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The Taste Remembered. On the Extraordinary Testimony of the Women from Terezín

Abstract: The article presents an attempt to combine *food studies* (also termed the anthropology of food) with scholarly reflection regarding memory. The analysis focuses on the book entitled *In Memory's Kitchen. A Legacy from the Women of Terezin* [ed. Cara de Silva 2006], containing recipes for Jewish dishes written down by women from the Teresienstadt ghetto. But some dozen recipes that have survived do not make it a cookbook, which is essentially meant to be functional. It is more of a remembrance, a testament, and also a source of knowledge of culture at a given point in time. It is also a testimonial document. Recipes collected by de Silva tell much about their authors. They define their roles as wives and mothers. In addition, the Terezin notes point to a culinary heritage, the religious principles of food preparation and the social and economical conditions that shaped the culinary preferences and the diets of women locked in the ghetto. The article demonstrates that the actions of preparing and consuming food are a constantly repeated practice, which is connected in a network of relationships with other practices. This practice it is anchored in the everyday life, embedded in the family's biography and fused with childhood memories. Food is presented as a sign of identity, the social bond and the community of family and friends, and also as a gift that serves to uphold these ties.

Key words: Theresienstadt, food and memory, recipes, heritage.

Terezín is the name of a small town and a military fortress situated ca. 60 km north of Prague. The construction of the fortress began in 1790 by order of the emperor of Austria Joseph II, known for his many reforms. Named after the emperor's mother Maria Theresa, the stronghold had a defensive purpose. However, it lost its strategic importance after 1879,

when a secret treaty was signed between Austria and Prussia. The fortress was never under siege. In the mid-19th century it was transformed into a jail for political prisoners. In December 1914 three members of the Young Bosnia movement responsible for the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo were incarcerated there. World War II brought the darkest time in the history of Terezín, since in 1939 the town became a part of the German-occupied Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The urban structure of Terezín was composed of two elements: a sizable walled town and the so-called Little Fortress incorporated into the system of the walls. In 1940, a transit camp (Familienlager Theresienstadt) was set up in the citadel. It held members of the resistance and the elite, priests and war prisoners. The majority of the inmates were Czech, but there were also some citizens of Poland, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. In the course of its existence the camp processed more than 32,000 people. Most of them did not stay long, but were sent on to concentration camps, e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau. The camp claimed 2600 lives; most victims died as a result of poor sanitation, hunger and disease.

The Little Fortress was the stage for two overlapping tales: first it held the heroes of the liberation movements of the Spring of Nations, and then the prisoners of World War II. The entire compound spreads over the area of several hectares and comprises low, sturdy buildings of red brick arranged in a symmetrical polygonal shape. To the left of the entrance there is a gate crowned with the inscription *Arbeit macht Frei*, leading to the main camp grounds. During the war, this part contained office buildings, the perpetually overcrowded cells, a model washroom (built to prove that the camp maintained a high standard of hygiene), an infirmary, a dispensary and a solitary confinement cell. Behind a low gate leading beyond the primary walls there is the execution ground, where prisoners were shot without trial, with a gallows that was used only once. It must be mentioned that the compound contained also a cinema for the personnel, a swimming pool, military barracks for the SS, rooms for the camp commandants and jail guards, and workshops where the prisoners worked. The furthest courtyard to the east, built by the Nazis in 1943, was surrounded by group and solitary cells.

For three years after the war, the Little Fortress served as a prison for war criminals and as an evacuation camp for Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia. Later it was used as barracks for Czechoslovakian soldiers. For a long time the existence of the camp was hidden from the general public.

The other part of Terezín, that is the walled town, has a different history. In the 19th century, it served as a garrison town with some 7,000 inhabitants. Heinrich Himmler ordered the town to be converted into a Jewish ghetto (Ghetto Theresienstadt) in November 1941. Jews, initially brought there only from Bohemia and Moravia, and later also from Germany and other German-occupied territories – the Netherlands, Denmark, and in the final stage of the ghetto's existence also from Slovakia and Hungary, were accommodated in the former barracks. Very soon there was not enough room for newcomers, so in 1942 the non-Jewish residents of the town were evicted and the entire area was converted into a ghetto. The internal affairs of the ghetto were managed by a Jewish "self-government", which had some, albeit very narrow and constrained, authority over selected aspects of everyday life. This made it possible to organise a limited mutual-help network and equally limited education system for children and to create some religious and cultural life for the community. Although men did not live together with women and children, it was possible for family members to meet. The inhabitants of the ghetto were allowed to keep their hand luggage and wear civilian clothing. They did not have to shave their heads and could receive letters and packages.

For foreign relation purposes and in national propaganda, Theresienstadt was presented as an "exemplary ghetto", the model for a new type of a Jewish settlement: a family camp. The Western public was to receive a very clear message that Jews were not being mistreated; that they could work as usual, send letters at the post office, do shopping, attend concerts. The delegation of the International Red Cross that inspected Theresienstadt in 1944 noticed neither the overcrowded dormitories where Jews were dying of exhaustion due to the ruthless work and starvation, nor the side track built in 1942–1943 and used to transport Jews to death camps situated in Poland and Germany, or the fact that the park, the children's

playgrounds and the cafés were simply elements of a purely propagandist campaign of the so-called beautification and that they were very far removed from the awful living conditions in the ghetto. Theresienstadt was the stage set for propaganda movies that expertly handled the carefully manufactured props – one of the buildings acquired a signboard with the inscription "School". Since the interior featured neither desks nor blackboards, another signboard was hung next to it. It read: "Winter break".

The final weeks of the ghetto's existence were tragic. While food delivery became scarce and irregular, Theresienstadt had to accommodate 15,000 new prisoners arriving on the so-called Death Marches; they were evacuees from camps towards which the front line had advanced. On 3rd May 1945, Theresienstadt came under the control of the Red Cross; the inmates were finally freed on 8th May, when Soviet troops entered the city. In the four years of the ghetto's existence, 87,000 Jews had been transported from it. Less then four thousand of them survived the war [see e.g. Brenner 2009; Lederer 1983; Troller 1991].

Many members of the Jewish community were well aware that the ghetto in Terezín was only the first stage in the chain of atrocities that awaited them. Their only weapon, and a means to maintain some semblance of normality, was art. Literary works, poetry, drawings, theatrical plays and music scores created by the prisoners have survived to become an extraordinary testimony of their experience. Documents, notes, diaries, letters and chronicles saved and discovered by a lucky chance are, to paraphrase the title of Ruth Thomson's book, "voices from Terezín" [Thompson 2013]. They contain unique stories that show the strength of human will [see e.g. Dicker-Brandeis 1991; Greek 1978; *I Never Saw Another Butterfly…* 1994; Karas 1985; Schwertfeger 1989; *We Are Children Just the Same…* 1995; Willoughby 2003; Wix 2010; Zapruder 2002].[1]

One of these is the story of a Czech Jewish girl from Brno, Dina Gottliebova. Formerly a student in the academy of fine arts, she painted Snow White and the Seven Dwarves on the wall of a barrack in Terezín. Her

1 A sizable collection of documents related to the functioning of the Terezín ghetto and the live of its inhabitants may be found in the museum in Terezín, which is also a memorial site, Památník Terezín [http://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz/cz].

life became the subject of Lidia Ostałowska's documentary entitled *Farby wodne* (Watercolours) [Ostałowska 2011]. Dina was transported from Theresienstadt to the concentration camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, initially ordered to paint numbers on dormitory walls, she became a portrait painter instead. She was commissioned by Dr Mengele to record the faces of the "gypsy crossbreeds" on whom he was conducting research. After the liberation of Auschwitz, her watercolours came to a young girl named Eva, a Hungarian Jewess. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum bought all these paintings from her in 1963. A few years later their author was discovered. Dina Gottliebova had survived the war and was living in the USA married to Art Babbitt, a famous artist from the Disney Studio.

Another artist that came to live in Theresienstadt was Helga Hošková, a very talented twelve-year-old from Prague, who was transported to the ghetto with her parents. Helga had been drawing and painting from early childhood, so it comes as no surprise that she began to record the reality of the lives of Czech Jews, following in this her father's advice: "Paint what you see" [Veissova 2013: 4]. She abandoned imaginary childish subjects and started a unique chronicle, drawing in her school notebooks with pencil, crayons and paints which she managed to smuggle in or get hold of later. She painted people queuing for bread, the primitive washrooms, a girl suffering from tuberculosis, the crowd at the surgery. One of the drawings shows the birthday of Francka, a friend whom Helga knew from before the war. Subsequent pictures show both girls as small children in 1929, then together on a bunk bed in 1943, then finally walking with baby strollers in 1957. Alas, the last scene was only a wish; Francka died in Auschwitz before her fifteenth birthday.

In Theresienstadt, it was forbidden to take photographs or paint genre scenes, yet the Germans did not notice what the slight teenager was doing. In September 1944, it was announced that 5000 men were to be sent away to build a new ghetto. A few weeks later Helga and her mother also left the camp. At the last moment the girl managed to give her diary and her drawings to her uncle, who walled them up in one of the barracks. Helga went through three camps in succession: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Freiberg and Mauthausen. She had no way to draw anymore there, but she

survived to become a celebrated painter. Many years later her memoirs and drawings were published as *Helga's Diary. A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp* [Veissova 2013]. Helga Hošková explained in the foreword that although the diary was written in the language of a child, full of mistakes, lengthy and extremely naive, she specifically asked for no editing corrections to be made, since any alterations would be to destroy the authenticity of her tale, which she considered to be of the utmost importance.

Another book written with the emphasis on authenticity is *In Memory's Kitchen. A Legacy from the Women of Terezín* [2006]. It contains recipes for Jewish dishes. It is not an ordinary cookbook, however, but a unique testimony created by women from the Theresienstadt ghetto. Rona Kaufman states that "what we […] know about these recipes is that they are the recipes of ghost – women who are no longer alive, and were barely alive when they wrote, but who speak to us through the language of food" [Kaufman 2004: 427].

This rediscovered tale of Terezín women features one important character, Mina Pachter, who was sent to Theresienstadt in 1942 at the age of 70. She died of hunger and malnutrition two years later, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, one of the most important Jewish holidays. Mina's daughter, Anny Stern, managed to escape to Palestine with her husband and their son. It was Mina Pachter who collected the recipes written down by the women in the ghetto. Aware that she was about to die, she asked one of her friends to take the recipes to her daughter in Palestine. The man survived, but was unable to find Anny. On his deathbed he entrusted this unusual task to another person. In 1969 in her Manhattan apartment Anny Stern received a phone call from a stranger who told her: "I have a package for you from your mother" [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: xxv]. "After all those years, it was like her hand was reaching out to me from long ago", recalls Stern [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: xvii].

Mina's daughter decided to publish the recipes. She described the project to no less than thirty-five publishing houses, none of which seemed to be interested. The editors and publishers did not know how to market such a book and were appalled at the prospect of combining the cookbook

genre with the traumatic stories of the Holocaust.[2] Finally, the book, edited by Cara da Silva, was published under the title *In Memory's Kitchen. A Legacy from the Women of Terezín* [2006].

The inmates of ghettos and concentration camps were starving to death, and Theresienstadt was no exception. Hunger was a permanent feature of life; thoughts of food became an obsession. In her book *Women of Theresienstadt. Voices from a Concentration Camp*, Ruth Schwertfeger writes: "Food, memories of it, missing it, craving it, dreaming of it, in short, the obsession of food colours all the Theresienstadt memoirs" [Schwertfeger 1989: 38]. The author cites one of the survivors, who admitted: "We had the largest imagination about what we would cook. I don't think I ever became so good a cook as I was in my mouth" [Schwertfeger 1989: 38].

The women writing their recipes down were dying of hunger; they knew they would never be given another opportunity to prepare or eat any of the dishes they learnt to cook from their mothers and grandmothers. They hoped, however, that their legacy would survive in these recipes and that their grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be able to find it a source of pride and say: "This is a strudel made according to my grandmother's recipe". Thus, the culinary recipes are an attempt at salvaging a fraction of the atmosphere of the pre-war household, and also at preserving certain skills. They contain the memories of happier days and lavishly laid tables, as well as the dream to be able to feed their families once more; they are an expression of love of food and of the people for whom the dishes were made. The recipes for chocolate cake, plum strudel, goose breast and other dishes were jotted down on scraps of paper, wood bark, onion and potato peels.

Rona Kaufman suggests how this book should be read:

> I tend to see these recipes not as useful, practical guides but as testimony. I'm tempted to call these recipes *sacred text* – therefore untouchable, unusable. I want these recipes to be as sacred as other texts in Judaism – the

2 At least several books dedicated to eating and cooking in the time of the Holocaust have been published so far [see: *Recipes Remembered…* 2001; *Holocaust Survivor Cookbook…* 2007].

> *Torah* in the ark, prayer scrolls in mezuzahs – texts that are meant to guide the everyday certainly but are always encased behind protective and ornamental shields. Read and honor – but do not touch [Kaufman 2004: 428].

The several dozen recipes included in the publication do not make it into a cookbook designed to be functional. It is rather a memory, a testimony, a statement of strength and will to live, as well as a source of information on the culture of a given period. This is a publication that should be placed in the *Judaica* section of a bookshop, not among books on the culinary art. In his introduction to *In Memory's Kitchen…*, the director of the United States Holocaust Research Institute Michael Berenbaum wrote:

> This work – unlike conventional cookbooks – is not to be savored for its culinary offerings but for the insight it gives us in understanding the extraordinary capacity of the human spirit to transcend its surroundings, to defy dehumanization, and to dream of the past and of the future [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: xvi].

Shoshana Felman referring to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* emphasises that a testimony – and the recipes from Theresienstadt may be perceived as one – means responsibility for the truth. She adds, however, that sometimes providing an inside testimony is impossible.

> The inside cannot testify on its own because it cannot speak its trauma in a language the outside can hear or understand, because as the witness has been deemed other, all sounds are heard as "mere noise". […] It is impossible to testify from the inside because the inside has no voice. […] The outside, however, cannot testify because it cannot know the truth of the trauma. But the two can work together – must work together – to articulate the horror. The inside and outside need to be set in motion and in dialogue with one another. […] Testimony from within needs a framework to be heard as testimony [Felman 1992: 231–232].

De Silva and Berenbaum wish for their book to be a document and a testimony, which is why they added a foreword and many footnotes. Presented

without the additional framework of its context, the testimony would not be understandable; it would not give the trauma its proper name. It would not speak: "This is what happened". The reader needs a guide that will indicate, explain, delineate the background. If it is so, however, who controls the assigning and deciphering of meanings? Wolfgang Iser suggests that in every case the readers themselves negotiate between the ideas conveyed by the text and the realm of their own knowledge and views; it is what he calls the *wandering viewpoint*. But the act of reading always occurs on the terms set forth by the text [Iser 1978]. The editors working with the culinary recipes from Theresienstadt tried to keep the translations literal, they did not interfere with the original wording or correct grammatical mistakes, and placed all explanatory comments in brackets.

Thus, the recipes collected by de Silva indicate much about their authors. They define their roles as wives and mothers. In Jewish culture a woman is perceived as a guardian of the household, who protects tradition and teaches her children about the principles of culinary arts and the laws of *kashrut*. The notes from Terezín also contain suggestions pertaining to the culinary heritage and the social and cultural conditions that shaped the tastes and the menus designed by the women imprisoned in the ghetto. One of the most important aspects in the life of orthodox Jews (somewhat less emphasised by the more progressive communities) were the numerous dietary laws. Meals had a religious significance and as such had to be preceded and followed by ritual actions and gestures. According to Alan Unterman, recipes specifying the dietary norms constituted an element of human life in general, of the transformation of a human being into "a sacred work of God" [Unterman 1999].

As a result of living in a diaspora and constant wandering, Jewish cuisine adopted many features and products known from the cuisine of other nations. Hence the recipes of the Theresienstadt women include surprisingly exotic combinations of flavours and spices, but also qualities common for most types of Jewish fare, especially dishes served by the Ashkenazi Jews from Northern Europe: the liberal use of certain spices (nutmeg, cloves, saffron, caraway), frequent use of onion and garlic, employing poultry fat as a substitute for the non-kosher (*treif*) lard, adding

sugar or honey to meat or fish dishes, and a preference for certain preparation methods such as grinding or grating. Not all dishes included in the book comply with the laws of *kashrut*. Their authors may have come from Moravia or Bohemia, as the Jewish communities living in these regions at the time were the ones most assimilated with the local population.

The practice of cooking constitutes a complex nexus of circumstances and objective data, where necessity meets flexibility, resulting in an unpredictable and constantly changing amalgam which spurs the invention of new tactics, the creation of new pathways and the individualisation of methods of action. Each of the women writing down her recipes undoubtedly had a repertoire of specialities, prized dishes for special occasions and ones that she herself liked to eat; each had her own set of skills, culinary superstitions, failures, tricks and routines. It is difficult not to interpret their writings in a broader context, since preparing any dish on the basis of the recipes would be challenging indeed. Some ingredients are missing and the preparation procedures are often given in the wrong order. In her recipe for *Gefüllte Eier* Mina Pachter writes simply: "Let fantasy run free" [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: 52].

Making Milk-Cream Strudel according to the recipe provided would prove impossible, because the book never mentions flour. The imprecise formula for making a Linzer Torte is clearly directed at people with much culinary experience:

> Milk-Cream Strudel
> Filling: ¼ liter cream, 2 eggs yolks, 6 decagrams blanched, ground almonds, sugar to taste, 1 roll soaked in milk, 4 decagrams butter, all beaten. 2 whites snow [stiffly beaten egg whites]. Sprinkle with raisins, bake lightly. Pour over sugared milk. Let it evaporate. Bake in casserole [baking dish] [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: 59].

> Linzer Torte
> 20 spoon flour, 8 spoons sugar, 4 spoons vinegar, 2 eggs, 10 decagrams margarine, 1 [packet] baking powder, some milk. Fill to your liking [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: 60].

The non-kosher recipe for a goose might be a memory from the times of freedom and prosperity:

> Breast of Goose. Pommern Style
> From a heavy goose, take [remove] the beilik [breast]. Cut the meat from both sides, rub it with mashed garlic, some salt, ½ half sugar cube, a little ginger. Pound it [the mixture] in well with [your] bare hand and let it stand. Now take the nice skin, place the [seasoned] beilik on the skin and tightly sew the goose skin around. Put it into the glazed earthenware pot, sprinkle it with a little salt, potassium and saltpeter. Cover the breast with a plate and weights and let it lay in the bring for 4 weeks, turning it daily. Give it to the selcher [pork butcher/sausage maker] for 2 days [to put in] the smoker. One can also bring the goose breast to the pork meat butcher and let him cure and smoke it until it is nicely brown [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: 29].

The following recipe probably comes from a family that cherished tradition:

> Cheap Real Jewish Bobe
> Make a plain loose yeast dough. When it is risen, place dough on a noodle board. Roll it out. Grate several potatoes onto dough, sprinkle with a lot of sugar and cinnamon, about 2-3 spoons cold goose fat. Fold and roll dough exactly 3 times. Put [half] in cake [pan]. Top it half with prune butter and half with a good poppy seed filling. Top tightly with dough cover. Spread it with fat and bake it in a medium hot oven [*In Memory's Kitchen…* 2006: 55].

Food is a symbol of identity, a sign of social ties, the bonds between family members and friends. It is also a gift that maintains there relations. Planning meals, preparing food, sharing recipes, feeding others – these were the focal points of the women's lives before they came to the Terezín ghetto. For this reason alone, the form of the testimony they left behind should not come as a surprise.

Luce Giard writes about restoring and cultivating the memory of tastes and culinary experiences in the following words:

> Perhaps that is exactly what I am seeking in my culinary joys: the reconstruction, through gestures, tastes, and combinations, of a *silent legend*,

> as if, by dint of merely living in it with my hands and body, I would succeed in restoring the alchemy of such a history, in meriting its secret of language, as if, from this stubborn stomping around on Mother Earth the truth of the word would come back to me one day. […] As long as one of us preserves your nourishing knowledge, as long as the recipes of your tender patience are transmitted from hand to hand and from generation to generation, a fragmentary yet tenacious memory of your life itself will live on. The sophisticated ritualization of basic gestures has thus become more dear to me than the persistence of words and texts, because body techniques seem better protected from the superficiality of fashion, and also, a more profound and heavier material faithfulness is at play there, a way of being-in-the-world and making it one's home [de Certeau, Giard, Mayol 1998: 154].

The activity of preparing and consuming food is a practice consistently repeated, forming a net of intertwined relations with other practices, rooted in everyday life, incorporated into family biography, linked to childhood memories. As Giard continues further on,

> This women's work has them proliferate into "gesture trees" (Rilke), into Shiva goddesses with a hundred arms, who are both clever and thrifty: the rapid and jerky back and forth movement of the whisk whipping egg whites, hands that slowly knead pastry dough with a symmetrical movement, a sort of restrained tenderness. A woman's worry: "Will the cake be moist enough?"; a woman's observation: "These tomatoes are not very juicy, I'll have to add some water while they cook". A transmission of knowledge: "My mother (or aunt or grandmother) always told me to add a drop of vinegar to grilled pork ribs". A series of techniques [*tours de main*] that one must observe before being able to imitate them: "To loosen a crêpe, you give the pan a sharp rap, like this" [de Certeau, Giard, Mayol 1998: 157].

Women who cook have a memory for gestures and consistency; the ones that wrote their recipes down in the ghetto were no exception. Such women can estimate the time of preparation and cooking, arrange the dishes in the right serving order and decide which one should be heated at which moment in order to be warm when placed on the table. They rely on their

senses; rather than following the prescribed baking time, they prefer to pay attention to the smell exuding from the oven or observe the look of the crust. Their ingenuity allows them to reuse the leftovers and employ mini-strategies if they suddenly find themselves without some ingredient.

> Every alimentary custom makes up a minuscule crossroads of histories. In the "invisible everyday", under the silent and repetitive system of everyday servitudes that one carries out by habit, the mind elsewhere, in a series of mechanically executed operations whose sequence follows a traditional design dissimulated under the mask of the obvious, there piles up a subtle montage of gestures, rites, and codes, of rhythms and choices, of received usage and practiced customs. In the private space of domestic life, far from worldly noises, the Kitchen Women Nation's voice murmurs that it is done this way because it has always been done more or less like that […] [de Certeau, Giard, Mayol 1998: 171].

The testimony of the Theresienstadt women preserves also the memory of gestures which constituted the system of culinary practices observed in the kitchen. Such gestures live and die. They never last longer than their usefulness maintained owing to the re-actualisations made by their users and to their interrelations. Such actions are repeated only as long as they are deemed effective.

> Ordinary language is unambiguous on this point: one does it that way "because we've always done it that way", besides, "you have to do it that way", and finally, "you have to follow custom". Deserted by the strength of belief, abandoned by necessity, the technical gesture withers and dies [de Certeau, Giard, Mayol 1998: 203] – the authors concludes.

Culinary legacy has a distinctively different quality that the heritage embodied by material objects of the past. It is tightly bound to cultural life, incorporated in social practices, susceptible to external influences and to innovations emerging within the given group. Writing on the subject of authenticity and originality of dietary traditions, David Bell and Gill Valentine note that

> The history of any nation's diet is the history of the nation itself, with food fashions, fads and fancies mapping episodes of colonialism and migration, trade and exploration, cultural exchange and boundary-making [Bell, Valentine 1997: 168–169].

Hence, they point out, the equation mark placed between food an nationalism is a fallacy, and the concept of "national foods" is a fiction. Even when considered typical to a given locale, food is always a sign of motion, mutation and the mixing of peoples and customs. This also relates, naturally, to family culinary traditions, recipes passed down and inherited, as well as preferences. The landscapes of flavours a person experiences and stores in his/her memory are therefore full of disorder, smaller and greater revelations and disappointments. They do, however, influence the choices and decisions made in later life. Gaston Bachelard wrote a somewhat poetic account of the rehabilitation of the sense of taste, arguing that a very important part of sensual education and the development of motor functions takes place in the kitchen:

> To remove a child from the kitchen is to condemn them to exile distancing them from dreams they will never know. The oneiric value of food awakens during the process of its preparation […]. Happy is he who as a child wandered around the kitchen [Bachelard 2002: 86].

The scientific discourse too, has responded to this assumption. In her essay on the so-called "lower" senses, Mădălina Diaconu offers a detailed analysis of experiencing and remembering taste:

> Already the incompleteness of the haptic, olfactory, and gustatory representations suggests the importance of time in the experience of these senses. The memory of haptic qualities, odors, and flavors is mostly nonverbal and diffuse, imbued with affective impressions and synaesthesias. We recollect odors and flavors spontaneously and involuntarily, as a blissful kairós, or only at the end of an often long and painful process of deliberate search. It is well-known that the modern Western philosophy has held memory to be one of the key-factors in the constitution of the personal

> identity (or rather, following Ricoeur, "ipséité"). Intentional remembrance connects the actual stimulus to the past moment when we have felt something similar, finding a place for it in the subject's continuous life-thread. To be a self means to become one, by identifying the present ego with/as the old one, thus by bringing together dispersed biographical episodes into a coherent story. On the contrary, in spontaneous recollection the past itself returns, as if the temporal strata (Schichten) of the ego were suddenly levelled and condensed into a story (Ge-schichte). A single scene concentrates one's life essence, time flows no more, but is somehow overcome (aufgehoben) [Diaconu 2003: 5].

The memory of taste is also mentioned by Kelvin Low:

> Oftentimes, the study of social memories divides its approach based on social groupings, such as working class memories, collective memories, gender memories, or on individual life histories/stories, usually with a concern for traumatic memories such as the Holocaust, or the Second World War. Instead of locating social memories through such groupings, or events-based trajectories, my works ruminate on the role of smell and taste in one's recollection of the past, and how such recollections may have bearings on one's experiences in the present. Hence, I add to the plethora of social memory and emotion scholarship by including the sensorial aspects linked with one's remembrance of the past, which is often neglected in these studies. In this way, I argue that the study of remembering the past, needs to locate the embodiedness in which the past is being recollected. The embodiedness alerts us to the ways in which our feelings and bodily sensations, generated in the past, help to interpret that past [Low 2013: 669].

David E. Sutton's book *Remembrance of Repasts: an Anthropology of Food and Memory* constitutes an attempt to combine the study of food with scholarly reflection on memory and the mechanisms of recollection. Sutton argues that this area is a fertile field for ethnographic studies and lists a number of significant aspects of marrying food with memory.

> Food has structure in both quotidian and ritual context – across days, weeks, and years – which facilitates remembering [Sutton 2001: 28–29].

> The structure and repetition of meals aid in remembering the past and contribute to prospective memory […] [Sutton 2001: 19]. Food memories constitute a form of historical consciousness [Sutton 2001: 26].[3]

Flavours are a key the lack of which would hinder the unlocking of the door to the past; they resemble the "seeds of lasting sentiment" [Tuan 1977: 143]. Once entwined in everyday life, unquestioned and unrealised, they come back suddenly, bringing with them the experiences, contexts and situations imprinted in a person's memory. This "sensory nostalgia", as Kelvin Low [2013] puts it, appears unexpectedly. A sudden stimulant, for example the taste of yeast cake, reinforced by the passage of time, makes it possible to recognise the value and the significance of the memory it evokes. Most often the stimuli are the tastes of childhood: cream horns sold by a friendly, round-faced lady at a funfair; juice bought during Sunday walks on the main street; unripe wild gooseberries picked straight from the bushes growing near the school building. Childhood memories, made of the coincidence of sensations, events, people and objects, are also filled with flavours. Thus constructed is "the vast structure of recollection" remarked on by Proust. A seemingly insignificant shard of memory, the taste of a biscuit, may become the starting point for a detailed vision of days gone by, for capturing their special colour:

> And suddenly the memory appears before me. The taste was that of the little morsel of madeleine that on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before the time for mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my Aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or of lime-blossom tea. [...] And just as the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little bits of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch themselves and bend, take on color and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, permanent and recognizable, so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish

3 See also Holtzman [2006].

> church and the whole of Combray and of its surroundings, taking their proper shapes and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea [Proust 2013: 53–54].

The memories of sensory experience may seem trivial; they may be soothing, but sometimes bring back something unwanted or disliked; they are usually highly emotional. After the people had died, the objects had been destroyed, the places had vanished and not much is left of one's childhood, only the sounds, smells and flavours – more fragile and less material, but more lasting and more faithful – will keep reminding us of that time. The flavours of childhood allow us to return to the good, tasty and happy days, when Mother used to call us for dinner. Perhaps this was the thought that inspired the women writing down their favourite recipes in the Terezín ghetto.

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