



Food as language and the market as kitchen: food in public markets as a social symbol

A comida como linguagem e o mercado como cozinha: a alimentação em mercados públicos enquanto um símbolo social

La alimentación como lengua y el mercado como cocina: la alimentación en los mercados públicos como símbolo social

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to reflect and analyze the symbology of the practice of eating in public markets and to introduce the methodological strategy of a case study carried out in the Municipal Market of Diamantina (a historic site in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil). Following a theoretical framework based on the concepts of “food-language” and “kitchen-market,” present in the explanations of Lévi-Strauss (1991, 2006) and “habitus,” as proposed by Bourdieu (1987;1998), the approach of the classic geographic category of Place was added, whose development proposes that, historically, the Market is a space subject to social interventions and public policies, not only related to economic factors – it is worth mentioning – and which visualizes such public establishment as a place that allows the reproduction and construction of a local popular culture and in which the “habitus” of eating relates to diversified identities that are intrinsic to the regulars, such as regional, familial, communitarian, and rural/urban.

Keywords: Public Market. Place. Food-Language. Symbol.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é fazer uma reflexão e análise sobre a simbologia do alimentar-se em mercados públicos e problematizar sobre a estratégia metodológica de um estudo de caso realizado no Mercado Municipal de Diamantina (MG). Baseando-se em um marco



teórico pautado nos conceitos de “comida-linguagem” e “cozinha-mercado” presentes na obra de Lévi-Strauss (1991; 2006) e “habitus” de Bourdieu (1987; 1998) aos quais se agrega a clássica categoria geográfica Lugar, a partir de cuja reelaboração compreendeu-se que historicamente o Mercado revela-se como um espaço passível de intervenções sociais e políticas públicas, não relacionados apenas a fatores econômicos – vale ressaltar – e visualizando tal estabelecimento público como um Lugar que simboliza a reprodução e construção de uma cultura popular local e no qual o “habitus” de alimentar-se vincular-se-ia a diversificadas identidades intrínsecas aos frequentadores, como a regional, familiar, comunitária e rural/urbana.

Palavras-chave: Mercado Público. Lugar. Comida-Linguagem. Símbolo.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es reflexionar y analizar la simbología del comer en los mercados públicos y discutir la estrategia metodológica de un estudio de caso realizado en el Mercado Municipal de Diamantina (ciudad histórica ubicada en el estado de Minas Gerais, sureste de Brasil). A partir de un marco teórico basado en los conceptos de “lenguaje-comida” y “mercado-cocina” presentes en la obra de Lévi-Strauss (1991; 2006) y habitus de Bourdieu (1987; 1998) a los que se refiere la clásica categoría de la Geografía: Lugar, de cuya reelaboración se entendió que históricamente el Mercado es un espacio sujeto a intervenciones sociales y políticas públicas, no sólo relacionadas con factores económicos – cabe mencionar -, y visualizando dicho establecimiento público como un Lugar que simboliza la reproducción y construcción de una cultura popular local y en la que el “habitus” de comer estaría ligado a diversas identidades intrínsecas a los habituales, como: regional, familiar, comunitaria y rural/urbana.

Palabras-clave: Mercado Público. Lugar. Lenguaje de Comida. Símbolo.

Introduction

The public market analyzed in this study was the Municipal Market of Diamantina, in the state of Minas Gerais (MG), Brazil, popularly known as “Mercado Velho” (the “Old Market”), an icon in the urban landscape of the municipality, which projects an image of tradition. In this Place, which could be considered devoid of modern conditions of comfort (offered by other food products, crafts, semi-precious gemstones, etc.), the act of buying and selling products of the land – crafts – and the greengrocers (considered important for the maintenance of regional identity roots, both from Minas Gerais and from the Jequitinhonha Valley¹ region itself) provides people

¹ The Jequitinhonha River Valley is located in northeastern Minas Gerais and in the far south of the state of Bahia. The Valley area located in the Minas Gerais territory covers approximately 85,000 square kilometers and has a population of one million inhabitants, spread across 80 municipalities, grouped into seven micro-regions: Almenara, Araçuaí, Capelina, Diamantina, Grão-Mogol, Pedra Azul, and Salinas. The region is characterized by an intense migratory flow, a small number of job offerings, and a low rate

with feelings of proximity to one another and identification with the Place, as the Market has marked the local urban landscape for several centuries (NEVES, 2015); and although it is observed that a society is subject to economic determinations, this tradition is captured and economic exploitation is perpetuated through Culture. It is suggestive to note that the custom of going to the market has become the norm, having ceased to be a way of life to become a “habitus,” which is how the market as a Place became more flexible and began to provide a commercial relationship, as well as sociocultural rearrangements with the (re)production/”reinvention” of social practices.

In this sense, it was possible to analyze the Public Market and its interrelationships through food and the acts of eating in that Place, understanding food, in this context, as a carrier of meaning, through the activation of the concept of Language in the perspective of Lévi-Strauss (1991; 2006), who refers to the act of cooking and eating as a language, being thus visualized as a cultural form that is essential to human activity. From this perspective, food, as well as its transformation (know-how) and consumption would contribute to the creation of meanings about human existence, whether at the social, political, economic, religious or cultural level.

Another concept that supports the work is Bourdieu’s “habitus” (1987; 1998), understood here as an open system of dispositions, actions and perceptions acquired by individuals over time in their social experiences, both in the material and corporeal aspect and in symbolic and cultural terms.

Thus, the understanding and analysis of the Public Market of Diamantina, historically seen as a space subject to social interventions and public policies, would here be related not only to economic factors but, on the contrary, viewed as a place that symbolizes the reproduction and construction of a popular culture, in which the “habitus” of eating would symbolize diverse identities that are intrinsic to the regulars, such as regional, familial, communitarian, and rural/urban; with which, moreover, they would continuously and closely interdigitate and interrelate with one another.

of urbanization. The Valley is one of the most striking regions of territorial formation and cultural identity in Minas Gerais. There, we observe a dense and contradictory social and cultural reality, continually reworked by local social stakeholders (DEUS et al., 2018, p. 279).

From markets to Public Markets: Historical places and places of coexistence

It is important to note, first, that the public market, located in the city or outside it, never corresponded exclusively to a place of supply of products, as in different historical periods, the custom was created to carry out the necessary exchanges for the reproduction of everyday life (PINTAUDI, 2006), and when this custom of trading and meeting in the market undergoes a rupture, with the emergence of other more modern forms of supply, the metamorphosis of the public market appears, in turn, as a possibility (and a new historical-cultural reality), which becomes appropriate as a traditional place, where it is intended to (re)produce a social identity.

In this sense, the public market comes to be understood as a place (and a vehicle) for the exchange of socially constructed products, which, since Classical Antiquity, has had a marked presence in space (e.g. urban), in permanent dialogue, however, with other more modern commercial forms. Several cultures have adopted this form of exchanging products, and the convenience of these exchanges taking place periodically and in appropriate places has always depended on certain factors, such as the variety of goods that were exchanged there; the need to carry out these exchanges with a certain frequency; the possibility of traveling to such places at different historical moments; and the importance that the place assumed, both for supplying the city (and its spheres of influence or regions of coverage), and for the reproduction of everyday life (NEVES, 2015, p. 55). It should also be noted that many markets had their genesis in open markets that were perpetuated and materialized in constructions, as soon as the reproduction of life in the city and/or region began to require a continuous supply of supplies, coming from more remote areas.

In Brazil, the first open market was established place in 1548, when the Portuguese king Dom João III ordered the Governor-General to hold an open market each day of the week – “Or more often, should you judge them necessary” (PRADO Jr., 1990, p. 310). Despite the enactment of this regiment, it was only in 1588 that the open markets were, in fact, implemented in the villages, so that residents could obtain supplies there, although despite the royal determinations, there is no record of open markets in the official documents of the Colony nor in the accounts of travelers of the

time, during the 16th and 17th centuries (PRADO Jr., 1990). Probably, according to Mott (2000), open markets emerged in Brazil, effectively, when greater demographic development and greater economic diversity in the Colony justified the creation of places for the exchange of goods, institutionalized not only in terms of their frequency, but also, in terms of obtaining administrative support from the authorities (which would later reach their peak with the construction of markets).

The available records of the period indicate that trade, in the initial phase of colonial Brazil, until virtually the beginning of the 18th century, took place around the sugar mills, warehouses in cities and villages, and the ports, being made possible also by the intermediate work of *mascates*² who circulated with the goods in the interior regions. This precarious commercial network gave rise, in the cities, to a shortage of foodstuffs for the population, insofar as all available labor was tied to sugar production, “(...) whose exportation left a large margin of profit.. “Due to the strength of the sugar economy, nobody gave importance, at the time, to the production of foodstuffs” (PRADO Jr., 1990), which were so necessary for the survival of the population.

It should be noted, however, that by the end of the 16th century, various forms of commerce were practiced in the capital of colonial Brazil, with sales, taverns, inns, butcher shops and *quitandas*³ being the most common. Around 1587, there is possibly the first reference to an open market being held in the Colony’s capital, where “(...) everything was sold in the square of this city: many groceries, fruits, and vegetables, which remedied [supplied] everyone in the city” (MOTT, 1975, p. 312).

In turn, in colonial Brazil during the 18th century, there were a priori two distinct forms of commerce: one was conducted by merchants responsible for selling the fine, luxury items brought from the Metropolis; while the other concerned open-air trade, relating to the sale of products from the land, produced by farmers, as well as by food producers, who represented a strong attraction for trade (PRADO Jr., 1990).

² A term of Arab origin that designates the street vendors of the time, who sold their products by bringing the merchandise to buyers.

³ A term of African origin (Quimbundu, a Bantu language originating in Angola) that designated/designates the market stalls where delicacies (and by extension, the food traded there) are/were sold.

Nevertheless, it is in the year 1834 that the first Public Market was built. It was called Mercado da Candelária, being established in the city of Rio de Janeiro, RJ, with the aim of replacing the old open market of Praia do Peixe (in view of the precariousness and lack of hygiene reported in this commercial space).

This, it was in the early 19th century that the Brazilian indoor markets appear. The need to open/implement these establishments was felt mainly in urban centers, in whose surroundings the exploitation of precious gemstones (gold and diamonds) took place, demanding the supply of foodstuffs from other regions (NEVES, 2015). Markets were built (or in some cases, residential buildings were transformed into markets) in places where agglomerations of open markets and street vendors appeared, with the aim of organizing and consolidating local commerce, establishing, from there, the payment of taxes on traded products, something which was desired by the authorities (NEVES, 2015).

The Municipal Market of Diamantina presented itself in this sense, as an example of this market implementation process, in which residential buildings were converted into public markets. Around 1880, in Diamantina, MG, there were three large intendancies and a number of scattered ranches that hosted troops loaded with a wide variety of products from the country, destined to supply the regional population, and which were offered for sale at the side. Tradesmen and consumers purchased what they needed directly from the *tropeiros*⁴ and the municipal authorities did not interfere in the groceries trade, except for the payment of taxes, which was a task by the local Inspector, appointed by the City Council (NEVES, 2015). The point of greatest commercial movement of groceries was the Intendency of Lage: It was a large building, resulting from the joint initiative of Lieutenant Joaquim Casimiro Lage, who, in 1835, ordered the building to be erected with two objectives: to serve, and at the same time, a commercial point. Finally, following the food crisis, which itself arose from the mining crisis, in 1880, the Lage Intendency was established as the Municipal Market of Diamantina (ARNO, 1949. p.20).

⁴ Tropeiros: “The denomination “*tropeiro*” (derived from Portuguese “*tropa*,” meaning a troop) is commonly attributed to countless individuals (...). This fact can be explained by the various possibilities of interpretation offered by the etymology of the word, as the designation *tropeiro* is used to refer to a multiplicity of occupations related to livestock and cargo transport” (CASTRO, 2014, p. 31).

The Municipal Market was the busiest point in the city, from five in the morning to around six in the afternoon. Throughout the day, Largo do Merca and the nearby streets were full of animals, which had to be tied to the posts and carefully loaded or unloaded. In the evening, the animals had to be taken to pastures on the outskirts of the city. The baskets and the leather bags, when the troops arrived at the Market, were taken to a corner of the building – and each batch of freighters took their corner. The bags and volumes of goods were stacked by the drovers, in piles about two meters apart, forming small spaces offered inside the Market. In front of these “compartments,” the kitchen trivets were placed, lighting the fire below them, with wood cut into small pieces. Following that, breakfast and meals were prepared for the drovers, lunch taking place around ten in the morning; and dinner, at around 4 in the afternoon (MARTINS, 2010).

The movement in the Diamantina Market was so intense that, during certain months of the year, more precisely in the dry season, the Market Square became too small to accommodate the animals. It was common to find lots of donkeys waiting in nearby streets and alleys for their turn to unload goods. It should also be noted that the taxes collected in that space came to represent virtually one third of the Municipality’s annual income around the 1930s (NEVES, 2015).

In contemporary times, the Municipal Market of Diamantina, popularly known among the local community as “Mercado Velho” (the “Old Market”), no longer corresponds to a place of supply of foodstuffs in the municipality, remaining, however, as a place for the material exchange of diversified foodstuffs, having been listed, alongside the entire Historic Center of Diamantina, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999.

Food practices and symbolic processes

Food translates into a cultural practice that reflects a context of ways and customs of a given place, given the “habitus”⁵ that constitutes the subject’s relationship with the environment. The subjects, in turn, relate to and interfere in the space, creating technologies and production options for the collection, handling and preparation of food linked to their reality. And given that eating habits have undergone transformations and being configured in this contemporaneity through various menu options, in an increasingly globalized universe, whether in large cities or small communities, it can be postulated that the “habitus” of tradition still persists.

It should be noted that food practices must be understood as a culinary system that is part of a set that emphasizes social and symbolic relationships within a linguistic process (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1991). These practices and food consumption within a society tend to indicate the subjects and their social, religious, ethnic, and even identitarian processes. Given that, these subjects are linked to social issues, often loaded with symbols that translate actions within a universe that is permeated by conditions such as purchasing power or even lifestyles⁶.

From this perspective, food in this article is understood not only as a symbolic cultural production, but also as a language, construction and maintenance of collective and social memory regarding aspects of life (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1991; BOURDIEU, 1983). We can see is that food has a direct relationship with culture and identity, qualifying itself as a strong means of communication between the place of experience and the gustatory memory.

In this sense, it is relevant to note, according to Giard (1994), that foods are constructed in light of codes and symbols not only belonging to the constitution of the food itself, but also through values and rules that are organized around of the different models and food practices, in different places and periods. And it is to the extent that

⁵ “Habitus” is understood here as the concept proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, who developed it in view of the need to “apprehend the relationships of affinity between the behavior of agents and the structures and social constraints” (SETTON, 2002, p. 62).

⁶ By lifestyle, we will follow the definition presented by Pierre Bourdieu (1983), who identifies it as a symbolic retranslation. We can understand that the lifestyle refers to the preferences that differentiate and distinguish the intentions that are expressed in the symbolic field that controls and induces certain societies (in terms of their own: food, furniture, clothes, etc.).

foods and ingredients cross times and spaces that they assume importance in the social layer, as they reveal customs, ways and behaviors of a given people, being associated with readings, symbols of places where those foods were tasted and culturally constructed habits, which can be understood and strengthened.

Another symbolic process is the simple act of eating for the human being. Cooking is a cultural action that connects us to our history, our experiences, and our desires, as well as what we produce, believe, and design. In this way, we can understand that food constitutes a set of cultural factors (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1991). According to Cascudo (1983), among all the natural acts of human beings, eating was the only one that was ritualized, slowly transforming itself into an expression of sociability, a social ritual, and an apparatus of high etiquette, which can be understood as a symbolic function of fellowship, an initiation rite for coexistence, for trust in the continuity of living relationships (CASCUDO, 1983, p. 42), of being-in-the-world-with-the-other.

This food that reflects and reveals the “ethos” of a people as a language link in history between the past and the present, strengthening the memory and collective imagination of this society by the simple fact of participating in the same food practices in the same place (GARINE, 1987, p. 4). It is relevant to note that we observe these actions as relationships that are established between food and the human being/community, linked to a linguistic extension; therefore, these feeding practices would have the ability to tell stories, through the multiplication of symbols, know-how, and orality, over time, influencing different cultures.

What we understand in these eating practices are the manifestations translated by the eating habits of a society, so that the customs and habits of a population and a place are also known through the cuisine practiced, contributing to the formation of its intangible heritage (SANTOS, 2012, p. 8).

In this way, it can be said that food “speaks,” food has a “voice,” and the Diamantina Municipal Market, in this perspective, would reveal itself as a stage that would make communication possible: a place full of symbols and uniqueness linked to food practices. It is also noted that the foods sold there would work as a communication channel: a vehicle that would reveal different meanings, sensations, emotions, regionally contextualized experiences, and identity.

The “habitus” of eating at the “Old Market”: food as a symbol

The Diamantina Municipal Market is located in the central region of the historic center of Diamantina, next to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Santo Antônio (referred to as the *Matriz*, or “Mother Church”), at the city’s busiest site. The market surroundings are typically commercial, composed of different establishments, such as a pharmacy, bars, bakery, stationery, funeral, hotel, and clothing stores. The movement of people is very intense during business hours, which gives the place the most expensive square meter in the city, in addition, of course, to the listing of establishments that would presumably justify this high value of local real estate.

Its opening hours are weekly, on Thursdays, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; on Fridays, from 6:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.; and on Saturdays, from 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.. It is worth mentioning the distinction between the three days of operation, both in the disposition of the merchants and their stalls, and in the types of products exposed and traded, i.e., each day is characterized by a specificity of products traded, as well as its own structure. The site’s administration is carried out by the Municipality, more specifically by the Municipal Department of Culture, Tourism, and Heritage.

On Thursdays, the market has only two areas of concentration, one with tables for customers and another for the sale of groceries, such as bread, coffee, milk, tea, cassava cake, chocolate cake, cornmeal cake, homemade cream, orange, and lemon cookies, among others. This market is named by the city hall as “Quinta da Quitanda,” (“Grocer Thursday”) and has the participation of only one family of merchants⁷.

⁷ This number refers to the data obtained during the research period, which took place in the period from 2013 to 2015.

Figure 1: A stall with delicacies



Source: Neves, Field Research, 2015.

On Fridays, the market is divided into seven different areas: stalls with typical foods, stalls for the sale of beverages, stalls with local crafts, the craft shop, tables for customers, a space for free dances and, a stage for performances by local guitarists. The place features 30 stalls; 8 aimed at typical foods; 2 for beverages; and 20 for crafts. The stalls have a familial characteristic, being mostly managed by women and their respective daughters (NEVES, 2015).

Figure 2: Food stall from Minas Gerais.



Source: Field Survey, 2015.

At the typical food stalls, the menu varies, with a great variety among the stalls, such as bean and cassava broth, tropeiro beans, meatballs with potatoes, hominy with ribs, sun-dried meat with cassava, oxtail with ora-pro-nobis, white beans with tripe, etc. The beverage stalls offer beers, soft drinks, cachaça produced in the region, and wine.

At the craft stalls, typical products from the Jequitinhonha Valley are sold, such as dolls and clay houses, crochet clothes and table runners and coverings. It is worth mentioning that many associations from neighboring municipalities exhibit their handicrafts at the site (such as Sopa and Couto Magalhães).

On Saturdays, the market is divided into six different areas: stalls with typical foods, stalls selling beverages, stalls selling crafts, a craft store, stalls with rural products, and a stage for presentations by local artists.

The stalls also have a familial characteristic, each being managed by a family; however, unlike in the Friday markets, heterogeneity between men and women is wide, and there is no administration of stalls with a more specific gender division (NEVES, 2015).

At the typical food stalls, the menu also varies, with a wide variety among stalls. The public is able to enjoy baked and fried pastries, *coxinhas* (croquette-style chicken pastries), chicken and cheese *empadas* (hand pies), cheese-stuffed dough balls, Serro cheese, cheese from local rural producers (not specified by the merchants), coffee, tea, natural juices, tropeiro beans, cassava broth, etc. At the beverage stalls, visitors find for sale local craft beers, assorted beers, soft drinks, natural and processed juice, and local artisanal cachaça.

Figure 3: Savory snacks stall on the left and cheese, cachaça and bottled wine stall on the right



Source: Neves, Field Research, 2015.

At the crafts stalls, typical products from the Jequitinhonha Valley are sold, such as clay dolls, clay houses, crochet clothes, and table runners and coverings, among many other items. It is also interesting to note that many associations from neighboring municipalities also exhibit their products on Saturdays at the market, such as Sopa and Couto Magalhães, but in greater quantities compared to Fridays.

The stalls selling rural products are characterized by the presence of rural workers, housing a wide variety of sellers and products, such as cereals, vegetables, fruits and vegetables, meats, free-range chicken, dairy products (cheese and curd), sweets (milk, lime, orange, papaya, and brown sugar), condiments, and seasonings.

Figure 4: Fruit and vegetable stall on the left, and pepper and canned food stall on the right



Source: Neves, Field Research, 2015.

When analyzing the diverse eating habits of the Diamantina Municipal Market regulars, however, some convergences were observed in conversations⁸ held with a group of 15 merchants who reported the representation assumed in their lives by the act of eating at the Market. When asked about going and eating at the Market, some merchants used the phrase “meeting point” (according to many of them, the most important in the city):

“It is a point of support, both for the countryside and for the city. It is a place where you can meet a lot of friends and get a lot of knowledge. There are a lot of people here, so I believe that this is a point of support for friends. We have friends from the countryside and friends from the city. We meet each other and chat” (MERCHANT 5. Interview granted to Mariana Rodrigues da Costa Neves. Master’s Thesis, 2015).⁹

“It is a point for meeting everyone, relatives and friends alike. We make a lot of friends, because here since people from all over the region come to this store. (...) I think it is very good! It is very good because this is the place to find everything. (...) The place where you can meet all our friends is here. We coexist with one another and make a lot of friends, too. (...) It is the biggest point. The Market and Churches – everything is nearby here. This is the biggest point of Diamantina. People have all their appointments in the market, saying “look for me there, we’ll meet there.” Many people come here who want to meet a friend and stop by, and they end up staying a while. I see them walking around.” (MERCHANT 7. Interview with Mariana Rodrigues da Costa Neves. Master’s Thesis, 2015).

It is interesting to note that, when asked about the act of eating, none of the interviewees referred to the food itself, but they recurrently referred, indeed, to meeting in order to eat and talk in that Place. Here, food could be seen “as a language” (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1991), being intimately linked to issues that go beyond the social sphere, reaching the point of referring to the individual’s own autonomy, with food being understood as a revelation of the identity, and the act of eating as an exchange, a sharing of knowledge.

This fact is so relevant in the merchants’ discourse that, for them, no other commercial point, such as a diner or a supermarket, is as important in their daily lives as the Market:

⁸ The ethnographic methodological tool of the Field Diary was used.

⁹ Pseudonym. All merchant names are fictitious in order to maintain the anonymity of interviewed sources.

“(...) The market is very different, because, at the supermarket, we do not have the time to stop to talk, chat, or get news from our families, but here, we can. Here, first we talk, we get news from our families and friends, and only then we get to make a sale, for the person to eat or take it home...” (MERCHANT 14. Interview granted to Mariana Rodrigues da Costa Neves. Master’s Thesis, 2015).

The difference here is that the people are warm. I believe it is a pleasure for them to come here to buy. Everyone I know says, “Whoever tries the water here no longer wants to leave – they always want to come back.” I believe that is because everyone really likes it. There is a sense of friendship and welcomeness! (MERCHANT 17, Interview granted to Mariana Rodrigues da Costa Neves. Master’s Thesis, 2015).

Everyone comes, has a coffee, eats, and enjoys a nice chat. Here, everyone is a friend, everyone knows about each other. We are almost like family.” (MERCHANT 12. Interview granted to Mariana Rodrigues da Costa Neves. Master’s Thesis, 2015).

The market is placed, in this sense, as a channel of communication between food and its customers, full of memories, revealing experiences, manifestations, and practices that inhabit the innermost being. “And this food – food in general – would constitute, in this perspective, a nucleus of meaning, a reference to the meaning of speech, around which there is a horizon” (MOSCOVICI, 2003, p. 226); a speech loaded with meanings that would reveal the tastes and customs of the collectivity.

Thus, when people go to eat at the market, food that could be bought in other local establishments, or even made in their homes, acquire a new meaning, which is established from the coexistence within that Place. This is how food is re-signified, becoming a food-market/kitchen-market (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1991).

Food practices are characterized by a relationship built through the subject’s identity, taking into account the Place, i.e., the universe in which this subject is inserted in light of cultural, social and economic symbolic practices experienced by the subject (and concerning food).

Final remarks

The analysis presented here leads us to reflect on the different meanings of food and its representations and indicates the need to understand eating practices as a dimension of reality to which the physiological, symbolic and cultural factors of food must be linked. In this sense, it is essential to apprehend food as a more complex practice than merely ingesting foodstuffs. Above all, it must be assigned the status of a pleasant experience, which provides connections with the meanings that involve affective memories, sociability, and even a cultural heritage.

The Public Market reveals itself as an emblematic place in the equally iconic city of Diamantina. It is worth noting that it can be clearly inserted into the discussion horizon developed here, particularly thanks to the symbolic character attributed to this place (endowed with so much particularity...), to the act of the eating-practice, which is also associated with intrinsic and unique characteristics, where it is possible to evidence a unique language loaded with meaning and linked to cultural values and which is configured through the experience of identity processes or, in other words, by making explicit a specific food-market/kitchen-market language. It is also worth noting that the community, through the experimentation of these practices, reconstructs moments, speeches and stories, and such narratives are shown/become decisive and necessary for the construction and continuity of language, in this active and dynamic process of constructing a social identity.

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