

XVI Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Cagliari
Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali

3-5 ottobre 2024



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Food politics in post-2003 Iraq: a cultural perspective

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words)

Food is essential for life. Therefore, it is central to many different political and social dynamics and a powerful lens through which to explore broader issues of power and identity. Food politics is of crucial importance to the Arab region, one of the most food-insecure regions of the world (Harrigan, 2014).

The case of Iraq is particularly relevant in this context. The weaponization of food, the extreme effects of which we are witnessing today in the politically and military-provoked mass starvation in the Gaza Strip, has been one of the most critical aspects of the multilateral UN embargo on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, from 1990 to 2003 (Woertz 2013).

Ensuring food security has also been a primary issue in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion: since then, policies of food production, consumption and distribution have been crucial for domestic political leaders' and external actors' quest for power and political stability.

While a growing body of critical literature is addressing food policies, green colonialism, and eco-activism in the Arab region, (Ayebe and Bush 2019; Woertz 2013; Zurayk and Gough 2014), the cultural aspects and implications of food insecurity, as well as the exploitation of and limited access to water and other natural resources, are hardly studied, and this is particularly true for the case of Iraq. Yet food – and access to it – plays a crucial role in shaping and reproducing cultural identities, both at the level of the dominant discourse and in the production of counter-narrations (*tārīkh muwāzin*).

The cultural dimension of food politics is indeed strictly related to the cultural nature of food itself. In the fields of cultural studies and social sciences, food has only recently become a significant and coherent area of research (Ashley et al. 2004; Zubaida and Tapper 1994; Laudan 2013). Despite the development of seminal frameworks, such as Barthes or Bourdieu's work on the relationship between food, feeding and cultural identity, no effort has yet been made to put them in dialogue with the Iraqi cultural scene.

The panel will contribute to bridging this gap by exploring the impact of different dimensions of food politics in contemporary Iraqi culture, its reflection in the work of Iraqi artists living both in their home country and in the diaspora, as well as the cultural and aesthetic aspects of political and social mobilizations for social and environmental justice. On the one hand, food (in)security is a central experience defining real and imagined bodies and subjectivities in the post-2003 conjuncture. As Christian Junge (2019: 145) argues, feeding is a fundamental site of 'somatic negotiation', bringing to the fore issues relating to embodiment, emotions, and affect in (literary) narratives. Iraq's long tradition in the representation of food and feeding (Nasrallah 2013; Gelder 2000) makes these negotiation process particularly rich when seen from a diachronic perspective (as re/inventions of traditions and cross-contamination processes). Conversely, in the diaspora and migrant communities, traditions related to the food sphere are another symbol of a multifaceted identity, and remembrances and preparation of typical dishes are means to express "ghurba" and sense of belonging. In a highly globalized interconnected world and in a time of massive migratory movements, food is also a primary signifier of cross-cultural contaminations, of the connection between the local and the global, but also of the ambivalent relation with the "other", of what we accept/consume and what we reject.

This panel aims to reflect on the cultural dimension of the processes of mobility, crossing and contamination investing the Iraqi society, understood as a community and as individual actors. Scholarly papers seeking to

elucidate how contemporary Iraqi cultural actors articulate the aesthetic and cultural processes and critical nodes relating to food production and consumption, both through canonical and non-canonical media, are particularly welcome. Contributions may delve into various aspects and draw from different frameworks, including but not limited to:

- the significance of food (production, consumption, traditions...) in the reproduction of social memory and in reinforcing collective identity
- endeavours to counteract cultural aggression, and the application of perspectives aimed at countering prevailing hegemonic and neo-colonial narratives.
- the place/representation/significance of food in cultural practices and art of Iraq and in the Iraqi diaspora (in literature, popular culture etc);
- cultural aspects of social and political mobilizations; aesthetic practices related to environmental-based activism, food and foodification in the construction of diasporic spaces;
- cultural implications of and responses to food policies implemented by State and non-State actors.

The panel is part of the activities of a research project PRIN 2022 funded by Next Generation EU and the Italian Ministry of University and Research.

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