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The Presence of Carnism on Portuguese Television

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a research about carnism on Portuguese television. It begins by presenting a case study of MasterChef program (TVI) which conveys carnism in both practices and language, and from which some characteristics of their dominant representations are described. Subsequently, the paper presents the indicators of the presence of carnism in the Portuguese television programming between 2013 and 2014, in the TVI, RTP1 and SIC channels. The data reveals that there is hegemony of the carnist ideology in the main channels of the Portuguese television. Also, the samples collected and viewed show no mention of the impacts of carnism in its various dimensions (non-human animals, environment, human health and sustainability).

Keywords

Carnism, Speciesism, Television, Portugal

1. Introduction

Carnism, like other discriminatory cultural hegemonic ideologies, was and is grounded by one of the great ideological structures: the media. The media culture has played a central role affecting all aspects of contemporary social life (Cf. Crane, 1992: 1). Particularly television, whose effects are determining on how it affects the audience and society in general, plays a key role in the dissemination of carnism. Like any other ideology, carnism can also be measured quantitatively and characterized qualitatively.

The first major goal of this paper is to understand the behavioral and linguistic patterns that characterize carnism. To this effect, the first chapter examines a case study with explicit images and the corresponding dialogs of competitors Cristina, Sónia and Margarida during the broadcasting of *MasterChef* TVI program (Episode 8). Because the language that is used to describe reality also determines one's perceptions, it was necessary to clarify the structure of the dialog through a diachronic analysis on the main language components. In addition, con-

tributions of reference authors in the areas of animal studies and culture sociology were used to back this analysis. Carol Adams (*The Sexual Politics of Meat: a Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 2010) is essential to understand the concept of “*absent reference*” used to describe linguistic descriptions and nonhuman animals representations. Melanie Joy (*Why we love dogs, eat pigs and wear cows*, 2010) allows us to understand the concept of carnism as a set of discriminatory practices, through eating habits, involving specific animal species. The concept of *habitus*, by Pierre Bourdieu (*El Sentido Práctico*, 2007), is an essential contribution because carnism also implies, by the individual, the embodying of structures, traditions and norms accepted as “*correct*” and “*natural*”. Because carnism is leveraged by [food] culture, the book of John Fiske (*Introdução ao Estudo da Comunicação*, 1990) brings light to concepts like culture, ideology, norms and conventions. John Fiske (*Idem*, 1990) and Diana Crane (*The Production of Culture of Media and the Urban Arts*, 1992) were also useful for their institutional analyses about the media and television.

The second major goal of this article was to measure the presence of carnism in Portuguese television programs (TVI, SIC and RTP1) between 2013 and 2014. To access the programming of the three TV stations, and cover all kinds of television programs (series, newscasts, soap operas, contests, reality shows, talk shows and documentaries), we needed to consult the official programming schedules and analyze 89 programs broadcasted between 2013 and 2014. We used Youtube and the TV station websites to view two examples of each program in order to measure:

- a) The presence and types of carnistic representations;
- b) If the representations mentioned/deconstructed the impact that livestock industries had on the environment, the exploitation of animals, human health, and natural resource management.

After viewing the TV programs, we found a pattern of 5 categories in which carnism is represented, *i.e.*: 1) Promotion of animal source food recipes; 2) Promotion of traditional animal source food products, produced locally, by districts; 3) Animal source cooking competitions; 4) Reproduction of inter-personal relationships (friends, family, business meetings, etc.) at dinners, lunches, parties, etc. based on animal source foods; 5) News coverage promoting food events based on animal source foods, or promoting animal source product markets. After determining the categories, we measured the presence, or frequency, of carnistic representations.

2. Carnism in the MasterChef Program (a Case Study)

Food is a powerful and complex cluster of cultural practices and beliefs that constantly intersects the categories of nature and culture. The human stomach can digest almost everything, so the distinction between “*edible*” and “*inedible*” has no physiological basis, rather a cultural basis. The culinary ceremonies integrated in socialization practices, the language and representations we share classify the nature in different categories: the “*edible*” and “*inedible*” animals; the animals with which we do not establish emotional bonds and those with which we do. It is precisely that hierarchical and discriminatory categorization of non-human animals that enforces carnism. The carnist ideology is widely shared, based on a collective mythology, and does not require any justification because it corresponds to a dominant view that is expressed in the discourses and practices (perceived as neutral). However, although it is a time-constant ideology, it can be deconstructed. The case study analyzed in this chapter, one among many hundreds of others, can help understand the behavioral and linguistic characteristics that embody carnism.

In the *MasterChef* program (TVI), Episode 8 (04.26.2014), two teams compete to please the jury with cooked “goat” and “lamb”. The blue team has chosen to prepare both goats, by converting them into food. The dialogue and images between Cristina, Sónia and Margarida (Blue team) embody a familiar sample of what can happen in everyday life, repeatedly, in identical interaction scenarios (see [Figure 1](#)). The dialogues and images between competitors begin by showing that both would have to dismember the two goats before cooking. A shock effect arises both during the washing process until the fragmentation process. The shock comes from the fact that the animals are presented as dead, but with their whole body (with head, eyes, teeth): with signs identifying them as (baby) individuals. The alleged resemblance of baby goat corpses with other living animals (like dogs) presented difficulties to both competitors during the fragmentation process. The third competitor, Margarida, showed more emotional disconnection towards the corpses and helped in the fragmentation process.

Like most of the Portuguese population, when Cristina and Sonia cook or eat meat they only perceive food. They focus on its flavor, aroma, and texture, and they don’t make a mental connection between the meat and the

<p>1 Narrator: The teams begin by defining tasks. In the blue team, Sonia and Cristina start preparing the baby goats.</p>  <p>Cristina: <i>Ouch ... so horrific!!</i></p>	<p>2 (The scene changes and Cristina summarizes what happened.)</p>  <p>Cristina: <i>It makes me remember a really cute dog, all plucked, with eyes and teeth ... Although it was already clean, it's always disturbing, isn't it?</i></p>
<p>3 (Sónia and Cristina run to wash the two goats in two basins).</p>  <p>Cristina: <i>So shocking. This makes me sick.</i> Sónia: <i>Careful with the teeth... ouch!</i> Cristina: <i>Oh man, don't look, don't look!</i> Sónia: <i>... I am washing a baby...</i> Cristina: <i>Ouch ... don't say anything. I feel sick!</i></p>	<p>4 (Meanwhile, the goats already washed up on the table to be fragmented by Sónia and Cristina.)</p>  <p>Cristina: <i>Man, let's just cut the head, best thing to do ...</i> Margarida: <i>Yes, take the head off first ...</i> Sónia: <i>Oh... yuck ...</i></p>
<p>5</p>  <p>Margarida: <i>Stop the sick look on your face ... Sonia ... control yourself. Hey ... Do you want me to cut the head? I can do it.</i> (Cristina, on the right, tries to use the knife and cut the animal's neck) Cristina: <i>Ouch... I am sorry ... eww! Oh, I'm freaking out!</i></p>	<p>6 (Margarida picks up the knife and intervenes in the body that Cristina should dismember)</p>  <p>Margarida: <i>Do you want to change tasks?</i> Sónia: <i>I am ... a little upset because of the animal.</i></p>
<p>7 (The scene changes and Sonia summarizes what has happened.)</p>  <p>Sónia: <i>I took the goat legs, I thought it was my dog after bathing and I couldn't do anything.</i></p>	<p>8 (A switch to the main scene, again.) Cristina: <i>This is making me dizzy ... Sonya: It's over, it's over.</i></p>  <p>Margarida: <i>No tantrums now. Come on, stop being a sissy... (...)</i></p>

Figure 1. The manifestation of carnism in *MasterChef* (TVI) [1] show.

animal that was once alive. One of the fundamental steps of the “assembly line” during the program—the fragmentation of the animals for meat—caused in both a shock effect: though dead, the goats were not yet converted into what Adams defined as “*absent referents*”: because they were not yet removed from their individuality—they were whole bodies to become fragmented and to be turned into food. Cristina and Sonia also refused to fragment the corpses by the physical similarities that allegedly they had with dogs. In the internal structure of the competitors, their representations derived from direct or indirect experiences, the dogs do not constitute as food—regardless of whether their cooked meat could be pleasant to the taste. In the representations and expe-

riences for both, the dog plays and runs to fetch the ball, and/or has moments of affection with its tutor. By contrast, the goat (alive) is missing in the affective everyday experiences of both competitors. However, goat meat is very present in their daily lives; it could be present on the birthday of the oldest member of the family, or part of the last Sunday Easter with the family. This common symptom of reacting differently to different types of meat (and exploited animals) is not because there is a physical difference between them, but because perception towards animals is divergent.

Sónia and Cristina have, since childhood, embodied a belief system, usually unquestioned, which sometimes legitimates, and sometimes sanctions, the exploitation of certain species of non-human animals. As a rooted and hegemonic cultural practice—carnism apparently became naturalized; but it is not neutral. Associated with carnism there are traditions, practices, and routines that, in articulation with popular culture and globalized culture in a given context, embody regulations. The carnist culture is dominant because it is always presented as *the culture*, as the reference point that contains the norms and the values, the dominant practices as legitimate and others as punishable: so is appropriate to eat cows, but inappropriate to eat dogs; it is appropriate to eat pigs but inappropriate to eat dolphins; it is appropriate to eat cod, but inappropriate to eat whales; it makes sense to drink cow's milk, but it doesn't make any sense to drink mare's milk, etc.

The only relationship that most Portuguese have with cows, pigs, poultry and some fish species is when they are served on the plate, with the fragmented remains of what were once sentient individuals. The perception of animal food is sensitively guided by taste, aroma, texture, and emotionally by representations and beliefs; and we must add the physical and emotional disconnection towards animals whose breeding and slaughtering process is hidden and silent. Vocabulary is objectifying and othering: we speak of fragmented bodies of animals (“*steak*”, “*fillet*”, “*hamburger*”, “*bacon*”, etc.); there are gastronomic designations culturally conceived as food, and for which there is a general consensus, institutionally strengthened (by the media, family, school, state), which is the baseline of a process in which

“Not only do our beliefs ultimately lead to our actions, but our actions also reinforce our beliefs. The more we don't eat dogs and do eat cows, the more we reinforce the belief that dogs are inedible and cows are edible.” [2]

[Food] culture provides meaning not only to the reality or external nature, but also to the social system of which it is part, as well the daily activities of those that belong to this system. As a cultural practice, carnism is an active hegemony, in both representations and language, which consolidates and reproduces (as a set of norms) in social practices. A norm is an average example, statistically calculated—it integrates the common practices of a group or society and is, therefore, predictable, expected [3]. The generally accepted conventions are close to the standard; the unexpected, the unconventional, is a deviation from the norm. Similarly, carnism is the expected standard, and is expected to be reproduced in cultural practices. Inversely, veganism is unconventional and therefore a deviation from the norm. Therefore, carnism is neutral; veganism isn't.

Being carnist involves the use of a common *habitus*¹, it means being socially constructed, being subjected to a set of rules, conventions, codes, languages, values, and share sets of perceptions that underlie the animal products as legitimate. Although intensified by capitalism, carnism is a product of history, by past and present experiences and representations that do maintain correspondent practices—also built by consumers.

3. The Presence of Carnism on Portuguese Television

The automation of carnism, which depends on human relations of domination towards non-human animals, is carried out by institutions and social groups. It also depends on the loyal and reiterated ritualization of each consumer, and is based on objective mechanisms that constantly reinforce it through collective sanctions and omissions. The enhancement of carnism is a product of home and public spaces, from where people inculcate and reproduce, from generating schemes, the familiar/traditional practices. But carnism also reproduces itself through disseminated practices by the media, particularly by broadcasting programs. In Portugal, television is central for the construction process of social reality, and its representations, regarding carnism, emphasizing certain ideas and values over others; it presents a (culturally based) consensus for non-human animals and, therefore, shapes itself for the audiences, but also reinforces their attitudes and behaviors.

Given the key issue of this paper, which involves assessing the presence of carnism on Portuguese television, we analyzed 89 broadcasting programs in the main Portuguese Television channels (TVI, SIC, RTP1) between

¹The Concept of *habitus* mentioned by Bourdieu is appropriate when we talk about carnism because it translates the subjects' incorporation of structures, norms and traditions accepted as “correct” and “natural”.

2013 and 2014². We used YouTube and television stations websites to view two examples of each program grid, covering all kinds of television genres: series, newscasts, soap operas, contests, reality shows, talk shows and documentaries (see [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)).

Table 1. The dominant categories and evidence of carnist ideology in programs broadcasted by Portuguese television (Channels: TVI, SIC, RTP) between 2013 and 2014.

Well evident	Quite evident	Not evident	Telltale/deconstructive of livestock impacts on animals	No data	Total
*Promotion of animal based recipes. *Promotion of traditional/local produce from various districts in Portugal (e.g., Cheeses, sausages, pig meat, lamb, etc.). *Cooking competition practices involving animal products.	*Reproduction of inter-personal relations (friends, family, business meetings, etc.), (e.g., dinners, lunches, parties) *Block news involving the animal product market (e.g., prices of beef or the crisis in the dairy sector) or even promote culinary events with animal products.	*No evidence of representations and/or language linked to carnist ideology.	In the collected samples there are no mentions (0%) that report on the livestock industry impacts on exploited animals, on human health, environment, or on the management of natural resources (e.g., food, water, energy).		
13 (15%)	39 (44%)	29 (33%)	0 (0%)	8 (9%)	89 (100%)

Table 2. Evidence of the carnist ideology in Portuguese television programs (Channels: TVI, SIC, RTP) in 2013 and 2014.

Channels	Television programs	Presence of carnism
TVI	Doce Tentação	Quite evident
	Louco Amor	“ ”
	Mundo ao Contrário	“ ”
	Doida por Ti	“ ”
	Destinos Cruzados	“ ”
	Belmonte	“ ”
	I Love It	“ ”
	Lie to Me	Not evident
	Você na TV!	Quite evident
	A Tarde É Sua	Well evident
	Não há Bela sem João	Quite evident
	Somos Portugal	Well evident
	Secret Story-Casa dos Segredos: Desafio final	Quite evident
	A Tua Cara não me é Estranha	Not evident
	Big Brother VIP	Quite evident
	Dança com as Estrelas	Not evident
	Secret Story-Casa dos Segredos	Quite evident
	Secret Story-Casa dos Segredos: Desafio Final 2	“ ”
	A Tua Cara não me é Estranha Kids	Not evident
	MasterChef Portugal	Well evident
	Rising Star-A Próxima Estrela	Not evident
	Dança com as Estrelas	“ ”
	Secret Story-Casa dos Segredos	Quite evident
	Diário da Manhã	Not evident
	Meteorologia	“ ”
	Jornal da Uma	Quite evident
	TVI Negócios	Not evident
	Repórter TVI	Not evident
	Jornal das 8	Quite evident
	Animações	No data
Kid Kanal	“ ”	
Festa do Emigrante	Well evident	
Festa de Verão TVI	Not evident	

²RTP1, SIC and TVI are the main general television channels in Portugal, with more audience, and with free access. Because they have more audience compared to pay channels, are representative enough to access the carnist ideology.

Continued

	Sol de Inverno	Quite evident
	Mar Salgado telenovela	“ ”
	Camilo, o Presidente	“ ”
	Cenas do Casamento	“ ”
	Senhora do Destino	“ ”
	Amor à Vida	“ ”
	A Guerreira	“ ”
	Rex, O Cão Polícia	“ ”
	NCIS: Los Angeles	“ ”
	Querida Júlia	“ ”
	Queridas Manhãs	No data
	Sextas Mágicas	“ ”
	O Formigueiro	“ ”
	Portugal em Festa	Well evident
	Os Vídeos Mais Loucos do Guinness World Records	No data
	Sabadabadão	“ ”
SIC	Os Segredos da Magia	Not evident
	Vale Tudo	“ ”
	Splash! Celebidades	“ ”
	Factor X	“ ”
	O Poder do Amor	Quite evident
	Edição da Manhã	Not evident
	Jornal de Síntese	“ ”
	Dance	“ ”
	Os Protegidos	Quite evident
	Sam Fox: Aventuras Extremas	No data
	Etnias	Well evident
	Episódio Especial	Quite evident
	Último Jornal	Quite evident
	Fama Show	Not evident
	Gosto Disto	Quite evident
	Sábado à Luta	Not evident
	Bom Dia Portugal	Quite evident
	Jornal da Tarde	“ ”
	Portugal em Direto	Well evident
	Telejornal	Quite evident
	Praça da Alegria	Well evident
	Portugal no Coração	“ ”
	5 para a Meia-Noite	“ ”
	Aqui Portugal	“ ”
	Sabe ou Não Sabe	Not evident
	Quem Quer Ser Milionário	“ ”
	Sexta às 9	“ ”
RTP1	Biosfera	“ ”
	Voz do Cidadão	“ ”
	BBC Terra	“ ”
	Chefs Academy Kids	Well evident
	Janela Indiscreta	Not evident
	Breviário Biltre	Quite evident
	Vivo em Portugal	Well evident
	Só Visto!	Quite evident
	Hora Da Sorte	Not evident
	Os Filhos Do Rock	Quite evident
	Habitat	“ ”
	Nós	Well evident
	Prós e Contras	Not evident

Data from this study reveals that carnism is very much in evidence in 15% of television programming in Portugal, as it reiterates and encourages the consumption, sale or offers animal based recipes. In Portuguese entertainment programs and talk shows such as “*Portugal no Coração*”, “*Vivo em Portugal*”, “*Praça da Alegria*”, “*A Tarde é Sua*”, “*Portugal em Festa*”, among others, food recipes are promoted live, as well as traditional, local produce from various districts in Portugal (e.g., cheeses, sausages, piglet, lamb, etc.). The *MasterChef* and *MasterChef Kids* competitions feature cooking practices where most of the products are animal based. Although the recipes used by competitors match both international and Portuguese contexts, they also follow the cultural requirements of carnism (exploration and hierarchization of certain species of animals for food consumption).

Carnism was evident in 44% of the Portuguese television programming. Soap operas like “*Doce Tentação*”, “*Belmonte*”, “*Mundo ao Contrário*”, “*Destinos Cruzados*”, “*Mar Salgado*”, “*Sol de Inverno*”, etc.; reality shows such as *Secret Story*, *Big Brother*, foreign or Portuguese series, such as “*A Guerreira*”, “*Rex, o Cão Polícia*”, “*NCIS: Los Angeles*”, “*Os Protegidos*”, “*Breviário Biltre*”, reproduced and conveyed interpersonal relationships with friends, family, business meetings, etc., which revolve around carnist practices (e.g., dinners, lunches, parties). News blocks such as “*Jornal da Uma*”, “*Telejornal*”, “*Último Jornal*”, “*Jornal da Tarde*”, among others, present news that involve the animal product market (e.g., beef prices or the crisis affecting the dairy sector) or the promotion of carnistic culinary events.

On the other hand, 33% of television programming in Portugal consisting of song contests (e.g., “*Rising Star - A Próxima Estrela*”); dance competitions (e.g., “*Dança com as Estrelas*”); other competitions (e.g., “*A Tua Cara não me é Estranha*”); weather (e.g., “*TVI Meteorologia*”), or news reports (e.g., “*Repórter TVI*”) show no evidence of food practices and language linked to carnist ideology.

The examples we collected and viewed made no reference (0%) to the impact of the livestock industry on exploited animals, or on other areas: human health; environment; management of natural resources (e.g., food, water, energy).

We were unable to obtain samples of entire programs in 9% of the Portuguese television programming (“*Sextas Mágicas*”, “*O Formigueiro*”, “*Sam Fox: Aventuras Extremas*”, “*Os Vídeos Mais Loucos do Guinness*”, “*World Records*”, “*Sabadabadão*”, *Animações “Kid Kanal*”).

4. Conclusions

The case study (dialogue between Cristina and Sonia in *MasterChef*) proves to be representative of a vast universe whose action is consistent with the dominant ideology: carnism. This ideology advocates the emotional disconnection between the “meat” and animals as sentient individuals, as well as the hierarchization and discrimination of species of animals (e.g., caring for dogs and cats, but eating pigs and cows). Carnism also reveals itself through representations and language: cows, pigs, birds, other mammals, and some species of fish are othered, set within and objectified both in discourses and images, converted physically and linguistically into “*filetes*”, “*bacon*”, “*bitoques*”, “*fêveras*”, “*bifes*”, “*Bacalhau à Gomes de Sá*”, etc.

According to the data collected, the carnist ideology is present in 59% of the Portuguese television programs (15% well in evidence and 44% quite evident). On TVI, SIC and RTP1 (advertising not included) carnism appears as: promotion of animal based food recipes; promotion of traditional/local animal based food; promotion of cooking competitions with various animal based food recipes; reproduction of personal interrelationships around animal based food; news blocks that commodify livestock animals.

Carnism is institutionalized by the Portuguese television, which promotes and encourages the acceptance of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards specific animal species. One leading cause to the hegemony of carnism has to do with the non-participation of non-human animals in the discussions about language, consequently in their own social construction [4]. In other words, the language and the representations commonly used allow the cover-up of coercive handling; physical, emotional and psychological oppression towards non-human animals, as well the cover-up of the resulting impacts caused by the livestock industry. A second factor consists in formulating a consensus around carnism through the internalization and sharing of eating habits promoted by television workers who, due to their condition, present behavioral style patterns, and similar patterns of language, nonverbal communication, tastes, values, ways of perception and reasoning [5], forming the external structures that are consistently perpetuated [6]. The third factor resides in the institutional status of television stations. Since they depend on funding (e.g., from advertising), the ideas, the meanings and above all the underlying economic system of television seeks to make the carnist culture seem natural and to disguise it. By

presenting such high indices of cultural carnism, the Portuguese TV broadcasting not only mirrors the consumer's own image, but also reinforces the ideology, and assimilates the consumer into the carnist culture and market-sustaining their vitality.

Although there is no carnist-related language or representation in 33% of television programs in Portugal, no reference is also made to the impact of the livestock industry on: exploited animals, human health, environment, and sustainability. Because it strengthens the *status quo*, because it is the result of representations, of ignorance derived from omissions, we can conclude that Portuguese television is not neutral, but rather active in the foundation of the hegemonic carnism.

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