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Cooking with(out) others? Changing kitchen technologies and family values in Marrakech

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ABSTRACT

Domestic cooking is changing the world over. Kitchen technologies and the smartphone transform the way we cook and whom we cook with. Coupled with urbanisation and the shrinking of households, cooking seems to be an increasingly solitary practice. At the same time, these processes did not change who cooks; across the globe it is mostly women who prepare the daily meal for their families. Yet, rather than treating domestic cooking solely as a gender relations issue, this article presents ethnographic research with low-income domestic cooks in Marrakech, Morocco, to argue that unequal generational relations are also important drivers of change in family life. Paradoxically, rather than cook alone or simplify meals, kitchen appliances and social media were employed to continue preparing elaborate family meals. Through a thick description of the preparation of a spread called *amlou* and of pizza, this article explores why domestic cooking remains centralto idealised notions of womanhood and family life in Marrakech and beyond. It introduces the concept of *culinary connectivity* to understand how new technologies were employed ininter-generational negotiations of cooking knowledge and power. Moreover, while the crafting of culinary connectivity enables young generations of low-income womento emancipate themselves from age-based power in the home, these practices also enmesh them in new relations of dependence on money and the market. By making cooking central to understanding the (re)production of everyday family life in the context of poverty, this article contributes to cross-cultural studies of food and to regional debates about the family.

KEYWORDS Food preparation; womanhood; family; kitchen technologies; social media; Morocco

Domestic cooking is changing. Kitchen technologies like the fridge, the pressure cooker, the food processor and even the smartphone transform the way we cook and whom we cook with. Coupled with urbanisation and the shrinking of households, cooking seems furthermore to be an

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increasingly solitary practice. At the same time, these processes did not change who cooks; across the world cooking remains a highly gendered task, it is largely women who prepare the daily meal for their families. Yet, rather than consider domestic cooking an issue of gender relations as many food scholars suggest, I argue that generational relations, especially the power and knowledge of older cooks, are an equally important driver of change, certainly among the low-income Marrakchis I lived and worked with. In the process of emancipating from the culturally sanctioned dominance of their mothers and mothers-in-law through moving out of the multi-generational and into conjugal households, younger generations of Marrakchi women harnessed kitchen technologies and, increasingly, social media to continue to make good food for their families. Smaller households and these technologies do not lead to the individualisation and simplification of cooking practices, as described for European or North American contexts, as I will show. They rather widen younger Marrakchi cook's relations and their sources of knowledge and thereby empower them.

Importantly, these new socio-material relations were harnessed not in order to cook less, but in order to continue the laborious preparation of homemade food as the material and symbolic basis of everyday social life and, in doing so, contribute to upholding the ideal of mature womanhood as embodied by the domestic cook; processes that I will analyse through the notion of *culinary connectivity*. This article explores how culinary connectivity works and why low-income Marrakchi, and likely many more women the world over, bother to (re)produce traditional meals despite a seemingly wide range of alternatives. Ultimately, in the context of poverty and the absence of an inclusive national welfare system, culinary connectivity contributes to ensuring the existence and wellbeing of low-income Moroccan families.

In this article I draw on ethnographic research between September 2012 and August 2013, during which I lived and worked as an apprentice cook with three low-income cooks and their families as well as their social networks in and around the rapidly growing city of Marrakech, Morocco (complemented by several shorter research visits and further interviews until 2018). Low-income refers to incomes below or around the National Minimum Wage, which was just above 2000MAD per month in 2013; roughly 200EURO. Although the lived experiences of all three cooks were – despite their differences – comparable, in this article I focus on those of Aicha and of Rachida. Neither had a work contract nor health insurance or significant savings. Like in other Arab states where national institutions are weak or non-existent, their family was their main insurance in case of sickness or financial crisis (cf. Joseph 2018).

At the time of my fieldwork, 30-year-old Aicha worked part-time as a cleaner in a nearby *riad* [traditional courtyard house] for tourists to which

she took her two small daughters until they began to visit pre-school. Aicha spent the rest of the day with shopping, processing or preparing food for her own small family as well as preparing a paid lunch for the two assistant shopkeepers of her husband Hassan. Hassan's work in a tourist boutique supplied their main but erratic income, while Aicha's monthly income contributed significantly towards the household budget managed by her. When I began to live and work with her and her family in their small rented two-bedroom apartment in May 2013, they had only recently moved out of her in-law's household in the same central neighbourhood in the *medina* [historic town] of Marrakech, comprising Hassan's mother Habiba and his aunt Amina among others.[1] Like many rural Berber/Imazighen of her generation (Crawford 2008), Aicha had moved to Marrakech as a teenager to earn money and support her impoverished natal family, while enjoying the relative freedom of city life. This was also the time when she attended alphabetisation programmes to make up for the education she did not receive ever since she dropped out of primary school to help her mother in the house from age seven. Once married and a mother herself, she revived and took pride in the many skills she acquired during her childhood, such as making her own bread and cooking homemade food. Between the first time I met Aicha in 2006 and the start of my fieldwork in September 2012, Aicha had also learned to speak some French through interacting with foreign guests at her employer's riad.

40-year-old Rachida worked full-time as cleaner in private homes across Marrakech from around the time their second daughter was born, when her husband Mohammed lost his work as artisan jeweller due to his fondness for alcohol. At the time of my fieldwork, Mohammed rarely drank, but rather spent his days sleeping in, roaming the medina, carrying out small errands for the family and predictably returning home for mealtimes. Rachida usually shopped and processed foods after work and, whenever her schedule and place of work allowed, she came home to prepare and serve a warm lunch for their family of four. At the time, her 15- and 20-year-old daughters Ibtissam and Zakia went to public secondary school and university respectively. Although the education of her daughters was her main ambition, Rachida expected them to help with domestic chores, and they did. They lived in a small adobe house in one of the *cha'abi* [popular, poor] neighbourhoods of the medina. Their traditional adobe house was so small that I could not live with them. Instead, I commuted regularly from a rented studio flat, usually on days when Rachida did not work for a wage or when her daughters had short days at school or university. Like many women of her generation, Rachida did not learn to read and write fluently, but she did learn to speak some French at work and through watching television. Rachida had moved to Marrakech as an underage bride to Mohamed, twenty years senior to her, a common arrangement in Morocco to this day (Zvan Elliott 2015). She

often told me how disappointed she was to have married 'a useless husband' unable to provide for his wife and children; still, when she had considered a divorce several years ago, her parents threatened to withdraw their support and so she stayed. During fieldwork, she routinely blamed him for many of her hardships, yet her daughters loved him and always managed to reconcile their parents.

As these brief introductions of Aicha and Rachida and their families show, domestic cooking is deeply interwoven in everyday family life and so is my methodology. Being a part of the same material and social environment for several months at a time and learning to make food alongside them, their daughters and many other women in their social networks, I deeply felt through all my bodily senses rather than merely observed food and family life; an approach I call participant perception.[2] My participant perception peaked during the Islamic month of Ramadan, in July and August 2013, when I joined in the daily fasting and feasting. During Ramadan the difficulties and the joys of family life became particularly palpable as we wondered together how to substitute an expensive ingredient or as we rushed and sweated to serve foods and drinks on time for the much-anticipated *leftour* [meal breaking the daytime fasting at sunset]. The ethnographic vignettes below are both taken from this period of my fieldwork. The selected cases help to make the negotiations around culinary connectivity particularly clear, since during Ramadan staple foods and kitchen tools tend to become pricier and expectations of a good and abundant meal rise, while most women and men continue their wage work despite their daytime fasting. Together, this heightens the constraints that low-income wage working cooks face.

In the following, the Marrakchi cases are contextualised in the broader cross-cultural literature on food and family life. Based on the case of Aicha, I argue for attending to inter-generational negotiations of power, rather than gendered ones, to understand the role of kitchen technologies in women's emancipation from patriarchal relations of dominance. By bringing a new materialist approach to the (re)production of cooking knowledge and family values, I subsequently enlarge the argument through the case of Rachida and Zakia to highlight how social media contributes to empowering young cooks as (re)producers of knowledge vis-à-vis more senior cooks. I go on to illustrate that although young women continue to materially and symbolically (re)produce food and families in the twenty-first century – thanks largely to the new socio-material relations enabled by kitchen appliances and smartphones – these technologies also entangle low-income cooks in new, largely hidden relations of power. My research participants relied on technologies from profit-making multinational companies that enmeshed them in the equally uneven power relations of a capitalising and globalising society. As a result, I conclude that a young cook's dependency shifts away

from senior women and multigenerational households towards the more invisible economic relations of the global market. The crafting of culinary connectivity – simply speaking the establishing, maintaining and negotiating of the self, the family and social relations through making food – is thus increasingly dependent on wage work and money, which are notoriously scarce and unreliable for women of low-income backgrounds. This has never more apparent than during the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Domestic food work and the family meal in comparison

On the one hand, despite its importance in everyday social life, the preparation of food has not been studied systematically in the regional scholarship of the family (cf. Joseph 2018).[3] My research seeks to fill that gap. On the other hand, the case of low-income Marrakchi cooks and the negotiations of inter-generational relations add a new, hitherto underexplored perspective on everyday food and family life to food studies in so-called Western contexts. The following comparative review thus joins family studies in the Arab region with food studies in Western families.

Notwithstanding women's education and desire to work for a wage in increasingly industrialised and capitalised societies – or rather *because of* women's emancipation – daily food preparation and family meals became a key site for the domestic negotiation of gender and generational relations. According to Lupton's (1996) classic sociological study on food, body and the self in Australia, the role of the mother as arbiter of familial care and love by offering food and nourishment emerged with, and was even due to, industrialisation and the notion of romantic love between a woman and a man as the basis of the conjugal household. Grossly simplified, with the shift away from the household as the primary site of production – requiring the joint work of all family members in usually multigenerational households – especially urban middle-class women across the globe became associated with the domestic sphere and food work (see, for instance, Schwartz Cowan 1983; Counihan 1999), and the daily family meal became a central manifestation of this new ideal (Murcott 1997). In the process, food preparation was increasingly considered an altruistic act, not one of work, as this example from Greece highlights: 'preparing food and serving it to her family reflects a woman's relationships with them and her fulfilment of her role as wife and mother' (Dubisch 1986, 207). By extension, the more work is invested in its preparation, the higher the symbolic value of a meal. That this work is ambivalently imbued with both pride and women's oppression is persuasively demonstrated in DeVault's (1991) classic sociological study of food and families in Chicago.

More recent studies among conjugal householdsin North America and Europe find that mothers are torn between the responsibility of preparing

good food for their families, and thus caring for them, and earning an income through wage work, which prevents them from taking the time needed to prepare what they consider good food.[4] While these authors describe that fathers increasingly help to cook, particularly for leisure during weekends or on special occasions, and that they enjoy doing so, they also demonstrate that mothers across income groups continue to bear the responsibility of managing routine domestic food work during the busy working week and mostly consider it a chore rather than a choice. This ambivalence about cooking is also the result of shifting social values. Ethnographers Collier (1997) and Counihan (2004) trace how wage work and the growing importance of monetary income, in low- and middle-income households in Spain and Italy respectively, contributed to shifting women's primary site of identification away from the home and food work as a key determinant of personhood, towards wage work as central to women's identity – just as it had become for men since the onset of industrialisation. As these societies capitalised over the last decades, wage work and the public sphere became increasingly valued over domestic work and the home.

The case of domestic cooking in low-income households in Marrakech offers an interesting complement to this literature and brings the few existing ethnographies of food preparation in Morocco and the region in dialogue with it. Importantly, as I will show below, womanhood, love and care are not only symbolically 'reflected' through food work, as the comparative literature on food and gender suggests, they are also materially (re)produced in the preparation of every family meal. Through this slight shift of perspective and the bringing together of hitherto unconnected scholarly debates, I will tease out the many nuances of changing domestic cooking practices, their relevance for contemporary values and norms around womanhood, domestic care and the family in low-income urban Morocco, and illustrate the mutual benefits of such a cross-cultural and comparative approach to studying food and the family.

Though predominantly Muslim rather than Christian, post-colonial Moroccan society is similarly determined by patriarchy as North American and European societies. Despite two long-standing feminist movements and a relatively progressive family law since 2004 [*mudawana*], family life in low-income Morocco is still marked by gendered and generational relations of power, whereby men and older family members are socially sanctioned to exert authority over women and younger family members (Errazzouki 2014; Sadiqi 2006; Zvan Elliott 2015). This also applies to domestic work such as cooking, especially in low-income households which cannot afford to outsource this work as many middle-class households in urban Morocco do (Newcomb 2009; Montgomery 2019). Although Moroccan men often have substantial knowledge of cooking and use these for wage work or in the context of labour migration, women of all social classes and income groups

are expected to cook – or manage cooking – in the domestic context of family life (see also, Conway-Long 2006).[5] Similar to Spain or Italy (Collier 1997; Counihan 2004), and other contexts determined by patriarchy and patrilocality such as Japan (Kondo 1990), India (Donner 2008), Yemen (MacLagan 1994), Egypt (Naguib 2015) or Mexico (Adapon 2008), domestic food preparation is rather considered a complementary project whereby men provide the raw ingredients (or increasingly money) and women process these into a family meal according to an established division of labour.

Yet, although family relations are gendered and often unequal across patriarchal societies, gender was not necessarily considered the main problem by the women and men I worked with.[6] Indeed, as a few early studies on food and family life in other Arab contexts show (Meneley 1996; MacLagan 1994), I found that it is rather generational relations, and in the context of cooking in particular the dominance of older women, that younger generations of women find problematic and wish to emancipate from. In the multigenerational households that mark more conservative Moroccan families, older women, usually mothers or mothers-in-law, reserve the prestigious task of cooking the main meal of the day for themselves, while they manage not only food stocks and meals, but also younger women's social life and their domestic work, which provides the more basic and often tedious services in the household (see also, Maher 1974; Kapchan 1996). The resulting family meal was and is often conceived not as mother's work, but as a joint undertaking, albeit one that results from a strict hierarchy of domestic labour, whereby senior women have significant influence and power in all domestic matters, while younger women often cannot determine their domestic routines. It is in this context that young women's desire to move out of the patrilocal household emerges. By implication, it is the changing relations between different generations of women, rather than between women and men, that matter to understanding changes in the (re)production of cooking knowledge, as I will demonstrate in the following.

The technological promise in modern families

An effect of industrialisation and urbanisation is that families increasingly live in conjugal households, typically composed of a wife, a partnering husband and their children (in Europe and North America family households increasingly diversify to include for instance same-sex parents). This aspect of the so-called individualisation of capitalist societies is particularly poignantly articulated in the title of Collier's (1997) monograph '*From Duty to Desire*', where she traces the shift away from multigenerational farming households towards smaller conjugal ones in urban areas as a result of the spread of the capitalist economy in southern Spain. With the parallel emergence of

convenience foods and appliance-filled functional kitchens, women were presumed to no longer need to cook, nor to require the help of others to do so. Observers across the world and in Morocco concluded that these processes lead to the individualisation and simplification of domestic cooking.[7] Yet, historical and ethnographic research shows that this is not actually the case, not even in highly industrialised societies. Historians of technology were among the first to show that so-called intelligent technologies, although touted to liberate women from food work, often resulted in '*More Work for Mother*' (Schwartz Cowan 1983) as these technologies released especially men and other family members from complementary food work. Silva (2000) shows furthermore how, despite all marketing efforts on the side of (male) manufacturers, most kitchen appliances such as ovens and microwaves still require continuous attention and even lead to new skills in the by-now thoroughly feminised cook.[8] Sutton's (2014) ethnographic research on a matrifocal Greek island further challenges these assumptions by demonstrating that although young couples choose to live in separate households with their children, the extended family remains important as women of several generations continue to share their kitchens, their food work and their knowledge.

Although based on different historical and cultural processes, material and social change in Morocco further complicates these observations. As a result of structural adjustment programmes and agricultural reforms in the 1980s, impoverished rural Moroccans increasingly sought their luck in the cities. The prospect of an independent income lured younger generations (Crawford 2008); poor young women were particularly attracted by education and the promises of a capitalist labour market in fast growing cities such as Casablanca, Rabat or Marrakech (Cairoli 2011; Montgomery 2019). Aicha and Rachida are no exception.

There is not the space here to delve into the details of class distinctions, but it is important to note that the experience of material and social change depends not only on different socioeconomic status and place of residence, but also on individual life cycles and, in the context of migration, personal trajectories. Aicha and Rachida gained some freedom when they left behind their natal families – and the tight social control in the village – without losing their rural kin and sense of identity (cf. Crawford 2008; Graf 2018). But their experiences stand in contrast to the young, urban middle-class women described by Cohen (2004) or Newcomb (2009), who benefitted from relatively easy access to education, yet, at the same time, remained suspicious of the wide-ranging reforms of the family law [*mudawana*] in 2004, including women's rights. Being married, Aicha and Rachida also no longer resemble the unmarried and poor working women described by Cairoli (2011), Zvan Elliott (2015) or Montgomery (2019), who remain financially and socially tethered to their natal rural families.

Education and wage work imply several things for younger Marrakchi women of low-income backgrounds. For the purpose of this article I define education primarily as literacy. Despite the ongoing Arabisation programmes since Moroccan independence in 1956, literacy in Morocco is strongly influenced by the oral Arabic dialect Darija, which also reflects the influence of educational policies during the French Protectorate (1912-1956). At the same time, most rural migrants are Berber/Amazigh and grew up speaking one of three distinct Tamazight dialects, which bear no linguistic resemblance to Darija and to *Fusha*, the Modern Standard Arabic that many Moroccans still scarcely use in their daily lives (cf. Sadiqi 2014; Boutieri 2016). Hence, in its most basic form, education refers not only to the ability to read – if not write – *Fusha*, the main language found in written sources such as cookbooks, but also the ability to use Arabic and Latin script to communicate via text messages and online. As a result, in this multi-linguist context, where scripture was long the domain of the urban Arab elite, literacy still cannot be taken for granted. Especially women of low-income households born in rural Morocco during and before the 1980s and early 1990s may struggle to read a cookbook, apply metric measures or use the internet to source new recipes.

Furthermore, although it is nothing new that women work for a wage, especially unmarried women or those whose husbands are unemployed (Cairoli 2011; Montgomery 2019; Salime 2018), in the last couple of decades it has become much more recurrent for married women to also take up paid work outside the home, certainly among low-income households (Conway-Long 2006; Sadiqi and Ennaji 2006). However, in contrast to the European and North American women described above (see, especially, Collier 1997; Counihan 2004; Cairns and Johnston 2015), most younger women I interviewed over the years worked for financial reasons and not because they identified with their jobs. In contradistinction to their counterparts in Europe and North America, I found that the ultimate aim of education and wage work for these women was the establishment of their own conjugal household to escape the domestic control exerted by older women and adopt the sole responsibility for domestic food work and their social life.

Younger women considered the ownership of a refrigerator, a combined hob and oven and a semi-automatic washing machine a form of liberation that many of their rural counterparts still do not enjoy (cf. Crawford 2008; Zvan Elliott 2015). At the same time, the supermarkets and convenience foods that allegedly alleviate the double burden for wage working middle-class wives and mothers in urban Morocco (Newcomb 2017; Tibère et al. 2020), were financially and geographically out of reach for my research participants. Instead, they shopped on a daily basis in the *suiqa* [shops and stalls along the high street] and the *suq* [neighbourhood market, partially open-air], often on their way home from work. Except for milk products,

the foods on offer in these markets were usually raw, unpackaged and required multisensory inspection and meticulous processing by hand.This helps explain why low-income women spent roughly four to six hours daily in and around food work. Despite the additional work, these practices allowed low-income women to 'know what's in it' and to control quality and food safety in the largely unstandardised Moroccan food market (Graf 2016). Indeed, because the products on offer are fresher and allow direct bodily engagement, traditional markets are preferred over supermarkets by most low-income Moroccans (Amine and Lazzaoui 2011). Against this background, provisioning food is an important and prestigious task that in Marrakech is usually undertaken by the most senior woman of the household.

While the spread of electric appliances and supermarkets in urban Morocco and the simultaneous shrinking of urban households have led other Morocco and gender scholars to conclude that cooking is no longer social, and its reproduction therefore at risk (see, for instance, Kapchan 1996; Newcomb 2017), I made different observations. In contrast to their mothers and mothers-in-law, who relied on hand-operated technologies, the women I worked with harnessed a whole range of new socio-material relations in their positions as lead cooks in the conjugal household. As I will illustrate in the following, they still cook with others, but now young women determined the terms of knowledge reproduction. Importantly, kitchen technologies and social media were harnessed not in order to cook less, but in order to continue making the family meal. In doing so, younger women contribute to reproducing what it takes to be a good wife and mother in low-income Morocco: cooking for the family.

Two scenes during the Islamic month of Ramadan between July and August 2013, in this and the next section, describe and analyse the moments in which both old and new practices, relations and values were invoked and (re)produced through food preparation. To prepare her husband's beloved *amlou*, a creamy spread traditionally made of almonds, argan oil and honey, and served with pancakes, Aicha had to ask her mother-in-law Habiba. Aicha does not come from the Souss Valley like her husband's family and thus never learned to make this regional specialty. She also did not have enough time to regularly prepare such labour-intensive dishes. Aicha and Habiba had a rather fraught relationship ever since Aicha had convinced Hassan – largely thanks to her own income – to move out of his family's multigenerational household roughly ten months earlier 'to be [her] own boss'. Nevertheless, Aicha decided to ask Habiba for help. She wanted to use Habiba's *al-raha*, a special grinding stone that is used to hand-grind almonds into the smooth, velvety paste that characterises homemade *amlou*. Together with her daughters we spent one evening at Habiba's house to make it. Yet, while Aicha had hoped to learn using the *al-raha* and thus acquire knowledge independent of these senior women,

Habiba and her sister-in-law Amina claimed she would not learn how to turn the stone in one evening. The two women thus ground the *amlou* themselves, with us ending up watching. Both women stressed that it is the technique of turning the wooden handle of the grinding stone, the 'feeling of the movement' and the response of the almonds, which determined the taste and texture of traditional *amlou*: A skill only experienced Soussi cooks mastered, and which they were clearly not willing to teach Aicha. (Figure 1).

Although vexed by this claim, Aicha was unfazed. Since she did not come from the Souss Valley, she did not lay claim to knowing the traditional taste of *amlou* and felt no personal responsibility to get it right. She wanted to please her husband by making his favourite Ramadan snack, but as the lead cook in her own household, she was able to determine the terms of its preparation. Indeed, before we went to Habiba's house, Aicha told me that she always had the option to use her neighbour's electric blender by the French brand Moulinex. Although it cuts rather than grinds, it would still do the job, she concluded. She also decided to use cheaper vegetable oil and refined sugar, rather than the more prized argan oil and thyme honey that Habiba had advised her to buy in advance. Though Aicha's knowledge could not compete with that of Habiba or Amina, as lead cook in her own household she was now their social equal. As such, Aicha was able to employ kitchen technologies when she saw fit, and pick and choose from her female in-law's knowledge, thus denying them the role of unchallenged experts and

Figure 1. Operating the al-raha, a traditional grinding stone.

the power this entailed for senior women in a multigenerational household. Habiba and Amina's attempt to reassert their authority was successfully thwarted by Aicha through carefully assessing and choosing from several alternatives.

Alone in the kitchen, but connected

To capture Aicha's position and fully understand her ability to negotiate her new relations as lead cook in her own kitchen, more than a symbolic analysis of food work is required. Subsumed under what is now termed 'new materialism' (Coole and Frost 2010), recent studies explore how food and the material environment collaborate in or affect the making of a meal. Janeja's (2010) research on Bengali food demonstrates the 'transactional agency' or 'collaborative performance' of food through combining classic material studies that explore the work of objects in constituting social relations with sensuous ethnography. Likewise, Van Daele's (2013) auto-ethnographic encounter with cooking during fieldwork in Sri Lanka explores the active role that food, technologies and animals play in mediating and shaping social relations, including those of the foreign ethnographer. Yet, in pursuing their convincing argument for conceiving of the materiality of food in the making of a meal, both authors eschew the important question of whether the cook has a special role in this assemblage and, despite their attention to food's relationality, thus risk missing the unequal domestic power relations and their embeddedness in broader social values and norms.

Although she focuses on eating practices, Abbots's argument that 'food's matter is *made to matter* by human practice and relations' (ibid. 23, original emphasis) brings together the new materialist claim that food and the material environment act upon and affect the making of a meal with the more symbolic analysis proposed in the above referenced literature on food, gender and the family and which tends to focus on the cook as a structurally determined actor. In doing so, Abbots's work in rural Ecuador shows the way for making sense of how new socio-material relations contribute to the (re)production of food and families in the context of rapid material and social change.

The example of Aicha learning to make *amlou* for Ramadan provides a glimpse of the many subtle adaptations and creative solutions a cook finds to negotiate knowledge and (re)produce both old and new relations. Simply speaking, while appliances like the electric blender cannot necessarily replace traditional tools like the *al-raha*, by offering an alternative choice they nonetheless enable younger cooks to actively choose or reject their seniors' techniques and expertise and, in doing so, to accept, alter or reject the latter's authority. The specific materialities of food – the nuts, the oil and the sweetener – and the idiosyncrasies of various technologies – the blender and *al-*

raha – are productively engaged with and incorporated into a cook's knowledge and thus contribute to the negotiation of a new social position. For instance, grinding almonds with oil in the *al-raha* yields a product of a very specific taste and texture, different from the blender, which chops the almonds without releasing the nuts' own oil. Equally, each tool requires a different bodily engagement of the cook. The *al-raha* is not sold but handed down from one generation to the next, thus limiting the ability to learn how to turn the handle or feel the crushing of almonds, and squarely embedding it in the multigenerational logic of knowledge reproduction. By contrast, the blender requires electricity and a cook's ability to interpret and operate its buttons, thus conjuring a whole new range of material relations and skills (cf. Schwartz Cowan 1983; Silva 2000).

While most other new dishes that Aicha prepared came from cookbooks – thanks to her self-taught ability to read *Fusha* – and from her friends rather than her extended family, each dish conjures its very own network of relations which a cook needs to consider. As a regional specialty, made with endemic ingredients such as argan oil, tools such as the *al-raha*, and bodily techniques such as operating the grinding stone, homemade *amlou* [*amlou beldi*] is typically found only in Soussi households. Although industrially produced *amlou* can be bought in supermarkets across Marrakech and Morocco, only *amlou beldi* is considered 'real' [*al-horr*] *amlou*. Aicha's desire to please her Soussi husband left no doubt that she had to prepare *amlou al-horr*. What exactly constituted *amlou beldi* and thus *al-horr* in this context depended upon many factors, all of which Aicha weighed carefully in her choice of ingredients, tools and techniques.

Whereas industrially produced *amlou* was by definition not of *beldi* quality, Aicha's experience shows that the multiple constituent relations that produce *amlou beldi* can, and indeed have to be, interpreted flexibly and situated. While I describe the characteristics that mark *beldi* foods and practices elsewhere (e.g. Graf 2016), here it is important to stress that although definitions of *beldi* are flexible, they are always tightly linked to the region a food and a cook come from. It is only in the context of movement – of foods and of people – that *beldi* acquires meaning. Thus, what is *beldi* for Aicha in Marrakech, who comes from the Middle Atlas region, is not so for her husband Hassan and his family from the Souss. By extension, if Aicha prepared *amlou* based on a recipe from a cookbook, it would not qualify as *amlou beldi*. To make it nonetheless, Aicha had to learn how to evaluate and choose ingredients, tools, bodily techniques and, importantly, the knowledge to engage with these.

On the one hand, she decided not to buy argan oil or even honey, because they would have cost too much this far from the Souss and their quality was dubious. On the other hand, she identified the *al-raha* as the crucial instrument for making *amlou beldi*. Her mother-in-law, Habiba, was the only

Soussia Aicha knew at the time who owned one and, indeed, Habiba confirmed the grinding stone's importance for making *amlou beldi*. Yet, rather than lend Aicha the *al-raha*, Habiba identified another crucial dimension of *amlou beldi*: the bodily technique of operating the grinding stone and the sensing of the transformation of almonds and oil into *amlou*, i.e. the broader 'taste knowledge' (Graf 2022) of an experienced Soussi cook like herself and her sister-in-law Amina. Thus defined, Aicha concluded that in order to make real (enough) *amlou* for Ramadan she could accept her in-laws' expertise, as it simultaneously allowed her to save expenses for costly ingredients. Being alone in the kitchen is thus marked by a number of trade-offs whereby a younger woman's ability to self-determine her domestic work and everyday life can outweigh the complex tastes and textures of a traditional dish, yet without dropping the dish altogether. The result is a situated and selective reproduction of cooking knowledge.

In sum, the integration of electric appliances and new sources of knowledge in domestic food preparations is intricately interwoven in a cook's considerations of a dish's broader socio-material relations. As these grow beyond the material and social environment of the multigenerational household, they enable younger women like Aicha to negotiate their positions as domestic cook and as a woman in novel ways. The preparation of *amlou* showcases the many intricacies inherent in these relations and helps explain why Aicha pursued a more traditional avenue of knowledge reproduction despite her overall rejection of senior women's domestic power. Thus, although indeed alone in the kitchen, in engaging with a widening choice of technologies and by increasingly incorporating also neighbours and friends, Marrakchi cooks emancipate from age-based dominance in the multigenerational household.

Sometimes, technologies serve both to alter domestic power relations and to uphold certain family values, as an example from Rachida's family demonstrates. Although their education was her priority, Rachida often stressed that her daughters should learn cooking and help with domestic work in order 'to become marriageable women', just as her generation had to. Ibtissam and Zakia carried out routine tasks typically associated with their age and experience in low-income Morocco: Ibtissam undertook the most tedious work, mainly processing raw ingredients, and her older sister Zakia was tasked with cooking side dishes for lunch and baking snacks. However, although neither of the girls envisaged spending as much time as their mother in the kitchen in their future roles as wives and mothers, they did not reject their informal apprenticeship in domestic cooking.

While Rachida stressed the importance of her daughters learning to make traditional Moroccan dishes, she allowed Zakia to try out new recipes and thus take ownership of an entire meal, which would have been rather unusual in multigenerational households. In her spare time Zakia routinely

searched for new recipes with her smartphone via social media like YouTube or WhatsApp. She once confided to me that she preferred European dishes, because 'they are easier and take much less time' to prepare. Although she consulted her mother about some details, such as which ingredients or tools to use or where to find them in their kitchen, Zakia planned and carried out the preparations largely independently of her mother. By drawing her mother and other senior women of the neighbourhood into conversations about these European dishes after a shared meal, Zakia managed to partially reverse the age-based association with expertise. I participated in several meals when Zakia initiated lively discussions around the texture, taste and behaviour of food as it had transformed through her bodily engagement. Through thus reflecting on her experience and sharing her newly gained knowledge, Zakia not only took ownership of her cooking, she also approached the status of an expert and temporarily became these women's social equal.

One day during Ramadan, when Rachida expected to return late from work, it was Zakia's task to prepare the daily *leftour* snacks to break the daytime fasting. She decided to make pizza, her 'favourite Ramadan dish'. She had searched for and skimmed several YouTube videos on her smartphone during the afternoon rest on the salon sofa. With her sister and myself, she then discussed how to adapt the presented recipe; for instance, which toppings we preferred, what herbs or what flour to use. An hour or two later, without consulting her phone again, and when thirst and tiredness had settled in our fasting bodies, Zakia set up everything like the women in the video. Different from the usual food preparation I observed during fieldwork, when ingredients were readied as needed, she placed all necessary ingredients visibly on the worktop, similar to how cookery lessons on TV are set up. Yet, when she started to mix the dough ingredients with both hands, she abandoned the script, her gestures of assembling and kneading now resembled the preparation of Moroccan flatbread. Her preparations continued thus, sometimes imitating the expert in a video, sometimes relying on her bodily experience and imitating her mother's gestures. Throughout, she half-playfully bossed around her younger sister, similar to how her mother would have entrusted her with tedious tasks such as attending to the dough in the oven, or cutting the peppers and olives for the topping. The atmosphere was relaxed as the sisters were laughingly re-enacting their mother's strict but well-meaning commands. Still, Zakia complained several times, just like her mother had chided her in front of me, that Ibtissam was bad at food work, 'too slow' and 'does not pay attention' or 'forgets everything'. (Figure 2).

Although largely playful, their hierarchical collaboration resembled that which I had perceived in multigenerational households, where mothers or mothers-in-law exerted their domestic power more forcefully. Yet, like

Figure 2. Making pizza based on instructions from YouTube videos.

other mothers who supported the formal education of their daughters, the division of food labour in Rachida's conjugal household was marked by new socio-material relations which enabled a form of digital connectedness in cooking. Media such as cookbooks, TV shows or social media via the smartphone allow educated young women new forms of social learning and to gain experience independent of their mothers or mothers-in-law. These are still based on experts, but often decoupled from domestic hierarchies and existing social relations. The cooks sharing their recipes via the YouTube videos or WhatsApp chats thatZakia consulted were predominantly middle-aged women who cooked in their private kitchens and, judging by their gestures and verbal commentaries, had considerable experience. While these women resembled Rachida and other senior domestic cooks in Zakia's social environment, they were also strangers for Zakia and her mother. Therefore, these cook's knowledge could be consulted independently of normal rules of social interaction, especially regarding respect for seniors, and which are shaped by a strong division of domestic labour and the expected subservience of younger women as described above. A video could be watched multiple times or stopped short if it did not match Zakia's expectations, a recipe via chat could be altered and adapted without requiring explanation or argument on Zakia's part, or one video or recipe could be compared to another without offending anyone. In short, Zakia remained free to choose, adapt or reject ideas and expertise without at the same time having to confirm or challenge these women's social status as Aicha did in the previous example.

Social technology and online literacy, through widening a cook's sources of knowledge and young women's participation in decision making, further alter the gendered and generational politics of domestic work and with it the preparation of food. As a wage-working woman and the only breadwinner at the time, Rachida needed her daughters to prepare food perhaps more so than other domestic cooks. Yet, by supporting Zakia's use of social media and choice of recipes, she also invited new socio-material relations into her household. In return for the freedom to experiment, Rachida expected Zakia to learn making Moroccan dishes in order 'to become a Moroccan woman'. In the end, Rachida thus managed to uphold traditional family values such as the association between motherly care and time-intensive food work, and the notion of complete womanhood in the figure of the lead cook and mother.

Culinary connectivity: reproducing food and families in the twenty-first century

Paradoxically, then, technologies such as electric blenders and the smartphone, and the new socio-material relations they enable to create, allow Marrakchi women not only to emancipate from age-based subjugation in the multigenerational household, but also to uphold cross-culturally shared family values in the context of rapid change. The symbolic association between expressions of love or care and homemade food is still intact and appears even stronger. Indeed, as the above scholarship on gender and food work shows, women and men across the globe continue to associate motherhood with routine domestic food work, with homemade and wholesome food in the form of the family meal – however that is defined in a given cultural and class context – being directly linked to good motherhood and, by extension, good family life. To make sense of the practices and new socio-material relations of younger cooks and how these materially and symbolically reproduce families in Marrakech and elsewhere, I propose the notion of 'culinary connectivity'.

Joseph (1999) coined the term 'patriarchal connectivity' to account for the seemingly unequal relationships within patriarchally organised families in Muslim Beirut. Connectivity is defined as 'Relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others' (ibid. 12). Persons do not experience themselves as bounded, but rather experience themselves through 'reading each other's minds' and attending to their likes and dislikes. With respect to food, in her classic ethnography of Langkawi Island in Malaysia, Carsten (1995, 224–225) demonstrates that kinship is a process of becoming that is to a large extent based on feeding, both in the sense of receiving and of giving nourishment: 'It is through living and consuming together in houses that people become

complete persons – that is, kin. […] Boundaries between people and what they consume – food – […] may be less clear than we tend to assume'. That food is collaborative in the (re)production of social life, especially in how cooks and eaters materially and symbolically relate to each other through carefully adapting to the different tastes and preferences of family members, friends or the ethnographer, has been confirmed by other food anthropologists (Janeja 2010; Van Daele 2013; Abbots 2017).

In cooking, this translates into anticipating what one's eaters would like to eat – including husbands and children or neighbours and friends – through carefully balancing the use of new technologies and senior cooks' knowledge, similar to how Aicha made her first *amlou* for Hassan. The serving and ingesting of food made by the hands of the loving cook is a means of extending the self materially and – at least partially – becoming the other. When a dish is met with success, it therefore not only symbolically reinforces the bonds between the cook and her audience, but also materialises and substantiates the cook's love and care for her family and friends. While adhering to a shared ideal of cuisine and family, through enacting her connectivity a cook skilfully negotiates her own preferences and knowledge with those of others, like Zakia during her pizza preparations.

While Joseph (1999) argues that connectivity does not necessarily bespeak inequality, it is often intertwined with patriarchy, which mobilises kinship to legitimate and institutionalise domination based on gender and seniority. However, with the described shrinking of households in Marrakech and the individualisation of capitalist societies more generally, relational connectivity undergoes a significant shift away from being determined by patriarchal dominance based on gender and seniority towards what I call 'culinary connectivity'. The establishment of an independent household allows young Marrakchi women, thanks largely to their own income, not only to escape dominance based on gender and seniority. The more self-determined cooking for family and friends also allows them to enact more diverse connective relationships. For them, like for Joseph's (1999, 12) interlocutors, 'Maturity is signaled [*sic*] in part by the successful enactment of a myriad of connective relationships'. (Figure 3).

The preparation of food is key to women's forging of social bonds. It allows them do to so beyond the multigenerational household, including via virtual connectivity. In contrast to Joseph's patriarchal connectivity, which necessarily understands maturity in terms of seniority, the notion of culinary connectivity is largely decoupled from age and experience – and thanks to the internet and social media even physical space and time – and highlights the important symbolic *and* material roles that food and technologies play in shaping new generations of domestic cooks and their relations. At the same time, culinary connectivity allows us to account for the ambiguous negotiations of cultural values and norms which different generations of

Figure 3. Sharing food and life.

Marrakchi cooks engage in as they cook, and which are made manifest in the observation that some key values are reinforced in the context of change. Thus, although Aicha stressed that she could use the blender rather than *al-raha* to make *amlou,* and potentially avoid her mother-in-law altogether in learning this new recipe, for the sake of her husband's taste preferences and her desire to make him happy, she temporarily accepted the humiliation of asking for advice by subordinating herself to Habiba's and Amina's experience. A good wife is still willing to go to great lengths to please her husband. The symbolic association between expressions of love or care and homemade food appears even stronger in the context of conjugal households, bearing striking resemblance to the family life in Europe or Australia described by Lupton (1996) and others.

Similarly, while Zakia herself described the pizza she prepared as a 'modern' dish – which, she explained to me, none of her older relatives in rural Morocco would approve of – by using YouTube videos to make pizza for *leftour* on that Ramadan day or on any other day as a snack for guests, and thus enacting her culinary connectivity, she also upheld core family values. A good mother still cooks for her family. Although Zakia rejected the idea of herself as a domestic cook at the time of my main fieldwork, she had absorbed the notion that in order to become a socially mature woman, she will marry (as she did in 2021) and have children. Equally, once a mother herself, Zakia might well strive to prepare homemade food whenever possible and whether she will work for a wage or not, quite like Aicha who started to cook once her first child was born. Social media via internet access on her smartphone helped Zakia not only prepare the 'European'

foods she desired, but also prepared her for a future based on the traditional association of the mother as primarily a domestic cook.

At the same time, the new socio-material relations that younger cooks rely on to develop and improve their cooking knowledge – via electric kitchen appliances, smartphones and social media or websites and blogs – entangle them in new, largely hidden relations of power. Apart from the initial acquisition of an appliance, electricity is required to power the blender; smartphones and a mobile internet connection require the acquisition of free minutes and gigabytes; all of which cost money that many of my research participants did not always and regularly have. Electricity is cut off surprisingly soon after missing one of the monthly payment deadlines which, at the time, had to be made in person in one of the local branches. Smartphone and internet use depended on special offers by one of the main companies. Most of my research participants owned several sim cards and phone numbers in order to switch between and profit from different companies and offers. However, if no offer was available, they had to wait several days, sometimes weeks, before being able to purchase a new data bag. In short, to escape the dominance of mothers and mothers-in-law and take control of their cooking, Aicha and Zakia relied on products from anonymous profit-making companies, enmeshing them – ironically – in the equally uneven power relations of a capitalising but not democratising society (cf. Maghraoui 2002). A young cook's dependency thus shifts away from senior women and the multigenerational household towards the more invisible – and no less patriarchal – economic relations of the free market.[9] The crafting of culinary connectivity in contemporary Marrakech is thus increasingly dependent on wage work and money, which are notoriously scarce and unreliable for women of low-income backgrounds.

Conclusion

Despite women's education and participation in the wage economy, men's growing interest in cooking and the emancipation through various technologies, day-to-day food work is still largely women's work and still requires knowledgeable engagement. The ethnographic cases of Aicha and Habiba as well as Rachida and Zakia show that even though women are increasingly cooking without others, they still (re)produce cooking knowledge through creatively employing new socio-material relations. These relations range from the food itself to new kitchen appliances and social technologies connecting with friends and virtual experts. For the Marrakchi women I introduced here, these relations enabled contesting and overcoming not *gendered* dominance but an easily overlooked form of dominance, namely that of senior over younger women. It manifests itself in how younger

cooks hone their cooking knowledge and whom they cook with. More generally, exploring inter-generational relations between women provides a productive perspective on material and social change in the home and contributes a nuanced portrait of changing family life to food studies in more industrialised contexts.

At the same time, these new socio-material relations create new, rather hidden dependencies. By accounting for the whole range of socio-material relations that enable the production of food and of everyday life – including the monetary relations that emerge in a capitalising society – culinary connectivity also captures the political economy of making the (conjugal) family. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is making these changes, and the new dependencies they create, ever more apparent. For instance, having renounced the power and protection of Hassan's mother and the patrilineal family by moving out of the multigenerational household, Aicha and Hassan have become more dependent on their own wage work and income, yet without at the same time gaining access to health insurance or social security like their middle- and upper-income counterparts in the past (Cohen 2004; Newcomb 2009). Losing their incomes as they did since the onset of the pandemic in Spring 2020 risked losing not only the financial but also the material and social basis of their everyday life.[10] Aicha's poetic remark one summer night during Ramadan 2013 that 'Money is short lived, it disappears; what stays are human relations', proves no less apt now than it did when discussing her emancipation from her in-laws' domestic control. In the absence of supportive state institutions, low-income Moroccans have no choice but to continue crafting a multitude of culinary connections. In fact, without access to a national welfare system, younger generations of low-income women in conjugal households experience more vulnerability than those who remain embedded in the traditional multigenerational household.

In this context of change, stressing the importance of food in relation building and family making is not romanticising domestic cooking. It is an occasion to highlight not only the knowledge but also the continuing difficulties that especially younger generations of low-income women face in Morocco and elsewhere as they make food for their families. Although cooking practices are changing and adapting as a result, they continue to be a central cultural practice, certainly for wives and mothers of low-income households. Yet, while wage work and the shift towards the conjugal-family reinforce the ideal of womanhood as embodied by the caring wife and mother similar to other cultural contexts, the Marrakchi women I worked with seemed less tormented by this change. Since these women's daily food work has been and continues to be highly valued across Moroccan society, its central role in family and social life as well as in notions around personhood are still widely recognised. In showcasing the crucial role of making food in relating to others and to the world, my research thus also makes the case

for more scholarly attention to food practices in everyday family life in the Arab region.

Finally, that wage working women still cook, not only in Marrakech but across the industrialised and capitalised world, suggests that culinary connectivity is holding families together in contexts where women feel obliged or desire to cook for their loved ones despite their increasing education and wage work. Whether we like it or not, patriarchal values and norms continue to underlie much of domestic food work in the twenty-first century, albeit ambiguously so and with much potential for further change.

Notes

1. With the money I paid for renting a bedroom and eating with the family, Aicha opened her first bank account. Eventually, however, she gave most of that additional income to her natal family in rural Morocco.
2. Participant perception also includes conversational interviews happening randomly around food work as well as photography, video and audio recordings and the (re)production of Moroccan meals in my own home after fieldwork (cf. my unpublished manuscript 'Moroccan Food and Families in the Making').
3. Although food figures more centrally in some French (and Arabic) language studies of Morocco, these are mostly descriptive and follow the documenting tradition of anthropology (see, for instance, Tibère et al. 2020). The review of scholarship on the Moroccan family by Salime (2018) confirms this.
4. See, for instance, Kaufmann 2010; Cairns and Johnston 2015; O'Connell and Brannen 2016; Trubek 2017; Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019.
5. In middle- and upper-class urban Moroccan households domestic workers are employed to carry out the more menial food related tasks such as cleaning and processing food or serving and washing up dishes. The female head of the household allocates and organises food work and often even does the cooking proper. Interestingly, domestic workers are often likened to daughters and as such declared junior family members with low social status (Montgomery 2019).
6. For an opposing view see Zirari (2020). Joseph (2018) argues more generally that Arab families are often studied from a Western perspective, which tends to apply a feminist understanding of family and gender to studying the family and thus overlooks the multiple, often contradictory meanings and workings that mark Arab families beyond gender.
7. See, for instance, Kapchan 1996; Giard, de Certeau, and Mayol 1998; Abarca 2006; Donner 2008; Newcomb 2017.
8. See also, Short 2006; Meah and Watson 2011; Trubek 2017; Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019.
9. Errazzouki (2014) and Zvan Elliott (2015) illustrate the persistence of patriarchal paternalism in their critical examination of the effects of recent economic and women's rights policies on Moroccan working-class and unmarried, rural women respectively.
10. In Spring 2020 I begun to send money to Aicha to partially make up for her family's loss of income.

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