

Volume 39
issue 3 / 2020

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 39 (3)
dec/2020-mar/2021

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

One is known by the food one eats: moral issues around food

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TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Bittencourt, B. C. & Melo, C. T. V (2020). One is known by the food one eats: moral issues around food. *Contracampo - Brazilian Journal of Communication*, v. 39, n. 3, dec./mar. 2020.

Submitted on: 02/26/2019 / Accepted on: 21/05/2019

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v39i3.40794>

Abstract

In this article, we analyse food as a place of truth in contemporary society. We argue that the idea of “real food” generates a separation between one type of food perceived as “good,” “real,” “natural”, and another one perceived as “bad”, “fake”, “artificial. “Food thus functions as a place of moral choices.” This separation then creates the myth that it is possible to achieve a better life through food. In order to study this issue, we take two Brazilian chefs’ YouTube channels as our corpus of analysis: *Panelinha*, by Rita Lobo, and *Canal da Bela*, by Bela Gil. Both are adept of so-called “real food”.

Keywords

Healthy food; real food; Panelinha; Canal da Bela.

Introduction

Departing from the hypothesis that food has become a place of truth in the present time, this article mainly aims at discussing the moral dispute around the expression “real food”. The idea of real food presupposes the existence of a fake food, a false food, or non-food. A dispute is at stake between so-called real food and the food industry. The first one positions itself as good and, consequently, the latter is positioned as evil. In the struggle against the food industry, supporters of the so-called real food highlight the importance of all people cooking their own meals.

It is also the aim of this article to show how the discourse of real food operates in accordance with scientific knowledge and the notion of risk. In this sense, it seeks to control life from a medical perspective.

Our theoretical-methodological choices are aligned with Foucault’s (1979) argument that power operates in the construction of subjectivities, which does not only act through the legitimate state apparatuses, but mainly in the daily life and prescription of the conducts. Therefore, we chose our corpus among media products about cooking that seek not only to teach recipes, but to explain what and how to eat daily. In this context, we chose Bela Gil’s and Rita Lobo’s YouTube channels as objects of analysis. Both are famous in the universe of cuisine in Brazil who defend what they call real food.

Bearing in mind that the two culinary professionals also present shows in other media, it is important to justify why we chose YouTube as a locus of observation of the chefs' discourses and practices. The YouTube platform allows content to be more broadly explained and developed, as there is no length limitation, commercial breaks, etc. It is on YouTube that Rita Lobo and Bela Gil extrapolate the format of the typical culinary show, focused on the preparation of dishes and meals, and they propose discussions on the subject of real food.

The collection of corpus was made in 2016. All the videos from *Panelinha* (by Rita Lobo) and *Canal da Bela* (by Bela Gil) published in 2016 were watched, which make up 145 videos. From this larger corpus, it was decided that only the most discursive, argumentative content - in which the chefs appear talking about healthy eating and real food and not preparing recipes - would be part of the restricted corpus. On those videos Rita Lobo and Bela Gil strongly argue on the reasons why practicing a healthy diet in everyday life is important. According to this criterion, the restricted corpus of research consists of the series *Comida de Verdade* (Real Food), made by Rita Lobo, and some videos of the series *Desafio da Bela* (Bela’s Challenge) and *Bela Responde* (Bela Answers), on *Canal da Bela*.

The *Comida de Verdade* series, on *Panelinha*, is a course series of ten videos¹, each with an average duration of seven minutes. The first eight videos contain interviews with doctor and professor Carlos Monteiro, coordinator of NUPENS (USP's Center for Epidemiological Research on Nutrition and Health). As a specialist, Monteiro clarifies nutritional issues about ingredients and foods. Carlos Monteiro does not participate in the last two videos, when Rita Lobo appears alone to demonstrate some practical procedures, such as cutting or cleaning food and keeping utensils.

The *Bela Responde* series, from *Canal da Bela*, answers her followers’ most frequent questions about food. The videos give advice on healthy eating habits to be cultivated, stimulating the consumption of certain foods (fruits, soy, organic, etc.) and advising against others (e.g. processed foods and sweetened drinks). The videos are one to two minutes long on average. The authors of the questions are not identified. In 2016, this series featured seven videos.

The *Desafio da Bela* series, also on *Canal da Bela*, aims at encouraging the audience to change some kind of eating habit during a certain period by restricting some foods. In the videos, Bela explains

¹ Lesson 1: What is healthy eating?; lesson 2: How to change eating habits at home; Lesson 3: How to know if food is healthy; Lesson 4: How can I eat real food without spending a lot of money?; Lesson 5: How to make real food just for me?; Lesson 6: How to take care of family feeding; Lesson 7: How to eat well out?; Lesson 8: What is the best diet?; Lesson 9: Culinary skills; Lesson 10: Indispensable Kitchenware.

the importance of adhering to the challenge by pointing out the harm that the consumption (or overconsumption) of a particular food brings to health and the benefits that can be obtained by suspending its consumption for a period. She also explains the rules of the game and how long the experience will take. Generally, Bela invites a known public person to participate in the challenge, but that person does not appear in the video. The setting of the series varies from episode to episode, sometimes indoors, other times outdoors. Those who take part in the challenge are invited to post on various social networks with the hashtag #desafiodabela, reporting the process. The intention is that, at the end of the experiment, the established relationship between time and food restriction will allow participants to observe its effects individually. In 2016, 36 videos were posted in this series, all very short – around one to two minutes – which leads us to question whether it is possible to discuss such complex issues in such a short time.

The analysis of the videos is guided by discussions around the ideas of will to truth, bioasceticism, society of control, society of risk, human capital and self-entrepreneurship. These are the analytical categories that guide the interpretation of the data and are exposed below.

Moral and truth

The law dictates that whoever eat the unclean, should eat it without knowing it. For anyone eating from the unclean knowing that it is unclean – will also know that the unclean is not unclean. Is that it?
(Lispector, 2009, p. 72).

What does it mean to be aware that something is unclean and yet eat it? More than that, what does it mean, when eating from the unclean, to discover that it is not? The above text implies that there is a disassociation between the discourse of the law and the truth revealed by a transgressor act. This passage of *The Passion According to G.H.* also reminds us of the biblical passage in which, using free will, Adam and Eve defy the rules of Paradise and devour the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a result, they are expelled from the Garden of Eden and become mortal. From then on, they need to redeem themselves from sins to gain eternal life. This narrative from the Genesis shows that for a long time moral has influenced the way man sees food.

Through the study of the conditions and circumstances that enabled the emergence of certain moral values, Nietzsche (2005, 2009) put these same values into check, pointing out that morality is not universal, but historically constructed. By comparing the morals of ancient Greece and those of Christianity, he sought to unmask Jewish-Christian morals and their effects on modern politics, science and culture. Through his genealogy, he showed that for the ancient Greeks having pride, strength and courage were characteristics of good men; in turn, being submissive, weak and humble were predicates of those considered bad. According to the German philosopher, Christianity reverses these values. According to Nietzsche, this reversal, in addition to becoming a rule for Western society, castrated human nature by removing the centrality of life (natural, physiological and biological) and focusing on a life aimed at the beyond (the Christian promise of a life after death).

The author's critique of the Judeo-Christian moral, centered on the ascetic ideal of overestimation of truth, is amplified by his analysis of the ideal of truth. For Nietzsche, the need for Christianity to find some unrevealed truth of things would be an attempt by man to escape his finitude condition, that is, death. The philosopher gives this phenomenon the name of the will to truth, an expression that does not exactly correspond to the need for something to be true, but something that is considered *as if*. In other words, the fundamental question is not the essence of the truth, but the belief in the truth.

The fact that the truth-appearance opposition denies the world in which one lives and creates

another world, considered better and true, enabled Nietzsche to associate the truth with a moralistic perspective on life. In this regard, he was also able to show the closeness between science, morals and metaphysics, since the condition of the possibility of science would ultimately be faith in a metaphysical value of truth. There would be no science without the metaphysical hypothesis that the true is superior to the false, that the truth is more valuable than the appearance..

Food as a place of truth

The theme of food is also governed by moral values and historical truths. Associated with the fields of nutrition (health) and taste (gastronomy), both in ancient and medieval age there was a perception that the pleasure of eating was linked to health (Montanari, 2013). If something pleased the palate, it was considered healthy. There was no disagreement between diet and gastronomic art.

At the beginning of modern age, this began to change. Chemical discoveries brought up the discussion about the nutritional value of food. Often, the pleasant taste of a dish went against what science preached. A pedagogy of taste was instituted to teach individuals what to eat. Food choices are no longer guided essentially by taste, intuition or ancestral knowledge, and are primarily guided by science.

Today, not only science, but also consumption permeate and make up the field of food. Currently, food is not consumed exclusively for survival, but to communicate a lifestyle. When thinking about food consumption, the idea of lifestyle walks *pari passu* to health and body issues. This triad – food, health and body – acts in harmony, enabling its own modes of subjectivation. Those who desire a defined muscular body, have a fitness lifestyle, go to the gym and consume protein supplements. Various discourses propagate that, through food, one can change body appearance, transform the emotional state and reinvent the subjectivity itself daily. This is especially true for those who belong to the middle and high sectors of society, who can pay for organic foods, nutritionists, supplements, special diets and still have time to cook their own meals.

Denise Sant'Anna (2003) defends the thesis that the food sector is today the holder of the truth about the subject. According to her, the will to truth, once invested in sex, migrated to food experiences. This would be the main reason for food to be a privileged focus of attention and pleasures today, as well as countless fears, risks and expectations. To demonstrate her hypothesis, Sant'Anna (2003) points out four events that have leveraged food to the place of truth about the subject: 1) increased willingness to learn about cooking and food; 2) the importance that the kitchen has acquired inside residences; 3) the growth of cases of food disorder associated with increased advertising about them; 4) the expansion and spectacularization of practices related to eating and cooking.

According to the aforementioned author, like sexuality in the past, knowing someone's eating habits has become a means of knowing more about their subjectivity and intimate desires. Denise Sant'Anna also emphasizes the growing willingness of the population to know more about the nutritional content of food. Such interest is encouraged by nutritionists, doctors and kitchen chefs who constantly warn about the importance of reading labels in search of the percentage of calories, proteins and fat in foods.

The researcher also points out that the representation of the kitchen has changed. While it was formerly the place of heavy domestic work, where dirt and mess were produced, since the end of the years 1950 it started to be considered as a functional, practical, comfortable and beautiful place. The American kitchen and easy-to-clean colourful appliances are some of the elements that allowed the combination of work and pleasure. Today, the appliances still delight consumers and the domestic act of cooking reaches the gourmet balconies.

Denise does not leave out of her diagnosis the fact that conditions such as obesity, anorexia and bulimia, previously restricted to medical practices, now appear on the screens in reality shows. This

context shows a perverse alliance between the growth of cases of food disorder, the media and the pharmaceutical industry.

Finally, she points out that food has become the great spectacle of the contemporary society. The author recalls that the expansion of the food variety and the quantity of food currently available gained strength with the emergence of supermarkets, hypermarkets and the proliferation of fast-food and self-service establishments. Denise draws attention to the role that images play in the field of food. Recipes usually circulate accompanied by elaborate photographs of the dishes. In fact, the expression *food porn* was coined to mean the glamorous presentation of food in advertisements, cooking shows, websites, etc.

Like Sant'Anna (2003), Renata Amaral (2015) also detects significant changes in the field of food in contemporary society. She calls this change a gastronomic turn, because it corresponds to the moment of transition in which cuisine is replaced by gastronomy in Brazilian journalism.² She demonstrates that, at the time of the cuisine, food-related contents were published in the editorial pieces aimed at the female audience, with the recipe being the predominant textual genre, since the focus was on the practice. There was a daily, trivial approach to the dishes, focusing on preparing the meals in the private space of the house and under the tutelage of a cook (usually female).

In the time of gastronomy, Amaral indicates that the contents linked to food migrated to the culture and leisure pages in the format of critique and reportage. The focus has switched to the discourse on appreciation and taste, no longer the practice. In other words, the approach has focused on the cultural aspect, with attention, for example, to the historical aspects of ingredients. Restaurants, bars and cafes were the frequent themes. The kitchen of the house no longer had such a relevant space and the new food and leisure spaces started to be occupied mainly by kitchen chefs (often male).

Renata Amaral (2015) situates the gastronomic turn in Brazilian journalism between the mid-1970's and mid-1990's. Almost thirty years later, there is no doubt that we are experiencing the boom of this phenomenon. Today, graduating in gastronomy is appreciated and there are numerous colleges and courses in this field. Many books by great chefs become best-sellers and the publishing market maintains specialized publications on the theme. On cable TV channels, there is a proliferation of gastronomy shows.

Although the scenario described by Amaral (2015) continues to be hegemonic, some aspects that characterize the gastronomic turn seem to be undergoing reconfigurations. For example, some social segments (especially the wealthiest ones) have revalued the house as the privileged place to eat and cook. This movement is associated with the idea of real food, defined as food made with *in natura* ingredients, originating from the traditional cooking process. A naive look could see a new nomenclature for home-made food there, but that is not what it is all about. The so-called real food goes beyond a domestic cooking practice, it concerns a discourse that goes against the logic of the food industry.

The will to truth for “real food”

American journalist Michel Pollan was one of the first to use the term real food. For him, consuming real food is the key to good food habits, but the food industry would be diverting mankind from this path.

Cooking for yourself is the only safe way to resume control of your diet – now in the power of scientists and food processors – and to ensure that real food is being eaten, not food-like substances, with oils, corn syrup with high fructose content and excessive salt, harmful to health (Pollan, 2013, p. 767).

The statement of real food reveals the tension between the food industry, accused of harming

² Several authors call attention to the distinction between cuisine and gastronomy. In general, they say that cuisine is about the preparation of the dishes, it is a practical matter, while gastronomy involves the discourse, the knowledge about the pleasure of eating.

human health by using many chemical additives and preservatives in food, and the expectations of certain consumers concerned not only with food considered healthy and sustainable, but also with a more transparent and ethical industry. The controversy between these two characters leaves no doubt about who plays the role of villain (food industry) and hero (critical consumers). In a recent article, Patriota and Silva (2018) showed the approximation between the idea of healthy eating and heroism in contemporary society. They cite products that use as their marketing strategies the idea of saving the world. This is the case of Brazilian juices brand *Sucos do Bem*, which is defined as a “culture of celebration of health and good humour” and claims to be here to “change the world through the production of beverages made with natural ingredients.”³ In turn, the slogan of Madero restaurant chain, specializing in gourmet burgers, announces: “Madero’s burger makes the world better,” because it uses “less processed, cultivated ingredients produced more naturally and free of chemicals.”⁴

Of course, the current discussions on food reveal not only tastes, trends or new ways of preparing recipes, but also concern the morality that guides our choices, that is, the way in which desire and power are managed in our society, even if we do not realize that. Food is at the heart of contemporary moralisms. If “we are what we eat”, one can deduce the consumer's character by the food consumed. Someone who continues to eat meat can be considered a person who is insensitive to animal suffering, environmental problems and sustainable life, and is on the side of the forces of evil. Food brings with it the moral weight of taking responsibility for one’s choices. Food is therefore a place of risk, sin and salvation.

If today we live in neo-liberal rationality, the truth about food is at the service of a morality created by the rules of the market, consumption, capital and profit. Denise Amon (2014) states that fast food is a paradigm of this contemporary rationality in the field of food. Sociologist George Ritzer, in turn, names as McDonaldization the process of “maximizing efficiency, increasing quantity to the detriment of quality and subjectivity, standardizing services and replacing human work with non-human technologies” (Ritzer, 1996 apud Amon, 2014, p. 204).

In contrast to McDonaldization of life, movements such as Slow Food appear. With the motto “good, clean and fair”, and using the figure of a snail as a symbol, the basic principle of this movement is to combine the pleasure of enjoying a meal in a slow and hospitable way to sustainable activities that respect biodiversity in the food distribution chain, promoting the rediscovery of the flavours of regional cuisines and bring producers and consumers closer together.

Despite the contradictions and resistance movements to neoliberal rationality, it is difficult to escape from it. The competition between the various types of food consumption and existing diets meets this logic, because, in the midst of the extravagant number of market offers, the subject is obliged to choose what to consume. The freedom of the consumer, that is, the supposed right to choose the goods and lifestyle one pleases, in fact, are options which the market has already defined as appropriate. Even the possibility of a life stylization, the result of a consumption that is said to be differentiated, as occurs with the adoption of a so-called healthy diet, often reveals the subjection of individuals to the market.

Ortega (2008) calls bioasceticism the rebirth of self-care from food, aesthetic care, or philosophies that preach the well-being of the body and mind. However, the author warns that, while in ancient times care with the body was characterized by a symbolic value for the construction of subjectivity, nowadays the subject lives for the body, at his service to guarantee its full state of health, its well-being and maximum longevity.

In order to study how all these issues constitute the field of so-called healthy eating in contemporary society, we selected as corpus of analysis made of videos released in 2016 on YouTube channels *Panelinha*,

³ Retrieved on October, 15, 2019, from: <http://portalintercom.org.br/anais/nacional2018/resumos/R13-1524-1.pdf>

⁴ Retrieved on October, 15, 2019, from: <http://portalintercom.org.br/anais/nacional2018/resumos/R13-1524-1.pdf>

by Rita Lobo, and *Canal da Bela*, by Bela Gil. Both chefs are advocates of real food and they propagate that, in order to have a healthier life, one needs to cook their own food, moving away from industrialized food. In this sense, they seek to democratize their recipes on their YouTube channels. Next, we discuss each channel in detail and describe the methodology used to select the corpus..

Rita Lobo and Panelinha

In 2018, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO/UN) awarded Rita Lobo a medal of honour for her work in defence of healthy food. Anyone who follows her show on television, as well as her social media profiles, has heard her saying that her goal is to teach people how to cook their own food. To achieve this goal, the chef ensures that the ingredients used in her show are easy to find and not expensive. She uses the expression “de-gourmetizing” to refer to the search for simple recipes, and states she always takes into account the Brazilian eating habits when proposing a dish. Rita Lobo stands against a gastronomy marked by luxury consumption (high-price products and sophisticated services). The series “What’s on the Frigde?”, on Youtube, and how she advertises some of her recipes – “What’s left from previous dishes can become a delicious new meal”; “Leverage the ingredients of the season” – seems to highlight this concern to demystify gastronomy.

Despite this discourse contrary to luxury consumption in the cuisine, Rita Lobo signs the tableware collection *Acervo Panelinha*, sold by commercial networks that are far from popular (Camicado, Tok&Stok, Spicy and Fast Shop). The cost is more than R\$ 300,00 per unit. The very production of Panelinha does not seem to be simple or cheap. Just look at the number of people that make up her team. The fixed team comprises about 20 professionals, apart the ones contracted for the project. In addition, recordings are made in a self-contained studio that occupies two floors of a house in the Jardins district of Sao Paulo. There, the recipes are prepared in a true kitchen, not a setting. Every detail of the show is planned: From the utensils to Rita’s outfit.

Panelinha, created in 2000 as a YouTube channel, is now a company that produces the *Cozinha Prática* (Practical Cuisine) show, presented by Rita Lobo on GNT cable TV channel. The company also edits the chef’s books and manages all the content circulating on the digital platforms where *Panelinha* is present (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest). Every day, the *Panelinha* team answers questions under the hashtag #RitaHelp. The questions are gathered and the chef answers during the weekly show on YouTube’s *Panelinha* channel. This indicates the importance of the communication devices for Rita Lobo’s work. In the story published by the Republic content agency, the chef stated: “I have all the data about my consumer, in addition to my experience of being with them for almost 20 years, in a very close way.”⁵

Rita Lobo has already been involved in some controversy. In 2017, an internet user asked on Twitter: “Why don’t you teach how to make mayonnaise with coconut oil and yogurt instead of yolk and oil?” to what Rita replied: “1) because it is not mayonnaise; 2) treat your food disorder. (...) To turn food into medicine is a disorder. I eat food, not nutrients.”⁶ Outside Twitter, commenting on what happened, the chef said she defended traditional Brazilian diet and real food, which includes the use of fresh food in the kitchen, without preservatives and additives of ultra-processed foods, and said she did not tolerate the fashion of gluten-free or lactose-free diets and the replacement of traditional ingredients with new foods, which has been considered the shortest way to achieve the ideal of good shape and health.

This case makes it clear that Rita Lobo is aligned to the segment contrary to nutritional rationality based on a physicalist perspective, a purely biological focus of the subject. For this segment, eating is not restricted to nutrition, but includes a number of other issues, such as having pleasure while eating, being

⁵ Retrieved January, 8, 2019, from: <http://republicaconteudo.com/bendita-panelinha/>

⁶ Retrieved January, 8, 2019, from: <https://twitter.com/RitaLobo/status/830387303369625600>

together both eating a meal and preparing it. The notion of comfort food also concerns a type of food that is not concerned with the nutritional values of food.

Bela Gil and Canal da Bela

Bela Gil presents two shows aired on GNT cable TV channel. In *Bela Cozinha*, on air since 2014, she welcomes celebrities, small producers and specialists in natural food. In *Vida + Bela*, which debuted in 2017, she talks not only about healthy eating, but also healthy life in general (conscious consumption, maternity, etc.). The show is a kind of reality show that follows the presenter's daily life. Also on YouTube platform, Bela addresses issues that reflect her positioning on food and lifestyle.

Bela Gil has partnerships with brands that seek to follow the precepts of a food and lifestyle perceived as more natural, such as companies *Monama*, *Brownie do Luiz*, *Morada da Floresta*, and *Mãe Terra*. In addition, she supports several social projects, being the head of the Bela Infância project, which seeks to teach children in public and private schools throughout the country to feed themselves better and fight childhood obesity. With four books released, she received in 2015 an award from *Veja Rio* magazine for her work in disseminating the idea of healthy eating. In 2016, she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Merit for Gastronomy.

Bela has also nurtured some enmities. Being educated in ayurveda nutrition by the Ayurveda Center of New York, Bela Gil has no diploma in nutrition recognized in Brazil. In 2015, when a newspaper in Rio Grande Sul referred to her as a nutritionist, the Regional Council of nutritionists in the 2ª Region of the State stated that, without national registration, she could not indicate foods that help in the prevention or control of diseases in her show, since this role would be unique to these professionals. At the time, her advisory responded that she is self-titled food advisor and not a nutritionist. Bela has also provoked the anger of dentists when she encouraged the use of the turmeric powder instead of toothpaste, claiming that it had antiseptic, antibiotic and anti-inflammatory properties, while fluoride intake was related to bone fracture, mouth cancer, and hypothyroidism.

In her recipes, it is common to use regional ingredients, products considered exotic and unconventional food plants (UFPs). When *Bela Cozinha* show was launched, the statement that she had ingested her own placenta caused controversy. Differently from Rita Lobo, Bela Gil emphasizes the nutritional issue of food with the aim of adapting people's taste to a menu considered healthy.

“Real food” and its surroundings

When Foucault taught the Birth of Biopolitics course, in Collège de France, between 1978 and 1979, he pointed out that society was experiencing the transition from a biopolitics centered on discipline to another focused on control. In 1990, Deleuze was categorical: “We are no longer in disciplinary societies we are leaving them behind. We are entering the control societies, which no longer function by confinement, but by continuous control and instant communication” (1992, p. 216).

The transformation of the disciplinary society into the control society detected by Foucault and Deleuze resulted from the emergence of a new model of governmentalism: Neoliberalism. According to Foucault (2008, p. 332), neoliberalism presupposes making the economic model of supply and demand that of investment-cost-profit, “a model of social relations, a model of existence, a form of relationship of the individual with oneself, with time, with one’s circle of friends, with the future, with the social group, with the family.” It is a new subjectivation process whose central figure is what the philosopher calls a self-entrepreneur.

The idea of the self-entrepreneur connects with the theory of human capital. According to it, investments in education, professional training, and health can improve the skills of individuals, making

them more productive, which, on a large scale, can positively influence the growth rates of countries. In this context, education would not only be the presupposition of economic development, but also of the development of the individual, who, by educating oneself, would be in theory valuing oneself. Thus, the problems of social inclusion, employment and professional performance are moved to the individual scope. For example, with the advent of technological innovations (computers, internet, etc.) and new forms of work (more services than industries), it was necessary to demand greater individual training for the worker. The question is no longer whether firms employ more or less workers and whether or not workers are qualified to occupy the jobs available, that is, whether they are employable. To some extent this means blaming the worker rather than blaming the productive system. In this context, we no longer talk about employment/unemployment, we have come to talk about employability/non-employability.

In his study on the *ethos* of transnational executives, López-Ruiz (2004) shows that the discourse and practice of human capital are now rooted in corporations. The subject not only sees himself as an entrepreneur but firmly believes that by investing his skills, capabilities and competencies, he will get a return, like any investor. It is in this context that consumption becomes an investment.

Isleide Arruda Fontenelle (2011), in turn, shows that the idea of free choice for healthy consumers is linked to a complex set of practices and discourses that exemplify how consumption is the production of oneself. According to her, “being a responsible consumer, especially for one’s body and one’s mental well-being, appears as part of the contemporary discourse around the “self as a venture” that the media reflects and reinforces” (2011, p. 207). According to the researcher, the discourse on healthy consumption is aligned with the neoliberal logic of the entrepreneur, because it requires a “self-government” by the subject, requiring that he be rational, reflective, aware of his acts and morally responsible for them.

Being a self-entrepreneur presupposes living entirely at risk, which implies acting in the present in a way to attempt to control the future. In this sense, the individual needs to calculate risks and benefits, take responsibility for their choices, and justify them. By maintaining strong connections with the information society, the risk society assumes that the individual has at his or her disposal the information necessary to make his or her choices in a conscious and informed manner, thus being fully responsible for the decisions he or she makes. Conduct in a society at risk is strongly guided by what science says. “through the emergence of risk, we can apprehend the invasion of everyday life by science and technology, the new articulation between media and science, and the media legitimizing itself for taking the place of the one who warns society about the existence of risks and proposes the means to circumvent them” (Vaz, 2006, p. 55).

The concepts operating in the corpus

All shows, from both channels studied, seek to guide people's food behavior according to scientific support. On the episode *Which is the best diet?*, Professor Carlos Monteiro advises that a diet should only be performed if there is medical advice. On the video *What’s your opinion on dietary supplements?*, Bela Gil warns that supplementation should be indicated by a nutritionist or a specialist doctor. Such counselling refers to the scientification of life. But, if science guides the subjects' choices, it is up to the media to translate the scientific precepts for the population.

The articulation between media and science guides the individual as to how to manage their daily lives to ensure healthy eating. This scientifically postulated daily care points out to how bioascensis acts in the orientation of contemporary wellbeing. In this context, the intake of certain foods is condemned, as well as diets considered good are prescribed. While Rita Lobo departs from the nutritional logic, Bela Gil seeks to inform the population about the harm and benefits of food and its ingredients. It is often suggested to exchange foods considered villains by others judged as good for the body, instituting a relationship between information and morality.

Bela's "evil list" includes those commonly referred to as white poisons: sugar, cow's milk, salt and white flour. Six videos of the *Bela Responde* series alert to the danger of sugar consumption. Sugar is also the subject of two episodes of the series *Desafio da Bela*. In one of the videos, participants are supposed to spend 30 days without consuming any kind of sugar so that they could rediscover the so-called natural flavour of food. Using the hashtag #desafiodabelaaçúcar (Bela's sugar challenge), the chef followed the whole process of changing participants' habits, answered questions and shared recipes. By adopting the challenge model, a kind of game in which participants need to overcome their difficulties, the control-repression form – which marks traditional diets – has been replaced by the control-stimulus form (Foucault, 1979). The basis is the accountability of individuals and their power of initiative. The stimulus to participation and mutual exchange is a dispositif of control and "distributed surveillance" (Bruno, 2013, p. 27), motivation and encouragement. Here we see an example of how the control and risk society acts in the direction and supervision of conduct.

In the video *Is milk consumption harmful?*, Bela Gil talks about the large amount of preservatives in industrialized milk and of the many nutrients lost in pasteurization and sterilization processes, in addition to reporting that the milk protein is denatured and can cause allergic reactions to the organism. She concludes by saying that "if it is not possible to obtain fresh milk of good origin, it is better not to drink milk."⁷ However, according to the legislation in force in Brazil⁸, only pasteurized or sterilized milk can serve human consumption, which makes it impossible to market fresh milk in Brazil.

In *Do Children need cow's milk?*, Bela informs that kids do not need animal milk to "grow strong and healthy."⁹ Her followers know that she encourages child breastfeeding. Therefore, they conclude that the indication she gives concerns bigger children. It is worth remembering that the current perspective on breastfeeding contrasts to that from the beginning of the 20th century, when the discourse circulated that breast milk could be weak, a phenomenon called hypogalactia. Such perception often caused early weaning, without the mother being judged for it (Monteiro & Nakano, 2001). Under these circumstances, some food products have found a possibility of expansion. Dairy companies started to work on spreading the idea that milk was not food for children only, but also a perfect and complete food with all the nutrients necessary for adults as well (Levenstein, 2018). The various polemics around milk and sugar show the dispute over the truth.

In the video *How to be vegetarian without spending too much?*, Bela warns that human beings up to 2 years old need animal protein, as only this protein contains vitamins that are not found in vegetables, such as vitamins D and B12.¹⁰ She reports that during this period breastfeeding supplies the needs for these vitamins and that, from weaning, there is no longer a need for animal protein. In the case of vitamin B12, which is only found in animals, Bela states that, in order not to suffer from nutritional deficit, vegans need food supplementation. Bela Gil's discourse suggests that maximising knowledge about food enables society to have more precise control of life, with the reduction of health risks, resulting in a prolongation of life. A myth about food is then created: That it is possible to achieve a better life through food. This perspective relates to the concepts of self-entrepreneur and human capital. In this sense, the proposals of the shows to help the viewer feed in a healthy way represent the search for the improvement of the subject's abilities.

On the episode "Which is the best diet?", from the *Comida de Verdade* (Real Food) series,

⁷ Retrieved on April, 1st, 2018, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onnOEOhrcBs>

⁸ Resolution 065/2005, which regulates health and industrial inspection for milk and milk products.

⁹ Retrieved on April, 1st, 2018, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twr3thBpLto>

¹⁰ Bela Responde series, presented on Canal da Bela YouTube channel. Video How to be vegetarian without spending too much?. Retrieved on July, 17, 2018, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBhK215d-Mtg>

Professor Carlos Monteiro observes the distinction between the restrictive diet (which seeks to reduce the consumption of certain foods) and that composed by a food pattern followed by each culture. He mentions the example of the Mediterranean region, where the inhabitants follow the diet of their own culture and live longer, have fewer heart diseases and live healthier.

Professor Carlos informs that NUPENS has been studying the Brazilian food standard for many years, and elaborated the new Food Guide for the Brazilian population, used and disclosed by the Ministry of Health. According to him, the more Brazilians feed according to their culinary traditions, the more it is possible to have balanced feeding, in addition to a lower risk of obesity. Carlos Monteiro points as a striking trait of the Brazilian food pattern the combination of rice and beans, which contains a very complete set of nutrients such as fibre, proteins, etc. He also argues that countries with the worst health indicators are those that have abandoned their food standards, where it is not possible to recognize what traditional food is. Cooking therefore becomes a way of caring for one's own health and avoiding the risk of disease, that is, cooking becomes a medical matter. If a population becomes obese, as the teacher points out, that is because there has been a detachment from traditional cooking and its practice. Taking care of oneself, in this context, is the subject's responsibility and involves seeking to prevent diseases from food choices.

It is also worth pointing out that both channels analyzed emphasize that so-called real food is accessible to all. But discourse does not always aligns with practice. Often, ingredients and recipes that constitute feeding based on real food are not really accessible to all. When answering questions about the price of organic products, Bela Gil recognizes that commitment to social and environmental values ends up making organic products less accessible. But that is not the recurring discourse. When she answers the question *How to be vegetarian without spending too much?*, Bela Gil states that such a diet is not necessarily more expensive, and justifies her statement by recalling that meat is more expensive than vegetables and greenery. However, the mere fact that questioning exists reveals that part of the population considers vegetarianism to be a less affordable type of diet. For many, not only the vegetarian diet in particular, but also healthy eating in general is the privilege of an elite. In this context, the considered real food separates those who have access to fresh foods, preferably organic, who can cook frequently, from those who eat a fake food – the ultra-processed one that, despite the allegedly low cost, brings harm to health.

Final considerations

In the search for health, food is a crucial factor. Knowing that some diseases can be acquired as a result of the consumption of certain substances, many people avoid fast food, soft drinks, industrial juices and ultra-processed foods, as well as concern themselves with genetically modified foods, the presence of pesticides in fruits and vegetables, as well as hormones in the meat, as all this constitutes a risk to the proper functioning of the body. The list of what should be banned or avoided is large, but what in fact guarantees a healthy diet?

The concept of healthy eating has changed in different historical contexts, reflecting the interest of a complex network of institutions, practices and discourses, including science, politics, economics, and the food industry. Nowadays, many foods and diets are advertised as healthy: Organic and hydroponic foods, macrobiotic diet, vegan, vegetarian etc. In the face of the variety of offerings, to be healthy and happy, theoretically, the subject only has to “choose freely” those options that best match their desire and lifestyle. In reality, that does not seem to work so easy.

Despite the differences, all discourses and diets linked to healthy eating aim to make the body work better. Nowadays, this implies valuing the foods because of their nutritional properties that can function as medicines for the body, the so-called “foodcines”. Bioavailability takes into account the combination of foods on the dish so that non-nutrients compete with each other when they are absorbed by the organism. Depending on the characteristics of each person's body, a nutritionist can guide how to

make the correct correlations, improving the bioavailability of everything to achieve not only a balanced diet, but a better performance of the body. There are also dietary supplements that provide nutrients that may be missing from the diet.

The obsession with nutritional benefits has been considered a food disorder in contemporary times: Orthorexia. Many people report that, behind this phenomenon, is also the marketing of the food industry, selling products with emphasis on nutritional characteristics that supposedly make them better than others. This is the case, for example, with probiotics and milk enriched with calcium, magnesium, omega 3 etc., displayed on supermarket shelves. This scenario shows how much food is medicalized today.

In this context, Camargo and Souza (2007, p. 5) question: “is food really medicine? And more importantly – what do we seek to “cure” or “correct” by consuming such foods? What are the effects of this information on the diet, behaviour and constitution of people's bodies?”

This whole debate shows that the so-called real food is a phenomenon that arises within a society based both on the ideas of prevention, risk and scientification of life and the logics of the self-entrepreneur, consumer culture and of the pedagogical role of a media that aims to educate the subject about the right way to eat.

The current discussion on food reveals not only tastes, trends or new ways of preparing recipes. It concerns the way in which desire and power are managed in the present society. More specifically, how neoliberal morality and values have begun to guide subjects' choices – even if they are not aware of it.

Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that the obsession with perfect health and healthy eating is a reflection of the old existential anguish related to ageing and death. The will to truth for the real food reveals the desire to prolong life – preferably happy, safe and healthy, and to drive away death. But, inevitably, death will come, whether for the one who enjoys a McDonald's Happy Meal snack or a portion of alfalfa.

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