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# The Semiotics of Gastronomy — Meals and Identity

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**ABSTRACT**

Gastronomy and meals have always played a key role in shaping cultural characteristics, and it is for this very reason that cultural anthropology pays particular attention to these topics. In this paper, we present several analytical dimensions that can be applied to the analysis of food culture, partly from a cultural anthropological perspective and partly from a socio-semiotic perspective. Firstly, we review those aspects of gastro-semiotics that help us to organize foods according to various dichotomies and polarities. We discuss, on the one hand, those aspects that may indicate differences between cultures and subcultures, and on the other those that relate to temporal differences in food consumption and those that are rooted in material differences among foods. We then list the dimensions that, in the form of general status symbols, may also play a role in the analysis of food. In the present paper we also discuss our longitudinal study *The Symbols of Hungarianness* (1997 and 2021/22), conducted on a nationwide representative sample of 1,000 people, in which we asked about foods and drinks that are characteristic in terms of national identity and that are thus also suitable for presenting certain typical features of Hungarian cuisine.

**KEYWORDS**

cultural anthropology, gastronomy, socio-semiotics, national identity, hierarchy symbols

In the following, we discuss the meaning and significance of food from the perspective of cultural anthropology (and semiotics), with a special focus on the symbolism of identity. The study of gastronomy has always played a major role in cultural anthropology. The discipline has a dual purpose. One is to demonstrate what is common to all cultures, and alimentation is obviously one of the most basic of these activities. The consumption of food and drink is not only a vital human necessity but is also one of the most common of human activities. The other

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focus of cultural anthropology research is the nature of cultural differences — that is, the differences between cultures in terms of the way they carry out a given activity or satisfy a given need. For example, most people are shocked to see on the television news that in some places people harvest live caterpillars from the trees to eat, since this is not customary in our culture; however, the impartial analyst — advocating an attitude of tolerance — will see this as a natural way to satisfy protein requirements in that culture, in the same way that we eat pork, for example, which is taboo in many other cultures. In cultural anthropology, the examination of eating habits is important from one additional perspective. This is the perspective of identity symbolism, since we know that where culture is difficult to preserve — in a diaspora, for example, where the customs of the original culture fade from generation to generation, leading to a loss of cohesion — even when the language is lost (i.e., when members of the younger generations start using the language of the host country as their mother tongue rather than the original language) certain elements of food-related traditions, as symbols of the given *cultural identity*, still manage to survive (Hoppál 1989, 1995; Niedermüller 1989; Fejős 1993; Bába 2015; Bögre 2018).

The symbolic role of food in identity is also manifested in the fact that, in ancient times, eating together was seen as the *exchange of souls*, the creation of a common *spiritual circle* (Kapitány – Kapitány 2020). This deeply rooted ancient attitude survives to this day: it is thus an insult to refuse what is offered, while it is an honor, a sign of friendship, to share a meal with someone. (Mary Douglas analyzes in detail how the types of food and drink we share with someone is related to the strength of the relationship [Douglas 1966, 2003].) Mary Douglas investigated the symbolic meaning and significance of food from several perspectives. On the one hand, she examined the phenomenon of food taboos (i.e., what makes some foodstuffs taboo in a culture), pointing out that food sources that are difficult to classify into distinct categories (apart from those foods that are considered poisonous or contaminating) often become taboo, and that the creation of taboos is very strongly linked to the protection of community homogeneity (Douglas 1966, 2003). Drawing on the research of other anthropologists, we might add that in the world of totemic beliefs, the consumption of animals and plants that are declared totemic is either taboo or, on the contrary, a ritual and sacred event. On the other hand, Mary Douglas also attempted to construct a kind of semiotic system of foods.

## ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS

Based partly on this, partly on other researches (Barthes 1961; Montanari 1999; Balázs et al. 2012), and partly on our own investigations, we would like to outline some possible dimensions of the semiotic analysis of food (Kapitány – Kapitány 2012, 2015). The first dimension that defines the meaning of food is obviously the "Yes/No" dichotomy, which here refers to the distinction between foods/drinks that are suitable for consumption and those that are unsuitable (nutritious versus poisonous). The next dimension is *raw/cooked*, which also forms the basis for the first distinction between civilized and uncivilized, since the use of fire is one of the first civilizational boundaries between human beings and animals. It should be mentioned here, of course, that we also know of a culture[1] in which (contrary to the general perception) "cooked" is

[1] From this perspective, the raw food diet popularized in Hungary by Béla Bicsérdy can also be seen as a culture in its own right.

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synonymous with harmful. The dichotomy of "appetizing" *versus* "disgusting" is related to the dimension of suitable/unsuitable for consumption. (This is fairly subjective: besides cultural customs, what is appetizing and what is not may be determined by a number of individual factors, from individual physiological characteristics through personal life experiences to conscious individual decisions.) The *sacred/profane* dichotomy is clearly a cultural dimension. The emergence of sacred meals has already been mentioned in the context of totemism; however, in the context of particular religions, the distinction is not only between *forbidden foods* and *preferred foods*. There is also a subtle system regulating the separation of ordinary meals from festive meals, the consecration of foods, the almost obligatory meals associated with certain festivals, and the rules which delimit the boundaries between what can and cannot be eaten during periods of fasting, for example. This is why forcing believers to break these rules (and thus deny sacred values) could be used in Ancient Rome as a form of religious persecution, while many of us may remember that meat was deliberately served in school cafeterias and factory canteens on fast days during the socialist era. The distinction between *daily* and *festive* meals is no longer necessarily religious but is certainly important in terms of structuring time and establishing a hierarchy among meals (since the distinction clearly identifies festive meals as being more valuable).

*Seasonality* also plays a role in food symbolism. Although globalization has made possible the realization of what was held up as an example of foolish insatiability in the story "Twelve Months" (when a poor girl was repeatedly ordered to bring fruit that was impossible to find in the given season), many people still insist on the seasonality of traditional consumption habits. Classification according to *times of the day* is also typical. We are aware that the number, copiousness, and customary "menu" of daily meals varies from culture to culture (and also according to the different possibilities enjoyed by particular social groups). An English breakfast, for example, is very different from a "Continental" breakfast. Many adhere to the healthy maxim "Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dine like a pauper," although in lifestyles where fast food is the only option during the day, and breakfast is a rushed affair so as to get to school or work on time, dinner, which plays an important role in family bonding, becomes the most important meal of the day. What kind of meals are eaten when is also a matter of habit, with breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus differing considerably. The traditional five meals a day (breakfast, midmorning snack/elevenses, lunch, afternoon snack, dinner — the distinction between them being demonstrated by their separate names) are becoming increasingly rare in today's lifestyle; with the exception of catering for children, where efforts are made to conform to this traditional regime, eating three meals a day is perhaps the most common pattern, although many people eat only twice a day, while those living in extreme deprivation may often be able to afford just one daily meal.

Speaking of social differences, the distinction between prestige (luxury) foods/subsistence foods is another important dimension. (This is subject to change, of course: as living standards rise, some meals may move out of the "prestige" category, while some tasty "subsistence foods" may become more popular. We see this, for example, in the case of *lebbencs* (Hungarian pasta) soup, or the growing popularity of sprouted wheat pudding.

Another approach is the classification of food according to *quality*. Again, there are many subjective and variable elements here, as "quality" cannot always be clearly defined. Quality may sometimes be determined chiefly by the food's nutritional value, while at other times it is the variety and sophistication of the flavors that are an indication of quality. The ingredients used, their purity, their "more prestigious" status, the method of preparation, the virtuosity of the cook (e.g., the thinness of strudel pastry as a measure of the cook's prowess) — many such

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things play a role in whether something is considered to be of better quality. (Once again, subjectivity comes into play here: in the case of strudel, for example, some people prefer having more filling, while others prefer less.)

In the semiotics of food, “Eastern/Western” is another important cultural dimension. In Euro-American, Western societies, the food of the East is considered exotic. Accordingly, for a long time it was common for consumers to stick to traditional “Western” meals, rarely sampling anything else, and only then out of curiosity. (The first Chinese and Thai restaurants that opened in rural Hungary, for example, quickly closed.) However, despite these early failures, Eastern gastronomy — together with other Eastern influences (sports, furnishings, clothing, spiritual practices, films, etc.) — began to gain ground, to the extent that some elements of oriental cuisine have now become an integral aspect of Hungarian home cooking.

The opposition between *masculine* and *feminine* foods is a further traditional dichotomy. (The traditional family model is crucial here, according to which men did the more physically demanding jobs, or at least jobs that were considered more demanding, thus “men’s food” was more substantial and filling.) Men were not supposed to have a “sweet tooth,” for example: cakes were thus clearly considered to be women’s food. As in other areas of gender-based distinctions, these boundaries are now being eroded. Another such distinction is the *children’s food/adult food* dichotomy, where children’s food was obviously the lighter option. Some delicacies are specifically aimed at children and are less often consumed by adults. Traditionally, for example, cotton candy, lollipops, and other sweets fell into this category, while rum-filled truffles and other desserts containing liquor were intended mainly for adults. These boundaries are also becoming gradually blurred, with more and more adults consuming children’s foods (if only because of the legitimization of childhood nostalgia), while the distinction between children and adults is maintained chiefly in terms of quantity (e.g., children’s portions).

The distinction between *urban* and *rural* foods is based on the different habits of the two settlement types, although its significance today is primarily symbolic: urban foods (e.g., what is available from global fast-food restaurants) are a symbol of urbanization for those living in the countryside, while rural foods (homemade fruit squashes and traditional village meals) are a symbol of nostalgia among urbanites.

There is an important distinction between *fixed menus* and *buffets*. The latter are gaining ground with the growing trend towards individualization. Alongside the advent of buffet-style breakfasts, more and more school and workplace cafeterias are now offering menu choices on the one hand, while on the other it is common for people to put together their own meals, adopting the buffet-style approach. In terms of home cooking, techniques that cater for the individual tastes of guests are also becoming widespread (fondue, raclette, etc.).

The *natural/artificial* distinction would seem to take us back to the first point (the contrast between raw and cooked foods), although “artificial” no longer refers to the human modification of natural foods but to the synthetic production of food ingredients. “Modernist” eras have tended to welcome the emergence of such foods as an indication of progress, while conservative eras, such as the recent postmodern era, have rather highlighted the negative, unhealthy aspects of the “artificial.”

Thus far, we have been discussing the cultural aspects of differentiation among foods. However, when exploring those dimensions in which foods are classified according to their material ingredients, we are still obliged to take cultural determinants into consideration. The *soup/meat/pasta orientation* not only classifies diets according to material differences in foodstuffs but also points to differences between soup-, meat-, and pasta-based cultures. In some cultures, one or

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other of these three dietary components is almost absent. *Meat- and vegetable-based meals* have, from the very beginning, represented a dichotomy, building on one of the first great schisms in the division of labor — the separation of cultures into farming and animal husbandry, or fishing and hunting. (Animal-based dishes can also be further subdivided according to whether they are made from *domestic animals and game* — game foods also being associated with images of hunting — or whether they are made from the *meat, fat, or offal* of the animal, all of which can be associated with different notions.)[2] The boundaries between plant- and animal-based foods have never been sharply drawn, of course: typically, food for human beings is provided by the cultivation of plants together with hunting/fishing, agriculture, and animal husbandry, although the emphasis may vary greatly from culture to culture. Where this is supported by religious considerations, as in India, it may result in the dominance of plant-based foods. In the modern age, health fashions and health considerations more often represent the dividing line: vegetarianism has long been a popular trend, and recently special diets (gluten-free, sugar-free, lactose-free) have been created for people with different allergies and sensitivities, although there are also movements (such as the so-called paleo diet) that argue in favor of meat consumption as a healthier option.[3]

Taste is an important aspect of division in terms of food symbology: we associate different things with *bitter, salty, sour,* and *sweet* foods (which is why the cuisine of the Far East strives for a balance among flavors). The physical properties of the texture of foodstuffs, such as *hardness/softness*, *dryness/moistness*, etc. are also important.

Naturally, the *color* of food carries significant symbolic value. Red is considered to have a particularly strong vitalizing content, even in terms of foodstuffs, while blue is in many ways considered less attractive: this is said to be because there are scarcely any edible blue foods to be found in nature. (Shades of blue are most likely to be produced by the growth of mold.) In fact, this is not entirely true: there are attractive blue berries and fruits, such as sloes, cranberries, and even plums; more recently, food colorings have given rise to blue ice creams and drinks. (Again, it is a matter of personal taste whether one finds these attractive or repulsive.) The shape and composition of food also matters: the names of some foods apply only when they appear in their traditional form (e.g., chimney cakes, Bundt cakes, grilled chicken, or layered potatoes), while in other cases variations in shape are tolerated (e.g., pancakes, which can be served either rolled or folded into triangles). *Composition* is particularly important in the world of gourmets and is particularly striking in meals served in Michelin-starred restaurants.

## HIERARCHY-FORMING DIMENSIONS

By collating the observations from several of our studies, we have found that the signaling of hierarchy — even in the very different systems of symbols that apply to life in society (e.g., in the perception of the material environment, in the use of language, or even in the symbology of gastronomy) — essentially relies on the same dichotomies. We therefore describe them briefly in the present context as the hierarchy-forming dimensions of gastro-semiotics.

[2]Again, of course, the value assigned to a particular type of food varies: in János Arany's epic poem *Toldi*, liver was still considered to be an inferior food fit for animals, while today it is regarded as a delicacy for gourmets.

[3]Quite tellingly, in the hierarchical relationship between meat and vegetable dishes, while vegetables can function as fillings and garnishes for meat dishes, meat can be a filling for vegetable dishes, but not a garnish.

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The first such dichotomy is formed by the poles of *cleanliness* and *dirt*. Obviously, both the setting of the meal and the food itself enjoy a higher status when judged as clean *versus* contaminated. In the context of a highly prestigious meal, the cutlery, crockery, and tableware, and the food itself, must be spotlessly clean, as this is what distinguishes it from a low-prestige meal. However, what is considered dirty in the first place is also culturally dependent (Douglas 1966). This is generally evident within a single culture. Inedible dust and mud are food contaminants, while food decoration is not; if a meat dish is swimming in gravy, it is clean, but if the soup from the previous course spills on it, it is considered contaminated. The same thing may even be judged differently: mold on bread is considered a contaminant, while mold on fine cheese is not.

The next dimension is that of *orderliness/disorderliness*. If food is arranged in an esthetically pleasing composition, it has quite a different impact in terms of its hierarchical status compared to food that is simply piled onto a plate in the context of mass catering. The dimension of quantity — the *abundance* of food, which is a symbol of well-being as opposed to *lack* or *scarcity* — is also essential: this is the case, for example, if a dish should contain meat or spices, etc., but does not; if a person is left hungry after a meal; or if there is no food at all at home.

The next hierarchizing dimension, which has already been discussed above, is *quality*, which also encompasses the *condition* of the food: its freshness, for example, or whether a piece has been broken off a slice of meat or a pastry. *Decoration/drabness* is related, but not identical to orderliness: a dish can be composed but at the same time convey drabness, and this again demotes it in the hierarchy of dishes. The symbolic role of *sparkle*, the dimension of *light/darkness*, is well known from the world of interior design but is also relevant, for example, in the judgement of cities and neighborhoods. Here we might think not only of foods such as flambéed Gundel pancakes or the decorations on birthday cakes but also, for example, the icing on cakes, or the rings of fat glistening on top of broth, which made the gastronomic references in Zoltán Huszárik's film adaptation of Gyula Krúdy's novel *Szindbád* so tangible.

The dimension of *convenience/inconvenience* refers to the conditions under which the food is consumed; it also applies (with a devaluing effect within the hierarchy) when a food is tough and chewy, or when fishbones make it unsafe for the person consuming it. This latter example leads to the next dimension of *safe/unsafe*. In Akira Kurosawa's film *Dodes'ka-den*, fish that is past its expiry date (which is thus inferior not only in terms of its quality and condition but also in terms of its safety) is thrown away by a restaurant, leading to the tragic poisoning of one of the homeless protagonists. The dimension of *exclusivity/life of the masses* is also present, both in the difference between settings (luxury restaurant versus soup kitchen) and in the meals themselves: "mass catering" using huge cooking pots as opposed to delicacies concocted personally for the privileged few. (In this respect, the sky is the limit: in the ancient world, magnates would throw pearls into their drinks, the ancient equivalent of a diamond finish on a Rolls Royce.) All these dimensions thus play a role in the extent to which a food is associated with a socially higher or lower status.

Finally, we would like to say a few words about those characteristics of Hungarian cuisine that can be seen as symbols of national identity, drawing on another of our research projects (Kapitány – Kapitány 2002, 2023).[4]

[4]During this research, a national representative sample of 1,000 people were asked about the characteristics of Hungarian culture, including food and drink, that are considered typical from the point of view of national identity.

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## SOME CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF HUNGARIAN CUISINE

Although soup, as we know it today, is a relatively new addition to Hungarian cuisine, and although many Hungarian soups reflect foreign influences, Hungarian cuisine can be considered "soup oriented" insofar as it was characterized by a wealth of sauces and foods boiled in water and/or wine even before the spread of goulash soup and fish soup. In some cultures, soup is not an integral part of the main meal; this cannot be said of Hungarian cuisine, and presumably the more recent soups were easily integrated into Hungarian cuisine since soup orientation was and always has been an inherent aspect of the gastronomic worldview of this culture. Another, even more distinctive and well-known characteristic, is Hungarian cuisine's strong association with the use of *paprika, onion,* and *spices*. Here again, it should be pointed out that although paprika may have arrived only after the colonization of America, Hungarian tastes were characterized by an inclination towards richly spiced meals long before that. The use of *meat* and *bacon* is also important: many Hungarians have a liking for "meat with meat," and bacon features in a remarkably large number of dishes. The significance of the pig-slaughtering festival deserves mention at this point: although pigs are killed in many other countries, the complex ritual associated with pig killing in Hungary is unique: several studies report that the pig-slaughtering festival is a significant means of identity building among Hungarian Americans (if only because it is not found in this form in other American communities). With respect to pastas: although such dishes are typically associated with Italian cuisine, many other cuisines use them in one form or another. Hungarian cuisine is also characterized by its *variety of pastry-, batter-, and dough-based dishes* (*lángos* [fried dough], *langalló* [pizza-like flat bread], *pogácsa* [savory scones], strudels, chimney cake (Pozsony 2014/2015), filled pastries, bread puddings, pancakes, etc.) and its variety of types of pasta, dough, and pastry[5] (pies, boiled pastas, yeasted doughs, puff pastry, cakes, etc.).[6] Many such dishes are so intricately associated with Hungarian culture that they have become symbols of national identity and their Hungarian name has been adopted in foreign languages, thus authenticating their character as *Hungaricum*s (see the case of the *lángos*, for example).

Another distinctive feature is the use of ingredients that are seldom used elsewhere in the same form. These include the use of *crumbly curd cheese* and even *sour cream*, both of which are common ingredients in many Hungarian dishes. Poppyseeds are also used as a flavoring in neighboring countries, although they are such an integral part of Hungarian food culture (featuring in poppyseed noodles, poppyseed strudel, poppyseed dumplings, etc.) that when the possibility of a ban arose at the time of Hungary's accession to the EU, many people saw it as a national slight. The culture of creamed vegetables (*főzelék*) is likewise part of the Hungarian national identity. Many peoples use plant-based foods, although what the Hungarians call

[5]Although some people dispute the Hungarian origins even of the Hungaricum *kürtőskalács* (chimney cake), there are several cakes that are verifiably Hungarian "inventions" (*Dobos* cake, *vargabéles* noodle dessert, *Somlói*-style sponge cake, and *Rákóczi* curd cheese cake).

[6]According to Éva Huseby-Darvas, among the foods eaten by American Hungarians, one of the most important symbols of Hungarian identity is the making of *csigatészta*, or snail shell pasta, as an important element in the festive preparations (Huseby-Darvas 1996). However, it can also be considered as such in Hungary, since it was one of the ritual household chores performed jointly by women (especially on the occasion of weddings), similar to husking corn or making plum jam.

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*főzelék* (thickened stewed vegetables) is less typical, especially when it comes to the wide variety found in Hungary (carrot, cabbage, potato, sorrel, bean, pea, lentil, spinach, pumpkin, etc.). As noted above, sweets are not traditionally considered to be a men's food, although many men do enjoy them and they come in a wide variety.

Another feature of Hungarian cuisine is its strong *conservatism*, although while retaining its traditionalism it is also characterized — as is the whole of Hungarian culture — by *acceptance and synthesis*. Hungarian culture absorbs many cultural influences, from east and west, north and south, synthesizing them into its own unique unity. We have emphasized on several occasions that it is not just the perception of particular foods that *varies historically* but the nature of Hungarian cuisine itself. Prior to goulash, cabbage with meat was considered to be the most typical Hungarian dish (Kisbán 1989), and as we go back in time, we find further and further symbols of identity among Hungarian dishes. It is also important to note that those Hungarian foods that are the most important in terms of identity are associated with *rituals*. We have already discussed the role of communal eating and drinking in the *formation of soul circles*. Another such ritual — a remnant of sacrificial rites — is the giving of foods and drinks as gifts, as in the case of the *komatál,* a community-building custom in the form of baskets of food given to a woman after childbirth. We have also mentioned the ritual nature of the pig-slaughtering festival and the preparation of snail shell pasta (see footnote 6), although the making of goulash or fish soup can also be considered a ritual — its ritual nature also being indicated by the fact that it is mostly considered a job for men. This is due not only to the fact that these dishes were originally prepared by men — shepherds or fishermen — working far from their families, but also to the festive nature of the dishes: what distinguishes them from everyday meals in a traditionally male-dominated culture was making their preparation the privilege of men who enjoyed greater prestige. Certain regional dishes can also acquire an image that associates them with the national identity. This was the case with goulash itself, but also with *slambuc* or *öhöm* [a Hungarian shepherds' dish made from bacon, pasta, and potatoes], as well as Transylvanian chimney cakes and layered cabbage. And the list could go on. In any case, this typically happens when the region itself becomes a symbol of national identity, such as the Hungarian Great Plain, and Hortobágy within it, or (especially since Trianon) Transylvania.

Also of decisive importance in the symbolism of food are *fairy tales, folk songs,* and *literary works* featuring food; childhood experiences are particularly strong when it comes to identity building. To name but a few, the tale known as the "Wishing Table" is a manifestation of the importance of eating itself (and the desire to enjoy it endlessly). The story "Stone Soup" is about the inventiveness of the poor man and at the same time a criticism of greed — and of course it is about how the soup-based Hungarian cuisine can mobilize an extraordinary wealth of flavors. The tale "Little Roly-Poly" is essentially a story of gluttony, although the all-devouring pig's stomach may also symbolize the making of brawn or "head cheese" [traditionally the cheeks, tongue, and head and organ meats stuffed into the pig's stomach]. The song that starts *túrós-csusza, bableves* ("curd cheese pasta, bean soup") contains elements of a very ancient layer of Hungarian culture: shamanic culture. On the one hand, this is apparent from the reverse order of the elements (which is usual in shamanic magic: see, for example, the reverse order of the days in the old Hungarian folk song "*szita, szita péntek, szerelem csütörtök, dobszerda*" ["Sieve, sieve Friday, love Thursday, drum Wednesday"]): it should be borne in mind that some of the dishes mentioned above are connected in a kind of sequence — the traditional "menu" of bean soup and curd cheese pasta, for example — only in the reverse order to their appearance in the song.

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(The next line of the song — "*Énrám babám ne nevess*" ["Don't laugh at me my darling"] — features another shamanic element, since laughter, in which the teeth are made visible, is an act that breaks the shamanic spell.) Of course, the text is not directly connected to the shamanic tradition but merely *preserves* elements of it that have lost their significance.

Finally, we would like to mention foods that members of the present-day Hungarian population chiefly associate with Hungarianness, according to our research into Hungarian symbols. For our research, we used a nationally representative sample of 1,000 people. The forerunner to this research was a similar countrywide representative survey of 1,000 people in 1997. While in 1997, goulash was the clear leader (64.1%), followed by fish soup (43.6%), stuffed cabbage (40.2%), chicken paprika (34.3%), paprika potatoes (25.4%), pork sausages and other products of the pig-slaughtering festival (23.7%), bean soup (21.8%), and curd cheese pasta (11.3%), in 2021 the gap had closed between goulash in first place (62%), stuffed cabbage in second (60%), and fish soup in third (56%), followed by the new entry *pörkölt* [meat stew] (42%), chicken paprika (36%), *lecsó* [ratatouille] (34%), fried meat (33%), pork sausages and other pork products (32%), and meat soup (31%). Comparisons are difficult, since in the 2021 study more than one choice was permitted (hence the higher percentages), and a higher number of items were included on the list. (The 2021 study also included a sample of intellectuals, who ranked three pasta-based dishes besides curd cheese pasta among the top ten.)

The list of *favorite* dishes is not identical to the list of dishes considered to be typically Hungarian (although the list of favorites may be representative of the culinary tastes of the Hungarian population today). (The data from the two surveys are easier to compare in this respect, since in both cases it was an open question, thus there were no predefined response options from which to choose.) In any case, there were changes in the rankings. The order in 1997 was stuffed cabbage (26.1%), breaded veal cutlets (19.3%), chicken paprika (16%), meat soup (15.9%), fish soup (12.7%), goulash (10.8%), bean soup (10.3%), and meat stew (10.1%). In 2021, the rankings were meat soup (26.4%), meat stew (23.4%), breaded veal cutlets (22.6%), stuffed cabbage (20.6%), goulash (13.1%), chicken paprika (11.6%), and fish soup (11.1%). However, and this is also noteworthy, the top ten included the selfsame dishes, thus the main players in the Hungarian diet had remained the same for 25 years (i.e., over one generation). In the foregoing, we have endeavored to present several analytical viewpoints that can contribute to a multifaceted analysis of the role of food in culture.

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