

Proposal Antonia Mazel

Gastro politics in Italy: food, national identity and the invention of tradition.

Since 2009, Italian cities like Lucca, Siena and Milan have banned foreign (sushi and kebab) and fast food restaurants from their city centres, in order 'to preserve the culinary identity and heritage of the Italian cuisine'. Even Sicilian cuisine, heavily influenced by Arab cooking, is considered to be foreign. This is even more ironical since the 'typical' Italian cuisine is itself a product of cultural exchange with its imported pasta, tomato and basil. More recently McDonalds Italy has 'Italianised' itself with the launch of the McItaly burger made of 100% certified Italian products.¹

Via two antinomies drawn from these case studies, I will investigate how national/regional identity is constructed via food.

On the one hand, there is the antinomy of national identity vs. globalization, which I will examine through concepts of Appadurai (imaginary, homogenization vs heterogenization) and Anderson (imagined communities). The Italian government invokes a national culinary identity and heritage, which is in fact a product of globalization and imagination. The preoccupation with local, regional food has in this way led to a form of 'legitimized' gastronomic xenophobia.²

On the other hand, there is the antinomy of fast food vs. slow food, which I will analyse through concepts of Ritzer (McDonaldization), Hobsbawm/Ranger (invention of tradition) and Petrini (Slow Food manifesto). In this context one could interpret the launch of the McItaly burger as a strategy to incorporate and upgrade fast food into Italian slow food culture. Recent work on the history of Italian cuisine demonstrates that many Italian culinary traditions are largely invented (Dickie, Parasecoli). From the perspective of these two antinomies one could argue that the politics of place and the protection of 'endangered' food traditions have contributed to a nationalist nostalgia and commodification of authenticity.

¹ Endorsed by the Minister of Agriculture Luca Zaia: 'It will also enable McDonald's clients to eat a healthy burger made with PDO and PGI 'Made in Italy' products. We hope this will convince them to forget about junk food and choose a healthier and better quality food. We are sure it will work.' (Cited in Matthew Fort 'McDonald's launch McItaly burger').

² Left wing politician Paolo Cocchi accused Lucca's city council of 'gastro racism'.

Works cited

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Ritzer, George. *The McDonaldization of Society*. Thousand Oaks [etc.]: Pine Forge Press, 1993.

Research interests/ projects

My aim is to start a PhD research project on food and culture. I am already participating in a more applied research project with the Design Academy Eindhoven on *Food Design for Healthy Living*. Subjects that I am particularly interested in are:

Food as lifestyle: foodtrends; food as a medium of distinction and cultural capital; the cultivation of taste.

Food and the politics of place: local, regional, national and international cuisine and identity; authenticity and the invention of tradition.

Food manifestos: the Futurist cookbook, Michael Pollan, Carlo Petrini's Slow Food manifesto.

Food and the city: gentrification urban agriculture, community gardening.

Food and media: cookery programmes, TV chefs, foodblogs, food films and documentaries.