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Food and culture. Cultural patterns and practices related to food in everyday life. Introduction

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As an everyday activity, sustaining our life, eating experiences reveal complex relationship between food and society, involving material and symbolic aspects of cultures, dietary order, but also aesthetics or hedonism (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, Douglas, 1966, Fischler, 1980, Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). Bringing on stage cultural values, food becomes a central identity marker, defining personality, social class, lifestyles, gender roles and relationships, from family, to community, to ethnic groups or nationality, changing through time and place. Food is a lens to analyze society order, historical changes, power and politics, if we think of the pioneering works in this area of studies, from Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the social classes' taste (1979), Jack Goody's connection between cuisine and class in West Africa (1982), Sidney Mintz research on sugar, modern times and colonialism (1985), to Arjun Appadurai's work on nationalism and cuisines (1988).

The more recent trend towards food heritage and heritagisation reveals the dynamic role of history in understanding culture, as well as the marketization of culinary traditions. Social changes, like evolutions in intergroup relations within societies, migration phenomena such as nomadism, refugees, expatriates, tourism, alongside with the industrialization of food production or the globalization of foods, the role of mass media and new technologies, all have their impact on the food production, distribution, preparation, *foodways* or *drinkways* changing either by expressing individual or group preferences for alternative consumption manners, or at collective level.

This issue on 'Food and Culture. Cultural patterns and practices related to food in everyday life' gives, once

more, reason to Roland Barthes who, in his introduction to Brillat Savarin's *Physiologie du goût*, understands food, generally (and gastronomy, particularly) as a domain fit for developing a humanistic approach, seen as total social fact, including different metalanguages. As he explains, 'It is this encyclopedic view, – this "humanism" – that encompasses, for Brillat-Savarin, the name of gastronomy' (Barthes, 1975).

But if gastronomy is, above all, a speech act, food represents firstly a culture act. This means that the way we understand and we relate to food, food practices, is always related to our identity, in the deepest manner. The danger that comes along with this approach is to understand these fundamental dimensions – identity, food, culture – on their ontological or essentialist dimension, shifting from identity to the identification with the good, the best, the ideal in culinary or in gastronomy.

Because food embodies this permanent dialectics between the attachments to our origins' model, with its emblematic, or totemic dishes, its recipes, its rituals and practices, and, the other way around, the need to ceaselessly explore, seeking new tastes, new savories, new recipes, or manners of doing and being. Food is caught in this dialectics of withdrawal, of return to the origins, to tradition, and at the same time, the opposite, of exploring, discovering, looking for the surprise, 'the search for the unexpected', to quote Floch (1995). The relation to food and culture translates the tension that defines our identity construction between finding refuge in a frame, in order to retrieve our own being, and escaping from this frame and discovering oneself throughout new worlds of flavors and sensations.

This oscillation is sustained by two identity dimensions which are at the heart of the relationship between food and culture: a narrative dimension (Ricoeur) and a figurative dimension (Fontanille). On the narrative level, eating means living and meeting, being himself or herself and becoming another. Identity and alterity (Stano), based on a constant relating to the other, from attraction to repulsion, with all the variations from good to bad taste, or even distaste (Assouly). On the figurative

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level, food and culture take us through all the repertoires of social life: objects, places, situations, roles, practices and behaviors, involving all the sociological levels. On a large cultural scale, we can understand the taste programming and the implicit interpretation grid in order to recognize and appreciate a dish, a wine (microsociologic level); the frame effects (the culinary, the table manners) presented as useful and essential for eating in confidence (middle scale level); representations, values and beliefs that govern our relationship to food, taste, all aspects, speech included, taken into consideration (macrosociologic level).

This is the orientation that we intended to give to this issue, throughout the different contributions. Food and culture, approached from an universal, humanistic, encyclopedic perspective, that enhance at the same time cultural contradictions, peculiarities and local aspects. Nothing is immutable or fix, as even under constraint or conformism, the food imaginary preserves all its rights; nothing impermanent or unimportant, as nothing escapes the signification, the meaning, when we think about food. On the metonymic itinerary from taste, in terms of sensations and flavors, to the taste imaginary, with its great power of visibility (eating scenes, social practices), iconicity (verbal and mental images, representations, associations of ideas), we can place everything that creates diversity between people and cultures, and, at the same time, everything that is similar, through the food symbolic incorporation.

The opening article of this issue, concerning food, culture, and re-membling, written by Graham, R., Hodgetts, D., & Stolte, is relevant for the perspective proposed by the editors of this issue. This original contribution deals with the processes of identity construction, social relationships and memory that food is connected to. The theoretical perspective provided by the Actor-Network Theory (Bruno Latour, 2005), is an excellent frame to explore the social, material and relational aspects of food. The chosen methodology, a case-comparative research, on three dual-heritage households (mixed migrant and indigenous) in Hamilton, New Zealand, manages to prove how everyday food-related practices (sourcing, preparing, serving and eating of food) reproduce aspects of culture and communal ways of being. The paper manages to put into evidence the way food is woven into family and societal relationships and identity, the reproduction of hybrid ways of being, throughout the processes of re-membling. The material re-construction involved in repeating food practices and familial traditions from the past enables people to reconnect with familial relationships, bringing them to

the present and passing them on to future generations.

The second article, *Do Your Best and Allah Will Take Care of the Rest: Muslim Turks Negotiate Halal in Strasbourg*, proposed by Alyanak Oguz addresses an original and more than ever stringent issue in the European foodscape, the market for Islamically permissible products, namely *halal* food. The originality of the approach consists in the fact that the author tackles this topic by inquiring the decision-making process through which Muslim Turks in Strasbourg assess the *halal* quality of a product. The methodological approach is that of ethnography, in order to explore the trust-based interpersonal relationships that ultimately, and paradoxically, confer a *halal* genuine meaning to a product. The ethnographic data, drawn on accounts provided by members of the Muslim Turkish community in Strasbourg, France, situate the research at the crossroad of the two public policies, namely food policies and how Islam is addressed by/in *public action* in France, how Islam is addressed in public policy, particularly how *halal* food is present in the public space in France and Europe.

The article of Michael Parzer, Franz Astleithner and Irene Rieder is an ethnographic research on immigrant grocery shops and the relationship they maintain with natives, in Vienna. Drawing on the identification of two typologies of consumption modes, ‘shopping for convenience’ and ‘shopping for exoticism/ exceptionality/ experience’ the authors identify two types of consumers. The first category chooses immigrant shops mainly *because of* the ethnicity associated with the shops, while the second one use these shops *in spite of* the entrepreneurs’ migrant background. Data gathered throughout extensive fieldwork, consisting in recorded interviews, field notices and protocols of observations, was analyzed using Charmaz’s (2014) grounded theory-based coding system. Based on their field research’ results, which challenge previous findings, the authors argue that natives’ shopping routines in immigrant shops have become increasingly ordinary. Yet, as the authors explain, while ‘because-of’-consumers might run the risk of reproducing ethnic stereotypes, the ‘nevertheless’-consumers tend to retain or even strengthen their xenophobic attitudes.

Alexandra Ciocanel’s article “What a Big Deal to be Romanian if You Don’t Have What to Eat” : Food Practices in Transition, is one of the few papers written on the food practices in the post-socialist period not only in Romania, but also in other countries from the former Soviet Bloc. She brings into our attention three interesting topics related to the period of transition: “hunger”, queues and new configurations of commerce. She presents how food is a matter of private life and of a state policy, and how

it translates not only the values and habits of people, but also the economic and political context. She starts with the deep feeling of being Romanian, which was the essence of the national communist doctrine for over 30 years, and with a profound sentiment of anger, caused by a long and painful policy of starvation carried out by the Romanian government in the same period. She shows how the queues remained in the Romanian conscience as a form of social memory, a sign of shortage and hunger, while the new forms of capitalism were still considered suspicious and beyond people's power of control. The article is a very interesting insight into the everyday economic and social practices of Romanians in the period that followed the decline of the communist regime. The paper is based on an analysis of the newspapers articles in the first years of the '90s and it reflects the transition period from the viewpoint of food practices and economic and democratic development.

The article of Lilian Nkengla Asi and Deli Tize Teri, The implication of food taboos on nutrition in rural communities in Cameroon, brings us into the field of intersections between cultural, religious and food practices. Her paper speaks about traditional societies and their specific rules related to food, which influence the consumption patterns. The article presents an interesting approach on food, as a form of obedience, over the entire life period, not only during specific periods of the year. The author analyzed food taboos from the structuralism and functionalism approaches, searching the meaning and the purpose of their use in food diets. She highlighted the use of taboos in food practices as a form of protection from evil and illness or as a form of prophylaxis. She considered taboos as a way to monopolize the resources, as a sign of respect, as an expression of empathy and identity, and as an ecological practice. The article is an interesting raid into Cameroon's rural space by means of food studies, revealing values and norms associated to food consumption which has deep roots in the African culture.

Last but not the least, Raffaele Mataracena's article, Linking alternative food networks and urban food policy: a step forward in the transition towards a sustainable and equitable food system, ends our travel in the world of food and culture with a very hot topic in the contemporary world, which is the food crisis. Food policies and their

efficiency are questioned in this article and the solutions for their deficiencies are, in the authors' approach, the alternative food networks. In this article the development of new forms of production and distribution of food reflects a new form of equity and sustainability. The author uses the concepts of "re-socialization" and "re-localization" of food in order to express the public intervention in the food production and distribution chain, with the purpose to maintain the traditional knowledge and to solve the food anxieties. He analyzes the conventional food system versus the alternative one, and proposes a new approach on food policy, related to the urban space and urban consumers, shifting the paradigm from the rural production and rural space. The paper is an original insight into the food system in a globalized world, bringing into our attention hard topics and offering solutions to what is now only the first phase of the food crisis.

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