

Environmental citizenship and consumption of meat: between dialogs, dilemmas and perspectives of consumers

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Recebido em 28 de janeiro de 2020.

Aceito em 06 de janeiro de 2021.

Publicado em 15 de abril de 2021.

Abstract - Recognizing the need for contributing to the discussions surrounding environmental issues, this article is about the dimension of consumption as an element for citizenship. It connects politicized consumption, environmental citizenship and meat consumption to the following problem: what is /are the perception(s) of consumers concerning the environmental impacts of production and consumption of meat? This study aimed to discuss the consumption of meat and its connection with the environmental citizenship. It was decided to use the techniques of exploratory focus groups and in-depth individual interviews in order to obtain the information and the thematic content analysis in order to analyze the material. One can verify that the consumption of meat is always linked to individual concerns like taste, health and pleasure. There is also a reflexive distancing of the participants around the theme and their dietary practices.

Keywords: Politicized consumption. Environmental citizenship. Consumption of meat.

Cidadania ambiental e consumo de carnes: entre diálogos, dilemas e perspectivas de consumidores

Resumo - Reconhecendo a necessidade de contribuir com as discussões acerca da questão ambiental, este artigo trata da dimensão do consumo enquanto elemento para a cidadania. Relaciona-se consumo politizado, cidadania ambiental e consumo de carnes a partir do seguinte problema: qual(is) a(s) percepção(ões) dos consumidores acerca dos impactos ambientais da produção e do consumo de carnes? Objetivou-se discutir o consumo de carnes e sua relação com a cidadania ambiental. Optou-se pelas técnicas de grupo focal exploratório e entrevista individual em profundidade para a obtenção das informações e pela análise de conteúdo temática para análise do material. Pode-se verificar que o consumo de carnes aparece sempre atrelado a preocupações individuais como o gosto, a saúde e o prazer. Há ainda, um distanciamento reflexivo dos participantes em torno da temática e das suas práticas alimentares.

Palavras-chave: Consumo politizado. Cidadania ambiental. Consumo de carnes.

Ciudadanía ambiental y consumo de carne: entre diálogos, dilemas y perspectivas del consumidor

Resumen - Reconociendo la necesidad de contribuir a las discusiones sobre temas ambientales, este artículo aborda la dimensión del consumo como un elemento para la ciudadanía. Se relacionan consumo político, ciudadanía ambiental y consumo de carne al siguiente problema: ¿cuál es la percepción de los consumidores con respecto a los impactos ambientales de la producción y consumo de carne? Objetivo-discutir el consumo de carne y su relación con la ciudadanía ambiental. Se optó por técnicas exploratorias de grupos focales y entrevistas individuales en profundidad para análisis de información y análisis de contenido temático para análisis del material. Se pudo verificar que el consumo de carne siempre aparece vinculado a preocupaciones individuales como el sabor, la salud y el placer. Todavía hay una distancia reflexiva de los participantes en torno al tema y sus prácticas alimentarias.

Palabras clave: Consumo politizado. Ciudadanía ambiental. El consumo de carne.

Introduction

It is known that the human being is the environment and the human being is constituted *in* and *from the* environment. In this way, this relationship causes environmental impacts that can be negative or positive. Therefore, one should consider this relationship as possessor of limits and possibilities that must be pondered in the light of the ethical consideration of a mutual constitution. From this perspective, production and consumption of food are also included as a universal and daily theme.

In addition to the essentiality of food products for human life, the discussion must analyze the scenario of population growth, which also means a potential increase of consumers (80 million new inhabitants per year), an augment in income and a change in the patterns of food consumption (CNI 2012). Thus, it is important to discuss the sustainability of food, since the planting of inputs until its decomposition. In addition to being a challenge, this analysis is the most coherent way of presenting the social, political, economic and environmental aspects of food consumption which is one of the most important political processes in human life (Rodrigues, Zaneti and Laranjeira 2012).

Thus, food acquires even more importance in the environmental issue, for its complexity, representation in societies and close connection with the environment, both through the need for exploitation of resources, as well as for the dimensions that food takes on human and social formation (Azevedo and Pelicioni 2011). Food has relations with the local culture, religion, taste, tradition, symbolism and identity (Azevedo 2017), besides ensuring livelihood and health; but, it was found that variables such as age, gender, physical constitution or illnesses also demonstrate it as social differentiator (Carneiro 2005). At this juncture, meat is considered an essential element of the meal, granting the possibility of social status (Mintz 2001), sociability and leisure (Barbosa, Portilho and Veloso 2009). Therefore, it transcends the economic aspect, usually highlighted in the analysis of the theme.

The increase of global population requires urgency in the reformulation of the productive systems once that with this increase grow the demands for land, natural resources and the production of greenhouse gases by means of pressure on the ecosystem. With the growth of the global middle class, also increases the consumption of meat. This means that its production will

require larger quantities of grain and water, with higher pressure on the agricultural systems (United Nations 2012).

In this context, animal breeding expands continually to produce more meat, originating large volumes of waste and effluents geographically more concentrated (FAO 2009). It should be noted that the intensive management of beef cattle, for example, has been presented as claimant of high supply of inputs, which generates a large amount of waste and increase of cattle trampling on the soil, causing its compression, and leading to a greater loss of space compared to other production systems when analyzed their environmental impacts (CNI 2012). Roy *et al.* (2009) conducted a review of studies that applied the life cycle assessment in food production and identified that, concerning the production of beef, the environmental impacts of fattening livestock are dependent on the period of feeding, on food production and the type of food, as well as animal housing and storage of manure.

Thus, it is necessary to reflect on the reason by which the consumption of meat has become a widespread practice in the contemporary society by observing what consequences are associated to the supply of this demand (Hiath 2013). The environmental impacts should also be a constant concern for the consumers, given that they represent one of the main components of the production chain, and when purchasing the products, they respond to industry favoring the continuity and growth of production (Brasília, 2005).

In the recommendations on the adoption of sustainable standards arises the proposal to rethink the consumption practices to meet today's needs without compromising the environmental quality and the needs of future generations. However, it is perceived that, in Brazil, there is still an incipient character regarding the effective understanding on the issue. This is represented by the lack of consensus on its purpose: if it is a question directed to individual actions of the consumer or a political opening for an exercise of citizen (Silva 2012).

This process of environmentalization and politicization of consumption and of everyday life relates to the achievements of political, moral and ecological values (Castañeda 2012). It is worth noting that this notion of citizenship was limited to the interlocution of individuals with political parties, with the government or with the political institutions. Overcoming this vision, the line between the private and the public interest and between the world of consumption and the world of citizenship, is less pronounced (Echegaray 2012).

Therefore, by understanding the possibility of enlarging the discussion about the human actions and their collective influence and about the consumption as an urgent field of reflections emerges the proposition of environmental citizenship as a new way of the individual redirect their practices. The concept of environmental citizenship, which is central in this article, can be understood as the effective condition of being together with others, based on a commitment made by citizens on the search for a sustainable society (Grubba, Pellenz and Bastiani, 2017). Environmental citizenship presupposes that citizens assume their responsibilities in the ethical and collective management of nature, biodiversity, human and non-human animals in a planetary dimension (Pellenz and Balsissera 2016).

In this sense, new ideologies, new discourses and social movements relate consumption and politics proposing as a solution for the confrontation of social and environmental problems, the politicized consumption practices (Portilho, Castañeda and Castro 2011). Consumers concerned with their decisions take ethical positions because they believe that by means of purchase they are

supporting environmental, social or political points of view that are important for the collectivity (Long and Murray 2013).

Understanding this fact helps to exit the sphere of individualism so widespread in today's society and of the discourse of food habits while single and influencer of the health-disease issues, to an ethical-political approach pervaded by socio-cultural, religious, economic and ethical issues. In this sense, consumers take decisions by understanding that their consumption interferes also collectively. In the same way, the possibility of a consumer who is concerned with the environmental issue strengthens the political vision of food. It is therefore necessary that consumers reappropriate their social place and their role in the productive chain.

To approach the topic it is argued that elements of socio-cultural, religious, economic and ethics dimensions appear as influencers of habits. It is possible, even, that consumers change their habits influenced by social and environmental concerns, because the food choices and the act of eating meet not only biological and individual aspects of human life, but also social, political, cultural, economic and ecological issues, overcoming the status of simple commodity (Oliveira, Cruz and Schneider 2019).

Based on the above, this article, resulting from the dissertation “Is the flesh weak?’ perception of the environmental impacts of production and consumption of food” (title in Portuguese: “A carne é fraca?” Percepção dos impactos ambientais da produção e do consumo alimentar) de Sampaio (2015), aims to discuss the consumption of meat and its relationship with the environmental citizenship from the dialog with different consumers. In this sense, it reports to the participants of this research as consumers and subjects immersed in a common and, at the same time, individual, reality and who bring in their speeches the influences of their way of life.

Thus, it is a study of meat consumers perception. From the merleau-pontyana perspective, where it is understood that the individual, as a consumer, acquires his place in the world and builds meanings through consumption. According to Merleau-Ponty (1999), perception is not just the sum of bodily sensations, but it is a general symbolic translation of the world frequented, understood, and signified by the body. In this way, consumption experiences are also ways in which the individual experiences his reality. All perception is communication and, in a society mediated by consumption, studies on perception ought to recognize daily life and habits as possible fields for the exercise of citizenship.

Material and methods

The qualitative approach of this research sought to enter the field of perception of consumers as environmental agents in their dietary practices. In this way, and recognizing the need for interaction with the participants, it was decided to use the technique of the focus group and in-depth individual interview as techniques for obtaining information.

The technique of focus group facilitated the identification of feelings and opinions of a group on a particular subject, being that the interaction produces data and *insights* that would not have been possible otherwise (Smeha 2009). The modality of the exploratory focus group (Virgínio and Nóbrega 2012) enabled the deepening of the theme, the facilitation of exchanges and elaborations and the good management of the group. It was decided to form groups of six

participants (Dias 2000; Kitzinger and Barbour 2009) in order to ensure the quantity and variety of information and the broadening of the focus of analysis (Gatti 2012).

The interviews allowed the greatest expression of those that little had communicated during the group or could not attend the meetings, but wanted to compose the research, as occurred with Group 3, due to the non-attendance of two participants in the discussions. Interviews were also conducted with one participant from each focus group, in order to deepen information. The interview in qualitative research is evaluated as an important resource because the social actors can more freely expose their behavior, opinions and expectations (Leopardi 2001). In total, the survey counted with 22 subjects, due to the withdrawal of a participant in Groups 1 and 4.

The criteria considered for the group formation met the dimensions addressed in this study (socio-cultural, religious, economic and ethics). The participants were consumers who include meat in their diet, thus grouped: *Group 1) Students and environmentalists*: two Masters students and a student from Doctorate Program of Development and Environment of the University Federal of Piauí (UFPI) and two environmentalists. This group was chosen to represent the scientific discussions and/or policies related to environmental issues; *Group 2) University students*: six undergraduate students in the areas of medicine, nutrition, biology, agronomy, economics and philosophy of the mentioned University, reflecting possibilities of discussion about environmental issues in their various areas of training; *Group 3) Representatives of religious or philosophical segments*: six participants of the segments: Adventist, Catholic, Spiritism, Buddhist, Umbanda and Santo Daime. This group points to the religious aspects as possible constituents of dietary practices and, therefore, it was decided by the variety of opinions resulting from the various segments; and, *Group 4) Community*: five participants of a group of healthy food representing the knowledge and popular practices of meat consumption.

Each meeting of the focus group had a variation of one and a half hour to two hours. The proposal of the first meeting was to gather the initial perceptions regarding the consumption of meat as a common, everyday practice among the participants and the associated meanings. The objective of the second meeting was to debate the consumption of meat in relation to the potential environmental impacts arising from such consumption. On the second meeting, as a stimulus and familiarization of the groups with the topic of research, a visualization of the first 15 minutes of the documentary “The flesh is weak” (title in Portuguese: “A carne é fraca”), produced by the Institute Nina Rosa in 2005, was shown, which presents aspects of the meat industry. The choice of the video did not aim at the dissemination of the documentary, but at the illustration obtained from contact with the environmental issues addressed therein, as it required by the modality of exploratory focus group. The use of this audiovisual feature presented feasible and facilitated the discussion of the subject.

For a better analysis, video recordings of the encounters were made, with the consent of the participants and as per ethical recommendations of research involving human beings, conferred in Legal Opinion N° 30310914.7.0000.5214 of the Committee of Ethics in Research of UFPI. The focus in the talks was important not only for the understanding of the group dynamics itself, but also to enrich the analysis (Gatti 2012), which was based on the Content Analysis method proposed by Minayo (2010). It was decided to use the Thematic Analysis and the procedure took place through the stages of pre-analysis, exploration of the material, handling the results and interpretation. For the analysis, it was important to ensure the focus not only on individual behaviors or aspects or

in the group in the abstract as reference, but to emphasize the sequences of exchanges and the group context (Gatti 2012), considering that both the opinions and the reactions of the different participants were presented by the group dynamics.

Results and discussion

It is known that, by having direct contact with things and the world, the subject has an active involvement with what surrounds him/her (Merleau-Ponty 1999), because the biological apparatus and the social and cultural context in which the individual is immersed act on how he/she perceives the world, his/her environment (Ribeiro, Cavassan and Caramaschi 2011). So, either within scientific, political, religious or economic context, it becomes increasingly necessary to reflect on the current way of life and the relationship with the future. Therefore, considering that in every sector of society there are agents who interfere and contribute to the social changes, the participants of this study were instituted to position themselves and initiate discussions about the reality in which they live.

The discussions that will be submitted express the senses and meanings found from the dialogs, speeches and experiences shared in the focus groups and interviews. The article used the notion of perception of Merleau-Ponty (1999), which understands that perception is communication with the world, it is the valuation we make of it based on the relational structure between our body and the world.

By means of axes of analysis based on the thematic categories, the visions of the participants about the relationship between the consumption of meat and environmental citizenship are explained. It was decided to present the excerpts of speeches interspersed with the theoretical resources, being indicated in italics and abbreviations (FG - focus group and IV - interview). Participants are identified by gender, age and individual characteristic, when necessary (example: Male (M): 45 years old, Adventist; Female (F): 21 years old, medicine).

“Then the food also accompanies...”

This axis of analysis explains the first encounter with the groups and the first questions in the interviews, addressing influences in the perception of consumers on their consumption of meat. To bring, *a priori*, the socio-cultural, religious, economic and ethics dimensions as aspects of composition of the theme, it is understood that each participant, according to their perception and their way of life, finds grounds that mobilize him/her to act in a certain way. In this way, the consumption acquires its own strength and justification: There are many products that we consume on a day to day basis and our pace of life dictates *standards in relation to time, and we don't usually have much time to check these things* [justification] (FG-1, M: 29 years old, environmentalist); and neither *patience* (FG-4, M: 50 years old).

It is not common to think about food habits and, even more, about the consumption of meat. *“We are not taught to worry about that”* [unaccountability] (FG-2, M: 21 years old, philosophy). When this occurs, it is sometimes restricted to the scope of food health, happening, for example, after nutritional recommendations.

FG-2: We go on living, go on living, to eat becomes something linked to necessity, social pleasure, but we are not faced with feeding problems. [...] we will come across either when we're undernourished, or when we're already getting obese, when it is a health problem (F: 21 years old, medicine).

For Group 2, to eat and consume meat is mainly a health issue. This vision was only magnified by the participant of philosophy, indicating that the area of professional training enables a variety of reflections: *how much should one eat, what is the extent of what one should eat, one should not exceed limits, one should not eat less than what is necessary to meet the needs, what should one eat, whether it is right to eat meat, whether it is right to eat only vegetables* (FG-2, M: 21 years old, philosophy). The discussion also considered other aspects such as production, food waste and hunger (Azevedo and Pelicioni 2011), but none of these were deepened.

The remark made on the FG-2 is also found in other studies with university students indicating that there are not clear differences between ethical attitudes and professional training, mainly in the questions on the use of animals (Fischer, Cordeiro and Librelato 2016; Fischer and Tamioso 2016). In the case of the participants in this study, there were specific manifestations of each area of training, with special attention to contrasts and tensions in the relationship with the animal. This debate generated strategies of fugue such as silence or overlapping of speeches. This occurs because, as emphasizes Adams (2012), on the emotional level, there is a constraint in relation to the consumption of animals. There are multiple processes that guide the decision of how and how much to consume, but the fact is that the animals occupy a place in this confrontational relationship, which generates an ethical dilemma of difficult approach (Fischer, Cordeiro and Librelato 2016).

Without doubt, meat has an important association with food health, being reinforced its nutritional value as a *major source of protein* (FG-1, F: 25 years old, Masters, biologist). And *there's a lot of things that you will only achieve if you eat meat* (FG-2, F: 21 years old, biology); *the proteins that come in the flesh, only come in the flesh* (FG-3, F: 57 years old, Spiritist). So, *if I don't consume the necessary nutrients, I'll be a sick person, right?* (FG-4, F: 69 years old). The exception to this collective thinking is represented by the participant of the Adventist philosophy: *meat is highly harmful to health* (FG-3: M: 45 years old). Also the Santo Daime recognizes that *science has already discovered much protein value of vegetables, which supply the needs of the body* (FG-3: M: 38 years old).

Group 4, bringing their popular and everyday practices on the consumption of meat, pondered their preferences by the type of meat as an attitude of health care. The participants opt for a lower per day and per week consumption. But, even with the diversity and divergence of factors that widely influence preferences in meat consumption, some patterns have been repeated when it comes to gender, age and geographical location (Tucker 2014). In this context, eventually ethical conflicts arise when the animal intended for feeding, acquires a relationship of nearness and esteem with man.

FG-4: I once killed a duck, so never again in my life (F: 69 years old). If it is mine, I don't kill (M: 72 years old). I cut its neck several times and it wouldn't die, started jumping without head, never again did I kill a duck and I never eat it again. That, for me, was a painful thing (F: 69 years old). I don't kill, because I feel sorry, we raise an animal, feeding it with all tenderness, ... And use an ax on its head and eat it (M: 72 years old). I also think it's very inhumane, if it's one, if it's from home I don't want... (F: 43 years old).

The affective dimension portrayed allows the identification and recognition of the animal as a being worthy of ethical consideration (Singer 2004). In this aspect, the identification is presented by the representation of death. Feelings of guilt and care are also present. Thus, it is possible to perceive the ethics in the decision not to kill or not to eat. In this direction, the ethics and politics can reach the level of practical questions: in the choice of the best food for health, preventing waste, worrying about the impact of the consumption or with the animal.

Then, if the consumer is relatively free to determine the meaning of their consumption (Linares and Trindade, 2011), which concerns permeate the consumption of meat? In general, the consensus established by the participating groups indicates that it is not usual and nor it is wished to think about the impacts that food habits generate in the collective context. When comparing the groups, it is clear a larger context: *Generally, we only purchase, make and eat* (FG-1, F: 25 years old, Masters, biologist). When *you're eating, you don't think about it* [justifying, laughs] (FG-3, M: 45 years old, Adventist). *Even because feeling responsible causes much anguish, right?* [feeling of remission] (FG-2, M: 21 years old, philosophy). But *without wanting everyone is also part of this [insight]* (FG-4, F: 43 years old).

In Group 1, again it is evident that the issue of health, linked to the conditions of production, was perceived as a concern with the consumption of meat: *I think that there's always a concern regarding the origin of the product* (FG-1, M: 29 years old, environmentalist), but *we want to believe that someone supervised, that everything is ok at the origin of the meat, right?* (FG-1, M: 34 years old, PhD, engineering). This also, in some way, was repeated in other groups:

FG-2: We only worry when we see (F: 21 years old, biology). I think that only if we perceive something abnormal (F: 21 years old, medicine). The issue of whether it is a hygienic restaurant (M: 19 years old, economy). I always check which, where was the slaughterhouse, there's always the information on the label... (M: 25 years old, nutrition). There is the supervision of slaughterhouses (F: 24 years old, agronomy).

FG-3: There is no healthy food. It is already industrialized. [...] I don't usually eat out (F: 43 years old, Umbanda). I, at least where I am, I try to see the condition from thence. I arrive in a showcase, but I also don't know what it was like before the showcase (F: 57 years old, Spiritist). Generally, everyone skips this step, right? (M: 45 years old, Adventist). I am usually worried with whoever makes it (M: 44 years old, Buddhist).

FG-4: Well, I never go out [to eat] (M: 82 years old). Because meat is not a healthy meat nowadays (M: 50 years old). We see how it is preserved. I prefer to buy at the supermarket (F: 69 years old). [In the market] it is exposed, arrives at dawn (M: 72 years old). We trust in the place where we buy, right? (F: 43 years old).

In the context presented, it should be noted that these apparent concerns with the consumed product do not consist in a factor that awakens a political action, as proposed Portilho (2005). However, a study conducted by Lazzarini et al. (2016) identified that health in the production of food is recognized by consumers as motivation for behavioral changes to occur in favor of reducing consumption of meat. But, for a change to occur, consumers emphasize that it is necessary to know the trajectory of the product.

Differences were perceived only in the case of the representative of the Santo Daime, who buys meat directly from the supplier. Defining himself as a critical consumer and less oriented to the market (Echegaray, 2012) argues that it is important to check *the meaning that you give to that flesh*

there; what I eat is not geared on meat, I do not stock meat as people do and have “awareness from where it comes” (FG-3: M: 38 years old). This decision of the consumer has favored the implementation and the development of initiatives for food supply that bring consumers and suppliers together (Darolt et al. 2016). Furthermore, how and how much one consumes helps to identify the interference of consumption in collective issues. This movement comes with a transformation process in which the consumer must act politically in consumption, in general, and in food consumption, in particular.

Further discussions point to a larger awareness of the consumer represented by food activism in the contemporary concept of healthy food: «ecological; organic; ethics; place; decolonial food (and colonial); sustainable development; traditional; safe and appropriate; clean; pure; animal friend food; food made by women; affective food; *site-specific food; comfort food...*” (Azevedo 2015, p. 299).

However, the impulse, the desire and the fantasies in the act of consuming (Sequinel and Caron 2010), reinforced by the speech of culture, status, media and health were further emphasized by the participants of this study in respect to the individual and collective sphere and are appointed among the psychological aspects of meat consumption (Modlinska and Pisula 2018). For example, *if you eat rice and beans, egg, you are poor. If you eat only meat, any meat, any piece of meat, you are middle class. If you eat “picanha” (sirloin cap), you are rich* (FG-2, M: 25 years old, nutrition). So, *because it is a matter of income* (FG-2, M: 19 years old, economy), there is a great influence of the market, both in terms of access to meat and in the desire to consume it. Therefore, *today one doesn't eat to eat, one eats for being* (FG-3, M: 45 years old, Adventist). Also, *the media places on us consumption habits (...), and this has a very strong pressure* (FG-1, M: 29 years old, environmentalist). *And the propaganda is there every day, at prime time saying that, that is part of a happy family* (FG-2, F: 21 years old, medicine). This emotional aspect abbreviates the feeling of impotence and irrationality and, therefore, distances the consumer of his own consumption.

As mentioned, food habits carry cultural, affective and behavioral meanings (Costa 2009) that can be understood as principles. In addition, the human being wants and needs to consume “*and, furthermore, our economic system is capitalist*” (FG-1, F: 39 years old). It is valid to recognize also that the globalization connected people and food produced in different places of the world, and at the same time, favored the loss of bond of food with its place of origin. This way, are also lost socio-cultural links and references of the origin of the products and their impact from production to consumption (Oliveira, Cruz and Schneider 2019), hindering the attitude of one seeing oneself as a citizen at the time of eating, of consuming meat. On the other hand, the consumer is increasingly pressed to reflect and to change their consumption habits, because this is currently considered one of the greatest dilemmas of sustainability (Zanirato and Rotondaro 2016).

“You cannot be a co-star”

Until now, the visions of the participants of this research about the relationship between production and consumption reveal a superficiality that hinders the perception on consumption and environmental citizenship. Therefore, this axis of analysis brings issues discussed at the second meeting of the focus group and in the unfolding of the interviews. It should be noted that the previous discussions were pervaded by difficulties in perceiving themselves present and active in the production chain, and of reflecting on their role in the consumption. This requires criticality and

overcoming an alienating model (Freitas and Avila 2010) that puts the consumer as a passive figure even when the consumer is established to assume a political role in society, as are the participants of this research, and especially those who admit a place of leadership or formation of opinions.

With its particularities, each participant group demonstrated conflicts and contradictions as citizens and consumers. The explanation for this is that the initiative should be from the State (FG-1; FG-3), because one is insignificant compared to a system (FG-3; FG-4), or yet, because the commitment to collective issues in general, and with the environmental issue, in particular, goes out in the face of growing human and individual needs (FG-2; FG-4). These justifications are similar to those found in the study of Macdiarmid, Douglas and Campbell (2016) with 12 focus groups of consumers in rural and urban areas. Like with this study, there was a detachment from the political role of consumers, prevailing a vision of citizenship linked to state power, which hinders the recognition of the possibilities of citizen experience. In this sense, the consumer does not usually rethink the forms and meanings that involve the consumption nor question themselves about the impacts in social life, the limits and attitudes as a citizen in the act of consuming (Costa and Teodosio 2011).

When deepening on the issue of citizenship, some participants in this study demonstrated an ethical stance in favor of values and attitudes that promote social change. More precisely, this ethical implication emerged in Group 3, linked to religious foundations, to a concept of change and responsibility to elevate the spirit. The citizenship starts when *observing the attitudes* (F: 57 years old Spiritist), *policing the actions* (F: 43 years old, Umbanda), *developing a character* (M: 45 years old, Adventist), *impose oneself a posture* (M: 44 years old, Buddhist). Therefore, this group advocates a moral reform, because only *when man educate themselves morally, then yes, we will have a better world* (FG-3, F: 57 years old Spiritist). It is necessary to understand that the social changes and citizenship do not happen *simply by changing the system, [...] it is from inside to outside, from the individual to the collective* (FG-3: IV, M: 38 years old, Santo Daime).

In addition, the consumption of meat for these consumers brought important issues, once that showed that the relationship between eating and spirituality draws important influences on how the subject perceives him/herself in the world. The understanding that one is, in some way, substantiated from the food, taking into consideration the fact that it is ingested and enters the body, allows to talk about a kind of moral burden that man carries within. Thus, the bodies can be considered as the product of character which, in turn, is revealed by the way one eats (Mintz 2001).

In this sense, if the subject is connected to the world through the body, the meaning that the subject gives this body influences their perception about the world (Merleau-Ponty 1999). In addition, it is important to note that it is through the body that the subject appropriates the world to survive, having as basic needs and conditions, the act of eating and breathing. In this respect, the subject is not alone in the world, because the world becomes a part of the subject. But these participants do not receive only influences of religious or philosophical beliefs, they are formed also by the current model of society which also argues that the change should be an effort of the individual. However, while recognizing that individual actions are important and should be encouraged, *attitudes must be ahead of everything* (FG-3, F: 57 years old Spiritist), in general, the speeches were predominantly outside the subject. It is difficult to perceive themselves environmentally, to find themselves in the world as a being also active, as develops Merleau-Ponty (1999) in his concept of perception.

The perceptive process being a phenomenological process, it should be remembered that the awareness of the perceived world permeates the whole experiences of the subject. And, although perception is something felt, experienced in a movement of mutual delivery and reception, there are difficulties in regarding consumption: *Also we live in a world in which we stand by what is already there, by what is already done* (FG-3: IV, M: 49 years old, Catholic). *That is to say, the error is not ours, we were born with the environment already ruined* (FG-4, M: 50 years old). *And if there's this need to consume, it doesn't matter where it comes from, what time you're eating, what you're eating, what's being affected. It's the conflict of interests* (FG-2: M, 19 years old, economy).

On the consumption of meat and its relationship with the environmental issue, the excess of consumption was cited by all participants of this study as a concern, because the more the consumption grows, greater impacts may arise in production, however, this reason is still not sufficient enough to reduce consumption by these participants. Pohjolainen et al. (2016) also identified that the reduction in meat consumption is supported by the majority of consumers, although for some specific reasons like health and animal matter, being the environmental reasons only potentially seen as a positive sign to an image of a conscious consumer or a prospect of sustainable food policy.

In this study, concerns about environmental aspects were more recurring in Group 1 who explained the need for ethical consideration concerning the environment. On the other hand, even when *a flag is raised* (FG-1, M: 25 years old, environmentalist) it is difficult to change habits that arouse pleasure. Thus, although one recognizes the excessive consumption of meat, there is a reflective detachment of feeding practices and a difficulty in denying the individual satisfaction in favor of a collective interest.

The consumption of meat, this way, because it is considered a deeply ingrained habit, leads to consumers' opposition or reluctance on reduction of meat consumption, so that the desire to eat meat seems to be very difficult to overcome. In the same way, the diet and life style do not seem to warrant political interference, because to do so would be a violation of privacy and individual autonomy or even a violation of a human right, i.e. the right to eat whatever you want (Nordgren 2012). In the study of Macdiarmid, Douglas and Campbell (2016), consumers have shown a reluctance to decrease the consumption of meat because they associated it with the pleasure of eating and with social, personal and cultural values. Moreover, they did not rely on the association between meat consumption and climate change, for example, being the non-food behaviors more acceptable for a possible change.

Thus, in general, when consumers realize themselves relieved of a collectivity, they relieve themselves from their role as citizens and, consequently, from their ethical-political action. Therefore, health continues being a great motive for the reorientation of food habits, so that the stimulus to the understanding of the relationship between human health and the environment can facilitate the exercise of an environmental citizenship. Some researches (Tilman and Clark 2014; Johnston, Fanzo and Cogill 2014; Lazzarini et al. 2016) corroborate this perspective when discussing the behavior of consumers in the sustainable food, relating human health and the environment. It is worth remembering that the movements of food activism promote the ethical-political understanding of food (Azevedo 2017) and formalize promising initiatives of environmental citizenship in which the consumer is no longer a co-star of the productive chain.

Conclusions

In general, the reception of the theme by the participants of this research portrays the reflexive detachment of the practices of daily consumption. However, it is possible to launch some positions on the need for this discussion: 1) It is necessary to extend the conception of politics to promote the environmentalization of consumption; 2) understand that meat consumption while feeding practice is one of the elements of organization of society; 3) understand the relationship of the consumer with their consumption helps to identify how the citizenship in food works.

According to the understanding of the participants, the consumption of meat and the environmental citizenship are distant issues because there is a difficulty to insert environmental concerns at the moment of consuming and eating. Thus, there is a rupture between consumption and environment; between individual, subject, citizen and world. There is also a conception of inactivity before a system that determines the standards. It is the actions of the State or the interests of the market and the media that decide how the subject-consumer-citizen should act. These interests are reinforced by biological, individual and socio-cultural needs that seem to be attenuated when interferences from philosophical or ethical assumptions occur, like the access to scientific, religious or experiential knowledge.

It is in this sense that the Master's and Doctoral students took to develop environmental concerns from the contact with the scientific discussions and the environmentalists when joined to specific groups. However, the issue of the meat is still not an environmental issue for those participants. University students admitted detachment of environmental concerns reporting little information in their academic courses. The religious group addressed the discussion as religious practice required for the spiritual and ethical development of man, although the environmental issue is still in the background. Participants in the healthy food group do not view the issue of meat as an environmental issue and the perception about the (non) consumption was only and closely linked to aspects of health.

It is important to consider here the significance of a relatively different historical, cultural and symbolic context between the groups. For example, Group 4 was composed of an older public, lower level of education and income. It is emphasized that perceptions, attitudes, opinions and representations are socio-culturally constructed. Regarding the elements that made up the influential dimensions of eating habits predominated, respectively: 1) Socio-cultural: age, lifestyle, information and education, biological discourse, health-disease relationship and media; 2) Religious: moral foundations; 3) Economic: income, market and status; 4) Ethics: relationship with the animal; excess and waste.

Finally, it is worth pointing out limiting aspects of this study to contribute to future prospects: due to the specificity of the method it was not possible to enlarge the number of participants; the socio-cultural and economic aspects could be further deepened to understand the consumer's context in their act of consuming; possible motivations of consumers to reduce meat consumption were not investigated and also which alternatives would be considered for this reduction.

Authors' participation: DBS - Author of the master's thesis that gave rise to this article, study design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, writing, revision and final approval of the version to be published; DBC - Supervising of the master's thesis that gave rise to this article, study design, analysis and interpretation of data, review and final approval of the version to be published; HMSM - Elaboration of the study; writing, revision and final approval of the version to be published.

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Research of University Federal of Piauí (UFPI), conferred in Legal Opinion nº 30310914.7.0000.5214.

Data availability: Study resulting from the master's thesis of the first author. UFPI Repository: https://sigaa.ufpi.br/sigaa/public/programa/apresentacao.jsf?lc=pt_BR&id=340

Funding: There are no funding sources associated with this article.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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