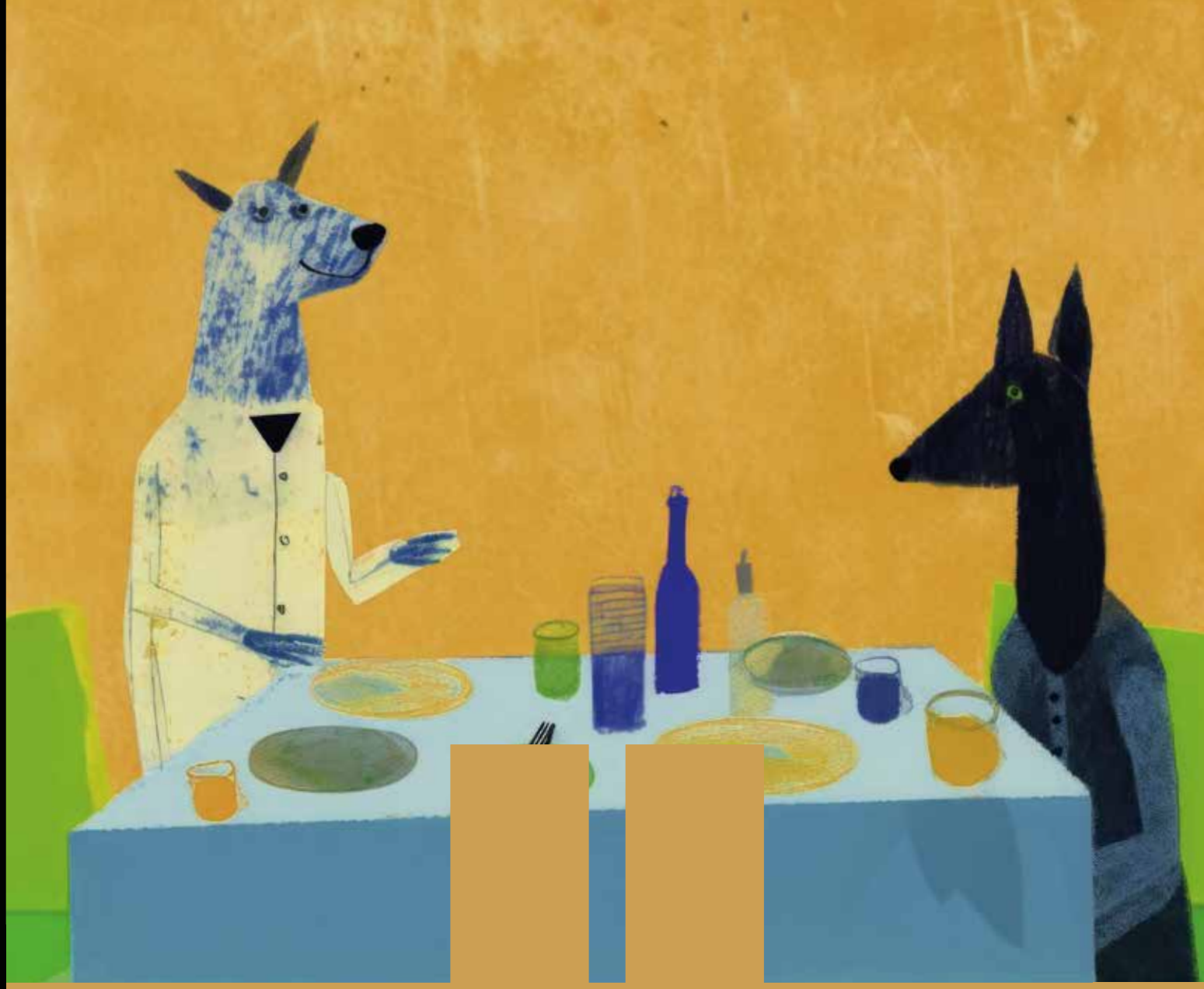


GLOBAL HUMANITIES

Year 10, Vol. 11, 2024 – ISSN 2199-3939

Editors Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

Dining out

Editorial by
Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

Texts by
Jerome Krase
Sebastiano Mannia
Juan Manuel Montoro and Sebastián Moreno

edizioni
Museo
Pasqualino

GLOBAL HUMANITIES

Year 10, Vol. 11, 2024 – ISSN 2199-3939

Editors Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

Dining out

Editorial by
Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

Texts by
Jerome Krase
Sebastiano Mannia
Juan Manuel Montoro and Sebastián Moreno

edizioni
Museo
Pasqualino

Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino
Piazza Antonio Pasqualino, 5 – 90133 Palermo PA, Italy
www.edizionimuseopasqualino.it – info@edizionimuseopasqualino.it

Regione siciliana
Assessorato dei beni culturali
e dell'identità siciliana
Dipartimento dei beni culturali
e dell'identità siciliana

ISBN 979-12-80664-96-9
EAN 9772199393003 40011
DOI https://doi.org/10.53123/GH_11

Design and Typesetting
Francesco Mangiapane

Printing House
Fotograph S.r.l., Palermo, Italy

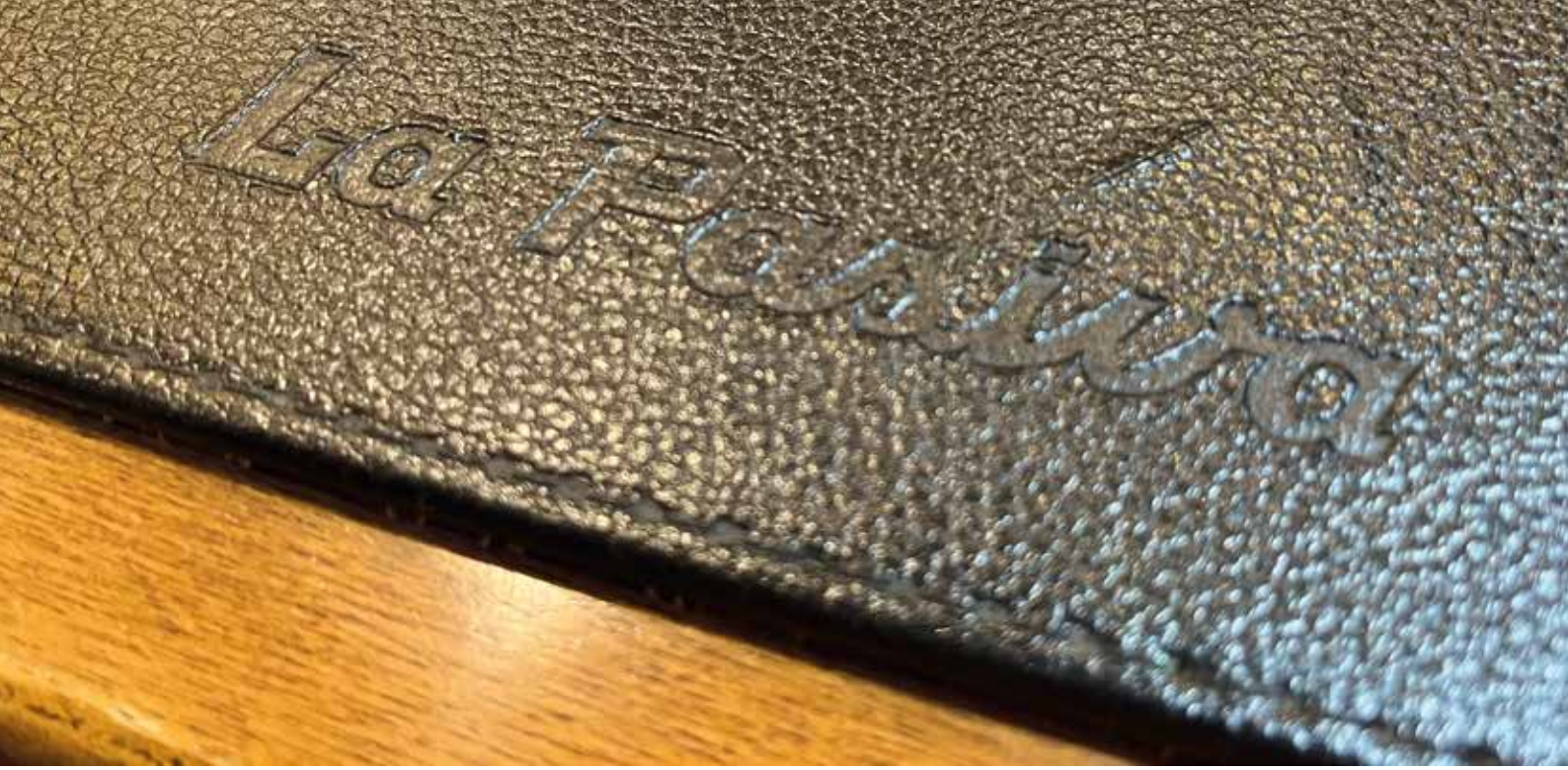
Cover
Dog family eating dinner animal painting mammal, AI generated, remixed by Francesco Mangiapane.

The articles in this volume were peer reviewed.

The publisher is available for any claimants who could not be contacted.

The paper used for printing is made with a fibrous mixture made of 100% recycled fibers and is guaranteed by Blauer Engel certification. Its fibers are bleached with Chlorine Free processes. It is therefore 100% ecological.

Table of Contents



https://doi.org/10.53123/GH_11_2

Cervecería La Pasiva
The 'Typical' Uruguayan Dining Out Experience

Juan Manuel Montoro
Catholic University of Uruguay
jmmontoro@outlook.com

Sebastián Moreno
Universidad ORT Uruguay
morenobarreneche@gmail.com

Abstract. Cervecería La Pasiva is a Uruguayan chain of restaurants specialized in local fast food (minutas). This article studies how La Pasiva, both as a brand and as a place for the experience of dining out, functions as 'typically' Uruguayan. The article begins with an introduction of the analytical category of 'geocultural identities', which we deem useful to describe processes of collective identification linked to territories, either national or not.

Keywords: Culinary Practices, Geocultural Identities, National Identity, Uruguay, La Pasiva.

1. Introduction

Uruguay is a scarcely populated country (it counts with ca. 3.5 million inhabitants) located in the South of Latin America. If a survey were conducted among Uruguayans asking them to name a specific restaurant that represents or reflects their national identity, a vast majority would most probably answer: Cervecería La Pasiva. La Pasiva is a Uruguayan chain of restaurants specialized in *minutas*, the local/regional version of fast food, that is, dishes that are not complex to prepare and that are eaten without much ceremony, usually in everyday life contexts. Although Uruguayans would most probably identify steakhouses – *parrilladas*, in Spanish – as the typical *type* of restaurant, La Pasiva would be the most probable option when asked to identify a specific restaurant.

© Photo by Sebastián Moreno, *La Pasiva's Logo on the Menu*, Montevideo, Uruguay.

The language and references used in local newspapers evidences the social imaginary that surrounds La Pasiva chain of restaurants: "an icon of national gastronomy", an "emblematic brand", a "traditional gastronomic chain" that is "famous for its draft beer, its light frankfurters and its mustard (El País 2016); a "Uruguayan fast food and *minutas* chain" that has become "one of Uruguay's most emblematic restaurants" (InfoNegocios 2020); a restaurant that serves "Uruguay's most famous frankfurters" (Ruocco 2012a). TasteAtlas lists it as one of the 10 "best traditional restaurants in Uruguay[1]".

What is curious about our imaginary survey is that La Pasiva restaurants do not display signs or symbols that are overtly Uruguayan, nor do they engage in a nationalistic/folkloristic rhetoric, as would be expected from a restaurant that TasteAtlas classes as one of the country's best *traditional* restaurants. How do restaurants convey the semantic value of /tradition/? Through which textual configurations do individuals recognize a restaurant as being traditional?

La Pasiva is certainly one of Uruguay's most traditional restaurants. However, neither its gastronomic offer nor its brand identity display semiotic contents easily recognizable – thanks to cultural codification – as typically Uruguayan in historical terms. Figure 1 depicts La Pasiva's logotype. How does the wooden barrel of beer relate to Uruguayan culinary identity and history? What about the giant hotdog, consisting of a frankfurter in soft Viennese bread with mustard on its top? What does the kid's attire convey in nationalistic terms? Where does his attire originally come from, since it has no relationship with Uruguayan folkloric attires? To sum up, none of the visual elements included in the logotype are *typically* Uruguayan.

Moving onto the spatial dimension of La Pasiva's restaurants, it projects heterotopies. Following Foucault , heterotopies constitute "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault [1984] 1986, p. 24). As spaces for heterotopic experiences, La Pasiva's restaurants seem to reproduce the narrative of the multicultural melting pot – *crisol de culturas,* in Spanish –, which consists of a convergence of diverse and heterogeneous cultures of origin that serve as the source for a relatively homogeneous, brand-new culture. For over a century, the narrative of a society composed by immigrants coming from different cultural backgrounds has been dominant as an account aimed at explaining the foundations of Uruguayan nationhood. This narrative is still recurrent among intellectuals, in political discourse and in the more general public sphere.

Fig. 1. La Pasiva's logotype.

In line with this hegemony of the discourse of multiculturalism, La Pasiva's menu mirrors the idea that poses that Uruguayan cuisine is not based on autochthonous products, ingredients, traditions and culinary practices that could be originally found in what nowadays is Uruguay's territory, but elsewhere (García Robles 2005). An observer unfamiliar with La Pasiva's restaurants will rapidly note how the brand proposes a *bricolage* of dishes that are located at the crossroads of (a) a blurred Central European imaginary – draft beer, homemade mustard, frankfurters and Hungarian sausages in Viennese bread –; (b) Mediterranean culinary traditions – different types of pizza and pasta, the local version of Genovese chickpea *farinata* (*fainá,* in

1 Source: https://www.tasteatlas.com/uruguay/restaurants, last accessed on December 15th 2023.

Spanish), Spanish omelet and Armenian *lahmacuns* – and (c) some creations of a creole origin – mostly *chivitos*, a beef tenderloin sandwich filled with an exuberating amount of ingredients, usually credited as the Uruguayan national dish.

To sum up, La Pasiva, one of Uruguay's most emblematic and traditional restaurant brands, does neither express nor convey directly the idea of a Uruguayan identity, as discussed above when analyzing its logo: the wooden barrel of beer and the attire of the brand's mascot do not have any link with the Uruguayan social imaginary regarding its national identity. In fact, it is almost impossible to find draft beer stored in wooden barrels in the country! However, in a sense that is less visible, the brand experience does reflect some of the core tenets of Uruguay's national identity.

The call for papers that motivated us writing this essay asked authors to embed dining-out ventures into a theoretical framework and ask the following questions: Why are they so special? How do they work as a social machine? How do their location, their spaces, their clients, their settings make sense? How does such meaning get acknowledged in the public sphere? This article aims at making sense of La Pasiva's restaurants as places for dining-out experiences where Uruguayans (and also tourists) are faced with a *typical* food experience related to Uruguayanness, that is, the Uruguayan national identity.

To achieve this goal, the first section introduces the notion of 'geocultural identities' that we proposed in previous articles as a useful analytical category to describe semiotic processes of collective identification linked to the culturalization of territories, either national or not (subnational, transnational or supranational regions, cities, cultural landscapes, etc.). Then, with a focus in the Uruguayan case, we discuss the implications of talking about 'national cuisines' in semiotic terms, that is, the articulation of sense that links a national identity – constructed in discourse – to a series of ingredients, products, dishes and culinary practices. After the initial theoretical considerations, we move to the semiotic analysis. There, we first introduce La Pasiva and study its identity, history and role within the Uruguayan semiosphere, and then, we relate it to the idea of a Uruguayan national culinary identity.

2. Geocultural identities

Over the past three to four decades, semioticians have expanded the scope of their analytical interest and started embracing objects of study that allow them to understand how individuals make sense of the world, and not only of texts understood in a traditional sense. This is how semiotics saw the growth of studies of practices (Fontanille 2008; de Oliveira 2013), interactions (Landowski 2006; de Oliveira 2004), spaces (Giannitrapani 2013) and other phenomena that have an inherent social – and therefore, discursive – dimension. In this theoretical expansion, semioticians have surprisingly not visited the concept of identity as it would have been expected. Or maybe they did, if one considers the semiotics of forms of life as a type of semiotics of identity.

Nevertheless, the study of human collectives and collective identities has been an object of interest for semioticians like Eliseo Verón (1987) and Jacques Fontanille (2021). We have recently proposed a theoretical justification for a semiotics of collective identities, with a particular focus on what we have named *geocultural identities* (Montoro & Moreno 2021a; 2021b; 2022; 2023; 2024a; 2024b). These are more or less stable and coherent discursive configurations of sense and meaning that are anchored in a geographical materiality or fact, i.e., that take a geographical materiality or fact to be constitutive of a semiotic core that is used as the nodal point of a type of social discourse that binds people together. Geocultural identities imply that a culturalization of geography occurred throughout history, giving place to the emergence of a social discourse linked to that semiotic process. That is why we have maintained

the reference to the *geographical* and *cultural* dimensions in the name of the analytical category we propose; although these collective identities are cultural, the cultural aspects – symbolic, discursive, narrative, imaginary, etc. – are linked to a geographical reality that can be either physical, such as mountain ranges, rivers, cardinal points, climates or biomes – like tropical, temperate, or polar ones – or conventional, such as borders, states, provinces, municipalities, etc.

As we have argued elsewhere, an evident starting point to approach, study and classify geocultural identities is the national level. National identities are a type of geocultural identity, but not the only one: there are also subnational (linked to administrative or geographical regions within a country, to cities, to neighborhoods), supranational (linked to administrative or geographical regions that encompass countries in their totality, like continental identities) and translational (linked to administrative or geographical regions that go beyond the borders of a country, but that do not encompass national identities in their totality, like the Alpine or Mediterranean identities) geocultural identities, depending on where the boundaries of an imagined space/community are set. Nevertheless, in 2024, the nation remains the most frequent and globally scalable unit of segmentation and analysis to define collective identities.

A national identity like the Uruguayan is therefore a type of geocultural identity – that is, an articulated set of discourses, narratives, social imaginaries, etc., that people, both in-group and out-group, use for identification in collective terms – in which specific boundaries and a state apparatus normally coincide with the boundaries of the nation. The Uruguayan national identity is a geocultural identity delimited by the borders of the Uruguayan state and that is constructed at different levels, in particular by the Uruguayan state, but also in banal contexts (Billig 1995). This definition does not imply that only individuals living in the Uruguayan territory identify with that geocultural identity – actually, also foreigners might embrace it, as well as Uruguayans living abroad who nevertheless feel as belonging to it.

As the product of discourse, geocultural identities are accessible to analysts through textual configurations. These configurations are located in the dimension of the expression and conduct to a dimension of the content. It is in the dimension of the content where a given identity is located as a unit of meaning resulting from a cultural segmentation of a continuum. To mention some examples, the literary works included in the syllabus of mandatory education and the iconography included in banknotes and coins (Moreno 2022) serve as entry points to understand the configuration that the Uruguayan national semiosphere takes, thanks to the action of the Uruguayan state, as a discursive articulation anchored in a unit of meaning segmented in the plane of the content. The same happens with culinary practices, in particular with ingredients, dishes, traditions and restaurants considered typical of a nation (Montoro y Moreno 2024b).

3. National cuisines: the case of Uruguay

In recent years, semioticians have turned their attention towards culinary and gastronomic practices. From the perspective of a semiotics of geocultural identities, these practices are relevant since they can be read as manifestations in the plane of the expression of particular units of meaning tied to national identities to be found in the plane of the content. If we open the menu of a restaurant in a random city or country without knowing where that restaurant is located, it is possible to deduct the location thanks to the options available in the menu: if it offers *Käsespätzle*, *Schweinsbraten*, *Zwiebelrostbraten* and *Schnitzel*, the restaurant is probably located in the Alpine region (Southern Germany or Austria); if it offers as desserts *cannoli* and *cassata*, we are probably in Sicily.

The two examples – Alpine and Sicilian identities – are interesting because they are not cases of *national* identities. That is why a semiotics of geocultural identities cannot be limited to national identities only, and subnational (Sicilian), transnational (Alpine) and also supranational (like the European) identities must be taken into account. In any case, what matters is that through specific configurations of meaning that are perceivable in the plane of the expression (in this case, dishes, ingredients or flavors), it is possible to re-organize the plane of the content (i.e., a given collective identity) differently to the political divisions that (have) produce(d) the existing nation states. As a result, these new segmentations of the semantic continuum can produce new units of meaning linked to collective identities that are not *national* (Alpine cuisine/culture, Sicilian cuisine/culture, etc.).

For semioticians interested in studying geocultural identities, considering practices such as those linked to cooking and eating (including those of dining out) can be enlightening since they can be interpreted as manifestations of something located at a deeper level – the national identity – that is expressed at a level that can be perceived empirically, described and analyzed. This applies not only to ingredients, beverages and dishes considered typical of a given geocultural identity, but also to practices linked to cooking, drinking and eating. In a restaurant considered *traditional*, it is reasonable to expect these differential practices and products to be present and, moreover, to be salient in the effect of sense that the restaurant proposes. This is the case in the many Italian restaurants and Spanish tapas bar located around the world, where a common thread is easily perceivable not only in the products that are offered, but also in the aesthetics of the restaurants (colors, decoration, music, attire of waiters, stories told, etc.).

Uruguayan national cuisine is quite simple to describe due to the lack of dishes that are autochthonous to the Uruguayan territory and, therefore, not shared with any other country in the region. Due to migratory reasons, the cuisine of the country is heavily influenced by Spanish and Italian culinary traditions. As Ángel Ruocco argues in the introductory chapter to one of Uruguayan chef Hugo Soca's cookbooks,

> The culinary history of Uruguay is the history of the country itself, but also of the countries its inhabitants come from. [...] Italian settlers – particularly from Genoa and Campania – brought along their pasta recipes and renewed and improved agriculture; Spaniards – from Galicia, Asturias and the Basque Country – widened the scope of eating possibilities in existence until then – mostly in the south of the country – with the introduction of preparations that included fish and sea fruits. They would also improve and enhance diary production. Those from Catalonia specialized in bakery and pastry. [...] Therefore, Creole cuisine [la *cocina criolla*] is an adaptation of the European recipes to our human, economic and agricultural reality, as well as of some of the preferences and practices both from the first native inhabitants of this region and of those Europeans that settled here along the different migratory waves (Ruocco 2012b, p. 16–17).

La Pasiva's gastronomic offer evidences this cultural shaping of the Uruguayan local cuisine by European traditions. However, it does not match in an evident way the social imaginaries of what is *typically* Uruguayan, which normally consists of traditions and practices originating in what nowadays is the Uruguayan territory, and therefore normally linked to the rural domain, like the *asado* (barbeque), as is discussed below. A key to understand to what extent a given restaurant may represent a national cuisine consists in examining whether that place offers a so-called national dish and which its symbolic positioning is within its more general gastronomic offer (for example: is it a dish featured or recommended by the restaurant in its menu?). Following this logic, thanks to cultural codification and the pervasiveness of social discourses linked to national identities, it is expected any Italian-themed restaurant in the world to offer pizza and/or pasta, American-themed eateries to serve burgers and soda drinks, and Japa-

nese-themed restaurants to specialize in sushi and ramen.

In the case of Uruguay, as well as other cultures linked to societies inhabiting the South American plains like Argentina, Paraguay, and southern Brazil, one of the most salient local dishes is grilled meat, locally known as *asado* in Spanish and *churrasco* in Portuguese. As the Uruguayan anthropologist Gustavo Laborde (2010) notes, in the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, *asado* began to be considered the favorite meal among the brand-new creole societies in Uruguay and Argentina. According to Laborde, its symbolic consolidation as the non-official national dish was already completed towards the decade of 1930. All over this transnational geographical region in which veal and calf meat is abundant, eating *asado* largely remained a social activity placed in private houses and barbecues, either in yards or in roofed grillrooms. However, apart from several *parrilladas* (steakhouses) dispersed in the country, Montevideo – Uruguay's capital city – currently concentrates one place where people gather in restaurants and eateries to enjoy *asado*: the Mercado del Puerto, located in the Old Town and a hotspot for tourists visiting the city.

Curiously, La Pasiva is unrelated to *asado*, one of the key meals and food rituals in Uruguay. However, this limitation does not impede the brand to play a prominent role among eateries that portray Uruguayanness in the domain of discourse linked to food. Which values of that so-called Uruguayanness does La Pasiva portray in its history and offer, both as a brand and as place for a dining out experience?

A possible answer can be found in Laborde's recent work on Uruguayan national cuisine. Laborde (2022) identifies three overarching culinary-discursive configurations throughout Uruguayan history. The first one emerged around a type of *creole* kitchen [*cocina criolla*] and was promoted at the end of the 19th century by urban elites with the purpose of recuperating from the past traditions that were considered local and typical of a broader, transnational region linked to the Rio de la Plata area (a transnational geocultural identity). The second culinary-discursive configuration, which became relevant in the first decades of the 20th century, was promoted by the newly created Uruguayan state and aimed at constructing Uruguayan national identity through specific dishes. This is the period of *Uruguayan* kitchen [*cocina uruguaya*]. Finally, a third configuration emerged at the end of the 20th century and is most visible in the first quarter of our current century. It is mainly touristic, located in the seaside resorts and coastal towns of Uruguay's South-East, and aims at recuperating ingredients that were used by the indigenous population of the country before the creation of the nation state. Laborde calls this discursive configuration *native Uruguayan kitchen* [*cocina nativa uruguaya*] This third type of discursive configuration has a contemporary, trendy element to it that does not make of it a good fit for a traditional, everyday life restaurant like La Pasiva.

4. La Pasiva, the 'typical' Uruguayan dining out experience

La Pasiva is different from most iconic brands, either global or local, that invest resources in public relations and marketing to create epic foundational narratives to share with their customers an appealing account of how they were born. Millions have heard how Coca-Cola was an accidental creation by a pharmacist from Atlanta, how two brothers partnered in Illinois to create McDonald's and sold the company to a young entrepreneur that escalated the business to its current global success, or how the son of a farmer near Louisville bought a pressure frying machine and created Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Conversely, not only little is known about how La Pasiva was created, but also many contradictory narratives coexist. Currently, La Pasiva does not count with an institutional spokesperson, does not have a corporate website and the Facebook page claiming to be the official on Facebook is not verified, has less than

1,000 followers and it has been inactive since 2018. There is a spread of social media profiles related to each specific restaurant and it is unclear to the general public which the exact business model is to license and franchise the brand – this issue has created some problems linked to complaints of inappropriate uses of the brand, especially abroad (mostly in Argentina and Spain).

The first restaurant of the chain opened in the 1960s next to Plaza Independencia, the most emblematic square in Montevideo. However, two versions about the origin of the name coexist. On the one hand, it is said that the name originates in the building that hosted it, which in its heyday used to be a barrack of battalion formed out of retired workers (*pasivos*, in Spanish) during the Uruguayan Civil War from 1839 to 1851 (Ruocco 2012a). Another version states that it was called as such because it was placed in an area enclosed by porticoes (*pasivas*, in Spanish), a rare feature in Montevideo's urban landscape.

In either case, the name rapidly disentangled from the type of food that was served in that original restaurant, and La Pasiva could be found in a wider geographical area of Montevideo's downtown, once famous for its historic cafés and restaurants, such as Café Brasilero, Café Sorocabana and Café Armonía, among others, where intellectuals and public figures used to gather. La Pasiva's first location was the same where Café Palace, one of these iconic cafés from Montevideo, operated previously. Such cultural legacy dealing with Montevideo's lifestyle from ca. the 1930s to the 1950s is visible today in many literary works and memorialist essays that celebrate such imprints (Burel 2017; Michelena 1998; Schinca 2003; Varese 2018).

In this sense, it could be argued that La Pasiva is part of a wider *mnemotope* – i.e., a vaguely defined landscape "consisting of topographical texts of cultural memory" (Assmann 1992, p. 44) – of a Uruguayan *golden era* of economic stability, progressive politics, a strong welfare state and a fast-growing urban middle-class that welcomed immigrants and offered them opportunities for achieving a better quality of life than the one they had in post-war Europe. Even if the peak of that golden era had already expired by the date in which La Pasiva was created as a business in 1963 (Real de Azúa 1964; Methol Ferré 1967), the fact of being part of that social atmosphere probably helped the brand to make it into the social imaginary of local businesses perceived as timeless, as if they had always been. This might explain why, differently to other iconic Uruguayan food chains and options, the conditions in which La Pasiva was created and grew were forgotten in collective memory (Connerton 2008).

However, there is a particular feature of its corporate story that echoes both Uruguayan hegemonic narratives linked to nationalism and La Pasiva's gastronomic offer: it assesses Uruguayan cuisine – and Uruguayanness, in general – as a local adaptation of traditions, recipes and ingredients brought by European immigrants. Following Laborde's identification of three culinary-discursive configurations, La Pasiva's offer goes in line with the second moment: that of the creation of a national, Uruguayan kitchen based on the inputs from different cultures around the world.

Curiously, while La Pasiva's brand identity, its spatial arrangements and some of its food offer reminds of a blurred Central European foodscape[2] at the level of *enoncé* – i.e., what is being said in the texts produced by a given semiosphere –, the empirical author (Eco 1962) behind such discourses – that is, La Pasiva's owners, who are those who actually produce those texts – is not of a Central European origin, but linked to a group of entrepreneurs who belonged to immigrant collectives that arrived to

2 The notion of *foodscape* is understood here as "a process of viewing place in which food is used as a lens to bring into focus selected human relations" (Yasmeen, 2008).

Uruguay from both western and eastern European peripheries – namely: Galicia, in Spain, and Armenia.

This fact can also explain – at least partially – the discontinuity in identity that emerges from contrasting La Pasiva as *model author* (based on the perceptions that consumers have about who might have created those texts, its positioning in the overarching Uruguayan social imaginary, its unchallenged presence in the Uruguayan cultural landscape) and La Pasiva as *empirical author* (the authorship as the result of the actions of groups of people who actually produce a cultural text, as seen in its corporate profile and in the wider history of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for social recognition in a cultural melting pot like Uruguayan society). By contrast, ethnic-themed restaurants are characterized by highlighting continuity and conjunction between these two dimensions (empirical authorship and model authorship; level of *enunciation* and level of the *enoncé*), since *actually being* from the places that are discursively portrayed in the menu and the overall thematic manipulation is a requirement for the brand to claim authenticity and discursive coherence.

As opposed to La Pasiva's brand image, ethnic-themed restaurants specifically aim at highlighting its function as an exotic experience of Otherness. They tend to enact a kind of heterotopias (Foucault 1984), similar to fantastic accounts and remote travel destinations. Conversely, the heterotopies displayed by La Pasiva's project a kind of experience that Uruguayans might feel as the source of a portion of its *modern* national identity (Laborde's second configuration), but still far from the more trendy nativistic and indigenist configuration that recently became mainstream in Uruguayan recipes (Laborde 2022), and of the more pre-modern, folkloristics traditions that are usually placed in rural settings, far from Montevideo (Laborde's first configuration).

La Pasiva's disengagement with both exoticizing spaces and monolithic accounts of nationhood results in a clear prototype of the self-perceived narrative of Uruguayanness as a cultural melting pot. While symbolically re-constructing this melting pot, La Pasiva vaguely defines an imaginary linked to a transcultural Central European geocultural identity, because it avoids explicit identification with specific nations: different types of hot dogs (among them, a dark sausage called *húngara*, i.e., "Hungarian"), specialized types of pizza that are difficult to find outside Italy like pizza marinara (without cheese on its top) and *farinata* (chickpea flour pie, called *fainá*), *gnocchi* and other pasta, breaded cutlets in different servings, etc.

From the perspective of an outsider, La Pasiva's menu might be a case of *bricolage* of different culinary traditions. However, most Uruguayans would undoubtedly recognize any of these dishes as *authentically* Uruguayan. Among them, probably the best-known dish from La Pasiva, the *chivito* – a beef tenderloin sandwich created randomly in the early 20th century that is served with abundant ingredients like fried eggs, grilled peppers, lettuce, tomato, melted cheese, olives, bacon and mayonnaise – might be even considered as *exclusively* Uruguayan[3].

A significant part of social discussions of banal nationalistic nature around the globe focuses on food (Ichijo & Ranta 2016), especially on which nation can rightfully claim to be the creator and/or owner of a dish, recipe or ingredient that is culturally scattered over a wider area. The prominence of national identities within the encompassing category of geocultural identities is reflected by the fact

3 Ruocco (2012b, p. 50) writes about the *chivito* that it is "such a typical Uruguayan dish that can be eaten at any bar or fast-food store, and each place has its unique way of preparing it. This sandwich was created just by change by a cook in Punta del Este City when once a client asked for a 'chivito' (which means that it had to be made with goat meat – *chivito*: young goat). There was no goat meat at the restaurant so the cook prepared it with beef instead. He sandwiched a beefsteak with ham, cheese, lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise. This was the 'chivito' born, so popular nowadays. And yet, such an easy dish is never made at home [...]".

that few people would see, for example, *dulce de leche* [sweet caramel] as a truly Latin American recipe rather than an *authentic* cultural manifestation of each individual nation that constitutes such supranational belonging (Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, etc.).

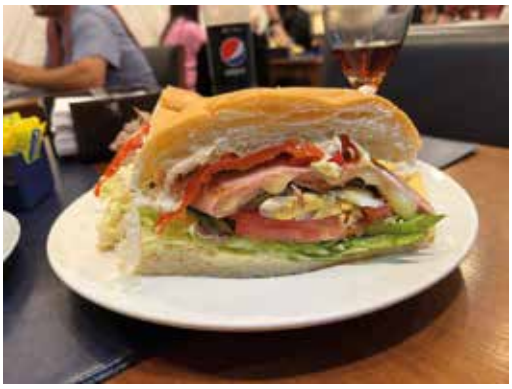


Fig. 2. A Uruguayan chivito. Source: photograph taken by the authors.

In the case of Uruguay, a country whose culture and traditions are much similar to those belonging to a bigger and more salient neighbouring state like Argentina, these discussions are relevant: many Uruguayan emigrants who aim at setting up an *asado*-themed steakhouse overseas often brand it as Argentinean rather than as Uruguayan because Argentinean meats – and Argentina as a nation brand, in general (Anholt 2007; Arkenbout 2015) – are easier to recognize worldwide than the Uruguayan ones. For reasons like this, as part of its processes of (banal) nation-building, Uruguayans historically attempted to find an *exclusively* Uruguayan dish that Argentineans could not claim as theirs (Laborde 2022). If we understand a national dish as such – and not as the dish that is most consumed among population or more related to local traditions –, then *chivito* would clearly fit into that category. Specifically, La Pasiva's *chivito* is socially regarded as the prototype of its class within the Uruguayan foodscape. Proof of this can be seen on how Argentinean sport TV's broadcasters often flatter Uruguay during international football matches by expressing desires of visiting this country and tasting La Pasiva's *chivitos,* even with those comments not being evidently linked to a paid promotional campaign.

There is a tendency among authors that applied Bourdieu's idea of *field* to food discourses (Ferguson 1998; Goody 1982; Laborde 2017) to distinguish *culinary* from *gastronomic* fields: while the former tend to focus on activities solely related to domestic cookery, the latter bring them closer to more complex social institutions defined by methods of preparing, ways of serving, role positioning, and other issues related to dining out and restaurant experiences. As Laborde (2017, p. 17) reminds us, "the consolidation of a gastronomic field in Uruguay is a work in progress that requires [...] a sizable set of critical and bold consumers". Taking this distinction into account, *chivito* clearly belongs to the gastronomic field because, differently to how *asado* is normally consumed, Uruguayans tend to consume it in the frame of a dining out experience and, to that regard, it is one the few dining out experiences that are discursively credited as *truly* Uruguayan.

5. Makings sense of La Pasiva

The experience of dining out in La Pasiva may vary significantly depending on the specific restaurant chosen because, among other reasons, its business model does not codify strictly the brand's usage nor many quality standards. If it is possible, then, to speak of a semiosphere (Lotman 1990) around La Pasiva, and we could identify at its peripheries those restaurants that are located either in cities from inner Uruguay or even its overseas experiences, like the unsuccessful attempts of setting up La Pasiva's restaurants for Uruguayan expat communities in cities like Buenos Aires, in Argentina, or Vigo, in Spain. In both cases, La Pasiva did not count with enough support by Uruguayans in the diaspora and/or interest by non-Uruguayans to make them profitable. On the contrary, the semiotic core of such semiosphere would be identified in the series of La Pasiva's restaurants that lies on 18 de Julio Ave-

nue – Montevideo most important avenue –, which makes this brand mirror similar notions of centrality than those that Uruguayan nationhood proper has: a country that is both administratively and culturally concentrated in its capital city, Montevideo, a capital city whose semiotic core is symbolically placed in the downtown along its main avenue, 18 de Julio. Alternatively, other set of restaurants that are considered authentic to the symbolic core of La Pasiva are those located inside shopping malls in the capital city.

There was a transition in Montevideo's spaces of consumption (Cervelli & Pezzini 2007) in the 1990s and 2000s by which dominance from historical *galerías* (inside street shops in the fashion of long galleries) in the 18 de Julio avenue passed to closed shopping malls, mimicking a cultural tradition originated in the United States. Before the construction of Montevideo's the first shopping facilities in the 1990s, the *galerías* constituted the undisputed buying excursions, reason why eating at La Pasiva was generally framed as part of a wider narrative programme related to leisure, like going to cinema or theatres, or the last stage when going shopping, or just for a weekend stroll with the family, as it happens with many cafés and restaurants in European cities, where people still visit the centre for leisure purposes.

Even though La Pasiva's gastronomical offer is varied in its origins, most dishes have in common that they are simple and easy to prepare. They are known as *minutas*, as mentioned above, which are a local version of fast food. However, this sense of belonging related to local food helps La Pasiva's minutas to be exempt of the criticism that fast food created by multinational companies operating in Uruguay, like McDonald's, Burger King or KFC, usually receive. On the other hand, its nationwide presence as a solid brand among Uruguayan consumers makes of La Pasiva's gastronomic offer a more commoditized experience – yet nationally scalable, and therefore prone to be linked to national belonging – in comparison with lesser, more localized options for eating *minutas*, like traditional bars dispersed in the neighbourhoods or *carritos*, the local version of street food trucks, although lacking any type of trendy connotation.

La Pasiva's spatial arrangement enables sitting either at the bar – close to the kitchen – or in tables. Differently to other options of fast food that tend to use furniture created using industrial materials, like plastic or aluminium, La Pasiva tends to present wooden tables, seats covered with wool and a bar made of marble. In fact, one of the historical restaurants of the chain – placed in downtown Montevideo – was famous for having a gigantic wooden beer barrel in the wall.

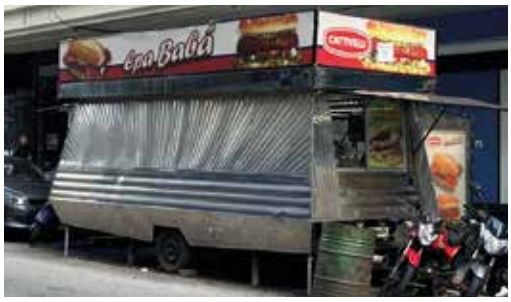


Fig. 3. A *carrito* (food truck) located nearby 18 de Julio avenue, in Montevideo. Source: photograph taken by the authors.

If the *chivito* is the most important main course for La Pasiva, hot dogs and draft beer make the experience of eating in this chain so distinctive and constitute a key element in its discursive staging of a blurred Central European heterotopia. Interestingly, hot dogs are known in the whole region of the South Cone (Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay) as *panchos* due to a derivation of the toponym with which they are more formally regarded (*frankfurters*) that resembles the common name Francisco, which is normally nicknamed Pancho. Then, the "pancho de La Pasiva" as part of the dining out experience is not limited only to an average hot dog in a Vienna bread but constitutes a textual configuration that links ingredients with spatio-temporal dimensions. To begin with, its simplicity

makes of it the easiest dish to serve. Indeed, customers usually ask waiters for hot dogs even before they come to table as if it were an appetizer. Furthermore, there are a uniqueness and a reputation that La Pasiva's craft mustard gained along the decades: La Pasiva's mustard is placed in tables in yellow plastic jars that resemble little beer barrels (Fig. 4), a token that became indissociable with the brand over time. As many successful brands have their own "secret ingredient", La Pasiva's mustard is probably one of the best kept secrets in Uruguayan gastronomy.

Fig. 4. La Pasiva's famous mustard barrel-shaped container. Source: Facebook.

It is also worth noticing the nature of some interactions that take place in La Pasiva's restaurant, especially in the communication between waiters and cooks, who are behind the bar, but partially visible to the customers. It does not seem that the company deploys an enunciative strategy for neither hiding nor exposing food manipulation, but it clearly enables this kind of operational exchanges to be heard by customers. As a matter of fact, a vast majority of clients would probably admit that listening to these informal exchanges would contribute to the brands' claims for authenticity and the overall experience of eating in a Uruguayan restaurant. This is not uncommon in other bars or restaurants that serve *minutas,* so it constitutes a wider code for understanding interactions in informal, everyday dining out places.

Like in every other code, it is possible to note the configuration of a specific language that borrows metaphors, slang terms and idioms from other popular, non-formal domains. For example, while in football discourses in Uruguay a "line of three" ("*una línea de tres*") would undoubtedly refer to the tactical position by which a team lines up its defence with three players (instead of four, for example), the exact same phrase travels to the gastronomic field when in La Pasiva and other similar restaurants waiters deliver an order to kitchen based on a standard combination of the three more usual types of pizzas: a Marinara pizza (without cheese, called in Uruguay as plain "pizza"), a regular pizza (called in Uruguay "mozzarella") and a Genovese-like *farinata* (known in Uruguay as *fainá*).

By becoming a place of gathering of different people, it is not strange for La Pasiva to also become a highly symbolic place in episodes of national euphoria when, for example, Uruguayans meet to watch the matches of the national football team, or more intimate celebrations like birthdays and anniversaries, among others.

The experience of dining out at La Pasiva arranges a series of manifestations of sense and meaning that explicitly addresses the presence of *foreigner* traditions that arrived in Uruguay together with European immigrants (diversified origins of food, furniture and the Central European overall atmosphere that the brand attempts to evoke, etc.). But it is also true that, while it places this social imaginary related to the Otherness at the level of *enoncé,* it appears as encompassed within a wider set of interactions and interpersonal relations that socially reinforces – at the level of *enonciation* – a marked belonging of La Pasiva as part of Uruguayan traditions, for it stresses values like spontaneity, informality, transparency and humbleness, all argued to be constitutive of the Uruguayan way of being (at least in discursive terms).

6. Concluding remarks

The aim of this article was to approach La Pasiva using the lens of geocultural identities. Ruocco (2012b, p. 17) uses the

following quote by Umberto Eco to refer to the Uruguayan culinary identity: "Each culture absorbs elements from cultures near and far, but it is characterized by the way it incorporates those elements". The Uruguayan case is not an exception to this idea. As we hope to have shown in this article, as a chain of restaurants that is popular among Uruguayans, La Pasiva reflects this logic of sense as well. Much more could be written about the restaurant chain, its products, the interactions that occur within it and its role within the Uruguayan semiosphere. We are satisfied if the reader is convinced by our reading of this chain through the lenses of geocultural identities and, in particular, if s/he is now curious to visit Uruguay to eat in one of La Pasiva's restaurants to experience the sense-making logic behind it directly.

References

Anholt, S., 2007, *Competitive identity: the new brand management for nations, cities, and regions*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Appadurai, A., 1988, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India", in *Contemporary Studies in Society and History*, 30(1), pp. 3-24.

Arkenbout, F., 2015, *National identity and Nation Branding in Argentina*. Thesis to obtain the Master's Degree in Latin American Studies, University of Leiden, Netherlands.

Assmann, J., 2011, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembering, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Burel, H., 2017, *Sorocabana Blues*, Montevideo, Alfaguara.

Connerton, P., 2013. "Seven types of forgetting", in J. Walker, ed.. *The Present Word Culture, Society and the Site of Literature*. Pp. 150-165.

de Oliveira, A. C., ed., 2004, *As interações sensíveis*, Saõ Paulo, Centro de Pesquisas Sociosemióticas/Estação das Letras e Cores.

de Oliveira, A. C., org., 2013, *Sentido e interação nas práticas*, Saõ Paulo, Centro de Pesquisas Sociosemióticas/Estação das Letras e Cores.

El País, 2016, "Locales de La Pasiva podrían tener que cambiar de nombre", 3/12/2016, https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/locales-de-la-pasiva-podrian-tener-que-cambiar-de-nombre, last accessed December 15th, 2023.

Ferguson, P., 1998, "A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in 19th-Century France 1", in *American Journal of Sociology*. 104(3): pp. 597-641.

Fontanille, J. 2008, *Pratiques sémiotiques*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.

Foucault, M., 1984, "Des Espaces Autres", *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuite*, n.5, pp. 46–49. Engl. trans. 1986, "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27.

García Robles, H. 2005, *El mantel celeste. Historia y recetario de la cocina uruguaya*, Montevideo, Ediciones de la Banda Oriental.

Giannitrapani, A, 2013, *Introduzione alla semiotica dello spazio*, Rome, Carocci.

Goody, J., 1982, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Ichijo, A., R. Ranta (2015). *Food, National Identity and Nationalism: From Everyday to Global Politics*. London: AIAA.

Infobae, 2022, "El presidente de Uruguay sorprendió a todos mientras almorzaba en la barra de un restaurante", 4/09/2022, https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2022/09/04/el-presidente-de-uruguay-sorprendio-a-todos-cuando-almorzaba-salchichas-en-un-restaurante-de-montevideo/, last accessed December 15th, 2023.

InfoNegocios, 2020, "El que espera no desespera (La Pasiva y una nueva sucursal)", 7/02/2020, https://infonegocios.biz/enfoque/el-que-espera-no-desespera-la-pasiva-y-una-nueva-sucursal, last accessed on December 15th, 2023.

Laborde, G., 2010, *El asado*, Montevideo, Banda Oriental.

Laborde, G., 2017, *Identidad uruguaya en la cocina. Narrativas sobre el origen*. Thesis to obtain the Doctoral Anthropology, University of Barcelona, Spain.

Laborde, G., 2022, *Los sabores de la nación*, Montevideo, Banda Oriental.

Landowski, Eric, 2005, *Les interactions risquées*, Limoges, Presses de l'Université de Limoges

Lotman, J. (1990). *Universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. London: IB Tauris.

Lotman, J., B. Uspenski, 1975, *Tipologia della cultura*, Milano, Bompiani.

Marrone, G., 2016, *Semiotica del gusto. Linguaggi della cucina, del cibo, della tavola*, Milano, Mimesis.

Methol Ferré, A, 1967, *El Uruguay como problema*, Montevideo, Biblioteca Artigas.

Michelena, A, 1998, *Montevideo: historia de gentes, reuniones y lugares*, Montevideo, Cal y Canto.

Montoro, J. M. y Moreno Barreneche, S. (2021a), "Towards a Social Semiotics of

Geo-cultural Identities. Theoretical Foundations and an Initial Semiotic Square", in *Estudos Semióticos*, 17(2), pp. 121-143.

Montoro, J. M. y Moreno Barreneche, S., 2021b, "Identidad latinoamericana y sistemas de transporte: notas para una semiótica de las identidades geo-culturales", in *DeSignis*, 34, pp. 67-82.

Montoro, J. M. y Moreno Barreneche, S., 2022, "La identidad geocultural europea en sus periferias y fronteras. Un abordaje desde la semiótica de la cultura de Yuri Lotman", in *DeSignis,* hors serie 2, pp. 173-184.

Montoro, J. M. y Moreno Barreneche, S, 2023, "Semiosferas y límites geográficos. El aporte de la semiótica de la cultura de Yuri Lotman al estudio de las identidades geoculturales", in *Signa*, 32, pp. 437-454.

Montoro, J. M. y Moreno Barreneche, S, 2024a (in press), "Mediterráneamente: la identidad geocultural mediterránea como forma de vida estilizada", in *DeSignis,* 40.

Montoro, J. M. y Moreno Barreneche, S, 2024b (in press), "Identidad latinoamericana y prácticas culinarias", in *DeSignis*, hors serie 3.

Nora, P. (1984). *Les lieux de mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard.

Cervelli, P., I. Pezzini, (2007). *Scene del consumo: dallo shopping al museo*. Rome, Meltemi.

Real de Azúa, C., 1964, *El impulso y su freno*. Montevideo, Biblioteca Artigas.

Ruocco, Á., 2012a, "La Pasiva, un patito feo convertido en cisne", in *El Observador*, 2/02/2012, https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/la-pasiva-un-patito-feo-convertido-en-cisne-201252000, last accessed December 15th 2023.

Ruocco, Á, 2012b, "La cocina uruguaya", in H Soca, *Nuestras recetas de siempre*, Montevideo, Aguaclara, pp. 15-19.

Schinca. M., 2003, *Boulevard Sarandí*, Montevideo, Banda Oriental.

Stano, S., 2020, "Glocalised foodscapes: the Self, the Other, and the Frontier", in *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*.

Varese, J. A., 2018, *Personajes y tertulias de cafés y bares de Montevideo*, Montevideo, Planeta.