

An Anti-Communist Revolution of Gastronomy. The Gastronomy Renewal Movement and Hungarian History

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ABSTRACT

The article's aim is to analyze how parts of the gastronomy renewal movement in Hungary are connected to nationalist politics of identity in Hungary. Based on insights from the study of everyday ethnicity, banal nationalism and comparative memory studies in CEE it shows how the nationalist anti-communist concept of history that constitutes a cornerstone of the identity of the right is inherent in the gastronomy movement. It is a-historic and manifestly mythicizing, finding the lowest point of gastronomy history in the Kádár-era, a period also excluded from national history in the great narrative of the right. This adjustment enables the movement to overturn existing hierarchies and infuse the public discourse with its own language with the help of politics but at the price of obligatorily lending its support to political PR action that contradicts its own promoted values.

KEYWORDS

gastronomy – post-communism – politics of identity – Kádár-era – Hungary – history – myth-making

1. Introduction

The famed culinary competition Bocuse d'Or hosted for the first time a cook from Hungary at its 2013 final, in Lyon. Competing teams are small, according to the rules only three people are allowed to participate on the floor, but the road to fame is usually shared by a group of other helping hands, arranging for accommodation, travel or organizing the program of the team during the event. There is obviously someone responsible for on the spot communication too – in the Hungarian team this task was taken over by a young lady, a stagiaire, who happened to be the eldest daughter of the country's then-prime minister. Viktor Orbán, a right-wing, nationalist politician is usually seen as having a natural instinct of populism that he uses with extreme skill to garner votes. His family could take no refuge from this fate too, the same daughter's marriage was staged as a local imitation of the marriage of UK royalties. Orbán's interest in the culinary competition, already signaled by the presence of his family in the team was also emphasized by his appearance at some of the training sessions of the team. (Orbán kóstolta a versenymenüt, 2013)

But so far such behavior can still only be a sign of instinctive populism of an otherwise authoritative personality, or a clever PR ploy of his advisers. Is there anything else that connects the attempt to renew Hungarian gastronomy to politics? Does the prime minister's direct and indirect involvement express a more profound affinity between politics and gastronomy in Hungary? How did at least one important current of the renewal movement integrate itself into a political field that is characteristic for the primary significance of politics of identity rooted in mutually exclusive readings of the country's twentieth century history? (See Egry, 2012) These are the questions we would like to address in this article, starting from the theoretical insights on banal nationalism and the importance of everyday consumption in expressing identity. After outlining this framework we will follow with the main ideas of this pursuit of culinary renewal, especially how it constructs a temporal sequence of past, present and future and how it perceives the ideal cook. The next step will be to point out how this discourse is related to the broader nationalist concept of history, one of the building blocks of the Hungarian right's ideology. We will also show how it is a classic effort of myth-making and why it is deeply political, that is proved primarily by its inherent internal contradictions and paradoxes. In lieu of conclusion we will give a short evaluation of the success of the broader gastronomy and nourishment movement.

2. Food and the nation

The last few years saw a gradual change of the gastronomy landscape in Hungary, with an abundance of festivals, blogs, TV-shows, culinary shops and restaurants that peaked in the awarding of a Michelin star to two restaurants in Budapest in 2012. (Abend, 2013) Even though the effects of a long lasting economic crisis are visible all over the city these events and facilities seem to flourish and together they form a veritable gastronomy and nourishment renewal movement. It is, not unlike most similar attempts, and in general the emergence of the new affluent class of the "Bobos" (Brooks, 2000), encompassing a wide range of social milieus and unites loosely actors with very different aims. Urban green movements advocating a new balance between technology and nature in the search for sustainable growth, proponents of healthier lifestyle and consumption, promoters of more natural nourishment, groups that aim to recover nature from urbanization or strive to overcome urban alienation, entrepreneurs who try to sell their products under the label of bio, natural, traditional or local food and simultaneously crowd out competitors all contribute something to the emergence of this scene. As a consequence overturning existing institutions and hierarchies, inventing new traditions, creating a new language of authority are all non-negligible aspects and potential outcomes inherent in the renewal movement. In this study we will focus only on one of them: the connection between nationalist political ideology and gastronomy.

Even though it could seem farfetched at first glance, consumption and nation are often intricately intertwined. As Michael Billig (1995) and Tim Edensor (2002) showed nationalism and national identity is far from being only sublime, exceptional, expressed through festive rituals and commemorations. On the contrary in order to successfully achieve its aims – to ingrain national identification as the individual's

primary source of loyalty and to make it seem natural, unquestionable – nationalism needs to infuse everyday settings with a latent, unnoticed context of the nation. This kind of presence of everything what is infused with national in everyday life generates the natural sense of the nation, makes it given for the individual. The distinctive – national – character of these everyday things goes unnoticed until they disappear or until one encounters a different context or setting that highlights the difference in everyday practices among national groups.

Obviously, it doesn't mean that these everyday settings and practices would be essential, inherent to the national group. They are still socially constructed, but the way they operate hides this constructed nature and suggest their essentialist character. (Brubaker, 2002) Recent studies on everyday nationalism propose to distinguish four aspects of everyday nationalism for analyses. (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008) All of which can be observed in the Hungarian gastronomy scene: speaking about and with the nation, performing the nation, and consuming the nation, choosing between nationally marked categories. The first one, the speech act, is mainly discernible in the discourse of the gastronomy renewal movement, on the blogs, in the magazines, newspaper articles, TV shows, advertisement leaflets etc. The second one, the performative aspect is best illustrated by the growing number of festivals (like mangalica-pork festival, sausage festival, 'pálinka' festival, gourmet festival etc. that promise to give a taste of national food). However, even the most important national holidays are involved in the ritualization of gastronomy. Since 2007 the „cake of the country” is served every year on Saint Stephen's Day, the official state holiday, made of ingredients that are treated as being typical in certain Hungarian regions. (In 2013 it was a walnut cake with honey from Milota, supposedly baked from walnut harvested in Milota, a village in North Eastern Hungary famous for this product.) Consuming the nation is inherently part of the nationalized marketing efforts that promote Hungarian products and dishes all over the country tacitly implying that provenience is equal to quality. But again there were and are state efforts to ensure the national character of certain gastronomy products permanently. One of the notable cases was Hungary's insistence during the EU accession talks on its exclusive rights to distill 'pálinka', a spirit made of fruits. Last, but not least choice is all over the gastronomy scene.

Together these convey a sense of a given, natural Hungarian national cuisine and a Hungarian specificity of food preparation that is to find or should be found in every kitchen, in every bistro, every restaurant. It has its specific national ingredients, specialties, local products and dishes. It doesn't necessarily mean relying on traditional methods of cooking or on traditional recipes, but discursively everything seen as part of Hungarian gastronomy is represented as being linked to a national tradition, uniquely characteristic only for Hungarians that should be preserved even if often through renewal.

In this article we are mainly concerned with the discursive aspect of the gastronomy renewal movement, because it offers the most illustrative example of its connection with nationalist politics of identity. In order to show the links between gastronomy and politics of identity one should note how important role history, especially that of the twentieth century plays in Hungarian – and in broader East Central European – politics. Three distinct varieties of memory emerged after the change of

regime in all of these post-soviet societies that narrated three different national histories. (Mark, 2010) A liberal anti-communist version stressed the unacceptable nature of the communist regimes but saw 1989 as the right foundation of a new community and admitted that the effects of the communist past are hard to dispose of. A radical, nationalist anti-communist variety portrayed the nation as victim of external forces and regimes of alien nature, proposed a return to the times before communism and gradually subscribed to the idea that 1989 was only an „unfinished revolution”. The third, post-communist variation narrated the story of communists as reformers during the socialist period, emphasized the modernization of society in this era and tried to legitimate personal or sometimes institutional continuity between the communist regimes and the post-communist leftist parties.

In its concrete form the Hungarian radical, nationalist anti-communist memory and its historical narrative denied that the communist period – the era between the end of WWII and the change of regime – could be part of the authentic national history. Furthermore, after the second millennium they increasingly tended to reject the legitimacy of the post-1989 era too. In this conceptualization of twentieth century Hungarian history the authentic national history abruptly came to halt in 1944 and could not revive until a nationally minded government installed a new political and social system that reflects the Hungarian national character. Nation and its history were and are inseparable thus the period that is seen as an era of alien rule could not be accepted in any way. Even its profound social transformations should be countered somehow, and nothing it brought about could be legitimate. It became the lowest point of history, an era of degradation of everything traditional, national, Hungarian, something that should be rejected in its entirety. (Mark, 2010; Egry, 2012)

This vision was incorporated into the preamble and the text of a new Constitution that took effect in 2012. This document is seen as the foundation of a renewed Hungarian nation – now stretching out of state boundaries. Thus, it is a fundamental part of the nationalist ideology of the mainstream right too.

3. In search of national gastronomy

Before starting the analysis of the discursive facet of the renewal movement, it is worth to stress once again that our analysis doesn't aim at the whole of the gastronomy renewal movement, neither are we trying to depict all of its aspects according to the four dimensions of everyday nationhood. It is a broad social phenomenon, driven by very different interests and ideas even if their goals and means could be very similar. Only a fraction of these currents are linked to nationalist ideology and its political representatives – often with personal links too. However, exactly these currents are best represented in media, mainly in the rightist organs. The leading figure of the movement – a kind of guru – Tamás Molnár B. had a regular column with his wife in the semi-official Fidesz (Alliance of Young Democrats, the main rightist party) daily, Magyar Nemzet. The semi-official Fidesz weekly, *Heti Válasz* carries the most frequently reports on gastronomy events and they covered the Bocuse d'Or extensively.¹ The popular website www.mandiner.hu, run by a group of “conservative youth”, close to Fidesz and to the government also features a special section of gastronomy and

wine, while the public broadcaster has a gastronomy TV show run by a former reporter of the semi-official Fidesz television, HírTv.

But close ties with government and with its ideology doesn't mean that even the scope of this current of the movement would be limited to building a national cuisine, regardless of any other aspect of gastronomy. As the basic document pronouncing the aims of the movement, the Hungarian Culinary Charta (2007) shows, their activity is aimed at (1) quality and healthiness of food, (2) diversity of ingredients, (3) authenticity of products and (4) representation of Hungary and its culture in and through gastronomy. However, all of these are bound together in a vision of the past and future of Hungarian cuisine that is embedded in the great narrative of national history.

What are the main elements of this historical perspective on Hungarian gastronomy? Not surprisingly the past is painted with glory, the present with the most somber colors, but the future is promising – if the movement prevails. The starting point of the assessment is an extraordinary abundance and diversity of ingredients found in the Carpathian-basin, promptly making the past Hungary the main geographic reference of Hungarian cuisine.² In the light of this potential the typical food today is unbelievably simple and unhealthy. This is – the Charta alleges – a catastrophe of equal scale as it was the Ottoman occupation in the 16th-17th centuries, the failure of three wars of liberation (1703-1711, 1848-1849, 1956), the dismantling of the country at the end of WWI. It also implies that modernization – primarily regulation of rivers and drainage of marshes in the 19th century – aggravated the situation, led to the disappearance of certain ingredients.

Nevertheless, the main culprit, the uncontested chief villain of the story is the fifty years of the communist and post-communist era. According to the Charta it brought about a total decline of gastronomy and food culture and socialized an unassuming population. In this interpretation the communist period – and first of all its second part, the so-called Kádár-era, named after the general secretary of the party, János Kádár, that provided the population with a relative abundance of goods – depraved agricultural production and impoverished mass food provision. The price of elimination of food shortages was the introduction of cheap fats and carbohydrates, mass produced, mediocre or poor quality ingredients. (Hungarian Culinary Charta, 2007) It was an overall social phenomenon (Molnár B., 2004):

“People – partly due to atavistic reasons – used to hold to what they experienced regarding eating during childhood. We grew up during Kádárism. Politically and emotionally not everyone gave in, but these decades left their mark on everyone. Concerning eating almost all of us became Kádárists. It was the effect of the false abundance of the Kádár-era after the scarcity of the fifties.”³

¹ It is telling that the Hungarian Wikipedia site of the 2013 Bocuse d'Or competition features 4 references to Heti Válasz among a total 12. It is followed by 3 references to gastroblogs. See Bocuse d'Or, 2013

² At the end of WWI Hungary, then encompassing the whole Carpathian-basin had to renounce on large territories that now constitute Slovakia or belong to Ukraine, Serbia, Romania, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia.

Anyway Hungarian gastronomy that was once an allure of the country is now rather a shame and a danger to the population's health, especially as it eroded their taste thus making way for the cheap, skimpy products that flooded into Hungary from abroad after the change of regime.

Consequently, in key texts of the movement, the present is painted with shades of gray, if not with black. While healthy nourishment is an issue of public health the typical Hungarian gastronomy is a detriment to it. In order to improve food and gastronomy quality ingredients are needed. But despite of the excellent natural conditions the production system of the Kádár-era extinguished such farms and gave way to low quality mass products. For a better future people need to be reeducated, as part of the school curriculum, not only in taste but in their consciousness of choosing food and raw materials (Hungarian Culinary Charta, 2007); .

But good cuisine is not only an issue of public good. It is also the sign of how civilized a country is. The better, healthier and more refined its cuisine the more civilized its citizens are. All of these point to the necessity of cooperation between civic initiatives and the government and their efforts should result in new cuisine. (Hungarian Culinary Charta, 2007) The new gastronomy – the future – should be built upon seasonality of ingredients, regionality of products (terroir), the use of handicraft products, the reinvention of tradition in the form of renewed versions of classic Hungarian dishes and the introduction of the most developed techniques and last but not least creativity. (Az új magyar konyha 7+2 pontja, 2007) As a Hungarian expat blogger summed it up reporting on the Bocuse d'Or (Gabor, 2013):

“Hungarian kitchen is well-known and is a synonym for very good cooking, but its image is full of clichés. Now it is time to elevate its perception and make Hungarian cooking known for its fine cuisine as well as to exploit the fantastic potential it has to offer. Bocuse d'Or event is the perfect place to demonstrate these potentials, to put Hungary on the fine culinary horizon and to inspire other Hungarian chefs and future chefs, as well.”

It is clear that the aims of the movement reach well beyond the narrow field of gastronomy proper. This vision is accompanied by an ambitious program of social renewal too, that would bring back Hungary to the world of civilized countries – also implying that the communist period drifted it away from being civilized. This program includes a preference for small, family farms and businesses, handicraft products, investment in local economy with local products, organic food as opposed to imported mass products. In this respect it is entirely compatible with other currents of the renewal movement and obviously would also find common points with the new left too.

³ Kádárism is a term popular in Hungarian public discourse and also in social sciences. It refers to the specific variety of state socialism during János Kádár's tenure that was characterized by the lack of shortages, relatively high standard of living and especially after 1963 by a higher than usual political tolerance towards the population. It is often referred to – emphasizing the relative abundance of goods – as goulash communism.

Furthermore, it proposes a different understanding of pleasure, something inextricably bound to eating. While the Kádárist heritage is condemned because pleasure was found in the experience of eating vast quantities of similar food, cooked invariably with sour cream, paprika, lard and onions the new cuisine is thought to generate pleasure through the exploration of the natural taste of often seldom used ingredients, the seasonality of food, the variety of meal courses at one occasion and the look of dishes. (*Az új magyar konyha 7+2 pontja*, 2007) This way it contrasts an existence portrayed as physical, unsophisticated, somewhat brutish with a life that is full of reflection, diversity and excitement for the senses and what helps to find a new balance of nature and humans. Physical life opposed to refinement, embodied in philosophy.

The key figure in this vision is the cook himself, be it professional or a leisure or hobby cook. Both of them holds responsibility for the realization of the movement's aims and their characteristics are similar. They are industrious, devoted to cooking, passionate in the kitchen, eager to learn the latest techniques and the most recent recipes, ready to engage with different culinary cultures and use this knowledge for invention, conscious in the selection of raw materials and of their social responsibility. The latter applies especially to small producers whom need to be helped with a constant demand and market for their quality products, but also to consumers who should be taught to enjoy the new cuisine. Thus the cook is instrumental in the social renewal too.

While cooks are embodiment of invention and reinvention, producers represent traditions and social embeddedness. (*Pacalok a világ körül*, 2010) The model producer keeps long standing family traditions, operates his business with consideration to the environment, rediscovers or saves forgotten varieties and ingredients. Creativity, innovation and tradition are inseparable building blocks of the new cuisine.

Tradition in Hungary means the 19th and early 20th centuries and cookbooks published in this period. It is invariably seen as an era when almost everything was eaten, agricultural products were grown without unnatural intervention and food was prepared with sophistication, using much more techniques than in the communist period. It is also alleged that gastronomy in this period was something that lured tourists who applauded the dishes they tasted in Budapest.

4. An anti-communist myth of Hungarian gastronomy?

So far the historical vision of the gastronomy renewal was outlined in a rather general way, and it shows a concept that is classic national history. Territorially bounded (to pre-WWI Hungary, the Carpathian-basin), based on traditions and formulated with belief in a national specificity that should come to expression in gastronomy too. Nevertheless, this article promised to explore more than just typical national elements of the renewal current. What I try to prove is that this is inherently tied to nationalist anti-communist conceptualization of history, to the extent that it is actually part of these efforts.

As it was mentioned earlier the nationalist anti-communist vision of history is based on the idea that authentic national history ended with the arrival of Soviet

troops to the country. (Laczó and Zombory, 2012; Palonen 2011; Mark, 2010; Egry, 2012) What followed was not simply a rule of foreigners, but the disintegration of the nation due to the new social system. The communist period is the embodiment of all evil and the proper counterpoint and anti-thesis of a new era that should strive for national renewal. It is a clear, organic, integral nationalist concept, so much that it even problematizes the post-1989 decades until 2010 as some kind of ambiguous, unsettled period that was still an impediment in the way of renewal.

It is important to stress that this view of history is mutually exclusive with the one existing on the political left and among liberals. There is no event, no personality that would offer a common ground for the whole polity and as a consequence political choice is also an act of exclusion from the community too. Thus the concept of history not only signals differences of worldview inside the community but it also defines who authentic representative of the nation is and who are suspicious of not being members.

The gastronomy renewal ideas analyzed here are perfectly adjusted to this vision of history. They postulate the beginning of communism as the starting point of culinary decline, portray the Kádár-era as the utmost catastrophe and decry the post-1989 period as an uneasy transition during which the representatives of the Kádár-era culinary status quo were still able to hinder any attempt of renewal. This is why texts like the Hungarian Culinary Charta were aimed at existing institutions and practices too and why they promoted the idea of a complete culinary change of the guards.

The intensity of anti-communist emotions among the members of this current are betrayed by a recent affair that also highlighted how far official „culinary anti-communism” is only instrumental in Hungarian rightist politics. Not long after taking office the Prime Minister nominated a former theater director, Imre Kerényi to be Government Commissary for Strengthening the Historical and Legal Consciousness of the Young Generations. Kerényi was very active from the start in politics of memory, for example he ordered a series of paintings to illustrate the editions of the new constitution. These pictures depicted important events or figures of Hungarian history, including police action against violent, extreme rightist demonstrators and participants of a Fidesz demonstration who became mingled with the radicals on October 23, 2006, a key element of a new rightist mythology as a kind of replay of 1956. Kerényi also designed to publish a series of books that he considered to be important part of the national heritage. The series included a cookbook written by József Venesz, a cook in the communist period too.

In the eyes of the members of the movement Venesz and his work is anathema, he is the man who is himself responsible for almost all of the degradations Hungarian culinary culture suffered. (See for example Molnár B., 2012) It is telling that the guru himself – Tamás Molnár B. – with his wife – Dóra Bittera – published an article on Venesz’s other cookbook in the review *Kommentár*. This journal is the organ of young conservatives, some of whom occupied important positions in Parliament or in government after 2010. The article appeared in a special thematic block with the title “Twelve false myths” that featured reviews of twelve books from the 20th century, considered to be detrimental to Hungarian public life. (Molnár and Bittera, 2012a) The publication of one of his works in a series that was intended to represent a new na-

tional canon caused outcry in these circles. (turul2k, 2013; Susánszky, 2013a; for a counterargument see Mélyi, 2013)

The main thrust of their argument was similar to the general depiction of the Kádár-era culinary world, but in this case they tied it to one person, József Venesz. But alongside the usual arguments concerning the low quality, unhealthy nature of uniform mass nourishment that was institutionalized during the Kádár-era and its detrimental nature to culinary culture some of the reactions singled out Venesz personally, especially for his efforts in 1958, when he managed a successful Hungarian restaurant in Brussels, at the World Fair. (Péteri Gy, 2012) It is seen as a servile contribution to communist propaganda efforts on the wake of the 1956 revolution.

Although the affair points out how much the gastronomy renewal idea is only an instrument for the government despite the permanent laudation for Molnár B. in rightist media, despite the Prime Minister's attention, despite the financial support Molnár received as the coach of Tamás Széll, it is also an excellent example of how much this vision of gastronomy history is incoherent and mythologizing. As most mythologizing efforts it is a-historical, full of internal contradictions, even paradoxes, and offers only a subdued reflection on present-day social circumstances.

It presents a low productivity agriculture that was prone to famine even in the second half of the 19th century as a model for a diversity of agricultural products. Similarly, it idealizes a way of life in which people were compelled to use everything eatable due to poverty and weak harvests. Even if gastronomy was more diverse, it was not necessarily the result of sophistication, rather of sheer necessity. It was entirely different in the Kádár-era, when agricultural family business existed in a symbiosis with larger agricultural cooperatives and produced an excess of products (although not necessarily in great diversity) that was sold to state companies or at the market.

As a result of the constraints of consumption in the 19th and early 20th centuries a hierarchy of food emerged. In its softer form it just meant an intention to abandon certain ingredients – most tellingly exemplified by the value attributed to bread baked from refined white flour. But there was also a tendency to forget potential foodstuffs when there was no necessity to include them into the family diet. (For example sweet-water crabs that demanded too much work for a small reward.) In its stricter form this hierarchy stigmatized certain ingredients, like tripe. However, some of them are promoted today as if they would have been part of the mythical traditional Hungarian cuisine regardless of this social aspect of their consumption that time. (Pacalok a világ körül, 2010; Cserna-Szabó A, 2010)

Another important aspect neglected in the gastronomy renewal discourse is the consumption pattern of the idealized and the abhorred periods. Until the sixties Hungary was a characteristically low income, poor country in this regard, with an unusually high ratio of food in total consumption. It not only means that most of the dishes in cookbooks from this era were not accessible to the bulk of the population. (Tomka, 2012; Valuch, 2008; Valuch, 2013: 130–167) The changes of the Kádár-era were aimed at the elimination of this phenomenon and mass production and mass food provision were the main tools of this effort. At the end the uniformization of canteens and restaurant kitchens offered better nourishment at the price of lower standards and also enabled most people to consume in a restaurant. Here dishes were mediocre

more often than not, but without huge differences in quality all over the country it was still an elevation of social status (as it meant the appearance of social practices among workers and lower grade state employees that were earlier part of lower-middle and middle class groups) and the standard of living.

This kind of social context is also missing from the assessment of the present. Not that better food, a diversity of ingredients consumed or quality assurance were not important aims for anyone involved in gastronomy and the social aspects of a better culinary culture are certainly important too. But high rate of poverty, a gradual impoverishment (Eurostat, 2013) constitutes an obstacle for stronger demand for these relatively expensive products or services. In the last few years even higher middle-class consumer seem to have been fallen out as indicated by the closure of many restaurants (Sas Bisztró, Abszint) that tried to offer quality menus for relatively cheaper prices. Quality food is hardly accessible for broad segments of society, probably it is the reason that instead of haute cuisine relatively cheap establishments (Vietnamese restaurants, places offering street food, soup bars etc.) gained ground recently.

The inherent contradictions and paradoxes of the views promoted are also noteworthy. While it represents an organic, integral nationalism and a view of the society very much aligned to this nationalism (emphasis on family businesses, local products, anti-globalism) its concept of the ideal cook is unmistakably meritocratic and libertarian. The cook is individualistic, cosmopolitan, never constrained by social bounds in his quest for learning or inventing. What he needs for self-fulfillment is individual effort and talent and his prize is his own quality kitchen.

But the marked anti-consumerism and anti-globalism is in contradiction with the means of dissemination too. The movement uses all of the potential modern media outlets, from the blogosphere to TV-shows and heavily advertised cookbooks made with the cooperation of celebrities. (Here is another link to politics and also a paradox, as Molnár B. and the Prime Minister's wife sit together in the editorial board of *Magyar Konyha*, a culinary magazine originating from the Kádár era.) And they are not only using these tools, but they are imitating the world regarding the content too. Here one can find a very strong British influence, again contradicting the nationalist claims. One of the signals of the renewal movement was the publication of Jamie Oliver cookbooks, an instant success, TV shows are usually following models from the UK and other British public culinary figures had their counterparts in Hungary too. (TV presenter and trained cook Judit Stahl embodied the Hungarian Nigella.) Often ideas are borrowed too, like in the case of a group of gastro-bloggers who imitated Jamie Oliver's effort to reform public school canteens. The Hungarian bloggers also devised a weekly menu that was covered by the daily allowance of such canteens. (Péter, 2012; Susánszky, 2013b)

How much these trends are unique to Hungary in a broader, Eastern European or European context? Food is, obviously, central to the representation and formation of national identity all over Europe. Many ideas that inform the Hungarian movement (importance of technique, locality, ingredients, the concept of a previous gilded age of national cuisine) are equally important all over the world. (Parsecoli, 2005; Parsecoli 2008) Their role in politics is also detectable, preservation of locality or national specificities is often an important aim of conservative or green and localist parties. (Pa-

rasecoli, 2005) However, such a marked infusion of these currents of thinking with a broader politics of memory and with the anti-communist reading of this history of national gastronomy is hardly found elsewhere and exactly this connection makes it possible to use this locality centered gastronomy in the pursuit of a uniform national community that denies local deviations.

Comparing Hungary to its Eastern European peers shows a mixed picture. General trends are visible in all over these countries, especially the ones connected to viticulture. (Parasecoli, 2008) But, if one can make a judgment based on the diversity of wines, the number of small wineries and not the least on the number of wine stores and wine bars it is probably only Slovakia and maybe Slovenia that kept pace with Hungary. The difference of the speed of the adaptation of this new trends is true for high-end cooking as exemplified by the number of such restaurants, Michelin stars (3 in Budapest, 2 in Prague, 1 in Warsaw, 0 in Bucharest, Bratislava, Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade) and Gault&Millau guide recommendations. There are some universal, post-communist features characteristic for all of these countries. The use of specific food (for example bananas) as a symbol of overcoming the scarcity of the communist era. (Passemore and Passemore, 2003) The definition of national cuisine as a collection of traditional, often peasant dishes, like Bigos, Romanian polenta, Slovak halusky, Czech knedlik etc. (see the individual country cases in Goldstein and Merkle, 2005) is also a common feature of culinary cultures in the region.

Nevertheless, the differences are again telling, especially how these culinary cultures treat their distant and closer history. In the Slovak case the socialist culinary practices, that resulted in a better nourishment at the cost of quality are taken as a necessary price to pay. (Stolicna, 2005) In Poland there are voices that argue in favor of the free market as the promoter of regional cuisines and local food as a competitor of transnational food chains. (Krzysztofek, 2005) In the Czech Republic, at least the representation of the socialist era shows marginal similarities, but the meaning attached to food differs too much to make this analogy useful. Basic, good quality, abundant traditional Czech food and its consumption was a symbol of freedom (Passemore and Passemore, 2003), while in Hungary the lack of refinement is the main target of criticism of the movement. Furthermore, in the Hungarian case, the discourse is not specific about regional food and somewhat surprisingly the one region that could be treated separately due to its specific culinary traditions, which is also crucial for the national imagination (Kürthi, 2001), Transylvania, does not have a strong symbolic role in the movement.

6. Successful revolution?

In the light of these findings the historical vision of the gastronomy renewal movement is rather myth-making and as such it is part of a broader effort of politics of identity. Whether it will be successful in making its view of national gastronomy canonical depends more on the politics of memory than on the representatives of this current of the movement. But it certainly doesn't imply that the movement should be unsuccessful concerning other aspects of its aims and efforts. It is true that the idea of a gastronomy renewal has today broader and deeper foundations in society. It reached

sometimes unexpected groups and social spheres, contributed to the transformation of city texts and generated local initiatives of community renewal. The spread of street food, the appearance of places that offer relatively cheap, quality daily menus, the growing number of bistros alongside restaurants all are signs that a new culinary culture is gaining ground in Hungary. It is perhaps best exemplified by the case of a small village in North Eastern Hungary, Erdőbénye. This locality is situated in the Tokaj wine producing region, but despite the viticulture potential it was in slow decline since decades. A group of gastro-bloggers from Budapest, who joined forces with winemakers, established a summer festival. It features local winemakers, cooks, gastro-bloggers and increasingly high quality cultural productions every year. Even if only for a few days the village enjoys a revival as thousands visit to eat, drink and listen to music. (Bor, mámor, Bénye, 2013)

On the other hand popular gastronomy in a broader sense was less influenced than the movement expected. 80 out of the 200 most popular cookbooks on the largest internet-based bookstore, Bookline.hu (as of October 6, 2014), are rather traditional works, covering Hungarian cuisine in its more traditional sense and the best-selling authors are those who were already popular in the seventies or in the eighties. Representatives of the movement can find solace in the success of cookbooks written by gastrobloggers and perhaps the relatively large number of works published by international cook celebrities (alongside Jamie Oliver, Ramsey Gordon, Heston Blumenthal, Rick Stein) who are otherwise the popular faces of this rigorous culinary philosophy.

The representatives of the current analyzed here were also successful in overturning the existing institutions and establish a new hierarchy. They sidelined the competing gastronomy organization and appropriated the rights to organize the Hungarian selection round of Bocuse d'Or. They are now publishing the Hungarian edition of the Gault&Millau culinary guide and there is a cluster of restaurants mainly in the center of Budapest that follow Molnár B.'s guidance. (Fabók 2013)

Alongside the successful occupation of key institutional positions the movement, due to its connection with the rightist media scene and the neglect of the other political currents towards the issue of gastronomy, was able to infuse the language of the public discourse on gastronomy. A new language of authority, legitimizing the movement and its aims has emerged. It was certainly made easier by the fact that the condemnation of the Kádár-era is not limited to the political right, it is also a popular motive of libertarian-individualist discourses, often without much emphasis on anti-communism. It was also shown that the renewal discourse has a potential to connect with individualist views too. Nowadays it is uncontested in mainstream electronic media, although it doesn't necessarily mean that it is socially dominant. Because of its social basis the renewal movement is still confined to a narrow circle, and as politics is more interested in PR than substance outside Budapest and a few larger cities and apart from media outlets with a declining audience there is hardly any gastronomy discourse at all. If one asks whether the gastronomy revolution was capable to establish a new latent, unconscious banal nationalism around its own understanding of national cuisine the answer is certainly not. Hungarian national cuisine is still predominantly what it was three or four decades ago, everyday life is more resistant to

changes in this sense as one would expect seeing the vibrant life of Budapest bistros and restaurants, not to speak of the decline of these institutions at the countryside.

Furthermore, there is a less appetizing face of these state subsidized efforts to create a national culinary canon and a new culinary culture. For many on the right gastronomy renewal offers a sense of the ability to balance traditions with modernity and that way an argument to refute claims from the left that Hungarian conservatives are backward people. The culinary world also offers a feeling of elevated social status, due to the high prices charged for products. But populism and quality food are sometimes irreconcilable and there is a price to pay for joining forces with populist politicians garnering votes, who tend to appeal to the electorate with a display of honoring their customs, whatever gastro-revolutionaries think of those. The Prime Minister, who sells himself as an unconditional supporter of culinary renewal efforts frequently appears on videos depicting scenes of heavy drinking and preparing or eating food that would certainly fall into the category of unhealthy, unsophisticated “Kádárist” products. (For example Hungarian sausage prepared with an abundance of paprika.) Other politicians think it appropriate to give awards to products from their constituency and include them on the list of the specific Hungarian products (Hungaricum), and the leaders of the renewal have to support it, whatever they feel about it privately. Just as it happened with the sheep goulash from Karcag, the seat of the constituency of then-minister of finance, Mihály Varga, what was applauded at the official website of the movement as an extraordinary culinary experience, a “charismatic dish”. (Molnár and Bittera, 2012b) And who knows which politician is the next to think of a juicy pork barrel?

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