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Production and Embarrassment in International Settings

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Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Résumé de l'article

L'auteur de cet article s'efforce d'outrepasser les limites du concept de patrimoine immatériel et, dans la foulée de cette orientation critique, il se demande comment un organisme international tel que l'UNESCO, qui non seulement se compose d'États nations mais dépend de leur coopération pour réaliser ses objectifs, peut aborder le statut de pratiques culturelles qui sont essentielles à la reconnaissance de soi de ces États nations mais que ces derniers se refusent à admettre devant les autres. Ce sont les pratiques que nous associons au concept « d'intimité culturelle » – le « linge sale » auquel tous les États nations sont confrontés, qu'ils refusent d'admettre mais qui représente pourtant, pour la plupart, un délice coupable. L'espace de l'intimité culturelle comprend tous ces aspects de la vie culturelle et sociale que l'on reconnaît au niveau local, mais que l'on réprime à l'extérieur. Dans quasiment tous les pays, il existe des pratiques populaires profondément inscrites et largement partagées qui ne paraissent pas se conformer aux canons de respectabilité d'inspiration largement occidentale qui prédominent dans le monde. On peut affirmer que ces pratiques constituent, pour les représentations étatiques et formelles de la culture, le problème le plus insoluble.

Intangible Delicacies

Production and Embarrassment in International Settings

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The title of this paper is a deliberate provocation. My intention is to worry away at the limits of the concept of intangible culture. In pursuing this line of critique, I especially want to ask how an international organization such as UNESCO, which is not only composed of nation-states but depends on their cooperation to get its work done, can address the status of cultural practices that are central to national self-recognition but that these nation-states do not want to admit to each other.

These are the practices that I associate with the concept of "cultural intimacy" – the "dirty laundry" that every nation-state confronts, denies, and yet, for the most part, guiltily enjoys (Herzfeld 2005). What notion of culture could be in any sense complete without these deeply rooted aspects of daily life and its embarrassments? But what self-respecting nation-state would ever own up to them even as it strives to present a complete picture of its national culture? And what suppression of local, minority, and other disenfranchised identities, and of their jokes and tales, might the collective celebration of state-defined culture entail? I well recall that, while on a student expedition to collect *rizitika* (foothill village) songs in western Crete in 1967, I encountered a local radio announcer and folklorist. This clearly knowledgeable local expert sternly told me that some of my recordings were not of "real" *rizitika* because they mentioned only highly localized, village-level events; he thereby recast what had been a pattern of textual refraction through local identities and division as a violation of *national* culture – as morally wrong and culturally inferior. Yet most singers would have recognized these local renditions as drawn from real life, while I have often heard deep complaints about the disinfected folklore that forms the core of most state-sponsored radio programs. Can we trust national institutions to offer an international body such as UNESCO a sampling of

oral literature that would genuinely represent social experience, let alone register its vicissitudes through time (see also Özyürek 2004)?

The paradox is that the very act of recognition of some performative act as a form of heritage renders it, in some real sense, tangible. For that reason, the very triviality of the examples to which I now turn – gastronomic delicacies with less-than-respectable-sounding names – guarantees that the answer to this last question will in fact be far from trivial. Indeed, it exemplifies what I have elsewhere (Herzfeld 1997) called "the politics of significance" – "mereness" as a categorical exclusion of what in practice constitutes the greater part of most citizens' daily lives and experiences.

Who sets such exclusions? We may begin to trace an answer to that question, at least, in the history of blasphemy and obscenity in various places around the world; a dominant set of values is clearly in operation,[1] buttressed by a one-sided morality that takes Christianity as the yardstick of moral purity (see Asad 1993). The long history of self-censorship by nationalistic folklorists, for example, responds to this global systematization of value. Nation-states compete for funds to restore and refurbish the carefully selected avatars of their so-called intangible heritages, thereby reifying what had hitherto been evanescent and chimerical features of daily life. The irony is that it is then those other cultural products, those deemed too embarrassing to display, that escape the museological clamp of heritage classification and so retain something that we might more realistically call intangibility. They have become, in an etymologically more literal sense of the word "intangible," fully untouchable; they are banished from sight and hearing. They are, in a word, embarrassing.

The fundamentally Cartesian distinction between tangible and intangible culture, moreover, reproduces a conceptual rigidity that does not even begin to express the complexity of the problem before us. In reality, we should not be talking about tangible and intangible culture as though these were two clearly defined and mutually opposed entities. Such a position perpetuates conventional but wrong-headed assumptions about a radical separation between the symbolic and the material, as though symbolic expression had no material consequences (on which, see Ardener 1989: 207-208; Herzfeld 2005: 21-33), and perpetuates the exiling of those aspects called "symbolic" (or, indeed, "intangible") to a pedestal of glorious irrelevance to the modern world where they can be condescendingly

1. This is the "global hierarchy of value" that I describe elsewhere (Herzfeld 2004) as the cultural successor to the political and military domination of European colonial systems.

dismissed as *mere* folklore and *mere* tradition. They thus contribute to the creation of a *negative* hierarchy of value – a hierarchy, in fact, of irrelevance. At the submerged base of the pyramid lie those traditions regarded as too obscene or blasphemous to be seen; above them comes respectable but embarrassingly picturesque folklore; and at the vanishingly thin pinnacle of this same pyramid we find only a few productions that have somehow survived the competition to be considered "art" and even "masterpieces." While taste is now widely understood to be a political matter (Bourdieu 1986; Kingsbury 1988; Thompson 1979), international organizations – themselves composed of national entities, all in mutual competition for the mantle of respectability that "heritage" implies – blithely amplify and endorse the hierarchical implications of words like taste, talent, and truth.

To counteract this coercive hegemony and reveal its complex ramifications, we should instead be asking about degrees and kinds of intangibility – or rather, less abstractly, about the conceptual degrees and kinds of intangibility entailed in the labeling of cultural phenomena. This would allow us to recognize how nation-states conceal the culturally intimate dimensions of daily life from larger view, and especially from each other. This is the key difficulty in any attempt to organize intangible heritage internationally – that is, among nation-states that are often, and unpredictably, suspicious of each other's motives, and determined not to reveal to each other anything that might be used to decry their values and standards. But these cultural embarrassments are not merely objects of potential mockery. They have a paradoxical and inescapable importance: without their existence in everyday life, the nation-states in question would be quite unable to command the loyalties of their citizens, for citizens are not so much loyal to the state as to the intimate relationships it allows them to have – warts and all -- with other citizens. Boyer (2000) has even suggested that the collapse of the German Democratic Republic may have been hastened by its own success in suppressing so much of the seamier side of social life that actually made life bearable under the austerely moralizing gaze of the state police. Most nation-states could not easily survive without these guilty delights, ranging from political corruption to sexual permissiveness and, potentially most dangerous of all, deep roots in "foreign" and even "enemy" cultures that the official nationalisms of state must logically abjure. How would an intangible heritage policy confront, for example, the jokes that Cretan animal-thieves tell about the politicians who write laws against animal-theft even as they barter their patronage for the thieves' votes? It would seem that the more intangible a familiar trait appears to be, the less it qualifies for inclusion in any official list of

"cultural heritage."[2]

But let us leave corruption and other political forms of symbolic pollution aside for a moment and consider another dimension of intangible heritage: its relationship to embodiment. I am thinking particularly of food traditions here, as much as anything because they often encapsulate a whole series of those features that cause cultural embarrassment. Because food is ephemeral, it is often not taken seriously as a cultural product; the rejection of the Mexican request to have certain recipes registered as intangible heritage would seem to confirm that judgment. Unlike chefs' creations, "ethnic food" rarely rates classification as a "masterpiece," a category that adverts to 19th-century Romantic European notions of individual genius. This in turn illustrates a key problem, since the idea of individual genius must logically be problematic for the very notion of intangible cultural heritage when viewed as a collective product – and thus serves as a grid through which some cultural achievements cannot easily pass.

Food, moreover, sometimes obstinately resists nationalization. Food names often speak to local rather than national traditions, even though enterprising writers can sometimes convert diversity into a national product in its own right (on this phenomenon, see especially Appadurai 1988; Yiakoumaki 2002).[3] Gastronomic diversity may itself reflect the

2. This is in some ways like secrecy, which is often, paradoxically, performed, since the goal is less the safeguarding of information than the symbolic capital of conveying either that one possesses such important data or that one is assiduous in protecting it. This paradox can sometimes reach the level of national discourse; while, for example, the Greek state used to invest considerable effort in hiding what it saw as the disreputable cultural remnants of the Ottoman era, it also exploited the orientalism that surrounded them as a tourist resource.

3. Appadurai's analysis of the creation of an Indian "national cuisine" through the publication of regional and, eventually, national cookbooks is largely applicable to the Italian case as well, although few Italians would argue, as Indologists might for South Asia (e.g., Dumont 1970), that the diversity of regional traditions made for much in the way of political unity. What makes Appadurai's argument especially pertinent to the Italian case is the way in which the few serious attempts at forging a sense of unified Italian culture, especially under Mussolini, emphasized the idea of transcendent Italian genius that produced huge variety without destroying an underlying and fully recognizable *italianità*. See Herzfeld 2005: 52, for further discussion of this phenomenon. Linguistically, the Greek state and media progressively eliminated local language varieties much more comprehensively than happened in Italy despite the homogenization attempted under Mussolini. Dialects do still exist within the national borders, but they are sometimes contrasted even by their own speakers with what the latter call "correct" or "official Greek," whereas Italians often speak of the national language

kind of cultural fragmentation that we also see in the relationship of local dialects to an official national language; the contrast between the relative uniformity of Greek food and language and the variety that Italian culture displays in both areas might appear to confirm that correlation.[4] But with the export of cuisines as national assets, which some countries (notably Thailand under the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatr) pursue as a matter of national policy, reification is never far behind.

Indeed, the Thai case is instructive. The supposedly national signature dish, *kuaytiaw pad thai*,[5] is said to be of Chinese origin, and was reconfigured as a national food by the nationalist dictator Marshal Pibul Songkram in the interwar years. Ironically, its appeal in the promotion of Thai cuisine probably lies partly in the fact that, in a notoriously spicy cuisine, it is one of the few relatively bland – if tasty – offerings. A much hotter and more challenging noodle dish is *kuaytiaw pad khii mao*, usually rendered as "drunken noodles" in English.[6]

"Drunken noodles" are now a staple of Thai restaurants throughout the United States, and *pasta alla puttanesca*, "pasta prostitute-style," features prominently on folksy restaurant menus in central Italy. Such commodifications of embarrassment may conceal interesting and localized histories. Some aspects of everyday culture are both ephemeral and repetitive, and express precisely the kind of social intimacy that governments most ardently hope to hide from outsiders. One way of blocking such revelations is to routinize the names of the food – a version of the "Zorba phenomenon" that in Greece has allowed certain officially disapproved aspects of local culture to emerge as romantic exoticisms, long before political and attitudinal changes in the country rendered the whole issue unimportant.

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and their local dialect as more or less equivalent entities – which would be all but unimaginable in the Greek context.

4. It is probably therefore no coincidence that, just as Greek awareness and tolerance of ethnic difference appears to be both on the rise and more actively contested by some elements, there are increasingly effective attempts to diversify and regionalize what had hitherto largely appeared to foreigners as an entirely predictable and uniform cuisine (see Yiakoumaki 2002).
5. This is the full name of *pad thai*, which literally means "Thai stir-fry"; *kwaytiaw* is the Hokkien-derived terms for noodles, especially those made from rice flour.
6. Actually, the translation is more innocuous than perhaps it should be; the literal translation of *khii mao* is "shit-drunk." But it would also be unwise to over-interpret this; the word *khii*, offensive when mentioned as a noun on its own, serves as a common intensifier of negative adjectives (e.g., *khi-kiat*, "lazy"; *khi-klaad*, "cowardly"; *khi-niao*, "stingy," literally "shit-sticky").

I suggest that the embarrassments associated with the kind of food name just mentioned, as well as with habitual violations of the rules of etiquette in the consumption of food, mask a much more complex problem: the intangibility of the bodily habitus is, for example, much greater than that of the food itself, but food – as a perishable item – must be accounted less tangible than a work of art or architecture. Food does have its own internal hierarchy, reproducing some of the invidious distinctive distinctions suggested by the opposition between art and craft, or between artisan and genial artist; the proliferation of "ethnic" restaurants, a category that rarely, if ever, includes those claiming to present "French cuisine," would seem fairly clear evidence of this position. It is rare indeed that hailing a fine meal as a "poem" is understood to be anything more than a cute metaphor.

The manners associated with food are also part of the intangible context of production and consumption. Foreigners who want to learn Thai culture, for example, are frequently enjoined to avoid using a knife, placing the fork in their mouths, or using the spoon on its own; while these strictures may be more severe in the rather stereotypical form they take in guidebooks and some websites, they suggest a playful inversion of Western-derived rules of etiquette, and their application to (for example) American consumers is a source of great discomfort to the latter – as the requirement that one not only eat but also cut salad with a fork held in the right hand is for me, trained as I was in the British tradition (and I well remember my German-born mother complaining bitterly in turn that she had never learned the English way of eating peas on the top of the tines of a fork). In fact, of course, many English people shovel up peas with the fork tines pointing upward, especially if they can do it without being noticed, and many Thais help themselves to food using only a fork. These acts then become an assertion of a personal idiosyncrasy that is also, because it violates a "national" rule, also perhaps recognizable as typical, if not exactly national. None of this will register in the discourse of intangible heritage. But is it not all part of an intangible (and shape-shifting) set of habits that are, in some sense, no less "national" than the rules they violate?

This is not to say that attempts are never made to fix the evanescent properties of food and its accompanying styles of consumption as a form of heritage. Indeed, the cookbooks discussed by Appadurai are a good illustration of precisely that process; by "entextualizing" recipes, they arrange them in a hierarchy that subordinates all to the national imperative.[7] But the more the process advances, the less intangible the

7. On entextualization as a strategy for producing colonially-inspired local hierarchies,

heritage in question becomes – entextualization being a very deliberate form of reification – and the more it entails the reproduction of an officially sanctioned regulation of the habitus. Such officializing strategies, to borrow a term from Bourdieu (1977: 37-40), are reproduced in semi-official institutions, notably museums. The poorly frequented Pasta Museum in Rome, for example, more or less forces the hapless visitor through a series of unlocked and relocked doors, propelled by an impatient guide and locked into a vocal trajectory by a pre-taped exhibit description that is heavily focused on the artifacts of production. One might thereby learn a great deal about the specific methods of pasta manufacture in Naples in the mid-19th century, for example, but one would have to turn to engraving, travelogues, and other forms of "unofficial" cultural recording to recuperate some sense of particular ways of eating or treating the pasta, such as the class snobbism that leads northern Italians to avoid the southern practice of using a spoon with the fork when eating the "national" carbohydrate.

Thus, the intangibility of the context of food consumption is far greater than that of the food itself. Through elaborations of etiquette and rules of commensality, it entails echoes of historic patterns of domination that ill accord with the classic nation-state representations of citizen equality. Clearly the Cartesian discrimination between the tangible and the intangible will not suffice to address the relationship between context and evanescence; at the very least, we should treat intangibility as a continuum, rather than as an absolute condition of absence. We experience that evanescence on a daily basis as we digest our food, as we react with discomfort to others' failure to master our cultural etiquette for the consumption of food, and as we long for familiar flavors of which we have lately been deprived.

Viewed in this light, food, whether or not it is to be sacralized as an intangible cultural good, can at least provide a source of serious reflection on the intangibility, so to speak, of intangibility itself. While exhibits like the Pasta Museum render the intangible more accessible in the museological sense, such experiences seem far removed from the guilty pleasures of kitchen and dining room. They seem like the gastronomic equivalent of a lumbering philological analysis of what was originally quite a funny joke. Indeed, like the joke, good food hints at excesses and insights that conflict with ideologies of seriousness and self-sacrifice. It is perhaps too redolent of the ways in which intimacy can corrode official dogma to be allowed a

see Raheja 1996; on the theory of entextualization more generally, see Silverstein and Urban, ed., 1996.

very prominent part of the cultural self-presentation of most nation-states. Contextually observed, it also corresponds to the orifices of the body in Douglas's (1966) classic treatment: because it dissolves boundaries – between production and consumption, between the artifactual and the natural, between prized cultural capital and bodily waste, even between tangibility and intangibility – it evokes dismay when introduced into the formal contexts of national self-presentation. The only way to control it is to decontextualize it, by detaching it from its familiar settings and place it in a cookbook or museum – in short, to render it entirely tangible. At this point, one can even give it a name that recalls prostitution or drunkenness; the scabrous becomes simply a mark of the "rudeness" of the traditional, and can be safely consumed because it is now controlled by an encompassing etiquette.[8]

Now let us return to folksongs and popular tales. Much of what I have said about food can be reproduced, *a fortiori*, in respect of oral texts. Many heroic attempts have been made to reproduce the contexts of performance; the Smithsonian is a justly acknowledged leader and innovator in this regard. But such performances do not reproduce the knowing looks, the *doubles entendres*, the physicality of some audience members' responses to the performance, or the personal knowledge about the performers that is the privilege of true insiders (and sometimes of particularly successful ethnographers).

If the term "intangibility" is problematic, the term *heritage* is no less so. We should not forget the etymological roots of the latter term in notions of *inheritance*, given the specifically patrilineal bias in terms like *patrimoine* – a point not explicitly noted by Richard Handler (1985a, 1985b, 1988) in his otherwise extremely revealing work on the emergence of European-derived nationalism, specifically in Quebec. Handler sees heritage as the extension to a national collectivity of early models of personhood as defined by property ownership. "Having a culture" thus expands the collective privilege implied by the ownership of land to the body politic as a whole.

Here we can usefully juxtapose Handler's observations with George Marcus's notion of the "dynastic uncanny" (Marcus 1992: 173-187). I take Marcus' phrase to mean a strange sense of recognition that often follows acknowledgment that someone is the descendant of a well-known, or powerful, group of people. Such notions are not of course restricted to the rich oil families of Texas or to the Portuguese aristocracy engaged in

8. It is worth noting that *rudus* meant "rustic" in a generic sense, and only acquired its meaning of "impolite" and even "obscene" in relatively recent times.

dialogue by Marcus (see also Marcus and Mascarenhas 2005). They are also highly widespread among Greek island fisherfolk and shepherds, for example; among these groups, the passage of material property from one generation to the next is often seen as directly parallel to that of both names and personal characteristics.[9] Despite the existence of such formalized rules, however, the "dynastic uncanny" is a persistence felt rather than stated – it is, in other words, an aspect of daily life that is so intimate that it not only needs no articulation in words, but might perhaps suffer from being reduced to verbal form. It is the most intangible of realities, yet it is experienced as a reality, and it is about inheritance – that is, heritage. Humor itself is notoriously evanescent, and I do not wish to kill the subtle hints of pleasures buried not far below the surface that we find in food names like prostitute's pasta and drunken noodles. I use them simply to point up the fact that so much of what constitutes the fleeting, sometimes rather disreputable and potentially embarrassing, but above all enjoyable and highly recognizable, moments of everyday life would simply never be captured by a rigid concept of intangible heritage.

Michel de Certeau (1984: xix), Deborah Reed-Danahay (1996: 212-213), James Scott (1998: 328-333), and others have written engagingly about the importance of recognizing practices of "muddling through" as a way of coping with the rigidity of state control. Such practices, while perhaps not always usefully rendered as forms of resistance, do represent the messier side of daily life. Scott, furthermore, recognizes that such practices may be found among bureaucrats just as much as among other citizens, as witness the extraordinary effectiveness of the kind of industrial action that is known as "work to rule" or "go slow." Excessive adherence to rules becomes a form of form of irony against which the self-seriousness of bureaucratic organization has little protection. But these are the very aspects of daily action that the bureaucrats themselves strenuously deny; they constitute the space of their cultural intimacy in both the national and more narrowly organizational senses, and as such are jealously guarded against inquisitive interlopers.

Small-scale societies, even (or perhaps especially) when they constitute islands of intimacy in large conurbations, disturb the high-modernist sense of order that, as Scott has argued, the modern nation-state promotes). It is perhaps no coincidence that the small community in Bangkok that I

9. See especially Vernier's (1991) important study of the parallel transmission of personal (baptismal) names, property, and personal characteristics (psychological and physiological) on the island of Kalymnos.

have recently been studying (see Herzfeld 2003, 2006) is mostly known to its neighbors as a place where various forms of food, representing several different culinary traditions within Thailand, are prepared for consumption in nearby offices and on the streets. Among these, needless to say, are various forms of noodles. At least one bureaucrat, intent on evicting this community from its present site, insisted that it was not in fact a genuine community according to what he conceived as true Thai tradition, since its members did not originate from a single place or grow out of a single professional activity. Moreover, the activity in which most of the residents engaged, food production, was not considered generally "productive," since it was in some sense secondary – a strange way of reasoning that occluded the artisanal nature of food preparation. That logic becomes clearer, however, when we see that the discomfort of the authorities lay in the multiple origins of the community and the challenge to official notions of order that its very successful modes of resistance entailed – including the strategic deployment of expertise as the purveyors of "national" food from around the country.

Recent developments may have given the community a chance to survive in situ; if it does, its food production will become, not simply a service industry, but an expression of "Thai culture." This is the price, it seems, that the inhabitants will have to pay for the right to remain in their old homes. The outcome of this struggle will thus result, in one way or the other, in a form of reductionism; the intangibles of commensality, cooking practices, and the sense of fellowship embedded in such daily practices but then cast into opposition to the local bureaucracy is precisely what cannot be described. To describe it would mean defining and thus also destroying it – either because definition has the same kind of effect as archaeological excavation in that it inevitably obliterates some aspects of context, or because, like the analysis of a joke, it turns gossamer into lead.

The community did in fact find a cultural activity that allowed it to be more tangible as an officially recognizable presence – an activity that would no doubt qualify as intangible heritage by most standards. This was an early form of dance theater (*likae*), something that much more closely approximates to UNESCO's definition of intangible heritage than any kind of food production – and that seems much more closely identifiable with the concept of masterpiece. It turned out that the community was the first site of performance for this genre in Bangkok. Its anchoring in the specifities of historical time and place as well as in the official cultural canon rendered it notionally palpable, and thus bureaucratically acceptable as intangible heritage. This was indeed an aspect of locality that could be

paraded before the municipal and state authorities to good effect, and it undoubtedly played a major role in the community's eventual success in warding off eviction on the grounds that such a heterogeneous group of people had no business inhabiting a national historic site.

The paradoxes of that situation are extremely revealing of the limits that a bureaucratic definition of intangible heritage must encounter. There is an unstable distinction between self-presentation and self-knowledge, and it is on this distinction that the defense of cultural intimacy is predicated. People may pay more than lip service to the ideal of a theatrical performance as representing their contribution to national culture, and this has indeed been recognized by a grant from the Ministry of Culture to the community, but food, like the gossip that gives anthropology its name, occupies far more of their actual time, both as workers and as consumers. Moreover, the significance of food items, and the memories that these evoke, will be very different from the ways in which they are presented to the wider public, both Thai middle-class people and foreign tourists. One of the important lessons to be learned from ethnographic research on McDonald's in East Asia, conducted by James L. Watson and his associates (Watson 2006), is precisely that the interpretation of food will not necessarily accord with the ideology that inspires its commercial globalization. Interpretation, moreover, is clearly more intangible than outward form and even then official ideological explanations. That does not make it less important, and, indeed, if we are to understand the varieties of culture that subsist behind the mask of official consensus, the museumification of food will do little to help – as the example of the Pasta Museum demonstrates.

Institutions re-draw, re-classify, and sometimes re-valorize habits of eating, impoverishing the experiences associated with them by reducing them to national menus. This process of commodification removes these items from their social contexts. American tourists, trained by Starbucks, go to Italy and ask for a "lah-tay" – a legitimacy-claiming and not very English-sounding American rendition of the Italian word "latte", which is taken to mean a milky form of coffee but actually, in Italy, means pure milk. The recent experiment with dolce latte, while doubtless suggestive of "la dolce vita" for many Americans, occludes the fact that this is the name of a creamy cheese, not of the sweet milky drink that Starbucks was promoting. Similarly, even if a a non-Thai who masters the term often given for "drunken noodles" (*phad khii mao*) may be very surprised when what arrives on the plate is, not a dish of noodles, but of rice covered with stir-fried vegetables of considerable spiciness. No one has troubled to explain,

it seems, that it is necessary to specify that one wants noodles (*kweitiao*)!

Clearly, intangible culture, like data, can be "cooked." This is especially true of its gastronomic realizations; Lévi-Strauss (1964), after all, pointed out long ago that the act of cooking represents the triumph of culture over nature. If the goal of a program of intangible heritage is to preserve cultural products, it does not seem to be doing very well on that particular front. There are severe limits to any notion of intangible culture that can be put into operation by a formal institution. Intangibility can never stand for a single cultural condition. Insisting on a rigid demarcation between the tangible and the intangible simply regiments the creations of other societies according to Cartesian principles that are now increasingly being regarded with suspicion even by many in the so-called West. It is perhaps a truism that museumification and commodification have changed the nature of culture; they are a hyper-domestication of the already-familiar. It would be foolish to image that we can prevent such processes, or indeed that it is desirable to try to do so – all social life, in some sense, is a process of reification. But it is precisely awareness of that condition that so easily disappears from consideration. Museums and other formalizations of culture can reverse this unfortunate occlusion by building reflexive commentaries on their own institutional histories into their displays. They can also invite reflection on the linkages as well as the discontinuities between what they are able to display and what their clients will experience as they try to savor something of the everyday life of the places in which these museums are located.

One intractable problem nevertheless remains. The very infractions of an imagined international decency that are singled by such terms as prostitution and drunkenness remain unacceptable to the agents of national cultural self-definition. Those who wished to see the Bangkok community I have mentioned evicted from its present site sometimes accuse it of harboring prostitutes; more to the point, perhaps, one of the leaders was very reluctant to let me write about a scene in which a drunken resident was gently removed from a community meeting, until I pointed out that no one would believe in the idea of a community completely free of alcoholism, whereas many would be impressed by the evidence of gentle care and the avoidance of unnecessary humiliation that the scene conveyed. Such is the everyday material of cultural intimacy, at both the state and the local levels. The same holds true for minorities struggling for existence within a majoritarian state; as they empower themselves through the assumption of ever clearer cultural criteria, they, too, become subject to this rigidification

of value, with a concomitant loss of space for the recognition of whatever lies in their zones of cultural intimacy.

In one sense, that is what cultural intimacy is all about: what cannot, and must not, be placed on public display, not only for the protection of the nation-state's reputation, but, above all, so as to avoid the explicitness that would lead to official repression and perhaps even to the internal collapse of social order (not to speak of the overkill that destroys humor). When communities and ethnic groups institutionalize identity, often in reaction to the bureaucratic state, they find that they, too, have zones of intimacy to preserve for the sake of sociability and to defend against judgmental eyes.

It is just such disorder at the heart of order that makes life within even the most bureaucratic system bearable for at least part of the time. Benign though the intentions behind the recognition of intangible culture may be, the very fact of recognition is itself a step in the reification of the intangible. UNESCO, and all well-intentioned scholars and institutions that follow its lead, must therefore strive for a delicate balance, one that recognizes that certain things cannot be said or displayed in museums, but are no less important than what one goes there to see. Perhaps, as visitors, we may discover some of the flavor of such matters in the museum restaurant and bar, but it will be a rare museum indeed that can equip us with the cultural knowledge and sensitivity to resist official control of the menu and a realization of *why* certain items are repressed. As long as international bodies concerned with the preservation of culture are articulated by nation-states, even well-intentioned ones, the limits on the representation of intangible dimensions of culture will remain severe.

The national and regional levels illustrate this well. Even in Italy, where the local often trumps the national, the commodification of certain foods illustrates the process well. A local Roman newspaper, *Il Messaggero* (13th November 1999, p.35), carried a story titled "*Amatriciana*, a cultural good." Other texts promote the central role of Rome's Jewish community in preserving the essential traditions of ancient Roman cuisine. Yet no one comments on the unholy alliance that these strange bedfellows represent: a more or less kosher version of one ancient tradition allied to that of the pig-farmers of Amatrice – a curious compromise, expressive of the Romans' self-image as "accommodating" (*accommodanti*). Labeling the resulting hybrid as *cucina romana*, "Roman cuisine," obscures the discomfiting tales of repression, exploitation, poverty, and racism that constitute its background and are the very features to which Romans themselves affectionately point

in explaining its origins.[10] This is a history in which Romans recognize the kind of experience that also lends the salt to their sometimes notorious brand of humor. Such elements of a somewhat disreputable past, recreated in the present in throwaway allusions and jokes (and that Romans significantly regard as impenetrable to outsiders), disappear with the adulation that accompanies commodification.

Therein lies the fundamental problem of the most well-intended attempts at the conservation of tradition. As credentialing now becomes the means for promoting economic advantage through the production of "vintages and traditions" (Ulin 1996), intangibility is under threat of being commodified out of existence. The drunks and prostitutes who could rescue it find their entrance to the global museum barred, their voices suppressed, and their lively presence reduced to sanctimonious footnotes in the official accounts of national cultures. May we invite them to return?

10. For example, they claim that the extensive use of offal is the result of the oppressive behavior of the princes of the Church, who kept all the good cuts for themselves. Rome exhibits a marked tendency to anticlericalism, strongly reinforced in recent years by a spate of evictions of poor families from church-owned properties. It is not unusual to find graffiti such as *Vaticano sfratta* ("The Vatican evicts") and *Roma pagana* (Pagan Rome).

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