Resistance through Cultural Heritage.
Food and Meanings

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Abstract

The language of food is one of the most complex, profound and communicative languages in all communities. Semioticians such as Gianfranco Marrone have revealed that we use food to signify the world and to give different meanings to the world. The purpose of this research comes from this character of food, food as language, as communication practice which has specific codes and rites as Roland Barthes, Marcel Danesi, and Jean-Jacques Boutaud confirmed. We intend to place our approach in the field of tradition, in the field of cultural heritage as a form of cultural resistance. To this purpose, we will assess the cultural resistance through a semiotic approach, from the identification of the element of cultural heritage to its contemporary discourse. We will follow the food heritage route as a form of resilience through the *eCultfood* research project and heritage communication through the Romanian communication campaign entitled "100 fire recipes".

Keywords: *cultural heritage, food, identity, cultural semiotics, resistance, cultural communication.*

1. Food, identity and cultural resistance

The starting point of our approach is represented by culture as an "active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures in a social system" (Fiske 1989: 23). In our study, we shall also apply the concept of resistance that is concerned with the "symbolic and discursive expression of a group identity and its position", as defined in Molek-Kozakowska (2011).

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The idea of cultural resistance has shown that the cultural systems are stable and sustainable in time, while the initial conditions remain unchanged. However, the systems are capable of evolving in time, by absorbing diversity and the continuous development. Consequently, cultural resilience appears as the capacity of cultural systems to face change and continue to develop in time.

> cultural resilience as the capability of a cultural system (consisting of cultural processes in relevant communities) to absorb adversity, deal with change and continue to develop. Cultural resilience thus implies both continuity and change: disturbances that can be absorbed are not an enemy to be avoided but a partner in the dance of cultural sustainability. (Holtorf 2018: 639)

Food activity is often presented from an economical, sociological, geographical or ethnological perspective which insert the food practice in its social context. According to Jean-Jacques Boutaud, food should be considered a culture act, related to the identity.

> 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. (Boutaud 2016: 1)

As described in anthropological and ethnological works, food must be analysed as as a signifying system while a set of signifying practices are present in the signifying activities involving how food and

eating should be considered.

Marcel Danesi (2004) considers food as an element of cultural semiotics, between Nature (the biosphere) and Culture (the semiosphere). At the denotative level, food represents a survival substance. At the connotative level,

> in cultural settings, food items become signs that assume specific kinds of meanings. Cultures vary widely as to the types and the degree of meaning they assign to food and eating. But through the world, food is as much symbolic substance as it is survival substance. (Danesi 2004: 203)

In this context, the *cuisine* represents the system of connotations that food suggests, "what certain people eat, how they make it, and what it reveals about them" (Ibidem: 194).

On the one hand, for Roland Barthes (2012: 21), eating represents a communicational system. On the other hand, food should be also considered as a corpus of representations, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviors. There are plenty of situations in which we may collect information about food habits, by means of direct observations of techniques (e.g. advertising) as direct ways. At the same time, we may find indirect ways of observing food behaviours, such as social mentality. These observations further serve as a starting point for the description of a dependable "grammar of food". The structural unit of this grammar consists of the significant elements of description of food elements as communication practices. For example, we could take into consideration the national or local food practices as a part of the "grammar" of the cultural heritage system. (Floria 2017)

2. Food as a language

Gianfranco Marrone (2018) shows that food could be considered a language, a system of signs with specific meanings

> It is used to communicate with others, to express oneself, to

interpret the world, to strengthen cultural traditions, to represent social hierarchies, to classify natural species ... […]
In addition to its purely nutritional, sensory, fun, historical and cultural dimension, food has a specifically semiotic dimension. Perhaps even more and better than many other systems of human and social significance, everything relating to human nutrition makes sense: from the materials chosen to the techniques to transform them, to the modalities of their ingestion. (Marrone 2018, our translation)

The Italian semiotician identifies two axes of food communication:

a. Talking about food

To talk about food is to give it meaning, directing it to aspects and moments of history and culture that systematically transcend it. This category includes all forms of discourse concerning food: conversations, magazines, books of recipes, culinary blogs etc.

b. Food as a specific form of language

Marrone considers that food itself communicates; through food we talk about the world, the society, the universe, about everything; consequently, cooking is a total social fact.

3. Food practices. Resistance through cultural heritage

Food identity implies history and maintaining tradition in order to recognize both the past and the present.

As a component of living culture, food identity is actualised in terms of gastronomic practices and actions. Intangible cultural heritage aims at preserving the authenticity and the difference between cultures through dialogue and sharing knowledge and values.

At the level of food practices, we may observe that particular practices are positioned in traditional style, while others are more oriented towards innovation and creativity, interpreting tradition under the influence of other cultural factors.

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, the individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (*Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 2003)

3.1. *eCultfood*. Food practices and local cultural resilience

A situation of cultural resilience is represented by the project *eCultfood* that resulted in a digital library of food-related cultural knowledge, reflected in common food practices in Bacău region (www.ecultfood.ub.ro). It aimed at the preservation and protection of intangible cultural heritage in this region.

As observed in Figure 1, the food system of Bacău Region includes:
- General Category (Food, Beverages);
- Specific Category (Herbal Food, Meat, Egg, Milk, Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages);
- Ingredients (wheat, corn, hemp, for processing the main ingredient (husked beans, crushed grains, flour, cocoons, etc.);
- Preparation tools (egg, chilug, sieve, kneading dish, baking dish, etc.);
- Presence of the transforming agent (yeast, with or without filler);
- Preparation process (boiling, baking, roasting, roasting, heating, picking);
- Secondary ingredients (honey, sugar, salt, salting, vinegar, etc.);
- Preparation agent (fire, salt, brine, vinegar);

- Preparation mediator (water, air, smoke, fat, milk etc.) hob, oven, chirosty, lottery, etc.);
- Slow / fast cooking;
- Preparation (ritual), religious ritual (Orthodox, Catholic);
- Context of preparation (family cycle, calendar cycle);
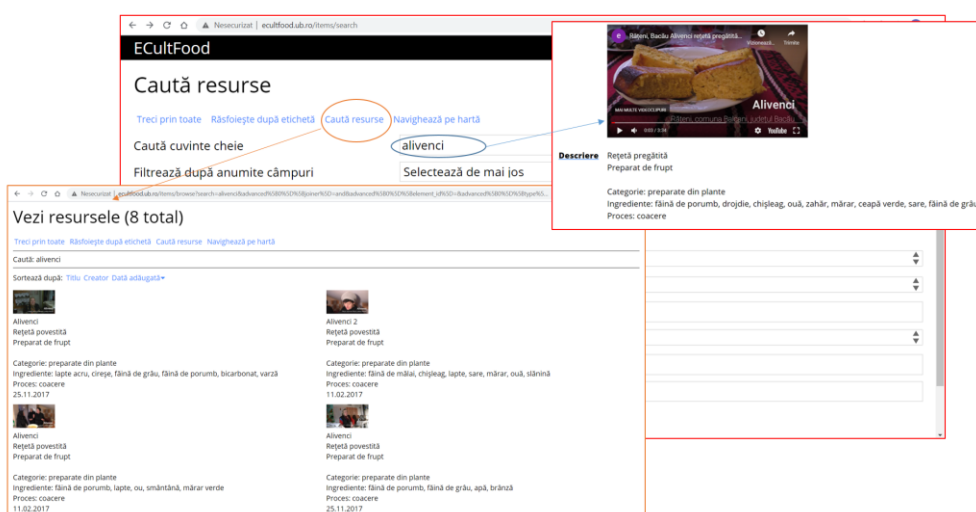- Presence in idiomatic expressions (expressions, proverbs, sayings etc.).

Figure 1. *eCultfood. Recipes* (ecultfood.ub.ro)

3.2. *100 fire recipes* **project. Glocal cultural resilience**

The project *100 fire recipes* is described as a tribute to the Romanian traditional cuisine. It comprises video recipes which are of a great variety, collected from many parts of Romania. Some particular areas that have given precious information for the study are the Danube Delta, Banat, Maramureş and Bucovina. This collection covers all the historical Romanian counties, seen though the eyes of a reporter. While the choosing of recipes is mainly subjective, the result has been used for
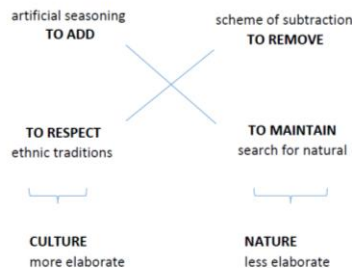
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marketing and tourism. Beyond the interest for the Romanian food traditions, we could find the outcomes of these recipes on the restaurant menu in the international airport (www.happyairport.ro). Local culture and local gastronomy, in particular, are a "valuable source" of activities for touristic purpose (Ilies, Dulău, Coros 2011). Moreover, "gastronomy is part of local identity and gives value to a touristic image" (Molina et alii 2016: 301).
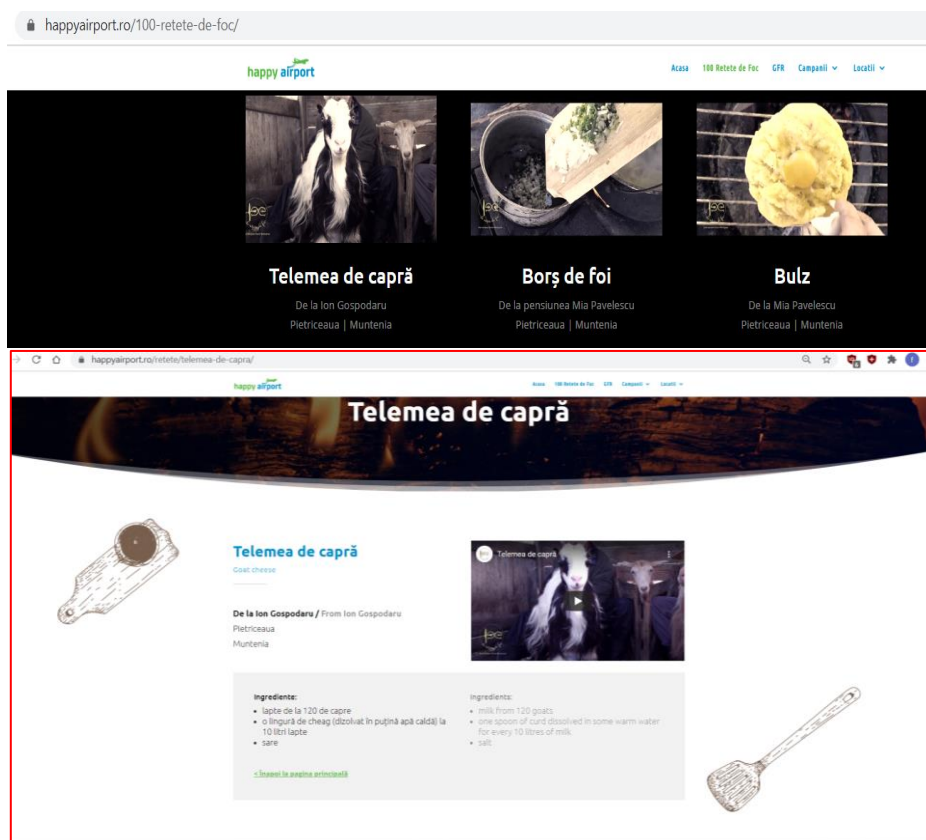
Figure 2. *100 fire recipes. Recipe discourse*

According to Gianfranco Marrone, *eCultfood* and *100 fire recipes*

represents food models. The central point of these cultural systems is the *recipe*, as *speech act* and *performative activity*, a pattern which preserves the food related knowledge. The food system is analysed by Marrone in the semiotic square, between nature and culture (Figure 3).

artificial seasoning
TO ADD

scheme of subtraction
TO REMOVE

TO RESPECT
ethnic traditions

TO MAINTAIN
search for natural

CULTURE
more elaborate

NATURE
less elaborate

Figure 3. *Food system between nature and culture*
(cf. Marrone 2018, our variant)

If the food model is a cultural system which tends to dictate the rules for relating the elements and the ingredients, namely, what we could call a canon of taste, the individual use interprets them, according to variations linked to the pleasures and necessities of the moment, without ever completely transgressing them. The most obvious case is that of the recipe books […]: they are transcriptions of oral knowledge, institutional reductions using very different techniques; moreover, precisely because they cannot say everything, they end up playing the same role as a musical score, where the performer has the right and the duty to interpret what is written on the score. (Marrone 2018, our translation)

Conclusions
The food model is a cultural system which tends to dictate the rules for relating the elements and the ingredients, namely, what we could call a standard of taste. The individual use interprets them, according to variations linked to the pleasures and necessities of the

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moment, without ever completely transgressing them.

The recipes are the transcription of oral knowledge of food practice. Recovering recipes and recovering tradition represent a form of resistance through Romanian cultural heritage.

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