

# Feeding in conflict: eating in times of crisis in *Persepolis*

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## Abstract

This article aims to understand the changes that political conflicts shown in the work *Persepolis*, used as the corpus for this research, generate in the feeding social space. Since it is an illustrated diary, almost like a comic book with an autobiographical nature, two types of analyses were used: verbal analysis and analysis of images, with specific data processing, focusing on passages that address the theme “Feeding” in the scenario of conflicts generated by the Iranian revolution. Verbal data were divided into sequential frames and in them were observed elements of interest for the research. As for the visual data, the presence of objects, body and facial expressions of the characters were observed. In both approaches, we sought data in which the Feeding Social Space theme would be clear. A classification matrix was developed. The analysis obtained the following information: (1) in the scenario of *Persepolis*, there is the production of an epidemic hunger; (2) the conflict imposes on the subjects a series of needs, in which fear and uncertainty are engines for lack of appetite; (3) the feeling of being a foreigner experienced in exile underscores the nostalgia of lost flavors. With this work, we are able to see that the changes that political conflicts generated in the feeding social space are structural ones, indicating the scope of the feeding phenomenon in its cultural and social dimensions. In addition, there is the power of the literary work as a corpus that has all the appropriate elements to an anthropological analysis and comprising dense reflections about the human condition.

**Key words:** Food Safety. Conflict. Culture.

## Introduction

The name *Persepolis* refers to how Greeks called the old capital of the Persian Empire, “City of the Persian” (*parseh + polis*).<sup>1</sup> The work analyzed in this paper is also called *Persepolis*: an illustrated diary by Marjane Satrapi, an Iranian who witnessed the Islamic Revolution in her country in 1979, as well as its consequences during the 80’s and 90’s, during the Islamic Republic. The background of the work is the conflict of Marjani, a modern young woman, the daughter of politicized parents, on an oppressing and authoritarian country.

Marjane Satrapi was born in Rasht, Iran, in 1969. Granddaughter of an emperor of the country and having studied in the French lyceum of Tehran, her education combined the tradition of the Persian culture and Western leftwing values. Born to a modern and politicized high-medium class family, in 1979, she witnessed the beginning of the revolution that introduced the Shia regimen in Iran. Twenty-five years later, Satrapi tells her experiences in her illustrated diary: *Persepolis*.

At the same time she narrates her conflicts, filled with anger and rebellion, the author gives some clues as to how the Islamic Revolution lead to a process of major transformations in the heart of the Iranian civil society. It is known that one of the systems that is mostly impacted by conflicts and environmental and civilizational catastrophes, such as wars, is feeding.<sup>2</sup> A report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, from 2014, shows that despite the worldwide advances in relation to the food safety issue, remarkable differences across regions still exist. Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia, for example, are regions that show modest advances with high indexes of poor feeding, since they are affected by conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it is known that feeding is subject to changes in times of conflicts. How this happens must be analyzed. This is one of the questions contemplated by the Anthropology of feeding, referred to by Contreras & Gracia:<sup>4</sup> it tries to understand and diagnose the feeding phenomena, describing and interpreting transformations that usually happen and that have happened, and their impact in society as a whole. The culinary rules comprehend several answers to a single and fundamental anthropological problem, related to eating and feeding. Behind variety, in fact, lies unity.<sup>5</sup>

Poulain & Proença<sup>6</sup> suggest an instrument to support the study of the feeding standards within the scope of feeding Anthropology. It is called *feeding social space*: “a complete sociological object in the Maussian sense; it means that the whole society and its institutions are ‘put into motion’ [...]”. In it, six dimensions stand out: the edible, food production, culinary, food consumption habits, temporality and social differentiations.

Therefore, an attempt was made to understand the changes that political conflicts create on the *feeding social space* shown in the work *Persepolis*. This paper tries to indicate some possibilities of dialogue between Nutrition and Social Sciences, also analyzing the possibility of making a piece of art, in this case, the comic book literature, into the research corpus from which a reflection on the human condition in the current society may be drawn.<sup>7</sup>

## Methodology

### Research design

This was an explanatory documental analysis research, whose corpus was the work *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi.<sup>8</sup> The selection criterion for the work was intentional: the relevance of its content for the studied theme was taken into consideration, since, in addition to drawing attention to a clearly defined political conflict scenario, with a perspective on theme that are not frequently understood in the Western world – such as the political situation of Iran and Islamism<sup>9</sup> –, this is a contemporary work, which helps us to understand this matter in relation to its articulation with the idea of time.

### Data documentation

Seven readings of the full work were made, with the purpose of promoting an initial acknowledgement of the corpus. Firstly, a floating reading of the work was conducted, that is, a back-to-back uninterrupted reading, in order to understand the material as a whole. Then, the other readings focused on the six dimensions of the feeding social space considered in the work. Then, a classification matrix was elaborated to support the data documentation work. This matrix was elaborated based on the dimensions that define the *feeding social space*.<sup>6</sup>

Successive readings of the work were made, with the purpose of filling the matrix. In each reading, fragments that could define the *feeding social space* at hand were highlighted, as well as the exchanges the work indicated during and after the Islamic Revolution. Then, the fragments were related to the matrix.

On the comic books, the use of two codes is observed: the linguistic and the image ones. They may be analytically separated, but they are complementary in order to read the comic books, even if sometimes one of the languages may prevail.<sup>10</sup> Eisner<sup>11</sup> restates the relevance of both codes when working with comic books.

*The general layout of the comic book shows a overlaying of words and images, and, therefore, the readers must exercise their visual and verbal interpretative abilities. The regencies of art (for example, perspective, symmetry, brush strokes) and literature (for example, grammar, plot, syntax) are mutually overlaid (p. 8).<sup>11</sup>*

Therefore, the narrative possibilities are limited when working with only one of these dimensions.<sup>12</sup> Considering its (visual and verbal) importance for the analysis process, the elaborated matrix contemplated room to document both materials. In addition, when filling the matrix, whenever possible, the characters were identified, above all, when there were several dialogues, except for the monologues of the main character, which were interpreted as thoughts and signalized as such.

The pages of the work are not numbered. Therefore, in order to make it easier to locate the fragments plotted in the matrix, the following procedure was used: after indicating the fragment, the title of the section of the comic book and the page that corresponded to the referred section were indicated.

## Data analysis

With the consolidated matrix, the analysis process started. The matrix was placed on a location where the researcher could see it, so it could be consulted at any time, and in order for the researcher to feel closer and more familiarized with the data to be read.

As mentioned, the joint analysis of the drawings and the plot is necessary whenever these elements are complementary, in order to define the studied context. However, since these are different materials, the text and the image need specific analytical treatments.

The verbal material was analyzed according to the content analysis suggested. Bardin,<sup>13</sup> author of the methodology, suggests that three phases constitute this type of analysis: (1) *Pre-analysis*: a phase to get to know the material for the first time through reading, which was conducted on this paper during the documentation phase, as previously described; (2) *exploring the material*: a phase in which the analysis units are defined, and the data are sorted out and classified into categories. During that phase, it was possible to search for a pattern in the data, regarding a standardization of the *feeding social space*; and, finally, (3) *data treatment, inference and interpretation*: during this phase the intention was to confer meaning to the data, from the production of charts, graphs, diagrams and figures with the purpose of highlighting the information obtained. During that last moment, the essential was to create syntheses that tried to answer to the initial question suggested during the investigation.

In order to analyze the visual material, the semiotic analysis technique for still images was used,<sup>14</sup> involving: (1) selecting the relevant images for the investigation; (2) describing the elements of the images, observing the presence of objects, facial and body expression of the characters; (3) elaborating a connotative description, a moment in which the analysis may use specific cultural knowledge, analogies, associations and comparisons. The value given to the analysis of the images on this paper is based on the principle that the drawing is a graphical manifestation elaborated by an illustrator. Therefore, the drawings are much more than realistic icons or icons that represent the reality; they are the fruit of a creation process, in which the artist invents, creates the new, thus, producing a work of art.<sup>15</sup>

### Selection criterion for images and texts

Images and texts from *Persepolis* with scenes or comments that fitted the six dimensions related to the feeding social space were used.<sup>6</sup>

## Results and discussion

### Standardization of the feeding social space in *Persepolis*

A feeding standard is a knowledge set that aggregates several experiences conducted as trial and error by the human community. This standard is seen as a series of fitted and imbricated categories, which are daily used by the member of a society, without being fully aware of it, since it occurs implicitly.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the standardization of the *feeding social space* in *Persepolis* may be elaborated as follows.

#### *The edible*

Satrapi provides a clear perspective of the edible in *Persepolis*, on an equally traditional and modern Iran. During her childhood, food was connected to festivities, such as in *The veil* (p. 5),<sup>a</sup> in which her family celebrates Nowruz, celebration to Zoroaster, when they ate apples, sprouts and breads; or connected to affection, such as when in Moscow (p. 5), the young Satrapi makes chocolate for her uncle (Anuch). Even with the war, the food types (although scarce) are seen in

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a The pages of the referred comic book are not numbered. For this reason, the numbers referred to with the fragments of the analyzed work were established considering the number of the chapter. Therefore, “p” refers to the number of the chapter of the analyzed work.

the family daily life, such as in *The jewels* (p. 6), in which, when shopping with her mother, Satrapi says “Look, there are still some red beans. We can make chili tonight”.<sup>b</sup> In the historical context of the work, the conflict shows limitations regarding the edible scope, due to the reduction in the variety and amount of food types. Fischler<sup>5</sup> indicates that scarcity often triggers neophilia: scarcity makes nations incorporate to their repertoire foods that were previously seen as culturally inedible. However, in *Persepolis*, it may be noticed that new products were not incorporated. This effect, in the case of the family of Marjane, occurred in the sense of a reduction in the amount of food, which could indicate a feeling of moderate food and nutritional unsafety.<sup>16</sup>

### Food production

It is inferred that the reduction in the amount of food on the table of a family with privileged social-economic condition is related to a *reduction in food production within the context of the country*. The reduction in food production within the context of the war is a common scenario regarding conflicts, as may be observed on the classical publication by the English Agriculture professor Thomas Hudson Middleton (1923).<sup>17</sup> However, *Persepolis* shows a unique question in which food production is pointed out: alcoholic beverages. With the prohibition to consume alcoholic beverages by the Islamic State, *their production becomes artisanal and illegal*, as seen in *The wine* (p. 4): “my uncle was the wine supplier. He had built a true vinification laboratory in the basement of his house. Mrs Nasrin, who also worked for him, smashed the grapes”. The increase in the alcohol consumption in conflict scenarios, as well as in prohibition contexts, is referred to by authors such as Froud et al.,<sup>18</sup> on studies made on the current conflicts at Georgia. Authors such as Wallace & Roberts<sup>19</sup> suggest that the post-conflict environment collaborates with the development of conservative policies, such as the alcohol restrictions. These measures, according to Radaev,<sup>20</sup> may promote the consumption of the domestically produced alcohol, as observed within the context of Russia.

### Culinary

The culinary aspect in *Persepolis* indicates *simple and quick transformations*, carefully conducted. Above all, the descriptions refer to beverages. In *Ski* (p. 1), the feeling of compassion is observed by the care in offering tea, “Oh, darling! You have been through so much... have some tea.”. “Orange

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b It is noteworthy that chili, both in relation to its preparation and in relation to most of the ingredients that are part of it, originates from Mesoamerica. However, with the intensification of the global exchanges promoted by the Third Industrial Revolution, and the resulting phenomenon known as McDonalization of the food habits, several dishes were internationalized. Chili is one of them, which, despite not being an Iranian food, today, it belongs to the global sphere. See more in: *The Cambridge world history of food* (Kenneth Kiple & Kriemhild Ornelas) and *Food History* (Jean-Louis Flandrin & Massimo Montanari).

juice, I made it myself, just now.” The *simplicity* of the foods and offers, in these cases, is not a synonym to *simplicity*. There is at all times some attention and carefulness that are characteristic of the culinary knowledge. The characters seem to observe the thinking of Mia Couto, in *Fio das Missangas*, who defends that cooking is a way of loving others.<sup>21</sup> Fisher<sup>22</sup> in *How to cook a wolf*, also points out the importance of *care during the preparation of food, even within the context of war*. For example, she talks about the importance of boiling water when it is close to the time of serving tea, so it does not have an unpleasant taste, as the one of old water.<sup>22</sup>

## Food consumption habits

*Persepolis* clearly shows the connection between the character and the family environment: meals (mostly dinner) are served with everyone around the table, followed by conversations that usually show a political nature, as seen in *Moscow* (p.1): “[...] and there was a hero in my family... it is needless to say I liked that immediately” – where we see Marjane together with her family listening to the stories of her uncle Anuch during his years of exile. *The maintenance of the commensality ritual during scarcity times* or food reduction is observed by Medeiros.<sup>23</sup> Commensality is “clearly an aggregation ritual [...], which was referred to as a ‘communion sacrament’”(p. 43).<sup>24</sup> Another aspect to be observed is the difference in habits at the table between the family and exile environments, highlighted in the chapter *Pasta* (p. 5). Satrapi, exiled and out of her domestic environment, is called out by the Mother superior for eating the food straight from the pan. Satrapi justifies her attitude: “But everyone here watches TV while they are eating”. To which the Mother replies: “but not from a pan! Where are your manners?”. Television in the food context, when *eating alone as a result of the exile condition, seems to compromise sociability and the food rituals*. The relationship between television and the loss of the ritual during the meals is indicated by authors such as Castro & Abdala.<sup>25</sup>

## Temporality

Satrapi starts her story in *The veil* (p. 1) with the following sentence: “This is me, 10 years old, in 1980”. By starting her story with a date, she prepares us to follow a long journey that would go from her childhood to the beginning of her adult age, a journey that begins and ends amid a number of political conflicts. During her childhood, characteristics that are implicit from this phase are observed, such as the feeling of pride for the history of her nation and energy to question everything she disagrees with. During her adolescence, her rebellion stands out. In *The cigarette* (p. 7), this phase is described: “As to me, I sealed my rebellion act against the dictatorship of my

mother smoking the cigarette I had stolen from my cousin 2 month before. I did not actually like it, but that was not the time to back away. Now I was grown”. At the end of her story, she shows us a Marjane Satrapi, who, as well as her country, had matured amid conflicts. The greatest temporal trait that may be observed in terms of feeding refers to the Iran-exile scenario. During the exile period, it may be observed the prevalence of a tedious habit of eating alone,<sup>26</sup> the nostalgia of the food from her land, as well as the time to learn about new flavors, the flavor of the new land.<sup>27</sup>

### *Social differentiations*

The author questions the difference between social classes, initially, during childhood. For example, in *The veil* (p. 4), she writes: “Because the maid did not have her meals by the table with us [...]”, and she shows throughout the entire work her concern with inequalities. At another moment, in *The letter* (p. 5), when she does not understand why the maid could not date the son of the neighbor, she says to her father “Ohh! But she cannot be blamed for where she was born. Dad! Are you in favor or against social classes? When I got into Mehri’s room, she was crying... we were not on the same social class, but at least we were on the same bed”. The subordination relationship between employer-employee does not seem to be a variation that is directly related to armed conflicts. Medeiros,<sup>28,29</sup> when studying the relationship between employers and employees in wealthy families, realizes this behavior of excluding from the table those who are different.

Satrapi, throughout her journey, through her memories, guides the reader through her world, where her expression of society is constantly connected to the emotional. Her concept of community is always connected by affection bonds. Within this context, food serves as an alliance between the author and her community, turning eating into a knot that binds them within their social environment.

## **Eating during times of conflict**

### **The production of an epidemic hunger**

Hunger, within its several aspects, is seen in *Persepolis* as a reflection of the personal conflicts of the author and the external conflicts. As to the latter, it may be observed the impact of armed confrontations on the food provided to a population.

Hunger is defined as the deprivation of the right to food and nutritional safety (FNS). The type of hunger that is seen on the work may be characterized as epidemic hunger.<sup>2</sup> In this case, even if its temporality is certain, it is not possible to estimate for how long the deprivation will

last. According to Josué de Castro, hunger epidemics are not limited to the discrete and tolerable aspects of partial hungers and specific needs. These are global quantitative and qualitative hunger epidemics, reaching with incredible violence the extreme limits of malnutrition and acute inanition and affect all with no distinctions, whether rich or poor, wealthy farmers and plantation workers, men, women and children, all ruthlessly affected by the terrible whip of droughts. This picture may be observed on Figure 1 (*The letter* [p. 2]).

The hunger observed in *Persepolis* does not come from the drought or natural catastrophes, but from wars. The region, formerly called Persia, currently known as Iran, has its history remarked by armed conflicts and foreign invasions. The indistinct hunger described by Josué de Castro was seen by Satrapi and described on her illustrated diary, showing, above all, the impact of changes to the political regimen in the story of her family.

In *The Jewels* (p. 1), the author shows her point of view and expresses the relationship between the war and the food scarcity of the population, describing it on the dialogues. “War has really begun”, with this sentence by the empty shelves, the real meaning of the conflict is observed. Within that scenario, even the families from wealthy layers are subjected to scarcity and hunger. According to Grada,<sup>30</sup> the greatest periods of hunger from the 20<sup>th</sup> century were connected to civil conflicts and war, in which the human action has more harmful effects than the actions of nature, in several cases. The importance of political factors in the availability of food is noteworthy. The emphasis of this panorama is observed in Figure 2 (*The jewels* [p. 1]).

“The stores are empty for one day and you almost devour each other. And you say you are ‘civilized people’ [...]”, the character says when criticizing the behavior of the population before scarcity. The insertion of higher classes, which were previously unfamiliar with the issue of food and nutritional unsafety of the country, shows the extension to which epidemic hunger is presented. On *How to cook a wolf*, Fisher<sup>22</sup> figuratively describes this situation, saying that “the wolf firmly stuck one paw on what seems to be a growing crack on the door” (p. 89), making it clear that hunger is a reality, strengthened by the conflict scenario, and lived to its endemic dimension by the people in a more social vulnerable position, even in the lack of conflicts.

This scenario is common in countries permeated by armed conflicts. Comparing official data, reports made by the Doctors Without Borders organization in Liberia show a hunger situation in 30 villages across the frontline of a group of 2,280 children under five years of age: 35% suffering from severe *kwashiorkor*.<sup>31</sup> The same document also shows that war is the main factor that leads to the establishment of epidemic hunger in countries under conflict, and that embargos to international aid collaborate to aggravate this picture.<sup>31</sup>

If hunger and unsafety in relation to the future reach the high social classes during the war, the low-income classes suffer with the damages of the conflict in anticipation. Even before the declared war, poor families were tortured by the lack of food during the revolutions.

Through the pleading of the parents of Mehri, “we have far too many children, sir! She is the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>” [...] “At your house, she will have good food”, it is possible to observe the dimension of the social inequity established by the conflict: due to the hunger, the parents of Mehri need to give up their daughter for adoption. They were no longer able to provide for her. Food and nutritional unsafety, among the people under an already compromised social-economic situation before the conflict, is severe: hunger affects children,<sup>16</sup> as seen on Figure 3 (*The Jewels* [p. 1]).

An important detail to highlight is: under this scarcity scenario, the religious promise of a new order gains perspective. On the chapter *The key* (p. 7), figure 4, the work shows the outlines of war and Satrapi mentions a passage from her childhood, when she sees the agony of Mrs Nasrin, who talks about the fear of losing her son to war: “They told him that in paradise there is food for everyone, women, golden and diamond houses”. The promises connected to the war propaganda, especially those that refer to the Islamic paradise, are a reward for death in religious wars and justify a present that is covered in hunger and misery.<sup>32</sup>

Being able to see some future or even a reward are the main reasons why young soldiers enlist, several times, they are running away from misery. A similar tactic, evidently with the promise of a Christian heaven, was used during the Paraguayan War, when children, mostly homeless boys, were exposed to death in the combats. Under the perspective of the young soldier, mostly unexperienced, poor and desperate recruits, turned into warriors, and who had to fight on their own for their survival, the lack of options was the main motivation. Hunger, during the war period, helps to constitute the essential background to understand the experience of the soldier.<sup>33</sup>

Since it is an illustrated diary, *Persepolis* exposes the experiences, bringing nuances of aspects that portray epidemic hunger as a side effect of the conflict – oftentimes forgotten or masked by the losses in the combat.

### The needs imposed by the conflict: fear and uncertainties as engines for the lack of appetite

In *Persepolis*, it is possible to see the connection between the author and her work. Not only due to the expression of her singularities (the autobiography in the diary), but, above all, due to her collective experience as an Iranian, a time in which she fits the conditions for a collective enunciation intermediation: “what he says is already a common action, what he says or does is necessarily political, although the others do not agree with that”(p. 39).<sup>34</sup>

Barthes<sup>35</sup> agrees with this Deleuzian perspective of the collective enunciation intermediation: when producing a work, authors shift from themselves and experience the other, they create an enunciation that is not individual, but it is based on a collective and political scenario. Satrapi, when describing her singular experience, produces, at the same time, a collective enunciation of despair of an entire country coming from war, from women devastated by a sexist ideal, from a hungry people, a people suffering with fear. The marks of the conflict are observed mainly on her sketches.

As seen on the following fragment (Figure 5), for example, it is possible to observe such characteristics due to how disheartened the characters are portrayed. The apathy reflects the feeling of the people and the imminent fear of loss: due to prison or death. “So we waited for hours... the silence seemed like the silence that precedes a storm”; the waiting referred to in the dialogue was often uncertain. They expected for news, without knowing whether they would be good or bad. “Literature has described for hundreds of years the notion of trauma and the psychological reactions to traumatic situations”, such as, for example, armed conflicts (p. 4).<sup>36</sup>

This feeling of vacuity is also portrayed on the work by Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, whose narrative is partially located during the period of the First World War. The war brings about misery, blood, conflicts. The war turned the Proustian Combray into a battlefield, with its church and its stained glasses all destroyed. Therefore, in addition to the material scarcity, of a digestive physiology, the scarcity regimen shown on the work produces literature: “Pain will be an incentive to us. Imagination and thinking are admirable machines, but they may be motionless. And suffering makes them move”(p. 254).<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Marjane produces, as a result from this pain, a work of art. The desire to confer meaning to these vacuity signs brought by the war are clear in the melancholic expressions of the characters, as well as the change in their scenarios: with darker tones and few decoration objects (chapter *The sheep*, figures 6 and 7). As to the food, the prevalence of beverages is noticed (tea or wine) in opposition to food, as it may be seen, for example, in figure 6, *The sheep* (p. 1).

The work, therefore, covers two types of scarcity: the food scarcity and the Meaning scarcity. The search for Meaning refers to the deconstruction of the signs brought by war; it involves a search with the purpose of untangling the several forces around it, a movement to invent new life possibilities. In the search for Meaning, Deleuze & Guattari<sup>38</sup> show that the mouth, whose primitive territoriality is food (sensory organ), loses its territoriality, fastens and searches for a new territory around a Meaning (Meaning organ).

Satrapi projects the melancholy and lack of appetite on the features, describing through her sketches what is hidden inside the mouth: the sadness of her people and the fear of war. This may be seen in Figure 8, *The sheep* (p. 6): even unaware of its origin, the separation from her uncle (Anuch) caused in Satrapi a feeling of lack of appetite coming from the misery due to his leaving and fear due to the real reason behind it.

Therefore, as shown by Medeiros:<sup>29</sup>

*[...] war is another event that makes man look underneath the ocular perimeter and realize what goes on around him, look to the Earth: "where does Earth search for this food"? Rich and poor, soldiers and cocottes, the bourgeoisie, the people and the aristocracy: there is no God. When food is lacking, the wealthy are restricted, and the people reaches misery (p. 76).*

This is the message Satrapi gives us on *Persepolis*: the needs imposed by the conflict transcend the material needs for food and create lack of appetite, and the pain created by the conflict is transformed into an engine to search for Meaning.

### Missing Iran and enjoying exile

*Persepolis* has, on its narrative, a romantic tone when referring to Iran. Satrapi tries to tell the Western world how is life in Iran and stumbles upon herself and her identity fragments to rebuild them on a book, which, as she says, is also a life positioning.

Missing Iran is not exclusively related to remarkable memories, but to the idea by Amon & Menasche,<sup>39</sup> that it is through daily food, through the preparation rituals, usual ingredients and spices, that old meanings may be negotiated and new meanings absorbed. It is through daily life that the fluidity of the borders that outline a community are noticed. It was due to the absence of her old routine that Satrapi incorporated new ways of understanding eating, creating an appreciation of the nostalgia for the flavors of her land.

*Exactly like language, the cuisine contains and expresses the culture of those who practice it, and it is a depository of traditions and group identities. Therefore, it is an extraordinary vehicle for self-representation and communication: it is not only a cultural identity instrument, but it may be the first way to get in touch with different cultures (p. 21).<sup>40</sup>*

Montanari<sup>40</sup> defends food as a self-representation and cultural exchange vehicle, possibly stronger than language. An exile experience, in addition to compromising the sociability component, as mentioned, contributes to negotiate traditional flavors, which creates the feeling of nostalgia and the incorporation of new flavors, which may attribute to the subject a feeling of new belonging, as shown by Montanari, a way to get in touch with what is different. Satrapi corroborates with this ideas describing her first contact with the European culture when she met Lucia, her Austrian roommate, as observed in Figure 9, *The soup* (p. 8).

In that figure, the exchange of foods, such as pistachio for Satrapi and mushroom soup for Lucia, tells a little about their origins and lifestyles in relation to feeding: “I gave her some pistachios I had brought [...]. They are a specialty from my country, we give them as a gift when someone travels abroad”. Much more than language, food helps in the intermediation between different cultures, opening the culinary systems to all types of inventions, crossings and contaminations.<sup>40</sup> “Lucia, in turn, cooked me some Knorr soup. Mushroom cream”.

Not only Montanari, but scholars such as Lévi-Strauss<sup>41</sup>, Roland Barthes<sup>42</sup> and Mary Douglas<sup>43</sup> were based on an analogy of food and the linguistic system, questioning the conventions and rules that govern how food items, conceived as signs for a system, are categorized and combined.<sup>40</sup> Food is conceived as a manifestation of a undelaying structure, which may be learnt, leading to the awareness of the characteristics of a society.<sup>39</sup> Just as one learns a language, it is possible to learn taste. That is how Marjane goes through her learning as an exiled person, as shown in Figure 10, *The pill* (p. 2).

Satrapi exposes the European stereotype that already exists from a sign of the Arab culture on her dialogue with Armelle: “Of course, how silly of me, tea, India, Persia, Russia, Samovar...” – the association between the tea and spices coming from Eastern countries. If, on the one hand, she lives these experiences that mix stereotypes and prejudice, so common to the Western view of the Eastern world,<sup>44,45</sup> Satrapi tries to remember her country through acquaintances in the exile scenario, as is the case of Armelle. The contact with the Iranian people made Armelle understand the feeling of Satrapi in relation to her nation – which may be noticed in Figure 11, *The pill* (p. 2).

Another crucial moment to soften the burden of missing her country in the exile was the contact with the food from her land prepared by her mother: “I spent 27 days by her side. I tasted the heavenly food from my country prepared by my mother. It was very different from pasta”. In that scenario, food represents a vehicle to manifest meanings, emotions, worldviews, identities, as well as a transformation method, through the resolution of conflicts, conduction of changes, and abandonments. The food of her mother is highlighted in that context, as happens in the experience of many exiled individuals.<sup>46</sup>

As suggested by Amon & Menasche, food reveals its potential to approach themes such as tradition, ethnicity, harmony, disagreement, transitoriness, identity. In relation to the memory triggered by missing something, specifically, Sutton<sup>47</sup> defends that food memory is a variety of historical awareness, making the cultural and temporal expression of the duality by Satrapi, coming from her Iranian origins and her experiences with different cultures in the exile scenario. Figure 12, *The Horse* (p. 9), clearly shows this.

## Conclusions

Through *Persepolis*, Satrapi shows her perspective on the conflicts she experienced. Constantly entangled into her work, she exposes a little on feeding in these crisis scenarios.

As to the edible aspect, she shows a picture of moderate food and nutritional unsafety, which may be referred to as “epidemic hunger”. The reduction in the amount of food, however, occurred to a degree that did not imply the insertion of foods that were previously considered as inedible from the cultural perspective; and, as to food production, it was observed a reduction in food production within the context of the country and the beginning of a domestic and illegal production of alcoholic beverages. Within the culinary domain, transformations tend to be simpler and faster, but the care when preparing the foods remain; in relation to sharing, the maintenance of the commensality rituals within the scarcity context is observed, but the solitary eating, a consequence of the exiled condition, seems to compromise sociability and the rituals connected to food. In relation to temporality, other two aspects of the exiled condition are added to eating alone: the nostalgia brought by the food from her motherland and learning a new taste. Finally, social differentiations from the conflict were not observed.

Therefore, the universe shown by Satrapi offered singular elements to study a *feeding social space*. Its main changes in relation to a time of conflicts, therefore, seem to be the lack of food, the use of a regimen of fear an insecurity that triggers lack of appetite and learning a new and more lonely and plural experience during exile.

The work offers important discussions of a political nature on Eastern issues, seen by the Western world only as “brief headlines” with no significance. War and specially the hunger shown in *Persepolis* are seen as much closer to us. In addition, of course, to the issue of gender and ethnicity discrimination.

Comic books have the potential to communicate, promoting the curiosity and interest in reading. In that case, it allowed knowing a narrative that interconnects culture, feeding and conflicts. This may be not only a way to conduct researches that correlate the area of Nutrition and Social and Human Sciences, with the purpose of understanding the human condition in relation to the

feeding phenomenon, but that it may also meet the current need toward developing action to promote healthy eating in the school environment. Reading comic books as the starting point for discussions of that nature may help in the reflection of students on eating: who are we when we eat? What do we eat? What are we when we do not eat? Among other questions...

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