

Food heritagization:  
the conflictual landscape of the Fiorentina  
beef-steak

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“One need only to open a contemporary cookbook, or a tourist guidebook to see how food is used to represent and distinguish a particular group or people, often through discourses of heritage and tradition” (Di Giovine and Brulotte, 2014, p. 4). Still, “Identifying a food culture with a locality has always involved a trade-off between searching for roots and recognizing they are not planted in any one spot but entail exchanges and borrowings from remote origins» (Capuzzo, 2020, p. 65). Moreover, “traditions may also be invented for the economic and social revitalization of communities” (Di Giovine and Brulotte, 2014, p.2).

Starting from these theoretical assumptions, the paper focuses on the process of patrimonialisation of bistecca alla fiorentina and in particular on the idea of obtaining Unesco recognition for it, in order to underline the discursive power of carnism (dell'Agnese, 2021). Believing that eating meat is "natural, normal and necessary" (Joy, 2010) is, in fact, a widespread attitude in Western culture, but certainly not shared by the whole of humanity, for ethical, environmental and religious reasons. The patrimonialisation of steak, therefore, even if it is a food with a strong identity for the locals, risks having a divisive

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effect and a negative impact, at least for some potential tourists, on the image of the city.

In 2018 the mayor of Florence announced that the “Bistecca alla Fiorentina” was to be nominated for the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Later, the Region of Tuscany also started to promote the candidature, because: “The Fiorentina is one of the most significant testimonies of the immense agricultural and food heritage of Tuscany”. The steak is a large cut of beef with bone, grilled and served very rare. In the 16th century, according to the legend, English merchants in Florence witnessed the offering of meat on the bone and called it “beef-steak”; the word was borrowed in Italian as “bistecca”, eventually leading to the identification of the “bistecca alla fiorentina”. Others claim instead that the Fiorentina is an “invented tradition”, as its diffusion was linked to the community of English people in 19th century Florence and to the desire of local restaurateurs to satisfy their love for meat (Pintus 2007). The contemporary process of patrimonialization goes hand in hand with the “meatification of the urban foodscape” (Puttilli, Bonati and Portinaro, 2019) and with its celebration in travel literature. So, in the description of a typical tavern where eating a good Fiorentina, you can read that “The owner would come over to the table in his bloody apron and carve the massive, dripping-rare *fiorentina* steak...”.

If successful, the Fiorentina will go along with other food or cooking practices, now part of the world heritage list, such as the Mediterranean diet, or the art of Neapolitan pizza makers. The application dossier must be submitted by the State and demonstrate that the proposed “intangible asset” complies with a list of criteria (Article 18, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage). First of all, it must be “recognized by the community...as part of their cultural heritage” and Fiorentina is for sure a symbol of Florence, strongly connected with the identity of the place. But then it

must also “be compatible with international human rights instruments, mutual respect and sustainable development”. This second criterion seems more problematic, at a time when carnism (Joy, 2010) is increasingly being questioned in terms of health, ethics and the environment. Indeed, to those who believe that we should not kill animals to eat them, the exaltation of “bloody aprons” can be disturbing. Moreover, the sustainability issue is even more challenging, given the highly negative impact that the breeding of animals for meat has on the planet.

## References

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