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**Food and Foodways Narratives: Recipes of Social Memory<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this article, originally in Portuguese, was published in the journal *Sociedade e Cultura*, see Amon and Menasche (2008) and was later included as a chapter of the book *Psicologia Social da Comida* (Amon 2014), see Amon and Menasche (2014). This article is a reworked version.

## Abstract

In this paper, the authors address the cultural dimension of food brought out through social action. Building their reflection on experiences lived by a Sephardi Jewish family established in Brazil and reviewing recipes of some daily dishes, the authors discuss how a community may manifest emotions, systems of relevance, meanings, social relationships, and collective identity through its food. They analyze the recipes and suggest that food and foodways can constitute themselves as narrative of a community's social memory arguing that these food narratives also build communities. As proposed by anthropology, it shows that a specific research territory can create questionings and open the way for more comprehensive analyses and interpretations. This pathway implies framing by the contextual and socio-historical influences, different from what is usual in other social sciences, where the individual instance is chosen because of its representativeness according to pre-existing criteria, serving as an illustration of analytical categories established at the formulation of an initial problem. The story told is not detached from a collective cultural symbolic system; rather, it is embedded in the social fabric of the symbolic products built and negotiated in culture and social milieus.

**Keywords:** recipes; social memory; narrative; identity; Jewish foodways.

## From a Cooking Recipe Notebook: Introduction

Late 1994, São Paulo. The grandmother of one of the authors of this paper was in the hospital, dying. Soon thereafter, one of her sisters (the closest one, also treated as a grandmother) would also pass away. Only one of the siblings remained, living in Rio de Janeiro. At that time, the sisters were between 90 and 100 years old.

In 1996, the granddaughter wrote her grandaunt a letter, from which we transcribe an excerpt:

*Hi, grandma Miriam:*

*At mom's suggestion, I'm writing to you for the following reason: I started to write down the recipes of our family's dishes, those that grandma Judith, grandma Rachel and you taught us to like, in order to make a booklet that I'll give away to all our relatives as a gift. Then I realized that we from the third generation do not know how to cook these foods we ate at our mothers' and grandmothers', and that this is our history, which shouldn't get lost. With this motivation, I started to write down the recipes together with mom and aunt Stella, and to put them in the computer so I could prepare the booklet for us. Well, today I was at mom's place asking some things about the story of you three and she couldn't answer me, suggesting that I should write you asking to tell me this story by letter. In the booklet's introduction, I'd like to tell a little of your story and the history of these Turkish foods we learned eating with you. So, if I'm not pushing the envelope, I'd ask you to write me; aunt Judithinha could bring me the letter when she comes back from Rio de Janeiro.*

*I would like to learn where you three were born, the name of the town, when you left, where you went to, when you arrived in Brazil, which language you spoke then, also about the food, who cooked at your house, how was the arrival in Brazil, how was living with Brazilian food, and anything else you might find interesting. My intention is to keep history alive.*

*I hope this won't be too much of a burden, but if you don't feel like writing about all this, please save yourself the trouble, all right?*

*As soon as I have the booklet ready I'll send over a copy to you.*

*Many kisses*

The reply is transcribed in full below:<sup>2</sup>

*Rio May 16, 96*

*Darling,*

*it was awkward receiving a letter from you, as you remembered I still exist.*

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<sup>2</sup> Both letters were published in full in a Cooking Recipe Notebook, gathering family recipes that was distributed exclusively among all descendants up to the fourth generation from the immigrants in this family. It is not available to the public in general. The Cooking Recipe Notebook was written in Portuguese except for the recipe's titles that appear in Ladino, as they were usually referred to in the family context. It comprises an introduction, featuring both letters; 43 recipes; a map showing Turkey in relation to Europe, Asia, Africa and other countries in the Middle Eastern; Turkey's political map showing the city of Kırklareli; and the facsimile of the letter handwritten by the grandaunt. The front cover shows the title and a photograph of the grand grandmother, the grandmother, and three grandaunts. The back cover shows a photograph of the grandmother and two grandaunts (all the three were referred to as grandmothers by the granddaughter), the one who wrote the letter and the other after which the Cooking Recipe Notebook was named. All real names mentioned in this paper were substituted by fictitious ones.

*I cannot recall anymore the recipes you're asking; as chance would have it, Judith [referring to her daughter, the same Judithinha of the previous letter, a namesake of Miriam's sister Judith] is bringing you a work, similar to what you have in mind, by the members of Wizo<sup>3</sup> in Rio, a very well-done affair. You might copy some recipes that interest you and your mother.*

*History of the grandmothers little interesting, interspersed with wars.*

*We were born in the european Turkey at the beginning of the century, at that time a part of the ottoman empire, in a little town on the border with Bulgaria, almost nestled in the Balkans, called Kirk-Klisse at the time, now Kirkklar Ele. Family name M., 4 sisters Stella, Rachel, Judith, Miriam. Family religion sephardic jews, that is stemming from jews driven out of Spain in 1592, time of the Inquisition.<sup>4</sup>*

*The ancestors probably lived in Italy at one time or another, hence the family name M.*

*My father was a tailor called Jacob, my mother, a heroin, was called Ruth.*

*We spoke archaic spanish with some turkish and french words.*

*As children, we watched the turkish-bulgarian war, our town being occupied 3 times by the enemy.*

*Education at the turkish schools was free of tuition, the turkish characters were arabic.*

*We studied at french school supported by the Aliança française*

*Universelle. Currently, Turkey has adopted catholic characters.*

*The Great War was declared in 1914, many allied countries against Germany, Turkey, Austria-Hungary, Romania etc.*

*My father was held prisoner of war in Romania, in labor camp. When the armistice came, time of the epidemics, the famous spanish flu, my father died in Bucharest. The last time I saw him I was 8 years old.*

*1918, my mother was now a penniless widow amidst very rich and selfish relatives in a backward town, where it was unusual for a woman to work. Judith was a teacher at the school, I was still a student. Mother sent to Istanbul, the capital, formerly Constantinople.*

*Stella was engaged when the war broke out, her fiancé not willing to be drafted, set out for Cuba. When the war ended, he requested Stella to go to Cuba, where they got married. The son, Jeremias R., is your mother's cousin, and an important accountant here in Rio.*

*The C. brothers, who led the business with the aim of returning to Turkey, decided to give up in order to avoid going to the war. They arrived once more in Porto Alegre and founded a shop dealing with silk and fine foreign articles, as there was no domestic manufacturing. It was the famous A la Ville de Bruxelles. Isaac, the eldest of the C. brothers, had proposed marriage to Judith when he was in Turkey, -at that time the mother didn't give her consent to such a far-reaching travel. After the war, distances became shorter. He repeated his entreaty. She came along with the P. family, wedded in P. Alegre and had a daughter, Sara. Later, the sons. Isaac's*

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<sup>3</sup> Established in England in 1920 and arriving in Brazil in 1926, the Women's International Zionist Organization defines itself as a global organization of Jewish women who do voluntary charity work. See <http://www.wizors.org.br/>

<sup>4</sup> The correct date is 1492.

*brother, Samuel, who became my husband, went to live at his brother's, where I met him when my brother in law Isaac caused us to come from Turkey. We adopted Brazil as our land, where we had the children who fill us with pride. I am sending along a copy of a document I received from Abrahão, [your] mom's cousin, and your relative too.*

*Kisses from aunt Miriam.*<sup>5</sup>

The granddaughter had been in a synagogue only once in her life. She had never lit a Shabbat candle and had rarely attended Pesach or Rosh Hashanah celebrations, mostly in her childhood. Apart from the Jewish school she attended, there was practically nothing Jewish about her life. At school, she took classes for many years on Hebrew and Jewish Culture, caring more for learning the language and how to write the characters than for the history and traditions of Jewish people.

This was her point of view until the death of her grandmother, when a very straightforward artifact was resignified: food. Since her childhood, the daily food at her home in Porto Alegre was different from that of several of her friends. There were no beans, rice, beefsteak, lettuce and tomato salad. There were instead *agristada, aroz kon domat, berendjena assada kon boyikos, mina de espinaka, truchi de repolho, kalavasutcho, borrekas de keso, boyikos de karne kon alho porro, takaut de berendjena, anginara*<sup>6</sup>.

If on the one hand this created a difference regarding these friends, for whom

this universe was strange, on the other hand the usual character of these flavors gave rise to and supported an everyday sense of communality with people she was not acquainted with, but she knew existed: a group of people coming from another place, speaking the same language, paying attention to the same details in life, practicing the same habits, eating the same foods – a community. Familiarity with these foods was generated by the fact that they were on the table every day, there was the repetition and the absence of reflection that characterize quotidian things. This familiarity by itself created an equally non-questioned sense of intimacy with this unknown group that ate similarly, a sense of identity with the community.

The Jewish community in the state where she lived comprised a total of 8.330 people more or less evenly distributed between male and female, most of which inhabited the capital of the state which is the city where this particular story takes place (7.051, again evenly distributed between male and female), according to a 1980 census (IBGE 1980). A 1992 Jewish community census reveals that the great majority of the Jewish community in the capital of the state was Ashkenazi and only a small portion was Sephardi: 86.7% of the family heads were Ashkenazi and 4.8% were Sephardi (others had mixed origin, either one parent Ashkenazi and the other Sephardi, or one parent Jewish and the other non-Jewish, or they did not know); 73.4% of spouses were Ashkenazi and 3.2% were Sephardi. The same census shows that only 2.2% of the parents of both family heads and spouses living in the capital of the state were originally from Turkey. (Brumer 1994)

Such a small Turkish Sephardi Jewish community in town used to nurture straight bonds. Families knew each other and women frequently met to play cards, sew, knit, embroider, make hand-woven tapestry together. Food was part of the informal meetings and could include typically Sephardi Jewish treats. They also met each other at the synagogue on special

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<sup>5</sup> Spelling and grammar mistakes in the original letter are reflected in capitalization and stylistic features in the translation.

<sup>6</sup> Named in Ladino as they were in everyday life, these Sephardi Jewish foods refer respectively to: egg and lemon sauce, rice with tomatoes, baked eggplant with meatballs, spinach and matzo pie, stuffed cabbage rolls, zucchini and cheese pie, cheese pastry, meatballs with leek, eggplant and ground beef pie, sweet-and-sour artichoke.

occasions such as weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, Rosh Hashanah and Iom Kipur, but the family we are talking about did not consider itself religious and did not use to go to the synagogue, limiting conviviality with other Sephardi Jewish families to leisure time. Nevertheless, those encounters were filled with Sephardi Jewish culture, either in the treats or in the language they all spoke, a mix of Portuguese filled with words, expressions and sayings in Ladino, simple manifestations of a whole worldview. When she was a child, she attended eventually those Sephardi women informal gatherings with her mother, though she did not enjoy, she would rather play with her friends. She was then unaware of what those meetings would come to signify later when she became adult.

This Jewish community was settled in a state heavily marked by immigrants' influences from different origins, among which German, Italian, African, and Portuguese. Though these very different traditions, habits and costumes were all mixed and spread in the local culture and cultivated in everyday life in a number of different manners, the state represented itself as characterized by conservatism and different peoples tended to nurture their roots through food.

This was the context within which she was raised. The importance of Sephardi Jewish food in her life became evident when she realized that her grandmother was dying, that eventually her mother would die and she would not be able to reproduce herself the flavors of her childhood either for herself or for the children she could eventually have. She hadn't learned the dishes. The family's entire third generation hadn't. All life long, food had been taken for granted, it was simply there on the table. And when it would no longer be there, what else would fail to be?

Practical cooking knowledge is traditionally socialized through generations among women, in the small actions repeated in the shared day-to-day of the family's kitchen (Giard 1994/2002). The increased

penetration of women in the professional market and the resulting changing gender relationships within the family could lead us to think that the women's major role in the family nutrition would be altered; this, however, is contradicted by Counihan's (2004) study about the Italian region of Tuscany. Eating has been transformed indeed, especially in terms of preparation time, which to a certain extent has shifted from the home kitchen to the food industry. With it comes a reduction of the time shared in the kitchen, when knowledge was passed on from mother to daughter. But the flavors produced from the inherited technique and wisdom can also be transmitted through the family's recipes circulating among its female members. And that is precisely what the granddaughter is claiming as she writes the letter to her ancestor.

This story is personal and singular, yet it introduces many others. As proposed by anthropology, it shows that a specific research territory can create questionings and open the way for more comprehensive analyses and interpretations. This pathway implies framing by the contextual and socio-historical influences, different from what is usual in other social sciences, where the individual instance is chosen because of its representativeness according to pre-existing criteria, serving as an illustration of analytical categories established at the formulation of an initial problem (Fonseca 1999). This story is not detached from a collective cultural symbolic system; rather, it is embedded in the social fabric of the symbolic products built and negotiated in culture and social milieus. The food mentioned in the letter narrates the experiences of a community, building and maintaining the social memory of a group to which grandparents and grandchildren belonged for the simple fact of eating the same food.

The relationship food has with memory has been established in different ways during the course of studies on the subject in Social Sciences. The *Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery* dedicated

one of its events to this relationship as seen from diverse perspectives, see Proceedings in Walker (2001). One of the papers presented at the symposium focuses Jewish food as a medium of remembrances and assessment of the past in a community in Northern Greece (Kravva 2001). This relationship is also examined by Sutton (2001) based on ethnographic research conducted on a Greek island, privileging the discussion of theoretical aspects. In her prominent book *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from Women of Terezín*, De Silva (1996) approached the "dream cooking" (p. xx) of the Jewish prisoners at the Terezín concentration camp during the Holocaust in a manuscript cookbook analyzing how the recipes of the food never to be eaten again, written by starving Jews, were means to maintain identity, memory and heritage; see also De Silva and Dumitresco (2016). The analysis and interpretation that Tye (2010) makes of her mother's collection of baking recipes in an autoethnographic approach draw on recollections of herself and others to read subtexts and offer insights into her mother's biography as well as into the life of other women with whom she had something in common. By the time the author conducted this research, her mother had already passed away and memories constituted the way to supplement meanings to the recipes.

The dimension we are bringing to the fore in the context of food and memory studies (1) approaches food and foodways from their communicative dimension, (2) relates to the specificities of daily eating experiences, the little routine food facts, rather than food associated to rites, religious festivities or commemorative events, and (3) focuses food prepared, consumed or simply imagined (dreamt) by immigrants in a geographic, social, cultural, economic, and political environment distinct from the original one. The relationship we establish between food, memory, and community is based on the notion that if food has a

communicative dimension, as speech has, then it can tell stories.<sup>7</sup>

## Stock: Food and Culture

A good sauce or a good soup is made from a stock. Stock consists in a slow process of cooking, liquid reduction, and flavor concentration. It can be made of beef, fish, chicken, or vegetables. Regardless of the main ingredient, these stocks have some characteristics in common: they are clear and fat-free. Chicken stock, for instance, is prepared by baking chicken bones in the oven, then cooking them in water, removing the fat, adding vegetables (carrot, leek, onion) and simmering it for approximately three hours in order to reduce and concentrate the flavors. There are variations in the manner of baking, which bones to bake, the vegetable assortments, and the cooking time. The stock imparts depth, intensity, and strength, enhancing the presence of the main ingredient of a sauce or soup as well as the remaining ingredients, while providing a light texture. It is the basis, the pure foundation.

The stock of the relationship between food and memory is culture. Particularly – compared to the satisfaction manners of other natural biological needs of the human species –, eating demands selection and combination activities (of ingredients, ways of preparing, intake and disposal forms etc.) that manifest choices made by a community, conceptions supported by a social group, therefore expressing a culture. What you eat, with whom you eat, when, how and where you eat – it's all defined by culture. "Man eats according to the society he belongs to" (Garine 1987, 4).

Eating concerns all human beings, it is universal, general; food defines a domain of options, it manifests particularities, it

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<sup>7</sup> The hypothesis of *food as social storytelling* or simply *narrative food* was developed by Amon (2004, 2014), Amon, Guareschi and Maldavsky (2005) and Amon and Maldavsky (2007).

establishes identities. Food is eating transformed by culture (Da Matta 1987, 1997).

In this paper, food is conceived as comprising the concept of foodways (Yoder 1972), which, inspired by European studies, injected new life into North American folklife food studies, widening its focus: while earlier it concentrated on the foods themselves, the gathering of cooking recipes, table etiquette, and nutritional value of food, now the perspective includes the psychological and social dimensions, encompassing attitudes, habits, meal systems, and material culture as related to food. When we refer to food, we insert it in this tradition and refer to a gamut encompassing, according to Long (2006), activities such as procurement, preservation, preparation, presentation of food, performance in foodways, consumption, and clean-up<sup>8</sup>, understood as socially-built processes involving exchange and negotiation of practices and meanings.

Learning the complex formed by the eating practices and wisdom of a certain social group – identified by its particular habits and beliefs – takes place early on and on a daily basis. This learning should be seen as part of a substantive body of historically derived cultural material. After all, “food-related behavior repeatedly reveals the culture in which each person is

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<sup>8</sup> The dimensions and aspects that the author associated to each of these processes are: *procurement*: ways of obtaining ingredients and items related to food; *preservation*: strategies to keep food frozen, fresh or stored; *preparation*: ways of cutting, seasoning and handling foods to be cooked or prepared, choice of recipes and transformations applied to them, decisions concerning flavor, equipment and cooking or preparation methods; *presentation of food*: the food itself, including the recipes chosen and the ingredients used, manners of actually presenting the food, bringing it to the table and serving people; *performance in foodways*: the place of the foods in the meal system, ways of social interaction through food; *consumption*: the manner in which people eat, including utensils, mixes created, and the order in which the foods are eaten; and *clean-up*: cleaning and disposal activities after preparing and consuming the food (Long 2000).

included” (Mintz 2001, 32). Also, “culture’s conceptual abstraction is concretized on the plate” (Millán 2002, 277).

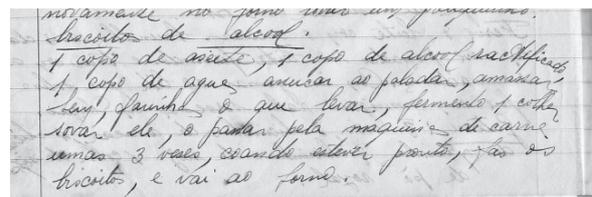
## Cooking Recipe 1: A Food Voice

### *Alcool cookies*

*1 cup of hoil, 1 cup of rectified alcool, 1 cup of water, sughar to taste, mix well, flour as needed, mix well, yeast 1 spoon, knead it or grind it some tree times with the meat grinder, when it’s ready, form the cookies and put in the oven.<sup>9</sup>*

Figure 1 shows the facsimile of this recipe.

Figure 1. Facsimile of the recipe *Alcool cookies*.



Source: Personal archive.

This recipe was handwritten on a notebook by one of the elderly women belonging to the Sephardi Jewish family mentioned in this paper’s introduction. The spelling is characteristic of the time when it was written and the way this lady, who originally spoke Turkish and Ladino<sup>10</sup>, learned Portuguese.

The recipe is unsophisticated. It shows its belonging to a time when science had not yet penetrated the cooking universe – or, as Koyré (1980) would have it, to a world of “more or less”. The lack of accuracy in the amount of the ingredients (“sughar to taste”, “flour as needed”) and the procedures (“mix well”, “form the cookies”)

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<sup>9</sup> Spelling mistakes in the recipes are intentional, reflecting misspellings in the original.

<sup>10</sup> Ladino – also known as Judaeo-Spanish – is the language spoken by the Jewish communities driven out of Spain in 1492, migrating to Morocco, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, and Turkey.

imparts to this cooking text the simplicity of personal notes. However, the woman already knew how to make the recipe, she had been doing it for a long time, which indicates that she was not writing it down for herself, but rather to transmit it to the next generations of the family. The passage of a practice into writing reveals the desire of permanence of the food in the community displaced from its original location, perhaps because she became aware of a changing world.

Waxman (1996) highlighted the complexity of apparently simple cooking writings, such as these *alcohol cookies*. They indicate an underlying confidence: the confidence that the recipe's writer is able to, in few words, few numbers and rather imprecise language, convey exactly what she means, and at the same time the confidence that the individual reading the recipe understands exactly what the writer calls for. The form of the writing reveals a very strong bond between writer and reader, who share knowledge about ingredients and cooking techniques, as well as the expected result. A straightforward account of ingredients and method seems sufficient, assuming that all the rest would emerge from shared experience and common sense. There is proximity between who is writing and who is reading.

The recipe mentions "sugar to taste". Someone could ask: to whose taste? But the question does not make any sense, for if there was any doubt about it, the amount would be informed, as is the case with oil and alcohol. The fact that the taste is not subject to questioning presupposes that there is an assumed taste in the family, which will extend to future generations as being "the" taste possible, "the" taste expected in alcohol cookies. There is confidence that taste is collective. The same applies to the amount of flour: "flour as needed" (in order to what?), also to the procedure "mix well" (to what point?) and baking "in the oven" (how long? at which temperature? until it gets how?). Everything non-verbal about the recipe is assumed at

the recipient level in the form of implied wisdom, built and kept through quotidian experience, a knowledge that is not questioned, knowledge belonging to life as it is lived. The recipe narrates the sharing of wisdom that is maintained as social memory and, by being transmitted through the recipe, tells the story of how a community understood and accepted the form, texture, and taste of a food.

The relationship established here between food and memory is based on the notion that food has a communicative dimension. This perspective was widely explored by several authors in anthropology (specifically Lévi-Strauss 1966/1997 and Douglas 1972) and semiotics (Barthes 1961/1993). These scholars started with an analogy between food and the linguistic system, presenting questions regarding the conventions and rules that regulate the ways in which food items (conceived as signs in a system) are categorized and combined. Food is perceived as the manifestation of an underlying structure that may be apprehended, leading to an understanding of the characteristics of a society.

Working from the perspective that food is a means of communication, Hauck-Lawson (1992, 1998) developed the concept of food voice<sup>11</sup> to refer to the dynamic, creative, symbolic and singular character through which food serves as a channel of communication. Thus, food would constitute a medium to manifest meanings, emotions, world views, identities, and also a way of transformation by means of conflict resolution, implementation of changes, waivers. The notion of food voice stresses its potential to approach topics such as tradition, ethnicity, harmony, discord, transience, identity.

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<sup>11</sup> The journal *Food, Culture & Society* dedicated a whole number to the theme of food voice (*Food, Culture & Society* 2004, vol. 7, n. 1). One of the papers published in that number related recipes to the expression of identities and focuses food voice as a vehicle for memories, teaching to listen to this voice (Long 2004).

That author researched three Polish families living in New York, outlining the role and meanings attributed to food by people sharing the same ethnic identity, notwithstanding differences in time of residence in the United States. In one of the cases examined, the seventy-five years old woman interviewed had been born in the United States, grown in Poland from her sixth year onwards and later returned to the United States, a very distant event at the time of the interview. The nostalgia and remembrances of the good flavors of the past served as inspiration for her to recreate and seek in her cooking practices an approximation between these flavors and those of the hosting location, even when the original ingredients could not be found. Soups and bread in her Polish childhood had a sour taste. Although she currently does not bake bread in the United States, she included in her cooking sour salt and lemons (ingredients which she cannot recall as being present during the period she lived in Poland) as emblems helping her to seek the old flavors in the current ones.<sup>12</sup> In order to recover the flavors of the past, she recreates that taste adding sour salt to chicken soup and lemons to pea soup. She thus transforms recipes to recover experiences from her community of origin. The food voice manifests the memory of flavors and experiences of the community where she spent her childhood and adolescence. “Food habits can change completely as we grow up, but the memory and the weight of early food learning and some of the social forms learned through it remain, maybe forever, in our conscience, as shown by Proust’s madeleine, the most famous case.” (Mintz 2001, 32)

The same approach of food as a voice that manifests meanings, ways of being in the world, identity, ethnicity, and other dimensions of life informs the reflection about traditional handmade food products, as is the case of the serrano cheese from the region of Campos de Cima da Serra

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<sup>12</sup> In her own words: “I don’t remember sour salt or lemons in Poland.” (Hauck-Lawson 1998, 24).

(mountain region in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil). Although the specificity of this kind of product is, to a great extent, associated to the physical characteristics of a given territory, its particularity is determined by the cultural dimension. Its differentiation results from a shared practical knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation, and also from a taste shaped locally from quality perceptions socialized within a community to the extent the product is part of a way of life. Thus, although the Brazilian law authorizes selling raw (unpasteurized) milk cheese only after it undergoes a minimum aging of 60 days, the shared experience among local producers and consumers tends to consider *good serrano* cheese as a cheese that is *yellowish*, which occurs from 15 to 20 days of aging (Cruz 2012, Menasche and Krone 2012).

If food is a voice that expresses meanings, as speech does, then it can tell stories.<sup>13</sup> The alcohol cookies recipe narrates a story of trust between people. It tells that the vitality of food does not dwell in the measurability of its components, but rather in the caring relationship among the family members – above all, trust is based on the sharing of wisdom; the belief in the communion of notions and the safety originating from it are acts of caring generosity. The recipe also tells that taste is a collective construction. The collectivization of taste does not need to be negotiated anymore, it is already a component of common sense, a tradition in

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<sup>13</sup> The term “stories” (or “narratives”) alludes to discursive verbal manifestation, but also to what lies behind it. For a detailed account of the concept, a theoretical and methodological deepening of the approach to food and foodways as narrative sequences, see Amon (2004, 2014) and Amon, Guareschi and Maldavsky (2005). For a contextualization and introduction to the theoretical hypothesis of food as social storytelling (narrative food), see Amon (2004, 2014) and Amon and Maldavsky (2007). Harris-Shapiro (2006) analyzes food voice as narrative among North American Jewish women, and adopts the term “narrative” as a cognitive and discursive genre where incidents are integrated in a consistent, chronologically organized way, constituting forms of social discourse.

its stable components: one knows how the cookies are supposed to taste like, it isn't necessary to measure the sugar to reproduce the taste. The same applies to the cooking form and doneness. The recipe also tells that there is no need for scientific precision in the narrative, since the perfect reproduction of the food is not the main issue at stake. Variation is acknowledged and valued within the parameters of implied collective acceptance. There is an assumed foundation underlying the alcohol cookies recipe: the assumption of community. Therefore, this recipe tells a story that recovers the memory of what the community elected as a value.

## Cooking Recipe 2: Quotidian Life and Changing Identities

*Aroz kon domat*

*rice*

*1 spoon of tomato paste or concentrate Elefante brand*

*oil*

*salt*

*warm water*

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*Warm the oil. Fry the rice well in plenty of oil (until it covers the bottom of the pan) and salt. When it is well fried, add the tomato paste and fry it too, mixing well. Fry until it gets like popcorn not too burnt. When it is really fluffy, lower the heat, add warm water so it overtops the rice by some 2 fingers. Place the lid on, increase the heat to the maximum. When it starts to get dry, taste it. If it is raw, add more water. If it isn't too raw, mix it, lower the heat and let it cook a little more with the lid on.*

In the alcohol cookies recipe, we observed the assumption of the community as affirmation of a collective identity. The rice

with tomatoes – *aroz kon domat*<sup>14</sup> – recipe, extracted from the referred Sephardi Jewish family's Cooking Recipe Notebook<sup>15</sup>, brings out another dimension of this assumption: food as an indicator of changing identities.

Rice with tomatoes is a simple, quotidian food. In this family, it is also a daily dish. Different recipes for this Sephardi dish indicate distinct ways of adding tomato: tomato purée (Grupo Aliyah da Wizo-Rio de Janeiro 1995, 104); fresh tomato sauce (Sternberg 1998, 277); tomato sauce, or, for Italian Jews, “cooking the rice simply with stock and braising tomatoes separately” (Goldstein 2000, 109); tomato purée or non-seasoned tomato sauce (Algranti 2002, 255); “tomato sauce, tomato purée, or smooth or chunky tomato salsa” (Marks 2005, 437). “Tomato paste or concentrate Elefante brand”<sup>16</sup> joined the recipe after the family's migration, when they were already settled in Brazil. The substitution by the industrialized version of the ingredient that gives the twist to *aroz kon domat* expresses a new synthesis produced from the recipe brought by the immigrants, whose customs and world view are transformed through interaction with the hosting society.

This phenomenon is not uncommon among Sephardi Jews, who after being expelled from Spain undertook radical changes in ingredients and cooking practices. Among those entering Turkey, for example, garlic – so characteristic of their food in Spain – was removed after they realized that its taste disgusted the local Muslims (Cooper cited in Goldstein 2000). In particular, due to the intimate contact between Jewish and Muslim women, who shared recipes, stories, music, news, the Turkey-based Sephardi Jews adopted much of the Turkish cooking, especially the sweets, so that the Jewish versions of

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<sup>14</sup> Also known as Turkish pilaf, Sephardic red rice, or Spanish rice.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Elefante*<sup>®</sup> is a nation-wide trademark of industrialized tomato concentrate available in the Brazilian market.

Turkish dishes are more "accurate" than those by Greek Orthodox Christians (Stavroulakis cited in Goldstein 2000, 18). The proximity between Jews and Ottomans was also evident in the adoption of Turkish garments by Jews (Goldstein 2000). In the migration process to Turkey, changes occurred in the original material culture through contact with new ways of eating, dressing, living, farming etc.<sup>17</sup>

The "tomato paste or concentrate Elefante brand" included in the family recipe indicates and results from the transformation of taste (industrialized tomato paste or concentrate) and cooking practices (tomato sauce, purée or pulp is no longer homemade). Just as the banning of garlic upon arriving in Turkey might mean an attempt to dilute the limits distinguishing Sephardi Jews from the surrounding society<sup>18</sup>, the adoption of the Elefante® tomato concentrate, resulting from the contact the family's women had with the new Brazilian neighbors – in whose pans different origins were mixed –, could mean the construction of a new proximity, the interaction with other identities. Moreover, as they adopted an industrialized product,

symbol of modernity, they showed the wish to identify with a new age.<sup>19</sup>

*Aroz kon domat* is a daily food brought by a family from a faraway land, and yet it is a food recreated, produced and described in a new location, at a new time, resulting from quotidian negotiations of meaning. This food – food in general – constitutes what Moscovici and Vignaux (2000, 165) call a "kernel meaning", "a reference [...] to the sense of the utterance" around which lies a horizon. In other words, food is like a semantic focus constituting a leading clue to the understanding of a whole world of expressions, a horizon, of stabilization and mobility of ideas, concepts, practical knowledges, tradition, beliefs, and identities. As seen in the analyzed example, on this horizon there are social groups relating, identities redesigning their limits, recipes in transformation.

Coexistence between communities has transformed the limits that differentiate one community from the other, and consequently the constitutive features of the collective identities; what was once a homogeneous space shared by a collectivity and experienced as natural and unquestionable (the feeling of belonging) is shaken, and people lose their old reference frameworks while gaining freedom to test new ways of living (Jovchelovitch 2007). "[...] holding a particular identity is a matter of daily and complex cultural work. Much of this cultural production is quotidian; what one chooses to wear, to eat, or talk about reweaves the pattern of identity/ies anew, and communicates powerfully one's own identifications to others." (Harris-Shapiro 2006: 71). It is in everyday food, as well as in other dimensions of manifestation of the material culture in quotidian life, that we can

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<sup>17</sup> The transformation of the material culture of communities with distinct habits in a migration process is common to other ethnic groups. "When they settled in rural regions of Rio Grande do Sul, the German immigrants brought with them customs and traditions that would be transmitted to the succeeding generations. But as they arrived in the new land, their knowledge and practices already started to undergo modifications. Just as the thick woolen clothes would be substituted by cotton or flax twill, straw hats would be adopted for working instead of felt ones, and women would exchange dark, heavy dresses for lighter ones (Roche 1969), aspects relating to several work and life dimensions would undergo changes." (Menasche and Schmitz 2007, 78) Wheeler and climate play an important role in the way people modify previous habits and respond to their needs for clothing and foodways.

<sup>18</sup> We could think the same about the daily menu of Jews in the Middle Ages, studied by Dolader (1998, 373), which "barely deviated from that of the Christians, except in regard to preparing and using certain animal raw materials".

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<sup>19</sup> Harris-Shapiro (2006, 69) shows how the Jewish foodways may serve both to unite Jews with their own folk and to articulate limits between Jewish and non-Jewish worlds, revealing an "intricate dance" between Judaism and Americanism that characterize Jewish culture in the United States. Thus, that author questions this potential evidence of acculturation or Jewish nostalgia, and proposes understanding the phenomenon as personalized Jewish identities.

better realize the affirmation and changes of identities through the coexistence of communities with distinct origins and cultures – a feature not only of migration processes, but also of globalization.

Ritual foods – characteristic to celebrations and rites of passage – imply crystallization. These foods are associated to *totemic dishes*, bearing great symbolic value and thus constituting identity milestones of the group (Contreras 2007). They are laid on the table in order to reaffirm an ancestry, a tradition, a belonging to the community. Therefore, they are less permeable to change.

It is necessary to take heed of potential shifts between quotidian and ritual. In an article analysing Claudia Roden's (1970, 1999) and Colette Rossant's (1999, 2003) cookbook memoirs, Naguib (2006) shows how for Egyptian Sephardi Jews established in Paris in a situation perceived as of exile, a dish of *ful medames* – fava beans cooked with pickled turnips, onions, and hot peppers, a simple food traditionally belonging to quotidian life at the time when they lived in Cairo – becomes a ritual food, a dish served on Sundays, around which memory is cultivated and identity reaffirmed. Topel's (2003) study analyzes the adoption in quotidian life of Jewish dietary laws, characteristic of ritual practices associated to eating, by a group of neo-orthodox Jews in São Paulo. These two distinct cases have in common the transformation of quotidian in exception. It is not this quotidian food, altered in its essence – where the usual is removed from daily life or the unusual becomes characteristic of daily life –, which we wish to deal with.

In everyday food, not transformed in ritual, there is room for the integration of different ingredients, techniques, utensils, ways of preparing, inasmuch as old meaning can be negotiated and new meanings can be incorporated. It is in everyday life where we can notice how fluid the limits are in a community's outline. The result is that quotidian food is a rich voice allowing for

the plural character in the identities – and consequently, the social memory of a community – to be heard.<sup>20</sup>

Eating behaviors reveal the strategies enabling a group and its members to outline an identity and a local distinction at the same time (Garrigues-Cresswell and Martin 1998). The *aroz kon domat* recipe is a voice narrating the identity affirmation of a Sephardi Jewish community settled in Brazil, expressing its distinction in relation to others, whilst reporting – through the Elefante® tomato concentrate as the protagonist in a traditional recipe – the transformation this identity suffered with migration and time. This voice narrates and reconstructs the immigrant group's social memory.

## Food, Social Memory, Narrative and Community

Our point of departure was a letter written by a granddaughter to her grandmother seeking to recover the history of a Sephardi Jewish immigrant family coming from Turkey and settled in Brazil. The letter was written in the context of the preparation of a Cooking Recipe Notebook for the family, assembling the recipes of the Jewish foods served on an everyday basis – the sole aspect of Judaism the granddaughter recognized in her upbringing. From this story, we analyzed some cooking recipes of this family, approaching the relationship food bears with a group's memory, based on culture. We proposed that quotidian food voice, in opposition to ritual food, narrates negotiations of meaning and affirms both the identity of a community and its transformations arising from coexistence

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<sup>20</sup> This could be considered as applying particularly to Jewish communities, since the Jewish religion is seen as “an orthopractic religion, where ethics and ritual are inextricably interwoven, leading to a definition of Judaism as a religion of prose rather than poetry, a religion celebrating quotidian facts rather than the *pathos* inherent to extraordinary moments” (Sacks cited in Topel 2003, 205).

with other social groups. The stories told by a food from another place in the place hosting it recover the memory of the place of origin. While they reaffirm and reconstruct this memory for the community's future generations, the food narratives may incorporate new features to the memory. The food narratives solidify and transform identity, the system of belongings, and the world views of the community in its new context. We are dealing then with social memory and what the individual memory can recover from it. The inability of this family's third generation to cook Sephardi Jewish food could mean more than losing the taste of childhood – it could mean the sinking into oblivion of a group's social memory.

The notion of food as narrative and the relationship of food with social memory and identities were established throughout this paper. The association deserving further exploration is between community and (food) narratives.

A community is characterized by ties that extrapolate functional and bureaucratic social relationships – they are chiefly ties of caring and belief sharing, where the people involved wish to be accepted and loved, and in turn love and accept. Community is “a kind of life in society ‘where everyone is called by name’, that is, where all are unique and thus may have their say, speak their mind, express their opinion” (Guareschi 2004, 57). This notion assumes that human beings are not isolated individuals, with total independence in regard to the others, nor are they parts of a machine whose functioning is independent from its constitutive parts; they are persons whose ontology is based on the relationships they establish: their being *is* in relationships. Therefore, a community is neither a sum of individuals nor a partial and massifying totalitarian reality; it is the fabric created by the exchanges where the paradox of individuality and whole reaches a compromise. It is a way of living in society where we need the others (person is relationship) and we have a name, we are unique, irreplaceable (Guareschi 2004, 56-

57). For a community to exist, there must be relationship, and relationship is the essence itself of the notion of human being as a person. The community provides the symbolic and material resources (often as quotidian wisdom guiding practices in daily life) allowing people to experience the world and achieve non-*a priori* intersubjective constructions, such as belonging, being together and feeling being together. (Jovchelovitch 2007). It is by sharing these resources that they remain in community.

Jovchelovitch (2007) makes a case that, through storytelling, social knowledge becomes life, as well as representations of the past and identity presentations. According to that author, narratives allow communities to recover the memory of what has happened, structure experience in a time sequence, give meaning to events, and build individual and social future. Narratives link events in a consistent story and relate them to the social identity of a community. They are interwoven with the construction and continuity of communities, with the production of common sense wisdom shared by the persons in a group. They allow reflection, questioning and criticism on communitarian life and historical heritage. Storytelling is one of the ways through which communities comprehend their past, their present and their future.

As they express the life of the communities (Jewish, and others), the oral, written, and practical food narratives preserve and transform the identity and social memory. Nevertheless, their task is greater than that: food narratives build communities. As they prepare Jewish food on a daily basis or transmit the recipes to the next generations, people reaffirm that they *are* as related to the others, that they belong *together* with the others who perform the same practices. Thus they build a community. Food and foodways performed and repeated on a daily basis constitute a social story telling that makes communities and, as such, provides substance for the constitution of social memory.

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