(I answer laughing) It's alright. – But it was one of those farm raised, 'organic.' Less bad, you know, they've had more freedom...*

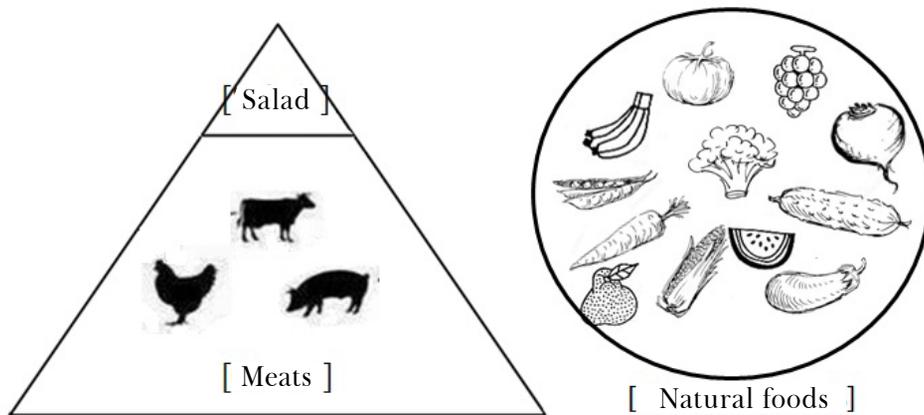
*But don't you cook chicken here? – No, no. Here it is all natural (laughs)*

*(field notebook from Afya's kitchen, May 2013).*

Welcomed in a kitchen that is based on a deep awakening of the *sensibility* in the forms of treatment and consideration towards 'the other eating,' diners at Afya, involved in a better use of food, are living critiques of a real lack of intimacy on the part of the MC stuck in its industrial predisposition to transform animals and plants into lifeless foods.

Needless to say that the patients' immediate strangeness is not uncommon when an apparent dietary restriction is established. Without realizing at the outset that such a proposal means, in fact, the expansion of a food supply in the sense that we have defended up to the present moment, gradually they learn to build really affective bonds and to trust in certain senses, as advocated by Ms. Lu when she says that "the cure is not in the plants," in defense of the importance of organic food, "but the importance is in the way of cultivating them, of relating to them." Plants have some healing power when regularly ingested in the form of food which is free from pesticides since they are watered with devotion and love.

In an attempt to represent the local cosmoecology, we offer the following scheme, in which the plants represent the foundation of energy recomposition:



**Figure 1.** Imaging representation of MC and NC: on the left, a hierarchical model that values some meat diet; and on the right, a nonhierarchical model of natural foods.

The figure above expresses an imaging suggestion representative of the dietary structure agreed upon by the different kitchens. On the one hand, the hierarchical structure of MC, based on the meat *representation*, in which animal protein forms the basis of an objectified diet in the hands of a *chef*. On the other hand, a non hierarchical representation of natural foods, an *open*, non-specific and demanding field of intimacy, approximation and *improvisation*, corresponding to some socio-historical process of denaturation of the animal protein of the human spirit, allowing the free emergence of some mouthfeel *open* to relationships, based on some “cuisine for others,”<sup>20</sup> that is, devoted, attentive to intersubjectivity (which, we indicate throughout the present article, deserves to be considered in the light of Ecology and its conceptualization – the environmental character – in the anthropological field).

In the local NC, food enjoyment is based on the creative exploration of a vast field of plant possibilities, largely unknown to the patients’ mouthfeel in terms of the ‘pre-conceptual’ indisposition towards leaves, branches and other parts, food portions cut and discarded by MC.

We extol the importance of the present exhibition of an in-process, moving, locally constructed vegetarianism attentive to some perspective that goes beyond mere culinary choices and works by seeking the illustrated inversion of values from plants to animals, representing for the body of MC eaters some risk to human physiology that every vegetarian practice tends to put to the test.

We seek to follow the problematization proposed by the women themselves in their unofficial culinary work on the ordinariness of the plants role in the construction of the modern world, left to the category of “salad,” and the established naturalization of human appetite, inconsequential as to some formation according to a sociological plan of some Fischlerian *consumer*.

The historical exclusion of the female body from the MC seems to accentuate the existing conflict around the healing processes legitimized by the NC at the moment, in which the vegetarian practice presents some social fear of disrespecting the constructed human naturalness in eating meat. Augusto Comte’s (French philosopher) “nutritional laboratories,” responsible for the development of “organic compounds necessary for our subsistence”<sup>25</sup> denote a high degree of meat eating naturalization in the human spirit today.

The emergence of empowerment processes through some cosmoecological resizing, in which plants begin to support the sense of ‘strong food,’ contributes to the pertinence of the appreciation of reckless vegetarian practices within the framework of a profound philosophical-anthropological literature devoted to the problematic ontological Nature/Culture distinction, which provides cohesion to modern Western thoughts. The relevance of the culinary use of ingredients of animal origin (meat and derivatives) contaminates the NC in different ways, to which we seek to give some peremptory intellectual treatment, according to what Lévi-Strauss,<sup>25</sup> on the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) (commonly known as mad cow disease), reflected on what would be a modern threat to human constitution:

These phenomena disturb and profoundly disrupt mankind’s living conditions, heralding a new era in which this other mortal danger would be installed in continuity, which would now be the carnivorous eating [...] We bet that the appetite for meat shall not disappear. Its satisfaction shall only become some rare, costly and risky occasion [...] Meat shall appear on the menu in exceptional circumstances. It shall be consumed with the same mixture of pious reverence and anxiety which, according to ancient travelers, would pervade the cannibal meals of certain peoples. In both cases, it is at the same time to commune with the ancestors and to incorporate, with their risks and dangers, the substance of living beings who have been or have become enemies (Id., p. 215-216).

The bleak future of the beef diet should still feed the contemporary discussion with regard to the risks of an “environmental health” involving human and non-human ones in a ‘denatured’ fashion,

not hierarchically. Some criticism of the inconsequential naturalization of the human mouthfeel as the founder of the current *anomie* of the modern *consumer-eaters*, as they extend on this subject ecofeminist lines of study and also following guidelines from studies devoted to animal feed,<sup>26</sup> in which the idealization of food reveals fundamental implications related to the evolutionary history of nonhuman animals, cooling the new demands of some humanistic and libertarian construction that incorporates the ecological dimension in the modern anthropocentric world.

Finally, the natural diner recreates the possibility of sensitization of human taste through the ontological approximation of the beings that compose the human cosmoecology, opening up proposals for the constitution of a field that demands, however, larger and more extensive investigations on the socio-cultural constructions that mark the displeasure of the exploration of *life* in the modern culinary context.

We thank the other works that deal with the vegetarian issue, deserving special reference, for the introductory character to the topic, the one by Elaine de Azevedo.<sup>27</sup> We point, however, to a renewed typology, in terms of bibliographical references, with some strong critical problematization as regards the form of theoretical-epistemological treatment given to culinary in Anthropology, pluralizing the theoretical referential devoted to such specificity.

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