

Projeto de pesquisa de Mestrado: A Criação da Cozinha Nacional Brasileira 1940 – 1950.

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Este é uma versão primeira do capítulo introdutório da minha Tese de Mestrado em História a ser defendida na Universidade de Tel Aviv. Este capítulo é um embasamento teórico que apresenta uma lista da bibliografia relevante tendo uma visão crítica que esta bibliografia oferece como base teórica.

Na continuação do trabalho, estou interessada em analisar, embasada no material teórico apresentado no primeiro capítulo, a criação da *Cozinha Nacional Brasileira* – conceito que, como mostro no capítulo teórico, é uma criação deliberada da sociedade e é parte de uma ideologia nacional. A análise deste processo tem como referência de pesquisa no campo empírico o livro “Comer Bem – Dona Benta”, devido ao seu alcance social e a sua permanência como literatura “resistente”, o que cumpre o requisito espaço-tempo no âmbito da investigação. A proposta básica, neste sentido, é a de que as primeiras edições do livro que foram publicadas no início dos anos 40 do século XX representam este processo de criação desta *Cozinha*.

Em primeiro lugar, a autora do livro, que é um personagem fictício – Dona Benta, de Monteiro Lobato -- representa uma realidade nacional imaginária, uma idealização da imagem da “boa avó brasileira”, que foi escolhida pelo real autor do livro por representar uma época e uma classe social específica na sociedade brasileira. O livro foi publicado por uma editora conhecida e representativa na época, a Companhia Editora Nacional, que não põe em questão sua posição político-social e que em muito contribui para a criação do nacionalismo brasileiro.

As principais fontes que utilizo para a pesquisa são as primeiras edições do livro “Comer Bem”, documentos relacionados com o livro e entrevistas com mulheres que eram então adultas nos anos 40 do século XX e que possuíam o livro em suas casas usando-o como livro

de receitas. Através destas entrevistas, estou interessada em analisar a forma pela qual estas mulheres entendem este conceito de *Cozinha Nacional Brasileira*, a forma que elas avaliam o referido livro, a relação entre ambos e o diálogo criado a partir dos mesmos.

Food and "cuisine"

The word "food" tends to limit the outlook into a specific direction – ingredients that are used to satisfy the eating behavior. Food is not just a collection of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and calories, but a rich cultural bond of relations between various social groups, as well as a vessel for the creation of personal, gender, and national identity¹. As such it can be approached by a variety of disciplines: biology, nutrition, sociology, psychology, political science, anthropology, history, etc. Gvion, an anthropologist that studied food habits of the Israeli Arab population, claims that as food constitutes an integral part of daily routine, the symbolic, cultural, and political aspects of it are not taken as serious as they deserve in historical discussions². It is our personal experience that although the traditional historiographies indeed lack in that respect, the topic of nineteenth and twentieth century food related behavior has been discussed by many historians in various regions over the last few decennia and more specifically in the Americas there is abundant research available.

Since it is the purpose of this paper to look into the historical development of the food-related behavior within and between specific communities, we will review some ethnographies as well as historiographies dealing with that subject. Therefore we choose to enter the concept of "cuisine" which contains a meeting point between three interrelated topics: "food", "communities", and "cultural treasure".

According to S.W.Mintz, an anthropologist that did abundant research on food related behavior, the concept of "cuisine" is something more than a mere collection of food recipes shared by a specific social entity. It is considered to have an additional value that cannot be found in a dictionary, but can be circumscribed as the cultural heritage that a specific community possesses in regard to their food. It is the food they grew up with and feed their offspring with; the food they have learned how to prepare and teach their children to prepare. In short, the anthropologic standpoint as represented by Mintz is that "cuisine" includes the dishes that members of a community can talk about and are experts on³.

¹ Gvion, Liora, *Culinary bridges versus culinary barriers: social and political aspects of Palestinian cookery in Israel* (Jerusalem, 2006) pp.14-15.

² Ibid, Ibid.

³ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting food, tasting freedom: excursions into eating, culture, and the past* (Boston, 1996), p. 96 .

On the other hand, historians view the concept of “cuisine” differently, in a more nation oriented framework. As Pilcher, a historian specializing in Mexican cultural history, demonstrated by quoting a well known French gastronome J.A. Brillat-Savarin : “Tell me what you eat and I’ll tell you who you are,” explaining how the concept of “cuisine” is part of the core of national identity formation⁴.

Mintz describes the culinary traditions pre-18th century, as having been regionally defined only in the lower social class, whereas the higher class all over Europe shared food habits with each other and ate very different from the lower class population in their surroundings. The lower class differed distinctly per region in their food habits⁵. Concepts such as "haute cuisine" and "grand cuisine" appear then to be class-related on the one hand and national or even international in status, in contrast to "regional cuisine" which was not class-related and thought to be the more authentic form of "cuisine", based upon the historic situation of a community with a given supply of food ingredients and limited by specific travel and communication boundaries⁶. Those dishes that could not be easily transported or are hard to copy remained truly "regional" in essence⁷. Mintz agrees with J.F.Revel that the "regional cuisine" constitutes the only true "cuisine", or in other words "cuisine" in a practical sense is "regional"⁸.

The sharing within the community of dishes and recipes, allows the development of a regional cuisine. The know-how of preparing daily meals, as well as festive foods, using the ingredients that are available in the region (each and every season with their specific availability of ingredients), taken together with generation after generation of sophisticating the preparation of dishes, makes for a truly regional eating tradition. The genuine cuisine mentioned, is thus the food of a place, the food of a community⁹.

The “expertise” on the dishes is being viewed in a more flexible fashion by historians, the concept not being rigidly “preparation expertise” but instead being “taste expertise”, thus including those who do not know how to prepare the food. Moreover the issue of passing the culinary knowledge on from parents to offspring has been used in a more flexible way by historians, allowing the influence of immigrant groups to affect food related behavior, both in the new immigrants as well as the host community, and still being considered as “cuisine”.

⁴ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que vivan los tamales! Food and the making of the Mexican identity* (Albuquerque, 1997) preface.

⁵ Gvion p. 17.

⁶ Mintz p. 97.

⁷ Ibid, p. 115

⁸ Ibid, p. 94

⁹ Ibid, p. 96

Creating a "national cuisine"

"There is no such thing as a national cuisine", is Mintz's view. He explains that the concept adds nothing of its own and thus in fact consists of a collection of regional culinary traditions and nothing more. To him the real cuisine is, as mentioned before, necessarily regional in essence¹⁰. It must have social roots, must have roots in a community¹¹. However, it is our view that the concept of community can be viewed in various dimensions, from an extended family-community through a small rural settlement, a city, a region, a nation, or even beyond that. So cuisine can be seen as having roots in a community, and still not be confined to a limited view of a regional community only. Moreover, "cuisine" is part of culture and as such has changed the pattern of influence over time. The cultural impact has fluctuated from direct contact between men to a more extended form of influence. As national borders and adherences have been created by man, the realm of cultural influence has been aligned accordingly. This discussion is in fact at the core of the disagreement between anthropologists and historians.

According to Pilcher, restaurants, cookbooks and cuisine-awareness in general emerged to mass Western culture in the aftermath of the French revolution, as did innovative ideas in so many other fields. The availability of gastronomic literature to the people, in connection with the creation of the modern nation states, allowed a National Cuisine to be created¹². In the process of nation state building, the construction of national cuisines and identities used regional cultures but transformed them. So national cuisine did develop or was actively created from regional cuisine sources, but it became an independent concept with an essence of its own¹³.

In fact, it contributed greatly to the project of cultural nation building, by providing a bridge connecting various regional and social subcultures in a non-threatening way. For instance, through participation in the creation of a national cuisine, women found a way to take part in the building of their nation, although excluded from formal politics¹⁴.

The nationalistic ideology is a modern concept; it uses themes of local ancient history or mythology in order to create a feeling of continuity and unity amongst the individuals within an arbitrary group. This can be described as the creation of an "imagined community", a concept put forward by Anderson, an expert in the field of International Political Studies. As he explains : a nation *"is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never*

¹⁰ Mintz, p. 97.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 101.

¹² Pilcher Jeffrey M. *Food in world history*_(New York 2006) p.52.

¹³ Ibid, p. 69.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.114.

*know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"*¹⁵.

With the emerging of nation states, national institutions were put into action like compulsory military service, compulsory education etc. This meant access to the entire population of a state. Through those institutions the spreading of nationalistic ideology and the standardization of common knowledge and values was achieved. Pilcher mentions the process in which regional dialects were transformed into a national language, through the national schooling system¹⁶. A similar process presumably occurred with the national cuisine emerging from a variety of regional cuisines. Both were part of a broader process namely the construction of a "national identity".

The nineteenth century brought about a change in the domestic reality in regional communities as a result of the modernization of technologies and urbanization. Industrialization of food preparation as well as the introduction of rapid shipping facilities allowed the distribution of large quantities of food all around the nation. This process broke the isolation of communities, and by connecting the nation as a marketplace, allowed the food habits to align accordingly¹⁷. The urbanization process, in which masses of people originating from a variety of rural settlements flocked together in urban centers, allowed for a reshuffling experience of the community connections. That's how we can explain the "cuisine" as well as other cultural aspects undergoing transformations, mediating the change from regional to national. In those urban melting pots of cultures, the social status of the various subcultures differed in the influence they exerted on the ultimate outcome.

The food we grow up with connects to childhood nostalgic memories and as such functions to install strong feelings that reflect upon much more than just food preferences later in life. Therefore, when a national identity is being created, the use of food in this process is a clever and powerful instrument. The development of a national cuisine differs in essence from the development of regional food habits, because it has this deliberate aspect to it which is lacking in the natural development of regional/community culinary practice. It seems that someone benefits from the creation of specific food habits. Politicians, food related industry and market factors indeed profit from the existence of a "national cuisine"¹⁸. By following the developments of "national cuisine", the history of social ties and conflicts unfolds before our

¹⁵ Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983) p.36

¹⁶ Pilcher, p. 63- 64.

¹⁷ Gabaccia, Donna R. *We are what we eat: ethnic food and the making of Americans*. (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard university press, 1998) pp. 54-55.

¹⁸ *Food Nations : Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, Ed. Belasco W. & Scranton P. (N.Y. 2002) p.12.

eyes. Those groups that benefit, are the ones that decide what dishes are included and which are excluded from entering into a nation's cuisine. Much like the way nations are described as "imagined communities", national cuisines may be described as "imagined food traditions".

After the creation of the new republic of the U.S.A, when a process of nation building occurred, local ingredients mixed with European methods of preparation produced dishes that created a unique national cuisine. D. Gabaccia, who studied Italian migration worldwide as well as the history of immigrants to U.S.A., illustrates this process as follows: "Americans did on occasion link patriotism and eating: in new England, for example, old residents eager to celebrate the special American origins of their new republic ritualized summertime clam roasts into clambakes, claimed they had originated with Native Americans, and then carried on their invented tradition to celebrate a town's founding or the fourth of July. A few patriots even renounced foreign wines and spirits, or pledged "to drink no other strong liquor than [corn] whisky", produced in the United States"¹⁹.

It was not until the massive immigration waves at the end of the nineteenth century that American national cuisine emerged from the joint efforts of educated women who worried about the future of their country "will uncle Sam be swallowed by foreigners?"²⁰. It appears that the intentions were twofold. On one hand they saw fit to interfere for the welfare of the newcomers (of course they felt that they knew better what was good for the immigrants). On the other hand their intentions were indeed to avoid foreign influence. By developing a "domestic science" or "home economics" appropriate for American citizens, the deliberate creation of an American National cuisine became a fact. "Domestic science emerged almost simultaneously from many sources: middle-class cooking schools in Boston and New York, the cookbooks of their organizers, the new middle-class women's magazines, and the social settlements that worked closely with poor and foreign-born communities"²¹. As we described Gabaccia's explanation of how a group of educated American women were the initiators of this dramatic creation in the U.S.A., we wonder whether the situation actually was like that or that behind the scenes there was a strong political force which pushed these women into action.

An example of forced nationalization efforts through a change in food habits happened when the U.S. health bureau and its domestic scientists saw it as their duty to Americanize both the new immigrants as well as the Native Americans that lived on reservations. To do so they convinced the new immigrants to get used to eating corn and corn products, while on the other hand the food rations handed out on the Indian reservations typically did not include cornmeal

¹⁹ Gabaccia p.125.

²⁰ Ibid, Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, Ibid.

but solely white wheat flour²². This example shows us how the socially dominant group defined the American identity and used food to force minority groups into adopting their ways. Corn as an ingredient did not have a static value in this case, but its use was encouraged in one group and discouraged in another, all with the purpose of blending them into the imagined American identity.

Immigration and "ethnic cuisine"

In the past, when a person moved away from the place where he grew up, he became aware of his food in a reflective sense. He realized that the people in his new surroundings ate different food from that which he knew in the place of origin. It was not until then, that he saw the distinctiveness of the different eating habits. In the case of a single person, the likely thing to happen is that he would start blending in with the local food habits, and maybe kept longing for home and the tastes of his past. In the case of an immigrant group however, the process differed. They might have made efforts to produce food they were used to in the old place, while the similarity between the results and the original dishes depended on the availability of ingredients. They also might have wanted to blend in and make efforts to learn the local habits.

Two main forces came into play at the meeting point between an immigrant group and the local community: intra-group and inter-group cohesive forces. Segregation can be seen as success of the first, while assimilation can reflect an overpowering of the second force. In the mind of many immigrants to abandon their food tradition for the foods of a new place, means to abandon community, family, and religion²³. M. Luis, studying Jewish immigrants in Argentina, describes it as follows: "The ways they choose to mix the new and the old, articulated their identities as they moved around the ethnic identity field. Near the ethnic pole, some Jews tried to replicate the life they had known in Europe. At the other end of the field,they cast off the traditions they had known in Europe. No one did one or the other all the time – they moved between the two extremes²⁴." Investigating daily life it shows that immigrant choices, like so many other human experiences, do not follow a black and white pattern, but tend to fluctuate and can be seen as a rich and colorful, forever changing, kaleidoscopic pattern.

The social surrounding of an immigrant group in the host country also undergoes a process of transformation as a result of the interaction. For instance the immigrant's food habits become an issue discussed by society, which labels it "different" or "ethnic". Therefore "ethnic

²² Ibid p. 130.

²³ Gabaccia p. 54.

²⁴ Lewis Mollie, "*Con Men, Cooks, and Cinema Kings: Popular Culture and Jewish Identities in Buenos Aires, 1905-1930*." Ph.D. dissertation, (Emory University 2007). chapter IV, Consuming and Selling Identities, p.3.

cuisine” is in fact a result of immigration processes. It happens in the public sphere, when the local population is confronted with the cuisine of an immigrant group. However not all immigrant food habits undergo the process of recognition by the host society that ultimately allows it to acquire the label of “ethnic cuisine”. It seems that the social status of the immigrant group is a crucial factor in the differentiation process here involved. If the group is met with extreme rejection, their food tends to be considered repulsive and may not even get to be tasted by the locals. On the other hand, if the food of a group does get to be tasted and meets with approval, this subsequently leads the way for it to become recognized as “ethnic cuisine”.

Once an immigrant group has acquired the status that their food habits are labeled “ethnic cuisine”, some of their dishes can then climb up the ladder of recognition and be incorporated into the “national cuisine”. By looking closely at food habits, we are able to write and revise history, as we can uncover relations of power and control, abuse and deprivation of rights, or disrespect towards the culture of the other²⁵. Pilcher noted that “in the United States, for example, tex-mex burritos and Vietnamese spring rolls have gained legitimacy, a form of cultural citizenship, just as in earlier times hot dogs and spaghetti helped win acceptance for German and Italian Americans²⁶”. The here above quoted conclusion seems to exclude the option that the social acceptance of the various immigrant groups may in fact have preceded the acceptance of their food. It is our view that both options are plausible, that the increased assimilation process of the German immigrants for example promoted the status of the hotdogs, or that the acceptance of the hotdogs promoted the social acceptance of the German immigrants. Decisions concerning food are not a mere gastronomic choice. Apart from personal taste, these choices reflect our social identity and status, our national and ethnic ties, and the way we choose to present ourselves to others²⁷.

An example of social segregation is described as follows in the early days of Europeans in North America: “From the beginning, settlers rejected the natives and their foods, depending instead on spoiled biscuits and other imports from Britain”²⁸. The Europeans came from a world based on wheat to one where wheat could not be found and corn was the main food. Thus the early settlers, though preferring imported products, sometimes had no choice but make use of corn and other local ingredients to avoid starvation. Moreover, they needed to learn how to prepare food from these unknown ingredients and depended for that on the indigenous population. This process of intermingling over food, cracked the social segregation

²⁵ Gvion, p.15.

²⁶ Pilcher, p.115

²⁷ Gvion p.15.

²⁸ Pilcher, p.115.

because of necessity, but still symbolized the creation of a new identity²⁹. These settlers broke away from their strictly European identity by adopting new ways.

Immigrants, especially when the traveling between new and old country is limited in one way or another, tend to host vivid memories of life in the old country. However, a process of crystallization occurs which makes their virtual reality differ from the actual reality and even more from the new reality that develops in the old country after their departure. A good example of this is the taste of the dishes they remember of their past. Alternatively, when abundant traveling between the two countries occurs and communities are connected by regular communication, money transfers, and crossing of oceans, the creation of transnational families and communities allows for a continuous exchange of culture. Thus both communities are influenced reciprocally and a clear example of this can also be found in the transformation of their cuisines. “Migrants throughout the Americas sought to transplant their traditional cultures, although Chinese and Italian dishes often emerged from the new soil as barely recognizable versions of the foods of the homeland”³⁰. In general, the Americas were defined by agricultural abundance and accordingly the newcomers gained access to both quantities as well as varieties of products that was quite unlike what they were used to. That “made it possible for common workers to eat like the rich back home”³¹

The story of immigration in general is about an interaction between communities. Part of that story is reflected in the food preferences of those people over time. By following up on how cuisines are developing, we can track the social process from extreme segregation through various stages of assimilation until ultimately complete blending in may occur. We find that even if most people are unaware of it, food is an important part of their identity, both for their own self image as well as how others perceive them. “One (North American) social worker reported a visit to an Italian (immigrant)home with the words: “still eating spaghetti, not yet assimilated”....An Italian American later recalled: it never occurred to me that just being a citizen of the United States meant that I was an “American”. “Americans” were people who ate peanut butter and jelly on mushy white bread that came out of a plastic package”³².

²⁹ Gabaccia, p.13.

³⁰ Pilcher, p. 80.

³¹ Pilcher p. 83.

On the same mater see also: Lewis, p. 9.

³² Pilcher p. 83.