

Supermarket Culinary Magazine: A Telescope to Observe Portuguese Contemporary Food Culture¹

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Whether through nature or culture, food reveals its multiple layers to human beings, and the senses of their bodies, tied to their memories, either induce or stop salivation for a new bite. The images and verbal calls are part of food consumption dynamics and provide different communicational mechanisms linked to social, economic, and political issues.

Food culture is exposed to a field with a "complex process of semiosis" (Parasecoli "Savoring Semiotics" 646), and supermarkets are great stages to study this stronghold. These companies buzz around food and develop strategies likely to move many wallets and stimulate appetites. They trigger a movement that resonates intensely in the cultural field. Thus, it is worth analyzing these sites to understand the critical period of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 and its impact on food culture.

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From the *Semiotics of Culture*, it is possible to see that COVID-19 has promoted modifications both in the first reality, that is, the physical — biological sphere, and in the second reality, the sign universe that is ordered as language, composing the sphere of culture (Bystrina). In turn, the pandemic forced adherence to new habits. In Portugal, for example, supermarkets have had to develop or improve their online sales services, since the practice became frequent from the beginning of the pandemic. Even in 2021, this European country presented itself as one of the leaders in purchasing meals by delivery (Pinto).

Such changes do not occur by themselves, because culture transforms itself, given the movement of cultural texts that dialogue with the emergency scenarios brought about by the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, the media is one of the spheres in which new imaginaries unfold and consolidate, also impacting cultural identity (Hall). The isolation imposed by the virus clashed with the ideals linked to globalization and exposed the fragilities of the mundialization of capital. Since very few countries can consider themselves self — sufficient nowadays, the question arises: what would be the effects of such changes in the sphere of Portuguese popular food culture?

In this regard, this paper focuses on addressing a communication vehicle used as a marketing tool by the Portuguese supermarket Pingo Doce (PD), which, in 2018, was the second largest supermarket chain by number of stores in the country (Grupo Marktest). This company is affiliated with the 50th largest food distributor in the world, the Portuguese group Jerónimo Martins, which also operates in Colombia and Poland (Deloitte). The cooking magazine *Sabe Bem* (SB) is available at the checkouts of PD supermarkets for only 0.50€ (fifty cents). It is a customized publication, issued bi-monthly for ten years with a circulation of approximately 150,000 copies. On top of that, this type of media vehicle explicitly includes the brand of the company of which it is a part (Fischer).

This paper sought to consider cultural texts transformations in food culture in Portugal during the COVID-19 pandemic by analyzing the semiotic narratives presented in this magazine. The corpus includes the six editions issued in 2020 and the first three of 2021.² This process analyzes these nine editions' visual and language messages, the images, colors, shapes, angles, and examined the use of words and verb tenses, repetition of terms, and the semantic relations of signifiers

² The PD supermarket website provides the digital versions of SB ten months after its printed publication. <https://www.pingodoce.pt/pingodoce-institucional/revista-sabe-bem>.

and meanings. The analysis of this series of signs and their relations was crucial to assess this magazine's topics and its communication strategies.

The chosen corpus, criteria, and a critical view are essential to grasp the underlying messages in the magazine's sign arrangements. This analysis highlighted the covers of the nine issues, their editor's letters, and the Mediterranean Diet (MD) topic, and the brand Juliana. MD is a concept SB promoted since its publication began, which gained further traction during the COVID-19 pandemic and the brand Juliana, which PD launched in late 2020, plays a particular role in promoting this diet.

SB demonstrates the engagement of issues that revolve around different propositions, which hover beyond the condition of food as a nutritional asset. The esteem for the 10th principle of the MD outlined in the editions of the magazine, setting the table as a social place, which displays the appreciation of family within the Portuguese culture, suggests other implicit values of the Portuguese culture, inherent to its semiosphere. In this regard, the SB 2020 Christmas edition (see Fig.1) demonstrates the adaptations in food rituals in the face of the pandemic. As a predominantly Catholic country, with gregarious habits, the Portuguese were restrained from circulating and organizing celebrations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.³

In this issue, the publisher's letter consoles the reader for having to change the routine and stresses the importance of keeping joy and sharing at the table, offering recipes “from the old faithful friend first PD codfish” to spread the magic of Christmas. More than that, it is in this issue that the PD brand reformulates its communicative strategy related to the dissemination of MD. Based on the repercussions of the pandemic, this food model becomes linked to the concept of *portugality* and is represented by a new brand: Juliana, Portuguese Mediterranean Diet.

³ In terms of political intervention, with the due approval from the Council of Ministers, the government has relied on the state of emergency, the state of calamity, the state of contingency situation, or the state of alert to direct population control, governing each situation according to the severity of the COVID-19 cases. At the moment, it is already planned to maintain the state of alert until March 22, 2022 (Vieira de Almeida).



Figure 1. *Sabe Bem* 58th issue cover

Particularly, this article points to a reconfiguration in the cultural text of this communicational support, which starts to amplify nationalist discourses and summons consumers to a new behavioral program, connecting consumption to a patriotic spirit. More specifically, this magazine presents itself as a telescope to closely observe the current advertising policies of a company, which has a relevant influence in the Portuguese public sphere, as it stands out as the largest enterprise regarding food in the country, in a time of fragility, due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

The Food Semiosphere

According to Fabio Parasecoli, the act of eating may even be perceived, at first glance, as a simple biological mechanism connected to the maintenance of existence. However, as the author argues, eating has a very intense and complex emotional meaning, precisely because it is a crucial element for survival (*Bite Me* 24). The outlines of such a connection are visible in numerous areas of life and form “an arena where cultural, social, and political struggles find visible expression” (72).

Food and eating are deeply embedded in our subjectivity and go far beyond biology. These are markers of social distinction (Bourdieu) and expressions of identity and belonging that change over time (Sobral, *Nacionalismo, Culinária e*

classe). This paper seeks to analyze the SB magazine and its contents through the semiotics of culture, mainly based on the concepts of the Russian Iúri Lotman (*La Semiosfera I*). Semiotics unfolds in different theoretical lines: the French school, linked to Saussure, focuses on linguistics, while the North American school, linked to signs, is supported by Peirce and, in turn, the Russian semiotics origin focuses on text and culture (Peres 150-1).

This semiotics argues that culture is a non-genetic memory, a behavior program in which events become knowledge and are passed on from generation to generation, shaping a fabric forged by a semiotic continuum (Velho 253). For Lotman (*La Semiosfera I*), there are no isolated cultural systems. They only work when immersed in this continuum, which Lotman called the semiosphere – an analogy to the concept of biosphere – and which consists of several types of semiotic organizations. This mechanism relies on the suggestion that culture is a large text, a concept that emerges from Lotman's dialogue with Information Theory and Cybernetics (Machado 32). Thereby, there is a system in which the information of social reality is codified and organized into texts that will become part of the culture, operating as a program that regulates the behavior of social groups. According to Lotman, “in the general system of culture, texts have at least two primary functions: the adequate conveyance of meanings and the creation of new meanings” (*La Semiosfera I* 65).

Simply put, everyday life events are organized in texts, which are systems of signs, and absorbed by the non – genetic memory of social groups in the form of codes that materialize through cultural manifestations. This mechanism is dynamic and depends on the relationship between different cultural texts, such as gastronomy, fashion, religion, and architecture. That is why culture is constantly changing to renew habits and practices over time.

Lotman (*La Semiosfera I*) explains that this complex game is played precisely within the so-called semiosphere, an environment that provides appropriate conditions for semiosis. Codes, languages, and, ultimately, cultural texts interact in the semiosphere. Thus, food would be a specific semiosphere, bringing together the cultural texts related to this area (Jacob 4). They do not exist in an isolated and static way because they relate to each other and create new cultural structures. The concept of translation of tradition, another crucial point in the semiotics of culture, fits into this principle:

The translation of tradition can thus be perceived as an encounter between different cultures from which cultural codes emerge to work as programs

for further developments. That means that cultural codes generate non – hereditary memory, as Lotman perceived it, responsible for formatting the semiotic systems of culture. (Machado 30)

Each cultural text holds a less penetrable core in the semiosphere, which houses its most stable elements. However, in its edges, the text has a more fluid and open structure, simultaneously contaminating and being contaminated by other cultural texts. The intensity of semiosis is greater there, generating updates from the contact with the edges of other semiospheres. This dynamic shapes the cultural text's reconfiguration process, completed through the contact between core and edges. When it comes to food, according to Helena Jacob, we have a cultural fabric made up of all the texts ever produced about food and cooking, because “The communication links that create new texts are structured in their connection, in a continuous semiosis and recoding process inherent to any cultural system” (4).

Whether in the field of food or others, what allows the new texts to coexist are the different densities between the semiosphere's components, the elements of innovation, and those that are part of its founding core, of its self-description. For Lotman, such dynamic unfolds within a polar structure, which underlies the concept of explosion. In his view (*Cultura y Explosión* 245), “the dynamic processes in culture are built as a kind of pendulum oscillations between the state of explosion and the state of organization, which happens in gradual processes” and, with this, they ensure continuity, while the explosive ones are responsible for innovation.

Based on this principle, one can infer that the COVID-19 pandemic and its global outbreak represents a moment of explosion. This is a concept that Ana Paula Velho (256) calls a “sudden acceleration” that will trigger explosions of new cultural texts. The virus outbreak introduces a new semiosphere that will expand into large shock waves and contaminate other semiospheres – like the PD supermarket and its communication strategies – in the fabric of contemporary culture, including food.

The information emerging from the physical- biological context is codified in new cultural texts transforming the habits and rituals related to eating. The food semiosphere and its texts, based on communion and sharing at the table, are now related to health risk concepts. The celebration of Christmas, mentioned above, was an example, as well as the creation of the Portuguese-style MD, which adds a nationalistic repertoire to the plot of its health-related parameters.

The act of eating is now under the shadow of caution and fear, especially in light of the cultural texts about the coronavirus' survival on surfaces and the

potential for contamination (Silva et al. “*Condutas sanitárias*”). The fear of such contamination hit hard on the relationship with food, creating routines that became hallmarks of the outset of the pandemic, such as sanitizing all groceries before putting them away.

The popular food culture was also directly affected by the quarantines adopted worldwide and the consequent mobility limitation. For instance, all public places of food socialization, such as bars, restaurants, food trucks, and community kitchens, were closed indefinitely. Along with the confinement requirement, that intensified the need to prepare food within the domestic space generating widespread phenomena, such as the so-called “*pãodemia*,” (breademic) pun coined in Brazil and Portugal to address the fever of bread production at home (Silva et al. “DELIquarantine”).

These events also touch and move the borders of the supermarkets' semiosphere, leading to new cultural texts related to the act of buying food. It is worth remembering that, as Miller (33) pointed out, notions of affection and sacrifice shape the exercise of consumption in supermarkets. In such a scenario, the following analysis focuses on SB magazine as a privileged semiosphere to understand the impact of COVID-19 and its ramifications on popular food cultures as its narratives configure and reconfigure cultural texts that will be part of culture's non-genetic memory and introduce new behavioral programs.

Sabe Bem and the Making of Being Portuguese

The promotions featured in customized supermarket magazines are a powerful tool to recognize the food market of a particular culture and a particular space/time. However, this analysis reveals other messages in these vehicles, as relevant as the commodities highlighted by the marketing team, which offer clues to understand different discourses on food that drive the population to ingest and digest new ideas and trends.

Among the different sections of that magazine, the covers represent an iconic object of study (Luderer & Carvalho). In each issue, the cover displays different content, which, through detailed image and graphic font layouts, summon the reader to spark their curiosity and whet their appetite enough to purchase the new issue and new products. Visually and verbally, the cover stands out for concisely expressing the editor's promise of what the reader will find in the magazine (Spiker).

The narrative in the editor's letter is another crucial section, as it sediments the narrator's intention and guides the audience to perceive the highlights of the new issue. Moreover, it is a space that seeks to connect the editor and the reader (Ali 204). Based on the importance of these two sections, as axes of each issue, they will be analyzed in greater depth because they represent the gateway to reflect on the corpus selected for this work.

From the first editions, the covers of SB have the following layout: at the top the title, underlined by its slogan, *Faz Bem* (is good for you); at the bottom, on the left, the drawing of an olive tree, with the caption *Sabores Mediterrânicos* (Mediterranean flavors) and, on the right, the PD supermarket logo. The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020, was also the year of the PD's 40th anniversary celebrations. As a result, the messages disseminated at the bottom of SB added further information: throughout this year, the caption "40 anos" (40 years) was added to the PD logo; and, as of the last 2020 edition, the olive tree and its caption were replaced by the Juliana logo (see Fig. 2), and the caption "*Dieta Mediterrânica à Portuguesa*" (Portuguese style Mediterranean diet).



Figure 2. Juliana's design (<https://juliana.pingodoce.pt/>)

Juliana is introduced as a new PD brand and refers to promoting a model of diet tied to the MD among the Portuguese. According to Duarte Vilaça⁴, responsible for the agency behind the Juliana communication project, the idea was on the agenda before the pandemic. Through a popular expression – casting a stone in the pond –

⁴ Duarte Vilaça is the head of the Born agency, and he was interviewed over the phone on August 23, 2021.

he emphasized the project gained relevance with the arrival of COVID-19, which he considered as an irreversible movement.

As Vilaça explains,⁵ “structurally, MD has a great commitment to sustainability, to health, and to Portuguese identity and culture” and one of the bets of the Jerónimo Martins Group is to promote it. The company had already drawn up a plan to launch a book with recipes to promote MD, including attention to soups, and this nutritional model gained relevance in the face of the widespread crisis surrounding the pandemic. The project was expanded to the point where they organized a larger plan: the launch of the new Juliana brand. After all, Vilaça said “everyone was talking about food sovereignty, about the food distribution chains,” in other words, that “it was necessary for each country to ensure its local production.” Added to this, MD gives people the opportunity to make “miracles with very little matter, the matter that exists next to our homes, in the backyard, very close to us.” An important complement to what Vilaça said is that, according to Pedro Graça (2020), soup is an iconic dish in Portugal and has a great expression that is not seen in other European regions. In other words, what we can see is that the supermarket chain takes advantage of this moment of fragility to reinforce its nationalist repertoires, emphasizing the idea of belonging through consumption.

According to José Manuel Sobral, the valorization of national cuisines is a phenomenon interpreted as a reaction against the “threats of homogenization inherent in globalization” (*O Revivalismo da Alimentação* 200). On the other hand, “the identification of food and cuisine as heritage, tradition, authenticity, in short, as culture” becomes a commodity for the world economy (202).

Juliana's colorful design (see Fig. 2), added from issue 58 (November – December 2020), suggests several messages referring to the MD. Each letter in the name is associated to different signs related to the foods promoted in this diet. There are waves and fish, vegetables, fruits and legumes, a spoon — referring to soup — and a heart in the center — representing the love for food and socializing at the table at mealtime. The caption added to the brand's name highlights the proposal's bond with the Portuguese people: *Dieta Mediterrânica à Portuguesa* (Portuguese style Mediterranean Diet).

⁵ The Vilaça presentation was held in the III Food and Sustainability Seminar, promoted on October 14, 2021, by Polobs / CECS, from University of Minho. <https://www.cecs.uminho.pt/en/agenda-2030-e-a-alimentacao-um-sabor-com-gosto-de-cultura>.

Bonded to a healthy diet paradigm, the MD was recognized by UNESCO in 2013 as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and Portugal, represented by the city of Tavira, became one of the seven countries for its Safeguarding (UNESCO; Romano). The information was disclosed in the 17th edition of SB (January-February 2014), when the magazine's spokesperson explained the proximity of the PD brand to this food proposal:

Aware of the medium and long-term advantages to health, Pingo Doce follows this same approach when developing its own-brand products. It chooses the most genuine and least refined ingredients to ensure that the products are as natural as possible, using as few additives as possible. That also applies to the choice of fats, preferring olive or sunflower oil and more whole wheat flours, for example. (8)

The SB nutrition team has showcased the MD since the beginning. As of issue 36 (March- April 2017), it includes a column signed by the Portuguese Directorate General of Health (DGS) to reinforce the repertoire on this diet in the magazine.⁶ The discourses of health experts underline the messages about the quality of the MD and, due to the pandemic scenario and the Portuguese's growing interest in health-related topics (see Fig. 3), Juliana's project became an opportunity to engage the public.

The communication contract, as proposed by Patrick Charaudeau (67), allows the inference that these conditions around the MD and the health experts provided a favorable communicational “frame of reference” for the Juliana project to engage the public. Such a tool also enables the narrator — the various actors linked to the media production — to keep the communication contract active with its readers (its recipients).

⁶ The column was missing from editions 54 to 57 (March to October 2020), the time frame of DGS's first efforts to address the problems arising from the pandemic.

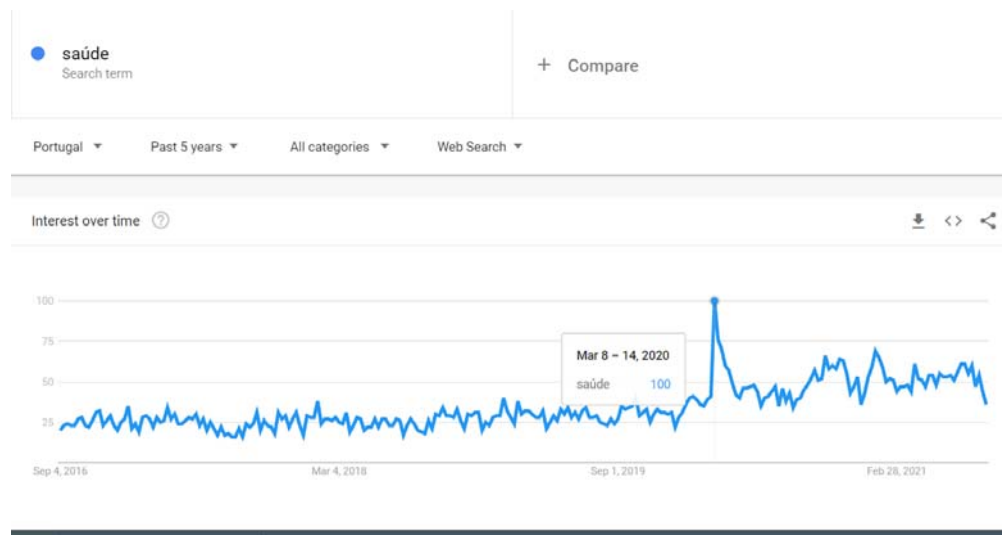


Figure 3. Google Trends search for the keyword Health, narrowed to Portugal, in the last five years, on August 30, 2021 (<https://trends.google.pt/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=PT&q=sa%C3%BAde>)

It is worth noting that “the answer comes later, the contract is always held late compared to the arrangements of the convocation” (Prado 67) when the public has already provided the speeches. Therefore, the device, the Juliana project, plays a significant role because:

The device seeks to draw attention, to promote customer retention, to encourage the proactive consumer's behavior as a listener, as a follower of consumer values, as a resonator, as a consumer. The narrator, to stand out, develops the text to appeal, to challenge a narrative loaded with meanings related to the everyday world. To be followed, the narrator creates contexts based on his authority as an expert. (Prado 67)

There is no frame of reference for the social community's apparent interest in the topic of health, endorsed by the echoes of experts dictating the benefits of the MD. Even if there were, the narrator would only confirm if his convocations were adequate to maintain a communication contract with the public vis a vis the messages promoted by Juliana after the public received the project.

This movement is in line with the famous expression used by the head of the Born agency, for when confronted with the pandemic, Juliana has become a stone cast in the pond in becoming relevant as a text, updating the MD to establish a food

culture centered on local production. In issue 59 (January February 2020), the message displayed in a box headlined “A diet that celebrates being Portuguese” suggests this motto:

The Portuguese style MD is a promoter of our culture and identity as a people. With Juliana, we want to bring the Portuguese closer to this food pattern/lifestyle and renew our commitment to promoting its benefits, reviving the ancient secrets in it and the roots of Portugal. With Juliana, we want to bring the Portuguese closer to this food pattern/lifestyle and renew our commitment to promoting its benefits, reviving the ancient secrets and the roots of being Portuguese. (9)

Hence, it is worth mentioning that the Portuguese style MD is a new cultural text created by the Jerónimo Martins marketing channels, and there is no record of a Portuguese version of the MD. This new designation is part of a narrative established to combine the ideals of health and sustainability, long connected by the publication to the MD, with the values of being Portuguese and belonging. This storyline grows stronger and stronger in the magazine as the pandemic progresses.

Lotman (*La Semiosfera I* 54), when dealing with the communicative process of the text, argues that, as part of collective memory, it grows richer, gets updated, or may even have parts forgotten. Such mutations are evident in this renewed movement of the MD, characterized as a translation of the tradition. The analyses confirm this phenomenon, which includes being Portuguese in the cultural text of the MD.

The covers of issues 53 (January/February 2020) and 54 (March/April 2020)⁷ focus on seasonality: they feature, respectively, recipes for winter and Easter highlights. Although both publications highlight the 40th anniversary of the PD supermarket chain, issue 54 is a commemorative edition. The so — called symbols of Portugal, like the colors of the national flag, the reference to typical recipes, and their connection to specific regions in the country, along with the inclusion of objects tied to local culture, are ignored on cover 53. On cover 54, the photo recipe is for "*minifolares com ovo de codorniz*" (puff pastry with quail eggs), a dish

⁷ Magazines, especially hard copy, work with a somewhat out-of-sync schedule with the factual events. Thus, SB only penetrates the semiosphere of the pandemic from issue 55 (May/June 2020) onward.

associated with Portuguese folklore⁸. To recognize such an association, one must own the repertoire of Portuguese gastronomic culture. With pastel tones and contemporary tableware, its imagery does not provide the same perception that more apparent symbols, such as the colors of the national flag or typical Portuguese tableware, would provide.

Issue 55 (May/June 2020) sets the pandemic cultural context into play. Halfway through the first quarantine period, the magazine was made available for free and only digitally. On the cover, the non-verbal elements highlight Portugal, with the colors of the Portuguese flag in the visual arrangement. The cover photo highlights the choice for symbols related to the regional paradigm: a fish-based recipe, included in the magazine as "*Dourada nacional no forno com escabeche e cenoura*" (roasted national sea bream with marinated carrot). The verbal statements complete the Portuguese construction with the following messages: "*Portugal à sua mesa*" (Portugal at your table) and "*Receitas rápidas e económicas com os melhores produtos nacionais*" (Quick and economical recipes with the best national products). This construction is significant because the publication does not often use red and green on the cover to evoke the Portuguese flag.

The design also suggests Portugal, as there are traces of green and red on the cover, underlining the slogan "*Portugal à sua mesa*" (Portugal at your table). The edition's page numbers also highlight these colors. Both initiatives become part of the 2021 issues when there is an opportunity to promote the magazine as a collection of recipes and content relating to the cuisine of the country's six regions.

Apart from the Christmas issue (n. 58, November/December 2020), which introduces Juliana to the reader and keeps the golden tone in focus (see Fig. 1), the combination of red and green frequently appears on the covers following issue 55 (see Fig. 4). In the summer issue (n. 56, July/August 2020), the colors of Portugal predominate in the composition of the refreshing fruit lollipops. In the following one (n. 57, September/October 2020), these colors materialize in the magazine's title and the boxes with messages describing the issue's promotions. The next three (numbers 59, 60, and 61), all referring to the first half of 2021, are featured as special issues for promoting a collection of recipes from different parts of the country and outline the names of each region with two dashes, in green and red (see Fig. 5).

⁸ The folar with quail egg is a traditional Easter dish in Portugal. The recipe links to a legend that involves the devotion to Santa Catarina and symbolizes reconciliation and forgiveness.



Figure 4. *Sabe Bem* 55th issue cover



Figure 5. *Sabe Bem* 59th issue cover

The editor's letters frequently include a reference to health in their narratives. Issue 59 (3) stresses the “*promoção da saúde pela alimentação*,” (promotion of health through food) and Juliana reinforces this commitment. Issue 61 (3) stresses PD's interest “*em promover a saúde através de uma boa alimentação*,” (in promoting health through good nutrition). It explains that, among the 2500 recipes developed by the nutrition team the magazine has published in its ten years, almost half of them are in line with the MD.

The MD is a significant vehicle for the health flagship, but it also stands for tradition, a dominant motto in the editor's letter, an essential topic for the PD. This noun is often used in the body of the magazine, and its radical – tradition and traditional, and their plural forms are mentioned twenty-three times in the hundred pages of the special edition dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the PD brand (n.54, January/February 2020).

The covers and the editor's letter examined endorse the premise of using this concept. “*O sabor da tradição*” (the taste of tradition) is announced on the covers of the 54th and 58th editions, and “*viagem pelos grandes clássicos*” (a journey through the great classics) and “*viagem pela gastronomia típica*” (a journey through local cuisine) on the 59th and 60th covers. The editor's letters also use this word, among others, to evoke a sense of origin and past. Moreover, these mnemonic convocations are often included in a context that praises belonging to the Portuguese universe – some excerpts, taken from the editor's letter in Table 1, show this link.

Looking at the editorials, issue 55 (May/June 2020) stands out because it represents a change in the magazine's targeting mode. It featured two messages: the editor's letter and a letter signed by PD's sales director titled “*compre o que é português*” (buy what is Portuguese). The editor's letter, featuring in every issue, underlines the cultural changes underway as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

In the month we celebrate *Sabe Bem's* ninth anniversary, we have a new normal in-store, very demanding and with enormous challenges at all levels. We know that nothing will be as it was before, and we also know that it is vital to look ahead and adapt. (2)

The note shows a change in behavior caused by the pandemic. Its message states that the magazine has become more valuable in the lockdown, as it helps the reader organize the daily meals, emphasizing that this would be a time when one “*preciso cozinhar*” (has to cook).

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| n.53 | (...) reviving classic tastes of typical Portuguese cuisine) |
| n.54 | (...) we share our <u>history</u> with Portugal and with the Portuguese (...) the gastronomic diversity, which is one of our country's most significant <u>legacies</u> and respecting traditions we have always tried to offer the best to a more demanding Portugal; (...) from the most <u>traditional</u> recipes to the <u>typical</u> sweets you will be able to cook with your family; good moments to celebrate with Portugal and the Portuguese |
| n.55 | (...) we invite you on a journey, from home, through 100% national and <u>authentic</u> flavors (...) taste the <u>typical</u> delicacies of our Portugal (...) – (editor's letter); |
| | <p>We have identified the Portuguese products most affected by this downturn, and we are buying them so that those who work the land, raise animals, and feed the country will not be short of orders. Furthermore, we will give greater visibility to the Portuguese quality products in our stores (...)</p> <p>We invite you to join forces with us by buying what is Portuguese. – (letter from the sales director)</p> |
| n.56 | (...) for 40 years, we have been passionate about good ingredients, good tastes, and good recipes, and we will continue to share this passion with you |
| n.57 | (...) dedication to bringing <u>authentic</u> food; (...) <u>genuine</u> , nutritious, and balanced <u>flavors</u> . Balance is, in fact, one of the keywords of the Mediterranean Diet, a dietary pattern that PD has promoted and advocates for more than a decade (...). For PD, it feels good to serve Portugal and help to make your table a better place (...) |
| n.58 | We know that the holidays will not be the same as we will have to postpone all the hugs and cuddles, but one thing is for sure: the table will have plenty of <u>traditional</u> recipes and delicacies of the season. Courses and desserts with the special touch and seasoning of grandma, dad or mom, and other relatives, <u>passed on from generation to generation</u> (...); (...) the table must have the old and faithful friend codfish) (...) to delight the Portuguese in <u>traditional</u> recipes (...); (...) Juliana's launch, a PD tribute to the Portuguese style MD, the ancient knowledge (...) A way to <u>keep heritage alive</u> (...); <u>traditional dishes</u> prepared with the utmost rigor (...) |
| n. 59 | SB celebrates its 10th anniversary in the best possible way: with a journey through the regions and flavors of Portugal. (...) let us discover the secrets of recipes, ingredients, protagonists, and traditions that make Portuguese gastronomy a worldwide reference (...). A decade ago, when the magazine project started, the <u>main focus</u> was promoting health through food. Ten years later (...) it has been reinforced with the launch of the Juliana project, a concept that represents the celebration of Portuguese style MD. (...) we adhere to the principles of the diet classified as <u>World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity</u> by UNESCO) (...) The Portuguese are well aware of the importance of this conviviality, and our identity (...) Get ready to be surprised by the <u>traditions</u> , stories, |

| | |
|-------|---|
| | and secrets behind some of the Portuguese cuisine's most famous dishes and products. |
| n. 60 | (...) we have never lost the drive to discover or rediscover the best of what we have in Portugal, for example, browsing the flavors of our gastronomy through the most <u>authentic</u> Portuguese ingredients) (...) Our journey through the regions and the flavors of Portugal (...) We stopped to listen to a proud woman from the Alentejo, a great lady in the Portuguese cuisine, Maria de Lourdes Modesto ⁹ (...) Through the passion for the best Portugal has (...) we always count on the best Portuguese products the PD has been bringing to our homes and whose production it supports (...) it is a constant recognition to national producers (...) we don't want Portuguese families to lack taste and joy (...) the <u>feeling of tradition</u> and celebration cannot be forgotten (...) come with us on this <u>surprising journey through the traditions of Portugal</u> . |
| n.61 | At PD, we have been passionate about food, and about everything related to the good Portuguese table, for over 40 years; (...) promoting health through food by helping Portuguese families; (...) each issue brings a Special devoted to the <u>gastronomic traditions of a region of Portugal</u> . |

Table 1. Most highlighted terms in the editor's letter that convoke the context of tradition (our emphasis).

The second letter of the issue had a picture of the author and a logo with the sentence “consigo damos força a Portugal” (with you, we make Portugal stronger). This logo, which refers to the coat of arms in the center of the Portuguese flag and has the same hues as the Portuguese national symbol (i.e., green, red, and golden yellow) invites the reader/consumer to engage in citizenship exalting Portugal. The article's title is also emblematic: “compre o que é português” (buy what is Portuguese) (SB 55 3), and its content is convocation to consumption as a means of solidarity with one's compatriots.

For 40 years, Pingo Doce has joined its strength to the strength of national production. Still, today, when national production needs more support than ever, we are reinforcing our commitment. We have identified the Portuguese products most affected by this downturn, and we are buying them so that those who work the land, raise animals, and feed the country will not be short of orders. (3)

Being Portuguese as a marketing campaign-related approach aimed at selling through a nationalistic appeal (Sousa) makes this issue peculiar. Besides this second letter, this issue has other highlighted visual and language messages replicated in the subsequent editions.

Thus, one can trace a translation process within the semiosphere of SB magazine starting in issue 55. The magazine narrative had already used the verbal sign "tradition" before. As Sobral says (*O revivalismo da alimentação*), "In Portugal in recent decades, there has been a persistent effort to preserve and defend culinary practices understood as traditional" (199). However, after the health crisis, which unfolds in an economic and social crisis, the magazine explores the noun with new meanings, linked to a sense of belonging beyond the bounds of the family, another constant sign in the magazine's texts. Stuart Hall (*A identidade cultural*) states that national culture is a discourse: the narrative of a nation is constructed and reconstructed from history, literature, media and popular culture. Also, according to the author, there are times when national cultures are tempted to seek a past time, in which the nation would have lived some kind of golden age.

Crises, such as the one caused by COVID-19, fit into this context. Traditional Portuguese recipes and rituals previously were about private affection, tied to memories and shared moments with those close to us. Updating this cultural text, the core of this semiosphere is crossed by discourses linked to a tradition personified by the appreciation of what is Portuguese, as a means of supporting food producers, calling for a new behavioral program: the consumption of local products to sustain and support Portuguese workers, empowering the local economy. It is worth noting that, even though sustainability topics cut across and essentially justify local consumption, in the SB, this practice relates almost entirely to the idea that this type of consumption establishes a relationship of solidarity and unity.

The previous editions also included international food products as a distinctive feature of the supermarket chain and described such products as delicacies. Issue 53, for example, includes a piece about the excellence of the PD chain's own — brand chocolate, noting that the bars are "feitos a partir do melhor cacão produzido no Gana e na Costa do Marfim" (made from the best cocoa produced in Ghana and Ivory Coast) (61). Foreign foods also feature in number 54 as signs of sophistication and quality. Cod from Norway, exotic fruits from tropical countries, and buffalo milk *burrata* from southern Italy are among the delicacies PD proposes to its customers.

The 55th issue is thus a landmark turning point. It makes intense use of local producers' images and their comments about how important the commercial relationship with the supermarket is for keeping their businesses afloat. Messages

on several pages highlight the discourses related to empowering the country through the consumption of regional products.

For instance, cooperative members join under the following rhetoric: “Purchasing of qualified regional products helps develop the country's most disadvantaged and depopulated regions. Supporting the production of native cattle breeds is a commitment on behalf of the national interest” (SB 55 7). Further on, the following text is linked to a horticulturist, pictured inside a greenhouse, surrounded by what is supposed to be his children: “Today, and more than ever, Pingo Doce has been fundamental for selling his products. The last weeks showed just that when the doors to the export market were practically closed, and the national market was essential for the survival of its producers, selling a substantial part of the domestic production. As for Beirabaga, we have much to be thankful for!” (SB 55 76).

In issue 56, the human element is the employees of the PD, who feature duly equipped with masks, talking about the sanitary procedures adopted by the company to avoid contamination. In the same issue, the magazine's visual identity includes the logo “National product,” crossed by green and red lines, and the slogan “with you we make Portugal stronger.” The signs materialized in the union of the colors green and red convoke the reader to the patriotic spirit and to recognize, rediscover and value the local products, as the use of two dashes in these colors, which underline the words in the context of the Portuguese universe. Olive oil, Angus beef, eggs, trout, raspberries, and cherries are some examples highlighted in issue 55 (May/June 2020). It reinforces the appeal to a sense of belonging to the nation through memory, phrases using the pronoun *we*, and even slogans linked to popular culture.

A publicized promotion of the PD own brand of olive oils, for example, describes them as “Surely a tradition of the Portuguese table” (10). The word “Portuguese” is underlined with the two dashes. This message builds an appeal to being Portuguese because this phrase, immersed in Portuguese culture, refers to the chorus of one of the most popular songs in the country: “*Uma casa portuguesa*” (A Portuguese house), sung by the fado singer Amália Rodrigues. It is worth noting that these texts – the chorus and the fado singer – became popular during the Estado Novo, the political period between 1933 and 1974 when a dictatorial regime governed Portugal under the rule of Salazar. Drawing on Vitor Sousa (2017), one can infer that messages like these, linked “at the service of an alleged sense of ‘being Portuguese’” (116), trigger nationalist rhetoric.

This olive oil advertisement also includes the phrases “our family of olive oils” and “National Product,” also highlighted in green and red; and then three cooking recipes, highlighting the targeted ingredient: the PD branded olive oil in these two colors. “The best of Portugal” is another motto that stands out on that page, as well as some boxes related to the advertised products, where one can see the image and texts that suggest the voice of producers or experts, endorsing the quality of Portuguese products. These messages demonstrate how PD supports them.

The use of the green and red outlines, which highlight or underline the terms linked to the Portuguese universe inside the magazine, are clarified in issue 56 (11): “In this issue, you can find a variety of recipes whose protagonists are national products, identified with the icon (drawing of the dashes), because together we make what is Portuguese stronger.” This information, footnoted, is on a page that contains the logo with the coat of arms with the message “with you we make Portugal stronger,” mentioned above, along with four pictures, stating: the best of Portuguese tradition; the best of our butcher's shop; the best of our fishmonger's shop; the best of our fruits and vegetables. The phrases using the pronoun “we” endorse the reader's belonging to the country's context and its tradition and summons the reader to realize that the supermarket, and its logistical divisions around food, are part of this scenario.

These interlocutions of the magazine, which contribute to activate the consumption of national products, are in line with the 52% of the Portuguese surveyed at the beginning of the pandemic who said that “the consumption of national products is a duty” and 29% consider it a “patriotic act”, respectively 7% and 2% more compared to the previous year's survey (Miguel). Among the reasons listed for consuming Portuguese products, 82% claimed to promote job creation, 62% for promoting economic development, 57% motivated by the superior quality of the products, and only 9% considered it a way to limit the environmental impact (Observador 19). This movement is further emphasized by the words of the president of Portugal Foods, who states that the disruption of supply chains at the beginning of the pandemic contributed to the focus on the “made in Portugal” products and that the emotional value of the local supplies is now being “transformed into economic value for companies” (Souza).

Conclusion

Aiming at analyzing which narratives linked to food culture the SB cooking magazine presented during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study concludes that the health crisis contaminated the discourses of this publication, establishing a new cultural text within the Portuguese food semiosphere. The use of signs that invoke Portugal was proof of this conclusion. The colors green and red were explicitly articulated in the narratives to link the reader and the national flag. Besides these colors, the messages praised and promoted Portuguese producers and the attributes of regional merchandise. However, it is worth emphasizing that these messages are not just about food quality but also relate to a potential citizenship action through consuming these goods.

One can also notice an updating of the SB magazine's semiosphere, from the translation of tradition into the cultural text of the MD, which is now referred to as being “Portuguese style.” The Juliana brand, and its composition of signs, which endorse this food proposal, reinforces SB's discourses around a convocation to being Portuguese.

By taking the above points into consideration, the magazine unfolded food – a basic necessity item – into signs of union, solidarity, patriotism, belonging, organizing a semiosphere, supported by narratives, which retain similarities with the elements present in nationalist discourses promoted by totalitarian governments. This semiotic composition places the enunciator in the condition of a father, the one who guides and protects those who inhabit his semiosphere. Even though the text is located in a capitalist paradigm, it makes sense to be alert to a model in which a commercial enterprise assumes this position. Taking into account the relevant role that the food universe occupies for society, it is fair to reflect on the effects of this construction of values, since discourses that follow this line can flow towards intolerance postures, especially in a pandemic moment, when food sovereignty proved to be a fragility.

In this sense, it is important to be aware of other configurations that go along with these discourses, which deserve to be explored in new investigations: one linked to the domain of the business market and the other to that of politics. In these two semiospheres, one can note significant updates, on one hand, the advance of foreign supermarket groups in the country; on the other hand, there is the rise of

political groups affiliated with conservative agendas⁹. These two cultural texts, that meet and interact, reveal a fertile environment for the expansion of the spirit of *Portugality* and, in extreme cases, of attitudes of intolerance.

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⁹ In the 2022 elections, amid a spike in the contamination of the Omicron variant, the far-right Chega (Enough) party, which spells out values of intolerance, rose from one to 12 seats in parliament.

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