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Stakeholders and Experts in Culinary Cultural Heritage

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1 Introduction

This article is about culinary authenticity as a cultural heritage issue. Our purpose is to establish a distinction between experts and stakeholders that, as we demonstrate, is neglected by the ongoing debate and is critical for addressing the wicked problem posed by culinary authenticity.

The underlying motivation for our research is a rising awareness of the potential of food as a component of a group's or community's cultural heritage. Numerous processes bear witness to this trend, including: the relatively recent inclusion of food items such as recipes and traditional cuisines on the UNESCO list of "intangible heritage" (Aykan 2016, Stazio 2021; Voltaire 2018); the growing role of gastrotourism as a form of travel and cultural encounter (Putri and Baskoro 2021); the flourishing of governmental efforts that rely on gastronomy to effect high diplomatic missions or to secure cultural acceptance and appeal among wider sectors of the population (Garcia 2021; Nair 2021; Rockower 2020).

Despite such a key role that food items play in cultural exchanges and politics, how such a value should be nurtured, protected, and enjoyed is still widely discussed. Engisch(2023), included in this symposium, for instance, offers a taste of the difficulty to frame a principled way to regard culinary items as bearers of cultural heritage. Recent philosophical literature has indeed shed light on the complex theoretical issues surrounding food identity and authenticity (Borghini and Engisch 2022). For example, who has the authority to determine what food is authentic? What deliberative procedures may be imagined to steer arguments about culinary identity and authenticity? Which characteristics of a dish or the situation of consumption are most important in making a decision? In this work, we focus on scenarios in which the answers to those questions cannot be obtained by appealing to the authority of experts, but rather depend on the existential position (that is, their perceived shared values, local histories, socio-political sensibilities and goals) of important stakeholders.

2 Authenticity and Heritage

Our analysis moves from two related points. First, an ontological one (Borghini 2022). Food items are multiple. They are replicated every day by innumerable individuals. Their features are often highly variable, and the practical needs they fulfil encourage shortcuts and creative adaptations. Under such conditions, it is unsurprising that food items evolve at a remarkable pace. Variation and evolution give rise to disputes regarding the legitimacy of purported instances of a food item. Second, food items are often tied to particular cultural groups. They acquire their value and significance through the role they play in the life of such groups (Engisch 2022; Ravasio 2018).

These two concerns are related in the sense that the evolution of a food item partly reflects the community that consumes it. But, communities and their identities are not static: they evolve over time. Communities may reinterpret, reassess, and revise their heritage and how they understand it as a result of these changes, through the display of a

variety of norms, as discussed by Atencia-Linares and Sebastián (2023) in this symposium. Food products that are part of a group's identity vary in their material ingredients and preparation as a result, and these changes are frequently crucial in relation to the group's identity, values, and requirements (Borghini 2022).

It is from this standpoint that we wish to pose the problem of culinary authenticity, of which Strohl (2019) has recently advanced an account. The notion of culinary authenticity is meant to capture the intuitive distinction between correct renditions of a dish or other culinary product, and incorrect ones.

Strohl's account has two components: replication and provenance requirements. Replication accounts for the multiple nature of food items. A token of food is an authentic instance of a food item if it is judged to be so by someone who is familiar with the perceptual features that are standardly present in that kind of food item — a "reasonable judge" (Strohl 2019, 161). Provenance requirements are supposed to capture the relevance of historical or geographical constraints on the identity of a food item. For instance, the *Pomodorino del Piennolo del Vesuvio* is a variety of grape tomato that is grown in a rather small area close to Naples, Italy. This particular geographical origin is essential to its identity. It is worth noting that provenance requirements are intended to account for the importance of non-perceptual aspects in the judge's decision.

Authenticity verdicts are indexed to a particular context, in that the same judge may produce different verdicts regarding the authenticity of a food item, if the variation in context is significant enough. As an example of this, think of how geographical context may restrict the availability of required ingredients, and thus influence the stringency of requirements (Strohl 2019, 162).

One may ask whether this two-component account exhausts all the properties that determine authenticity verdicts about food items. For instance, it may be that in some cases a token of food requires certain dispositional properties in order for it to count as an authentic instance of a certain food item type. Think of properties such as being filling, intoxicating, comforting, etc. Though such properties may sometimes partly depend upon perceptual features of a food token, it is implausible to think that they can be reduced to such features (Scruton 2009).

Rather than pressing on this point, we wish to examine the relation between the replication-provenance account and our concerns, to show how we need something more, or something different, in order to discuss the problem of food as cultural heritage.

3 Culinary Authenticity as a Wicked Problem

The replication-provenance account assumes that a food item has an associated normative profile of sorts, that is, some features that ought to belong to any acceptable token of a given food item type. This profile is then broken down into the two components of replicability and provenance. Strohl's is thus an account of a food item's identity conditions at a given time. However, as previously said, addressing the issue of food as cultural heritage requires a consideration of how a food item's normative profile evolves over time, as well as its connection to a certain cultural group. Our claim is that this cannot be done by focusing on authenticity verdicts produced by Strohl's "reasonable judge." Let us look at a relevant example.

In the context of an examination of ethical problems related to food, Barnhill and Bonotti (2021) discuss the attempt to modify the traditional English meat pie so as to include vegan versions. Such an attempt can be motivated by the desire some may have "to live according to their dietary preferences (and the moral values that underlie them) while also embracing an additional identity associated with the traditional pie, e.g., 'Londoner' or 'English'" (Barnhill and Bonotti 2021, 218). As they note, this identity project requires a continuity between the traditional meat pie and its vegan variation, and cannot be accomplished through the mere creation of a new food item that suits the restrictions of the vegan community. On the other hand, any attempt to propose vegan versions of the meat pie as legitimate variations is bound to encounter opposition by more conservatively-minded individuals, who see it as an unacceptable move.

This disagreement cannot be easily captured in terms of the replication-provenance account. The issue is not so much that the vegan and the traditionalist disagree about the replication and provenance features that determine the authenticity of the meat pie. The point is that they have a different stance with regard to changes to that normative framework.

Considered in this way, the connection between culinary heritage and authenticity assumes the characteristic features of a "wicked problem." Rittel and Webber (1973, 161-167) notably identify 10 symptoms that make a problem wicked rather than tame. The central and more general symptoms are: that there is widespread and irresolvable disagreement about the nature of the problem (Proposition 1); that the solutions to the problem are good or bad, rather than true or false (Proposition 3); and that the problem can be considered a symptom of another problem (Proposition 8).

As per Proposition 1, it is debated where the issue of culinary authenticity lies. Is it an issue of ingredients? Of consumers' opinions and judgments? Of the overall context of consumption (Borghini 2022)? The complex nature of food makes each of these options, as well as a few others, all seem prima facie plausible answers. In addition, as per Proposition 3, solutions to problems of culinary authenticity are not a matter of truth and falsity, as the case of the vegan pie was meant to show. Finally, as per Proposition 8, the problem of culinary authenticity can be regarded as the symptom of another problem, namely, as we shall argue in the next section, the contentious role and competing interests of *stakeholders*.

4 Stakeholders vs. Experts

We argue that, in order to tackle issues regarding culinary heritage, one needs a distinction between *stakeholders* and *experts* of a food item.

The term 'stakeholder' is most employed to indicate any agent who has a stake on the nature and functioning of a business or institution (customers, retailers, stockholders, employees, etc.). It is in this sense that it also appears in discussions of wicked problems, of which policy problems are the paradigmatic case (Head 2022, 21).

The term has been coopted by scholars who work in heritage studies to indicate any agent who has an interest in tangible or intangible cultural heritage (Albert and Ringbeck 2013, 176-78;). For example, the stakeholders of a valuable architectural complex may include the local and central governments, nearby residents and business owners,

tourists, travel agencies, etc. In this paper, we employ the term in a more specific sense, defining stakeholders as the individuals who can reasonably view the food item in question as part of their cultural heritage.

What is it to *reasonably* consider something as part of their heritage? The answer to this question is complex enough to exclude an exhaustive treatment in the context of this article, but we can offer some indicative criteria. Crucially, a necessary condition on an individual stakeholder status with regard to a cultural item is that the item in question features centrally in the individual's communal cultural practices. In the context of culinary heritage, this means that an individual has stakeholder status in a food item if that item is a salient aspect of a practice that is part of the culture of a community to which the individual belongs. This can be defined as the structural grounds on which stakeholder status may be granted. Additionally, *historical* considerations may also be a plausible basis for claiming stakeholder status. In the case of living traditions, structural and historical grounds go hand in hand, but they may diverge in the case of abandoned practices.

While we realize that these remarks fall a long way short of exhausting issues concerning a community's claim to a cultural product or practice, we believe that they are sufficient to trace a distinction between stakeholder status in the narrow sense from the broader notion introduced earlier. The producer of a food item is always a stakeholder in the broad sense, but need not be a stakeholder in the narrow sense, for it may lack the relevant structural and historical ties to that food item.

We contrast the concept of stakeholder with that of a food item's *expert*. We define an expert of a food item as anyone who is familiar with central aspects of a food item, such as its ingredients, flavor profile, mode of preparation, mode of consumption, and historical origin. Expertise comes in degrees, and different experts will likely differ in their degree of familiarity with any of the aspects just mentioned (Borghini and Piazza 2019). Crucially, an expert of a food item is knowledgeable about the norms governing the production and appreciation of that food item, and is thus in an epistemic position to formulate reasoned verdicts with regard to the status of a candidate token of a given dish or culinary product.

Expert status can be acquired independently of whether one is a stakeholder with respect to a given food item. As suggested, expertise is an epistemic notion, and expert status can be acquired by anyone who acquires the relevant knowledge. In contrast, an individual's status as the stakeholder of a food item depends on their existential position as member of a certain human community.

Of course, expertise and stakeholder status are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, most stakeholders are likely to have some knowledge of the culinary items that constitute their gastronomic identity. But it would be incorrect to argue that stakeholder status entails expertise. A great many stakeholders are no more than consumers of products that are nonetheless important to their identity. Their expertise is at best limited.

This distinction, while original, reflects recent discoveries in philosophical discussions of food authenticity. As an example, Heldke and Thomsen (2014, 80-81) observe that internet restaurant reviews give evidence of at least two ways of discussing the authenticity of an establishment. The first focuses on the presence or absence of certain

dishes, or on the specific features of some of the items offered, whereas the second is more concerned with the identity of the people who own and/or run the place. These different approaches to authenticity can be seen as roughly matching a concern for expertise vs. a concern for the involvement of stakeholders.

Note that we are not claiming that all food items can be associated with an identifiable stakeholder group. The most obvious example of stakeholder-free food item is perhaps that of the chef's signature dish (Bacchini 2020; Borghini and Gandolini 2020). While potentially replicable, these food items are generally too loosely tied to the cultural life of communities to acquire a group of stakeholders. Another example is mass-produced food that is distributed globally. There's no doubt that Nutella, Coca Cola, and Heineken play essential roles in many people's cultural lives, yet it is hard to conceive of those individuals as a unified cultural community. Finally, higher-level food categories are a particularly interesting case of stakeholder-free food item. Consider Cabernet Sauvignon. Wines made from this grape are found across the globe, and any attempt to identify stakeholders at this level of generality is likely to be pointless. The interest of such cases lies in the fact that it is not implausible to think of some of them as culinary heritage. The notion of cultural heritage is often employed in an extended sense that includes objects that lack any obvious link to an identifiable existing stakeholder community. Several sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List plausibly belong to this category. The upshot of this is that stakeholder status is not relevant to all culinary heritage problems, although it is central to some.

5 Food purists

In this section, we apply the distinction traced above to an analysis of food purism. We can broadly define food purism as a recalcitrant attitude towards the acceptance of controversial candidate instances of a food item. The food purist is unwilling to accept as authentic instances of a dish that fail to meet fairly stringent requirements, and is equally unwelcoming towards proposed changes in a food item's constitutive properties. Food purism is a familiar phenomenon: Italians who complain about pineapple on pizza, members of minority groups who hold a celebrity chef accountable for butchering their national dish, beer connoisseurs who cast aspersions on a chocolate-flavored stout, etc.

A consequence of our preceding discussion is that the recriminations raised by food purists are not all alike. Sometimes, food purism is grounded in expertise: an expert of a food item rejects a proposed variation as illegitimate, or refuses to consider a token of food as an instance of a food item on epistemic grounds. Disputes of this sort may be solved by appealing to a community of experts. Perhaps the apparently unacceptable variation will turn out to be an established local version of a dish, or the offending ingredient an acceptable substitution.

In other cases, however, food purism has a rather different origin. This idea can be illustrated by a recent dispute concerning acceptable variations to a well-known Italian recipe, *tortellini*. Every year on October 4th, the Italian city of Bologna honors its patron, Saint Petronius. The events organized on this occasion invariably also involve food. Tortellini are a ring-shaped stuffed pasta dish, and one of Bologna's most famous traditional dishes. According to the recipe filed with the Italian Chamber of Commerce,

their filling is made of various pork cuts (prosciutto, mortadella, and loin), eggs, and parmesan.

During the 2019 Saint Petronius celebrations, the diocese of Bologna served both the traditional version and one with a filling of chicken, ricotta, egg, and parmesan cheese. While the chicken version of tortellini was intended to include anyone who wished to eschew pork meat, it became evident that one of the primary goals was to allow the Muslim population to consume this classic dish.

Public reaction to the initiative was mixed. While some welcomed the gesture, others saw it as a gratuitous threat to the identity of a valued traditional dish (Scarcella 2019). The debate prompted some food historians to point out that the oldest known *tortellini* recipe does not actually include any pork. It is found in Francesco Leonardi's *L'Apicio moderno* (1790), and mandates chicken breast, beef bone marrow, parmesan, butter, salt, nutmeg, cinnamon, and egg yolks. Pork first appears listed as an ingredient in Pellegrino Artusi's *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (1891), but recipes including also chicken are found up until the 1960s.

In our view, instances of food purism such as this are not motivated by the purists' epistemic position as an expert, but rather by their existential position as stakeholders. In the case in question, a purist attitude revolved around a perceived threat to the cultural role of *tortellini* within a community of stakeholders.

If the identical chicken tortellini recipe had been offered as a "healthier" version of the original dish, it would not have received the same level of criticism. Given the dish's history, a chicken stuffing presented as a "historically authentic" recipe would have certainly been even more widely accepted. The motivations of a community to accept or reject changes as legitimate are not only aesthetic and epistemically grounded, but also existential, and thus influenced by a wide range of factors such as perceived traditional values, selected local histories, and current socio-political sensibilities and aims.

In such cases, it is a conceptual mistake to think that appeal to expertise may resolve the issue. Thus, as important as it may be for food historians to point out the complex origin and diverse nature of *tortellini* recipes, this is unlikely to change the stakeholders' position. Their view of the legitimacy of proposed variations is tied to a broader conception of their identity as a group. In such instances, authenticity in food heritage becomes an existential issue rather than an epistemological one.

6 Conclusion

In the final chapter of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Arthur Danto develops an account of style as self-expression by an individual or group, contrasting it to manner. The difference between style and manner is that the former issues from the artist without the mediation of identifiable rules and skills, while the latter simply replicates the appearance stylistic features by following principles that could be given explicit formulation (Danto 1981, 200-201). Much like being virtuous is not a matter of following a set of prescriptions, but rather of acting appropriately in different and novel situations, so stylistic actions cannot be captured in terms of third-person prescriptions. There is a creative aspect to virtue, as there is to style, and it is this creativity that manner fails to preserve (Danto 1981, 202).

The parallel between Danto's account of style and the issues we have discussed in this article is more than a superficial one. On Danto's account, stylistic choices are those that result from the unmediated, creative self-expression of an individual or group. Manner allows for the reproduction of stylistic features at the price of detaching them from the agent they issued from. In our framework, mannerism is represented by approaches that tackle culinary heritage problem exclusively in terms of expertise. The danger in this, we claim, lies in the risk of severing the cultural connection between heritage and the groups that create and embrace it as existentially meaningful.

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