



Reflections for a food approach: society, culture and boundaries

Reflexões para uma abordagem alimentar: sociedade, cultura e fronteiras

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Abstract

The concepts of society, culture and boundaries are polysemic, fluid, flexible, and permeate the lives of individuals. The discussion on these three elements pervades many areas of knowledge, but we chose the approach from the social phenomenon of food. The bibliographical review methodology was applied. The objective is to carry out reflections for a critical food approach from the perspective of society, culture, modernity and boundaries, fostering the articulation between these concepts. The reflections generated an interrelationship between group concepts and social coercion by Émile Durkheim; culture as a mechanism of control by Clifford Geertz; modernity and standardization by Renato Ortiz; and the construction of boundaries by Ernelo Schallenger. There has been problematization of how feeding and eating behaviors relate to these. Speckled and sprinkled are present in the elaboration of an intellectual dish, to be eaten, tasted and appreciated. With this text, it is expected to foster further discussions on the social phenomenon of food.

Keywords: Sociology. Culture. Modernity. Food behavior.

Resumo

Os conceitos de sociedade, cultura e fronteiras são polissêmicos, fluidos, flexíveis e permeiam a vida dos indivíduos. A discussão sobre estes três elementos perpassa inúmeras áreas do conhecimento, mas opta-se pela abordagem a partir do fenômeno social da alimentação. A metodologia aplicada é a revisão bibliográfica. Objetiva-se realizar reflexões para uma

abordagem alimentar crítica na perspectiva da sociedade, cultura, modernidade e fronteiras, fomentando a articulação entre esses conceitos. As reflexões geraram uma inter-relação entre os conceitos de grupo e coerção social por Émile Durkheim, cultura como mecanismo de controle por Clifford Geertz, modernidade e padronização por Renato Ortiz e a construção de fronteiras por Erneldo Schallenger, possuindo como discussão de fundo a alimentação. Problematisa-se como a alimentação e os comportamentos alimentares relacionam-se com estes. Pitadas, salpicadas e polvilhadas se encontram na elaboração de um prato intelectual, para ser comido, degustado e apreciado. Espera-se, com este texto, fomentar maiores discussões sobre o fenômeno social da alimentação.

Palavras-chave: Sociologia. Cultura. Modernidade. Comportamento alimentar.

Introduction

“Society,” “culture,” and “boundaries” are separate words whose concepts are polysemous, but that can be related and interconnected. “Society, culture and boundaries” also give name to a Stricto Sensu Graduate Program of the Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná (UNIOESTE - State University of Western Paraná). However, more than a denomination, these three elements represent the complex articulations and dialogues of the researches developed in this Program, which are based on phenomena or social facts provoked by human beings and social groups.

The social phenomenon is based on the place and the time in which one is. Thus, this textual and intellectual production was only possible with this way of writing, content and perspective, because it was developed in a certain period in 2016/2017, in this academy, in the city of Foz do Iguaçu, with these teachers, with these readings, based on Western thought and paradigm, with students who added in the participation of the debates, with the previous training of one of the authors in Gastronomy, and the other authors in History.

Certainly we should have started with the proposed text by carrying out the discussions that were expected from the article. But we believe that the medium, the individual, the memories, the prior knowledge and the social context interfere in the way we interpret the data, the contents and the representations. Thus, we seek to contextualize the reader about the academic-professional experiences, and the place and moment in which we find ourselves, emphasizing that these

questions reflect our perception of the world and our perspective regarding social phenomena. The phenomena would be different if we were producing elsewhere in Africa, Asia or Europe. We would be different.

The discussion of these three concepts pervades innumerable areas of knowledge, but opts for an approach based on a social phenomenon that has a central role in daily life and which can be considered inherent to any human being - whether by lack or by presence - of food. In addition, food is the ground we tread,^{a1} having a significant tendency to research on the subject, since we understand that an intellectual work is also a personal work.

In this work, a correlation of the feeding with authors of parallel areas is made, but here, in these sheets, these concepts are correlated, applying the bibliographic review methodology. The objective is to carry out reflections for a critical food approach from the perspective of society, culture, modernity and boundaries, fostering the articulation between these concepts. There is the problematization of how the food relates to these conceptions. The reflections generated an interrelationship between group concepts and social coercion by Émile Durkheim, culture as a mechanism of control by Clifford Geertz, modernity and standardization by Renato Ortiz, and the construction of boundaries by Erneldo Schallenger, considering food as a substantive discussion. These reflections are the contribution of this work.

Speckled and sprinkled are present in the elaboration of an intellectual dish, to be eaten, tasted and appreciated. There are spices from diverse origins: society, culture, modernity and boundaries.

A pinch of sociology and culture from Durkheim and Geertz

When discussing food as a social phenomenon that emerges and is built within the framework of society, an earlier problematization in relation to the understanding of society itself becomes essential, dialoguing with classic authors and verifying how they thought and conceived society.

Understanding the reality and the society that surrounds us is part of the researcher's work; in one way or another, we seek to conceive of a certain social reality. For this discussion, reflections are made from Anthony Giddens,² British sociologist, in his book *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*. In this work, Giddens presents an exposition and a comparative study of the three main roots of Western sociological thought, with their respective theorists: Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. These are the foundations of Western thought as to how to understand the world; these are explanatory theories of society, ways of seeing and working reality, one through class

a Alluding to the chapter "The ground we tread". Flusser, Vilém. *Pós-história: vinte instantâneos e um modo de usar*. São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1983.

struggle, another through social coercion, and another through phenomenology. The economic, the social and the phenomenological. Marx, Durkheim and Weber. As the author describes:

The works of Marx are, of course, the main source of the various forms of contemporary neo-Marxism; the works of Durkheim had a decisive influence on today's <<structural functionalism>>; and at least some of the modern variants of phenomenology derive directly or indirectly from the works of Max Weber (Giddens, 2005, p.12).

Even unconsciously, our view of the world is influenced by one of these thinkers. These concepts are fluid, permeate the academy, and overflow the boundary of the university walls.

Although Marx contributed to the understanding of society from the market and capital, and although Weber diffused the important concept of the web of meanings, it is in Durkheim that we find more theoretical support in the way of interpreting society. The sociologist is a pioneer in bringing up discussions about the organization of society through collective morality and social coercion.

In comparison to the others, Durkheim was the one who stayed the most away: “[...] on a personal level, of the great political events of his time: his works are almost all of an academic character, and therefore much less dispersed - and less propagandistic - than those of Marx or Weber”. (Giddens, 2005, p.109)

Durkheim's greatest contribution was to demonstrate that: “[...] moral rules and actions can be scientifically studied in their capacity as properties of social organization. At this point, Durkheim defines a precept that was to become one of the guiding principles of all his work” (Giddens, 2005, p.114). Therefore, society can be understood and analyzed as something palpable. Actions are social, and so are the responses. “Moral rules arise within society and are integrally linked to the conditions of social life prevailing in a given time and place” (Giddens, 2005, p.118). For Durkheim, the social coercion, generated through exteriority and constraint, and the reinforcement of collective morality, regards the logic of social morality to understand society. The inherent negotiation between the Self and the Other.

Two of his most widespread studies are on religious behavior and suicide. However, it is possible to extend these discussions to other social phenomena, such as food. It is not displaced, it is not in nature - it is in society. Any social behavior can and should be analyzed because it is socially constructed.

Durkheim's ideas on cohesion and social morality find continuity in the studies on culture by the American anthropologist Clifford James Geertz (1989),³ in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Geertz's synthesis has two great claims; the first one is that the culture:

[...] is best seen **not as complexes of concrete patterns of behavior** - customs, uses, traditions, bundles of habits - as has been the case so far, **but as a set of control mechanisms** - plans, recipes, rules, instructions (which computer engineers call “programs”) - **to govern behavior** (Geertz, 1989, p. 32, highlight made by us).

Thus, Geertz³ defends the idea of culture as a set of control mechanisms to govern behavior, imposing a worldview. According to the author, one can affirm that our ideas, values, acts, emotions, and even our nervous system are cultural products, manufactured, produced, and built from innate tendencies and abilities (Geertz, 1989, p.36). In the end, we were and are produced. In this social game, we are cultural artifacts. Thus, culture can be understood as a social phenomenon constructed.

The second one is that man: “[...] is precisely the animal most desperately dependent on such extra-genetic, out-of-the-skin control mechanisms of such cultural programs for ordering his behavior” (Geertz, 1989, p.32-33). Therefore, culture is a mechanism of control that the individual lacks and depends on.

Faced with such a polysemic term, Geertz³ states that: “Eclecticism is an autofrustration, not because there is only one direction to go with advantage, but because there are many: it is necessary to choose” (Geertz, 1989, p.4). And according to his personal choice, the concept of culture is essentially semiotic. By agreeing with Max Weber, that man is a being tied to webs of meaning woven by himself, Geertz assumes culture as these webs and its analyzes, and not as an experimental science, but as an interpretive science, in search of meaning (Geertz, 1989, p.4). So, culture is not the thing itself, but it is the meaning employed in this thing. Culture is not the artifacts, but their meanings and representations. Culture is not the effect, but the cause. Culture is not food itself, but its symbolic representations.

On society, Giddens² (2005, p.69-70) states that: “According to Marx, the progress of society is the result of the continuous productive interaction established between men and nature.” And the author continues: “Productive activity is therefore at the base of all society, both in historical and analytical sense”. However, “human beings do not produce individually, but as members of a particular form of society [...]” – considering that, in this production, men act not only on nature, but on other men.

It is a fact that society is governed by the logic of the market, as Marx argues; however, as Giddens² (2005, p.114) emphasizes, the thought of Durkheim: “If there were no social norms for contracting, there would be “incoherent chaos” in the economic world. The rules governing economic life cannot be explained in purely economic terms”. Therefore, to explain the economic factor only by the economic view, is determinism and reductionism.

If we were to take this discussion to food, it would be like saying that the economic factor is the aspect that influences eating behaviors. It would be like diminishing or stifling a number of other elements, such as religious, physical, psychological, political, media, sociological, cultural, scientific and even the availability of time and product. Therefore, the economic factor is not determinant; sociological factors are fluid.

This question still permeates the relationship between the choice of food and the individual. In some situations and theories, it seems that the individual acts independently of the reality around him/her and that he/she consumes what desires, with no relation to the social. Durkheim rejects the idea of individualism, criticizing the concept that each one is each one, and that society does not determine us as subjects:

The ideals and feelings that constitute the cultural heritage of the members of a society are <;impersonal>;, that is, they develop socially and are not the fruit or property of specific individuals. The language example demonstrates it: <<each of us speaks in a language we have not created>> (Giddens, 2005, p.112).²

Man, as an individual, cannot be led to explain a society. The society, which is around the individual, influences him/her. Therefore, the individual does not exist by himself/herself; he/she exists as he/she is, because he/she is in society. To paraphrase the author, each individual eats a food that he/she did not create.

In this discussion one can problematize the food choices, or even, when an ingredient becomes an option of consumption. The anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1986)⁴ says that: “**So, there is feed and there is food.** Food is not just a feeding substance, but it is also a way, a style and a way of eating. And the way of eating defines not only what is ingested, but also the one that ingests it” (DaMatta, 1986, p.55-56, highlight made by us). The feed then becomes the gross piece; and the food, its refinement. The wild and the domestic, the natural and the cultural, the raw and the baked, the feed and the food. It is possible to remember here the conception of the raw and the cooked by the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss.

In this sense, one can reflect that not everything that feeds is good or socially acceptable. Likewise, not everything that is feed is food. For this discussion, another French anthropologist dedicated to the study of food could not miss, Claude Fischler,⁵ by saying, briefly, that: “[...] Not everything which is biologically edible is culturally edible” (Fischler, 1995, p.33). That is, not everything that is biologically edible, is culturally edible. It's the difference between feed and food. Beef can be eaten, edible in the gaucho culture, but it is not in Indian culture, for religious reasons. Just as some insects are food, edible in some Asian countries, or Brazilian Indian tribes, but they are not edible in other cultures. Even so, however, both beef and insects continue to be feed.

From this perspective, it may be questioned that, in Brazilian society, when referring to conventional animal protein, one is referring to beef, pork or poultry, and not to dog or cat meat. It is not the animal A and B that is in question, but how that particular society perceives it. What is the meaning that it carries, besides being what it is? Animal for food consumption, animal for emotional consumption. Therefore, feed and food differ in the social sphere, and not in the individual, as Durkheim points out.

Faced with these observations, the question is about food culture. The subject of numerous articles, books and texts, the connection between food and culture is intrinsic. At all times, one word is linked to the other, and they seem like inborn concepts. However, it is understood, as Geertz points out, that more than a romanticized vision of culture, as something sacred, concrete and fixed, culture is built, is fluid, is a mechanism of control, not something individual.

Diners eat culture, since eating is not a neutral act, just as the food is not, since the choice of diners is loaded by cultural meanings and symbologies. So, it is possible to say that food is culturalized, after all we eat food, we eat culture, we eat moments, we eat people and we eat memories (Stefanutti, 2015).⁶

No matter how individual choices may be made, food culture is based on social cohesion, as Durkheim recalls, which has its market logic according to Marx and which is entangled in webs of meaning, as Weber reminds us. Food is not just the ingredient itself. It is symbol, it is meaning, it is representation of a certain society that identifies itself as such.

For Geertz,³ culture is public, it is social, and so is its meaning. If there wasn't an understanding of meaning, there would be no culture. It would not make sense. The communication would not take effect. There would be no transmission of meaning through object, gesture, music, food, among others. For example: "Our ability to speak is innate, certainly; but our ability to speak English, however, is undoubtedly cultural" (Geertz, 1989, p.36). Our ability to eat is innate; however, our ability to eat rice and beans is cultural. The author further states that: "Man can be defined by the link between how innate abilities are transformed into actual behavior" (Geertz, 1989, p.37-38).

Despite Durkheim's contributions, it is necessary to criticize him by pointing to the analysis of society as structuralist, as if the same logic were applied to all spaces and time, without taking into account the contexts, deriving an understanding of the notion of society in a closed way. Durkheim treats social facts as things, but as the Austrian sociologist Michael Pollak states,⁷ it is not a question of addressing social facts as things, but of understanding how they become things, by whom they are validated as such, and how they hold themselves as things.

Therefore, the researcher must understand the context to explain the phenomenon, cause and effect relationship. It is not the effect, the act itself that must be analyzed, but the causes, the motivations, the whys, the lines between. Looking at the object of Durkheim, suicide, what matters

is how suicide is possible, how it occurs, what leads to the occurrence of this social phenomenon. We remember, by the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg,⁸ the search in between the lines, in the unsaid, on the edges, in what is not apparent, the reading behind things. In this sense, Ginzburg contrasts Durkheim with the *indicia* method.

Bringing this discussion to food, it is not only a matter of analyzing rice and beans, but to see how they were introduced into the national territory and the table of those who lived here, how they became choices, how they became a symbolic food of Brazilian cuisine and by whom they are regarded as such. Have a look that goes beyond the ingredient, with its nutritional and functional properties and organoleptic characteristics, but contemplate it as a cultural, social, economic, political element, added to the representations and symbologies that it can assume over a period in a given space.

Considering reflections on society from the perspective of Durkheim, and on culture from the perspective of Geertz, the next subitem of this article on modernity and food standardization is introduced from Renato Ortiz.

Pinch of modernity and food standardization from Ortiz

Some historical facts marked not only the time of those who lived them, but they left irreversible marks in the history of humanity. But none of them is as representative as the Industrial Revolution. Factory, wool, sheep, rural exodus, labor input, labor force, surplus value, social inequality, standardization, homogenization, capitalism, modernity. But after all, how do the Revolution and the consequent modernity affect us?

The standardization and homogenization of customs, behaviors, values, languages, clothing and food are evidences of this intervention, possible through Durkheim's social cohesion, previously discussed.

Reflections are made from the Brazilian sociologist Renato Ortiz,⁹ who discusses food standardization through Lucien Febvre, that sought to determine the origin and diffusion of basic fats (lard, butter and olive oil) in French territory.

Problematizing and consenting with the Spanish anthropologists of the feeding area, Contreras & Gracia,¹⁰ it is stated that the kitchens reflect the societies. "Each social group has a framework of references that guides the choice of their food. Some of these references are shared with other groups, others are unique" (Contreras; Gracia, 2011, p.139). However, this statement does not mean that eating behaviors remained static and did not suffer alternations in their societies and respective territories.

If History, Anthropology and Geography converge in the consolidation of the territoriality of cultures, as Ortiz affirms,⁹ Tourism and Gastronomy also play the same role of consolidating cultures in certain territories. However: “The advent of conservation techniques, the cheapness of transportation, and the invention of industrial food have radically transformed this picture. This is why some scholars are beginning to talk about the internationalization of eating behavior” (Ortiz, 2003, p. 79). Man dominates nature, and in this intention of dominating, he ends up being dominated.

According to the Italian historian Massimo Montanari,¹¹ (2008, p. 36), science and technology have always wanted to control time in two main lines of action: to prolong it with the diversification of species and to stop it with the techniques of conservation of food. Montanari¹¹ (2008, p. 38) still quotes the sociologist Girolamo Sineri, who says: “Canned food is pure anxiety”. It is emphasized that access to electricity in urban and rural areas is a relatively new reality in the context of human history. Conservation can be conceived as a principle of modernity, for today’s accumulation is necessary for tomorrow’s survival. A logic contrary to the thinking of the Guaraní people and some fishermen, for example.

Sausages, salami, vegetable and fruit compotes are food preservation processes that humankind has developed to increase the shelf life of products. In Luís da Câmara Cascudo¹² (2004, p. 152), Brazilian author of *History of Food in Brazil*, there are references on the conservation of meat in fat, especially lard, melted bacon of pork, in Portugal, in previous periods. Even cooking itself is a method of preservation along with salt. The techniques of food preservation were signs of availability of food in periods of abundance and / or scarcity.

In addition to food preservation, Ortiz⁹ (2003, p.81) says that two movements highlight the process of globalization: the diversification of products and the transition from traditional to industrial cuisine. Regarding the diversification of products, it can be said that there is a paradox, since at the same time that there was diversification, there was a drastic reduction of biodiversity. Potatoes in Peru are an example of this. According to the Centro Internacional de la Papa (CIP),^{bb13} headquartered in Lima, capital of Peru, there are more than 4,000 edible potato varieties found mainly in the South American Andes, and this Center harbors the seeds of all these species. Given this scenario, one wonders: how many species of potatoes are available on the world market? Could we list ten species? For reflection. The varieties are diminished and the distribution is increased; it is the logic of the market.

The traditional and the industrial cuisine live in an intense exchange of ingredients and techniques; on the one hand, the introduced dishes adapt to the local palate, being syncretized according to the prevailing culinary norms. And on the other hand, traditional dishes are incorporated into the industrial cuisine, but they lose their uniqueness and identity⁹ (Ortiz, 2003,

b See more at <<http://cipotato.org/potato/>>.

p. 77-78). The “traditional” cuisine nomenclature used by Ortiz is complex, but the trend toward food standardization is evident.

[...] the consumption of vegetables and dried fruit increasingly decreases, but the consumption of canned food, jellies, biscuits, industrial sweets, diet foods, frozen dishes etc, increases. Technological achievements “liberate” foods from the environment, from the soil that bound them to the regions (Ortiz, 2003, p. 84).

In this internationalization of eating behaviors, food detaches itself from its territory to be distributed worldwide. Thus, as one of the consequences of modernity, one can verify the rupture of the bond between place and food. Food on an industrial scale has no territorial relationship, and if it has, it is essentialized, as if every American consumes only hamburger; every Mexican, *tacos* and *nachos*; every Japanese, *sushi* and *sashimi*; and every Chinese, *yakisoba*. Ideas essentialized and internalized through the big chains of *fast food*, as Ortiz asserts⁹ (2003, p. 82): “In the case of McDonald’s, its Americanism matters less than the fact that it expresses a new food pattern, the *fast-food*”. It is not only the food, the ingredient, but the standardization of production, service and, why not say, the customer. Thus, the essentialized discussion on the origin and spread of fats in French territory is meaningless, as are other essentialized food claims.

Food standardization did not only occur in behaviors, practices and eating habits, but also in table manners, in “civility” at the table, a distinction of who has and who does not have it. The table is a border, because it separates the different ones and unites the same ones. The table is not democratic. Knowing how to be at the table is a symbol of culture, *status*, differentiation, modernity, civility. As it can be seen in the book *The Civilizing Process: 1. The History of Manners*, the German sociologist Norbert Elias,¹⁴ which reports the rules of conduct and behaviors at the table, which is a process of civility and good manners.

Modernity standardized eating behaviors. This modernity is reinvented through food discourses. If *fast food*, ready food, were the first signs of this food standardization, obesity was undoubtedly one of its consequences. What triggered a discourse of natural, healthy food, until the “medicalization” of food, that is, food became a medicine.

Our society is driven by the logic of the market, and the social coercion can be verified through the food discourses if a given product is beneficial or not to health. One day we learned that lard is bad; other day, we cannot consume butter; months later, soybean oil is our biggest enemy; the oil cannot be heated, and without seeing, twenty years later, the lard is the new allied to the fight against cardiovascular diseases. Therefore, capitalism, social cohesion, culture, meanings, modernity and standardization are intertwined in a tangle that influences eating behaviors.

The following are discussions on cultural and border reflections.

Pinch of Cultural and Border Reflections

Society is organized from boundaries, and just like it, borders are fluid. Boundaries are not natural; they are symbols of social relations and their coercion and cohesion. Therefore, it is not possible to understand social boundaries without contextualizing the notion of time and space.

If for Giddens² (2005, p.69), “each one of the individuals, in their daily life, recreates and reproduces society at all times; this phenomenon is at the origin both of the stability of the social organization and the infinite modifications of that same organization”. It is possible to dialogue with José Lindomar Coelho Albuquerque,¹⁵ in his text *Boundaries: between the ways of observation and the mazes of interpretation*, which addresses how people in their daily lives make the border, as the Brazilian, the Paraguayan, the Brazilian Paraguayan, make the border between Brazil and Paraguay. How the motoboy, the fisherman, the food, make the border? The frontier is the human, that is, it is the action of the human in the very formation of the boundaries.

This is agreed with Geertz,³ who states: “[...] if you want to understand what science is, you may see, firstly, not for its theories or discoveries, and certainly not for what its apologists say about it; you should see what practitioners of science do” (Geertz, 1989, p.4). Understand why they do what they do, and look beyond what is front of our eyes. If the goal is to understand the frontier, one should look, like Albuquerque, at those who make, live, and practice the frontier.

And if the goal is to understand dietary behaviors, one should look at food practitioners, the individuals, and their eating practices. But in addition, look beyond the thing itself, not looking at eating with hands or cutlery, but understanding why each one eats his/her own way. Interpreting what is being analyzed and going further, in a deeper reading. Geertz further states that human behavior is seen and can be understood as symbolic action.

The idea of polysemic boundaries, and built by those who dialogue with the boundaries, can be applied to all areas of knowledge and objects of study. Literature can discuss boundaries because it has boundaries. Just as food can. Knowing how to eat *versus* not knowing how to eat; the classic cuisines *versus* the regional cuisines; the erudite food *versus* the popular food; the typical food *versus* the cooked food.

In addition, it is necessary to observe our own physical senses that capture our sensory experience in the world, vision, taste, touch, smell, hearing, to understand how people operate their senses to act in the world and with each other¹⁵ (Albuquerque, 2014, p.65).

The historian Erneldo Schallenger,¹⁶ in the essay *Historical break and cultural (dis)continuities at the frontier: the challenges of the researcher*, contributes to the discussions about boundaries,

describing the process of approximation and estrangement actions during the colonization of America, focusing on border regions, and how cartographic sources were essential in this process. Geography highlights boundaries, and documents as well. The historian makes a retrospective of the colonization and shows how policies on the other side of the Atlantic, between Portugal and Spain, influenced directly in The Silver Basin. Guaranis, Jesuits, metropolis, colony, treaties, Nation-states, settlers, immigrants and Itaipu are intertwined in a plot, on various sides, by establishing national boundaries and their meanings. The boundaries are being built. They are social phenomena, and come from these interactions.

The author points out that the social subjects that construct the frontier do so from the place where they came from, and the world of meanings, symbols and representations that they had previously. Thus, relations at the boundaries end up producing differentiations. And “in the encounter of peoples with worlds of different signification and representation, the space happens to be configured as a symbolic stage where power relations are locked” (Schallenger, 2014, p.215). In this stage entangled by power relations, there is the establishment of concepts, ideas, identities, fixed cultures, and the determination of the boundaries between the Self and the Other expressed by the essentialisms.

Despite discussing essentialized identities, the sociologist Kathryn Woodward¹⁷ can contribute to this discussion because, according to the author, “essentialism” can have a biological and natural, or historical and cultural, support. However, regardless of the root, it remains essentialist in having a fixed, single, static conception of identity. For Woodward,¹⁷ in addition to the (essentialist) definitions themselves, a non-essentialist definition would take into account the explanation of how identities were formed, the processes and negotiations involved, and even how these identities changed over time, questioning whether, in fact, identities are fixed.

Essentializing the boundaries is part of daily life. The essentialization homogenizes all. It denies diversity. The essentialized frontier is the result of Nation-states. The idea of frontier arises from the construction of Nation-states. How to say that the chipa is Paraguayan without essentializing the border and chipa itself? Following the example of Schallenger, the answer would be to contextualize the chipa that is made from the staple food, the corn; that corn is found from the United States to Patagonia; which has indigenous roots; which has indigenous techniques; which contains Spanish influence; and that the territory where there was the preparation and consumption of the chipa today belongs to Paraguay, where it is still consumed. It is not to reduce the phenomenon, but to recognize that Paraguay exists, that it produces a food, loaded with techniques, and that this food preparation is capable of representing its own people.

Final considerations

The concepts of “society”, “culture” and “boundaries” are polysemic, fluid, flexible and permeate the lives of individuals. They are in our routine, in our daily lives. As the concept of frontier transcends the spatial and geographic determination sphere, even those who do not consider themselves in a border region, live in a social, cultural, political, economic, food sphere. From the series of social facts that could be chosen to discuss the three elements, we opted for a concrete fact: food.

Through the ideas of Durkheim, one can establish parallels in relation to the alimentary behaviors, since they are constructed from the cohesion and social morality. And they should not have a reductionist perspective when discussing such behaviors in the individual scope, since they are socially constructed.

These ideas agree with Geertz's: culture is a mechanism of control, socially constructed, on which the individual lacks and depends. And it is not the thing itself, the artefact, the object, the food, but its meanings and representations, as can be seen through the discussions about rice and beans, beef, insects and animal proteins in the national territory. They are also opposed to the concept of Durkheim, in what concerns to analyze the phenomenon from its effects.

Modernity homogenizes, neutralizes the different, tends to standardization. It standardizes customs, behaviors and foods. Conservation techniques, more financially accessible means of transportation, the constant technological development of industrial food, species diversification and food discourses gave subsidies for standardization, also called “internationalization” of eating behaviors. The food disconnects from the territory, it is no longer linked to it and its people; it is worldwide. It belongs to everyone, and it belongs to no one.

The idea of polysemic boundaries, and built by those who dialogue with the boundaries, can be applied to all areas of knowledge and objects of study, this being the main purpose of this subitem. The social subjects that construct the frontier do so from the place where they came from, and the world of meanings, symbols and representations that they had previously. Essentializing the boundaries is part of daily life. The search for the origin of a particular dish or ingredient is an indication of the act of essentializing the frontier and the dish itself. In this case, with the chipa discussion. Understanding a dish, an ingredient, a food without essentializing them must be the constant search of the food researcher.

Among speckled and sprinkled, reflections were made for a critical food approach in the perspective of the concepts of society, culture, modernity and boundaries. With this text, it is expected to foment further discussions on the social phenomenon of food.

Contributors

Stefanutti P worked on all steps, from designing the study to reviewing the final version of the article. Klauck S participated with indication of bibliography, discussions and interpretations, as well as the writing of the article. Gregory V participated with indication of bibliography, discussions and review of the article.

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