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EXPLORING A SPONTANEOUS PROCESS OF EUROPEAN CULTURAL INTEGRATION – FOOD, TASTE AND CULINARY PRACTICES IN THE CASE OF MIGRANT WORKERS FROM EASTERN ROMANIA

1. Introduction

This paper aims to reveal aspects of *European cultural continuity* and *transformation* exploring the *eating habits* and *taste preferences* in the case of international migrant workers from Eastern Romania (Neamț region). It starts from the assumption that food and taste help “reading” complex cultural dynamics and transnational interactions. Second, based on previous findings,^{*} it is assumed that Romanian migrants are active and creative actors of cultural encountering who, already started to integrate in the European cultural and economic space, by themselves, in an ongoing process of learning and adaptation. This process of creative adaptation took place at the level of daily life, including their culinary habits. This less visible and less explored type of integration “from below” paralleled the European unification and “pre-accession” process directed at macro-political and economic levels.

This study comparatively explores the taste predilections and the practices of *food distribution* and *preparation* in the case of the Romanian migrants who are working in Italy and Ireland. In dealing with taste preferences and culinary practices of Romanian migrant workers and their families, it is one main hypothesis of this study that both processes

* As part of my ongoing PhD research, I carried a pilot ethnographic fieldwork both in an Eastern Romanian high-rate migration sending region (2005) and in a receiving community from Ireland. (2006).

of cultural continuity and ongoing creative adaptation could be revealed. This research assumes that strong elements of continuity and constancy with the larger European context could be identified at the more latent layer of taste preferences and eating habits, while diets are in a continuous state of transformation. It aims to reveal and interpret aspects of cultural creativity concerning migrants' culinary practices in the transnational but European context.

To explore the culinary habits of Romanian migrants and socio-symbolic meanings attached to them, this study pays attention to the cultural exchange and interaction that takes place in the two destination countries. The paper starts with an analysis of the main theoretical perspectives and contributions regarding taste predilections and culinary practices. Given the complex and holistic nature of the ethnographic studies on food habits this section favours an anthropological approach. The next part of the paper introduces the research setting and methodology. It follows a description of research findings through a comparative exploration of culinary adaptation abroad, taste preferences, practices of food procurement and the "micro-politics" of cooking in case of migrants who are working in Italy and Ireland.

2. Theoretical Perspectives on Food, Taste and Cultural Dynamics

2.1. *The Anthropology of Food*

The attitude to food, table manners, customs of common eating – the morals of food, as we might call it, the things permitted, forbidden, and enjoined – all form a complex and developed ideology of food.

Bronislaw Malinowski, *Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe* (in Ferzacca, 2004, p. 41).

Anthropology has traditionally been in the forefront of food studies. This is related to its preferred focus on everyday practices in a holistic and contextual manner. From the structural perspective of Claude Levi-Strauss (1965) and the semiotic approach of Mary Douglas (1966), anthropology concerns with culinary practices in diverse societies and what they signify about the complexities of larger cultural dynamics (Ferguson and Zukin, 1995).

In social theory building, food systems helped revealing broad social processes such as political-economic value-creation, symbolic value creation, and the social construction of memory (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002, p. 100). In her study, Sidney Mintz reconstructs global linkages between slave labor in the Caribbean and the English working class by examining the production and consumption of sugar, coffee, tea and chocolate in an early industrial period (Mintz, 1985). David Sutton, on the other hand, contributes to the theory in the field of culinary practices exploring the embodied connection between food and memory, which is culturally specific and cross-culturally variable (Sutton, 2001).

Culinary ethnography is defined as “an ethnographic account on various aspects of a culture [which] are manifested through the production, preparation and consumption of food”. Food facilitates both the study of material culture – the food items and the tools used to prepare it – and the symbolic and social meaning attributed to dishes, meals and eating practices (Trankel, 1995 p. 20). In the same tradition of thinking, *foodways* are defined as “the beliefs and behavior surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food”(Counihan , 1999, p2).

Food is not only substance providing nutrition but also an important way of communication that carries many kinds of meaning (Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997).

As Arjun Appadurai writes, food is “a highly condensed social fact, [...] a marvelously plastic kind of collective representation” (1981, p. 494). The capacity of food to encode social messages is enriched during the preparation process in its own socio-economic context. According to the quoted author, the “semiotic virtuosity” of cuisine is due to both the daily pressure to produce and cook food that makes it ideal to support the everyday social discourse, and to its capacity to mobilize strong emotions.

Food and eating encode and regulate social relationships. Culinary practices play a key role in human socialization, in developing an awareness of body and self, language acquisition, and personality growth (Ferzacca, p. 56). Food sharing creates and increases solidarity. It is a medium for maintaining social relations both inside and beyond the household. At the same time, food marks social differences, boundaries and contradictions (Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997). Food practices can thus support two types of social relations either characterized by equality, solidarity and intimacy or by hierarchy, distance and segmentation. It

can reveal both homogeneity and heterogeneity of human relationships (Appadurai. 1981, pp. 496-508).

Finally, food and culinary habits support processes of identity creation, whether that identity be class, gender-based, ethnic or national. Food provides boundary markers between “Us” and “the Other”. These identity dynamics are especially explored in ethnicity studies. In addition, food serves to the strengthening of personal identity including its gender dimension. In her study about “Food and Body”, Carole Counihan (1999) relates culinary practices with concerns about gender roles and power relations. She illustrates how men and women from a Sardinian town define themselves differently through their foodways and how industrialization transformed their social relations.

2.2. Culinary Practices, Taste and Memory Processes

Culinary practices and taste preferences are intimately related with memory processes and bring insights on layers of individual and collective history. In his study about the relationship between culinary habits and memory, David Sutton emphasizes the perspective of “memory as performance” in order to interpret the practices and meanings around the collection, cooking and eating of food. In supporting this perspective on memory, Turner’s view of culture as performance is preferred to Geertz’s culture as text. Sutton also draws on Connerton’s term “habit memory” for his embodied view of memory. According to Connerton,

“An image of the past, even in a form of a master narrative, is conveyed and sustained by ritual performances. [...] Participants must not be simply cognitively competent to execute the performance; they must be habituated to those performances. This habituation is to be found [...] in the bodily substrate of performance” (Connerton in Sutton, 2001, p. 12).

Unlike textual or verbal memories, the memories of these “incorporating practices” can be found “sedimented in the body” and encode the lived signification of food and eating (Connerton in Sutton, 2001). This approach comes closer to what Casey (1987) refers as “habitual body memory” – an “active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting, and regular manner” (Casey in

Ferzacca, 2004, p. 57). Sutton brings an interesting analysis that illustrates this perspective on memory in connection with cooking practices. In his view, “cooking is best learned [through] an embodied apprenticeship, in which what is remembered is not a set of rules, but images, tastes, smells and experiences” (Sutton, 2001, p 135).

To explore the issues of historical cultural continuity and change of culinary habits and tastes, this paper also draws on Bourdieu theoretical contributions. In his perspective, taste is seen as an acquired disposition to “differentiate” and “appreciate”, a product of history reproduced by education (Bourdieu, 1984). Central in his theoretical construction is the related concept of *habitus* seen as “embodied history”. *Habitus* “ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each individual in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the constancy of practices over time, more reliable than all the formal rules and explicit norms.” (Bourdieu, 2005, pp. 54-56)

Based on his empirical research on class and taste preferences in France, Bourdieu shows structural oppositions that are found in tastes and “eating habits”. In his view,

“the antithesis between quantity and quality, substance and form, correspond to the opposition – linked to different distances from necessity – between taste of necessity, which favors the most ‘filling’ and most economical foods, and the taste of liberty – of luxury – which shifts the emphasis to the manner (of presenting, serving, eating etc.) and tends to use stylized form to deny function.” (1984, p. 6)

Relevant for the understanding of the relationship between food and memory is role of learning and education. As Counihan writes, feeding is one of the most important practices for child socialization and personality development (1999, p. 17). Tastes are mostly rooted in childhood and at a lifetime of learning. Both family and school institutions play an important role in changing or keeping food preferences from one generation to another. Related to the topic this study, it is one hypothesis that migrants’ children, born and socialized in different environments, could bring a new diversity of culinary tastes to their families.

2.3. Global Tendencies in Food Dynamics: “Fast”/“Slow” Food Movements

Whether the connection between food and memory offers a grasp of culinary meanings and an intimate access to an embodied layer of individual and collective history, it is also relevant to place the analysis at global level looking at the larger tendencies and “gastro-politics” (Appadurai, 1981). Interesting insights about these tendencies are offered by an exploration of the tension between *fast food* and *slow food* movements.

Fast Food could be seen as a global tendency, an expression of the growing industrialization and standardization of food production and consumption. It also suggests speed and homogenisation of taste. Fast food is frequently seen, particularly in Mediterranean countries as France and Italy, as a distinctively “American” commodity, aesthetic and way of life and experience that risk to threaten “culinary patrimony” and to break with traditional food habits and conceptions (Fantasia, 1995; Miele and Murdoch, 2002).

However, several researchers question the direct association between an “American” homogenizing influence and fast food phenomenon in European countries. According to Claude Fischler, fast food is rather an expression of the global circulation of culinary culture. The popularity of Coca Cola and hamburgers in France is the effect of the same process of “alimentary cosmopolitanism” and “transcultural fusion” that makes French croissants and Italian pizza well known and widely consumed in United States. In a closer perspective, Jack Goody sees the internationalisation of taste and the industrialization of food as inevitable global processes (Fantasia, 1995, p 202).

Fast food is not only linked to its attached “cultural ethos”, but also to larger structural conditions. For instance, in his study about “fast food in France”, Rick Fantasia mentions the following factors that led to change in culinary habits in France: the growing number of women in the paid force, the expansion of the working day without extended meal break, increased urban traffic congestion, and the weakening of family ties with less emphasis of family mealtimes. However this trend toward fast food is clearly more extended in Great Britain. As Lang and Careher mention in their study about culinary skills transition, “the trend is toward lone dining, even when people don’t live alone, and fast food habits. Britons

have the 'fastest' food habits in Europe and 'eating on the hoof' is a growing feature, with entire industries servicing the trend [...]" (Lang and Careher, 2001, p. 5).

Slow Food movement developed in reaction to industrialized and facile consumption patterns (Leitch in Mintz and Du Bois, 2002, p. 104). It may also be seen as a way of resisting the commodification of our personal, private relationships (Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002, p. 348). Historically, Slow Food movement was established in 1986 in Italy by a group of writers and chefs emerging out of the local food cultures and regional cuisines. It started as a reaction against the potential impact of "Americanized" Fast Food on local food habits and related production practices. As Renato Sardo, the director of Slow Food International, noticed,

There was a lot of public debate at that time about standardization, the McDonaldisation, if you will, of the world. [...] On one hand there were the gastronomes, whose focus was fixed entirely on the pleasure of food. The other tradition was a Marxist one, which was about the methods of food production and their social and historical implication. (Sardo in Miele and Murdoch, 2002, p. 317).

Similar to the case of Fast Food phenomenon we may identify two dimensions of the Slow Food movement, one cultural – related to the representations and practices of consumption – and another one structural – connected with practices of production. The "philosophy of slowness" extends to ingredients, style of cooking and hospitality during meals. Regional cuisines and typical products are seen as a "cultural heritage", important features of local cultural distinctiveness. Typical products have an aesthetic dimension, are a result of human crafts, and are embedded in the surrounding local and regional environments. In addition, the movement also responds to the pressure of local food producers and distributors. Particularly in the Italian case, traditional eateries are closely connected and dependent on local food production systems. In this context Slow Food was seen as a support and promotion of local food cultures (Miele and Murdoch, pp. 307-325).

Both Fast and Slow Food phenomena can be seen as polar tendencies reflecting current food production and consumption practices and beliefs. The exploration of these movements is rather useful as an analytic tool.

Another option is to pay attention to “gastronomic syncretism” that could be seen as an alternative to Fast/ Slow food duality (Belasco in Nanau, 2007) and can reflect larger tendencies to “cultural syncretism”. Migration and transnational cultural dynamics are rich fields for such an exploration.

2.4. Globalization, Transnational Migration and Food/Cultural Syncretism

According to Richard Wilk, “Food and cooking can be an avenue toward understanding complex issues of cultural change and transnational cultural flow” (1999, p 244). They can reveal complex relationship between local and global culture, between immigrant or ethnic groups, on one hand, and the dominant one, on the other hand. Cultural practices of eating and food preferences can offer insights on patterns of cultural adaptation, identification, diversity or integration. Transformation in individual or collective culinary practices may also reflect changes in broader cultural dynamics.

Contrary to the assumptions of older modernization and assimilation theories that predicted a growing Westernization and homogenization of the world’s cultures, current transnational processes reveal a continuous production of cultural diversity and an increase in syncretistic practices. This fact is supported by social theorists who explain how individual agency is enabled in spite of global pressures and who explore related practices of cultural creativity and resistance. For Giddens, “the fundamental question of social theory [...] is to explicate how the limitations of individual ‘presence’ are transcended by the ‘stretching’ of social relations across time and space” (1984, p. 35). This current “stretching” and spanning of social relations across time and space that characterize processes of globalization and transnationalization led to a wider range of options for the people involved.

Ulf Hannerz argues against the notion of “global village” and “homogenization” of culture. He focuses on the constant motivation of people to creatively and selectively reinterpret larger cultural influences, a process he called “creolization”. Terms as “hybridity”, “creolization” and “transnational syncretism” reflect a continued production of new diversity. One recurrent theme in transnational research studies is that of “resistance”. Local people respond through confrontation, evasion,

subversive interpretations to influences appearing from outside that seem massively powerful. Another related topic is that of “cultural creativity” which is often explored in reaction to the theoretical perspective that equals globalization with global cultural homogenization (Hannerz, 1998, p. 238).

International migrants are key actors in the transnational cultural dynamics and flows including those related to food preferences and eating practices. According to Caroline Brettell (2000), migrants operate in “social fields” which transgress geographical and political borders “making home and host society a single arena action”. As Hannerz writes, migrants and those who remained home can stay in a rather close touch through visits and return trips from home, through telephone calls and regular exchange of consumer goods. All these connected people on move “form a coherent, although spatially dispersed social field” (1998, p. 240).

Anthropologists have commonly studied people on the move – migrants, refugees, and colonizers – as agents of culinary continuity and change (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002, 105). As a spatially and culturally transitional stage, the migration process brings possibilities of adaptation at or cultural negotiation of new habits, behaviors and experiences. Moreover, migrants keep their ties to a homeland through their preservation of and participation in traditional customs and rituals of consumption. They can prove to be “entirely passionate about such matters as the eating habits of the motherland” (Parama, 2002). A logic of *diglossia* (Ferguson) may function among immigrants communities trying to integrate into a dominant culture while keeping elements of their own original culture. For instance, in the case of Maghrebians in Paris, this logic works through a systematic opposition between cooking, eating practices and food items that helps to trace the boundaries of the migrant group (Bahloul, 1995, p. 494). The role of food practices in the maintenance of identity is also explored in the case of Greek migrants who have left their “homeland” behind, both in moments of revitalization or in times of prospective remembrance. Food offers entry points into the “blended temporalities of experience” (Sutton, 2001, p. 159).

Finally, migrants’ diet and foodways need to be explored and interpreted within a transnational framework where ingredients, techniques and options are no longer limited to the cultural context of the country of origin, or of the country of immigration. Actually migrants’ cultural practices include a bit of everything: traditional and modern, local and

global. These cultural practices also reflect the dynamics of the migrants' "fluid" or "creolized" cultural identities (Hall, 1992). As Richard Wilk quoted, "what is much less well understood is how such a stable pillar of identity can be so fluid and changeable, how seemingly insurmountable boundaries between each group's unique dietary practices and habits can be maintained, while diets, recipes, and cuisines are in a constant state of flux" (Warde in Wilk, 1999, p. 244).

3. Historical Context and Research Setting

3.1. Labour Migration during European Union Accession Process

The breakdown of the "Iron Curtain" and the massive post-communist deindustrialization process, which was encountered by a reduction of real salaries and living standards for many Romanian citizens as well by an increase in unemployment rate, led to a high rate of labour migration to Western European countries. According to a national survey (Public Opinion Barometer, OSF, 2005), 30% of the citizens from the region under study (Neamț County) had at least one family member working abroad in the last year, a migration rate more than three-fold than the national average (9%). Based on research findings, the migration strategy from the villages where I did fieldwork takes cyclical or temporary forms and the main destination countries include Italy and Ireland.

In January 2002, as part of the European Union pre-accession process, Romanian citizens got the right to enter Schengen space without visa but just as tourists and with condition of not exceeding three months of staying. This led to an overall increase in labour mobility and brought important differences between the strategies to migrate in Schengen and in non-Schengen states and between the related irregular practices to enter and work. Whether in the case of labour migration in Italy, many workers entered as "tourists", started their jobs without contracts and frequently overstayed their permitted entry waiting for regularization programmes, in the case of migration to Ireland – a non-Schengen state – irregularity also included practices of illegal entry and brought a higher risk of deportation. This distinction relates with important differences between migration and integration patterns in the two countries. While migration to Italy had been mostly cyclical and temporary, strategies of long-term migration were more frequent in the case of migrants to Ireland. The EU

accession of Romania in January, 2007 brought freedom of movement outside the Schengen space, but the access to labour market and the social integration remained difficult for the migrants who chose Ireland as destination country. These differences regarding the degree of social, economic and political integration are relevant for understanding migrant's adaptation practices, including the culinary ones.

3.2. General description of the sending communities

Both villages where I carried fieldwork – Piatra and Temeșani – are situated in Neamț County (Eastern Romania) at a distance of about 100 km one from the other. The villages are close to Roman and Piatra Neamț towns where many villagers used to work as commuters. The surrounding industrial platforms from Roman, Săvinești and Roznov provided the main source of jobs and income during communist regime. The families from the two villages used to combine commuting with work on their land and local farms.

The deindustrialization process, which was part of the main post-communist transformations, brought high levels of unemployment in the concerned villages. Most of the commuters were dismissed on the basis of governmental ordinances by which they received a number of salaries as a compensation for losing their jobs. This process mainly took place between 1994 and 2000. According to local statistical data, in 2000 the employed population (in the country) did not surpass 7% of the total active population from the two villages (Prefecture of Neamț County). One of the main responses to the local job market reduction and decreasing of life level was the strategy to migrate abroad for getting jobs there.

Italy and Ireland are currently among the most preferred destination countries for villagers from the researched sending communities (see *Annex 1*). The migration strategies are gendered. According to the interviews, men were the first who migrate but the women also started to migrate 5-6 years ago. There is a division between the jobs which men and women perform abroad. Men usually work in constructions, both in Italy and Ireland, and have better paid jobs. For women it is easier to find jobs in Italy as domestic workers taking care of children and elder people. This partly explains their predilection in learning Italian cooking style. By contrast, women who are migrating in Ireland use to raise their children and to take care of their own family, paid jobs being less easy to find.

4. Research Methodology

Given the specificity of the topic, the research methodology articulated multiple methods, sources and perspectives. Ethnographic interviews carried with migrants and members of their families were particularly useful to have access to migrants' discourses regarding their culinary habits, and to the cultural meanings attached to these practices. They also facilitate contextualisation taking into account the personal and family life histories, on one hand, and the larger socio-economic changes, on the other. Whether the main unit of analysis had been transnational household, these interviews took place both with men and women, both with older and younger generations. This was done in order to explore processes of cultural continuity and transformation at family level. Second, participant observation complementarily revealed non-discursive realms of peoples' lives, providing a privileged and intimate access to culinary practices and preferences by "tasting culture". The project for this research is partly a result of the warm and friendly dinners I shared with Romanian migrants in Dublin. Third, photography helped recording aspects of food distribution abroad.

Because the lives of Romanian migrants and their families take place in spatially distanced but interconnected locations, this study encompassed multi-sited fieldwork research (Marcus, 1995; Hannerz, 2003). Part of the field research was accomplished in a rural region from Eastern Romania (Neamţ County) and this especially helped interviewing the family members of the migrants. However, for a better understanding of the phenomena, a pilot research study was also carried out in Dublin, one main destination. The preliminary research I undertook in Dublin helped to create several "entry points" and contacts, which enabled the continuation of this research.

5. Case Study: Culinary Habits and Taste preferences of Romanian Migrants from Neamţ County

5.1. Taste Predilections and Gastronomic Practices

5.1.1. Culinary Adaptation Abroad

According to migrants' accounts, Italy and Ireland seem to belong to different culinary regions. The success of their culinary adaptation and the

required practices vary sharply from one country to the other. Whether Italian food is highly appreciated and the adaptation is successful, at least in the case of younger generations, Ireland is rather *an arena of confrontation and improvisation*, migrants trying to reproduce their Romanian eating practices and cuisines in a much more different culinary context. The logic of adaptation abroad is thus different from one case to the other. We may see a *logic of culinary and culturally integration in Italy*, by adoption on local cuisines, in contrast with Romanian migrants from Ireland who rather distance themselves from the dishes and culinary habits found abroad, by keeping their “traditional” eating habits in creative ways.

As migrants said,

We really got accustomed with Italian food. This one reason we want to go back to Italy. The vegetables are fresh there, even during winter. [...] The food is better than ours. And they have very good salami (*stagionati*). They have sweet dishes. They have the best olives, and a very good wine. [...] We also like *pasta*. It is a light and tasty food. If you combine it, you get thousands of tastes. (Romanian migrant to Italy)

When you are at the beginning it is very difficult. Their foods are too peppery. Their cuisines are very different from ours. [...] We use to prepare our food at home, and not their food. *We keep our Romanian tradition*. We cook the same food, but with their ingredients. Unfortunately, we cannot find there a lovage (*leuștean*), a good dill (*mărar*) or a good parsley (*pătrunjel*). We cannot find orache (*lobodă*) or celery (*țelină*). For these, we try to find replacements. (Romanian migrant to Ireland)

We got sick of their food. In the end, their food is toxic and artificial. Meat is toxic for sure. They put a lot of preservatives. Not to speak about the fruits they import. They have no taste. Ours have taste, even if they have worms. (Romanian migrant to Ireland)

The difference in food preferences is thus justified by migrants in terms of health, tastiness and variety. Whether Italian food is seen as tasty and healthy, the Irish one is considered “toxic”, “artificial” and without taste. The above quotations also give a hint about food preparation. Migrants from Ireland reproduce the structure and taste of their Romanian cuisines, while creatively combining local ingredients.

5.1.2. Generational Differences and Taste Preferences

According to the research findings, the attachment to Romanian tastes and cuisines is heavily influenced by generational differences. In contrast with recipes and diets, tastes are less likely to change, being rooted in childhood and at a life time of learning. Besides, as a previous quotation illustrated, tastes are also markers of community and national belonging. The older generation is more conservative in its culinary tastes. In contrast, the younger generation of migrants has polisemic and even cosmopolitan taste preferences, which could mask pressures to acquire prestige and social mobility. At the end of the spectrum, migrants' children, born and socialized in different environments, bring a new diversity of culinary tastes to their families.

Do you know something? Our food tastes very good. It is better than the Italian one. <But the younger ones said the Italian food tastes better>. Yes. It is normal. (Old lady, mother of two migrants and "commuter" to Italy)

Our children prefer Italian food. They became Italians (*s-au italianizat*). This is because they eat a lot in school canteens. The girl is at nursery (*creșă*). Our boy eats like this from the age of two. They got used with that food. They like *pasta* and *spaghetti* a lot. We will cook *pasta* in this evening. From time to time we also eat *pasta*. (Romanian migrant to Italy)

The children born there in our crowd (*grămadă*) eat what we cook. The ones we sent to kindergarten eat their food. They adapt. They eat in both places and they like. (Romanian migrant to Ireland)

In this context the concept of *habitus* and its connection with taste are highly relevant. Taste – an acquired disposition to "differentiate" and "appreciate" (Bourdieu, 1984) – is produced and reproduced by education during primary socialization. Migrants' children rose in Italian and Irish nurseries and primary schools bring new tastes and combine them with those learned in their Romanian families.

5.1.3. Culinary Representations and the Role of Food in Everyday Life

For Romanian migrants, eating is not just a necessary daily activity but also a way of life, an opportunity to have fun, to socialize and to strengthen

their social relations. The difference in global culinary tendencies previously illustrated through the “fast food” / “slow food” duality seems to be well fitted with the difference in culinary representations the migrants have about Irish and Italian culinary habits. In contrast with Irish people who are seen as stressed and hurried in their eating practices, Italians are appreciated for their life care, self respect and joy. As one migrant said “From Italian we learned to live healthy”. The following quotations are relevant to illustrate the dynamics of these culinary representations,

In Italy, if you go out into the street at one a clock, is nobody there. They have one hour of lunch break. And this is not paid. You work 4 hours before and 4 hours after. [...] Romanian got a very good habit there. *They learned to live in a steady and ordered manner.* We were debauched (*destrăbălați*) before that. [...] I quarrel with my family here [in Romania] when they ask me to eat at 12 or at 11a.m. “No. I eat at one a clock!” I use to drink a coffee in the morning and to eat something light to avoid digestion problems. Italians are very ordered. They really care about their life (*țin mult la viață*). (Romanian migrant to Italy)

In Ireland, the life quality is much reduced when compared to Italy. In Italy, they respect themselves. They have fun. They have their food. Staying at lunch is different. So, they respect themselves. They have dessert. They stay one hour or one hour and a half. But in Ireland you stay 30 minutes and then leave. They are different. (Romanian migrant to Ireland)

Generally *we really like to stay and eat together.* You can talk. You can drink a glass of wine. But they [Irish] are not like us. They are always running. This is their life. *Everything is counted in minutes.* They do not want to lose time. This is how they eat. They do not stay to talk. But we Romanians are always making time. For them the schedule is the schedule. Everything is previously calculated. *This is how Occident is made (Pentru ca așa e făcut Occidentul ăsta).* But we didn't get in this circle yet. For us, it doesn't matter. [...] They are too stressed. [...] You have money but I don't think this is extraordinary. Many times it is more important to have peace, to take care of your health, to have freedom. (Romanian migrant to Ireland)

In migrants' representations about the culinary Other, both a temporal and a social dimension could be identified. Whether for Irish people “time is money” and “everything is previously calculated”, for Italians “time

is life” and this is reflected in their culinary habits and siesta. Making time to eat slowly and to share the dishes brings feelings of freedom and group belonging for Romanian migrants. Having shared dinners is also an opportunity for family discussions and education matters. They criticize the Irish eating style that leads to a fragmentation of their social relations.

5.2. Romanian Food Procurement Practices

Food procurement strategies differ between the two groups of migrants. Finding alternative or complementary food items to those on the normal market is rather seen as a necessity by Romanian migrants who are working in Ireland. This is due to the perceived low quality of products on the market and their sharp difference in taste when comparing to those from the home country. However, even in Italy the interviewed migrants tend to bring some condiments and ingredients from home in order to cook dishes that taste “like home”. These “markers of taste” are important in the logic of cooking. As one Romanian old lady recounted,

When I go there (Italy) I cook for them. I prepared *caltaboş* for them [*Romanian homemade pork product made of pork offals, rice and spices*]. But I had problems with their meat because it is not fatty at all. So, I asked my son in law, who is international transporter, to bring me some ham (*şuncă*) [from Romania]. If you put *şuncă*, it ties up the composition (*se leagă*). They [Italians] use to throw away what is too fatty. [...] I also use to bring lovage (*leuştean*) from here. They do have parsley (*pătrunjel*). But they miss dill (*mărar*). However, I planted lovage there and it got roots! [...] Next time I want to make borsch (*borş*) for them. I especially want to do this. I brought fermented cereal broth (*huşe*) and husk (*tărăţe*) from home. (Old lady, mother of two migrants)

A similar strategy to bring condiments from home is also found in case of Romanians from Ireland. However, procuring “appropriate” and “tasty” food ingredients is much more difficult in Ireland. Sometimes, migrants use informal channels to get the products they need. Some items, as “Romanian sausages”, are “trafficked” through the border, as one migrant said. Other items are procured by means of private connections in the local food distribution sector. The following quotation is illustrative,

It is very difficult to bring meat in Ireland, but we have some Romanians who work at a supermarket there. They are Romanians and know which kind of meat Romanians prefer. They bring pork meat without preservatives. They know that on Friday, meat will be sold out and they do not put chemicals in it. [...] We also have a Romanian who is working at a butchery and knows the Romanian way of preparation. (Romanian migrants to Ireland)

Another channel for “Romanian” food procurement consists of the grocery stores with Romanian specific. Actually, Romanian shops and restaurants abroad are also arenas for an integration of Romanian food products and habits in a larger European context. These shops perform more functions than just distributing food. They are places for group meeting and some of them even offer money transfer services (see *Annex 2*). This food distribution channel is more important in Ireland than in Italy. Migrants from Italy alternatively use the service of transporters, the border control being less severe.

5.3. The “Micro-politics of Cooking”

5.3.1. The “Logic” of Cooking

Facing a diverse European cultural context, Romanian migrants from both Italy and Ireland increasingly incorporate a *wider “menu” of options* in their cooking activities. In their case, cooking became a *bricolage*, a creative improvisation process, being able to combine ingredients of different origins in original ways. However the cooking process has its specific logic. As already illustrated, foreign ingredients are used in cooking but what really counts is the final taste and “form” of the cooked cuisine and not its isolated basic elements. Characteristic flavours and aromas introduced through “traditional” condiments as lovage, dill and garlic, in specific ways, help keeping a constant *principle of taste* and give a “Romanian” taste to the cooked food. As Fischler points out, within such a food system one can introduce some new ingredients and still have the resulting dish be acceptable to the system (Fischler in Sutton, 2001, p. 130).

5.3.2. Gender and Generational Dynamics of Food Preparation

This paper pays attention to the “gastro-politics” (Appadurai, 1981) at household level through the exploration of the gender dynamics of food preparation in the case of Romanian migrants. Transnational migration led in many cases to a higher degree of flexibility of gender roles in the family. The transition of productive base from farming to wage labour altered the domestic roles of men and women. Thus, unlike previous periods, cooking became an activity that can be transferred to men, depending on situational contexts. This change in gender roles is not unique to Romanian migrants and can be found in case of other East European migrants, as well (Bloch, 1976). The transition to more balanced gender relations is explained by one of the interviewed migrants,

My wife is cooking, if she has time. If not, I help her. It is now the same. We speak on the phone and establish what to eat and what to buy. So now is balanced. [...] In the past it was beautiful, but it was a different way of life. The women stayed at home and it was normal for them to cook. What to do, to keep her doing nothing? [*O ai de gătit. O ții degeaba?*] But, as long as she brings money as you do, she works on the same schedule as you do... You came late in the evening and you have to take care of the children. So you have to do it together. (Romanian migrant to Italy)

With regard to generational differences and their effects on cooking, there are cases when the parents of the migrants go abroad to help their children at housework during winter. For instance, at Christmas time, they cook ritual food – named by them “traditional” food – as “*cozonac*”, “*caltaboș*”, “*tobă*” and “*sarmale*” (forcemeat rolls in cabbage/vine leaves). Migrants of older generation keep a constant connection with the culinary tradition from home.

5.3.3. The Oral Transmission of Recipes

According to the research findings, in all the explored cases the recipes and the knowledge of cooking were orally transmitted and learned in practice, while being in the origin families. The stress is thus on socially embedded apprenticeship, on learning by doing. Contrasting this type of transmission with cooking from written cookbooks, Sutton (2001, p. 19) notices: “what is remembered is not a set of rules, but images,

tastes, smells and experiences". These practices assure a transmission of embodied memories that carry their original social and emotional context of learning.

5.3.4. New Cooking Technology and its Role

An interesting issue regarding the cultural contact and the change of cooking style during migration process is *the impact of modern technologies*. New cooking technologies are timesaving devices and tend to replace the older gestures and techniques. However, neither the traditional temporality of cooking, nor the practical knowledge and habits around it, are easy to change in case of Romanian migrants. Tools, as blender and microwave oven, provoke suspicions among migrants and their wives. As one interviewed couple said,

We have a microwave oven, but we use our classic oven (*aragaz*) because we got used with it. We sent the microwave oven from Ireland but we never use it. (migrant to Ireland)

But the microwave oven is not good at all! It emanates some currents, some energy that is not good for the children. *We have it but we never used it.* (migrant's wife)

Modern cooking tools – as microwave oven – have rather a *social role*, migrants being proud of their "acquisitions". They are markers of social prestige in the local sending community, being placed and exposed as decorative artefacts (sometimes on a carpet) in their household (personal observation).

6. Final Comments and Conclusions

This research paper revealed aspects of European cultural continuity and transformation by analysing the dynamics of culinary habits and taste preferences in the case of labour migrants from Eastern Romania and their families. It thus gave an account on processes of spontaneous European cultural integration of Romanian migrants that started long before the "official" pre-accession project directed at a larger political level. These

people were able to integrate by themselves and, through their interaction, exchange and mobility, they re-connected cultural European spaces at the level of their lives and daily practices, including the culinary ones.

In dealing with taste preferences and culinary practices of Romanian migrant workers and their families, the findings indicate that both processes of cultural continuity and ongoing creative adaptation and confrontation are taking place. Whether strong elements of continuity and constancy could be identified at the more latent layer of dietary habits and taste preferences, diets, recipes, cuisines and basic ingredients are in a continuous state of transformation or improvisation.

Whether the migrants who are working in Italy rather emphasize aspects of *continuity* regarding their culinary habits and tastes (“We like Italian food”, “They respect the meal hours”, “They know how to drink”), Ireland is rather an area of *creative adaptation and confrontation*, Romanian migrants trying to reproduce their culinary habits in a much more different cultural environment.

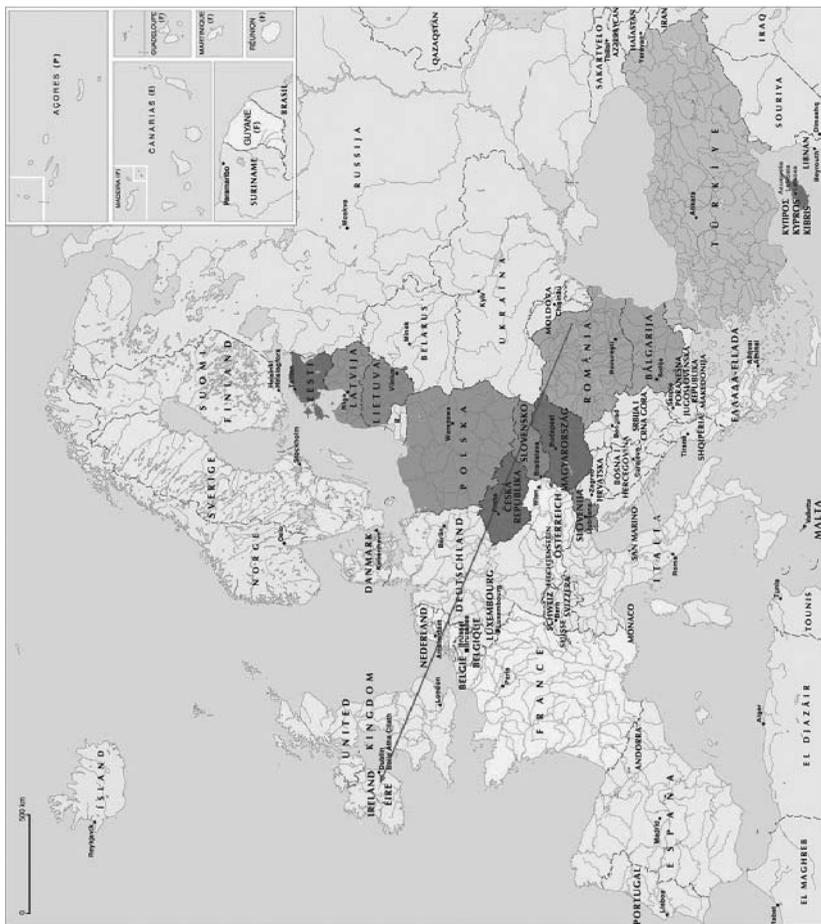
Exploring the continuity and transformation of Romanian migrants’ dietary habits and culinary preferences, this study brings its own “embodied” perspective on memory processes. It explores the “logics” of cultural practices around food, eating and cooking and thus gives an account on a latent layer of memory and habits encrypted at their level.

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Annex 1: Routes of Transnational Migration



Annex 2: Spaces of Romanian Food Distribution



Romanian shop in Dublin selling “European” food



“Traditional Romanian restaurant” in Dublin