

Popular cuisines at tourist tables: Moroccan *bissara* and its rising path between heritage and commodification

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ABSTRACT

In the current context of debate about food heritage and its implications for territories and communities, this text seeks to trace the history and path of a Moroccan food preparation - the *bissara* (a fava bean soup) - enlightening the narrative reconfigurations to which this dish has been subjected over time, focusing on its resignification and valorization in the framework of a new global heritage order. Starting from an analysis of historical sources and cookbooks focused on the Moroccan territory, this text also builds on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Chefchaouen (Morocco) in which participant observation was carried out in markets and restaurants, as well as interviews were conducted with tourists and local inhabitants. The text will discuss how, in a territory marked by the heritage reasoning triggered by the classification of the “Mediterranean Diet” in 2010 by UNESCO - of which Chefchaouen is the representative city of Morocco - the way *bissara* was re-signified and valued, in its conversion from humble dish to a strong identity dish, is part of a recurrent and contemporary process of obliteration of the past for the creation of commodities with heritage value.

1. Introduction

This text takes the territory of Chefchaouen, located in the Rif Mountain system, in northern Morocco, as its starting point, and will seek to discuss some transformations in the local food landscape, namely the requalification of certain practices and foods whose upward social mobility processes are in progress. More specifically, the text will focus on the social transformation of a food preparation, more specifically a fava bean soup – *bissara* - which has been historically associated with food consumptions contextually connoted with periods of scarcity and deprivation or, in other words, a “poor man’s food”. This dish has recently witnessed a transmutation of its status and value. This transformation can be associated with the classification of the “Mediterranean Diet” as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity (2010) by UNESCO,¹ which had Morocco as one of the associated countries, and Chefchaouen as the Moroccan representative city (see Fig. 1).

The text will argue that, in the absence of regional food products that can be promoted in the tourist sphere as “authentic” or “traditional”, in a national context where the food offer for tourism is quite homogeneous

and massified, and in which the idea of a “national dish”, despite being able to be deconstructed – as Hubert (2000) points out – is still operative, *bissara* Fig. 2 acquires a new meaning and a new status, becoming sought after by international tourists and by a new generations of Moroccan consumers, who perceive it as something “typical”, of the region, such as an identity feature that must be preserved and valued.

This text is based on the idea that food (ingredients or prepared dishes), carry with it a value and a collective legacy related to a national or regional history, legacy that often identifies food - positively or negatively - with a value and status. This value or status also determines by whom certain foods are consumed or who chooses them, in the sense of belonging to a social class or in the possibility of distinction that material consumption can bring (Bourdieu and Distinção, 1979). Of course, as Pierre Bourdieu also points out, the idea of choice is itself already revealing of belonging to a social class that can choose. Throughout this text, when we perceive the consumption of *bissara* over time, we will find that it asserted itself as an inevitable dish in that specific territory because, precisely, there were no other food available.

Unlike other African countries strongly marked by transversal

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¹ The inscription of the “Mediterranean Diet” as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO occurred at two distinct moments: the first in 2010, in a dossier submitted by Spain, Morocco, Italy and Greece (5.COM, Nomination File 00394); and the second in 2013, a re-inscription to which Portugal, Cyprus and Croatia joined (8.COM, Nomination File 00884). Each country involved in the application had to indicate the “representative city” of the Mediterranean Diet on a national scale. Thus, there are seven cities representing the “Mediterranean Diet”: Chefchaouen (Morocco), Tavira (Portugal), Soria (Spain), Cilento (Italy), Koroni (Greece), Agros (Cyprus), Kvar and Brac (Croatia).

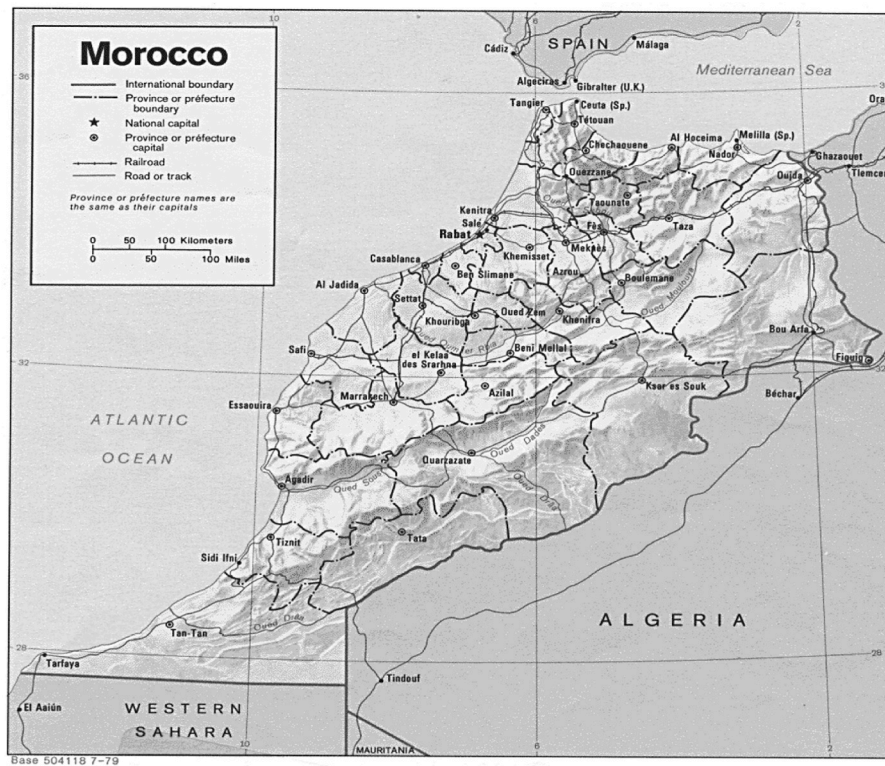


Fig. 1. Map of Morocco.²¹



Fig. 2. Bissara, served in a local restaurant Chefchaouen, October 2018 (Author's Image).

hunger (Guyer, 1987), Moroccan territory has characteristics (geographical, climatic, etc.) that mark a considerable part of its territorial extension or, at least, a large triangle that would link Fez, Casablanca and Marrakesh, and which was considered during the period of colonial administration as “Maroc utile” as a counterpoint to the rest of the territory – “Maroc inutile” – territory whose characteristics would not be the most favorable for large-scale agricultural production. Therefore, and considering that the territory on which we will focus here – Chefchaouen – formed part of the colonial “Maroc inutile”, it must be considered that the geographical particularities of this territory are the

same that determined periods of famine and food shortage geographically circumscribed.

Although there are some reports that account situations of famine and food shortage in Morocco, these are generally located between the 16th and 17th centuries and are often associated with epidemics such as the plague (Rosenberger, 1977). Rosenberger also mentions that the epidemics were largely responsible for an exodus of populations from the cereal plains to the mountains since there was an abundance of “(...) rodents and fleas” (1976:143) that would help to spread infectious diseases. Other authors, such as Jean-François Clement (1986), refer to the period of World War II as one of the main factors responsible for the return of famine to Morocco, with generalized price increases, namely the increase in the price of potato seeds in the souks of the Rif.

As we shall see, the affirmation of Morocco as a large, abundant, and self-sufficient agricultural production territory is an idea that can hardly be applied to the mountainous region of the Rif. The poor production of cereals in the territory meant that they rarely reached local markets, as they never constituted a surplus of production that could be dispensed. Agricultural practices that date back to periods of scarcity and hunger – like the one between 1940 and 1947³ – are based on commercial exchanges between local farmers.

The reduced production of cereals, taking also into account the characteristics of the territory - mountainous and hilly, composed of small agricultural parishes - led to legumes gaining importance, both in agricultural production and consequently in the eating habits of local populations. But it's not just in Morocco, or in the Rif Mountains, that we find legumes as the main ingredients of dishes that are considered the

³ Known as the period of “Aam El Boun”, the drastic rationing of food products between 1940 and 1947. “After the defeat of France in 1940 during the Second World War, France drew on the resources of its colonies, including Morocco, the Vichy government undertakes rationing, done on an ethnic basis favoring the French to the detriment of the Jews and then the Muslims”.

Semi-structured interviews	Number	Period of fieldwork
Restaurant owners	3	2017
Owner of food store	1	2018
Residents	4	2017 (1) 2018 (3)
International tourists	5	2017 (2) 2018 (3)
Moroccan tourists	3	2017 (2) 2018 (1)

Fig. 3. Detail of semi-structured interviews.

basis of local food practices. Legumes have always been recognized sources of protein, giving rise to comforting meals, especially during winter, in contexts of cold and lack of animal protein.

As we will see here, in several countries in North Africa - such as Tunisia and Egypt - we find culinary preparations like Moroccan *bissara*, where the narrative that accompanies them, not infrequently tracing their origins, places emphasis precisely on their importance as survival dishes, present in contexts of food scarcity, poverty and even hunger. However, and as we will also see, the narrative of scarcity and deprivation of animal protein seems to be linked to another: the exaltation of these meals as extremely operative identity markers, but also, and above all, the undeniable preference of the population for these meals, when faced with the possibility of choice.

Resisting well to cold temperatures, and perhaps for this reason this characteristic has made it the resistance food of the mountainous area of the Riff (where temperatures in winter can reach -14°C), the fava bean was the first legume to be consumed in the old world (Albala, 2007).

According to the same author, when the word “bean” was used in European texts prior to 1492, it was essentially with reference to the fava bean (Albala, 2007:68). However, and despite its prevalence and centrality as a leguminous plant, Albala also mentions the existence of prejudice on the part of the more affluent classes in relation to the consumption of fava beans, and its assumption as food for populations deprived of other types of food:

“(…) the overwhelming social prejudice against fava beans in the ancient world. As a food of the poor, all cosmic considerations aside, to eat fava beans was to become like the poor. Anyone who could afford to do otherwise, ate meat” (Albala, 2007:78).

The fava bean was considered a central ingredient in Egyptian food practices during successive dynasties, remaining until very recently as a privileged source of protein for the poorest, with *ful medames* being considered the “national dish” of the country. *Ful medames* consists of a puree of cooked dried fava beans, later seasoned with garlic, olive oil, lemon and cumin, and there is also a soup version – (*shorbet*) *ful nabad* – which is considered the original recipe for *ful medames*.

Claudia Roden, in her book “The Book of Middle Eastern Food” (1968), also compiles a recipe for a puree of dried fava beans, which she names *ful nabad* or *bissara*, classifying it as an Egyptian dish: the dry fava beans should be soaked in cold water overnight, then cooked in abundant salted water, and after cooking they are transformed into a puree to which lemon juice, sugar and cooking water are added in order to make it creamy. It is served covering it with fried onions, and adding olive oil, cumin, paprika and parsley or dill. About this dish Roden states: “(…) this soup is popular in Egypt, where sick and convalescing people are encouraged to eat it to regain their health” (Roden, 1968:339). Still according to Roden, there is a Turkish version of the same dish – *call-edfava*– which, before serving, should be refrigerated for 8 h as the desired consistency for this puree is very solid.

However, the Tunisian version of this dish is made with chickpeas –

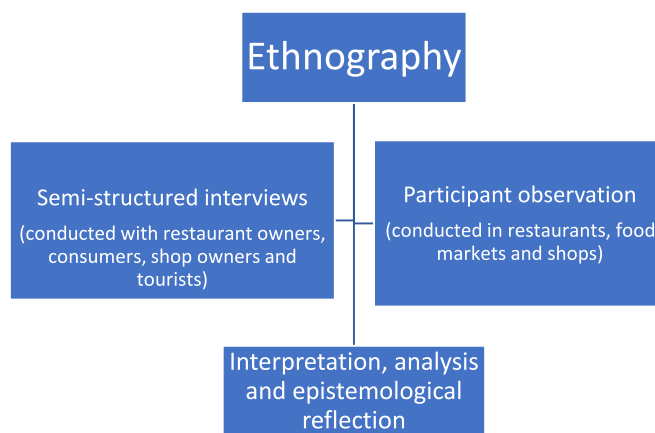


Fig. 4. Research techniques.

labladi – having, however, the same function as the Moroccan *bissara*: *labladi* is served for breakfast, and is a popular soup that, for the poorest families, serves as a meal during the day. The *labladi*, despite being made with chickpeas, uses precisely the same ingredients as *bissara*: salt, garlic, harissa, and cumin, to which olive oil and lemon juice are added when eating. In “The Book of Middle Eastern Food” (1968), Claudia Roden also tells us about *labladi*, referring that: “This very popular Tunisian soup is eaten for breakfast. In poor families it serves as a meal during the day. Little cafés in popular areas serve it in the morning to people going off to work” (Roden, 1968:338). However, and like *ful medames*, *labladi* has gained fans among Tunisian youth who consume it at dawn, after going out at night.

Throughout the text, I will try to illustrate the process of social ascension of *bissara*, based on an indispensable historical analysis and contextualization of its consumption and practices associated. To do so, we will focus on the mountainous territory of the Riff and the Chefchaouen region, and then we will show how this soup of fava beans was associated with a “popular” diet and food scarcity, using historical reports and cookbooks produced in different historical periods. Finally, we will present the ethnographic material that illustrates, we believe, the contemporary transformation of *bissara* in Chefchaouen.

2. Materials and methods

This text will rely on the analysis of historical sources and documents, as well as cookbooks, thinking of them, as Jack Goody (1982) and Arjun Appadurai (1988) did, as testimonies of food production and distribution structures related to the time in which they were produced, but also, and above all, as carriers of notions of class and hierarchy, as well as powerful means of defining the status – ascending or descending – of certain foods.

At the same time, the text departs from ethnographic research and its qualitative methods, research that took place in Chefchaouen in 2017 and 2018. During the stay in the field, semi-directive interviews were carried out with several interlocutors who were linked to the universe of food practices and consumption in Chefchaouen – food vendors, restaurant owners, food store owners, local consumers, and tourists. Participant observation was also carried out in restaurants and markets.

The ethnography was conducted at two different times: the first in July 2017 and the second in October 2018. A third field stay was scheduled for May 2020 but was successively postponed due to the closure of the Moroccan borders due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. During both fieldwork missions, participant observation was conducted in markets (Souk Beldi), which was guided by the purchase of food products, questions to the sellers, observation of the market clientele (gender, age), products purchased and for what purpose, observation of interactions between sellers, observation of interactions between sellers

² Source: <https://mapcruzin.com/free-morocco-maps.htm>.

⁴ Data for the year 2005 (EUROMED, 2017).

and clientele. At the same time, participant observation was also carried out in some restaurants in the city, which essentially meant observing the clientele (tourists and local population), observing what tourists and local people ate, the dynamics between the clientele and the restaurant staff (do they ask for recommendations? do they ask for information about the dishes and local food?) Fig. 4.

In addition to participant observation, semi-directed interviews were also conducted, both in 2017 and 2018, with inhabitants of Chefchaouen and with national and international tourists. Interviews were conducted with three restaurant owners located in Chefchaouen, one interview with the owner of a regional food store, and four interviews with Chefchaouen residents who use the local souk as a prime place to buy food products. Five interviews were also conducted with international tourists of various nationalities, and three interviews with Moroccan tourists Fig. 3.

One of the main objectives of the interviews was to understand, on the part of the tourists, if they had any knowledge about the local gastronomy and what choices they made regarding their food consumption during their stay in Chefchaouen. With the restaurant owners we tried to find out what kind of food they promoted in their establishment, and if there was a concern to offer dishes considered local or traditional of the region, as is the case of *bissara*.

When I started fieldwork in Chefchaouen in 2017, on the effects of classification of the Mediterranean Diet, in addition to exploring what the contents of the (still under construction) “Museum of the Mediterranean Diet” would be, I devoted a lot of attention to local restaurants menus, and how they would echo (or not) the enhancement to which their food practices had been subject, after a UNESCO classification that provided international guarantee and recognition. I quickly realized that the vast majority of restaurants had precisely the same menus that we could find in Rabat, Fez, Marrakech, or Taroudant, precisely asserting the idea of “national dishes”, with the promotion of couscous and tajine and some other well-known Moroccan dishes..⁵

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The consumption of *bissara* in Morocco: class, status, and the perpetuation of a narrative

In various texts of pre-colonial and colonial recognition in Morocco, there are references to *bissara* and its consumption which, as we will see, locate, and circumscribe it in the mountainous area of the Rif and its populations, insisting, even then, on its character as a dish of hunger and scarcity and, concomitantly, as an element of identity consolidation in this mountainous region.

One of the most recognized explorers not only of Moroccan territory, but also of other parts of the African continent – Lion, the African⁶ – publishes, in the first half of the 16th century, the *Cosmographia of Africa*, in which he describes the territories he visited, as well as the habits and traits of the populations with which he makes contact, from which I extract this excerpt on the populations of the Moroccan Rif region, namely the mountain of Beni Buseibet, in which there is a reference to a soup of fava beans:

⁵ In Chefchaouen there are currently a total of 60 catering establishments, including 53 restaurants and 7 fast-food businesses (*Observatoire du Tourisme de Chefchaouen, Annuaire Statistique*, 2016). Considering a recent influx of Asian tourists, two restaurants have recently opened in Chefchaouen whose menu is exclusively made up of Asian dishes, aimed precisely at these tourists.

⁶ Born Hasan al-Wazzan around 1488 in Granada, he later had to take refuge in Morocco when the city was taken over in 1492 by the Catholic Monarchs. Following a shipwreck, he was welcomed by Pope Leo X in 1518, who adopted him as a son, catechizing him and naming him Jean-Léon de Médicis, later becoming known as Léon l'Africain.

“In wintertime, merchants of nuts and candied grapes travel to this mountain, where they find neither bread nor flesh, but plenty of onions, salted sardines which sell for dear prices there. They use boiled wine and fava bean soup, which they consider the best meat among them, and eat their bread in boiled wine. (LEÃO, O AFRICANO, 1526 (1980):293) (Author's translation).

Interestingly, the reference to fava bean soup as an alternative to meat consumption already appears here, allegedly being considered by the population as “better than meat”. These considerations will be present over time in a series of descriptions concerning the populations of the Rif Mountains, and the inhabitants of Chefchaouen in particular.

Auguste Molières, a French missionary and anthropologist born in Algeria in 1855, also traveled through Morocco and Algeria between 1872 and 1893, reporting on the habits and cultural traits of the populations with which he crossed paths, namely the inhabitants of the mountainous region of the Rif, on the which he refers:

“Except for rich families, where meat dishes with sauce are the basis of the diet, we can say that *biçar* is the national dish of our Moroccan mountain people. It is really kouskous, but a kouskous of barley semolina, with large grains, mixed with badly crushed fava beans, boiled in water, then accommodated with a little oil and garlic. Wheat and barley kouskous, unknown to the East, is the favorite dish of the Muslim populations of northern Africa. It probably represents the main course of the prehistoric Berbers, and the Arabs, conquering this country, eagerly adopted this healthy and delicate food, which remained for them the last word, the ideal of the culinary art” (MOULIÈRES, 1899:366–367) (Author's translation).

Describing in more detail what I categorize here as *bissara*, he also mentions:

“The *biçar*, a kind of coarse kouskous, made with fava beans, barley flour, garlic, and oil, was spread out on a plate, its pasty mass resting on a bed of hot peppers intended to spice up this tasteless food. *Biçar* is the basis of the diet of all Djebalians, they eat it morning and evening, dipping strong loaves of bread in it” (Moulières, 1899:4) (Author's translation).

A few years later, Édouard Michaux-Bellaire, who headed a French colonial mission to Tangier and, from 1907 onwards, published several texts on Morocco, identified *bissara* as the “national dish” of the *Djebala*⁷ in a 1911 publication. In this excerpt, which we can find in Marie Caquel's doctoral thesis (2018), he states:

“(…) “the real national dish of the Djebala is *baïçara* (*bissara*)” which he describes as crushed beans boiled in water with garlic, chili, cumin and salt, which are exactly the same ingredients used for this recipe today “(Michaux-Bellaire apud CAQUEL, 2018:189–190) (Author's translation).

In his book “La Gastronomie Africaine” (1930), which seeks to be a compilation of recipes from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, under a curious unifying (or standardizing) reference to these North African cuisines, Léon Isnard also alludes to *bissara*, but perhaps revealing to us the only discordant note of what was (and has been) its description over time, referring to it as “(…) boiled fava beans with butter and milk” (Isnard, 1930:17. Interestingly, and as mentioned by Marie Caquel, and substantiated, by the way, by this discordant description of the *bissara*, Isnard seems to reveal a limited knowledge of Moroccan food practices:

⁷ Djebala is one of the ways in which the inhabitants of the mountainous region of the Rif are named. Chefchaouen is culturally and ethnically inserted in the “Pays Jbala”, which geographically extends from the Strait of Gibraltar to Taza, where the Rif and Middle Atlas Mountains meet. The Jbala are an ethnic group from northern Morocco, of Berber origin, and the Jebli dialect – a pre-Hilalian Arabic dialect – is used by many. The word Jbala is the plural of jebli, which means “from the mountain”.

“Thus, Léon Isnard’s recipe book is absolutely not the mirror of what was consumed in North Africa in the 1930s, and even less in Morocco given the few recipes referring to the country, it seems that Léon Isnard has never set foot there. (CAQUEL, 2018:208) (Author’s translation).

Still during the colonial period, in 1933, a volume entitled “L’alimentation indigène dans les colonies françaises, protectorats et territoires sous mandats” was published, directed by Hardy and Richet, which contained a chapter dedicated to Morocco, by Hardy, where the author seeks to identify eating habits from north to south of the country, explaining the geographical conditions that determine them, also giving an account of the etiquette at the table of local populations. In the text, the author mentions the populations of the Riff, referring to their agricultural and food practices:

“It is the very type of the inhabited mountain, with its terraced crops, its olive groves and its orchards, its herds which change pastures according to the seasons. The typical dish is the comfortable porridge of flour, fava beans and oil.” (Hardy, 1933:128) (Author’s translation).

More recently, and perhaps the character that arouses the most curiosity in what is the universe of the French colonial presence in Morocco, Zette Guinaudeau,⁸ author of two books dedicated to Moroccan cuisine,⁹ also contributes to the preservation of a traditional Moroccan recipe.

Here, the attempt to turn the recipe into an archive – and in this case, a colonial archive – sought to preserve practices considered traditional in Morocco and which would be at risk through their possible “contamination” with European habits. This exercise is particularly effective in her first book (1957), published slightly against the current (just one year after the declaration of the end of the French protectorate in the country, on March 2, 1956), and it is the first work of knowledge and systematization of Moroccan cuisine, despite being mainly centered on the eating practices of the Fez region.

Zette Guinaudeau later published, in 1981, the book “Les secrets des cuisines en Terre Marocaine” in which, as a preamble to a *bissara* recipe, she notes the following Moroccan proverb:

“What would you do mountain man, asked a townsman, if you became sultan?” and the *jebli* answer him, in his dream of good food: “If I were sultan, I would eat *bissara* every day ...” (Guinaudeau, 1981:130) (Author’s translation).

After a detailed description of the preparation of *bissara*, Guinaudeau also mentions that:

“On the occasion of a wedding, *bissara* is offered to the guests as soon as they arrive, presented in a large rifaine pottery dish¹⁰, everyone tastes a few spoonful and goes to sit down while waiting for the first dish” (Guinaudeau, 1981:131) (Author’s translation).

However, in more contemporary recipes and compilations relating to Moroccan cuisine, it is relatively rare to find a reference to *bissara*. Not being part of the group of dishes that are commonly part of the collective imagination as “national dishes”, or not recognizing its gastronomic potential because it is a strongly regional dish, or not very stimulating

from a gustatory (and also aesthetic) point of view, the space dedicated to Moroccan soups is usually occupied and monopolized by *harira*.¹¹

This absence is compensated for by Paula Wolfert, author of “The Food of Morocco” (2011), among other books dedicated to the country’s gastronomy,¹² which echoes the modest origin of the *bissara*, but concomitantly referring – and as we had already witnessed on the part of authors from the colonial period – the predilection of the populations of the North of Morocco for this dish, compared to other possibilities, such as the consumption of meat. For Paula Wolfert:

“(…) *byssara*, popular in northern Morocco. It’s an authentic *plat de pauvre* that’s beloved by all strata of society (...) in northern Morocco, the women leave the soup to cook all night over dying ember and then serve it up for breakfast” (Wolfert, 2011:495).

Wolfert also refers to a recipe for “Berber fava bean puree with olive oil (*byssara*), distinguishing it from “Creamy Fava Bean Soup”, referring:

“(…) this soupy, earthy dip, is as popular in North Africa as hummus is in the Middle East. When cooked overnight in a clay pot over coals, it is revered by the Berbers of Northern Morocco as “better than meat!” (Wolfert, 2011:1169).

3.2. Heritage, commodities, and value

The exercise that we have just done here had the main objective of illustrating how, over time and from different historical and political contexts, the construction of a narrative about a dish – which geographically anchors its main consumers, as well as the its social origins – cementing, reproducing and finding, at the same time, arguments that naturalize not only the taste, but also the preference of the populations of the mountains of the Riff for this fava bean soup.

Therefore, when it came to finding heritage correspondents for what could be configured as a “traditional and authentic” food practice, *bissara* seemed – along with *samet*¹³ – to be able to fit in and mold itself to an idea of food heritage.

As in many other places where heritagization came from tacit agreements and/or activation of more or less formal networks of prior cooperation, Chefchaouen was designated as an emblematic city for the representation of Morocco in the candidacy of the “Mediterranean Diet” to intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2010 in a relatively accidental way.

Being a city very dependent on the tourism economy, not far from the Mediterranean coast of the country, and being inserted in a geographically marked territory – the Riff Mountain system – which conditions its agricultural production in an expressive and unequivocal way, it has some of the ingredients that serve the assumptions of heritagization and that point to the reification of a circumscribed idea of community. Here, the territory conditions agriculture, which in turn conditions food, which will, in turn, condition what can serve the purpose of “food heritage”.

¹¹ The most famous soup in Morocco is called *harira*, which, in effect, symbolizes the unification of the Moroccan people during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. (...) Every region of the country has its own version of *harira*, which changes as Ramadan rotates through the seasons (it’s based on a lunar calendar). The soup is often chunky with meat and beans, or thick with leafy vegetables and herbs, but the underlying texture of the liquid is always silky-smooth. This is the one constant, no matter the regional variation, and, in fact, the word *hareer* in Arabic suggests velvetiness.” (Wolfert, 2011:472).

¹² Paula Wolfert is the author of around a dozen cookbooks, including two dedicated to Moroccan cuisine: “Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco” (1973) and “The Food of Morocco” (2011).

¹³ Also known as “*arrobe*” or “*rubb*” in other regions of Morocco, *samet* is a preparation made from grape must, usually with grapes of the Taferiale, Singu and Boukhanzi varieties, abundant in the region.

⁸ Zette Guinaudeau lived in Morocco for more than fifty years (from the 1930s to the 1980s) accompanying her husband who worked there as an ophthalmologist in Fez, having researched for more than twenty years about practices and eating habits in Morocco, and his command of the national language will have allowed him privileged access to contexts and people.

⁹ Fès, vu par sa cuisine” (1957); Les secrets des cuisines en Terre Marocaine” (1981).

¹⁰ Alluding to ceramics from the Riff Mountain region. About Moroccan ceramics see H. Balfet, *Poterie féminine et poterie masculine au Maghreb*, thèse de doctorat d’État, sous la direction de A. Leroi-Gourhan, Paris, 1977.

Chefchaouen, a small tourist town in the Rif area,¹⁴ was then faced – from 2010 onwards – with the need to create heritage – as a commodity – that would meet, in some way, the assumptions of UNESCO, and that could constitute an added value or an additional tourist resource to add to what was already being promoted locally over several decades.

However, if at the institutional level the difficulty persists in finding food correspondents for an idea of local heritage, or possibly the lack of dignity of a soup (in this case, a fava bean soup), to assert itself as a food heritage, when in fact, and as we saw above, it is a soup associated with contexts of poverty and food scarcity, the same does not happen in other spheres and in other circuits as the tourism sector illustrates.

As we saw earlier, *bissara* is full of referents: a) identity – in its intrinsic relationship with the populations of the Rif mountains; b) social and economic – in its condition of soup of hunger and food scarcity; c) historical – in the way it is located in several ancestral accounts; but concomitantly in the way it mobilizes a certain exultation of all these elements, a kind of pride, which translates into a new value, something that became desired.

As Ken Albala points out about the consumption of *Ful Medames* being able to constitute not only an act of resistance – to globalization in particular – but also an act of claiming and displaying an identity – which refers to a past and to traditionally anchored food practices – also referring that eating as practice, is also a conscious act of nationalism:

“*Ful medames* is an expression of identity for modern Egyptians who choose to resist the onslaught of contemporary breakfast foods; it is a way to remember who they are.” (ALBALA, 2007:69)

In this context, could the appearance of *bissara* on breakfast menus in Chefchaouen be subject to the same interpretation? Could it still be seen as an act of resistance to globalization and identity affirmation of the populations of the Rif Mountains region? Or, taking the path of identity affirmations, was it rather a way of touristically capitalizing on a gastronomic practice with a strong regional nature and anchored in a specific geographic location?

Indeed, the memory of *bissara* as “poor man’s food” seems to be erased in Chefchaouen (see Fig. 4). In the most touristy restaurants – almost all of them in town – we don’t even see *bissara* on the menu, but instead the national soup (*harira*)¹⁵ is recurrently found and consumed by tourists. *Bissara* is only served in more popular cafes, often promoted as a dish for a “traditional” breakfast (see Fig. 5), and in a restaurant recognized as being the most “authentic” in town. In this restaurant – Restaurant “Baraka” – despite being largely frequented by international tourists, it is possible to observe many Moroccans eating *bissara*, especially at lunch, only complemented with bread and olives and abundantly drizzled with olive oil.

In an interview with the owner of restaurant “Baraka”, he said that despite the predominance of mass tourism that spends little time in the city and is not concerned with the “regional authenticity” of their dining experiences – exoticism is already achieved through the consumption of the more touristy Moroccan food – there is an increase of tourists who are looking for dining experiences linked to the territories and communities, and who are willing to consume a dish like *bissara*.

The locals with whom I spoke about *bissara*, say that, for those who don’t cook it at home, there are few places in the city where you can



Fig. 5. Breakfast menu at “Outa El Hammam” Square Chefchaouen, October 2018 (Author’s Image).

consume this substantial soup. Youssef, who introduced me to the consumption of *bissara*, mentioning that I should shower it abundantly with olive oil, mentions that the only place in Chefchaouen that makes a good *bissara* is the restaurant “Baraka”, and that the other places – which, as we have seen, are not abundant – serve a version for “tourists”, more liquid and less intense, more adapted to a “western” palate, he says. “*Bissara* is an extreme experience”, says Youssef. “Not everyone likes the intense flavor of fava beans and the thick texture of this soup. It has a flavor that is very much from here, it is a Moroccan taste, and very specific to this part of the country. People in the south (of Morocco) don’t like it! It is a taste of the North of the country”, Youssef adds.

At the restaurant “Baraka”, some Asian tourists also venture into *bissara* consumption. The dish comes to the table steaming and it is necessary to wait a few minutes until the soup is ready to be consumed. For these tourists, *bissara* is as exotic and as authentic as *tangia*,¹⁶ and this will probably be the most exotic gastronomic experience they will have during their stay in Chefchaouen. But not all tourists want to venture into *bissara* tasting, especially at breakfast, as it is promoted in one of the most touristic places in the city (see Fig. 5). For breakfast, most tourists continue to prefer versions that are closer to a “western” meal, which a fava bean soup is clearly not. Bread, olives, or even the acclaimed *amlou*,¹⁷ are choices that we have observed among most international tourists visiting the city. Sophie, a French tourist, don’t even consider having fava bean soup for breakfast. She appreciates the “French heritage” of pastries that can be seen in Morocco, such as “croissants” or “petit pain au chocolat” and goes without the exoticism of olives or fried eggs for breakfast, as is observed all over the country. As for *bissara*, she mentions that she doesn’t even like fava beans very much, and it would never cross her mind to eat soup for breakfast.

4. Conclusion

The transformation of food into heritage has been a widely discussed process in recent decades, specifically as a result of the nominations for intangible cultural heritage promoted by UNESCO, which had as their

¹⁴ Known as the “Perle Bleue”, Chefchaouen has established itself as a tourist destination largely thanks to the characteristics of its medina (picturesque, rustic, and painted with lime and cobalt pigments), but mainly due to its small size, which makes it easily into a familiar place that can be walked around and recognized easily. However, it should also be noted that its proximity to Europe contributed to the popularization of some flows of European tourists, namely Spanish tourists.

¹⁵ *Harira* is a tomato-based soup, with chickpeas and lentils in most versions, and may also contain meat. Served all over Moroccan territory, it is what Hubert (2000) could refer to as a “national dish”.

¹⁶ *Tangia* is a slow-cooked dish, traditionally prepared in a clay pot called *tangia*. Rather than cook the meat at home, the *tangia* would be brought to an oven adjacent to a “hammam,” where it would cook in the ashes from the fire used to heat the bathhouse.

¹⁷ A smooth paste made from crushed almonds with argan oil and lightly sweetened with honey.

starting point the discussion that took place around the classification of the “Gastronomic meal of the French ” in 2010 and which inaugurated the debate on food transformed into heritage (see, for example, Bortolotto, 2017). The idea that food, or eating practices, can constitute heritage, is the starting point for transforming the perception of *bissara* and its ascending path as a food preparation. Heritage, considered an added value in the new heritage regime that we live on, paves the way for the collective validation, and even the consecration, of food practices that were associated with historical periods or difficult economic situations.

Chefchaouen, like many other places in the world, does not want to be left out of the heritage feast which, these days, is just another argument/product that is used to promote places touristically. In this heritage eagerness, which is characterized by quickly finding products that refer to the territory, the history or contextualization of eating practices is not taken into account, nor is an effort made to show how eating practices were (and still are) linked to the food resources of regions and places. Chefchaouen, which as we have seen, is located in a kind of geographic enclave, has always been a place - like so many - that has been characterized by scarcity and limited food resources.

However, this research reveals that, sometimes, local populations are more effective in finding “heritage” than official institutions. *Bissara*, never having been “officially” promoted as a heritage food of the region or deeply connected to the territory, possibly because it carries a connotation of scarcity and food deprivation linked to the past, has come to be appropriated by the informal sectors of catering as something that is “traditional” and “authentic”, and which can constitute a product, a commodity valued by tourists looking for heritage and exoticism. The attempt to find a food identity, anchored to the territory, by local inhabitants of Chefchaouen, turned its eyes to *bissara* and its regional specificity. *Bissara* thus began to be proposed on tourist menus, advertised as a “regional product”, as something “local and traditional”, also meeting the expectations of tourists who are often faced with a standardized offer, and which often replicated an idea of international meal of the western world. *Bissara*, perceived as a potential asset and identity value, now has a place in these menus, not considering its historical connotation. At the same time, its consumption has also come to be valued by a part of the local population, especially young people, who associate *bissara* with an idea of regional identity that must be preserved and valued.

5. Implications for gastronomy

This text seeks to contribute to the debate around the effects of the heritagization of food and gastronomy on territories and communities. In Chefchaouen, as in other places, the process of classifying the Mediterranean Diet as intangible cultural heritage started from a top-bottom initiative, which was subsequently welcomed by the local populations. In a context of rarefaction of regional gastronomies, *bissara* has been promoted from the narrative of its “authenticity” and “longevity”, which obliterates its social place as survival food in a context of food scarcity. In this volume we observe many other similar phenomena, where, beyond the social re-valorization of certain food preparations, we also witness their gourmetisation. It remains to be seen, something that should be the subject of ethnographic follow-up, whether the future of *bissara* will also be that of its gourmetisation, or spread to other areas of the country, as a kind of franchising maneuver.

Author statement

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