

Selling Flavor, Selling Fable

The Commodification of Traditional Identity on the Island of Gozo

by Hannah Howard

A B S T R A C T

On the island of Gozo in Malta, the last decade has been host to an explosion of Gozitan heritage festivals and “traditional” restaurants and cultural centers. Promoted by both local governments and businessmen, this spike is tantamount to a highly successful commodification initiative aimed at creating consumable images of local identity and national pride. This movement, characterized largely by a promotion of superior products and taste of place, has served two primary purposes: to increase tourism to the area by creating a desirable market for “unique” or “cultured” food consumption, and to heighten the local or native sense of identity difference and superiority in a larger European context. The relationship between what is seen as the primary reason for promoting these images of identity and the less acknowledged – though no less important – motivations for commodification represent Gozo’s collective effort to find its niche within the “modern” cultures of Malta and Europe at large.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords

identity performance, heritage, invention of tradition, ritual, traditional v. modern, gastronationalism, consumption, anthropology of food

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Introduction

Following independence in 1964, the Maltese people have worked to strengthen their own identity in a larger European and global context. Given the increased focus on ritual and tourism studies of the 1980s and 1990s (Boissevain 1992), the unique experiences of locals and others on the island in regards to identity construction should be reexamined. In the majority of such literature, the “traditional” is contrasted with the “modern,” forcing the two concepts into a dichotomous relationship and inferring that a resurgence of tradition and ritual in periphery nations equates to a return to the past (Herzfeld 1987; Boissevain 1992). An alternative to this incompatibility is offered by Maltese anthropologist Paul Sant Cassia: “Too often it has been assumed that the terms “traditional” and “modern” have relatively fixed and unambiguous meanings, especially when explored from within the framework of the nation state” (2000:282).

Sant Cassia thus suggests that the relationship between the two is being redefined: “[in] societies on the margins of Europe, modernity is increasingly pursued through the

celebration of traditionalism” (2000:282). Traditionalism is structured as a pivotal piece of cultural identity within the web of modern relations and social patterns. This points to a larger trend of promoting heritage as a significant orientation device within diversified modern identities. “The modern point of view needs to discover exoticism in its own past” (Billiard 2006: 122). Recognizing that the term “modern” is itself ambiguous, these narratives have been added to such conceptions by modeling them as “experiences of discovery,” opening up the possibility for constant identity change and redefinition (Sant Cassia 2000:282).

In this paper, I put forth two primary observations intended to establish and guide my research and conclusions. First and foremost, I suggest that Sant Cassia’s theories of celebration and the subsequent bolstering of national identity are not the only factors at play. Rather, traditionalism is also systematically created and promoted as a means to bring about culturally significant modernity through tourism and commoditized identity. Second, I contend that this structure is clearly visible in the ever-expanding traditional foods market. Leaders in the traditional food and heritage movement offer tangible and consumable markers of Gozitan identity, simultaneously directed (albeit through different modes) at locals and tourists. Ultimately, this movement helps to create a narrative of desirable traditions, interesting rituals, and an identity that is uniquely Gozitan.

Methods & Data: Working on Gozo

I came to Gozo as a student researcher in the Off the Beaten Track Field School, hosted by Expeditions, Research in Applied Anthropology¹ and sponsored by Washington and Lee University², in the summer of 2015. I originally thought my project would concern a simple evaluation of what these traditional foods meant to Gozitans; however, I soon realized that there was much more at play in the construction of tradition and edible heritage. I became fascinated with the political, social, and economic factors influencing and being influenced by

notions of traditional food. I spent my days observing waiters, chefs, and customers in various “traditional” restaurants in multiple towns on the islands. I supplemented these observations with those done at high tourism areas in order to determine the language surrounding food and identity in both the local and tourist populations. When consulting individuals in these settings, I informed them fully of my research intentions, as well as gained their consent to use their opinions in my final analysis. Names of people and some places, however, have been changed for anonymity.

Early on in my research, I happened upon a restaurant promoting itself as the best and most traditionally accurate Gozitan restaurant on the island. I met the restaurant owner, a spirited middle-aged man, who grew up watching his father cook the “dishes of the homeland.” He was sure to tell me that his cooking and eating preferences made him “a true patriot.” With this, he became both my favorite informant and my first experience with the nationalist pride involved in Gozitan cooking. This theme continued throughout my conversations with Gozitan locals. As observations turned towards interviews and participation, I became even more aware of the nationalist bent in the creation and promotion of local cuisine.

At the end of my time in Gozo, I compared my personal data from interviews and observations with more concrete and standardized information available on the island. I planned trips to a variety of cultural sites that I deemed relevant to my work. This included local folklore museums (only those which in some part mentioned patterns of food production and consumption) and multiple agro-tourism sites (including the Gozitano Agricultural Market, Magro Food Village/Savina Creative Center, and the Ta’ Mena Traditional Estate). These locations provided me with historical facts, evidence of current production and consumption patterns, and the opportunity to converse with more people involved in the industry.

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A Note on Gozo versus Malta

This paper focuses purely on Gozo. The country of Malta is made up of three islands: the main island, Malta, the “little island,” Gozo, and the largely uninhabited island, Comino³. While the inhabitants of the country all share a national identity, a language, and many customs, there are important differences between Gozo and Malta that make it impossible to extend some aspects of this analysis to the nation as a whole. According to one informant, the two locations are relationally structured in a series of dichotomies: traditional versus cosmopolitan, agricultural versus industrial, small communities versus cities, leisure versus bustle.

These differences between the islands have two primary consequences that affect this research. First, Gozo seems better suited to the promotion of traditionalism, or so its inhabitants often claim. The landscapes and cultural markers of the little island indicate a culture somehow seemingly untouched by the passing of time, in contrast to its neighboring island. Furthermore, this resurgence of traditionalism is helpful to Gozo. It praises the lifestyle on the island and awards it a proper place in the “modernity” towards which Malta has been working. The invention of tradition and appreciation of heritage seen in the last decade on the part of both locals and outsiders makes Gozo desirable in the international and domestic spheres. I spoke to many visitors to the island who asserted that they could not get the same quality of products on Malta as on Gozo. Said one woman, “It is city life at home. But Gozo knows the traditions, so we come here.”

The people of Gozo exhibit not only national pride, but also an intense love for their region. I was once told by a local man in the bay, “No, I’m not Maltese first. I am Gozitan.” He is certainly not alone. There is a reason why so many locals speak of the “taste of Gozo,” and not the “taste of Malta.” The owner of a traditional foods store in Victoria advertises the shop as a place for only the best Gozitan products, though many products do sport a general Malta label. Furthermore, one of my primary informants owns a restaurant whose menu and advertising highlight flavors not of Malta in general, but specifically of Gozo. The primary agricultural market and food sharing cooperation is aptly called The Gozitano.

There is also a concerted effort by the government to promote heritage throughout the entire country, but there seems to be further effort to promote these images on Gozo. Of the 68 local councils in the country, 14 are positioned on Gozo. This ratio is high given the comparison in actual population. Furthermore, while every council is required to host at least one cultural event every year, the Gozitan councils often choose to host more. This could be because images of tradition and identity legitimately fit into the myth and heritage of Gozo more fluidly. On the other hand, it might be said that the Gozitan locals are simply buying into and producing the heritage ideology more than the Maltese locals. Regardless of which of these is accurate – or if both are – the taste, identity, and invented tradition I discuss as commodities in this paper are most accurately those of Gozo, and not the Maltese nation as a whole.

Tradition, Gastronationalism, and the Tourist Gaze

“It seems that a real *tradition mania* has invaded Malta,” inspiring a revitalized fervor and appreciation for heritage (Billiard 2006:121). This tradition mania, however, should spark a healthy level of skepticism given that “tradition is neither self-evident nor transparent. It needs to be identified, packaged, and made the subject of discretion and taste” (Sant Cassia 2000:291). Indeed, the celebrated tradition on Gozo is not an unmediated occurrence.

Discussions with local councils and residents of Gozo point to a facilitation of heritage on the island. Walking around the tourist hub of Xlendi Bay, however, it is also evident that tradition mania has not only benefitted the locals’ sense of identity and place. Tourism, “the single most important sector of the Maltese economy,” has thrived under the revitalization of ritual as more and more visitors have sought out an “authentic” experience of the island (Sant-Cassia 1999:248). This preliminary data thus suggests two distinct, though equally important, purposes of traditional food promotion in Gozo. Remembering that “material things lend themselves to investigations of paradox,” we must look at why it is that both functions of the traditional food movement exist, as

³ According to 2014 estimations of the nearly 450,000 residents of the nation itself, only about 37,000 live on the island of Gozo. Comino has a permanent population of four.

well as how they are originated and perpetuated (Rosenberger 2007:340).

Both functions of food and fable narratives on Gozo point to an “invention” of Gozitan heritage as a means for reproducing images of identity for various audiences. Invented tradition refers to “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). Continuity with the past gives locals a sense of legitimacy in their claims to heritage and traditional identity; simultaneously, this supposed continuity with the past creates the chance for outsiders to have an authentic experience within the community.

What invented tradition first encourages is an elevation of self-identity over the identity of the *other* – here meaning tourists, other Europeans, and even Maltese from Malta rather than the little island. This elevation is not unique, as many nations use invented tradition to fight against the growing themes of globalization and the concerns of global uniformity associated with it⁴. As they attempt to differentiate and assert themselves by clinging to a structured view of the past and its place within the present as heritage, proponents of invented tradition increasingly fit their narratives into the shared values or systems of a group or nation. Whether through explicit creation or simply rediscovery and revival, invented tradition therefore bestows a cultural premium on memory, as it is “selective[ly] related to contemporary social relations or aspirations” (Macdonald 2013:28).

These manifest in cultural memory complexes including historical sites, cultural events, festas⁵, heritage fairs⁶, public and private rituals, and the ongoing discourse of a romanticized past.

By formalizing an appreciation for their past within the realities of their present, Gozitans have internalized a sense of unique and localized pride in their identity and origins. This purpose is easily promoted by the chosen vehicle of traditional foods: “Food is materially and sensually evocative, a powerful conveyor of memory through its synaesthetic effects” (Macdonald 2013:123). Anthropologist Nancy Rosenberger argues “the material item of food [is] amenable to nation-building as national cuisine,” (2007:339). Foods may become easily ritualized because of their basis in passed down oral or experiential traditions. People often reminisce about an earlier time during food preparation, consumption, and conversation – either through referencing familial ties or local legends and origin stories. The rise of this “gastronationalism,” or the intimate linkage between food, taste and “new forms of identity politics invigorated by an increasingly homogenous environment,” encourages the banding together of individuals in order to form more “links... [to] their cultural pasts” (DeSoucey 2010:433-4). These repurposed linkages root the people in an imagined history that is easily manifested in social exchanges and consumed by social actors⁷.

Of course, proponents also use this discourse to orient the state within the regional or international sphere. For many years, the Westernization of foods in peripheral

⁴ What is most interesting about this phenomenon, in my opinion, is that it seems to pivot on a very Westernized idea of celebrating heritage. The arbiters of “culture” in these new settings now wish to express their unique history in a very standardized method. By doing so, they are hopeful that an attractive version of their identity will be easily translated for and consumed by Western tourist audiences, thereby increasing their own cultural capital.

⁵ These are traditional celebrations in Malta and Gozo usually associated with religious figures or holidays. They take place during the summer season in villages around the island; during the high season, a festa can be found in Gozo nearly every week. They are often marked by fireworks, live bands, and parties long into the evenings.

⁶ These include a variety of festivals, usually revolving around some kind of traditional dish or ritual. Examples include the fig festival and Gharb Traditional Foods Fair.

⁷ This observation is representative of the idea of “imagined communities” expressed by Benedict Anderson in his famous work on nationalism (1983). A deeper look into this theory is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to recognize the importance of collective imaginings in bringing people and identities together. To say that the community encouraged by Gozitan traditional food is partially imagined is not to say that it is not a very real part of daily life for people on the island.

nations was trending towards complete takeover. Many states believed that such acculturation was necessary for agency on the international stage. Thus, national pride was facilitated by constructing a state powerful enough to be known or respected by the dominant West. However, more recent relations have shown that power and identity within the international sphere is increasingly linked to the desirability of difference. The modern world has become one of nostalgic revivals as means for gaining cultural capital (Sant Cassia 2000; Billiard 2006).

As appealing as a sense of superiority and distinctiveness may be to the locals and their individual and collective identities, these qualities are equally appealing to external markets. Tourism on the island is driven by the common conception that Gozo is a place of unparalleled heritage and attractive tradition. These imaginings of authenticity and shared history operate as draws to outsiders. "History is becoming business; money is being made out of memory; and [Gozo] is turning into a market of heritage attractions" (Macdonald 2013:109).

Specifically, notions of a national cuisine are easily translatable into attractive items and images for consumption. They are engaging, interactive, and relatable while also being palpable items for consumption – "an asset... and item of movable cultural property" (McKercher and du Cros 2002:65). Thus by trying national cuisine, tourists feel that they digest – physically and mentally – not only a material piece of the culture, but also a symbol of the culture's values and identity – a seemingly objective "audible account" of heritage – as opposed to those products of heritage that are subtle or even rather indiscernible to the outside (Macdonald 2013:62).

Though this cultural tourism occupies an important spot within the social system on Gozo, it is laden with controversy. Local proponents of edible heritage are hesitant to admit to the role that tourism and economics actually play in the celebration of tradition on the island. This is because "tourism [itself] is a mystifying subject... deprecated by almost everyone. Even tourists themselves belittle tourism as it connotes something commercial, tacky, and superficial" (Bruner 2005:7). These ideas about tourism spur on the disdain with which many Gozitan traditionalists speak of commodification, outsiders, and inauthenticity. Despite whatever qualms locals may purport to have about tourism, however, they are undeniably dependent on it.

Patriotic Eating on the Island of Gozo

"To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in"
(Edward Casey 1996:18).

The revitalization of tradition as an important aspect of modern identity has led to the rediscovery of foods considered either historically Maltese (such as pastizzi, a cheese pastry) or strikingly original because of the combinations of influences (such as *fira*, described as the Gozitan version of pizza by multiple informants). By using both of these elements, members of local councils, restaurant owners, and local customers celebrate the heritage of Gozo through their production and consumption patterns. Producers especially consider themselves to be the purveyors of patriotism and identity. As such, the narratives of edible heritage on the island are intended to increase such sentiments and draw attention away from the role of other influences, such as tourism and economic advancement.

As has been mentioned, one of my most helpful informants was very proud of the dishes he served at his local restaurant in Xlendi Bay. This pride originated from his strong sense that his food had history and local significance. His restaurant is representative of the idea that "in heritage, it is through place... that the past is made present" (Macdonald 2013:94). His nationalist attitudes endow his food with a pride of place, which becomes entrenched with the pride in the food itself, and thus increases the cuisine's legitimacy in the eyes of its consumers.

I had not been on the island very long when I first met him, and I was immediately impressed with his enthusiasm in discussing his foods with me. He quickly offered me a menu, but as soon as he discovered I was a student, he sat down across from me stating, "Oh so you want to interview me." The restaurant is the culmination of his lifelong work in the local food business. Growing up, he says that he learned "magnificent cuisine" by watching his father and grandfather cook. "I use only the best quality, because this is what makes my food authentic. These imported restaurants can't cook genuine Gozo food. There is no quality, no love." He indicated to me (though of course the influence of my own position in this exchange should not be forgotten) that his preparation is unique amongst the rest of the island, where tradition has been tainted. When asked about any

of his products or dishes, he unwaveringly claims to have the very best.

Interestingly, however, I found very similar products in many of the traditional food markets across Gozo. In fact, the tradition of food on the island appears to have been invented so as to be standardized amongst various sellers, a common result according to Hobsbawm (1983). This standardization could be due to the fact that many believe the dishes should be made in the historical style. Many producers I encountered told me that the production of traditional foods can only be honest when produced with a certain patriotic attitude or flair. These connect the food more deeply to its historical roots and thus amplify the taste experience and enjoyment from consumption. My informant describes this sentiment best, saying that he does his work “wholeheartedly. I love making this food. It’s a celebration of what Gozo is. Maybe you can find a Gozitan menu somewhere else, but it won’t be the same.” Additionally, one of the businessmen involved with the Gozitano Agricultural Market, echoed these views: “People that make traditional Gozitan food do it because they love it. It helps them know who they are.”

Efforts by producers such as those working in the market or in traditional restaurants and stores have been definitive for the identity of many Gozitans. One owner of a market in Munxar noted the surge of traditional food, festivals, and pride in recent years. “More and more recently, there are people who hold on to the traditions.” She sells many universally essential goods as well as imports in her market, but still keeps some traditional products and certainly knows where to purchase others. Though she does not herself participate in the celebrated cultivation of tradition and heritage, during many of our conversations she discussed how this celebration has been good for Gozo: “It’s nice for people to know what the history and the tradition is. I think they like that, and it makes us different.” This allows even those who do not act as producers of tradition to participate in the consumption of images of identity put forth by others with more influence.

I was also connected with a home cook in her mid-50s. Her parents’ generation had been embedded in traditionalism and the old ways of preparing and consuming national cuisine. Interestingly, however, she would not call it a specific cuisine at that time. “People ate the same things because it was what they had. I think that was all it was, but now we are calling it ‘tradition.’ ” She therefore believes that the young people in favor of

heritage resurgence are searching for a way to inject their own identity with things seen as more uniquely Gozitan. “It is young people who are so fascinated with the heritage. They did not get so much of it from their parents (my generation) so they promote it now. This nostalgia is giving them more context than their history books.” By pushing for patriotic eating on the island, Gozitans “inculcate certain values and... imply continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). This continuity strengthens notions of collective identity by giving it a foundation and legitimacy that would otherwise be missing.

Selling Tradition: The Use of Heritage in Gozitan Tourism

“A unique asset, culture, or building is not a tourist attraction unless its tourism potential is actualized by enabling its consumption... cultural tourism thus represents the result of wider social changes by which cultural provision is becoming commercialized” (McKercher and du Cros 2002:102).

Despite the promotion of a uniquely Gozitan cuisine as ostensibly being for the locals, the villages of Gozo benefit from the outsider attention. Tourism, as the largest industry in the country, receives much attention for its potential as a development tool. From charter buses used for public transportation to the influx of English maps and guides all over the island, it is clear that Gozitans have embraced (at least on some level) the benefits of tourism for their small nation. What is fascinating about this embrace, however, is that it is shrouded in a reticence to discuss tourism and the commodification of identity implied therein. Whether this is because of true discomfort amongst the locals regarding commodification of their collective identity is unclear.

The tensions between heritage and tourism exhibit themselves most in the traditional food shops and agrotourism sites of Gozo. Where many restaurants and markets are able to effectively market themselves for local consumption and patriotic spirit, these other sites find such an objective more problematic, primarily because their customer bases are so filled with tourists. One shop owner explained, “I sell to locals and tourists. It’s nice because locals love the tradition already and I get to teach the tradition to the others that come.” This tended to be

the norm across the food shops I observed, especially because the bulk of these are in Victoria, the capital.

In addition to a different customer base, these sites offer the opportunity for continuous consumption, rather than the single consumption event offered by a restaurant. For example, products for continued use, such as canned goods and packaged items, are available in specialty stores. Agrotourism sites offer ideas of memory and education, which can be revisited again and again. Ultimately, these locations veer away from the singular experience of dining on one traditional meal and thus more heavily ascribe to the spirit of cultural tourism than the examples of patriotic eating on the island.

A necessary aspect of ascribing to this cultural tourism ideal is the creation of a fully engrossing event for the consumer. The atmosphere of stores and sites on the island exemplifies the value of this behavior. Owners decorate the exteriors of these shops with flags, signage touting traditional cuisine that allows you to “experience” Gozo, and images of traditional looking scenes. They create an experience largely marked by assumed authenticity and idyllic nostalgia. Though each shop plays up this special aspect and claims to be the most authentic or patriotic, they offer a similarly standardized array of products. In most cases this includes nougats, capers, sundried tomatoes, carob products, small biscuits, bean spread, honey, and olives. A few stores may offer various products in addition to these but a visitor would be hard-pressed to find a shop without the products listed above.

Though any person – local, tourist, or otherwise – can technically purchase from these stores, they are angled towards the tourist gaze (McKercher and du Cros 2002). At these stores and markets, however, there seems to be an interesting dichotomy between people openly positioning themselves towards this tourist gaze and those focused on Gozitans. Despite the fact that I was in the store with an Australian couple and a British man, the proprietor of a food store in Victoria told me that they were creating something unique and non-commercial for Gozitans: “Cooking and eating on Gozo is a family affair. Our products support that.”

There are also those who recognize and openly appreciate the role that tourism plays. My informant from the agricultural market was seemingly the person most comfortable with “selling heritage.” He was quick to address the dual purpose of identity and business: “Of course we have created a market by promoting tradition.

It can so easily be exploited as an asset to tourists.” His presence on the opposite end of the spectrum of recognition is not surprising given his role within the traditional foods market. He has been pivotal in organizing a renewed celebration of heritage, one that is actively aware of the benefits it can bring to the island. He also attends many events on the island concerned with how to market tradition as a business endeavor. Additionally, he is one of the main proprietors of the Gozitano Agricultural Co-Op and a leader within a group of farmers attempting to cultivate new products on the island, allowing the expansion of dishes in the national cuisine.

The Gozitano is one of two main agrotourism sites in Gozo, the second categorical location for an exchange between heritage and economy. Agrotourism sites are an expanding market in the European heritage complex (Mitchell 1996; Nickerson, Black and McCool 2001). The other agrotourism site on the island is the Magro Food Village, which is connected with the Savina Creative Center. The Gozitano is a collective of various farmers and traditional foods producers on the island. They host weekly markets, support traditional foods cultivation, and occasionally host special events for the celebration of edible heritage. The Magro Food Village also is publicized as an authentic site for heritage and food tradition on the island, but its core business is in fact a tomato factory. They purchase tomatoes from local farmers, process them for a variety of products, and package those products for consumption both in Gozo and the UK.

Tours of the factory are offered at Magro. The tour begins with a romanticized video about the founding of the company by the Magro brothers, as well as the development of national cuisine on the island. It harkens back to ages gone by, implying that at Magro the past is felt in the present. To seal this image further, Magro recently developed the Savina Creative Center. Savina is used as a production center separate from the primary business of the tomato factory. Here, they sell traditional foods, seasonings, lace products, historical texts, and even offer traditional cooking demonstrations for tourists. Employees offer samples and encourage tourists to experience and enjoy the living tradition. More than any other company on the island, the combined unit of Magro and Savina has made an incredibly profitable business based almost entirely on the idea of Gozitan heritage.

The Problem of Authenticity

“Heritage, by these accounts, is a noisy cultural form, an artificially manufactured memory practice, dominated by the market, which risks drowning out ‘authentic’ relationships with the past” (Macdonald 2013:109).

Dilemmas over the boundaries of tradition and the selling of heritage are representative of the large question overhanging any discussion of tradition – is the idea of the past being celebrated truly authentic? The relationship between the goals of edible heritage and business as described in the sections above exist in a tense exchange over this question. Though both nationalist pride and touristic development can be charted back to the same impetus of food tradition and nostalgia, the final products of these patterns are largely expressed through contention. “Put overly crudely, the market is typically considered inauthentic – as concerned only with profit; and heritage is valued for its promise to provide ‘something more,’ ‘something real’ – the authentic. So when the two come together, this is oxymoronic and unsettling” (Macdonald 2013:110).

The gaze of both audiences inherently desires the greatest level of authenticity. Yet ensuring, or even defining, what is authentic is problematic. “The idea that commodification itself renders heritage inauthentic is odd, for usually marketing, advertising, and so forth are considered extrinsic to the objects... [while] authenticity is thought of as intrinsic to the thing” (Macdonald 2013:119). One of the leaders of the Gozitano is a good example of someone whose personal philosophies bridge the contention between the two arenas; thus he resolves some aspects of this problem of authenticity. Though he is a champion for authentic (by his definition) heritage, he does not see that authenticity as threatened by discourses of tourism and development. However, he seems to be the outlier. Most people on the island, tourists and locals alike, seem to see the combination of the two aims of food heritage as ironic to say the least.

My discussions with the restaurant owner for example, were more focused on authenticity and pride in his own history and culture than on any other business or marketing influences. “I have this restaurant because I love it and I want other Gozitans to share my love,” he

says. “There are other people doing it for money... they lose the feeling behind it. Not me.” Other storeowners appeared to agree with him that in order to be authentic, any traces of commodification of local identity had to be ignored or pushed to the background. Most interesting in the discussion of these aims on the island, however, are the government officials. The secretary of the local council of Munxar and Xlendi explained in regards to food festivals and heritage celebrations: “Our history is so important. That is why we have these [events]... [to] remind people where they came from, who they are. That authentic celebration draws others in too, but it is for us.” We are thus left with a series of questions: are any representations of this identity narrative really seen as authentic in the eyes of locals and tourists? What aspects characterize these edible symbols of identity as either truly Gozitan, merely a show, or both? More importantly, is it possible to delineate a difference? These questions bring to the foreground a central debate of invented tradition at large. The term alone implies a dichotomy – that there must be some set of “real” traditions that offset those which are invented for specific purposes (Hobsbawm 1983; Macdonald 2013). While this implication has often been a critique of invented tradition theories, the questions of what can be authentic brought to bear by the discussion are important for understanding how tradition and heritage are celebrated by insiders and marketed for outsiders (McKercher and du Cros 2002).

Ultimately, it seems that Hobsbawm and Macdonald’s analyses give us an important proposal: authenticity itself may be an outdated and impossible goal in the modern landscape of European memorylands. As groups move further away from the heritage and history with which they assume strict continuity and as the global cultural economy expands and intertwines even more, it becomes more difficult to objectively or accurately say what defines the past. Accordingly, it is nearly impossible to argue for anything resembling neutrality when structuring the past within the present.

Conclusion

The propagation of Gozitan “edible heritage” for both local and tourist experiences illuminates again how tradition has become “trendy” (Billiard 2006). It is both an influencer in exchanges on the island (local-local, local-tourist, tourist-tourist) and an object influenced by other patterns of consumption and organization. Within the geographic, economic, and cultural landscape of the

island of Gozo, tradition thus becomes a significant orientation device for tourists and locals alike.

This tradition has certainly been presented through a variety of symbols and avenues over time, but the use of food as commodity and vehicle for such symbolic identity is one of the most observable and explainable. The relationship between traditional food restaurants, stores, and agrotourism sites creates a memory-scape in which both audiences seek to define themselves and their experiences. By promoting these heritage experiences, the gatekeepers of Gozitan history and tradition ensure that locals internalize images for the increase of their own gastronomical pride and difference and tourists consume tradition as a commodity that improves their notions of cultural exchange. Although this duality ultimately calls into question the possible existence of authenticity, understanding the interplay of seemingly contradictory goals is important for developing theories concerning the rightful position of the past in current definitions of the present.

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