

## SESSION 6

## SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF FOOD

## PAPER ABSTRACTS

***The Ethnographic Flexibility: Acquiring Local Knowledge and Conventions during Fieldwork in a Food Market***

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The aim of this paper is to explore the way local knowledge and conventions are acquired through fieldwork. Carrying out my research in Catania's open-air food market, La Pescheria, I have been embarking in a journey, which led me to play different roles within the market context. Since the very first stay in Catania until my last visit in 2010, I have been exposed to the local knowledge and performance, particularly in relation to food and Sicilian cuisine. This body of knowledge is highly evaluated at the market and it is acquired through the daily interactions between vendors and buyers, the market's significant Others. It was a direct result of my participant observation and it played a fundamental role in changing the way I perceived the market and the way I was perceived at the market. I had to learn the appropriate way of speaking, moving, smiling, communicating, a whole new behavioural code, which transformed me from a foreigner into an (almost) insider. This process was not based on speculation, rather on the bodily daily experience at the market. In this perspective the knowledge about local food is seen as a grammar I felt the urge to learn to communicate with vendors and buyers within the market. This paper will engage with the acquisition of the idiom of a Sicilian market, highlighting the empirical nature of this process and the importance of the ethnographer's flexibility, in placing himself/herself in relation to the context and the importance of the discourse about food in constructing interactions among people.

***Communicating Difference, Managing Selves: Performance of Food in Turkish/Kurdish Restaurant Spaces in London***

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The connection between food and identity has been studied by a number of scholars. Two opposing approaches seem to be visible in the literature: First, food is seen as a stable marker of cultural identity when it is taken as a symbolic product. Second, almost no relationship between food and identity is claimed when food is taken as a practical product. This study tries to challenge this dual thinking imposed on food (symbolic versus practical) and aims to find a way to talk about both at the same time. This study examines Turkish/Kurdish restaurants in London and the ways in which restaurateurs define their food and space while trying to manage their businesses and identities. Therefore, in this study, I look at the ways in which economy and culture, business and identity, local and global, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism act to re-create a particular cuisine in the Turkish/Kurdish restaurant spaces in London. I explore the following questions: While commercial success is a priority in highly competitive restaurant business in London, how do Turkish/Kurdish restaurateurs manage their identities and differences in their restaurant spaces? How is the tension between traditional and modern, local and global, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism reflected onto Turkish/Kurdish food business in London? Are there new identity formations that

are different from conventional nationalistic ones? Are there moments when food or space enables the creation of new belongings and political formations, which would challenge fixed categories of traditionalism and nationalism? This research is grounded in in-depth interviews conducted with sixteen Turkish/Kurdish restaurateurs, managers and chefs in London. I have also analyzed twenty-five restaurant spaces, their menus, food, interior and exterior décors and websites.

***Finland is a Strawberry: Strawberries, Nationalism and Finnish Identity***

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What is the place of the strawberry in Finnish national identity? To what extent does it symbolize Finnishness? To many foreigners, Finland and the strawberry do not naturally go together. However, I will draw upon fieldwork in northern Finland to examine the place of the strawberry in Finnish national identity. Looking at the extent to which the strawberry is part of European nationalist discourses more broadly, I will examine the research looking at the popularity of the strawberry as a symbol in English nationalist discourse both currently and historically. I will then summarise previous work on the anthropology of Finnish food and suggest why there is relatively little research in this area. I will argue that Finnish attitudes to strawberries are congruous with the body of research on food and national identity. I will then look – based on specific ethnographic encounters and interviews – at how strawberries are used to express and cement Finnish nationalism and specific dimensions of Finnish nationalist discourse, such as uniqueness, cultural cringe and ‘sisu.’ In particular, I will look at conversations surrounding selling strawberries from street stalls in the summer, attitudes to Spanish strawberries, the representation of strawberries in the Finnish newspapers and in television programmes, Finnish sayings, as well as at specific and rather idiosyncratic ethnographic encounters.

***‘A Fine Leg of English Mutton’: marking ethnic boundaries with food.***

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Ethnicity may be regarded an aspect of social relations between members of one internally defined group and members of other groups with whom they have regular interaction in which perceived or actual cultural differences play an agentive role (see, e.g., Barth, Eriksen). In this paper I propose to discuss food-related markers of self-identification in a long-term English merchant community in pre-Soviet St. Petersburg. Food consumption is a human universal which is performed daily and ‘foodways’ – choices, preparation, sharing and eating practices, associated ritual and disgust – naturally have strongly cohesive effects on in-group members: contributing to definitions of group identity, helping to define a group’s boundaries and internal hierarchies, providing perceptions of other groups whose foodways differ and offering a context for the performance of group rituals. Foodways are the product of tradition but also expressions of dynamic aspects of group culture and meaning attribution, the tensions between which are very relevant to examination of migrant or sub-cultural groups within a majority culture.

Data for the discussion are drawn from the diaries and letters of English women in St. Petersburg in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a corpus of work which makes it evident that foodways within the expatriate community rested on regular affirmation of tradition: the Christmas cakes and puddings which were made by ‘a real Englishwoman’ in the

capital; the ‘fine legs’ of mutton which were discreetly brought in from England along with the coal used to cook them; the modes of commensality; the revulsion felt for the scents of cabbage soup, garlic and ‘fast oil’ which became Russian staples during Lent. Disgust formation tends to carve a boundary around the foodways of a group, contributing to the development of ‘we’ versus ‘they’ eating rules which reinforce group identity, particularly in the presence of other forms of perceived differentiation – cultural, political, economic. Despite this, the dynamism of group culture over time ensured that many Russian practices were gradually incorporated into Anglo-Russian foodways and even moved back to affect habits in England: the order of service at the dining table was a prominent example of this. Russian terms crept into the culinary lexicon and thence into everyday usage; local modes of preparing local produce and the foraging that was part of gathering the crayfish, berries and mushrooms also impacted on ways of life more generally.

The paper examines which areas of group food practices were most volatile in this Anglo-Russian community, which most closely guarded, and suggests reasons for this.

### ***Dining Culture in Late Soviet Estonia 1975-1989***

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Exploration into dining culture continues to be an incredibly revealing method of research. What kinds of restaurants exist in a certain place, where the local population dines, where tourists dine and so forth, are informative approaches to understanding culture and customs. However, what can be perceived of a place where dining culture is restricted, monitored or even non-existent? The case of Soviet occupied Estonia presents an instance where food availability was sporadic, thus creating a necessity for constant consumption monitoring. This was performed through distribution of food stamps to the Estonian population, as well a strict monitoring system placed upon public eating establishments, such as restaurants and cafeterias. Availability of ingredients to restaurants was more consistent than to the general public. As a result of a steadier food supply, usage of said food was to be recorded, and standard recipes put in place. This paper examines dining culture in Estonia from 1975-1989. Using verbal accounts as well as surveys of individual perceptions of Soviet dining culture (both in and out of the kitchen) this paper will show how food is used to assert autonomy. Despite this control, however, Estonia’s culinary identity emerged.

### ***Bring and Braai: Reconsidering hospitality in a social food event in an ex-Rhodesian diaspora community***

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This paper examines a social food event, the bring and braai, a barbeque to which people bring along their own food – meat, side dishes and drinks – for their own consumption. In diaspora communities food is often considered a significant identity marker, capable of uniting the consumers to a shared past. Sharing food from home substantiates ties to colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) as homeland, as well as to the contemporary dispersed community of ex-Rhodesians. Sharing of food is also about moral gestures. The white ex-Rhodesian community in South Africa cultivates and reproduces its idea of Rhodesianness through a nostalgic narrative of past, which has at its nucleus a caring hospitality, best expressed by food generosity. In colonial Rhodesia, hospitality rested on the fact that in due course of time, the generosity one has

shown would be reciprocated. The ways of being hospitable and showing generosity have, however, been restructured in diaspora, and it needs to be considered how the actively upheld moral act of food sharing accords with the actual practice of bringing in the braai? If food generosity is a key feature of hospitality and if the sharing of food is quintessential in feasts of communal solidarity, what can we make of the braai, which brings people together to consume their own food? In this paper, I will show that despite the compromised generosity, the bring and braai as a festive meal does make and mark social relationships, create bonds between participants and build a deep sense of togetherness. It does this by acting as an equalizer, an expression of solidarity and a tactful leveler of differences in social and economic standing, celebrating values significant for the creation of a moral community: friendship, comradeship and the lack of hierarchy.

***Food in Nordic everyday life: Change and stability in eating patterns***

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Food and eating have become, in a new way, societal problems and are now central issues in discourses about the health of populations, environmental issues, modern family life, gender equality, and the social integration of the society in general. Discussions about food and meals increasingly serve as entry to more fundamental discussions about the basics of modern living and societal problems of immediate importance.

The presentation introduces a collaborative study that investigates the everyday eating practices and meal patterns in modern everyday life in the Nordic countries and their linkages to other social practices in time and space in a comparative, quantitative design. The study is unique in offering a possibility to compare both the Nordic countries with each other and the changes that have taken place in eating patterns during the past fifteen years by involving a comparison between results from an earlier Nordic study from 1997. The study addresses how daily routines regarding eating relate to the timing and social contexts of everyday activities of Nordic populations. It seeks to identify underlying cultural conventions about good eating and the compromises that people make in an everyday setting.

In our presentation we will introduce the theoretical background and methodological considerations of the study. We bring in our working hypothesis for the new study and present the methodological problems and their solutions of our quantitative data collection due to in 2012. The manifoldness of rules and practices around eating in peoples' everyday life is identified with a model called 'the eating system'. It draws upon several theoretical discussions around food, particularly ideas of meals and their structure developed by Mary Douglas and Anne Murcott, in order to take into account The model distinguishes between three dimensions: the meal format, the social context of eating, and the eating pattern.

***The problematic meat: Encounters of animal and environmental concerns and the cultural significance of meat in everyday eating***

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In contemporary societies, meat is an apotheosis of the conflicts faced in everyday consumption. Meat as the most valued food of both traditional and modern societies is

increasingly burdened with ethical problems relating to health, environment and animal welfare. This paper draws on contemporary discourses on risk society on one hand and the societal consequences of modern food consumption on the other. Meat and its consumption in Finland is used as an example of the ambiguities present in current eating patterns.

The paper is based on an Internet survey (N=1623, representative of the Finnish population) on meat consumption conducted in March 2010 in collaboration between two Finnish research institutes MTT Agrifood Research Finland and National Consumer Research Centre. The survey focuses on meat consumption patterns and views on animal welfare and the economy, safety, healthiness and environmental impacts of meat and meat production. In addition, it includes questions on meals, eating patterns and the social and cultural importance of meat.

In the paper, we analyse the current place and cultural significance of meat in Finnish eating patterns, examine the roles of environmental and animal welfare concerns in meat consumption, and explore the conditions for more sustainable meat consumption in the future. Our findings show that some consumer groups are already changing their consumption patterns for ethical reasons. In addition, we suggest that ongoing ethical discourses are already part of public understanding of meat as a societally controversial issue. However, at a larger scale, societal concerns may be difficult to reconcile with the socially and culturally high valuation of meat manifested in the commensality of both everyday and festive eating.

***Hunting Shadows to Subsist: the existential value of bears and bear meat in northern Quebec and elsewhere***

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From time to time, I have been reminded that beyond the scope of “interesting” ethnographic studies of individual lives, the phenomenological interiority and existentialist bias of thinkers like Heidegger and Nietzsche has little to contribute to grand social (anthropological) theory. Moreover, some consider such approaches as contrary to the project to prove anthropology’s public and applied political worth in today’s world. In this paper, I refute such pessimism. I draw on existential-phenomenology and the case study of a traditional (non-Aboriginal) bowhunter of black bears in northern Quebec to elaborate on the broad, existential root meaning of subsistence (*subsistentia*) as “real being”. To hunt bears in order to subsist, I argue, is obviously about the meat and the local relationships with kin and community members that it helps the hunter reproduce; but it is also, and perhaps most importantly, about the deep attachment to place and the hunter’s experiences of autochthonous belonging. Thus, I show how engagement with ‘subsistence’ and a local life lived in concert with the bush provides the grounding for discussion of one of anthropology’s most pressing issues - the “global conjuncture of belonging” (Murray-Li 2000).

***Obligation to give, obligation to receive and obligation to refuse: Social dynamics of food in Southern Kiribati, Central Pacific***

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In the classic formulation by Marcel Mauss, acting in a socially appropriate way in the context of exchange entails an obligation give, an obligation to receive and an

obligation to give again. However, as I propose to discuss in this paper, there are situations where it is socially more appropriate to refuse a gift. Drawing on my research on the island of Tabiteuea, I want to discuss how in this southern Kiribati, Pacific society, there are situations where it is appropriate to refuse food that is offered. Given that food is generally speaking a prime medium through which social relations are created and consolidated, and that Kiribati is a society placing great value on social relationships and the whole they form, refusing food is a conspicuous phenomenon.

Namely, in Tabiteuea it is considered improper to accept food from non-relatives, unless one is a formally invited guest. Indifferently accepting food from a non-relative would send out the message that one (as part of his/her kin group) cannot fend for oneself. Therefore, there is a wealth of expressions to politely say that one is not hungry, regardless of when one has eaten last. Sometimes, however, it seemed that the situation had to be negotiated, and that such verbal exchanges could become almost like power struggles, one person repeatedly offering food and the other declining - or maybe giving in.

In this paper I want to examine the social dynamics of these refusals. They touch upon the distinctions between a relative, a non-relative and a guest/stranger (*iruwa*) and the marked status of the latter, as well as gradations of social distance. Particularly, refusing a gift a food is linked to the local value of (corporative) independence or (group) autonomy, *inaomata*, which the refusals seem to assert.

### ***Daily consumption of ritual food: Korean rice cake makers as manufacturers and carriers of tradition***

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Rice cakes, or *ttôk*, are an indispensable part of Korean ritual consumption of food. Different varieties of *ttôk* are presented and consumed in kinship and family rituals as well as in occasions such as business openings or initiations of diverse projects. In addition to ritual or celebratory use, rice cakes are also sold as daily snacks in ready-made small packages.

For the rice cake manufacturers, who are most often married couples running small establishments, the ritual consumption of their product is financially the most important part of their enterprise, and traditional festivities are the busy seasons which carry the business over slacker periods. However, simplification and decrease of rituals as well as pressures of competition from other spheres of food manufacturing and retail have increased the importance ready-made sales of rice cakes.

This presentation examines the makers and making of rice cakes in the intersection of asserted Korean tradition and traditional food and perceived need for modernization, development, and even globalization. The ethnographic material is from my current postdoctoral research on trade associations of the self-employed in Korea, in which the main object of investigation has been the Rice Cake Producers' Association and the individual members and functionaries of the organization.

The notion of rice cakes as traditional and representative Korean food is fundamental in the identity of the persons in the trade either as manufacturers or as employees of the trade association. This traditionality is intimately related to the use of domestic rice as the main ingredient of *ttôk*, which for small manufacturers is also a way of self-identification and distinction from industrial manufacturers, which use more imported rice. The association of rice cakes (and identification of the makers) with the tradition

was best expressed by a rice cake maker who was also active in the functions of the association: “Ttök is a medium of love, sharing sadness and happiness, jointly. [...] I consider myself a manufacturer of love. Ttök is the symbol of love, and I deliver love. I am a conveyor of love.”