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Research Article

The Politics of Consumption: Fischler's Food Theory and Moral Agency in the Dystopia of The Platform

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the symbolic and disciplinary role of food in *The Platform* (2019), examining how consumption becomes a mechanism for shaping, eroding, and potentially reclaiming subjectivity within systems of inequality. The paper's theme is that food, identity, and power are intertwined in a closed, hierarchical setting, where access to food is key not only to survival but also to moral behavior and self-perception. According to Claude Fischler's theory of food and identity, food is often used as a means of degradation, violence, and inequality, rather than as a means of cultural affirmation. In this sense, the paper explores how food has turned out to be a moral agent of dehumanization and how people internalize the roles assigned to them in systems of inequality through food. It also discusses how the act of refusing to consume, especially the uneaten panna cotta, acts as an act of ethical resistance. The study also traces the protagonist's descent from an idealistic observer to an embodied participant in a violent system, illustrating how food operates not only as a source of sustenance but also as a tool of control and a site of resistance. Methodologically, this study uses close textual reading of the major scenes in the movie, especially the dialogue, character development, and space. These are thematically interpreted to show that *The Platform* is not only a metaphor of social stratification but also a tool of moral and psychological transformation through food. Such findings open up to further interdisciplinary interaction with food as a medium where political, ethical, and social meanings are negotiated.

Key Words: Dystopian, Food and Identity, Dehumanization, Degradation, and Act of Ethical Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, dystopian cinema has emerged as an essential cultural phenomenon through which the intersection between ethics, power, and identity in late capitalist cultures is investigated. *The Platform* (original title: *El Hoyo*, 2019), a Spanish science-fiction horror film by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia and written by David Desola and Pedro Rivero, is one of such works that, with the help of a minimalistic yet deeply allegorical approach to human behaviour in extreme circumstances, reaches the depth of the problem. Set in a vertical prison-like structure known as the "Vertical Self-Management Centre", the film presents a harrowing metaphor of capitalist scarcity, social stratification, and the brutal politics of survival. There are two prisoners in each of the prison levels, and there is a platform loaded with food that is lowered every day from the top floor to the bottom. People on the upper levels consume first, leaving scraps or nothing for the people below. Each month, the prisoners are randomly reassigned to new levels, creating a cyclic instability that prevents any lasting social order or code of morals. In this paper, the hypothesis is that food is an active force of dehumanization and resistance, which



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Article History

Received: June 03, 2025

Accepted: June 30, 2025

Published: June 30, 2025



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constructs subjectivity in a disciplinary framework. Within the context of the theory of incorporation developed by Fischler, it has been suggested that the consumption in the Vertical Self-Management Centre not only creates identity but also destroys it in the process of mediation of systemic inequality and scarcity. Moreover, the rejection of the panna cotta is a gesture of ethical appropriation, which can be seen as an example of how non-consumption can be used as a form of protest against the established hierarchies.

The main character, Goreng, joins the building willingly with the aim of getting a diploma and anticipates a controlled atmosphere. But what we get is a literal and moral plunge into a system that resembles the grotesque inequalities of the outside world. As he goes through stages of deprivation, alliance, resistance, and finally sacrifice, Goreng comes to associate food consumption with something more than passive consumption, something more than simple eating, an ethical act of defiance. To investigate these dimensions, this paper relies on the theory of food and identity presented by Claude Fischler, which is considered one of the cornerstones of food studies and anthropology. According to the influential essay *Food, Self and Identity* (1988) by the French sociologist and anthropologist Fischler, food is much more than nourishment; it is a cultural and symbolic practice that defines who we are. His assertion that "you are what you eat" speaks to the intimate relationship between ingestion and identity formation. Fischler stated that eating is a cultural norm, value, and self-conception, and it also defines the boundaries of self and other. Food practices are thus practices of individual identity and belonging or exclusion.

Fischler brings forth the concept that food works on the paradox of incorporation: when we eat, we literally absorb something into our bodies, as well as absorb values, meanings, and cultural identities. This incorporation process shows how food mediates individual and collective identities and, in most cases, highlights power relations in society. This idea is dramatized in the movie. The prison is a vertical foodscape of moral exposure for survival: people are not judged by their own identity but by the way they eat, what they leave behind, and whether they eat in moderation or with abandon. The platform turns into a transmitter not only of food but of meaning, and it is a reflection of the moral position and existential decisions of its recipients. The change in attitude towards the food is the best way to trace the moral development of Goreng. Passive and idealistic at the beginning, he slowly comes to realize the disruptive reasoning of the system. After experiencing both excess and deprivation, he becomes a conscious actor, choosing to ration food with force, if necessary, in the belief that solidarity through controlled consumption can send a "message" to those above. His final choice to jump on the platform and go down to save one of the untouched desserts (a panna cotta) as a sign of protest proves the theory of Fischler (that food can be used to represent not only identity, but also ethical intent) by showing how food can act as a proxy of resistance. The panna cotta becomes a paradoxical object: simultaneously nourishing and untouchable, personal and collective, mundane and revolutionary.

The symbolic meaning of this gesture can be unpacked with the help of the framework developed by Fischler. In his refusal to eat the dessert, Goreng performs a rupture in the system that had ingrained in him the logic of austerity, rivalry, and dehumanization. In the view of Fischler, it is an identity claim by means of a rearrangement of consumption. The refusal to eat is not an abstinence but rather a performance with the aim of reclaiming the food as a communicative, ethical, and identity-forming medium that Goreng refuses to accept. It is this reversal, eater to messenger, where we can see the origins of moral agency.

However, this paper will manage to attain certain objectives: to explore the role of food as a symbolic means of constructing, negotiating, and contesting identity in *The Platform* through the theoretical lens of Claude Fischler's theory of food and identity, to investigate how the dystopian framework of vertical food distribution in *The Platform* can be interpreted as a metaphor of structural inequality, dehumanization, and moral failure and to study the evolution of the main character due to shifting food habits, which is a kind of transition to the active mode of consumption, ethical choice, and self-definition.

This study will be useful to both film studies and food studies as it places *The Platform* in the larger discussions of food ethics, identity, and power in dystopian narratives. The paper presents a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the reflection of late-capitalist inequalities in structures of consumption by using Fischler's theoretical framework and the ideas of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and George Ritzer. It also points out the symbolic power of food as an act of communication, and how the act of refusing to eat turns into an affirmation of moral agency.

Thus, *The Platform* is a dystopian experimental study of the food ethics and politics of consuming. Using the food and identity theory by Claude Fischler, the film highlights the significance of eating in our identity, our interactions with others, and our response to societal injustice. The story of Goreng as a consumer evolving into an ethical subject demonstrates that even the most inhumane of systems cannot strip the symbolic power of food to construct identity, imbue it with moral meaning, and resist systems of oppression.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design, utilizing close textual and visual analysis as its primary methodology. The study focuses on Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia's *The Platform* (2019), analysing the symbolic and political role of food as a central mechanism of meaning, identity construction, and ethical transformation. The interpretive approach is selected because the film operates through intricate metaphors and multilayered symbolism, and the only way to uncover the critique of subjectivity, consumption, and morality embedded in it is to engage in a detailed analysis of the film's narrative structure, character development, dialogue, and visual motifs.

Close textual analysis is concerned with in-depth interpretation of the dialogues in the film, the interactions between the characters, and the events in the narrative. As an example, the line of Trimagasi, which is, Hunger unleashes that madman in us and the call of Baharat, the panna cotta is the message that is analyzed as a way of understanding how the film creates connections between power, morality, and food. These discussions are placed in a wider context of theories of consumption and identity, revealing the moral failures that the film attempts to critique. This is completed with the visual analysis that decodes the cinematography, mise-en-scène, and symbolic images of the film. The untouched panna cotta, the falling of the platform, and the transition of bodily states of Goreng are interpreted as visual texts. This level of analysis investigates the production of meaning by means of the opposition of abundance and scarcity, chaos and silence, consumption and resistance.

Through attention to visual motifs, including the physical transformation of Goreng and the vertical hierarchy of levels, the study demonstrates how *The Platform* not only inserts its critique into its words but also into the images that inspire the viewer to think about systemic oppression and ethical potential. Together, these methods allow for a layered reading of the movie and reveal how meaning is constructed not only through what is said but through what is shown, preserved, and ultimately resisted on screen.

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily rooted in Claude Fischler's theory of incorporation (1988), which examines the deep interconnection between food, identity, and subjectivity. Fischler states that food is never merely a biological need, but a symbolic and cultural means through which people define their relation to the self, to society, and others. Fischler (1988), in his seminal work, explains that incorporating a food is, in a manner, incorporating all or some of the properties of the food. Eating is thus not only a matter of nutrition, but also of self-construction, where what we eat not only literally but metaphorically enters into our composition. In *The Platform*, this concept is brought to the forefront of interpreting the role of food as an identity, agency, and power determinant in the dystopian prison system of verticality.

But *The Platform* radically undermines the idea of incorporation as Fischler introduces it and portrays incorporation as an act of both creating and destroying identity. Eating is deprived of its cultural and communal aspects in the vertical hierarchy of the film; the process of eating is transformed into a violent negotiation of survival. In the top levels, the overconsumption is packaged as privilege and control, whereas in the lower levels, starvation, desperation, and cannibalism reign. This is a reversal of what Fischler refers to as gastro-anomie, whereby the established social norms and rituals of food are lost and cause ethical and psychological confusion. As an example, when Trimagasi says to Goreng, "*Hunger unleashes that madman in us. It's better to eat than be eaten,*" captures this deconstruction of subjectivity: the lines that define human morality and animal survival have been erased by systemic lack. Goreng, who first comes to the prison as an intellectual with Don Quixote, is slowly turned into a fragmented subject who first resists, then engages in violence, and finally recreates his identity through the refusal.

The other important aspect of the framework of Fischler is the concept of symbolic boundaries- the notion that food practices create and re-create the boundaries of purity and pollution, belonging and exclusion, morality and transgression. In *The Platform*, such symbolic boundaries are reversed and disoriented. The fall of the food-laden platform has a literal hierarchy of identity; access to consumption defines dignity, autonomy, and survival. Abundance and choice at the higher levels confirm social power, and below, people are driven to humiliating scavenging and even cannibalism. The fact that Goreng later refuses to eat, to save the panna cotta, and, eventually, the child, is his re-appropriation of subjectivity because he can overcome the logic of consumption that the system imposes. This way, the insights of Fischler on food as identity-making can be used to explain how Goreng becomes an ethical agent after being a passive consumer. Through the application of the theory of Fischler to *The Platform*, this paper explains how eating, refusing, and being eaten become political and existential actions. The vertical form of the prison makes literal the concepts of Fischler: incorporation no longer implies nourishment but implies erosion,

hierarchy, and resistance. Food is the means of creation, deprivation, and reconstruction of identities, and it is at the center of the discussion of the film as a critique of dehumanization and structural inequality.

Research Questions

How does *The Platform* use the representation of food to both expose and critique the erosion of subjectivity, and how does Fischler's theory help articulate the relationship between consumption and identity?

How does the panna cotta, in the end, as an uneaten object, function as a site of ethical meaning, resistance, and identity-making in light of Fischler's theory of incorporation?

In what ways does Goreng's transformation from consumer to ethical subject reflect Fischler's idea of commensality and self vs other or belonging vs exclusion as identity-making in a hostile, dehumanizing foodscape?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mehdi, Muntazar, Anwar, and Ahmad (2022) present a qualitative multimodal analysis of the Spanish film *The Platform*, interpreting it as a metaphor for capitalist structures within the Spanish socio-economic and political context. The study explores how visual and symbolic elements in the movie reflect themes of capitalism, cannibalism, and humanism. Through semiotic analysis, the authors reveal how class disparity and systemic inequality are represented metaphorically, particularly through the imagery of hunger and consumption. This research contributes to understanding how cinematic representations communicate critical discourses, emphasizing the importance of analysing visual media through socio-political and moral lenses in a globalized world.

In his sociological framework, Fischler's interpretation of food practices aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's "taste" theory in *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, where culinary choices serve as expressions of social positioning. Bourdieu conceptualizes taste as a manifestation of the habitus, a system of durable dispositions shaped by one's social conditions, which governs both the production and recognition of cultural preferences, including food. This process generates symbolic boundaries that mark class distinctions. Thus, identity is negotiated and reproduced through shared culinary norms, taboos, and preferences, reflecting broader dynamics of cultural capital and social stratification (Bourdieu, 2018).

Foucault (2023) conceptualizes the Panopticon as a symbol of modern disciplinary power, highlighting how visibility becomes a means of control. Unlike traditional prisons that conceal, the panoptic model ensures constant observation, thus internalizing discipline. He reframes punishment as a shift from legal authority to a diffuse, technological mode of surveillance and regulation, forming what he terms the "anatomy of power" (Foucault, 2023, pp. 291–299).

In *The Anthropology of Food and Body* (1999), Carole M. Counihan offers a nuanced feminist anthropological perspective on how food practices embody and perform gendered power relations. She argues that food consumption is not merely biological but a cultural performance of identity shaped by social scripts, norms, and group affiliations (Counihan, 2018). Her work builds on Fischler's sociological insights by illustrating how personal food choices are deeply embedded in and mediated by social structures. Counihan's analysis underscores the body as a site where cultural meaning is enacted, reinforcing the intersection of food, identity, and power.

Michaela DeSoucey (2010) in "*Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European Union*," introduces the concept of "gastronationalism" to examine how food functions as a medium for national identity construction and symbolic boundary maintenance. Through macro- and micro-level analyses such as EU origin-designation schemes and the foie gras debate in France, DeSoucey illustrates how nationalist sentiment shapes both food production and marketing. This perspective challenges homogenizing narratives of globalization by revealing how food operates as a tool of cultural protectionism.

In *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*, Claude S. Fischler (2010) traces the enduring traits of American identity through cultural practices, emphasizing how behaviours like eating are not isolated choices but socially embedded rituals. He argues that food habits function as expressions of collective identity, reinforcing values such as independence, community, and egalitarianism. This perspective aligns with symbolic interactionism, which views daily acts like sharing meals as socially meaningful performances of belonging and status. Fischler's work contributes a longitudinal lens to food studies, showing how national character is continuously negotiated through mundane practices.

In *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, Johnston and Baumann (2014) present a dual narrative about contemporary food culture. On one hand, food is celebrated as democratic, with foodies embracing authenticity through ethnic eateries and working-class fare. On the other hand, food practices subtly reinforce class

distinctions, as culinary knowledge and taste serve as markers of cultural capital and privilege. By exploring this tension, the authors reveal how food becomes a site where egalitarian ideals and social hierarchies intersect. Their analysis expands upon Fischler's sociological approach by illustrating how food mediates identity, status, and cultural belonging in complex ways.

Krishnendu Ray's *The Ethnic Restaurateur* (2016) offers a deeply personal and sociologically rich account of how food practices mediate identity, labour, and migration. Reflecting on his journey from domestic ineptitude to culinary expertise, Ray illustrates how immigration catalysed a shift in gendered labour roles and provoked critical consciousness around food and care work. He frames this transformation as both material and epistemological, what he terms a "hauntology" of overlooked domestic labour. Ray's insights align with Fischler's emphasis on community and cultural continuity, showing how immigrant foodways serve as survival strategies and modes of resistance and identity formation (Ray, 2016).

Ashley et al. (2004) offer a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach to the study of food within cultural studies, emphasizing how food choices reflect and shape identity, social position, and cultural meaning. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Barthes' semiotics, Lévi-Strauss' anthropology, Elias' historical sociology, and Bourdieu's notions of taste and class, the authors situate food as a central element in everyday life and cultural discourse. They extend the analysis to contemporary issues such as national identity, gendered eating practices, media representations of food, and ethical debates around vegetarianism and food-related risk (Ashley et al., 2004). This work is foundational in legitimizing food as a cultural study domain.

While Claude Fischler's theory of food as a marker of identity and social belonging has been widely applied in cultural and sociological studies, its use in analysing dystopian cinema, particularly *The Platform*, remains underexplored. Existing scholarship often emphasizes the film's socio-political allegory or spatial critique, but rarely interrogates how food functions as a mechanism of subjectivity and ethical erosion, as theorized by Fischler. This paper addresses the specific research gap in the movie.

ANALYSIS

The Platform (2019), directed by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia and written by David Desola and Pedro Rivero, is a Spanish dystopian thriller that uses the mechanics of food distribution within a vertical prison structure to explore themes of inequality, morality, and subjectivity. The movie is set in a tower-like prison known as the Vertical Self-Management Center, where food is dropped one floor at a time, and those on the higher floors are fed well, and the lower levels are left to starve or kill each other. Although the story is a bleak allegory of the social order of the capitalist world, it can connect this social commentary with the most fundamental human action: eating, which gives it its strength. The film uses food to dramatize how systems of control not only oppress bodies but also destroy identity, morality, and community. *The Platform* is examined in this paper in the light of the theoretical approach by Claude Fischler and his ideas of incorporation and gastro-anomie. Fischler states that the act of eating is symbolic in that it establishes identity, cultural affiliation, and moral limits. Once food becomes devoid of its symbolic value, an identity crisis occurs, and that is the dynamic that the film vividly portrays. The main contention of this study is that *The Platform* employs food as the structural inequality metaphor, but also as a material and symbolic tool of deconstructing and reconstructing subjectivity. However, the movie also has scenes of resistance, in which food refusal is a re-appropriation of ethical agency and identity in an otherwise dehumanizing order.

Food, Identity, and Power in *The Platform*

In *The Platform* (2019), food operates as both a literal sustenance and a symbolic mechanism through which subjectivity is dismantled. The main conceit of the film, the vertical prison-like building of the Vertical Self-Management Center, is based on food not only as an indicator of inequality, but also as a disciplinary tool that imposes and naturalizes social stratification and dehumanization. This spatial metaphor of top and bottom has been transformed into a moral and psychological schema, in which characters internalize their status to permit the system to continue to reproduce its logic without an explicit form of control. "What are we going to eat?" Goreng asks. "The people above's leftovers," Trimagasi replies. This conversation summarizes the grotesque reversal of the cultural and symbolic meaning of food in the film. Food is the affirmation of identity, the common rituals and practices, but here it is the sign of subordination. The theory of incorporation developed by Claude Fischler provides a useful theoretical framework in which this dynamic can be examined. As Fischler states, "To incorporate a food is, in a way, to incorporate all or part of its properties" (*Food, self, and identity*, 1988). Community, tradition, and nourishment are not what is included, however, in *The Platform*: degradation, inequality, and despair are. The

characters eat what the people above them reject, both literally and metaphorically, and in the process, they consume the moral reasoning of the system that undervalues them. In that way, identity ceases to be a stable, self-determined entity, but a disjointed and relational one, dependent upon the degree and availability of food.

Since the design of the prison does not provide any surveillance or any form of obvious punishment, control is through architecture and repetition. Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is especially relevant here. He claims that such modern institutions produce docile bodies not by brute force, but by internalized means of control, including spatial organization and routine. This logic is imposed by the film through its rotation of levels, time-based food delivery, and weaponization of scarcity.

"Don't speak to the people below...because they're down below. The people above won't answer you...because they're above, obviously" (The Platform, 2019), as Trimagasi asserts, echoing Foucault's insight, who observes how discipline creates social division through the manipulation of space (Discipline and Punish, 1977). The physical order is an order of the mind and of the conscience, and the notion that those above have a right to excess and those below to deprivation is naturalized. This spatial organization is a disciplinary organization that re-forms the identity of the individual. Characters behave and are moral according to their level. They can indulge themselves guiltlessly when on higher levels, and they can go to extremes like cannibalism when they are on lower levels, which is what the system wanted and somehow justified. Trimagasi's bleak taxonomy: "There are three kinds of people: those above, those below, and those who fall" (The Platform, 2019). Here, the literalization of Fischler's concept of gastro-anomie, or the loss of social and symbolic meaning in food, occurs (*Food, self, and identity*, 1988). Food is no longer a means of culture but a survivalist raw commodity. Goreng, a reader of Don Quixote and an idealist at the beginning, is slowly turned into a person who can commit acts of violence and even complicity. Even the very process of eating is a sign of a failure of ethical subjectivity: one is not eating as a cultural being but as a body ruled by instinct and imposed scarcity. The discussion of the spatial operations of power by Foucault is relevant once more. The platform architecture generates seclusion and self-control. A panopticon is unnecessary; the body is better disciplined by the threat of hunger and the uncertainty of placement than it could be by surveillance (Discipline and Punish, 1977).

Food is the core of building personal and group identity, as Fischler observes, but in *The Platform*, the identity also gets consumed with the food (*Food, self, and identity*, 1988). The physical shape of the characters, bloated on the top and skeletal on the bottom, reflects their moral and psychological degradation. Food is no longer a common human need, but a status and subordination currency. This criticism of rationalized inequality is further honed with the concept of McDonaldization as expounded by George Ritzer, which is the act of making human experiences justifiable, rationalized, and predictable, but devoid of meaning (The McDonaldization thesis: Is expansion inevitable?, 1996). The platform's food delivery is absurdly efficient: it arrives on time, in exact form, every day, yet it utterly fails to fulfill its purpose of nourishing everyone. Mechanistically rational, ethically bankrupt is the system. In this regard, food turns into an empty ritual, which lacks any symbolic or cultural meaning. The consumption is no longer a place of identity confirmation but its destruction. Hence, *The Platform* makes food not only the metaphor of structural violence but the tool itself by which subjectivity is deconstructed. The theory of Fischler explains the vulnerability of identity as a point of vulnerability in the systems of inequality when it is linked to the acts of incorporation. Once food is deprived of its social role, it no longer has the capacity to nourish the self; rather, it becomes the means of internalizing hierarchy and practicing dehumanization. Foucault allows us to understand how this internalization is done not with direct domination but with the body's immersion in the space of structure and the repetition of the rituals. Collectively, these frameworks can help us to read *The Platform* not only as a dystopia of hunger, but also as a deep critique of how institutions practice identity through the simplest of acts of consumption.

Food Refusal as Ethical Resistance and Subjective Reclamation in *The Platform*

By the end of the film, the uneaten panna cotta emerges not simply as a dessert but as a charged symbol, an anomaly within a structure that has reduced food to a mechanism of survival and control. In a world where consumption is complicity, the untouched panna cotta is a radical gesture of resistance. It does not just declare the possibility of moral agency but also the reappropriation of subjectivity within a system that is set to undermine it.

"The panna cotta is the message. The panna cotta is the message. The panna cotta is the message", says Baharat (The Platform, 2019).

The repetition of this refrain makes the dessert less of a sustenance and more of a symbol, making the panna cotta an object of communication. It is an interruption of a closed system that is based on predictable behaviours: hunger, greed, and survival. Here, Claude Fischler's theory of food and identity is of great interpretive value. "To incorporate a food is, in a way, to incorporate all or part of its properties" (*Food, self, and identity*, 1988). That is, to eat is

biological and symbolic; it is a confirmation of values, borders, and belonging. In *The Platform*, though, this is a grotesque inversion of the relationship. Eating in the system is to give in to the system- food becomes a means of disciplining the violence of the system. Therefore, the refusal to eat is an act of resistance in symbolism. The panna cotta is a reaffirmation of the potential of moral order amid moral collapse.

Furthermore, Elspeth Probyn's *Carnal Appetites (Carnal appetites: foodsexidentities, 2003)* reinforces this idea, arguing that eating is always entangled with morality, identity, and power. In that regard, the choice of not eating the panna cotta turns into a profoundly embodied ethical action. In a world where food has lost its cultural and symbolic significance, the refusal of Goreng and Baharat reinstates the moral burden in food. They do what Probyn would term an embodied ethic, not by theorizing resistance, but by living and suffering it. The panna cotta, then, is an ethical subjectivity, a subjectivity formed not by idealism, but by physical, carnal opposition.

"How do we send a message? With a symbol" (The Platform, 2019).

This line is a change of instinct to intentionality, animal to human. Goreng and Baharat want the administrators, when they are served the perfect panna cotta, to understand what it means: that solidarity, restraint, and moral awareness can still exist in a system that is meant to eliminate them. This aligns with Michaela DeSoucey's theory of gastronationalism, which positions food as a medium of political expression (*Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European Union, 2010*). *The Platform* is not a nation-state, but it is a closed political system, and the panna cotta is a form of gastro-political resistance. It is not a protest of slogans or banners, but of non-consumption, of the claim that even in totalized systems, choice and moral dissent are possible.

Another aspect of the symbolic charge of panna cotta is provided by Pierre Bourdieu in the theory of distinction (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the judgement of Taste, 2018*). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that taste is a social weapon; food preferences signify class, cultural capital, and power. The panna cotta is a fine and exclusive dessert that usually represents luxury and sophistication. In the world of *The Platform*, however, such goodies are torn apart by the people above and never even seen by the people below. Here, maintaining the panna cotta is to recover the cultural capital of the lower. It turns into an act of subversion, and it reverses the logic of Bourdieu: the panna cotta is no longer a marker of the elite identity but rather of the oppressed. It is no longer a class marker but a resistance marker, a means of saying that even the bottom can lay claim to discernment, agency, and symbolic power.

This inversion also aligns with Muntazar Mehdi et al.'s (*CAPITALISM, CANNIBALISM AND HUMANISM: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE "THE PLATFORM", 2022*) reading of *The Platform* as a critique of capitalism's cannibalistic logic, consuming bodies, subjectivities, and ethics in pursuit of profit and control. In this allegory, the panna cotta is a rediscovery of humanism, a pristine relic that denies the dehumanizing imperative of the system. It opposes literal and metaphorical cannibalism, giving a peek at what has not been corrupted. As Almerico notes, "food is a marker of identity and a medium through which people express who they are culturally and individually" (*Food and identity: Food studies, cultural, and personal identity, 2014*). When Goreng and Baharat decide not to eat the panna cotta, they once again establish themselves as subjects, not as bodies. They create a frontier between themselves and the internalized logic of consumption within the institution. This can be termed as symbolic boundary-making by Fischler: the self is defined not by what is assimilated, but by what is rejected (*Food, self, and identity, 1988*). Their act is a sort of ethical incorporation-by-denial, an incorporation by which identity is reclaimed in the act of refusal. Hence, the panna cotta that is not eaten in *The Platform* is a symbol on several levels: as an ethical act of resistance, as the reclamation of agency, as a gastro-political protest, and as a cultural re-signification. It disrupts the cycle of incorporation by not being swallowed by the system, both literally and figuratively. Therefore, it offers a break in a dystopia where food tends to consume meaning. Using the theory of incorporation and symbolic boundaries by Fischler, the panna cotta can be seen as the last act of subjectivity not only to the administrators above, but to the logic of the system itself.

Digesting the System: Subjectivity and Sacrifice in Goreng's Arc

Goreng enters the Vertical Self-Management Center carrying a copy of *Don Quixote*, which is a representation of an early leaning towards personal conscience and moral ideals. At this point, his identity is still fairly intact, as it is still influenced by the norms of the outside world. Culture, ethics, and reason mediate his relationship with food. But this stability is lost when he goes down both literally and figuratively through the violent hierarchy of the system.

"Hunger unleashes that madman in us. It's better to eat than be eaten", Trimagasi (The Platform, 2019).

This line is a precursor to the fall of moral order and rational agency. When Goreng is both rich and poor, his eating habits change: he feasts when he is on top, he fasts and is on the verge of cannibalism when he is down. According to Fischler (*Food, self, and identity, 1988*), this signals gastro-anomie, the collapse of the cultural and moral

frameworks that normally govern food practices. Goreng no longer eats as a social or moral creature; he eats to live. The symbolic inclusion of food, its use in determining identity and social boundaries, fails in the words of Fischler. The identity of Goreng breaks, most creepily in his hallucinated conversations with Trimagasi, a man whom he despised but now psychologically lives in him. Such hallucinations are not only symptoms of insanity, but they are the internalization of the logic of the system, a literal and metaphorical consumption of violence. Almerico (Food and identity: Food studies, cultural, and personal identity, 2014) supports this reading by noting that food is always more than physical sustenance; it is emotional, cultural, and identity-forming. Goreng's madness, then, represents the emotional and moral implosion brought about by the system's cannibalistic imperatives. The turning point in Goreng starts with him joining forces with Baharat to ration and redistribute the food. Their project is a rearrangement of food as a commodity into the communal resource, an act of ethical defiance.

"Friends, I ask you not to approach the platform. We want you to join a peaceful protest movement that will inexorably change the course of events and set an important precedent", Baharat (The Platform, 2019).

It is a rhetorical and a physical effort to rebuild commensality, which is a central concept in the theory of Fischler (*Food, self, and identity*, 1988). Social identity and inclusion are based on commensality, which is the act of eating together. It confirms a status in a moral and cultural order. In *The Platform*, on the contrary, the system promotes radical isolation, competition, and exclusion. The effort of Goreng and Baharat to implement a bottom-up commensality (feeding the underlings) transforms into the reconstruction of identities via common ethics. Elspeth Probyn's concept of the "carnal economy" (*Carnal appetites: foodsexidentities*, 2003) helps us understand how Goreng's transformation is not born from rational revelation, but from the suffering of the body. His starvation, his scars, his trauma make him what Probyn describes as an embodied ethicist, a person whose morality is not built on abstract principle, but through flesh. The redistribution of food is not a theory; it is etched on their bodies. Goreng and Baharat turn into food by refusing to eat it in selfishness. They perform a sacrifice as a counteraction.

As Counihan (*The anthropology of food and body: Gender, meaning and Power*, 2018) also argues, food and food practices are central to personal and collective identity. Hunger or power devours the identity of the majority of characters in this violent structure. Goreng and Baharat are trying to reconstruct identity by means of food ethics, by non-consumption, rationing, and sacrifice, to establish new symbolic limits. The final transformation, which Goreng undergoes, is to remain behind and send the child up. According to Levinasian existentialism, freedom cannot be separated from responsibility to the Other (Affected by the Face of the Other. The Levinasian Movement from the Exteriority to the Interiority of the Infinite, 2009). Self-preservation is at the basis of Goreng's early life decisions; however, he later turns to ethical relationality, that is, being-with-others, even death.

"The girl is the message", Goreng (The Platform, 2019).

This quote shows that Goreng does not act in the end with hope or result in mind but with moral responsibility. The child is not only an individual; she is the hope of the future, the promise of something greater in a system that dehumanizes people. By deciding to send her up, Goreng does not escape; he accepts his fate and stays back as a part of the message. Here, the connection between self and other, belonging and exclusion, takes center stage. According to Fischler (*Food, self, and identity*, 1988), food practices help define who is "us" and who is "them." These boundaries are deleted by the system of the Platform, which implements radical self-interest. However, Goreng and Baharat recreate some kind of moral belonging. Their commensal effort is a sort of miniature social contract. This is reminiscent of the concept of ethical subjectivity as put forth by Levinas, which comes about when one takes the responsibility of the Other without the hope of a payoff or a payback (Affected by the Face of the Other. The Levinasian Movement from the Exteriority to the Interiority of the Infinite, 2009). The fact that the child is placed on the platform is also a commensality and exclusion reversed: the child is excluded on all levels, shielded by silence and invisibility, and at the same time becomes the most morally visible. By sending her up, Goreng and Baharat make a last act of communion not in eating together, but in the hope of a world where eating together would one day be fair.

CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on *The Platform* as a vital allegory of systemic inequality, examining the role of food as a literal need and a symbolic tool of social control. Based on the theories of identity, embodiment, and spatial discipline, the study concluded that the film creates a closed system in which consumption is directly related to hierarchy, morality, and subjectivity. In this context, food ceases to confirm identity but to dismantle it instead, which shifts the process of eating into a tool of internalizing oppression. The characters adjust to their levels as psychological logic of stratified

systems in which degradation is justified by survival. Notably, the paper has also revealed the way food refusal, such as the uneaten panna cotta and the choice to send the child up the ladder, is an embodied means of ethical resistance. These instances mark the possibility of subjectivity to be reclaimed by restraint, solidarity, and symbolic action. This analysis concludes that the opposition to dehumanizing systems is not necessarily explicit; instead, it can appear in the body itself and moral decisions taken at an extreme critical point. The significance of this study goes beyond the analysis of films. It calls upon the consideration of how the identity is organized by the real-world institutions on the basis of consumption, scarcity, and control within a dystopian carceral prison. It also shows the possibility of moral agency even in the systems that were meant to destroy it. The research, therefore, adds to more general arguments concerning subjectivity, inequality, and politics of everyday life by examining how food can reflect and resist power, and also, this research is highly significant for dystopian fiction as it unveils the importance of food as a tool for maintaining a disruptive power within a dystopian setting.

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