

## CHAPTER 4

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### **Contested Commensalities: Communion and Community around the Table (*The case of the Bread House Cultural Center, Bulgaria*)**

#### **Tables of Confluence and Conflict**

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It was a hot evening, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011, at the Bread House Cultural Center in Gabrovo. It was one of the regular Saturday evenings, which, since December 2009, had been bringing diverse people to come to make, bake, and break bread together. Nikolina, an economist from Sofia working for a large international surveys think-tank, had learned about the Bread House on the Internet while searching for hands-on things to engage beyond her intellectual work. Inspired by the idea, she decided for the special event of her best friend's daughter's wedding to travel with her family more than 300 kilometers to Gabrovo to make a ritually-decorated bread together with strangers of different ages – strangers with the potential to become literal and symbolic “companions” (indeed, as etymologically analyzed from Latin, people with whom one shares, “*com*,” bread, “*panis*”).

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The Bread House began as a simple idea out of my interlocutors' craving for fresh bread, which is currently hard to find in Bulgaria because most bread is sold packaged in supermarkets. It is through their talk that I started imagining the difference it could make if the *chitalishte* cultural centers started smelling like hot bread. I was led to inquire about this situation by people's comparisons, metaphors, and complaints about the lack of good, artisan-made bread in Bulgaria after the decades of socialist bread factories. In people's craving for hot, fresh, hand-made bread, I started unpacking the power of this charged cultural symbol, rooted in both the Orthodox Christian ritual breads and in the wide variety of daily rituals, superstitions, and idioms employing bread.

In this chapter I explore how place can change an ordinary daily practice into a special, extraordinary experience, and then how adding the possibility for engaging the different senses in new combinations and within a new spatial and social context can further change acceptable categories and redraft social dynamics. For example, why are people willing to work out in a gym with other people rather than doing the same thing alone at home, when it would save them money and time for travel? Why would people who do not like to cook at home enjoy taking cooking classes? What transforms an activity from a chore into a pastime and leisure?

In the case of collective bread-making being invented as a new kind of communal event and an ambiguous mixture of tradition (artisanal bread-making) and modernity (workshop, discussion, and group therapy dynamics), I analytically approach these gatherings through the conceptual framework of ritual analysis, grounded in the classical works of Durkheim ([1912] 1995) on "collective effervescences." I will explore how rituals are invented, produced, and evolve when there is a special space destined for them

– such as the *chitalishte* cultural center and, in the case of the Bread House, a *chitalishte* with a wood-fired oven and a kneading table. Do the sensorial experiences in that space trigger dormant individual and collective memories, and what do these mean in people's daily lives? Do these experience create and nurture the production of new collective memories and invented traditions, and again what are some of the meanings of these new rituals?

Furthermore, I started wondering why: “If people of all ages and professions in Bulgaria get so excited talking and thinking about hot bread, then why do they choose to engage in this particular activity collectively rather than just bake bread at home? Finally, on the basis of the heated debates at UNESCO concerning whether French, Mediterranean, and Mexican cuisines qualify for protection as intangible heritage why was food never explicitly mentioned in the ICH Convention, particularly since “culinary arts” as field of study is not officially included as a subject in arts schools and arts departments? If people value food so much as an experience, as a medium of socialization, and as an expression of creativity and care, why is food absent from the formal artistic discourse and praxis, both at the level of professional arts and organized community arts networks?

The fact that in the special spaces destined to preserve “culture” – the *chitalishte* in Bulgaria or “houses of culture” in other countries - kitchens were missing as much as tables around which to share food, shows the narrow vision of the state as to what constitutes the notion of “culture,” limited to modern and traditional (“folk”) cultural expressions. Even when food is central to “culture” in the minds of Bulgarians and most people around the world, this lack of factoring food as an element to be exchanged in the

houses of culture is thus a kind of an indicator to measure the degrees of separation and friction between the state and the local, community-rooted notions and practices of “culture”.

The socialist Ministries of Culture around the world, impacted heavily by the Soviet vision, viewed culture as mostly limited to three areas: professional arts; cultural and historic heritage sites, thus tangible cultural heritage; and “folk” culture, which was often choreographed according to the professional stage aesthetics and thus far from the recent, UNESCO-led emphasis on living intangible cultural heritage.

This Soviet notion of culture started being redrafted only after the 1957 so-called Socialist Cultural Revolution when the new period after Stalin’s death tried to rethink “culture” as people’s whole way of life, including more and more cooking classes and home economics classes in Poland and East Germany (see Kyril Kounakovich, Princeton history dissertation in progress), yet again in didactic and controlling terms rather than letting informal celebrations take place.

In Bulgaria, many of my interlocutors recollected with fondness the diverse activities and the vibrancy of social life inside the *chitalishte*, which in their words seem to not have been as heavily under control and censure as in the Soviet Union. At the same time, a noticeable comment related to socialism in Bulgaria related to smell in two seemingly separate domains. One smell that was widely commented was the bad smell of the *chitalishte* (cold and moldy) both during socialism and at present times, where the smell for many was an indicator of the few changes or of the negative changes taking place in the *chitalishte* and, as often people took the *chitalishte* as an larger epitomy, of Bulgarian society in general. The second type of smell came up in many conversations

with a sense of nostalgia, as people were missing the aroma of hot bread in the streets from the last years of Communism, when hot bread was delivered at certain times from the factories and thus children were sent to get the bread at the exact time when it was still fresh (even if not the same sourdough that was made in Bulgaria before the factories were built).

Based on these recurring discourses about the same kinds of smells becoming at times speech tropes, I started wondering whether introducing the bread aroma and bread-making as an activity at a cultural center would make people come more to it? And how would their use of space and their relations with each other change when the multiple senses are engaged?

This chapter is organized in three main sections that trace issues about meaning-making and identity formation, or why and how do people come together to experience collective rituals, which I examine through the issues and practices negotiated and enacted within and around the Bread House: 1) exploring the process of establishing the Bread House as a process of making a private home public, which is a process different from the process I examined at the Bistritsa chitalishte in Sofia with the UNESCO recognized Bistritsa Babi group, where I was examining how through informal practices off and behind the stage people were domesticating (privatizing) the public house of culture, whereas in the case of the Bread House I experienced the reverse process of making public the home, or the publicization of private space; and 2) exploring the various inter-generational and cross-gender dynamics triggered by collective bread-making as evolving leisurely activity and somewhat sacred ritual (when making festive church breads), which opened up intriguing questions about gender roles – and indeed,

## Seeded Content – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE QUALITY OF SEVERAL BREADS ASSORTMENTS AVAILABLE ON THE ROMANIAN MARKET AND ON THE TECHNOLOGICAL PROCESSES RELIABILITY.

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Bread is one of the most consumed foods in Romania. The average consumption of bread was estimated in 2015 to about 100.6 kg per capita [10]. Consumption is declining relative to the previous decade, but it is at a level about 25% higher than the European average [9]. Decreasing consumption of bread has forced manufacturers to invest in technologies and recipes that enable the increase of products added value, in order to maintain or increase profit margins. Generally, the diversification of products range aimed to satisfy consumer interest in diet products, with functional properties suitable to a healthy lifestyles [1].

The bread, traditionally eaten in Romania, is 300 grams white bread, obtained from 650 type flour [7].

Although its market is

shrinking, it is the best sold product on the current market of bread. Our investigations have focused on the analysis of several bread assortments manufactured by the largest producer in Romania, in terms of key quality parameters. The aim of the study was to evaluate the quality profile of each assortment, to analyze the degree of quality parameters variability (as an indicator of the technological processes reliability) and to highlight the main distinguishing features between quality parameters, considered as purchase consumer criteria.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

There were analyzed four breads assortments coming from a local producer, namely Vel Pitar, as follows: whole wheat bread (it contains whole wheat flour, ash > 1.4%), white bread (contains flour type 650, ash 0.65%), intermediate bread (contains a mixture of flour type 650 + flour type 1350) and dark bread (contains flour type 1350, ash 1.35%) [2]. Of each assortment were taken 15 samples from different

batches. For each sample, there were analyzed the main quality parameters, according to the methods shown in Table 1 [2, 3, 11].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 shows the quality parameters descriptive statistics of the four assortments of bread. The results revealed that whole wheat bread did not exceed the limits set by the laws in force, concerning pre-packaged products ( $500 \pm 15$  g). Constant weight overcoming is in favor of the purchaser, but in time it will increase the production costs.

At the same time, whole wheat bread acidity was significantly lower compared to the limit, making the bread to be more vulnerable to infection with microorganisms. It is however noted that the elasticity and porosity are very good, as aW and bread dimensions.

Variation coefficients are within the permitted limits (under 12%), that which characterizes a normal distribution for quality parameter values. This reflects the fact that the technology of whole wheat bread production is sustainable and provides industrial process repeatability. We note, however, that the largest variation was presented in whole wheat bread acidity ( $CV = 9.59\%$ ).

That means that the influence of external factors on the proofing process had a greater extent than on other parameters [5, 8]. It appears that the weight limit ( $300 \pm 9$  g) of white bread is exceeded, on average with 2.23 g and acidity is also much lower compared to the limit. The dimensions of white bread did not conform, being smaller than those set by limits. Moisture, porosity and elasticity meets the standard for this type of bread. Coefficients of variation are normal, but higher concerning acidity parameter ( $CV = 8.62\%$ ).

It is noted that in the case of intermediate bread, weight exceeded the limit provided in the specifications, while the acidity did not reach the value needed for the bread to stand in front of microbial contamination, if not quickly consumed. Basically, low acidity decreases storage stability of the product. Intermediate bread porosity, elasticity and dimensions enrolled within limits, as well as the variation coefficient. Acidity registered the higher variation coefficient ( $CV = 11.04\%$ ) at

intermediate bread, compared to other assortments. Although the process showed consistency and repeatability, however we can say that the most vulnerable stage and less easily controlled was the proofing stage, that influenced acidity levels.

Dark bread weight and acidity did not comply with manufacturing limits, similar to other bread assortments. Thus, the weight exceeded the limit with 1.62 g and the acidity was lower below the permissible limit, but less lower than to the other bread assortments. Porosity, elasticity, aW and dimensions were compliant. Variation coefficients of the dark bread quality parameters were low, so the technological process of bread obtaining is reliable and sustainable. We should mention that CV% of acidity parameter (5.88%) had the lowest value of CV% values of other bread assortments. Water activity was similar for all assortments of bread and enrolled within limits (max. 0.95).

The four bread assortments presented features to be highlighted by the Student test (t), respectively the significance of quality parameters mean difference (Table 3).

Recipe and technological process differences between bread assortments is seen by large differences in quality parameters. There are significant differences related to moisture, between pairs of bread assortments. It is noted that bread assortments which contained more fibers, respectively whole wheat bread and dark bread had higher moisture, because the fibers retained more water.

Acidity is very significantly increased in 363 whole wheat bread and dark bread assortments, compared to white bread and intermediate bread assortments. The fact is explicable as the whole wheat bread and the dark bread contained high extraction flours, which had higher acidities (whole wheat flour and 1350 flour). Between white bread and intermediate bread or whole wheat bread and dark bread there are no significant differences concerning acidity.

The same is found in porosity. There were established significant differences in porosity between white bread or intermediate bread, and whole wheat bread or dark bread. Bread with a higher amount of fibers (whole wheat and dark bread) had a lower porosity, while white bread and intermediate bread showed porosities over 85% and higher volumes. Elasticities are very good in general and did not significantly



differ between bread assortments, except the elasticity of white bread, which is significantly increased compared to elasticity of whole wheat bread ( $t = 3.456 *$ ). The water activity  $a_W$  did not differ significantly between the assortments of bread.

The dimensions of bread assortments are significantly different from each other, but this is naturally, because we must take into account the technical specifications. Intermediate bread and white bread did not differ on the length or height, but differed significantly ( $2.598 *$ ) on width.

All these reported differences, with varying degrees of significance, represent peculiarities of bread assortments taken for analysis. The correlations established between quality parameters of bread assortments, are also characteristics of the respective assortments. Concerning whole wheat bread there were established between pairs of quality parameters, the following correlations: weight-porosity significant negative correlation (correlation coefficient  $r = -0.606 *$ ), length- $a_W$  significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.632 *$ ), width-porosity significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.551 *$ ), width-elasticity significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.524 *$ ) and height-moisture significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.573 *$ ). Concerning white bread there were established: a significant positive correlation elasticity-moisture ( $r = 0.573 *$ ), a distinct significant positive correlation high-acidity ( $r = 0.666 **$ ) and a height-length positive correlation ( $r = 0.517 *$ ).

Some quality parameters of intermediate bread established a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.626 *$ ), namely height and porosity.

The quality parameters for dark bread did not correlate to each other, except the significant negative correlation between width and  $a_W$  ( $r = -0.541 *$ ).

We find that all the significant correlations formed have particularized analyzed bread assortments, because of the fact that the assortments of bread did not show significant correlations between the same quality parameters. It is highlighted in this way, the differences between recipes and technological process.

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