

## NATIONAL IDENTITIES, NATIONAL EXCLUSIONS.

## THE CASE OF CHILEAN CUISINE

BY Dr. Valeria Campos Salvaterra



Dr. Valeria Campos is Associate Professor and researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at Catholic University of Valparaiso, Chile. She studies the subject of food and human feeding from a philosophical and anthropological point of view, especially concern with its ethical and political dimensions.

She has done preliminary researches on food public policies, with the idea of making a proposal to unify all feeding policies under the idea that eating is a 'cultural event'. She is currently leading a research entitled *Politics of taste and aesthetics of food. Genesis and structure of philosophical discourses on eating and tasting*, supported by CONICYT (National Council of Science and Technology of Chile). In this inquiry, she makes an analysis of the meanings and values that Western culture has given to the act of eating and the sense of taste, in order to obtain critical results that could help us to increase our understanding of our relation with food.

Even though we probably are not aware, eating and cooking has always been -and now probably it is more strongly- big instruments for violence and domination, and maybe the most effective and concerning ones. Why? Exactly because we think they are not political issue, because we don't really think about those practices in that way, as serious concerning subjects. It seems that eating and cooking are practices that are transparent to political discourse, and to that extent they belong to other areas of interest, such as our domestic life, pleasure and playfulness, festive culture. To cook seems to be a purely celebratory act, and the same we think about tasting and eating; and as our traditions has taught us festive and pleasurable things are not important thinks to be approach from a critical point of view. Even though like never before chefs are now stars, and food is contaminating the realm of art, and cultural studies are focusing in cooking and eating practices, these is not really a key element for a critical, ethical and political approach. We have exclude our relation to food from all the relevant areas of discourse, because food is something we do -we *eat*, we *cook*- but we don't need to talk about it, at least not as an important matter. But, what is really paradoxal, is that we still love food, we love it, and by this I mean: we have a very big desire for it. We desire food more maybe than most of things in life that are desirable. Food is a very important object for desire in general: we engage with food in many different ways, and all of them are related to desire: for pleasure, for sheering, for relaxing, for making social relations, even we relate to food in some addictive and

pathological ways. So, in this essay I'm going to talk about eating and cooking from what I consider a political point of view: about the role food has in the delimitation of national identities and its importance to approach this phenomenon in the world of today.

I'll approach the subject of eating and cooking but from a specific perspective: from what we can call 'national identity'. How is national identity built? How do we draw the limits between the identity of one nation and the other? Let's do some philosophical analysis: The word 'identity' comes from the Greek word *ἴδιον* –*idion*–, which means *one's own, pertaining to oneself*. *Proper* also works, since it names something that belongs to someone. For Aristotle, *Idion* was also a logical category that referred to certain particular characteristics of an individual that define what he/she/it 'is' (*Topics*, 102a20). These characteristics are also exclusives, which means that they only belong to that individual, and to nobody else (they make it authentic and unique, different from every other individual). Plato and Aristotle configured what was proper (*idion*) of something also by relating it with what was exclusively possessed by that. That is how, for example, the limit between humans and non-humans were established: Aristotle asked himself: What is the proper function (*ἔργον; érgon*) of man? (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a). And he solved it by founding his exclusive function: reason. If we match identity with the proper, and this with the exclusive, then there is only one step to purity. It is from this idea that latter philosophers brought up the concept of 'essence', 'essential' to refer to these set of proper characteristics<sup>1</sup>. They also started to see them as a principle of knowledge, this means, as what could tell us the *truth* about the being of something in the most deep and accurate way possible. The essence then was the ground for identity, since also this Greek philosophical tradition always thought there was continuity between being-thought-language, which means that the linguistic definition of something is totally linked to its essence. This gave them a criteria for making correct judgments about things, since the essence would only allowed one definition of the thing, one *only*, avoiding with this the polysemy of words, allowing only a univocal way of understanding the nature of things. This was –and still is– very useful; let's just think in all the problems that polysemy give us when we are trying to define something, and how we are always trying to reduce the multivocal meaning of things in order to understand them better. In synthesis, by the *idion* as a logical category for describing things, the Greeks, and all our culture, created an instrument for controlling any dissemination of meaning and a powerful tool to classify everything in the world by founding what was proper and exclusive to them.

But there was also another characteristic of the *idion* or of the essence, and this is that it is also an-historical. This means that cannot change through time, staying always the same. The problem of change was always a big trouble for the Greeks when they were inquiring about identity, since how can something have an identity if is not *the same* in every moment of time? To have an identity also means to be identical with oneself through time and change. This ultimately means that identity is possible only by

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1998), *On Being and Essence*.

resisting the becoming of time. How this is possible for us, temporal beings? Aristotle is the one that gave the most respectable answer to this problem, by saying that only the accidental attributes change, while the attributes of the essence (the ones that were convertible with the category of the *idion*) stay always the same, are unchangeable. So identity, if we follow our philosophical tradition, 1) is constructed by a gesture of placing frontiers between what we call proper, exclusively ours, and what we call the other, and 2) makes knowledge of thing possible by reducing both the multiplicity of meaning to only one and the natural becoming of things, crystalizing them in an eternal present.

## Identity and the nations

The case of national identity, as we said, is very similar. What makes a 'country' what it is? We could always repeat the gesture of the Greeks and try to find the *idion*, the essential properties, the proper, the exclusive, that that is only ours and no one else's. But how do we do that? I'll use the case of Chile. But let's begin with the word 'National' this time. 'Nation' refers in the language of political philosophy to a social community that has a political organization, a territory and that is sovereign and independent from others political communities. This refers, as we can see, to the political way of administrating a community. But also 'nation' refers to a people, meaning, to a group of human individuals that live together and *share* some things such as language, ethnic, religion, and so on. It can also be synthesise in the problem of what is *common* to a group of people. If we analyse the first meaning of 'nation', we need to look at Chilean political system: it is, like most of countries in the world, a nation-state. But since the definition of an identity, as we have said before, refers specifically to a gesture of placing frontiers, we should then look specifically to our political frontiers.

As is well known, Chile has a very short history. Actually 200 years since independence from Spanish Crown, and 200 years more since it was 'discovered'. Before that there was no 'Chile' and, strictly, there was no 'America' either; just a big piece of land to the west of Europe inhabited by people that the first Europeans that arrived could not even call 'humans', since they were outside of the frontiers or limits of the concept of 'human' that Europe had already built. Of course, humans for European people looked mainly like them: they where white, and since men had a cultural supremacy over women, humans were really, properly speaking, males. So we are a country born out of the ashes of European colonisation. Having this in mind, let's look at this closely:

- a) First of all, Chile, as I have said it before, it is a geopolitical configuration that has the administrative structure of a Nation-Estate. Certainly, the frontier of what we call 'Chilean culture' cannot be reduced to those of what we call the country, nation-estate of Chile. Doing this will reduce the cultural into the political-administrative. As we know, political borders have been set quite arbitrary, decided by wars or international negotiations that don't really reflect completely the *ethos*, or the character of a people and their practices. Political borders also create the figure

of the migrant, a foreign character that arrives to an alien country to live within its borders, but without really belonging inside. The migrant is not really welcomed inside, since she/he doesn't have -yet- the rights and duties that other members of the community have -the citizens or the nationals. This makes them a living example of the sovereign gesture of inclusion/exclusion that operates in every political regime that it is constituted under the borders of the nation-state. We relate to the immigrant but we don't really suppose to mix with him/her. But to think in this way is very complicated for Chile, since actually Chile as all America is culturally shaped by migrations that started with colonization, with a migration that came from Europe. Also, in Chile we have more in common that some people would want with Peruvians and Bolivians, for example, since we all inhabitate the same territory and are in permanent relations of exchange. So to try to extremely differentiate us from them is a task as futile as impossible.

- b) Now let's refer to language: we speak Spanish mainly, since the Spanish crown colonized us. That is our official language and everybody in Chile speaks it. But it is this language exclusive from Chile? Is not like Polish, for example, which is only spoken by polish people. Spanish actually was in the origin of our country the language *of the other*: of the foreigner, of the alien. Before the colonization of America, the people who lived there were speaking many languages that they could call proper: mainly Mapudungun, which is the language of our biggest community of ancestors: the Mapuche. But really there were a lot of native people here before the Spanish came, and they were divided into different communities as well. We had the Chonos, the Changos, the Fueguinos, the Yaganes, the Selknam, Pehuenches, Picunches, Aymaras, Huilliches, etc. Aymaras are a special case, since they lost their own language before the Spanish colonization by another, more antique colonization: the Incas colonization. Their main city was in what now is Perú, but they expanded very fast and effectively all over the Andean region, imposing their own language, Quechua, to every culture around. So, not even the Quechua, which was a native language for the Spanish, were really proper to some of the indigenous people of Chile. The conclusion is that our language, what we call *our own*, has always been the language of the other, and there is no purity in that realm whatsoever that we can fairly claim. We claim to have *one* native language, one language of our own. But this monolinguisism is, as J. Derrida said (cf. 1996), always a monolinguisism of the other.
- c) The *ethnia* is another important factor to talk about identity. With this word we refer mainly to race, to the proper race of a people. But we are a people born out from mix: between the native people first, as I said, between the Spanish and the natives then (and not only Spanish: a big German community arrived to colonize the south part of Chile, more hostile for Spanish but very rich in resources). There were also some mix with the Africans slaves that the Europeans brought to America -specially in the north part of Chile-, but in Chile this mixes were rare and they are not a

big part of our ethnical definition. So we are a society of *criollos* (mix between Indians and Europeans), with some *mulatos* (mix Africans and Europeans) and a few *zambos* (mix between Africans and Indians). So, purity in race has never been a patrimony to us, we could never aspire to be called pure. Every Chilean has multiple types of blood running through their veins. And exclusive genetic pool will be impossible to conceive.

I have been talking here about Chile, but really, can we say that this is only an American reality, or a Colonial reality? Doesn't this happen to every country and to every culture of the world? Aren't we all humans arbitrary enclosed inside political-administrative national frontiers? Aren't all of our languages really languages of the other, that came from the other: from a mix with the other, even if this mix was violent or not, and the language of the other imposed, agreed, received with hospitality, and so on?<sup>2</sup> Haven't already science proved that we are all coming from basically the same genetic pool, so to find differences between races is not just violent, or inappropriate but really impossible? Taking all these points in consideration, we can find some truth in what Benedict Anderson says about nations:

So, with anthropological spirit I propose the following definition of nation: a political community that is imagined as self-limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because even the members of the smallest nation will never meet most of their fellow countrymen. They will not see them, they will not even hear about them, but in the mind of each of them lives the image of their communion (1993:23, emphasis mine).

So, this has to take us to *another* thesis about identity, very far away from the semantic Greek root of the word: away from the proper, the exclusive, the authentic, away from the an-historical as well. For nations are not pure, don't have anything exclusive and they definitely change, essentially not just accidentally, through time.

Of course this is something we knew. But, do we behave like we know? Sometimes I think we don't. Because really this expropriation of what we think is our property -nationality, language, ethnia- has, as Derrida says, a *colonial essence*: it is a result of struggles for domain, struggles to establish hegemonic forms of power over those that every time we consider 'the other' (1996:45). This colonial essence cannot be reduced only to what we know as 'colonial period' in history. Is still happening and happens every time we don't recognize the *other* as other among us. And this is very obvious when we talk about migration, for example. Now all over the world the tendency is to receive the other inside our political and cultural frontier. But are we really *welcoming* them? Are we really been a host, receiving the other with hospitality,

---

<sup>2</sup> Even Polish, for example, as a balto-slavic language was 3500 years ago mixed with aryan languages, and was really impossible to determine a pure origin for it.

or are we being *hostes*, the hostile, the one that receives the other with violence? (This closeness between the host and the *hostes* is very clarifying sometimes now).

When the other is not seeing as conforming a structural part of the 'I', and of 'us' without reducing to it, we tend to fall into the political dynamic of what many philosophers have called the *state of exception* (Schmitt (1985), Agamben (1995; 2003), Negri (2000), among others). This is composed by many gestures of tracing limits and frontiers that exclude or include individuals into political practices in order to administrate their lives and have control over them. One is the gesture of exclusion: we draw a clear line between us and the other, and with this we not only try to clearly differentiate us from him/her, but we also make a hierarchy: we put ourselves in a more privilege place that the other. We can see this not only in the quotidian treat we have with the other, but also as I have also sketched, in our system of law, since we don't give them the same status as subjects of rights that we do with our fellow nationals. Most of the time this exclusion gesture is also an inclusion gesture as well: we include the other just to be able to control him/her in a better and more effective way. So we give the other a number, a code, some differential right, in order to know who they are and where they are just in case the situation turns difficult. Of these political and ethical practices I think we are all very aware since is the subject, the main subject, of our political times. But I'm not sure if we realize that even the good-intentioned gestures of inclusion can be actually dangerous. Even when we want to include the other we can also make him/her some violence, since we accept him/her only under the condition of making him/her *like us, similar* to us; we try to make them fit inside our own frontiers, without really opening ourselves to their otherness: we teach them our language (or maybe we impose it), we turn our practices into a matrix that needs to be follow. We actually force them to cross over to our side of the frontier, instead of questioning the frontier itself: where has been place and how has been drawn. We *absorb* their otherness into our identity.

So, as I would like to point out, neither exclusion nor inclusion can really 'solve' the 'problem' of our inner and unbreakable link to the other, the fact that we are completely constituted by the relation with the other. The other is always resisting the gestures of domination<sup>3</sup>; the other is always avoiding and exceeding our ways of managing his/her life. The other is always between us as other, even if we want to send him/her away or turning identical to us. The fact that all process of colonization (in the wide way I put it before) ended with the massive killing of the others, rather than confirming the possibility of domination really shows the unbreakable resistance of the others, that forces sovereign power to destroy them as an ultimate resources given the impossibility of totally control them. So, as Derrida also says:

Anyone should be able to declare under oath: I have no more than one language and is not mine, my 'own' language is a language inassimilable for me. My language, the only I hear myself speaking and the one I manage to speak, is the language of the other (1996:47).

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Levinas, 1988, *Totalité et infini*.

Derrida is stating with the case of language something that is transversal to the whole the phenomenon of identity: that what we think is ours is not really so, that we are all the time foreigners to ourselves; that I actually, as Paul Ricoeur said, can only see myself as another (2006). The problem, then, will be to see this altered identity as a problem, and not as what it is: *the inevitable relational constitution of ourselves*.

### The food of the other

So, cuisine. Cuisine I think is a very important political space to debate these problems. Why? Because cuisine is probably the main cultural practice of human kind that has been totally shaped by migration and exchange with the other, by border trespassing, by mixing with the foreigner. If it weren't by this total geographical mobility of humans, 'national' cuisines actually would not be as rich as they are. There is no other dimension of culture where this structural and unavoidable relationship with the other can be seen more clearly. As we have said, we know our political frontiers are arbitrary, we know that our language comes in one way or another from the other, we know there is no real limit between ethnos... but we seem to forget! We seem to forget every day, every time the other, the visible other (the one that doesn't have my same passport, that doesn't speak my language, that doesn't have my physical features) faces us and talk to us and makes us feel uncomfortable, even scared, since many times the other appears to us as a danger. Well, this strange lack of consciousness that we suffer some times when we relate to the other seems to go away, disappear, when we try the *food of the other*.

We can probe this importance of cuisine quoting C. Lévi-Strauss, for whom cooking was one of the determinant practices for the emergence of culture and for the shaping of specific forms of life. Cooking, he said, is like a language through which societies 'unconsciously translate their culture' (2003:432), a complex symbolic structure that can effectively show the many ways in which we relate with nature and with others. Following Lévi-Strauss, C. Fischler (1995) also established that one of the most important functions of cooking and eating was actually that of building self-identity. He explains this through what he called 'embodiment principle': 'the movement by which food trespasses the frontier (border) between the world and our body, between the outside and the inside' (1995:65). We can clearly see how this principle actually problematizes the sovereignty of the Greek *idion* by establishing as a condition of possibility for identity not what belongs to the inner structure of the self, but what *trespasses* the frontier that separates it from the exterior. Eating is the introjection of the other in our self, into the very substance of our being, transforming it every time and creating in this way an identity that is not only always already alienated and altered, but also never the *same*<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Fischer (1995) quotes Frazer: 'The wild commonly believed that eating the flesh of an animal or a man he will acquire not only physical but also moral and intellectual qualities that are characteristic of that animal or that man' (Frazer, 1890 [1911]). The same author also stated that, in certain groups, the warriors abstained from eating rabbit or hedgehog for fear of losing its value or

To eat what the foreign brings to our culture is actually to in-bodying his/her food, but also in-bodying her/his culture, since they don't bring just their produce, but their whole symbolic cultural structure. And by this, even if we want it or not, if we know it or not, we are allowing them to become part of our own identity in the most immediate and intense way possible –much faster than through language. The other is in our everyday food, in Poland –in a very much self-identical culture– as well as in Chile –a very mix culture as we have seen–, as well as all over the world. We just need to look up to our restaurants, to the restaurants in any capital city of Europe, for example: Italian, Japanese, Thai, Indians, Turkish, Greeks... They are all around us, and we can try to exclude them from political life, or even to include them and make them like us, to reduce their otherness; but their food will still be there, *because cuisine is a space of cultural and political resistance*. Do you know why? Because we love it, we desire it; it makes our lives better, more desirable to live. We love the food of the other, and probably we love it exactly because it is different! Food, then, is a very important political issue because it always talks about the other, at the same time it talks about us. But, as we have stated before at the beginning of this essay, since food itself is also a dangerous other for what we consider relevant areas of discourses: political, ethical, and also scientific, we have a tendency to silence everything that has to do with it. Food is the subject we don't talk about because we know it is absolutely connected to the other in general: first, to our biological and physiological being, to our animal part –which has always been considered by philosophers as a very dangerous other, an other that we need to dominate, that we need to tame and control–. And second, food is, as I said, always related to that cultural other. To silence the discourse about eating and cooking is to silence the other, but it is also to silence ourselves, since the other is a constitutive part of what we call *our* identity.

## Chilean mixtures

So let's go back to Chile. I want to connect a very big part of Chilean culinary spectrum with this idea of silencing the other. Because food has never been an important issue for us to talk about (we just enjoyed it), we don't have very clearly defined what we understand by "Chilean cuisine". We actually are so jealous of Italians, Chinese, Japanese, and also in our region of Mexican and ultimately Peruvians, who seem to really know what their cuisines are. They know it so well that they are actually exporting their cuisine all over the world! And we? We are still there, eating Peruvian, Mexican, Italian food, but not really valuing our own cuisine. This is very painful for us as well because part of this particular phenomenon can be related to a universal phenomenon: globalization of capitalism and the homogenization of cultures. But it seems for us that this is even more terrible in our case since for us savage capitalism came in a very violent way: by

---

intimidated by the danger, or even that pregnant women avoid certain species that could 'contaminate' their offspring. Meanings associated with the consumption of human flesh are plain: snagging a trait or character of the victim (exocannibalism); to live through his devoured body (endocannibalism)



another colonization, the USA colonization we suffer during the cold war (1973), when the United States government, very concerned for the installation of a socialist government in Chile led by Salvador Allende – and that could become another ‘Cuba’- put together a strategy to destabilize the government and to install a military right wing dictatorship that lasted 18 years. Along all the death and repression and pain this meant for Chileans, another element affected us very deeply: the installation of the so called first ‘neoliberal experiment’, lead by Chicago School of Economics (especially, by Milton Friedman), that built a brutally unsafe political-economical regime that is hurting Chileans till today. With that, of course all the North American culture penetrated very strongly and specially did fast food. But more importantly maybe, we inherited from the American capitalist economical point of view the industrialization of food production, specially referred to agriculture. This has maintained us very apart not just only from traditional culinary practices, but also and more fundamentally, from our terroir, our land, our produces and also our producers, who used to cultivated in much more harmonically ways amazing and unique vegetables that now are, most of them, almost extinct by their displacement of our regular diet by industrialized agriculture and its preferences<sup>5</sup>. This is a terrible example of what happens when food and culinary practices disappear from our political and cultural discourses: they become a weapon for domination and control, for new and more violent ways of managing life. Nevertheless, this ‘America invasion’ couldn’t really completely take over the food culture in Chile, and once again, it brought us ‘materials’ for new mixtures and a possibility to invent new dishes: *completo italiano* is one of them<sup>6</sup>, a traditional American hot-dog but topped with *palta* (avocado), tomato and mayonnaise instead of the traditional USA ingredients. It is called ‘italiano’ or Italian not because it has any relation to Italian cuisine, but because the triple-colored topping –red, green, white- resemble the Italian flag.

So, given this reality, many people in Chile –most of them chefs and journalists- had started several campaigns to remain Chilean people about some of the roots of our cuisine, roots that, very fortunately for us, are very visibly hybrids. For, nevertheless of this multicultural and natural richness of Chilean resources and culinary traditions, people in Chile were and still are kind of ashamed of our cuisine. Actually, a very important *restauranteur* in Chile, Marcelo Cicali (owner of the famous *Liguria Bar*)<sup>7</sup>, has put this better than me. He says that our relation with our cuisine is like the relation one has with a lover in an affair. Secret, hidden, silent. Takes place in the dark. You don’t want anybody to know you have an affair, so you never take your lover out in public. But, still, is the best sex of your life. You love it, you enjoy it, and you don’t want to quit it. So for many years till now, Chileans were treating their cuisine as a hidden lover, eating it only at home, and never with guests, without any care for elegance. Eating sometimes just out from the pot, in the dark, and enjoying it as if it was the silent encounter with a lover. But this shame has really become our doom, first for the construction of a definition of cultural identity that effectively

---

<sup>5</sup> Image nº 1, *Tomate corazón de buey*. For the topic of extinction of edible species by the proliferation of industrial agriculture and its selling-consuming dynamics, Cf. Petrini, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Image nº 2

<sup>7</sup> Image nº 3

welcomes the other inside, and second for creating an also effective movement of emancipation from these dominating industrial practices related to food. We started to spread the message about the urgent need to notice and re-value Chilean cuisine probably around 10 years ago, and have been a great success.

We can see the mix of cultures in our cuisine from the very beginning of it, the clash and harmony between Native and Spanish is everywhere in the cuisine of our traditions. When the Spanish arrived they were eating not exactly what they wanted, but what they could: many researches tell us how terribly the Spanish suffer from hunger and bad nutrition (Sanfuentes, 2010:89), and how hard was for them to get used to culinary traditions of native people living here, and to adapt, later, the endemic produce of this land to the recipes of their memories. The people that lived here of course had in that respect an advantage at first, but unfortunately, European colonization didn't respected very much the culture of those who were already there, and basically they destroyed as much as they could of it, killing most of their people in order to achieve it in a more effective way. They achieved to make their languages obsolete, and so most of their cultural practices and traditions. But there was one thing that resisted: food. So, all of what we consider 'national' dishes have elements from both worlds. I want to give a few examples of this mixture I'm talking about:

- 1) *Cazuela*<sup>8</sup> will be the first since is a very traditional dish, one we could call 'paradigmatic' to Chilean people. Cazuela is just a stew that combine a bunch of ingredients that are traditionally produce in this land, such as corn, pumpkin, potato, green beans, with a piece of meat, mainly beef or chicken. This dish has a Spanish origin, in what they call *Olla podrida*, or 'rotten pot', since the ingredients tend to 'melt' inside the casserole, resembling a rotten substance. Nevertheless, this Chilean version hasn't accepted the 'rotten' part of the Spanish pot, and preserves the whole ingredients, very well differentiated one from another. As in every adaptation of European gastronomy, in Chile we substitute the original ingredients for native ones, and that is the case of corn and potato, mainly.
- 2) Another paradigmatic Chilean dish is *Empanada de pino*<sup>9</sup>, and is, according to a recent social study<sup>10</sup>, the dish that Chileans consider the most representative of their culture. Empanada is present in Spanish cuisine since the thirteenth century and was commonly eat in Europe. It came with the Spanish colonists and became popular among the native people known as Mapuche through the cuisine of the Spanish prisoners. In the seventeenth century its doe fully define, when European wheat flour began to replace the native corn flour (Eyzaguirre, 1986). The filling was a native invention, a mix of onion, finely chopped beef and other species, that was called *pinu or pirru*<sup>11</sup>, word that has mutated into the actual voice 'pino'.

---

<sup>8</sup> Image n°4

<sup>9</sup> Image n°5

<sup>10</sup> Cadem, 2015, Study about '*Chilenidad*' ('Chilenity')

<sup>11</sup> The Chilean historian Eugenio Pereira Salas (1977) says '*pinu*' is the original indigenous voice; others, between them Eyzaguirre (1986), say '*pirru*' is the original voice.

- 3) *Pastel de choclo*<sup>12</sup> has a native origin in humita, a tamal or a doe made with grinded corn and cooked inside their leaves. The Chilean anthropologist Sonia Montecinos says that Pastel de choclo is actually a mix between empanada and this Chilean tamal called humita (2005:105), since it has a corn cover and filling made of beef, chicken an egg. Anyway, this dish was a proper festive dish: it was eaten for great occasions and not as an everyday meal.
- 4) A popular saying that says that, when something or someone is *very* Chilean, he/she is '*más chileno que los porotos*', more Chilean than *porotos*. *Porotos* is the national word for beans, specially refer to a bean stew, and has a *quechua* origin. The *poroto* is a native produce that is present in the daily diet of Chileans since centuries. It has a humble tradition, usually identify with a poor context. So common is the porotos dish in Chile that the famous Chilean poet Pablo de Rokha wrote a whole book in its name: *Rotología del poroto*<sup>13</sup>, a kind of an ode, but with a very political and critic tone (since '*roto*' is the popular name for a poor person). One particular way of preparing the, the *porotos granados*<sup>14</sup> is a dish that many people say is actually unique -that means exclusive- to Chilean culture, since it seems we are the only country that et porotos in their younger state: just after they come out from their green phase. It is a very typically summer meal, since the younger bean appear in that season, and is always accompanied with corn and pumpkin, and matched with fresh red seasonal tomatoes and onion (what we call a *Chilean salad*).
- 5) The other dish that seems to be exclusively Chilean is *Charquicán*<sup>15</sup>: a mashed mixture of potato, corn, peas, some other vegetables, and sun-dried meat known as charqui. This meat was traditionally horse meat, an animal that arrived with the Spanish to this land, but it seems to be a native dish only slightly changed by Europeans -now it is eaten mainly with dried beef rather than horse meat. According to the *Larousse Gastronomique*, it is authentic Chilean dish (*c'est met le plat national chilien*). This has happened at least in one of its editions, directed by the French writer Prosper Merimee (1803-1870); in the latest edition, directed by Robert Courtine, this data is no longer displayed.

These dishes I have quoted are what we can call 'the most traditional' ones. Still, we have other cultural clashes in cuisine that we like to call our 'own', and that is the case of, for example, *Kuchen*<sup>16</sup>, a Chilean version of the traditional German sweet pie. This receipt is typical from the south part of Chile, since there was a huge German immigration and colonization since early 20<sup>th</sup> century on. Another example are Chilean sandwiches, which are very thoughtful variations of the American Hamburger, and were clearly adopted in our culture with the appearance of the soda fountains, the most traditional urban place for

---

<sup>12</sup> Image n°6

<sup>13</sup> Cf. De Rokha, P. (1987) *Rotología del poroto*. In *Nueva Antología de Pablo de Rokha*. Ed. Naín Nómez. Santiago: Sinfronteras.

<sup>14</sup> image n°7

<sup>15</sup> image n°8

<sup>16</sup> image n°9

public food since the 70's. Just to point to a specific case, the *Chacarero*<sup>17</sup> is a very rare and unique sandwich made with beef tomato and green beans. So strange is this dish that was one of the 2015 *Time* magazine best sandwiches in the world.

It seems now time has come for our cuisine. There has been a tendency in the last 5-10 years to re-value what is called "traditional" Chilean cuisine. This tendency has become a reality thanks to a big transversal movement of people involved in the gastronomic scene: chefs, restaurateurs and journalists, but also anthropologist and sociologist, even artist had started to reconfigure the discourse about what we can call "our" cuisine. This discourse has taken the whole public sphere of debate about food, and has spread like butter over bread through the minds and hearts of Chileans. Today you can go out to eat Chilean cuisine in fancy restaurants, or watch in the morning show a chef teaching you how to prepare the food of our grannies, or be invited to a friend's house to eat *porotos*. Even high cuisine has accepted the challenge of re-making or de-constructing what we normally call "Chilean" cuisine. My specific task in Chile now is to think about the problematic production of this national identity through cuisine, asking: How to do this in a proper way? How to do this with justice? How to avoid the violence of every delimitation gesture? How we deal with exclusion and outcast as effects of that gesture? This is not easy for the reasons I have already exposed and probably because of many others. Nevertheless, it is my job as a philosopher to try to think the conditions of possibility of those limits, knowing that to draw them is, in last term, to make a decision. This means that the first thing I'm conscious about is the impossibility to derive those limits from some kind of Chilean "nature", or "essence", since that is not really theoretically sustainable. From the fact that there is a large disagreement among Chileans themselves about who we are, what is our "nature", we assume that trying to configure one will result in an abstract and general structure that will reduce difference in it becoming. This is where Chile is now: ready to show our cuisine and produce to the world. You are all invited.

## Bibliography

- Agamben, G. (1995) *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Einaudi, Torino, 1995
- Agamben, G. (2003) *Stato di Eccezione*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2003, así como Rens van Munster, op. cit.
- Aquinas, Thomas (1998). *On Being and Essence*. London: Notre Dame press
- Anderson, Benedict (1993). *Comunidades imaginadas. Reflexiones sobre el origen y la difusión del nacionalismo*. México: FCE.

---

<sup>17</sup> image n°10

- Aristotle (1982) *Topicos*. En *Organon I*. Madrid: Gredos
  - Aristotle (1985). *Ética a Nicómaco*. Madrid: Gredos.
  - Aristotle (1998). *Metafísica*. Madrid: Gredos.
  - Cadem (2015). *Estudio sobre chilenidad*. Santiago: Cadem.
  - De Rockha, P. (1987) *Rotología del poroto*. In *Nueva Antología de Pablo de Rokha*. Ed. Naín Nómez. Santiago: Editorial Sinfronteras, 1987.
  - Derrida, J (1996) *Le monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine*. París: Galilée
  - Eyzaguirre, H. (1986). *Sabor y saber de la cocina chilena*. Santiago: Andrés Bello.
  - Fischler, Claude (1995), *El (h)omnívoro. El gusto, la cocina y el cuerpo*. Barcelona: Anagrama
  - Levinas. E (1988). *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*. La Haye/Boston/Londres: Martinus Nijhoff publishers
  - Lévi-Strauss, Claude (2003). *Mitológicas III, El origen de las maneras de mesa*. México: FCE
  - Lévi-Strauss, Claude (2003). *Mitológicas I, Lo crudo y lo cocino*. México: FCE
  - Montecinos, S. (2005). *La olla deleitosa. Cocinas mestizas de Chile*. Santiago: Catalonia.
  - Pereira Salas, E. (1977). *Apuntes para la historia de la cocina chilena*. Santiago: Universitaria.
  - Petrini, Carlo. (2007). *Bueno, limpio y justo. Principios de una nueva gastronomía*. Madrid: Polifemo
  - Ricoeur, P. (2006). *Sí mismo como otro*. Madrid: Siglo XXI
  - Sanfuentes, O. (2010). *Morirse de hambre. El hambre del conquistador*. En Sciolla, C. (Ed.) *Historia y cultura de la alimentación en Chile*. Santiago: Catalonia.
  - Schmitt, C. (1985) *Political Theology. Four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
  - Hardt, M. & Negri, T. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
-

This paper was written in 2017

IGCAT's mission is to empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

© IGCAT and the author 2015

You may copy, download or print IGCAT content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from IGCAT publications and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgement of IGCAT and the author is given. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use and/or translation rights should be submitted to [info@igcat.org](mailto:info@igcat.org)

Published by IGCAT [www.igcat.org](http://www.igcat.org)