

Politics Around the Dining Table: Brazil, 1881 to 1928

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Group eating has long been associated with ritual ceremonies of the life cycle. ‘Food and Disruption: What shall we eat tomorrow?’ It is an interesting theme when we look back to forms of dining, specifically to the use of the dining table as a space and instrument for the construction of the idea of progress and national identity. Self-definition occurs in a specific space and time, in this case, Brazil between 1889 and 1930.

Formal meals have become an interest of mine since I started studying the relations between house spaces and guest-hosting, through the analysis of furniture and objects linked to food consumption. The lists of formal meals, oftentimes loose and hidden in the archives’ documentation, allow us to bring to light important features of the feeding practices in a specific historical period. Dating back from the second half of the 19th century to the first decades of the 20th century in Brazil, these documents reveal not only what the guests ate, but also important aspects of the formation of a political network and sociability in practice in the Republican Brazil. Within this paper, I intend to explore the feeding habits and social representation around food.

From the theoretical-methodological point of view, material and visual culture are explanatory categories for apprehending relations and social representation around food (Lima and Carvalho, 1997). Although previously the culinary manuscripts, cookbooks and menus went unnoticed by historians, for some time now this documentation has served as a primary source of research within the field of cultural history.

Historically, it is clear that food is closely related with power and social positions. Since Antiquity, formal meals have involved rituals, hierarchies and spectacle. Transformations in the manners of eating have been ongoing for centuries. However, in the 17th and 18th centuries, behaviour towards eating changed, and the monumental kitchen of the courts gave way to simplicity, or as one might say: eating with elegance, ‘the eyes deposing the nose’ and *ratio convivialis* (Camporesi, 1996, p.13). The act of eating together is considered a performance through which we demonstrate discernment and distinction, including where, what, and how we eat (Bourdieu, 2007; Strong, 2004).

The French model for behaviour and appearance was assimilated in Brazil in 1808, with the arrival of the Imperial Family. It is from this perspective that I discuss the ceremonial lunches and dinners offered to politicians and other guests. Most public social events linked to the political history of Brazil lead us to conjecture about the role of ceremonial meals to seal political alliances, close

business deals, inaugurations, honour distinguished figures, often with orchestras, and exercise eloquence (Borrego and Abrahão, 2019).

This presentation considers the menu collections gathered by politicians such as former presidents, governors and senators, among them: Washington Luis Pereira de Souza (1926–1930), Francisco Pereira Passos (1902–1906) and Rui Barbosa de Oliveira (1890–1893, 1902–1909 and 1915–1921). Based on archives, photo albums and newspapers, I explore how eating practices in a given time and space enable us to understand a complex and multifaceted network experience and social enhancement.

The Menus Collections

It is important to first identify the main characters as well as the menu collections to understand the practices and political scenery of Brazil. The country was experiencing the transition between the final years of the monarchy and the first decades of the republic.

Three men participated in political actions to initiate urban changes, road and rail infrastructure and foreign policy. By their actions, each of them left their mark on Brazilian politics as well as created their own relationships.

Francisco Pereira Passos’ menu collection is preserved by the Republic Museum housed in the Catete Palace, Rio de Janeiro. It is composed of seventy-two documents, thirty-two of which are formal meals dating from 14 May 1881 to 6 September 1911. The other forty documents cover his period in office as mayor of Rio de Janeiro, and date from 10 July 1902 to 13 November 1906. There are also two photos of banquets.

The engineer Francisco Pereira Passos was born in the city of São João Marcos, Rio de Janeiro, on 29 August 1836. Most of his career as an engineer in the nineteenth century was in the public sector, where he held key positions, most notably in Brazilian engineering between 1874 and 1880.

As mayor of Rio de Janeiro between 1902 and 1906, Pereira Passos’ time in office was marked by remodelling and sanitation work on the city, both of which altered the urban landscape considerably. He was known as ‘bota abaixo’ (which translates into saying that he imploded the city and rebuilt it) so big were the changes implemented in the city centre of Rio de Janeiro. He died on 1 March 1913.

Another important person was Rui Barbosa de Oliveira, a lawyer, journalist, jurist, politician, diplomat, essayist and speaker. He was born in Salvador, Bahia, on 5 November 1849. He was a deputy during the Second Empire, and

Finance Minister during Deodoro da Fonseca's government (1889–1891). As senator for Bahia, he played an important role in the Congressional declaration of the Constitution which took place on 24 February 1891.

In 1905, he put his name forward as a potential candidate for President of the Republic, but withdrew his candidacy in favour of Afonso Augusto Moreira Pena, elected in 1906. Two years later, Rui Barbosa participated as head of the Brazilian delegation at the Second Peace Conference held in The Hague, Netherlands from 15 June to 19 October 1907.

In 1929, he ran as a candidate for the presidency of the Republic. During the campaign, Rui Barbosa visited several cities where he was honoured and welcomed by friends, coreligionists and admirers at lunches and banquets. He was an important figure and was internationally recognized. He died on 10 March 1923.

The menu collection is composed of ninety-three menus divided into two series. The first series contains documents from when he participated in the Second Hague Convention dated from 24 May 1907 to 28 December 1907. The second consists of twenty-six menus relating to other formal meals dated from 11 February 1890 to 6 February 1920.

The Collection Washington Luís Pereira de Souza is kept in the Republican Museum 'Convenção de Itu' at the University of São Paulo. It constitutes fifty-six menus, dated from 28 December 1880 to 25 August 1928, and several photos which portray gatherings around the table such as luncheons, dinners and banquets.

Washington Luís Pereira de Sousa was born in Macaé, Rio de Janeiro, on 26 October 1869. A competent and charismatic lawyer, he quickly ascended to political positions, starting as a municipal councillor in Batatais in 1895. This small city is located in the northwest of São Paulo, in the region known as 'Alta Mogiana', a relevant coffee producer region in the state. Determined advocate of municipal autonomy, he promoted strategic actions for the development of this small city, which demanded improvements in the areas of public education and the sewage system.

Following this, Washington Luís was appointed Secretary of Justice of São Paulo for two terms. He was mayor of São Paulo and subsequently, governor of the same state. He became a senator in 1925 and President of the Republic the following year (1926). However, he did not complete his term in office, and in 1930 was removed from power by Getúlio Vargas a few days before the end of his mandate.

Washington Luís was known as 'o paulista de Macaé', which means that he was born in Rio de Janeiro but was considered a citizen of São Paulo. He became known for the slogan 'Governar é construir estradas' ('To govern is to build roads').

Menus: research sources and possible analysis

The use of menus emerged in Europe and the Americas from the mid 19th century, not only in restaurants but also at official banquets served in public or private venues. These



Figure 1. This menu features the depiction of coffee branches as a representation of a symbol of Brazilian culture. Coffee was the main Brazilian product and was exported worldwide. Source: Alves Filho. Menu (s.d).

documents are important means by which to study aspects of the feeding practices between components such as the feast date, place, type of celebration, food and guests.

I will investigate three menu collections (totalling 150 documents) which are related to political moments. The reasons why Washington Luís Pereira de Souza, Francisco Pereira Passos and Rui Barbosa de Oliveira amongst others, kept the menus is not known. Nonetheless, it was not rare during that period for guests including D. Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil, to preserve such documents, perhaps given their decorative nature or simply as a souvenir of an important social occasion.

As Luce Giard said (2000, p.287) it is possible to categorise actions and objects through the lexicon of culinary recipes. I followed Giard's concept to analyse the menus. Firstly, I retrieved the material used in the composition of the document, i.e. the format, print or

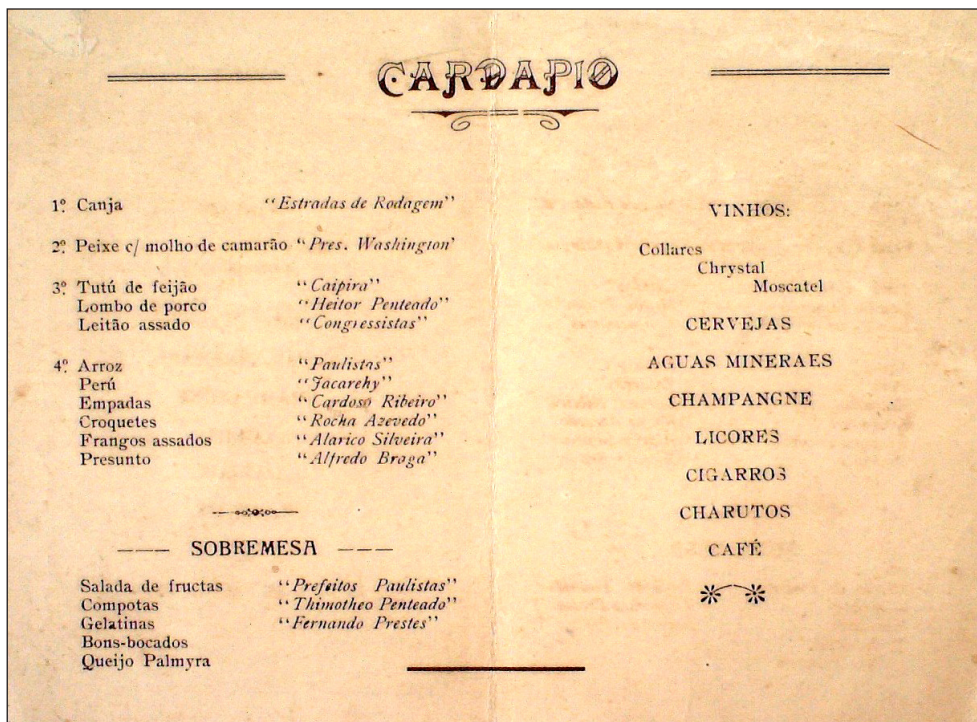


Figure 2. The dishes were commonly named after current politicians and governors, as well as their development initiatives. Source: Souza. Menu (14 October 1923).

manuscript, and the language used, French, English or Portuguese. Secondly, I identified the ingredients and beverages, the menu sequence and, consequently, the type of service, *à la française* or *à la russe*, and the names given to the dishes. Unlike cookbooks or recipes these papers effectively portray what was eaten at the feasts or banquets.

In Brazil it was usual to import pre-printed menus. These included ornaments and other illustrations, and chefs and hosts usually wrote the list of dishes by hand. They are printed in cardboard or silk with drawings and photos. Some of them contain depictions of symbols in Brazilian culture, for example, coffee branches as shown in Figure 1.

I organized the menus according to the kind of occasion: lunch, dinner or a banquet. It is important to point out that when these took place in houses the menus were handwritten. This may indicate that on such occasions, the dinner or lunch was the responsibility of the housewife, evidence was found during my doctoral thesis research. The women advised instructions about all protocols involving formal dinners for their housekeeper – invitation, food choice, arrangement of the house and dining table, for instance (Abrahão, 2018).

The venues for these meals were diverse, varying from trains or steamboats, to public places such as hotels like the Grand Hotel de la Rotisserie Sportman, in São Paulo, or the Hotel dos Estrangeiros, Confeitaria Colombo and Casa Paschoal restaurants, all based in Rio de Janeiro.

I perceived that when formal meals took place in larger cities, the model was French cuisine. But, if the lunch or dinner was prepared in smaller cities in the Brazilian

countryside, the menus were composed in Portuguese and included regional ingredients and local dishes. A good example of this is when Washington Luís visited Jacaré, one hundred kilometers from São Paulo.

The menu was inspired by local dishes or as commonly known: ‘caipira’ food. The term ‘caipira’ can be translated into ‘bumpkin’ and is used to refer to people who live in rural areas in the countryside of São Paulo. The dishes prepared and served were: ‘tutu de feijão caipira’ which is prepared with cassava flour, bacon, and pork sausage; pork loins; roasted suckling pig; rice,

turkey, pies, croquettes, roasted chicken and ham.

Another fact worth mentioning is that dishes were commonly named after current politicians and governors, as well as their development initiatives. For example: ‘Canja Estradas de Rodagem’ (chicken soup *à la* Motorways); fish with shrimp sauce named ‘Pres. Washington’; ‘Peru *à la* Jacarehy’ (turkey *à la* Jacarehy) and ‘Presunto Alfredo Braga’ (ham Alfredo Braga) as shown in Figure 2.

According to Luce Giard (2000), housewives would give the recipes ordinary names when they were to be served in private gatherings in the house. In the case of banquet menus, in public or private venues, the names were more sophisticated. The documents allowed me to identify one more relevant element, dishes were named in honour of a public figure and to remember political events or cities, for example: ‘Armadillo of the Tijuca forest’. In this case there are two references; the armadillo, native to Brazilian forests, and Tijuca, a lush district in Rio de Janeiro as shown in Figure 3.

Several menus included national ingredients and local dishes. Francisco Lellis and André Boccato (2013) found, in their study for the second half of the 19th century, that some choices involved regional ingredients. It is important to understand the process of national identity that Brazil was going through during the period discussed herein. There was a tendency to prepare dishes with local ingredients and recipes, and name them under Brazilian characteristics. This becomes evident in the Washington Luís and Rui Barbosa Collections.

In a specific menu from the Pereira Passos Collection, for instance, the second dish was the ‘Consommé Tapioca’.



Figure 3. The dishes were named to refer to political events and cities. In this case, for example: ‘Armadillo of the Tijuca forest’. Source: Passos. Menu (1905).

It is an important indicative of regional choice, given that ‘tapioca’, a starchy substance in the form of hard white grains, obtained from cassava, is a typical Brazilian ingredient, even though cassava and its flour had been used in other countries since the 16th century (Hue, 2008). Tapioca was used to prepare soup/broth, chicken with rice and other dishes.

Another example is the ‘Velouté au Tapioca’, the first dish served in the banquet promoted to Senator José Gomes Pinheiro Machado on 22 April 1903. Here we can see the consolidation of the Brazilian ingredient, despite the fact that the rest of the lunch was served following the French model. This meal took place at the Hotel dos Estrangeiros, Rio de Janeiro. As for the graphic design, it was produced by ‘Graphics Ferdinando’ in blue as shown in Figure 4.

One last example, when Rui Barbosa visited Alagoinhas, Bahia, on 3 December 1919, where typical ingredients were

included, was: ‘requeijão de Alagoinhas’, a kind of cheese typical from the northwest, and roast lamb as shown in Figure 5 (Barbosa, 1919).

These choices for portraying identity through typical Brazilian cuisine reveal that food is a vital element to collective feeling and social belonging. Years before, in the 1920’s, two movements arose: the Modernist movement in the southeast and the Regional movement in the northeast. In both cases, the proposition was to establish the local identity and the definition of a typical Brazilian cuisine. However, with the vast geographic territory and the richness of specific local cultures, the project of a single typical Brazilian dish was a utopian ideal. Nevertheless, simultaneously to the local dishes, *foie gras*, a delicacy much appreciated in French cuisine, is present on several menus.



Figure 4. ‘Graphics Ferdinando’ printed this menu in blue and it is the only example found with such characteristics. Source: Passos. Menu (22 April 1905).

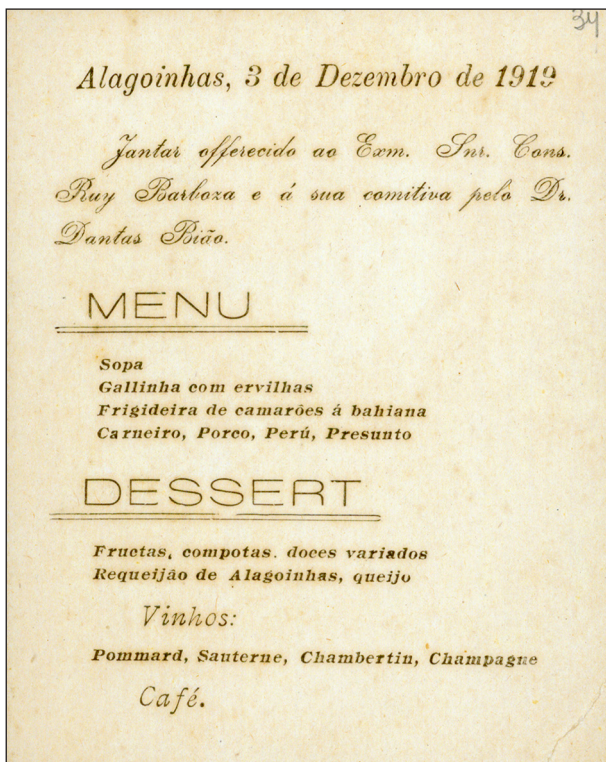


Figure 5. A typical ingredient was included in this menu: ‘requeijão de Alagoinhas’, a kind of cheese typical from the northwest. Source: Barbosa. Menu (3 December 1919).

During this period, the number of establishments increased in cities such as Salvador (Bahia), Curitiba (Paraná), Manaus (Amazonas). In the main capitals of Brazil in the second half of the nineteenth century, new spaces of sociability emerged in public spaces such as restaurants, hotels, casinos or clubs, which were often chosen for socio-professional celebrations, political parties and associations. Those responsible for arranging and preparing the delicacies were under the supervision of *mâitres d’hôtel* and chefs.

Throughout the nineteenth century it is possible to identify in newspapers the search for French cooks in the principal cities. These cooks worked for the main restaurants and hotels established in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Salvador, among others as shown in Figure 6. Despite the demand for French chefs, there was an increased preference for national recipes and ingredients, corroborating the idea of national identity. For instance, in the advertisement below the restaurant announces the presence of an ‘excellent French chef’ while most of the dishes are typically local.

In addition to these collections I have researched local newspapers and identified the places visited by Washington Luís, Rui Barbosa and Pereira Passos. These archives give details such as the venues, how the dining room was set, the decorative arrangements used, the dishes served and the names of the guests. This allows us to understand the network of relations of social groups – agricultural, industrial and cultural – in line with Republican projects. That is, the

food was a way to understand social structure and how society was run. Finally, with the help of these newspapers, it was possible to cross-reference the dates with menus, guest lists and specifics of the meals.

An example of this can be seen at reception offered to Rui Barbosa by his counterparts. Rui Barbosa, ran for President of Brazil on two occasions. His importance and representation to Bahia, his state, can be seen in the twelve pages devoted by Bahia Illustrada magazine, in the account of his arrival in Salvador, Bahia’s capital, aboard the ‘Acre’ steamboat, and all of the tributes which were made to him. The richness of detail brings us back to a journey through time and into the banquet hall.

The local newspaper reported that among the guests were merchants, capitalists, bankers, magistrates, doctors, lawyers, finally, all ‘social classes’. At the top table, Rui Barbosa sat between two significant people: Miguel Calmon - working in his political campaign - and Octavio Mangabeira - Senator. The paper covered all the solemnities around him during his second campaign for the Presidency (Bahia, 1919, p.25). The menu offered can be view as shown in Figure 7.

The social network of politicians can be seen from the menus that contain autographs of the participants and through the names of the guests published in the newspapers. The analysis of newspapers of the period reveal a consistent political agenda of national propaganda; through the publication of menus and gatherings, these political figures were able to reinforce the importance of their deeds, such as the construction of new roads and other national projects.

RESTAURANT MULLEM
PRAÇA DE PALACIO

O abaixo assignado participa ao respeitavel publico, que tendo contratado um excellente cosinheiro francez, achase aberto o seu RESTAURANT.

PREÇOS

ALMOÇO — 2 pratos de carne, batatas, pirão, chá ou café, pão e manteiga	1\$000
JANTAR — Sopa, 3 pratos de carne, verdura, sobre-meza, café e meia garrafa de vinho.	1\$500
Um prato de peixe ou carne.	\$500
Ostras cruas, duzia	\$320
Cerveja ingleza de barril, copo	\$250

DEPOSITO
DOS MELHORES CHARUTOS E CIGARROS
G. H. Mullem.

Figure 6. The Restaurant Mullem tells the public that the food served was prepared by a French chef. Source: Diário de Notícias (29 September, 1877), p. 3.

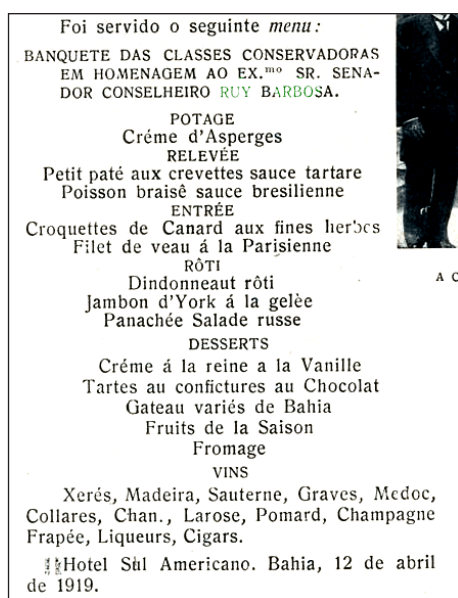


Figure 7. This menu was produced by Hotel Sul Americano for the banquet offered to Senator Rui Barbosa. Source: Bahia Illustrada (April 1919), 25.

The protocol and seating arrangements were extensively described in these publications, this reveals the importance and political status of each guest. The closer to the guest of honour a person sits, the more relevant is the reputation they have in society, in terms of political, economic, and cultural importance.

Final considerations

The wealth of information on feeding practices shown by menus goes far beyond their materiality. Manuscripts or printed on card, paper or textile; colourful and decorated, they fit into a context of appreciation of refinement and good manners. In addition to the varied menu, the best decoration, objects and utensils were used to impress the guests in such a way that they would then share this commitment with their future invitations and political fidelity.

Three characters that participated in urban improvements, made legislation as a national constitution and other political decisions in favour of modernity and consolidation of the republic in Brazil. It is clear that formal meals and feeding practices contributed to the formation of a network of Brazilian politics during the period studied.

Although I was unable to cover all content of the research, I identified regional ingredients and meals as well as the sociability politics around the table. It is clear that at the banquets organized in the state capitals, the French model predominated over the national culinary tradition. In the Pereira Passos Collection, the French reference is very well-defined while in Washington Luís and Rui Barbosa collections there was a visible blend with Brazilian elements. During the years 1890–1928 there was a growth of national dishes choices in opposition to the traditional French model consolidated the Brazilian cuisine.

The Rui Barbosa and Washington Luís collections indicate that this nationalist movement was gradually being incorporated in Brazilian society. We can see the overlap of flavours in the typical food offered in different regions.

Historically, the official meetings reveal the food choices and the art of eating together. Food, drink and music expose the plurality of the food phenomenon that involves group practices, habits, rituals, tastes and identities in their broad political, economic and cultural scope.

As Pauline Schmitt Pantel (1998, pp.155–169) says: 'Banquets play an important role in the cultural history of the community. Their inception coincides with the institution of communal relations and the constitution of a political identity'.

As formal meals or banquets offered variety, contrast and completeness, with the dishes considering a wide range of flavours, salty to sweet, liquids and solids, cold and hot. The dialogues complemented in a good wine, good food and a pleasant environment, are occasions for maintaining and updating the bonds of social responsibility between equals.

Finally, I can affirm that the political network articulated the developments of society around the table and through food, promoted the unity of the States and the recognition of several governments. It is through the publication and advertisement of such rituals that the politicians were able to reveal governmental actions and promote the idea of national unity and progress, and foster the consciousness of the collective identity, 'the Brazilian people'.

Notes

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