

Parrot eating and being brazilian: culinary recipes and the construction of the brazilian identity*

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* This work was presented at the 35th International Conference of the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition (ICAF), Birds as Food: Cross-Cultural and Health Perspectives, held in Sopron, Hungria, July 13th – 15th, 2012.

Abstract

Brazil became independent and was the only monarchical state in the Americas, but that was not enough. It was necessary to give it a nation and an identity. In urban centers, the free population had inherited its traditions mainly from the metropolis: it spoke Portuguese, was Catholic and had Portuguese customs and habits. One of the strategies adopted by the imperial political elite to build a self-identity distinct from the Portuguese was to incorporate an European lifestyle, especially copied from London and Paris. However, the indiscriminate, uncritical and hasty introduction of these new consumption habits ended up becoming an obstacle to the construction of a national identity.

Some intellectuals committed to this project reacted with unusual and creative solutions. One of them, the anonymous National Cook, aimed to present “a cuisine Brazilian in every aspect.” His wish was to offer a cookbook where food was viscerally connected to the national territory, its inhabitants and its history. He wanted, in effect, his book to be the expression of the relationship between “people and culinary preparations” and thus recover, through cooking, the regional identities that, assembled in one book, would be the expression of a national cuisine that used ingredients and techniques from all regions of Brazil. Thus, introducing a cuisine made up from all of the Brazilian fauna, where you could prepare snakes, jaguars, anteaters and lizards, the National Cook gave us his recipe for the construction of the Brazilian identity which could be summarized as follows: “Parrot Eating and Being Brazilian.”

Key words: Cookbooks. Culinary and gastronomy. Intellectual cooks. Brazilian cuisine and national identity.

Introduction

What interests us in this article, based primarily in the writings of foreign travelers and Brazilian cookbooks, all from the nineteenth century, is to analyze how the intellectual elites of the newly created Brazilian state, in their zeal to give it a nation, reacted to the foreign discourse of belittlement of their culture and identity, contrasting him a speech marked by the romanticism of the exaltation of its splendid nature, its lush flora and its numerous and varied fauna. Or, using the thought of an anonymous Brazilian author, Brazil should be presented “to the eyes of the world, occupying the distinct place that nature gave it”.¹

Cuisine and national identity

The Brazilian Independence in 1822 raised the problem of the recognition of the Brazilian State by the former metropolis and other nations, and that of the affirmation of its own identity, which was not obvious, since Brazilians descended from the Portuguese, spoke the same language, had the same religion and very similar customs.

However, there was an old feud between the metropolitans and those born in the colony. The former, since their landing in 1808, following the Portuguese royal family, despite the hospitality with which they were welcomed in a difficult moment of their lives, having to hastily abandon their country and their fortunes, especially real estate, behaved in such a presumptuous, boastful, and even hostile way toward their hosts, refusing to understand “the difference in color of the Brazilian generation, whom they ironically treat as mulatto, without distinction of origin”.

It was evident that the mark of slavery weighed in the physical constitution of the Brazilian, who saw in the “most frequent mixing of the two bloods”, theirs and that of Europeans, and in the “progress of education”, the output for this state of affairs, because the latter “rectifies the public opinion and leads to respecting the true merit wherever it is found”.

And what did it mean to be Brazilian, this iconic inhabitant of the South American empire, but a dialectical synthesis of all cultures, including indigenous and African cultures subordinated to the Portuguese, who mingled in the houses (in the kitchen and in bed) and in the streets, and whose successes or charms “should be one more title in favor of the future oblivion of this line of [ethnic] demarcation, that love itself traced but that reason should erase one day”.²

Or, in the absence of a recognized cultural tradition other than the Portuguese, the solution found by the Brazilian elite, since the independence of the colony, was the exaltation of nature, in the hope that the Brazilian people “[...] in time would come to be as great as the natural environment

in which they live. They would feel, then, proud to be a mixed people, as considered by European arrogance and qualified by the jealousy of their Metropolis”.³

From this premise, the approach of other nations and encouragement to European immigration had a double goal: to attract capital and free workers to modernize its economy, and introduce new values and cultural traits that distinguish them from the Portuguese. However, this openness to what is foreign and especially to Europe sparked an avalanche of new values, sometimes uncritically assimilated. Here is the opinion of Count Eugène de Robiano, from circa 1878, in this regard:

“Of course, in their heads, the Brazilians don’t absolutely believe they are behind with respect to Europe, and, in fact, outwardly at least, they begin to lend its crazy fashions and customs, when in reality they are only its first victim [...]. Which is unfortunate, to see so the very mark of each country lost even in the smallest details, to the benefit only of the absurd law of universal leveling “.”⁴

Which, indeed, presented yet the problem of erasing their identity before the real threat of suffocation from the traditional traits of Brazilian culture. The authors of cookbooks responded to that unrestrained Europeanization and acted in line with the understanding that they had their own political role and that of the food in the construction of Brazilian identity and nationality. Here’s the first line of the book by the anonymous author cited above: *“National Cook*, such is the heading that we choose for our work; e how great are the obligations that it imposes upon us!”¹

The europeanization of food habits and consumption of domestic poultry

In the early nineteenth century, in addition to the general shortage of domestic poultry within the country, the food customs did not help the foreigners. So, Luccock, knowing that the walk that awaited the next day would be longer than usual, and through uninhabited forests, wanted to be prepared “with some cool bird to eat on the road; but such monstrous thing was never heard of around there” and he was forced “to take boiled eggs with flour”.⁵ Nevertheless, some thirty years later, things had changed and Ida Pfeiffer was more successful: “In the morning, I said goodbye to my kind hosts; the excellent hostess gave me a roast chicken for the road, with manioc flour and cheese, and so, well provided, I went on with my journey”.⁶

Fortunately for travelers, gradually, as foreigners flocked to Brazil and discovered its territory, the number of inns or shops, which near villages and farms served especially for “tropeiros” in their journeys, increased, and their menu varied a bit, if possible, beyond the invariable beef jerky with manioc flour, “obtaining chickens and piglets”⁵, although its preparation could last for hours!

However, when it was a “holy day”, with great difficulty one could find a chicken, and in this case, they had to “pay at least double the price it was worth!”⁵ But even if we were in the distant province of Amazonas, in Vila Bela, for example, it would be possible to buy in 1859, at the shop that belonged to the police chief, “a bottle of Port, two chickens and a tortoise”.⁷

And indeed, the habit of raising domestic poultry had spread throughout the country, even in its most remote corners. Indeed, it had become common to find them in the backyards of homes, and even within, promiscuously with their owners. There is no shortage of reports, sometimes jokingly, such as those that Biard tells us of when he decided to meet the inside the House in which he was staying:

*“[...] I continued on my tour: after the kitchen I was careful to examine the dining room where there was an angry monkey that bit everyone, six skinny dogs, many other large and small cats, chickens, ducks and [Indians] living peacefully with the home owners and committing, as I witnessed soon after, repeated distasteful acts during our meals. [...]”*⁷

On another occasion, at the Penaud family home, established in the Espírito Santo Province, he tells us: “One morning, for example, I found inside my hat a chicken and an egg freshly laid”.⁷

These details of daily life serve to confirm that the raising poultry introduced from Europe, even though many were from other continents or American countries, such as the turkey, expanded throughout the country and, consequently, its price tended to lower and its consumption became popular.

Indeed, reports, or rather complaints, of different travelers and foreigners who lived in Brazil during the first half of the nineteenth century are recurrent regarding the poor quality and exorbitant price of poultry: “The birds are mediocre and overpriced”, denounced the German Schlichthorst that, just as Carl Seidler, could no longer count on the pay of mercenary armyman from the Brazilian emperor, who could only envy the tables of the rich English merchants, resident in Rio de Janeiro, who had the means to eat sheep meat and poultry, as a “fat hen costs on average one Spanish piastre and more, and a turkey three to four.” As for the German mercenaries, they were forced to settle on eating eggs “that are sold at relatively reasonable prices”.⁸

Indeed, for the high price that was asked for a chicken, its consumption was restricted to the wealthy and sick, whose slaves went to the poultry market of Rio for provisions, at the Don Manuel Beach, in front of the Imperial Palace. There they were always sure to find in great amounts “hens, turkeys, parrots, monkeys and animals of different species”, despite their high prices. Indeed,

taking the words of the French painter Jean-Baptiste Debret, who lived in Rio from 1816 to 1831:

“The most important reason perhaps requiring citizens to bear without recrimination the rising price of this bird species is the use of chicken soup, imported by the Portuguese to Brazil and so widespread today in Rio de Janeiro that it is possible to observe the daily presence of this dish on the tables of rich men and even more strictly in the sick room, as a substantial regime, slightly refreshing, recommended by the doctors just as much as the Brazilians do not absolutely appreciate the very healthy calf meat. So the soup, made necessary, is prepared since the morning in eateries and infirmaries, [...]”.²

Certainly, it were the high prices that increasingly stimulated poultry trade, and the devastation caused by very frequent epidemics became even more lucrative. In effect, there were many Brazilians who practiced this trade, as appreciated as the raising poultry on farms was inexpensive, since it was easy to raise them loose “during the day to feed on large insects, numerous in the hedges” and in the city, due to moisture in backyards and basements, the profusion of insects, especially cockroaches, inside houses, was enough for “feeding a well populated chicken coop. “ Not to mention the ease with which they reproduced, to the point that “you cannot step on a pile of firewood, or enter a barn, or a kitchen without trampling pecking chicks”.²

The transportation and sale of poultry in Rio de Janeiro was a real visual spectacle that grew with the rapid increase in population that doubled in just over 15 years, between 1816 and 1831, mainly due to French, German and English immigration, and the activity of its harbor crowded with merchant ships and foreign troops it should supply. In fact, this very large poultry consumption was fueled by a regular trade, organized “from the distant provinces of São Paulo and Minas to a radius of six to ten leagues around the capital” of the Empire. And the carioca could recognize the origin of these birds by the means employed in transportation. They knew, for example, that the birds sent from Minas Gerais and São Paulo in baskets called “jacás”, carried on the backs of mules, suffered do much from the heat during the trip that they did not survive the fatigue of the journey for more than a month. Therefore, they preferred the ones sent by farmers of the suburbs in round baskets with barred lids, called “capoeira”, which “were transported at night by boat or over the heads of the blacks in charge of selling them”, and came fresh to the market before sunrise. Or those that were raised in the neighborhoods of the city, and were simply tied by the feet in bundles of three to four, that the black carried by hand or suspended on a pole resting over the shoulder. The advantage of these sellers was that they not only could “hit the market in less than a quarter of an hour,” but above all, they took advantage of the fact that they are known in the city where they offered “their birds door to door”², which served as a guarantee for the buyers.

And indeed, the consumption of chicken and their eggs has become so widespread in the kitchens of the wealthy families as feijoada, the most popular dish of Brazil. So much that it no longer was strange to find it on all tables, usually without the head, accompanied by a tray of rice. Here is the description of a lunch offered to Luiz and Elizabeth Agassiz near Rio, around 1865:

*“They served us first black beans cooked with beef jerky (beef dried in the sun with salt). It is the basic dish in all Brazilian meals. [...] Then came potatoes, rice made with water, chicken stew, sauce, dishes that were almost all characteristic of the Brazilian cuisine as much as the beans; then eggs cooked in every way, meats, wine, coffee and bread. Vegetables are an absolute rarity, although they are easy to produce in this climate, with rich variety”.*⁹

However, as the city grew and modernized and consumption increased, street vendors were gradually replaced by stores. Moreover, with the enrichment of an increasingly large layer of the population eager to imitate the Europeans, not to mention the immigrants themselves, their eating habits also tended to conform to the foreign standards. Indeed, the number of French, Portuguese, Italian, German and English restaurants increased dramatically, and even more the amount of cafes and taverns kept by foreigners, not only introducing new dishes as well as new ways of consuming. This new demand would explain, in part, the emergence of national cookbooks, but also the decline of urban consumption of wild game, which tended to disappear from the habits of increasingly Europeanized urban populations. Birds and wild animals offered as food in markets, such as monkeys, apes and parrots, started to be seen as pets, and typical Brazilian food, the most popular and also the most consumed in the streets and families, such as angu and feijoada, tended to eclipse themselves from restaurant menus. This trend was well expressed in the first half of the nineteenth century, by Seidler:

*“Brazilians eat tapir, monkey, parrot, but the Germans could not accommodate themselves to eat the last two species, because the purple meat of the parrot is very hard and stiff, and monkey was disgusting to them, with its reddish-brown color, sweet taste and human aspect. Only tapir somehow indemnified, with its meat very similar to beef [...]”*⁸

Menus and cookbooks

Indeed, it seems that Seidler was right, because the only “exotic” dish still consumed in Rio, turtle soup, already announced by a bakery,¹⁰ in 1828, and which was still offered in 1849 by the famous Pharoux Hotel,¹¹ owned by a Frenchman, who offered it in English - Green-turtle soup - apparently to attract a wealthy English clientele, disappears from 1856, when it is last announced by the restaurant of the Águia de Ouro Hotel.¹²

Judging by the menus of bakeries, bakeries, cafes, taverns, restaurants and hotels, it is concluded that, since the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, the trade of prepared foods in Rio was mostly controlled by foreigners, and tended to follow European standards. What explains the strong European content of cookbooks. And since the Portuguese were the most numerous of all traders in wholesale and retail, and formed the largest colony of immigrants, it was normal that they had a stronger influence on the carioca's eating habits.

Indeed, the different colonies of immigrants, especially of French, Italian, English and German, not to mention the Portuguese, brought their habits of meeting and eating in public, hence the success and proliferation of cafes and taverns and, to a lesser extent, restaurants and bakeries. However, as might be expected, they also brought their class prejudices and segregated their less successful countrymen, who did not participate in the circles and clubs of the most successful. Thus, public spaces where one could eat and drink were organized according to the different cooking nationalities of immigrants and their customs, as well as the traditional Brazilian cuisine, but rather according to the purchasing power of their customers.

This eating cultural diversity was clearly etched on menus touted in advertisements from restaurants and hotels in Rio's newspapers published. But without much effort, through sale notices and the rental of domestic servants, freemen and slaves, whose culinary know-how was divulged, we can see how these strange tastes were introduced into food habits of families residing in Rio. In fact, since the 1840s, the term "perfect stove, oven and pasta cook" becomes increasingly recurrent and synonymous with perfection in its art; as well as there's an increase in the number of foreign professionals who cook "à la française" "Portuguese style" or "German style" and offer their services to families and restaurants. Nevertheless, "the good simple cook" does not disappear, being preferred by "bachelors" and by "little family homes" generally less affluent and that were satisfied with the traditional Brazilian cuisine.

It is known that imported products, very expensive, have always been a privilege of those who have the means to acquire them, and the less affluent stayed with the cheaper items of local or regional production. What explains the success of feijoada, made with black beans, lard and beef jerky, to which manioc flour was added in the act of consumption, and angu, made of manioc or corn flour cooked in water, but which were excluded, perhaps due to their popular character, from the first Brazilian cookbooks, though they were the most consumed dishes in the streets, by the poorest, and in Brazilian families of all social classes as a matter of taste and habit.

However, the first Brazilian cookbook, *Cozineiro Imperial*, written in 1840 by R. C. M. (which, it seems, by signing only the initials wished to remain anonymous), did not include the angu or feijoada, but only a few white beans. Only in its fifth edition, probably from the 1860s, opening the kitchen "to new objects inciting appetite among which were many and delicious delicacies

such as vatapás, carurus, angus, caris, fish moquecas, exquisite taste pasta etc.”, known dishes of the province of Bahia, was when the book gained a more national character. Nevertheless, only in the 1887 edition is that we find some recipes for angu and two of black beans: “Bahia black beans with coconut milk” and “Minas tutu or black beans.”^a The feijoada in its traditional form remained banned in its 1900 edition.^b

Despite this injustice with the national dish par excellence of Brazilian cuisine, R. C. M. intended to supplant not only the few and outdated Portuguese compilations circulating in the country, but to provide “Brazilian artists” with a treaty where they could “take full advantage of the natural products of this beautiful and fertile country”, since “fish, poultry, fruits from Brazil enjoy a reputation that matches its variety, taste and delicacy”.^c There it was, timidly outlined, the concept of *terroir*, mitigated into the indeterminate and opaque, but highly esteemed notion of the romantic, to justify his cookbook.

However, his attachment to the European taste was stronger than his love for the natural products of his homeland, and a few paragraphs later he reminded us that “the most delicate ingredients such as tubaras [truffles] and mushrooms had not been forgotten”!^d But unfortunately, the Brazilian flora and fauna fell in almost complete oblivion, and he offers us recipes of partridges, pheasants, thrushes, larks, woodcocks, snipes and many other birds “raging the northern countries”!^e It is true that he tried to redeem himself and, in the 1887 edition, added: “The jacutinga, and even the tinamou and the jacu may be prepared in the same manner as woodcocks”¹³.

This original sin has not escaped the criticism of the National Cook when he said that it was not enough to write a book in Portuguese to give it a national imprint; nor - which was even more serious - confer it the title of “imperial”, associating it to the Brazilian title, “a vile plagiarism”¹. After such harsh criticism, it’s no wonder R. C. M. preferred to keep the anonymity.

Surely, the National Cook, so strikingly criticizing R. C. M., wanted to harass the entire layer of Rio society, of whom the latter was but one representative, who believed that modernity was in uncritically copying European values. Fortunately, as stated by Ferdinand Denis in the 1830s, if you penetrate inside the houses of the simple Brazilian bourgeoisie, you would see that in the recesses of the family, “even now are preserved the most ancient customs”¹⁴. And if so was, it would be possible to suspect that, in reality, R. C. M., like much of Rio society, ate feijoada and burped caviar.

a R. C. M. *O cozinheiro Imperial*, p. 216.

b R. C. M., *Cozinheiro Imperial*, p. VIII.

c R. C. M. *Cozinheiro Imperial*, p. V.

d R. C. M., *Cozinheiro Imperial*, p. VI.

e R. C. M., *Cozinheiro Imperial*, p. 131.

This assumption finds its counterpart in a sale notice of a “very beautiful 25 year old slave girl” by a “respectable home” in 1870, which announced new times, not because the slave was an “master cook in oven, stove, pasta and pastries [...] and all sorts of delicacies and desserts”, but because she was an expert in “all that belongs to the art of cooking, the Brazilian way and the French way”.¹⁵ In other words, not only Brazilian cuisine was placed at the same level as the French cuisine, but was indeed practiced in a “respectable” family, meaning rich and sophisticated, and boasted very naturally, perhaps with pride.

O *cozinheiro nacional* e a construção da nacionalidade brasileira

Some years later, it is not known exactly when, but certainly still in the 1870s, was first published the *National Cook* book, whose author unfortunately wished to keep his anonymity, even though it was an important and conscious spokesman of broad strata compromised with the construction of a Brazilian identity and nationality, at a time when the provincial, anti-monarchy centrifugal forces represented in the Republican Party were structured.

This clairvoyant awareness is manifested in the first lines of the book: “[...] given that we gave the title ‘national’ to our work, we believe to have contracted a solemn commitment of presenting a cuisine in all Brazilian”.¹ And, it seems, just as a great Italian cook left in his work – *Opera di Bartolomeo Scappi* – a cuisine that can be truly described as Italian, because it used ingredients and techniques of all regions of the peninsula,¹⁶ the *National Cook* does the same, three hundred years later, with respect to Brazilian cuisine, with the proposal to indicate:

“[...] the means of preparing, in the country, the meat of numerous mammals that inhabit its forests and roam its fields; birds inhabiting these diverse climates; fish that furrow its rivers and seas, reptiles, plants and roots entirely different from those from Europe, in flavor, appearance, shape and virtue, and which therefore require unique preparations, fertilizers and specialty appetizers that are only found in the place where those substances abound, and are claimed by nature, by the customs and occupations of its inhabitants”¹ (emphasis added)

The Brazilian national identity, for the *National Cook*, was implicitly mixed with the concept of *terroir* clearly formulated. For him, there was no doubt that the food was viscerally linked to a territory, its inhabitants and its history, and therefore, his book should express this relationship between “people and culinary preparations,” and be done once and for all with “this anachronism of accommodating themselves with foreign books that teach the preparation of substances that are not found in the country; or that can only be costllyreached”.¹

The National Cook intended, therefore, “with a language that, simple in its sentences and word selection”, was “available to all classes of society”.¹ Meaning, he wished to represent people who were accommodated but not rich and could not pay unreasonably high prices for imported products whose names had no meaning to them, because they were “objects they had never seen, nor could reach” such as truffles, fungi, capers, pheasant, meadowlark, hare, trout, tench, salmon, carp etc., and did not know how to replace them with domestic products, since, even worse, these cookbooks did not even inform them the name of the national animal or plant “that was corresponding and whose preparation may be identical “.¹

Consequently, without denying the foreign contribution, the National Cook associated to the “substances of Europe” products of the country, as to be recognized immediately “that all wild game, fish, vegetables and fruits are gathered in one article, not only are prepared the same way, but also may be substituted for each other.” Thus, explicitly recognizing that he copied or translated “only the preparations concerning the meat or substances found in all countries,” the National Cook did not claim “originality except for meat and vegetable stews exclusive of Brazil.”

Thus, Brazil, until then a tributary of the countries from which foodstuff was acquired, could in turn recover its pride “with its delicious, healthy and comforting preparations “, and provide them the different products required for their making and where “health, strength and long life” would be found¹.

And wouldn't this be the recipe for the construction of the Brazilian identity: without denying foreign cultural, contributions, adding to them the typically Brazilian cultural traits, exalted in its features then globally recognized of health, robustness and longevity?

Parrot eating and being brazilian with pleasure

Just as today an inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro would be shocked with the idea that you can eat these beautiful and colorful macaws, toucans and other birds protected by various NGOs and the Brazilian State, and which are only seen in documentaries and at the zoo, in the 1870s, also, the new carioca generation that went to the town's bird market would be amazed with the idea that you could eat those not very innocent, talkative parrots, who could perfectly repeat all insults and profanities, and many more birds of beautiful plumage and endearing songs, which delighted the kids and went crazy with foreigners who went there to admire them and buy them to get them to their countries. For the carioca, who was unaware of the Brazilian Amazon and the far inlands of Brazil, it had become inconceivable that someone could feed on wild animals, unless it was an Indian, or rather a savage! What would their reaction be opening a copy of the *National Cook*? Maybe one would believe to be facing an indigenous cookbook with recipes for preparing fried or boiled leopards, monkeys, parrots, toucans, lizards, turtles, ants, anteaters and snakes!

Let's read, pretending the neutrality of a social scientist, his three chapters devoted to birds, and that were divided into Poultry, Turkeys and Wild Birds.

Four things, at least, draw attention immediately. The first is its pedagogical concern. I am not referring to the book's organization according to a simple plan following the order of the table service, which started with the soup, followed by meat and finally desserts, or the alphabetical layout of the recipes, both had been inaugurated by La Varenne in his 1651 book, *Cuisinier Français*, but the smart and easy way it is conceived for its audience, i.e. women, housewives. But please, let's not fall into the temptation of imagining that the recipes circulating the carioca society were transmitted by cookbooks. Although the level of female literacy in Rio de Janeiro was high, which is evidenced by the number of schools for girls and for their occupation ability, it is known that the family recipe notebooks were what guarded and transmitted them, and that their diffusion was mainly oral, especially in a society where, in the 1870s, 41% of domestic workers were slaves and others were blinders and immigrants, usually illiterate. The role of the housewife in broadcasting recipes was therefore evident both in the act of reading as in its practical explanation.

It really is plausible to assume that the way recipes were stated, clearly and accurately, following a sequence of actions within a logical chain of thoughts, allowed women, both housewives and maids, to rapidly develop a logical reasoning and a way of being pragmatic, necessary not only for the execution of the dishes, as well as for the administration of the home and domestic economy. Moreover, the standardized instructions of recipes, simple and clear, not only should facilitate their transmission from the author of the book to the housewives, but orally from the housewives to the illiterate cooks, and also to provide a common language for women when talking among themselves, speaking of food and exchanging recipes.

Wouldn't it be the reason, to enable development among women in a formal, clear and logical, and above all easy language, that the National Cook believed to "have opened a path" that could "produce abundant fruit, not only regarding cooking, but even regarding other human knowledge"?¹

Now, this practical knowledge naturally developed and transmitted mean, visually and with few words, within domestic and community relationships, had historically taken a theoretical form in standardized, fixed and imperative literary style. What actually was but the verbal expression of a corporate hierarchical or class domination relationship, the chef who commands his subordinates, the housewife who gives orders to her maids. To make it more tender, the National Cook softened it, addressing the cooks and housewives (and not the "artists", professional cooks) with a simple language and everyday words. And, breaking with tradition, abandoned the imperative mode and employed the third person singular present indicative in its impersonal form: "A fat bird is

sautéed in butter, then cut into pieces [...]; it is cooked at low fire [...]”¹ A style undoubtedly quite distinct from that used by R. C. M.: “Take two young chickens [...], take all their neck bones, while cooking a fourth of rice [...]”^f

In addition, to facilitate understanding of certain recipes of European origin, he gathered in one item, according to an associative logic, for example, Brazilian and European birds that could not only be prepared in the same way as they could also be substituted for one another: “Saracura, inhuma, wild duck, teals, wild geese, water chicken, kingfisher, large and small woodcock (large and small becassina)”. And, to make available to all housewives the recipes most commonly found in foreign cookbooks, he included in his prologue a list of items displayed in two columns: the left containing the names of some Brazilian products, and the right with their European counterparts. Then, surprisingly, one could discover that bananas could replace apples; in lieu of the European eggplant one could use the scarlet eggplant; and sweet potatoes instead of beets!

The second thing that challenges the reader is the knowledge that the National Cook had of the birds used in his recipes. The chicken, for example, should not have more than eighteen months to two years, and should not be thin. The best chickens “are four to six months, when their spurs are pointing out, but capons have a more delicate meat.” The turkey, to be good, must not be over eight months, “except if it is too fat; the leg being preferred for the roast, as it is more delicate”.¹ Garganey meat, “of a darker color”, however of easy digestion such as that of the hen and the turkey, being, however, “of more substance”, should never be consumed after eight to ten months, “to obtain a delicate meat”. Finally, domestic pigeons, whose flesh is “just like chicken”, could not be over a year old, and the little pigeons, who were to be sacrificed when they began to “show feathers” were “one of the finest and most delicate eats”.¹

The third thing that is surprising is the dialogue that the National Cook establishes with the “good cooks”, with whom he obtains information and certainly takes the experience, transferring then this know-how to housewives, his potential readers:

*“The goose, though not as delicate as the hen, chicken or turkey, or even as the duck, is well liked by good cooks for offering a good variety of dishes, in addition to the fat, that is liquid and sweet as oil, which is used for salads and for preparing some canned goods [...]”*¹

This pivot role around which were interchanged domestic culinary knowledge, purely handcrafted and expressed in colloquial language, and established culinary knowledge, formalized in a standard language and in a logical sequence, is also evident throughout his work, as in this description of how to kill the turkey:

f R. C. M., *Cozinheiro Imperial*, 1843, Aves, p. 96.

“Two hours before killing the turkey, it is necessary to make it swallow two spoonfuls of vinegar or brandy; then one person holds it, and with his left hand, armed with a machete, cuts its head at the naked part of the neck; after it is cold, the body is laid down on its back on the block, and, with the back of the ax, the breast bone is broken, the bird is plucked, and its guts are taken out”.¹

A similar relationship of dialogue, mediated by the National Cook, happens, on the one hand, between the producers - in the case of wild birds, the hunters - with whom he learned both technical and culinary knowledge of hunting, and, on the other hand, with housewives, for whom he wrote, as in the item “Pigeons, Quail-doves, Wood Pigeons and Doves”:

“The meat of these doves is excellent, especially at the beginning of the drought, as they are fatter at this time; the preparation mode is the same for all: the wood pigeon, after plucked, must have the back cut off, because it contains small bags filled with a very stinky oil; it is preferable to pluck the tail while she is warm, and this is a duty that pertains to the hunter”.¹

Other times, the National Cook informs with the peasants that knew better than anyone the nutritive properties of birds. And not to miss out on any information in his book, which intended to collect every traditional dish of the country, and thus be the first real national cookbook, included quite bizarre products such as the smooth-billed ani, a typical bird of Brazil “that only eats ticks” and smells terribly bad, not being appreciated by anyone. And, as if to apologize, he explained:

“The peasants, however, assert that its meat has the property to cure asthma, inveterate syphilis and warts; although we are not completely convinced of the effectiveness of its properties, we are excited, however, to present the way in which its meat is prepared as to please all, in view of the general belief regarding the properties of its meat”.¹

Fourth and last, but by no means least, is the appreciation that he devotes to Brazilian birds, or birds acclimated in Brazil, such as the Helmeted Guineafowl, imported from Africa, which could be considered a domestic bird, despite its wandering life and the quality of its meat, similar to white meat wild birds, but “far superior to the Pheasant, so esteemed in Europe,”¹ or such as mallards and garganeys that “are not as fat as the domestic ducks, nor have such a white meat, but is more aromatic”.¹ Nor were forgotten or underrated the black meat birds hunted in Brazil, such as the guan, the curassow, the fruitcrow, the toucanet, the toucan, the oropendola, the woodpecker and the seriema because “varied are the ways of preparing them”;¹ nor were forgotten birds such as the thrush, which should not be neglected because of its small size, “as they offer very tasty dishes”.¹

But as he himself warns us in his prologue, in no time European products would be rejected in his recipes, such as butter to fry thrushes, and the white wine for the sauce that was served “on a slice of fried bread”.¹ We could, therefore, say that the book *Cozinheiro Nacional* was a reflection of what was happening in society, whose identity was being built with national and foreign contributions.

Recipes for “Macaws, Parrots, Toucans, Parakeets”¹ could well illustrate how the National Cook socially conceived Brazilian cuisine, as a result of a synthesis of cultures in which the Brazilianness should be imposed by the quality and variety of its natural products.

Thus, if on the one hand, the recipes for birds listed above as “roasted on the stick” is not very far, in its structure, from the way Austrian Ida Pfeiffer savored the parakeets hunted in the company of the Purí Indians, except for the salt with which they were scrubbed inside and out (along with cumari, which was native), and the cream with which it was simmered while cooking. In exchange, in the recipe “Macaws, parrots etc. stew”, imported products such as butter, wheat flour, onions, white wine, brandy, vinegar, cloves and nutmeg, predominated spitefully. However, for “Macaws, parrots etc. sauteed with eggplants” there is a balance between Brazilian products, or already acclimatized in Brazil, and European products. Here we find, side by side, the eggplant that could also be replaced by plantain, the garlic wine sauce (white wine or vinegar, garlic, onions, bay leaf and salt), cumari pepper juice, earth orange juice, parsley and chopped onion leaves instead of green onions, pork fat in place of butter, cassava flour, bacon, grated cheese and sugar.

These recipes illustrated the distinct and varied forms of Brazilian regional identity, more or less influenced by foreign immigrants, more or less integrated with European culture.

Now there is no doubt that, for his detailed knowledge of the huge variety of the fauna and flora of Brazil, and the different ways of preparing them, the National Cook was a master cook, certainly prestigious, perhaps of some great restaurant, very in tune with the eating habits of the countryside.

Anyway, despite the color and fuss of his recipes with animals from tropical forests and grasslands and savannas of central highlands, its revenues concerning beef, mutton and pork, that is, meat brought by the Europeans, were characteristically urban and typical of the international cuisine of the time. They practically never mention Brazilian products (except pepper). So, in order to compensate and give his book a national character, he invests on the use of birds, mammals and reptiles of the Brazilian fauna. It is true that among the many animals, there were some who certainly should cause, as they still cause today, disgust or pity in the inhabitants of large cities, although its culinary preparation followed the European, dominant urban model, and left nothing to be desired. However, his recipes were presented more for therapeutic and medicinal reasons - which was one of the outstanding characteristics of the cuisine of the time - than for its gustatory value, as is the case of the smooth-billed ani.

And let's face it, there are so many well made and appetizing recipes of animals of the Brazilian fauna, as is the extensive the knowledge of the particularities of each meat, that one can easily assume that its revenues had its origin in the culinary experiences of families in the countryside, established in city centers or farms, and it was for them that he wrote his chapter devoted to hunting. This is for two main reasons: the first was that it would not be possible to consume these animals except where they existed in nature, because they were not raised and reproduced in captivity, and were not marketed outside of their habitat, because there was no way to transport them alive for long distances between major cities along the coast, nor to conserve them killed during the long travel times. The second reason was that within the country there was no prejudice against their consumption, and in the large coastal urban centers there was.

This hypothesis finds support in the case of large lizard meat consumption, exclusive of America, and also native of the Rio de Janeiro region, where it was much appreciated even by foreigners, in the first half of the eighteen hundreds. However, the comments made by the National Cook that its "chicken like white meat" resembled it in taste so much that, "if prepared in fricasset, certainly no one would say that they did not eat a delicate chicken stew", and that they had been so many who had "been duped by delicacies made with the meat of this animal",¹ allow the assumption that since the 1870s the lizard meat was an object of disgust in certain urban strata.

But from there to eating snake meat was a big step to an inhabitant of the "civilized" Imperial Capital! The National Cook made an effort to convince you that its flesh was identical to the frog, consumed in Europe, and the lizard (whose acceptance in Rio was in sharp decline and already causing disgust), and that it not only was "very delicious" as "was not inferior to the best fish to which it resembles", asserting that "people who ate snake meat prefer it to any other". But what would be the reaction of a housewife in Rio, to whom, like many other Brazilian city dwellers, the "snake inspired disgust and horror", and firmly believed that "its flesh was poisonous", reading that "viviparous were preferable to oviparous" and, among those, "the rattlesnake is the most delicate and effective"?¹ Does the scientific explanation that the poison is located beneath the fangs and that one only needs to remove the head to make their meat harmless, was enough to override a prejudice that persists to this day?

And why would he have included in his recipe book tayras, leopards and anteaters, if he himself recognized that:

*"The meat of tayras, leopards, and anteaters is rarely eaten, for their meat is very hard and dry; however, since it is medicinal, and very fruitful in some cases, we present here some ways to prepare it, certain that **it will be a dish much appreciated in the woods of Brazil**".¹ (Emphasis added)*

Now, who in the 1870s ate tayra, leopard or anteater in Brazil, except for the Indians? Here's, then, the recipe for a dish that was supposed to be “much appreciated in the forests of Brazil”, which then as now, the Indians do not eat fried foods or use products such as ginger, nutmeg, vinegar and mustard, among others:

“Tayra, leopard and anteater stew. — The meat is put to soak in strong vinegar, salt, parsley, cumari peppers, ginger, nutmeg, and a lot of ground mustard seeds; after twenty-four hours, it is removed and fried in fat, turning so that is brown on both sides; the meat is cut into small pieces, in the same fat a tablespoon of flour, two onions, two cups of water and a cup of vinegar are sauteed; the mix is boiled a bit the meat is gently put in this sauce; it is boiled until cooked, and served”.¹

Obviously he did not write for forestry Brazilians who did not speak nor read Portuguese and of whose diet he was clearly unaware, these recipes get a sharp political and character and a strong ideological taste of exaltation to products of the Brazilian land.

Nevertheless, the National Cook, in his pioneer pretension of building a national identity through cuisine, bringing together in one table all the supposed national flavors, explicitly recognized the existence of regional Brazilian cuisines. Although only two cuisines appear prominently, that of Minas Gerais, by far the most represented with 26 recipes, followed by Bahia with only four recipes that might justify their title of “Bahia-style” with the use of cumari pepper, peanut and ginger (none of African origin, for the first two are American and the third is Asian). The other provinces, when they appear, are represented by only one recipe, like “Paulista Porridge”, the “Ceará Porridge” and “Rio’s roast turkey on a stick”. All other dishes take their names from the base product. However, “English”, “German”, “Portuguese”, “French” or “Paris”, and “Italian” style dishes are many.

Thus, once again, the broad yet not explicit notion of *terroir* is embodied in his theory of the construction of the national cuisine. Since, in general, the same animal species lived scattered over large areas of the Brazilian soil, which went far beyond provincial administrative boundaries, the variety of recipes represented the different regional ways of preparing them. It was the case of the raccoon, whose “meat is excellent and very popular; and as it is almost everywhere, we will mention here several ways to prepare it, as it is used in different provinces of Brazil”.[§] However, the best examples would be the boar, considered “the most delicious meat of all qualities of wild game” and that could be found “in large herds in its forests”,¹ on which he presents 32 recipes; and the deer, that abounded in Brazil and in South America and which certainly, after the boar, was the “most prized beef” with 26 different recipes.¹

g Anonymus, *Cozinheiro Nacional*, Chapter VIII, p. 240.

The National Cook, unlike R. C. M., which in his 1840 *Cozinheiro Imperial*^h does not include any dish with a Brazilian regional name, not only presents recipes designated by the provinces or cities where they supposedly came from, such as the “Uberaba Porridge”, but introduces several dishes “Brazilian style”. It is true that some of them, such as “Brazilian style bird pastry”¹ - which consisted of a portion of fried and well toasted sparrows that, once seasoned with vinegar and ground pepper, were wrapped in a slice of dough, whose edges were united and again fried in fat - took their originality solely due to the use of typically Brazilian birds and the constant use of pepper.

But the term “Brazilian” to designate certain dishes was not popularly used since at least the 1830s, such as the “Brazilian feijoada” announced in the *Diario de Pernambuco* of August 7th, 1833.¹⁷

So, it seems, the National Cook himself was either outdated or lived outside the major coastal urban centers such as Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Recife, and did not understand the real gastronomic importance of the cuisine of small restaurants. In return, he gave the food of families and that served at feasts (often commissioned to large restaurants and bakeries) perhaps and exaggerated importance, since the Brazilian cuisine was also built in the kitchen of less affluent families and on the city streets: in the street kitchens of freed black women, in family and food pensions of, as well as in the cafes, taverns and popular restaurants.

It is inconceivable that the National Cook, so concerned with national identity, did not know that the Brazilian food culture had a strong asset: feijoada. The widespread acceptance of this dish enjoyed by all, free and slave, regardless of social cleavages between them, assured it a social base for almost the entire length of the vast Brazilian territory, guaranteeing a gastronomic importance indisputable and perhaps unique in such large countries.

Despite this national preference for feijoada, which at least since the 1840s symbolized, more than any other cultural trait, the Brazilian identity,¹⁸ it was not even mentioned in his book. Maybe because its origin was so modest - since until the beginning of the nineteenth century beans were considered a food for slaves and the poor, i.e., blacks and mulattos - that it bothered the National Cook that, following the romantic nationalist current, would rather cultivate the fanciful indigenous origin of the Brazilian, idealized in the literature (and only there) as haughty, brave and free.

This hypothesis is supported on the very small presence of important dishes of the cuisine of Bahia, the most influenced by the African, and in the complete absence, in a book of over 1500 recipes, of a typical product of its cuisine, palm oil. And just by reading the recipes with the word “Bahia” in the title, such as the “Bahia style pork vatapá”, the “Bahia style rabbit stew”, the “Bahia style cod, grouper etc. stew” or “Bahia style black beans”, it is clear that they do not contain African origin ingredients, but only European and American. What makes us suppose that this

h In his 1887 edition, there is only one dish entitled “Minas Gerais style” and another “Bahia style”, but on the other hand, various dishes from the Bahia cuisine were added since the 5th edition.

cuisine was only incorporated in his book to give it a comprehensive national character, though its African face was disfigured.

This assumption is strengthened on the fact that, in the 1820s, Debret gives us an appetizing recipe for angu with palm oil², and the *Cozinheiro Imperial* in its fifth edition, certainly before the first edition of the *Cozinheiro Nacional*, already contained several recipes typical of the Bahian cuisine, such as vatapá, caruru, the fish stew moqueca [and angu], all made with palm oil.

These facts, however, do not diminish the value of the *Cozinheiro Nacional*, on the contrary, are located in the historical and social context of its era. Indeed, what praises it is its “satisfaction of having pursued a new path”¹, its political consciousness of “having opened a new path” that, if taken by other people to share their opinions, could “produce abundant fruit not only regarding cooking, but even to other human knowledge”.

“Because it’s time for Brazil to undress its child-like garments, and, abandoning the customs of imitating other nations, to present itself to the world, occupying the place given to it by nature”¹.

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Received: 6/30/2013

Approved: 8/15/2013

