

Traditional Food Heritage in Contemporary Tuscany Local Networks and Global Policies around the Zolfino Bean

Michela Badii

Volume 35, numéro 2, 2013

Paysages patrimoniaux
Heritage Scapes

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1026551ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1026551ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)
1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Badii, M. (2013). Traditional Food Heritage in Contemporary Tuscany: Local Networks and Global Policies around the Zolfino Bean. *Ethnologies*, 35(2), 129–145. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1026551ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article a pour objectif d'explorer la constitution d'un patrimoine alimentaire traditionnel dans la Toscane d'aujourd'hui. Pour ce faire, nous analyserons la « vie sociale » qui se développe autour de la fève *zolfino*, un produit symbolique des traditions locales. Les principaux sujets de cette recherche ont été observés dans le cadre local de leur vie quotidienne pour identifier les mesures de patrimonialisation de même que les processus de subjectivation par le bas. Nous examinerons en particulier le « conflit » pour l'étiquetage qui met en lumière la ligne de controverse entre localisation et globalisation. Cette étude de cas révèle la nature ambiguë des politiques patrimoniales qui transforment un capital local en un produit qui incarne un sens d'appartenance au territoire en termes d'accès social et de style de vie.

TRADITIONAL FOOD HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TUSCANY

Local Networks and Global Policies around the Zolfino Bean

Michela Badii

University of Milan Bicocca

Introduction

This article proposes an ethnography starting with a contemporary analysis of the creation of a food heritage in the Valdarno Valley, a post sharecropping territory¹ located between Arezzo and Florence, in Tuscany. In this paper, I will focus on the labelling procedures concerning the *Zolfino* bean, particularly its creation as a symbol of local heritage, from a humble food to a product of excellence. This product has been subjected to a “manipulation” process on the controversial divide between localization and globalization.

Heritage is treated here as a category of governance at a rhetorical and socio-economical level (Herzfeld 1997; Palumbo 2003), where new relationships of power and forms of subjectivity emerge. Many anthropological works have emphasised the processes of heritage construction in order to observe the labelling procedures from the top to the bottom that have favoured the development of a new social life around local food in both material and immaterial terms. This social life refers to the regulations, customs and imaginary elements (the rhetorics of “tradition”, “emergence of territorial food safeguard” etc.) that guide the selection criteria and the promotion of food from below. The contribution of Michael Di Giovine and Ronda Brulotte (2014) shows, through different

-
1. A system of socio-economic and cultural exploitation based on sharecropping and self-sustenance. It consisted in a contract between the landowner and the peasant. The landowner provided the *mezzadro* with a farm (the *podere*) to live on. In return, the *mezzadro* cultivated the land, using the labour force of his entire family. The expenses and the final product were divided equally between the landlord and the peasant (Bianco 1988).

ethnographies, how food is used to create identities that are considered as forms of cultural heritage at a regional, national and transnational level (also see Turgeon 2010). Where European food policies are concerned, Cristina Papa underlines the paradoxical effects of the labelling process (PDO): although European norms are in place to protect the product, paradoxically they tend to restrict production, unable to understand its multiple and often informal uses on a local scale. Cristina Grasseni (2012) analyses the socio-technological processes that transform small-scale Alpine cheese production, and how its introduction on the wider market of global heritage causes food to be re-invented locally. Other contemporary ethnographies consider Slow Food as a form of food activism triggering new social and economic dynamics for local territories (Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014).

These contributions demonstrate that Slow Food and the European Community, as policy makers, are closely linked to the creation of food heritage because they are connected to the locality and contribute to the creation of new political meanings of traditional food, redefined in terms of “social access” and “cultural boundaries” (Donati 2005; Leitch 2008; Sassatelli and Davolio 2010).

Slow Food has been mapping biodiversity of local products on a worldwide scale since 1989 (*The Manifesto* publishing year). It promotes the concept of food that is “good to think about”. This association offers to manage local food heritage in partnership with the State, due to the charismatic power and expertise it can offer in the territories (Miele and Murdoch 2002). The “right to pleasure”, food quality selected by “taste” criteria, as well as the slogan “Good, Clean and Fair” (Petrini 2005) have become the ideological parameters that Slow Food uses on a local level. As far as public policies are concerned, the European Community has introduced new “rhetoric” in rural contexts (the so-called “Sustainable Development Plans”) in favour of quality and sustainability.

This ethnography will show how this process modifies food material and symbolic capital in the social context today. Therefore, global policies take shape in the local context, where procedures, ideologies and customs meet. It is precisely at this level that one can observe shifting meanings, specific food-context relationships and the translation of local food “traditions” according to trans-local codes. This case study offers, therefore, a critical analysis of how heritage food policies arise from contemporary global multilevel processes that redefine cultural boundaries. I will attempt to show through ethnographic narration how these heritage policies have been embodied by the actors themselves.

“Food heritage” has become one of the symbols of Tuscany on an international level. Moreover, it is significant that the first Slow Food *presidium* in the world was set up in Tuscany in 1999 for the *Zolfino* bean, whose progress I followed for four years. The *presidium* is the international strategy of Slow Food for organising local networks that safeguard the local biodiversity and gastronomic traditions considered at risk of extinction.

Starting from the locality, I will focus on the practices and discourses that Slow Food and the European Community produce from below or in other words, where transnational policies encounter memory, discourses, material culture, and local embedded practices.

I carried out the research as a militant of the local *convivium* of the Slow Food Movement over a long period of field observation. The association operates in the territory through decentralized bases called *convivia* (management committees) which follow the directives from the headquarters in Bra. The *convivium* is the movement’s local unit that protects and selects products and producers who represent the local food heritage.² It’s right here that the local *presidia*’s presidents (*Zolfino* bean, Tarese ham and Valdarno Chicken) meet and organize the local food promotion. This is why I chose the *convivium* as the observation point for local heritage processes, as it is here that the main actors, not only local ones, are involved in these processes. My research was carried out through individual informal interviews, participating in *convivium* activities, visiting public offices, farmers, events, and observing Slow Food local policies. In particular, I observed subjects at work during a farmers’ market revival project (the process of revitalising a traditional popular festival) and a local meeting with the Slow Food leader, Carlo Petrini (Badii 2009, 2012, 2014).

The article aims to show that the heritage process has not been sufficient to reorganize this small-scale production. For this reason, as far as the *Zolfino* bean is concerned, it is necessary to consider the relationship between the self-sustaining sharecropping system, where the *Zolfino* bean originally belonged, and the contemporary heritage policies where it has been introduced. Despite the Slow Food rhetoric, there is no continuity between the old sharecroppers and today’s producers. Like the president of the *Zolfino Presidium*, many of these modern producers came back to the countryside in the 1990s, after working in industry or the handcraft sector. Others bought

2. At the time of my research (2004-2007), the local *convivium* consisted of the three local presidents of the local *presidia* (Valdarno chicken, Valdarno Tarese and the *Zolfino* bean), the Slow Food’s regional governor, four urban middle-class militants and a left-wing/centre politician.

farmhouses in the 1980s as a middle-class lifestyle choice reflecting a desire to return to their origins (so called “neo-rurals”). Moreover, the Tuscan rural economy changed significantly after the flight of peasants from the countryside. In the 1970s, the European Community started a process of industrialisation of rural areas, converting to monocultures and introducing new crops such as corn, wheat and sunflowers, all of which was done for the sake of quantity. In fact, romantic postcards of Tuscany with fields of sunflowers paradoxically portray these policies of “quantity” quite clearly. The end of sharecropping meant that many products for self-consumption, such as the *Zolfino* were transformed into hobby-style productions. The rural work force was redirected to industries and handicrafts and rural technological know-how was lost. This progression from the stereotypic peasant figure to “producer” was only a partial professionalization, which meant that each subject acquired territorial knowledge and technical know-how in an almost random fashion.

This historic background will shed light on two important aspects: first, the selective practices used by heritage policies to draw from local capital and manipulate social history and folklore and second, the way in which global labelling policies crystalise differences.

“Forgotten” local produce

The *Zolfino* bean has had a difficult history. Cultivation techniques and practices have been lost in fragmented oral testimonies of old sharecropping tenants and local farmers. Direct sources confirm the presence of this type of bean in the mountain range and foothills on the western side of the Pratomagno. This spatial limitation is linked to the product’s organoleptic properties, since there is a greater yield in sandy, dry land where the rain waters the plant without pooling. Therefore, it can be assumed that the *Zolfino* bean is only grown on land that has these properties.

In a not too distant past, when the countryside was still cultivated by sharecropping tenants, the *Zolfino* harvest was not shared with the landowner. In fact, each tenant sowed these beans for his own family’s needs or informal exchange. What makes the *Zolfino* stand out from other types of beans, such as the Toscanello or Coconano, is its delicate skin, almost imperceptible after cooking, and the soft ivory flesh. That is why the local oral tradition has given nicknames to the *Zolfino*, such as *Burrino*, referring to its buttery texture. Another distinctive quality of this bean is that it resists long cooking times, up to four hours, without deteriorating.

The delicate flesh makes it a simple product, and this is reflected in the traditional recipes: one clove of garlic, one sage leaf, a tomato and water (spring water is specified in these recipes) in a saucepan, often served with raw onion. Alternatively, “*fagioli rifatti*”, now more commonly known as “*all’uccelletta*”: the beans are reheated with tomato sauce in a pan, usually the day after they have been boiled. In the words of a Slow Food journalist: “They’re a wonder to the palate: the skin is thin and light, the flesh is dense, almost like cream, a delicious puree [...]. Eat them with an onion (but don’t sprinkle chopped onions on them). Wash them down with a glass of Chianti.”

At the time of tenant farming, however, flavour was secondary to other critical parameters of subsistence, including the availability of raw materials and their quantity. The tenant farmers regarded it as a capricious plant and it was cultivated almost for fun in the valley, without much hope that the crop would succeed. “We’d throw it amongst vines and buckwheat or in the crags. If it came out, all well and good; if not...” exclaimed an old peasant. On the other hand, when the land lent itself to a better yield, the bean was sown in April as part of the seasonal yield for personal consumption.

It is no coincidence that the *Zolfino* was called the “*fagiolo del cento*” (the hundred bean), as it was sown on the 100th day of the year, on April 11. The method of cultivation was traditionally by hand. After the land was prepared (ploughing, tilling and weeding), the bean was sown “*a postarella*” (positioning four or six seeds in the holes). In some cases, rows were sown six centimetres apart, but this was a risky technique due to the plant’s germination difficulties. Hoeing took place a fortnight later and was repeated four times on average until harvesting. Weeding and ridging, using hand-held tools, helped to protect the plants from disease and insects. In the fruit-setting stage, irrigation was reduced to a minimum.

The plants ripened between July and September and the beans were gathered manually in the morning. The plants were first dried in the sun followed by the threshing stage, using a *manfino* or *correggiato*, a tool consisting of two sticks, one short and one long, connected by a cord. Once separated from the straw, the grain was sieved. The bean could then be stored in a dry environment with peppercorns and bay leaves to combat the spreading of larvae and insects, especially the bean weevil. Today, some technical stages have been replaced with farming machinery and the sowing period has been brought forward due to climatic changes. The tilling of the ground is mechanical, as is the milling and sowing, apart from crops located on mountain terraces for obvious environmental reasons.

Although production guidelines usually advocate the traditional cultivation technique, many producers, especially on more level ground, use mechanical equipment in all stages of the harvesting, so even threshing and storage have been transformed. Many now store the beans in sealed containers, subjecting them to a temperature treatment of minus two degrees to combat the spreading of the bean weevil in the harvest. The cultivation area is now estimated to be around forty hectares, producing an annual yield of five hundred quintals, mostly sold through direct sales (only a small part being allocated to local markets and to the rest of Tuscany.) There are about eighty businesses involved, six of which follow the organic cultivation method and fifteen which have included this in their cultivation plans.

“It’s all in the label”: the heritage process of the Zolfino bean

“*Zolfino* beans are like Roberto Cavalli’s clothes.” (Mario, producer)

The *Zolfino* bean is a representative case of a heritage process of an everyday food practice. Many problems affecting this local product are common to other typical produce. In particular, institutional rules and power struggles have been the main cause of clashes and transformations within the commercial and productive networks. The conflict culminated in the temporary suspension of the *Zolfino* presidium, eight years after its creation. Official notice was given during a *convivium* meeting which I attended (Bérard and Marchenay 2004) and we will analyse the process of *Zolfino* revitalisation starting from this conflict, which marks a sort of epilogue in its institutionalisation.

On April 17, 2007 the *presidium* of the *Zolfino* bean was temporarily closed. The governor announced his decision after a meeting with the regional authorities of the movement, gathered to talk about the Tuscan *presidia*. The governor explained that one of the main causes was the lack of discipline of the *Zolfino* presidium’s producers, who often disobeyed the rules established by the local governing bodies, not only Slow Food, but also the public institutions in charge of the control of brand certification of typical goods. The news of the *presidium*’s closure was no surprise to the members of the *convivium*. The clashes between the *convivium* and the president of the *Zolfino* *presidium* had been increasing for quite a long time, particularly as concerned the definition of production rules to obtain PDO certification (Protected Designation of Origin).

As a matter of fact, ten years earlier and after the opening of the

presidium, some farmers from the village of La Penna founded the “association for the *Zolfino* bean”, in order to achieve the European label, the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin).

The regulations were never completed because of the never-ending conflicts among the producers, who were officially members of the *presidium*, but who never took an active part in any event or political Slow Food meetings. More often than not, they did not even know each other and neither the *convivium* nor the local “Office for typical products” was able to estimate their real number.

During the meetings, before the closure of the *presidium*, both the trustee and the Slow Food regional governor had expressed their disappointment to the President of the *Zolfino* *presidium* during a *convivium* meeting:

G³: It's impossible to obtain the Pdo for the *Zolfino*... “your friends” (the other producers) didn't pay for Slow Food membership and didn't even attend. We run the risk of closing down the *presidium*, because of this lack of collaboration. The producers don't know what a *presidium* is at all... Slow Food isn't the problem, the producers are.

P⁴: Slow Food sent us useless forms for self-assessment; they treated us as if we didn't know anything at all.

These disputes occurred on a regular basis in the *convivium* for all three local *presidia*: *Zolfino* bean, *Valdarno* chicken and *Tarese* ham. The main issue was always the relationship between power (institutional policies, rules and *presidia*) and local producers. When a producer joins a *presidium*, he complies at the same time with the principles of the movement stated in the Slow Food manifesto. The association sends the producer questionnaires every three months where he must report on production and declare that production rules and regulations have been respected. As Franca, the president of the *Valdarno* chicken *presidium*, complained:

An upside down pyramid is created with the product at the bottom, which becomes just a source of information for university projects, financed by the EU, for the “Regione” to gain funds pretending to have typical products in its territory and lastly for some journalists, who want to write an article.

Both the *presidium* and the PDO's objective is the protection of a product with a well-defined origin; therefore, it is important for the institutions to define the production boundaries as well as common rules shared by the

-
3. Governor (regional governor of Slow Food).
 4. President of the *Zolfino* *presidium*.

whole group of producers involved. It must be said that the *Zolfino* bean was the only product that nearly obtained the PDO. Nevertheless, the coexistence of the *presidium* regulations and the European rules trigger conflicts and arguments between big and small producers. On one hand, the public institutions want to promote product quantity, which helps the bigger producers. On the other hand, the “historic” producers of the bean are against the extension of the production area down in the valley, which is not a traditional bean-growing area. This has led to stagnation and in fact, the rules have not been approved yet. Furthermore, the *presidium* has lost its authority over the producers who get enough support from sales thanks to Slow Food’s image and reputation as promoted by the media.

The no-global bean: or tradition in politics

I met Pietro (the president of the *Zolfino* *presidium*) about eighteen months before the *presidium* was suspended. He invited me to his farm, “*Zolfino* Farm”, a rather too obvious name. This was the first time I had met a *Zolfino* bean producer, apart from the numerous tenant farmers who cultivate *Zolfino* beans as a hobby outside the symbolic boundaries and therefore outside the circuits of heritage valorisation. I had not imagined I would meet a veritable promoter of his product, in fact, I had expected him to be a mistrustful or diffident farmer, like the old sharecropping tenants had been (Badii 2010). He was aware of my research on local “typical production” and he welcomed me with enthusiasm, curious to find out what I wanted to ask him. Actually, the setting looked more like an interview room, where I was the journalist who would write about the product. He proudly showed me the labels created by the Association with the “Z” logo. Even though it was his home, everything was arranged choreographically and the *Zolfino* bags containing the last bean harvest were scattered around for everyone to see. From nature to artifice. He showed me a handful of beans like precious stones and described them as if they were alive: “Look how beautiful they are; it seems they are staring at you”. As soon as I sat down, he gave me some written information he had prepared for the occasion. I did not even get a chance to look at it, because Pietro had already started telling me the story of the product, making sure, every now and then, that I was interested in what he was saying. However, I caught a glimpse of a rather peculiar title: “The No-global Bean”. Noticing my curiosity, Pietro told me it belonged to an article written by a journalist, starting as follows:

The No-global Bean. A bean with a traditional taste, one of our small local productions that has become a symbol for the defence

of biodiversity...it can't be missed. In 1999, Paolo De Castro, Italian minister of Agriculture, waved a small bag of Zolfino beans in front of the World Trade Organization bureaucrats in Seattle. He wanted to focus attention on a threatened and endangered legacy, culture and tradition. Those were legendary beans; those were Valdarno beans from an area starting in the foothills around *La Penna*, a little hamlet near *Terranuova Bracciolini*, going up to the summit of the *Pratomagno* Mountains. This tiny pulse bears a huge responsibility, thus becoming the flagship of the battle against the heartless products of the food corporations: the beans from *La Penna* versus plastic McDonald's burgers. An unequal battle, but fruitful nevertheless. Who knows, Pietro Bigi (the president of the *Zolfino presidium*) may become – if of course he is willing – the Italian Jean Bové (maybe she meant José, Author's note), leader of the farmers' movement against unfair globalization in the name of beans? (AA.VV 2001: 74-75)

It was not by chance that the *Zolfino* appeared in an international political arena such as Seattle, coinciding with the creation of the Slow Food *presidium*. For over a decade, the *Zolfino* had been the focus of a heritage process, which changed its real relationship with the local economy and history forever.

The *Zolfino* story first began in the 1980s, and has now become to all effects a market product. The *Zolfino presidium* president told me that everything started thanks to a new town festival in 1981:

Let me begin with the festival's date, in about 1980. The festival was called "Beans and Onions" and those beans were the *Zolfino* beans, which grow right here, in the *La Penna* hamlet. The people who came to that festival noticed that they were special beans: without a skin, tasty, resistant to over-cooking and could even be cooked twice in a pan with sage, oil and tomato sauce [...]. This bean was successful also thanks to Mr. Fazzuoli, who advertised it on his television program "*Linea Verde*".

A committee was set up by a group of people living in the *La Penna* hamlet to organize the new festival: "the *Zolfino* festival" (more recently renamed "The *Zolfino* festival... the authentic one" as the president affirmed "to distinguish it from the fake '*zolfini*' in circulation!").

It is necessary to consider the relationship between the self-sustaining sharecropping system, where the *Zolfino* bean originally belonged, and the new market economy where the *Zolfino* has been introduced. Until the festival and the subsequent television exposure, the *Zolfino* bean had survived within the local context as a legacy of self-consumption, of the sharecropping economy, which had officially disappeared in the 1970s.

Before the starting of the heritage process, there were only two producers left in Penna. No one was selling it directly; it was limited to informal exchanges, and the *Zolfino* seed presented virosis caused by hybridization and changes in farming.

In the late 1980s, the first militants of Slow Food started to select traditional products at risk of extinction. They projected urban values of taste, such as quest for authenticity, on the rural world. One of the last sharecropping tenants had given the local Slow Food trustee some seeds. However, the old peasants did not understand the need to preserve such a farming practice at that time: “Why do you want to save those seeds, there are better ones”.

The festival set the heritage machine in motion and thanks to a TV showman coming from *La Penna* and the creation of the Slow Food *presidium*, this little object of farmers’ memory has been manipulated and transformed into local heritage. The article goes on to celebrate the revival of the product:

The *Zolfino* bean appeared on TV and some clever old gourmets from Slow Food noticed it: that bean really had something special, excellent, and even exceptional. So the journalists dealing with good food started their pilgrimages to the *La Penna* hamlet. Mr. Fazzuoli (the TV showman) even became the honorary president of the bean producers’ association. The *Zolfino* soon became a media legend (AA. VV, 2001: 76).

The rhetoric of an endangered local identity proclaimed by Slow Food and public institutions has gradually become a tactic used by smaller producers in order to gain legitimacy. After this, the European labelling process marked the beginning of the codification phase in the late 1990s.

Since the *Zolfino* bean has always played a rather limited role in the rural economy, it is still quite difficult to write down the regulations, which, according to European law, have three requirements: an institutional, a technical and a historical one. In a way, the regulatory code is almost a biography, an ID of the product, which provides the organoleptic features as well as the product’s historic origins in order to inform the consumer and guide the producer. In short, it is a cultural map. For these reasons, a workforce composed of many and various people is necessary in order to achieve a regulatory code. The mediators, such as the *convivium* members, took on the task of embodying historic memory by tracing the origin in historiographic documents dedicated to the Valdarno Valley. Certifications, such as the PDO, have replaced historic evidence and recent oral sources

have produced new forms of subjectification as far as production is concerned. Certifications objectify the practice by codifying it. This rigour concerning production standards is almost nonsensical especially if applied to the wide range of practices and customs of traditional objects belonging to everyday life. For this reason, no oral source or details are certain. There are numerous versions of memories extrapolated from oral speeches, and technical reports written by territorial authorities over the last centuries, but they have all been altered through time. Each link or interpretation, as long as it may be considered of historic importance, is given to the mediators, who long for reliable data to prove a unique bond with the territory. However, in this situation, even the name *Zolfino* is questionable: it is impossible to find an unambiguous translation of such a vernacular word (*Zolfino* is a diminutive of the noun sulphur). In the regulations, the colour of the bean is given as a possible reason, being almost like that of sulphur. Nonetheless, there is also another hypothesis, probably more uncertain, but just as fascinating, that the mysterious name was influenced by the proximity of a sulphuric brook near the village of *Levane*. Even the borders of the production area are doubtful, although they should be well defined in order to fulfil the prerequisites of the European regulations. Anyone familiar with the area knows that such practices overstep the territory of the hamlet, selected as the chosen homeland, and that it is not rare to find *Zolfino* beans in the orchards down in the valley.

The certification, therefore, caused conflict from below, among the producers.

For instance, some large farms situated in the lowest area of the Valdarno hills, following the new trends in food and wine, discovered that the *Zolfino* bean was a successful economic resource. However, the fact that this practice has become familiar outside the symbolic borders annoyed the smaller producers of Penna. They believed the other producers had deprived them of a practice which the collective imagination had assigned firmly to the little hillside hamlet. Pietro himself, when I met him, underlined this internal clash between the smaller producers and the bigger farms situated down in the valley.

This statement may suggest some entrepreneurial competition; however, some producers may prefer to keep bean production quite low in order to maintain high prices. One only has to consider that the price of the *Zolfino* bean ranges from € 22/ kg to € 28/ kg. If production increased, the cost of the product might go down, thus damaging the smaller farmers. On the other hand, the Slow Food members and local institutions claim

that the tactic chosen by the smaller producers to keep production at a hobby level, managed individually rather than in an organized group, aims at avoiding checks and controls such as the norms that would be established after the attainment of the certification. The opposing interests of small and large producers were probably the main reason for the *presidium*'s closure.

Behind the political rhetoric, where Slow Food members stand for quality protection and the public institutions promote quantity, the producers become involved in this strategic game, afflicted by internal disputes between those who intend to modernise production processes to increase yield and those who want to emphasise the importance of traditional *savoir-faire*. Nevertheless, the "hobbyist" producers, or those who work within the group of typical product farmers, are more intransigent. This kind of resistance to technological innovation can be linked to a certain sense of belonging. Those in possession of know-how, very often inherited it from their fathers, feel the privilege associated with the preservation and rediscovery of these memories.

Following the revival in the 1990s, the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florence started some research aimed at preserving the germplasm. One of the main issues was linked to the poor performance of the plants; the rather limited harvest was thought to be caused by virosis contracted by the beans in the last few decades. However, research in experimental fields near Penna showed that virosis did not affect the vegetative behaviour of the plant, which "biologically" results in poor harvests (Attilio 1998: 129).

Representation of Zolfino as heritage: media, rhetoric, the imaginary

In spite of technological changes, this "local" farming know-how has lent itself to marketing communication, thus becoming a special feature of folklore and uniqueness.

In 2005, a video about the *Zolfino* was produced for the "Gambero Rosso" television channel. The *presidium* producer in the role of a typical peasant underlines the difficulties concerning the relaunch and the battle against industrial farming. An old peasant plays the role of a direct witness; we can say that he is acting out his own life. The narrator tells the story about the discovery of the bean, shows landscapes, territories and the local culture, without forgetting to name the institutions: the Region, Slow Food, the University, etc... In a certain sense, this video seems a poetic image where the simulation of authenticity passes through an illusion of

cooperation among the different subjects. The greyish colour of the film is supposed to remind the viewers of some old images taken from an archive. Traditional methods are used to describe the technical steps of bean farming. A young man told me: “The scene where the ploughing is shown was shot in a field in Penna with two rented oxen and thanks to the help of an old peasant”. Although production guidelines and videos tend to advocate the traditional cultivation technique, many producers use mechanical equipment in all stages of the harvesting. Now young farmers thresh using modern methods, some of which are rather unusual: “I shouldn’t say this, but I drive over them, with my jeep backwards and forwards. My grandfather knows how to use the flail, but I always end up hitting my head with it”.

The depiction of the hamlet in a video production turned an everyday action into a show; in a certain sense it became an “aesthetic object”. However, behind the scenes the labour of the producers goes on (Abélès 2001). An intimate and conflicting dimension exists, behind the identifying images created by institutions and bureaucracy, which becomes evident only under the scrutiny of the ethnographic eye in the field (Herzfeld 1997).

The heritage process of the *Zolfino* bean shows that the image developed by taste-makers such as Slow Food and the media has taken over the socio-economic reality, thus generating an increasing gap between the community and the trans-local outcome of the product itself, which most of the farmers sought to take advantage of and probably rightly so. This advantage was brought about merely by the power of words, rather than by an effective economic revitalisation plan. It may be said that the *Zolfino* bean was a victim of the seduction it brought to bear on the market (Bayart 2004: 342).

The image evoked by Slow Food (the exaltation of origin and the emphasis on territorial boundaries), expressed by the presidia and the media (*Linea Verde* TV programme, the video, Slow Food’s reputation), has locked subjects into ideological positions (the authenticity, the purity of tradition, etc.) rather than promote effective business plans. Rhetoric has made the relaunch of this practice extremely rigorous within a framework of almost “cultural fundamentalism” (Stolcke 1996). For example, the *Zolfino presidium*’s president defined *Zolfino* beans produced outside the “symbolic” border, and thus without a specific place of origin, as “clandestine”.

Conclusion

The heritage process of the *Zolfino* bean shows that the rhetoric developed by institutions and the media has taken over the economic

reality. None of the typical local productions, including the *Zolfino* bean, currently meets the institutional requirements for the following reasons: the number of producers is unclear, farming techniques are not standardised, production area boundaries are not defined⁵ and there is no control of the retail price. These factors have contributed to an increasing state of crisis.

Moreover, fragmentation and crisis allow public institutions and Slow Food to perpetuate the rhetoric of emergency, a vital tool in sustaining the heritage mechanism. As we saw before, in spite of the management difficulties of the *presidium* and the PDO achievement, farmers have been able to obtain good profits on a commercial level, thanks to the powerful imaginary created by Slow Food.

Traditional food heritage becomes the metaphor of belonging, a rediscovered relationship between subject and territory. The disappearance of traditional society produced a temporal distance that made it possible to recover objects from the past into modern society. Slow Food perceived these political and economic gaps in the Tuscan rural world since the disappearance of the sharecropping system and proposed itself as a management agency for goods and subjects. Slow Food has created an “ideal business community” through the capillary action of its local activists, with its own “agricultural production cycle” supported by the *presidia* and new subjectivity, such as the “expert” (trustee, governor, journalists, etc.), the “peasant” and the militant. Its status is ambiguous and changes according to its main interlocutors. It is a consumer association, but at the same time, it is a business enterprise for the farmers who belong to the *presidia*. Secondary cultural values such as slowness, commitment and conviviality have been patrimonialized by Slow Food. However, neoliberal market forces change their meanings and “traditional” practices and relationships are no longer repeatable since they were set in a pre-capitalist period (as, for example, the *mezzadria* system) (Bianco 1988). Therefore, the simple objects of folkloric culture, such as agricultural products like the *Zolfino*, are best suited to the process of identity essentialization that heritage produces in the locality. This representation of the locality seems to be more a reflection of what “others” (Slow Food militants as new taste-makers and consumers of “typicality”) have projected on this rural area and this is also the case

5 The area of production, drying, preservation and packing of the “*fagiolo zolfino del Pratomagno*” is “symbolically” situated on the western slope of the Pratomagno mountain, which is part both of the territory of Reggello, in the Florentine Province, and of Piandiscò and Loro Ciuffenna, in Arezzo Province, besides the towns of Castelfranco di Sopra and Terranova Bracciolini.

in other areas of Tuscany (Leitch 2008).

The failure to apply European certifications and the suspension of the *Zolfino presidium* may be considered as evidence of the above-mentioned situation. The closure of the *presidium* has not damaged the farmers' work very much, but it has underlined the distance between institutional language and actors (Douglas 1999). Today, the producers have to adhere to heritage policies in order to take part in events that could be considered a contractual form of selection (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2009). In fact, the support of local expert mediators, such as the Slow Food *convivium*, is essential in order to join such circuits. These mediators play an almost paternalistic role in the relationship with the producers: not all of them are capable of coping with the complicated paper work related to the European aids; moreover, it is not that easy to join the close-knit circle of Slow Food members.

In conclusion, the supply of food heritage goods in the food-industry dominated market produces lifestyles embodied by citizens through discourse and social practices (Jeudy 2001; Palumbo 2003). The production of heritage transforms moral values such as distinction, authenticity and quest for identity into needs of a certain type of Western consumer. These values are engendered by revival strategies that have involved networks in the creation of local communities supporting traditional agriculture and interests of identity. As we saw for the *Zolfino* heritage process, the creation of boundaries takes part in the construction and selection of food heritage, becoming an ambiguous terrain for the reproduction of differences. Indeed, food heritage processes borrow the language of autochthony to "redefine" local capital, emphasising traditional features to "naturalize" differences (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) through the mirror of authenticity. In this situation, local capital – material culture, practices and subjects – run the risk of just ending up in the global showcase of "differences".

References

- AA.VV. 2001. *Viaggio in Toscana. Alla scoperta dei prodotti tipici*, Firenze: Giunti Editore.
- Abèlès, Marc. 2001. *Politica gioco di spazi*. Roma: Meltemi.
- Appadurai, Arjun, ed. 1986. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Attilio, Carla. 1998/99. *Caratterizzazione morfologica e molecolare di popolazioni locali di fagiolo Zolfino (Phaseolus vulgaris L.) provenienti dal Pratomagno (Degree dissertation)*. Firenze: Facoltà di Agraria, Università

- degli Studi di Firenze.
- Badii, Michela. 2014. "Quand le patrimoine fait la différence. Processus d'authentification d'un produit local en Toscane." *Ethnologie Française* 44(2): 331-339.
- Badii, Michela. 2012. *Processi di patrimonializzazione e politiche del cibo. Un'etnografia nella Toscana contemporanea*. Perugia: Morlacchi.
- Badii, Michela. 2010. *Cibo in festa fra tradizione e trasformazioni. Pratiche alimentari tradizionali in un contesto mezzadrale*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Badii, Michela. 2009. "Processus de patrimonialisation et politiques de la nourriture traditionnelle dans le Valdarno arétin contemporain." *Réseau Européen d'Analyse des Sociétés Politiques, Reasopo* [Online]: http://www.fasopo.org/reasopo/jr/these_badii_it.pdf
- Bayart, Jean-François. 2004. *Le gouvernement du monde*. Paris: Fayard.
- Bérard, Laurence and Philippe Marchenay. 2004. *Les produits de terroir. Entre cultures et règlements*. Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Bianco, Carla. 1988. "The Mezzadria Family: a Study of Kinship Roles in the Life Cycle." *Ethnologia Europaea. Journal of European Ethnology* 18(2): 135-147.
- Brulotte, Ronda L. and Michael di Giovine, eds. 2014. *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*. London: Ashgate.
- Counihan, Carole and Valeria Siniscalchi. 2014. *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Comaroff, John and Jean Comaroff. 2009. *Ethnicity Inc*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Donati, Kelly. 2005. "The Pleasure of Diversity in Slow Food's Ethics of Taste." *Food, Culture & Society* 8(2): 227-242.
- Douglas, Mary. 1990. *Come pensano le istituzioni*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Grasseni, Cristina. 2011. "Re-inventing food: Alpine cheese in the age of global heritage." *Anthropology of food* 8 [Online]: <http://aof.revues.org/6819>.
- Geschiere, Peter and Francis Nyamnjoh. 2000. "Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging." *Public Culture* 12(2): 423-452.
- Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy. Social Poetics in The Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.
- Jeudy, Henry-Pierre. 2001. *La machinerie patrimoniale*. Paris: Sens & Tonka.
- Lascoumes, Pierre and Patrick Le Galès, eds. 2009. *Gli strumenti per governare*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Leitch, Allison. 2008. "Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity." In Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik,

- eds. *Food and Culture. A reader*: 381-399. New York: Routledge.
- Miele, Mara and Murdoch, Jonathan. 2002. "The Practical Aesthetics of Traditional Cuisine: Slow Food in Tuscany." *Sociologia Ruralis* 42(4): 312-328.
- Palumbo, Berardino. 2003. *L'Unesco e il campanile. Antropologia, politica e beni culturali in Sicilia orientale*, Roma: Meltemi.
- Papa, Cristina. 2002. "Il prodotto tipico come ossimoro: il caso dell'olio extravergine di oliva umbro." In Valeria Siniscalchi, eds. *Frammenti di economie. Ricerche di antropologia economica in Italia*: 159-191. Cosenza: Guerini e Associati.
- Petrini, Carlo. 2005. *Buono, pulito e giusto. Principi di nuova gastronomia*, Torino: Einaudi.
- Sassatelli, Roberta and Federica Davolio. 2010. "Consumption, Pleasure and Politics: Slow Food and the politico-aesthetic problematization of Food." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10(2): 202-232.
- Shore, Chris and Susan Wright. 1997. *Anthropology of Policy. Critical perspectives on governance and power*. London: Routledge.
- Stolcke, Verena. 1996. "Europe: nouvelles frontières, nouvelles rhétoriques de l'exclusion." In Daniel Fabre, eds. *L'Europe entre cultures et nations*: 227-255. Paris: éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'Homme.
- Turgeon, Laurier. 2010. "Les produits du terroir, version Québec." *Ethnologie française* 40(3): 477-486.