

Matching national stereotypes? Eating and drinking in the Basque borderland

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ABSTRACT:

Focusing on tourism practices, this article discusses the role of food in the construction and reconstruction of identities and stereotypes in the Basque borderland. Borderlands, as places where national identities meet and perceptions of otherness merge, offer an interesting perspective on how identities are enacted. In the Basque Country, food in general and Basque cuisine in particular are considered significant markers of identity as well as hallmarks of tradition. Now a major tourist destination, thousands of Spaniards come to the Basque Country to enjoy the tastes of the much-praised Basque cuisine. At the same time, many French tourists come to the Basque borderland in search of Spanish experiences, including food. Thus, border tourism provides differing representations of this issue. Drawing from ethnographic data, different examples of the ways in which specific dishes and drinks come to conform to stereotypes of national identities will be presented. The analysis of food consumption patterns and their symbolic representation in the borderland offers a stimulating context in which to study how these images match stereotypes of national identity, but also contribute to the creation of new aspects of identity.

KEY WORDS: food and identity, national stereotypes, border, tourism, Basque cuisine.

Introduction

Food plays a central role in the construction of identities. Both cooking and food consumption have long been considered identity markers to the point that some scholars talk of 'alimentary identities' (Bruegel and Laurieux 2002). Studying food is relevant to the study of the construction and reconstruction of identities, including national identities and fixed representations of these identities, namely, stereotypes. For its implications in defining identities as well as power relations, cuisine has been considered a political object (Belasco 2002; Coulon 2000; Letamendia and Coulon 2000). In this sense, cuisine meets the definition of an 'unidentified political object' –a 'UPO'–, borrowing Denis-Constant Martin's expression (1989), i.e., a manifestation and expression that reveals or conveys the links between power and its exercise, while allowing the reconstruction of specific symbolic codes and languages.

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Cooking and eating as identity markers have been extensively studied by scholars. The anthropology of food as well as the latest works on consumption have focused on the construction and de-construction of national cuisines (Belasco 2002; Hubert 2000). However, little attention has been paid to the way alimentation is involved in the creation of stereotypes and their maintenance, as a feature of which food is often invoked as a derogatory element. This article aims to bring together the issue of food as an identity marker and a mode of identification, borrowing MacClancy's term (2004), and the anthropology of borders, which has paid special attention to the construction of national identities.

I consider the borderland as a stage where different identities are performed; where national, regional and local identities from both sides of the border, as well as stereotypes, interact. These representations include stereotypes conveyed by tourists as well as those performed for the tourist eye. Some of these are in my view, exclusive to the borderland and can be considered as inherent to the creation of a borderland culture shared by people from both sides of the border. Border tourism provides interesting examples of this drama.

From this perspective, I will deal with the construction and maintenance of stereotypes of national identities related to eating and drinking as encountered in the Basque borderland. To do so, I will focus on border tourism, more specifically on the interaction between French tourists and local vendors at the *bentak*¹. An analysis of Basque cuisine and the subsequent development of a gastronomic tourism attracting mainly Spaniards will complete the discussion on food related stereotypes of national identities.

The data presented here is derived from participant observation during fieldwork in the Basque borderland. Long-term multi-sited fieldwork was conducted in the border area on both sides of the Spanish-French border where I lived between 1996 and 1998, completed with regular visits in subsequent years. The main observation area encompasses sites with a high concentration of border businesses—locally known as *benta*—, namely multifunctional establishments, shops and restaurants situated along the border line—located in the border area between the twin *quartiers* of Behobia in Irun/Hendaia, in the most western part of the French-Spanish border, and Luzaide/Arnegi further east. Special attention has been paid to Ibardin, Larrun, Dantxarinea, traditional shopping areas dedicated exclusively to border tourism that since 2000 have known a tremendous boom with the introduction of the Euro. Interviews and informal discussions with *benta* owners and workers, local customers, as well as tourists in Dantxarinea, Ibardin, Sara and Zugarramurdi complete the fieldnotes.

The politics of food: food and stereotypes

We are said to be what we eat, what we ate (Sutton 2001), as well as, following Mary Douglas, what we do not eat (1966). As an identity marker, food is often analysed as a

¹*Benta*, borrowed from Spanish, is the Basque form for *venta*, a kind of inn originally situated along the main roads. The form *bentak* corresponds to the plural in Basque. These establishments are also locally known as *benta* or *menta*, and in strictly local French, *bentte*.

significant marker in the process of setting cultural boundaries. The political implications of this operation are clear. What happens then at international borders? Could they be considered to overlap cultural boundaries? Anthropologists are well aware of the lack of systematic correspondence between cultural and political borders (Bromberger and Morrel 2001). However, the international border in the Basque Country is still commonly seen as the divide between olive oil and butter, a view shared both by local people and visitors alike. However, this boundary, corresponding to the Mediterranean/Northern European divide, happens to be relatively new. Extensive surveys of food consumption patterns and cooking trends show that traditionally animal fat was broadly used until quite recently all over the Basque land, both north and south of the border (Barandiaran and Manterola 1990). Olive oil was only consumed in everyday cooking in the southern areas of the country. How can then these two very different realities – international borders and cultural boundaries - be approached in terms of food studies?

The political significance of food becomes particularly apparent when analysing stereotypes. Most of the time, national stereotypes based on food are effective ways of disparaging others. As the widespread use of metaphors related to food illustrates, examples of what can be considered, following James Boon, a gastronomically specific exaggeration of cultures in cross-cultural encounters (1982) abound. In this perspective, ‘spaghetitis’, like ‘frogs’, ‘roast-beefs’, and ‘hamburgers’ refer to distinct and clearly identifiable national identities, namely, Italians, French, British and Americans. These derogatory names focus on a particular food, often considered disgusting if not inedible. However, the stress on particular pieces of food may change from one culture to the other, leading to variations in the way national identities are portrayed by their neighbours. For example, the French, usually referred to as ‘frogs’ by the British, are called ‘baguette-heads’ in the German borderland (Lask 1994).

Food-based stereotypes are not always derogatory, though. Stereotypes related to Basque gastronomy, particularly those circulating in Spain, illustrate this point. In fact, some of the most appreciated dishes of Basque cuisine, such as squids cooked in their ink – a pitch-black dish, usually rejected by foreigners at first view –, or elvers – a once-traditional Christmas dish on the coast area and a most expensive delicacy nowadays that provokes strong reactions (the elvers look like worms in the dish) - could well have served as a starting point for establishing derogatory stereotypes. However, Basque cuisine is not only much praised but gives way to what can be considered amongst the most positive contemporary stereotypes about the Basques circulating in Spain.

Once famous for being stubborn, but also serious, diligent and hard-working, the adjectives portraying the stereotypes of Basques in Spain have substantially changed in recent years. Nowadays, emphasis is put on terms ranging from unemotional to violent, if not direct accusations of being terrorists, a tendency that was reinforced after the 11 September attacks. This stereotyped image, grounded on Euskadi eta Askatasuna, ETA's bombings and strongly promoted by the Popular Party, the PP, has resulted in a collective demonisation of Basque people, especially during the rule of the PP. The Spanish conservative government based its main political guidelines on an articulated confrontation policy. The idea of an ‘inner enemy’ was crucial to obtaining national cohesion. In 2000,

the PP scored an absolute majority, confirming the success of its strategy. The political discourse powered by the media targeted not solely ETA, though. In a manner very reminiscent of the action of pollution (Douglas 1966), cultural and political organizations have been accused of being part of ETA. Anything considered 'too Basque' has become the object of harsh attacks in the political arena and even, more frequently than not, end up in prosecution. In this move, continuous attempts at criminalisation have affected all sorts of cultural associations as well as social initiatives, political parties and businesses, including two news and a radio station that have been closed and declared illegal in the last ten years. Basque cuisine was not spared and has not remained completely above suspicion. In October 2004, four of the most renowned Basque chefs appeared in court accused of having paid the 'revolutionary tax' to ETA, charged with financing a terrorist group. Even though they were released, a strong campaign against them was launched by Spanish sectors supporting the conservative government².

Basque cuisine: an identity issue turned into a tourist attraction

Despite this incident, the Basque Country has long been noted for the excellence of its food. All over Spain and abroad, Basques are very much portrayed as food lovers, big eaters and excellent cooks. The reputation of Basque chefs owes much to the rise of the New Basque Cuisine, a renowned cuisine, combining traditional cooking with the sophistication of *Haute cuisine*. In recent decades, Basque chefs have obtained worldwide recognition, winning numerous international awards. Donostia, a Basque capital and an average size city, is internationally known for holding one of the highest concentrations of Michelin stars per square kilometre. A whole generation of Basque chefs has accomplished the impressive feat of bringing together identity and food.

As MacClancy points out, the claims to existence of contemporary nations involve self-vaunted possession of a prestigious culture, which may include a distinctive cuisine (2004: 66). New Basque Cuisine, together with Basque gastronomy in its broad sense, has been strongly fostered by Basque nationalism. Emphasis has been put on tradition and innovation, in a narrative centred on heritage and the past –the traditional roots - but at the same time highlighting the innovative potential of Basque cuisine as it faces the future. Gastronomy becomes then a metaphor for the evolution of the nation. Indeed, Basque cuisine is one the few elements accepted as an identity feature by all Basques, no matter their ideology or political affiliation (Iturbe and Letamendia 2000). In the intricate Basque political arena, Basque cuisine enjoys widespread acceptance and has even resulted in attempts at institutionalisation by the Basque Government³.

²The titles of leading articles published in the days following the news reveal the scope of the confrontational atmosphere and the way gastronomy was turned into a highly sensitive political subject. Some of them, such as 'To feed ETA' or 'Nurturing the monster' (El Mundo, 2004-10-17), are particularly revealing.

This strong relationship between food and identity goes well beyond the geographical boundaries of the Basque Country. Food is a key factor in community building and maintenance, and collective food consumption has a cohesive function, especially in diasporic contexts. As Hubert (2000) points out, cooking is a strong identity marker, passed on from generation to generation, right down to the third and even the fourth generations, in the case of festive food. According to Medina (1997) amongst the Basques in Catalonia, eating is an effective instrument for the construction of identity. Similarly, in the American West, the first contact most non-Basques have with Basque culture is through the many restaurants to be found in the Western states (Zubiri 1988). Basque cuisine gives Basque people a place on the world map.

Today, gastronomy has become an important tourist attraction, bringing every year to the Basque Country hundreds of thousands of visitors, mostly Spaniards, eager to taste the delicacies of Basque cuisine. This ranges from the most sophisticated cuisine with minimalist and extremely elaborate dishes to traditional cuisine with large portions of home-made dishes, without forgetting the *sagardotegi*, the cider-places that since the eighties have spread all over the country and even into the main Spanish cities. In fact, the promotion of gastronomy to a tourist attraction is particularly important in Spain, where Basque cuisine has attained the summit of its glory.

Border tourism and the quest for 'authenticity'

What happens in the border area where food and drink consumption play an important part in border tourism? Since the opening of the Spanish border in the mid 1960's, French tourists cross the border in search of 'typically Spanish' products. The *bentak* along the border display a whole range of these products which exclusively target tourists, as revealed by the extravagant and kitsch packaging. These 'typically Spanish' products include, among the more curious examples, glass bottles shaped in the form of a *sevillana*-dancer containing sangria, or sherry wine sold in bottles like a bull's head. Other products include pork delicatessen, very much praised by the French. All through the summer, tourists buy large amounts of *jamón serrano* -cured Parma style ham- *chorizo*, and *lomo*, cured loin and other varieties of *embutidos*. Olives, olive oil, and canned food, such as tuna fish, sardines, preserved anchovies and canned red peppers – especially a local variety of slightly hot peppers, *piquillo* peppers, often simply referred to in French as *pimientos* - are also purchased.

In general, these delicatessen are not only much cheaper than in France but also considered of better quality. Difficult to get in France in the past and expensive, these products are considered as 'exotic' too. Some differences in shopping must be pointed out, though. Tourists coming from afar mostly buy canned and preserved food, whereas

³The official website of and the tourist brochures edited by the Tourist Board of the Basque Government, with a specific and detailed section on Basque cuisine, illustrate this point.

local border crossers, shopping on a regular basis, include fresh produce such as meat, fruit and vegetables and more recently, fish, in their shopping cart. However, as in most border contexts, heavily taxed products represent the core of border business. In the Basque borderland these include alcohol and tobacco purchased in massive quantities by tourists, as well as petrol, much cheaper on the Spanish side than on the French side. Border shopping at the *bentak* is one of the main economic resources in the borderland and involves buying and selling large amounts of food and, particularly, alcohol.

In recent decades, border tourism has significantly increased in the Basque Country. Since the introduction of the Euro new establishments have been built, always on the Spanish side of the border, giving an even more chaotic appearance to the borderland area. [photo no. 1]. Alongside the old traditional *bentak*, in the last ten years all kinds of establishments have opened along the borderline, including both completely refurbished large supermarkets and specialized shops, as well as a whole range of services, from hairdressers to brand boutiques, nightclubs and hostess bars, and of course, petrol stations. Impressive shopping centres reminding us of American malls and outlets have emerged in the middle of nowhere, on the top of mountains, as in Larrun, on the slopes of hills, as in Ibardin. These *bentak* are the main attraction for thousands of visitors crossing the border. During the course of the twentieth century the borderland has become a consumption-oriented place (Leizaola 2004). As one of these enlarged *bentak* advertises, the borderland is the perfect place to shop and spend the day.



Photo no. 1 (by A. Leizaola)

The first *bentak* appeared in the borderland in the nineteenth century as the customs were moved from the Ebro river, on the southern boundary of Navarre, to the border line in the Pyrenees in 1848 as a direct consequence of the victory of the Liberals in the Carlist wars. This resulted in the displacement of trade activities, both legal and illegal: Together with customs, smuggling also shifted to the border area. As a result, many farmsteads in the proximity of the border line sheltered smugglers or became strategic hideouts. Later on, they became small trading spots where local products and smuggled goods were exchanged and sold (Leizaola 2004). Most of them included a bar section that later became a restaurant and with time, they expanded their commercial potential. Today, the *benta* is a multifunctional business housing different services under the same roof: grocery shop, bar, restaurant and tobacconist; some of the oldest ones had a butchery section. Nowadays, many of these originally family-run establishments have been transformed into oversize supermarkets [photo no. 2].



Photo no. 2 (by A. Leizaola)

Spain on a plate: eating paella in the borderland

Eating in a *benta* is part of the leisure activities of border tourism. This kind of tourism, mainly centred on shopping, could easily be considered as a solely economic activity aimed at reducing costs. However, the numerous bars and restaurants at the *bentak* stress the popularity of these spots for day-out plans in which, besides shopping, eating is a major activity. Having lunch at a *benta* is also a pleasant way to finish a walk in the surrounding hills and mountains. The magnificent views one can enjoy from Larrun and Ibaardin, from where all the Basque coastline as well as the Pyrenees can be admired, constitute an additional reason for choosing this setting for a family meal or a week-end plan.

At the *bentak*, faded photographs showing a once bright yellow dish [photo no. 3] announce the menu. Paella, undoubtedly one of the most - if not the most - internationally renowned Spanish dishes, is a rice dish cooked with vegetables combined with an array of ingredients (fish, poultry, meat) which originally comes from Valencia, on the Mediterranean coast. The dish takes its name from the pan in which it is prepared: a round, shallow pan which is used not only for cooking the dish, but also as a communal plate which everybody eats from. Wooden spoons, used to cook as well as to eat with, recall the humble origin of the dish and also prevent the pan from getting scratched. The size of the pan varies according to the number of guests.



Photo no. 3 (by A. Leizaola)

Traditionally, paella is cooked with a pinch of saffron, which gives the dish its characteristic colour. Because of the high price of the spice, artificial colorants are used as a substitute. Similar to other food that is internationally thought to represent a 'national' dish – pizza, kebab, tacos- paella has become a commercial product. As a result, restaurant chains have opened in the main Spanish cities. Specialised food brands have also emerged, ranging from the 'traditional' cooking style to semi-processed paella.

Throughout the twentieth century, paella has undergone an interesting evolution which has been studied in depth (Duhart and Medina 2005). From being a typical dish of the region of Valencia, paella has become the Spanish national dish. Whilst retaining its regional touch, paella—together with tortilla or Spanish omelette,- is undoubtedly the most familiar Spanish dish abroad. In the absence of a national cuisine in Spain, regional dishes serve not only as regional identity markers, but also as hallmarks of national identity (Ortiz García 1999). Today, paella has become a symbol of Spanish identity to the same extent as bullfighting, siesta or sangria. As such, it has become an ever-present dish in tourist locales.

Prior to the paella's entry into the market and its subsequent commercialisation, a whole set of discourses on the 'authenticity' of paella appeared. These connoisseur-type discourses stressed the quality of the ingredients; the uniqueness of the flavour, and above all, the right way to prepare paella, which from a purist's point of view include cooking the paella as in the old days over a wood fire. In this vein, preference for varieties of rice grown in the Albufera of Valencia, the use of local vegetables and beans typical of that area (such as *ferraura*, *tavella* and *garrofó* beans) and snails are taken as indubitable signs of an 'authentic' paella.

As in most rice dishes, calculating the cooking time carefully makes all the difference: paella must be cooked *al dente*, that is, not too 'wet' nor *pasado*, over-cooked. Valencians consider a rice dish that is too wet just *arroz*, rice, rather than paella no matter the ingredients. The cook's secret lies then in the right amount of stock used, i.e. in the ability to control the cooking point of the rice as much as in the adequacy of the ingredients. From this perspective, the use of saffron is a must to achieve good paella. The use of substitutes is thought to spoil the dish and they are thus discarded. In the connoisseurs' words, saffron gives the dish a unique flavour and its distinctive bright yellow colour.

For various reasons, paella is not considered a 'traditional' Basque dish. Rice consumption was rather rare in the Basque Country and did not become generalised until the post-war period of the 1940's (Barandiaran and Manterola 1990). Until then, rice was mostly used to prepare desserts and was rarely eaten as a main course or a side dish. Nevertheless, in recent decades rice and especially paella have become quite popular in the Basque Country. It is frequently included as the dish of the day in ordinary restaurants as well as in well-known restaurants. However, what is called paella in the Basque Country differs greatly from the Valencian version of the dish. In the Basque Country, paella is usually cooked wet – when not overcooked –, often prepared in a pressure cooker and not in a proper paella pan (which constitutes a sacrilege for Valencian paella-lovers) and saffron is not usually used. Instead, a little tomato sauce is usually added to give a homogeneous colour to the dish.

Despite these differences, paella, spelled and pronounced the French way *paëlla*, remains the star dish in the *bentak* alongside the border. Why is this so? Different factors must be taken into account. First, it is worth remembering that paella is an extremely popular dish in France. Long before processed paella appeared on the Spanish market, canned paella was sold in French supermarkets. As with couscous and ravioli⁴, paella was a dish both foreign and familiar at the same time.

In the midst of nineteenth century romanticism, Spain became a pole of attraction for European travellers and writers alike (Benassar and Benassar 1998; García Mercadal 1962). Their writings portrayed a Spain full of stereotypes, with lots of Moorish references that paradoxically were adamantly rejected by Spaniards. In the trail of Orientalism, Spain became for the French a neighbour both close-by, and at the same time, unknown and ‘exotic’, thus inviting both adventure and discovery. Travel literature contributed to the beginning of tourism; its influence was considerable in the Basque Country, particularly in the borderland (Leizaola 2002). Paella, with its ‘Moorish’ roots⁵, was amongst the exotic items discovered at that time. In the 1960’s, still under Franco’s dictatorship, the opening up of the international border gave way to an unprecedented boom of mass tourism. Spain, particularly the Mediterranean, became a popular resort for European tourists, the French among them.

However, historical explanations alone do not adequately account for the popularity of the dish. As with couscous and ravioli, class issues seem to have been determining factors too. The success of those foods, related to their early inclusion amongst processed food, owes as much to economic factors as to cultural issues. Indeed, all three dishes, particularly couscous and paella, remind us of the presence of Spanish, Italian, and above all, North African migrants in contemporary France. Cheap and easy to prepare, canned couscous, ravioli and paella provided a ready-made, affordable and tasty lunch in record time. Bringing together reminders of home for those migrants of Spanish descent as well as reminiscences of holidays past for working class people, eating paella is a sort of return trip – to roots, to holidays – for many French tourists.

A passion for sangria

In this perspective, the *benta* offers border tourists the opportunity to experience the ‘real taste’ of Spain without having to travel any further. Together with paella, sangria – a sweet alcoholic punch made of red wine and fruits, originally from southern Spain – is widely

⁴In addition to paella, couscous and ravioli were offered as ‘exotic’ prepared foods one could buy cheaply. All of them come originally from Mediterranean countries or regions with which France has maintained historical ties through colonialism and migration. By the end of the 1970’s, these dishes competed with other canned food labelled as ‘authentically French’ regional dishes, such as lentils with sausage, *choucroute*, or *cassoulet*.

⁵Even though rice was grown before their arrival into Spain, the Arabs contributed to its spread during the Middle Ages. According to some etymologists, paella might come from the Arabic word *baquiyah* (Duhart and Medina 2005).



Photo no. 4 (by A. Leizaola)

consumed in the border area. In most of the *benta*, a jar of sangria stands by the beer pumps welcoming French customers. Signs announcing 'home-made sangria' are displayed everywhere [photo no. 4]. Whereas paella has been adopted – and locally adapted, as we have seen – by Basques, the same cannot be said of sangria. As a matter of fact, in the borderland sangria is exclusively a matter for French tourists. People from the borderland, on either side of the border, prefer drinking beer or wine.

At this point, it is interesting to compare the attitudes towards the consumption of sangria and of *pastis* in the borderland. This anis-like, sweet drink that is drunk mixed with water is extremely popular in the south of France where it is seen as a major representative of regional taste. In contrast, at the border, *pastis* is an exclusively French product, brought for and by French tourists. Produced by French industries and often packed specifically for border business, large quantities of *pastis* are sold every week-end at the *bentak*. South of the border, it has become a national symbol of France as a whole, no matter where the consumer comes from. As I have explained in previous works (Leizaola 2004, 2002), whereas in the area where I conducted fieldwork, *pastis* has been adopted by northern, and to some extent, southern borderlanders, the same has not happened with sangria.

Nevertheless, sangria is far from being an unknown drink in the Basque Country. However, its consumption is low compared to other alcoholic beverages and generally

linked to particular festivals. The drink is particularly appreciated during the *San Fermín*, when large quantities of sangria are taken to the bullfights every afternoon. Nowadays, a certain taste for sangria can be spotted in very particular contexts, too. Sangria is often ordered instead of wine in Chinese restaurants. Here, sangria is regarded as a cheap and quite an 'exotic' choice suitable for an exotic setting.

Other sangria-like punches are also popular in certain Basque regions, particularly in the south of Navarre. In the Ribera region huge quantities of a red wine punch called *zurrapote* are prepared for the summer festivals. *Zurrapote* is mainly made of red wine and stronger drinks, preferably sweet, anis-like alcohols. Fruit is added too: lemon, oranges, apples and most importantly, peaches in syrup. On top of that, lots of sugar is added to increase the effect of the alcohol. In general, *zurrapote* is considered to be stronger than sangria, not only because of the higher alcohol content, but also because of its sweetness that accelerates the metabolism of alcohol⁶. Unlike sangria, which can now be bought ready-made in tetra-bricks and five-litre containers, *zurrapote* remains a mainly regional, homemade beverage.

Other sweet alcoholic drinks made of a combination of wine and non alcoholic soft drinks are also consumed in large quantities in the Basque Country, specially south of the border. Among these *kalimotxo*, which consists of regular red wine mixed with coke, is extremely popular among young people who drink it all year round. Its consumption rate competes with that of draft beer and its popularity expands well beyond the Basque Country where it was created some thirty years ago (Muguruza et al. 2006). Young people also drink other drinks combining wine and soft, sweet drinks such as *txurrimuski*, rosé wine with a soft drink and *pitilingorri*⁷, red wine with a lemon drink, even though they are not as popular as *kalimotxo*.

Yet in the Basque Country, despite the wide appeal of sweet wine-based, fruity drinks, sangria remains almost exclusively a tourist product. While for French tourists it represents a hallmark of an 'authentic Spanish way of life', what ever that means, for borderlanders as well as for Basques in general, the drink is largely identified as a foreign item very much identified with Spain. Whereas in the border *bentak*, asking for a sangria would not be considered unusual, once you leave the border area the request might sound strange. Indeed, one of the most popular travel guides in France, *Le Guide du routard*, explicitly warns travellers that ordering sangria would be a 'faux-pas', confusing Spain with the Basque Country, as sangria

is an andalousian drink and ordering one means assimilating the Basque Country to the rest of Spain (...) Keep in mind that you are not in Spain talking to Spaniards: A simple example: you do not drink sangria in a Basque bar (Josse 2000: 59).

⁶This gives a new nuance to the distinction between 'strong' and 'soft' drinks, which has been shown to be a gender-orientated distinction (Fabre-Vassas 1989). Low alcohol content and sweetness have traditionally been regarded as the main features of soft drinks generally reserved exclusively for women.

⁷Literally 'red dick' in Basque. The rest of the drink names mentioned above, apart from *zurrapote*, meaning 'thrashing cape', have no exact translations. *Kalimotxo* is spelled *calimotxo* in Spanish.

Fitting into stereotypes

The analysis of eating and drinking patterns and their symbolic values in the Basque borderland leads us to conclude that, gastronomically, the border area begins to represent to French tourists what they imagine to be the 'Spanish way of life'. Ethnographic data show that consumption of specific products and dishes matches the culturally assumed stereotyped images of Spanish culture in France. The *benta* owners' strategy of conforming to the tourists' demands is not uncommon. Moreover, it obeys the rules of the market. Adopting others' identities for tourism purposes has been observed too in other settings (Lucas and Caravalheira 2005). Gastronomy is usually amongst the features so disguised. Examples of how 'ethnic' restaurants hide their origin and adopt another identity abound: so-called 'Greek' restaurants run by Turks, 'Japanese' restaurants run by people from other Asian countries in the Quartier Latin in Paris, and 'Indian' rather than Pakistani restaurants in Spain. Iranian migrants working in the catering industry in Britain have been known to disguise their ethnicity and try to pass 'as more acceptable others, such as Italians, Greeks or Turks' (Harbottle 1997: 99) in order to avoid hostile reactions due to negative public perceptions and stereotypes, particularly of Islamic fundamentalism. Compliance with clients' taste is just one facet of larger, complex issues such as cultural proximity, international relations and most importantly, stereotypes, according to which some cuisines are famous and others disregarded. *Benta* owners and workers of any ideological affiliation or identification, who usually speak Basque, Spanish and French fluently and come from the bordering villages on the Spanish side, do not object to selling typically Spanish products and complying with the tourists' stereotypes. Until now they have made their living by selling sangria, Andalusian-style fans and a whole range of 'typically Spanish' apparel, which does not mean they inevitably identify themselves as Spaniards. In fact, there are Basque nationalists and regionalists among them.

In turn, these actions reinforce stereotypes about the French too, who are seen by borderlanders as being 'dumb' – drinking sangria is certainly not the thing to do – and 'alcoholic', because of the large amounts of alcohol bought for home consumption. Drinking patterns and preferences differ on both sides of the border, not only concerning the nature of the alcohol consumed (Bray 2004), but also concerning the way it is consumed (Leizaola 2004). As many scholars have pointed out, drinking is an important part of Basque social life (Kasmir 2005; Medina 2001). In contrast, drinking at home is considered a sign of alcoholism and buying large quantities of alcohol for home consumption as the French tourists do, results in their identification as alcoholics (Leizaola 2004).

Conclusion

As features of identity, food and drink choices establish boundaries and borders (Belasco 2002). In the borderland, these boundaries are intertwined with stereotypes of national identities. In this sense, as these ethnographic examples show, it is striking to note how different the expectations and consumption patterns of French and Spanish tourists are. South of the border, Basque cuisine is one of the main tourist attractions and gastronomic tourism brings thousands of Spanish tourists to the provinces of the Basque Country every year, even in peak periods of high political tension and conflict. In contrast, French

tourists choosing paella and sangria at the *bentak* feed a ready-made stereotype of 'typically Spanish'.

Border establishments have so far catered to this specific taste. Whereas the reputation of the New Basque cuisine has extended well beyond the Basque Country, it still remains largely unknown to the average French tourist. However, in comparison to ten years ago, significant changes are occurring. Local habits and values from the southern Basque provinces are being adopted by people from the French side and are then passed on to tourists. For instance, going south to a *sagardotegi*, a cider place, has become extremely popular and since the 1990's, Basques from north of the border travel south to enjoy the experience. Following this trend, in recent years, cider-places have opened at the border (in Behobia and Dantxarinea), an area where cider culture had disappeared. Offering a prearranged menu of cod-omelette, cod, charcoal-grilled T-bone steaks, and as much cider as you like, the cider place is today a hallmark of traditional Basque cuisine. As such, it has become the 'typically Basque' thing to do. Similarly, new food and identity items are being incorporated into the border business. Since the end of the 1990's some *bentak* include Basque dishes on their menu, stressing not Spanish but Basque gastronomy. Moreover, several French travel guides have been published since 2000 which, for the first time, treat the Basque Country as a whole, comprising both sides of the border and all seven provinces. These have played a significant role in making French tourists aware of the cultural features of their destination, including gastronomy.

Eating patterns evolve through time. So do food-related identity markers as well as the symbolic meanings they convey. National identity as portrayed through food is strongly linked to the development of stereotypes. In the Basque borderland, differences in taste and food consumption between tourists and locals illustrate the importance of food in the production and reproduction of identities and in the making of stereotypes. As these ethnographic examples from the Basque borderland show, food-related identity issues are constantly subject to trends and fluctuations, a subject still very much unexplored. Studying food and eating practices in borderland areas can provide us with detailed and in-depth insights into changing representations of national identities. *Bon appétit!*

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POVZETEK

Članek analizira vlogo hrane v konstrukciji in rekonstrukciji identitet in stereotipov v obmejnem delu baskovske regije s poudarkom na turističnih praksah. Obmejna območja, kot kraji, kjer se srečajo nacionalne identitete in percepcije drugačnosti, nudijo zanimivo perspektivo za opazovanje »udejanjanja« identitet. V Baskiji imajo tako hrano na splošno, kot tudi baskovsko kuhinjo, za pomemben znak identitete in tudi za simbol svoje tradicije. Danes je ta pokrajina pomembna turistična destinacija kamor prihaja na tisoče Špancev, da bi okusili slovito baskovsko kuhinjo. Hkrati pa na baskovsko obmejno območje prihajajo številni francoski turisti, da bi izkusili Španijo in njeno kulinariko. Na podlagi etnografskih podatkov, članek predstavi različne primere, kako se specifične jedi in pijače prilagajajo stereotipom turistov o španski nacionalni identiteti. Analiza prehranskih vzorcev in njihovih simboličnih reprezentacij na tem obmejnem območju ponuja zanimiv kontekst za preučevanje tega, kako se reprezentacije ujemajo s stereotipi o nacionalni identiteti in kako hkrati prispevajo k nastajanju njenih novih elementov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: hrana in identiteta, nacionalni stereotipi, meja, turizem, baskovska kuhinja