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Feeding genders

Nourrir les genres

Marzia Mauriello and Gaia Cottino (dir.)



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Introduction

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Marzia Mauriello and Gaia Cottino

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In this introduction, Marzia Mauriello wrote the section entitled *Feeding Genders* and Gaia Cottino the section entitled *Deep down in the context*. They wrote the conclusion together.

- 1 Juliet comes from Nigeria and has been living in Italy for the past 20 years. “*Where I come from, a woman who does not know how to cook cannot get married*”, she told me (Mauriello) when we first met during my fieldwork in Naples. Stories told by migrant women from other sub-Saharan African regions that I (Mauriello) collected in recent years describe mothers who “test” their daughters about their cooking abilities to see whether they can prepare an entire meal on their own, to be sure that “they are ready”. Thus, apprenticeship in the art of cooking becomes the measure of the passage to adulthood, and the confirmation that a girl is “ready” to be a wife and a mother. That is to say, ready “to be” a woman.
- 2 It is no coincidence that food, from production and selection to preparation and consumption, has contributed to building and confirming a “gender order” based on the division of practices and roles related to it. Furthermore, food can be seen as “constitutive” of differentiated bodies, and in fact, the sign and symbol of an embodied difference. As the French sociologist Claude Fischler argues, the incorporation of food serves to construct the notion of individual identity by individually assimilating the qualities of that food, as well as subsequently including that individual in a “culinary system” and therefore in a social group (1988). Food accordingly constitutes subjectivities in a material sense as much as in a symbolic sense: namely, socio-cultural belonging. There are, in the past as in the present, differences between women and

men with respect to who eats what: there are foods that are considered the exclusive prerogative of one gender or more appropriate to one gender than another.

- 3 In different times and places there have been and continue to be male foods and female foods (Adams 1990; Counihan & Kaplan 1998; Counihan 1999), the essence of which “forms” the subjects who eat them. For this reason, in some contexts, foods may have to be consumed separately by men and women: the intimacy of the food act, so close and in fact assimilated to the sexual act, may represent the potential dangers of gender (Counihan 1999). Gender is therefore also performed through food, becoming a sort of “quality” that can be “transmitted”, rather than an essence of the subject.
- 4 If on the one hand the consumption of food (which food, where, how, how much, when, and with whom) marks a difference in the sense of gender, on the other hand, food itself plays a pivotal role in embodying gender, from its choice to its production, preparation, and consumption. While belonging to a gender marks the modes, times, places, and roles related to food, at the same time food takes on a central importance in socializing gender, as food contributes to inserting a subject into a community, educating him/her/hir on the rules of gender, which appear to be closely related to food rules. The relationship between these two elements is therefore mutual, dynamic, dialectical, and multifaceted. As a result, over the last few decades growing attention has been given in the academic world to the intricate ways in which gender and food are connected.
- 5 The second wave of feminism in Euro-American contexts was a resource and an opportunity for the development of careful reflections about the relationship between food and gender, or, better, the relationship between activities related to domestic cooking, of evident feminine sign, and the submissive and subordinate role of women (Murcott 1983; Charles & Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991). Further reflections have broadened this perspective, identifying food as a potential source of empowerment for women, since it is a vital resource managed by them. A new gender perspective has therefore entered the discourse on food, which is no longer considered (only) another tool and sign of oppression and supremacy of the male over the female, but also a potential resource for women (Avakian 1997; Counihan & Kaplan 1998; Counihan 1999; Abarca 2006; Williams-Forsen 2006; Cairns *et al.* 2010; Allen & Sachs 2012; McLean 2013; Parsons 2015). Different contexts produce different effects on the perspective on food and on the relationship between food and the construction of gendered subjectivities, and the interpretation of concepts such as power, agency and oppression may acquire different meanings. For this reason, the intertwinement of food and gender should be framed in a perspective that includes and embraces the dimension of the self in relation to others, in both a material and symbolic sense. The relationship with food is furthermore affected by a series of factors, and actors, including the vision of the body that is harnessed in far-reaching historical, geographical, and socio-cultural processes (Foxcroft 2012).
- 6 This new gender perspective, in identifying an element of agency, creativity and power in the role of the female cook (*cuisinière*), starts from a different assumption that gives us the opportunity to question the meaning of the same practice in different contexts. It also leads to a reflection on the different gazes produced within the scientific/academic environment. A gaze that re-discusses feminism itself, decolonizes it, de-westernizes it, and thus provides a key for interpreting the construction of a female subjectivity that is not based on assumptions otherwise imagined as universal and

therefore applicable to all contexts (Suárez Navaz & Hernández Castillo 2008). A delocalized and decolonized feminism, then, that takes on a much broader dimension: the inequalities that are produced and perpetuated through food – and, in the meantime, the forms of agency and power that food can and does in fact represent for women. This broader analysis has considered forms, modalities, and contexts in which food and gender have been analyzed, and ranges from the studies of Carole Counihan (1999) to those of Abarca (2006) and Avakian (1997), the latter of whom demonstrates the various meanings that cooking may acquire for women: “Though absolutely central to our survival, it is [food] [t]hat is taken for granted. If we delve into the relationship between women and food we will discover the ways in which women have forged spaces within that oppression. Cooking becomes a vehicle for artistic expression, a source of sensual pleasure, an opportunity for resistance and even power. By reclaiming cooking we ensure that we are not throwing the spaghetti out with the boiling water.” (Avakian 1997: 6)

- 7 Placing the link between food and gender on a wide-ranging historical and geographical level helps to restore the multifaceted and processual dimension of this relationship. And that is precisely what this *Special Issue* proposes.
- 8 Cooking may be seen as a form of subjugation for women, since domestic cooking is, historically and currently, part of that invisible and unwaged female work, distinct from that (male) “paid” form of production that contributes to family growth (Renata Blumberg; Emilia Cordero Ocegüera, this volume). However, in the context of domestic work itself, cooking becomes a tool for agency, through which women give meaning and reason to themselves. In these cases, cooking is inseparable from one’s female gender, namely, not (only) a constraint – although cooking may be a burden – but one of the central elements in the construction of female subjectivity within a given community (Stephen Wooten, this volume). In this perspective, and far from the essentialism that sees the gendered division of roles as natural, cooking becomes a kind of body technique: an embodied culinary knowledge linked to the knowledge of the land (Flavia Cuturi, this volume), one that belongs to women, and which, in some cases, turns into a real strategy of resistance (Cordero Ocegüera, this volume).
- 9 Furthermore, the relationship with food involves responsibility for resources and their production and is therefore linked both to the safeguarding of food cultures and, consequently, to agroecology and agri-environmental sustainability (Cuturi; Renata Motta and Marco Teixeira; Cordero Ocegüera, this volume). Thus, through food, women protect both cultural and environmental heritages.
- 10 What this *Issue* proposes, then, is a reflection on food and gender that broadens our perspectives and rethinks the deep links between culinary knowledge, the constitution of subjectivities, and the relationship with the earth, including both knowledge of agriculture and horticulture and the preservation of land. The protection and preservation of life spaces, of the environment, of territories, are in turn part of a very contemporary and fundamental discourse on ecology and ecovegfeminism (Adams 1990; Gaard 2002; Zabatón 2012). Precisely in the wake of these studies and movements, a further reflection on the role of food in overcoming the female/male binary logic has developed, paving the way for a discourse on the relationship between the queer perspective and some food choices, with particular reference to veganism. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol J. Adams highlighted the relationship between the forms of speciesism that are intertwined with those of sexism; starting from there –

and within a discourse of power and domination of (male) humans over other (female) humans and non-humans – the choice of a vegan diet, therefore an alternative food choice, becomes a political and resistance strategy against sexist, speciesist, and heteronormative logics (Simonsen 2012; Hall 2013).

- 11 From production to cooking, the pairing of food and gender then involves a sort of circular dimension of power that from the earth reaches the kitchen. The latter, the forge where subjectivities are constituted, despite being in most cases the realm of women, can also be, as some authors in this *Issue* suggest, the place where masculinity is restored (Luisa Stagi, Sebastiano Benasso & Luca Guzzetti; Jonatan Leer, this volume).
- 12 The consumption of food can effectively turn into a real political strategy for affirming a “whole” male (here in the sense of “genuine, intact”), one that is “original” and “right”, like the construction of white masculinity through the ingestion of specific foods (Stagi, Benasso & Guzzetti, this volume).
- 13 Such western white masculinity, as shown by one of the contributions (Nina Studer, this volume), has defined itself over time through food moderation and the ability to contain “appetites”, these last to be read in their dual sense of craving for food and sex drive. If food in contemporary western societies contributes to the strategical and political building of a typical male as the symbol of an essentialized idea of “nation”, food has therefore contributed to building a hierarchy of cultural differences using the male as a departure point (Studer, this volume). What “others” eat becomes in this case the symbol of a backwardness that Europeans have overcome in the name of measure, of containment, especially of sexual nature, within the cultural framework of an immoderate sexuality perceived as a form of primitivism.
- 14 Reasoning in terms of past and present, the assumption of a past of “tradition” and a present of “modernity” has significantly contributed to constructing the difference between genders, as in the case of the masculinization of agriculture through its industrialization (Blumberg, this volume). This latter, understood more broadly as a sign of modernization, seems to have led to a gender change with regard to activities related to agriculture. This would reconfirm the vision of an underlying link between women and “tradition” – as a sign not only of the past but also of immobility and passivity – and the male space/role related, on the contrary, to movement, velocity, innovation, and the future. Similarly, the transition from domestic cooking (work) to professional cuisine (job) marked, certainly in western contexts, a gender difference, as well as the perception of female cooking as reproductive work (in the sense of reproducing what has always been there, tradition) and male cooking as a creative and productive act (inventiveness, production).
- 15 Starting from the assumption that “women give birth, men create” (Ferrand 2004: 69), the binarism “reproduction vs production” returns, even in the subtle form of a type of cooking (barbecue) that is, at least in western environments, historically associated with men and which has only recently been “opened” to women (Leer, this volume).
- 16 This last case allows us to reflect on this gendered scheme; unlike women, who symbolically stay anchored to the domestic space (which symbolizes family and care) even when they “work with food” (production, preparation, cooking) outside of this space, men are instead able to dissociate themselves from “domesticity” and from all the symbols related to it, even when they perform and act inside the domestic space. (Stagi, Benasso & Guzzetti, this volume).

- 17 The “places of food” therefore become symbolic spaces in which to exercise – in a more or less explicit way – power defining one’s subjectivity within a gendered frame; but they are also places in which to establish the lines of one’s range of action in a given space. It is no coincidence that food places, may they be kitchens, fields, lands, can be “taboo”, becoming strictly forbidden to the other gender.

Deep down into the context

- 18 “*Today you cannot come to the bush with us, because we’re harvesting yams*” is the sentence that has represented a turning point in my field observations (Cottino) in the kingdom of Tonga. “*Why, if I may ask?*” was my response. “*Because if you come, yams will know there is a woman in the field, might get jealous and come out small and knotty, and we do not want this to happen*”. On that day, I understood the weight of the invisible. Because despite being a resource and organizing principle of social, economic, religious and political life, the weight of gender is invisible and subtle, yet very tangible. Not being a stable ontological property, but rather embedded in everyday interactions and diverse according to the socio-cultural and economic contexts, it sits between the lines. Even more so, in the universal yet peculiar grammar of food practices. For this reason, ethnographic and historical research, capable of diving deep into the context, is so needed; and in this *Special Issue*, the articles are a significant attempt to contribute to this advancement.
- 19 In our research experience as much as in this issue, such deep immersion in the context, whether historical or ethnographic, reveals the capacity of societies (or portions of societies) to “bite back” (Fresno-Calleja 2017) heteronormative, colonial and imperial impositions. The cases analyzed here prove that through food practices and through the development of a critical discourse of political taste, community members decolonize stomachs and food-related roles, overcome “structural indigestions” (Santos Perez 2017) and gender inequalities.
- 20 Despite addressing different geographical areas and socio-cultural contexts, the hereby contributions share, in the first place, such taste proving that universally food practices are, explicitly or implicitly, political acts and gendered acts. Through food practices, indeed, political stances are taken, ranging from nationalism to sovereignty and ecofeminism, enhancing gastro-nationalism as much as the liberation from gastro-colonialism. Food is as much a means of control over specific segments of population as a means of agency, amplifying local voices in the global community.
- 21 Secondly, this *Special Issue* articles prove that the political instances conveyed by food are entangled and inseparable: hierarchy, education, background, class, gender intersect with inequality, access to resources, power and violence.
- 22 Lastly, if on the one hand, the western masculinity crisis, brought about by contemporary socio-economic shifts, has triggered a remasculinization or reparation of masculinity process reimposing a gendered order based on male supremacy, on the other hand, the recognition of uncommodified and commodified women food work has tackled such order, proposing a new one where shared responsibilities overcome the binary order.
- 23 These threads, that sum up the “gastropolitics” (Appadurai 1981), the intersectionality, the reparation of masculinity and the recognition of productive and reproductive

women work, cut-cross the contributions in this volume, creating a navigable seaway that is shortly illustrated below.

- 24 While some of the articles are more socio-historical and others solidly ethnographic, together they provide an important and timely contribution to what we hope will become a distinct field in the anthropology of food, merging environment relations, gender relations and food production.
- 25 Jonatan Leer shares with Sebastiano Benasso, Luca Guzzetti and Luisa Stagi the masculinity crisis' analysis, which triggered a twofold reparation process -an exaggerated masculinity and search for exotic and horrific flavors on one side, and a de-chefization in search of domesticity, escapism and national taste on the other. They also share the analysis of media as the new space for gendered narrations. Here Benasso, Guzzetti and Stagi take a step forward in proposing a third reparation process, embodied by the right-wing party's leader Matteo Salvini. Finding in media a powerful means of representation, he offers a different reparation scenario "in Italian sauce": through the mediatic rejection of sophistication, intellectual and classy tastes, the exposition of a body far from concerned of cultural pressure towards a healthy and fit metrosexual body and the preference for regional food products, he restores the traditional gender order (proposing a hegemonic consumerist masculinity) and affirms, at the same time, political ideals of sovereigntist and nationalist taste.
- 26 The restoring of different gender profiles in order to avoid gender contamination is also addressed by Jonatan Leer, who, through a meticulous analysis of the Netflix series *Chef's Table BBQ 2020*, proves that "women as barbeque chefs are not culturally unthinkable, but female barbeque chefs differ from their male peers". In his analysis of the four chefs' profiles and their mediatic (re)presentation, Leer shows the extent to which, despite sharing some values such as the ethos of manual working and an anti-modern attitude, women possess desirable values, such as the gatekeeping of tradition and authenticity, which in contemporary times' prestigious and fine dining are nevertheless overruled by individualism, cosmopolitanism and culinary audacity, distinctive male chefs' features. Such "negotiation of various discursive repertoires that are gendered differently, making room for distinct gender identities while excluding others" as illustrated by Leer, summarizes the rich contribution of Nina Studer. By illustrating medical and travelers' accounts of colonial Maghreb in order to unveil the cultural construction of the colonized Muslim men, she works on two levels of identity distinction: that internal to the Maghrebi cultural setting and that which exists in relation to the French colonists. *Studer* indeed navigates through historical sources that reflect a western gaze and portrays the Maghrebi people in two ways: as excessive and insatiable, and as noble and healthy savages, yet more primitive and more robust, and suited for the consumption of spices. Studer traces a link between spice, sexuality and primitive masculinity drawing from accounts which describe the foodscape as over-spiced as the result of a sexual insatiability of both Muslim men and women. The author shows that in the Maghreb context the orientalism framework has been "reversed": men were over-masculized and sexualized while women de-passivized and described as agentively helping their partners revitalizing their virility through the use of spices. French, through such cultural construction, distinguished themselves as moderate, fought assimilation through the ingestion of the others' food and framed their fears for numeric inferiority in colonial settings.

- 27 Another account breaking the stereotype of women passiveness is provided by Renata Blumberg, whose analysis of Eastern European, and specifically Latvian female farmers, prove that women have not been excluded nor have faced obstacles in taking up farming as a livelihood activity. Just as Leer proves the thinkability of women barbequers only when it is associated with the reorganization of gender hierarchy, Blumberg illustrates the thinkability of Latvian women as farmworkers only if combined with their “double burden” of social reproduction and production for profit. Even when engaging in alternative food networks (AFN), which allows them to set their own prices, women are disadvantaged unless they belong to the “normative family farm” where men are responsible for specific tasks. This occurs not because women cannot do men’s work, but rather because of the opposite: indeed, the fall of the Soviet-Union has re-shaped the farming sector and farm work, pushing women back into the social reproduction role of mothers of the nation. Therefore, despite representing half of the farm working population, “the happy marriage between the neoliberal economic framework and the neoconservative gender ideology is in reality the restatement of women political, social and economic disempowerment” argues Blumberg quoting Irina Novikova. It leads to the marginalization of contemporary Latvian women.
- 28 The social reproduction role is addressed, in different yet similar terms, also by Emilia Cordero Ocegüera, who illustrates the complex interplay between oppression and agency among Mexican farmworkers in the US. She introduces a distinction between “food work”, carried out at home and “food labour”, which includes both home and professional work. According to Ocegüera indeed, when carrying out food labour “working class women challenge the binary division of male-provider and women-caregiver, since they serve both tasks”. Mexican migrant women working in the American farming sector are an eloquent example of this process. They express resistance to gender marginalization in three ways: firstly through the awareness of the importance of their labour at home and in the field; secondly, by reproducing home food and food practices from their country of origin, namely metaphorically manipulating and making edible and digestible the oppressive setting they moved into; and lastly, by engaging in moments of pleasure and joy while working in the field, which serve the double function of providing their work with meanings beyond the strenuous tasks and of alleviating the home/caregiving daily task.
- 29 Acts of resistance to marginalization and invisibility are also addressed by Flavia Cuturi, who illustrates the process of deshadowing and empowerment that the Afro-descendant women in the Colombian region of Guapi went through, thanks to the care of the “azoteas” herbal gardens. These gardens, spaces of resistance where an in-verse counter-language, namely a poetic situated language, is spoken, fall under women’s sphere of influence: they provide food; liberate from dependence on industrial products; allow for women’s autonomy, independence and provisioning which safeguards them from gender violence in the domestic setting; strengthen inter-generational cohesion and matrilinear knowledge transmission; legitimize the right to difference and rootedness and decolonize taste. Indeed, the Fundacion Chyangua, evocatively named after cilantro (a herb part of the region’s cuisine), has achieved the manifold objectives of making this practice fashionable, de-colonize the local gastronomy, and more importantly rebuild the community body through the recovery of the azoteas. The living dimension of these gardens, which as part of the family act as

subjects and not only tools of resistance, reaffirm the Afro-colombian community rootedness to both the space and the farming practices.

- 30 Renata Motta and Marco Teixeira share with Cuturi the reference to a connection between women and landscape by underlying that women “breathe life into territories” not only because of their botanical expertise, but also because their relationship with the environment promotes social, biological, cultural diversity and regeneration. After distinguishing the contemporary popular feminism from the historical one - the first one being a working class mobilization against 80s and 90s neoliberal economic reforms and the second a white middle-class activism coming from political exile in Europe - the two authors argue that pivotal in the struggles of the popular feminism is the idea that the transition to agroecological farming entails a shift in gender relations. The 100.000 people walking the *Marcha das Margaridas*, followed and observed by Motta and Teixeira through the years, argue that “without feminism there is no agroecology”. This popular feminist movement has built new inclusive agendas, diversified feminist struggles and created space for participative democracy. Through the analysis of the five themes of their discourse (food is a right and a commons; women are central in food production; uncommodified food is valuable; agro-ecological consciousness must be awakened; class and gender affect working women, creating power asymmetries) the two authors clearly show the refined contribution of the *Marcha das Margaridas* to the anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, decolonial and ecological struggle carried out in many other contexts of the world. These key issues all merge in food sovereignty, defined by the authors as “the right of people to decide their own food and production system, based on healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced in a sustainable and ecological way, which places those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies, above the demands of the markets and companies, while also defending the interests and insuring the inclusion of future generations”. Food sovereignty emerges from numerous articles of the Special Issue as the vehicle for transforming environmental relations and gender relations in a new regime of shared responsibilities.
- 31 Such shared and collective dimension, as well as the women’s role beyond the nurturing one as cultural weavers, are two aspects of the deep ethnography proposed by Stephen Wooten, result of a decennial fieldwork in the Niamakoroni settlement of the Mande Plateau (South Central Mali). His observation of the unified consumption units of the households, where women produce food “for sauce” (inter-cropping) and men “for life” (staple crops), both provides further data on shared responsibility models and responds to the need for more ethnography on “cooking as cooking”, as David Sutton quoted by Wooten has argued. The shared production of food, the cooking process carried out by women, the commensality and act of sharing food coming from the same hearth, strengthens and promotes, according to Wooten, kinship values. Women, here again carrying the double burden of production and reproduction, become crucial agents of kinship netting.

To conclude

- 32 The contributions collected here, which we have briefly summarized and intertwined in this introduction, allow a multifaceted and variegated analysis of the relationship between food and gender. This dynamic relationship, analyzed in specific times and

places, highlights a number of central issues in the contemporary world, including ecologism, cultural and social differences, land rights, resistance processes and strategies, and usages of (mediatic) representation. It comes to be the “litmus test” for reasoning on differences and inequalities, which despite being constituted and expressed in very different ways depending on the context, produce very similar results.

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Gender and barbecue

The gendering of tradition, innovation and space in the Netflix series
Chef's Table: BBQ (2020)

*Genre et barbecue: genre, tradition, innovation et espace dans la série Netflix
Chef's Table: BBQ (2020)*

Jonatan Leer

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Introduction

- 1 Barbecuing is often highlighted as one of the most masculine forms of cooking (Dummit 1998, Nyvang & Leer 2019). Maybe this is due to its spatial and thus symbolic disassociation from the feminized sphere of the domestic kitchen (Devault 1991, Miller 2010). Another reason might be that it is a somewhat time-consuming kind of cooking and often used for special events, which fits in nicely with the predominantly leisurely character of men's home cooking (Szabo 2013), although men's share of everyday cooking is rising, notably in the Nordic region (Neuman 2016, Holm et al. 2015). Barbecuing is also associated with traditional forms of masculinity (Matthews 2009) and male homosociality understood as bonding between persons of the same sex (Leer 2016). Also, barbecuing is closely connected to meat consumption, which has strong connotations to traditional forms of masculinity (Parry 2010, Adams 1990) e.g. Szabo 2014 description of the socially constructed "traditional culinary femininities and masculinities" (Szabo 2013, p. 20-22). This seems to be the case in many cultures, but not least in the American barbecue culture which, since the post-war era, has spread across Western societies (Dummit 1998) via popular culture and iconic barbecue grill tools like the Weber round-topped kettle barbecue. Although often associated with American folklore and popular culture (Moss 2010), barbecue exists in many forms and cultures around the world as highlighted by Deutsch and Elias (2014) who approach barbecue in a non-US-centric manner. However, their account also underlines that,

across contexts and cultures, barbecuing is a practice predominantly undertaken by men and strongly associated with masculinity (Deutsch & Elias 2014: 25-46).

- 2 In this paper, I will analyse a recent Netflix documentary series, *Chef's Table: BBQ* (2020), portraying four different barbecue chefs, including two women. The barbecue chefs are from Australia, Mexico, and the US. The series is in four episodes. Each episode focuses on one of the chefs and her/his context. As such, each episode unfolds the personal story of the chef and her/his view on the craft of barbecuing, but the series uses these stories to present a portrait of the local contexts and traditions. As such, the documentary adopts – contrary to the traditionally more high-paced travelogue food show (Leer and Kjær 2015) – a more anthropological perspective on food practices as cultural practices and follows the individuals and their social groups over a period of time to unfold these practices and contexts.
- 3 The aim of the paper is to discuss how this documentary reframes our understanding of gender and barbecuing by including these acclaimed female barbecue chefs. The main argument of the paper is that despite the series' celebration of female barbecue chefs, more subtle forms of gender distinctions are nonetheless apparent, notably in relation to how the male chefs are described as “innovative” in the sense that they are not “slaves of tradition”, rather they break with tradition and norms to do a more personal kind of cooking foregrounding their individual identity over the collective identity. Both male chefs clearly seek culinary status via innovative approaches to barbecuing while the female chefs tend to remain in their local area and be respectful of tradition. The series thus associates female barbecuing with tradition and the preservation of community while male barbecuing is driven by male individualism, innovation, and the aspiration to grant barbecue legitimacy in fine dining and thus status to the male chefs. As such, the series challenges dominant perceptions of the gendering of barbecuing as being solely a male activity. At the same time, gender distinctions are evident in the way barbecuing is performed as they are in the discourses surrounding barbecuing.
- 4 The paper thus contributes to the extensive food studies literature on food and gendered hierarchies, more particularly the critical studies of representations of food and gender by discussing the masculinized practice of barbecuing. Surprisingly, the theme of barbecuing has not been the subject of study to any great extent and the manly nature of barbecuing has gone unquestioned. This paper seeks to nuance this view. The empirical contribution is based on an empirical case study and on a comparative analysis of the male and female barbecue chefs. As demonstrated by this analysis, women as barbecue chefs are not culturally unthinkable, but in the series, the female barbecue chefs differ significantly from their male peers. The men are innovative and ambitious individualists who break with tradition while the women are strongly attached to, and defined by, the barbecue tradition of their native environment and its preservation. Theoretically, the paper uses the analysis to suggest that the series highlights two contradictory trends in the contemporary food culture and food discourses, which also seem to have a gender perspective.
- 5 The article opens with a theoretical section introducing the theoretical perspective on gender and food. This section also includes a short overview of previous literature on barbecuing and gender. Next, the methodological section which describes the role of *Chef's Table: BBQ* within the food documentary genre and outlines the reading strategy. The analysis opens with an introduction to the four protagonists of the series and the rest of the section is divided into three sections. In the concluding discussion, the

perspectives of the analysis are discussed, including a more general reflection on the gendering of innovation and tradition in contemporary food culture.

A post-structural perspective on gendered food practices

- 6 This paper is informed by a post-structural approach to food and gender which understands gender as a social construct and not a biological essence (Cairns & Johnston 2015). This is a predominant position in many contemporary food studies of gender (for instance Hollows 2003a, Counihan 1999, Halkier 2009, Lewis 2020). Also, this perspective often includes critical perspectives on the gender hierarchies and gender inequalities reproduced in food culture (Devault 1991, Swinbank 2002, Lupton and Feldman 2019, Leer et al. 2019). Much of this research on food and gender could be divided into studies of everyday life (in the context of sociological and anthropological research methods such as interviews, observations...) and studies of representations (in the context of cultural studies research methods, including various forms of textual analysis). The boundaries between these two approaches are increasingly blurred in studies of food practices in a contemporary digitalized culture, allowing for new forms of textual practices (Leer & Krogager 2021, Leer et al. 2019).
- 7 In this paper, I adopt an approach inspired by the British school of cultural studies (Hollows 2003a, 2003b, Gill 2003, MacRobbie 2004). In this school, gender is considered a negotiation of various discursive repertoires that are gendered differently, making room for distinct gendered identities while excluding others (Gill 2003, Lapina & Leer 2016). For instance, in terms of food spaces, the professional restaurant kitchens and the associated discursive repertoires have a history of being male-dominated and favour machoism (Nilsson 2012) whereas the domestic kitchen and sphere connote females (Hollows 2003b). This perspective is very conscious of the power and social inequalities of these distinctions.
- 8 Different food practices seem to allow for different gendered profiles (Leer et al. 2019). As mentioned, barbecuing seems to be closely associated with masculinity. In terms of gender and marketing, the term “gender contamination” is used to describe how distinct gendered objects and practices “contaminate” the subjects performing them (Avery 2012). A central point is that the gender contamination is unequal in men’s and women’s consumption: “given the political and power disparity that still exists between men and women, women's gender-bending consumption might be more dangerous to men than men's gender-bending consumption is to women. The gender contamination of brands might occur as men searching for masculine distinction work to avoid brands that are used by women and/or abandon previously masculine brands that have been infiltrated by women” (Avery 2012: 232-234).
- 9 In relation to food, Contois (2020) underlines how men have been strongly opposed to, and have avoided, products like diet sodas, yogurts and diets, but lately, the companies behind these food products have successfully changed this gendering via clever marketing. This marketing made use of the American cultural figure of the “dude”, an unambitious, boyish and fun-seeking masculine figure similar to the British “new lad” from the 1990s (Jackson et al. 2001). An iconic example of this strategy is the case of diet sodas like Pepsi Max, a diet coke that was branded via dudes and extreme sportsmen

under the slogan “Living life to the max”. This is as far from feminized diet Pepsi as you can get with its connotations of weight anxiety, health, self-discipline, etc. Contois argues that the dude works to change the gendered status of such food items, thereby reducing the feminine connotation of these (Contois 2020). Hence diet sodas become legitimate for male consumers.

- 10 In relation to barbecuing, we are also dealing with a highly gendered food practice, but contrary to diet sodas, it is associated with masculinity across a range of cultural contexts (Deutsch & Elias 2014). Various studies confirm this strong bond between masculinity and barbecuing, including studies of Danish children’s cookbooks (Nyvang & Leer 2019), post-war Canada (Dummit 1998), Finnish working-class men (Roos, Prättälä & Koski 2001), twenty-first century British newspaper articles (Gough 2007), the Argentinian Asado culture (DeLessio-Parson 2017). Also, in their global history of barbecuing, Deutsch and Elias (2014) note that this bond is also found in Mongolian barbecuing practices, in Papua New Guinea, and various other non-Western cultures (Deutsch & Elias 2014: 25-46).
- 11 In my analysis, I want to use this post-structural perspective to discuss the gendered practices of barbecuing and how this gendering is reproduced and contested in the portraits of the four barbecue chefs. The concept of gender contamination will also guide the readings as a theoretical concept to see how the gendered connotations are negotiated.
- 12 The post-structural perspective inspired by Johnston and Baumann (2010) also applies to other concepts like tradition, authenticity, innovation and community which are understood as social constructions more than cultural essences. This does not mean that they are meaningless, rather as we shall see these are very powerful concepts used to frame specific visions of the world and frame certain foods as heritage and desirable for cosmopolitan consumers (Brulotte & DiGiovine 2016 Shepherd 2018).

Method

- 13 In this paper, I have decided to focus on the Netflix series *Chef’s Table: BBQ* because it seems to challenge the cultural assumption of the strong bond between barbecuing and masculinity by including an equal number of female and male barbecue chefs. It thus seems to be a very interesting case to debate and nuance the relationship between gender and barbecuing.
- 14 Before I outline my reading strategy, I will include a few remarks about the genre of my empirical case. Food documentaries have gained importance in the twenty-first century, which might be seen as a consequence of the increased variety in available foods and a growing foodie culture in Western and non-Western countries (Johnston & Baumann 2010, Naccarato & Lebesco 2012, Parasecoli & Halawa 2021). This development is also linked to a growth in food media (Rousseau 2012, Leer & Povlsen 2016) and digital food media (Lewis 2020, Lupton & Feldman 2019, Goodman & Jaworska 2020). In this new mediated food culture, food documentaries could be seen as one of the more exclusive products, often the result of a long work process (research, interviews, field work, editing, etc.). This slowness of production adds to its exclusivity in a world of digital food communication where the amount of digital media texts is

exploding (Leer & Krogager 2021) and often focused on capturing the “instant” of a food experience (Contois & Kish 2021).

- 15 There are various subgenres of the food documentary. A significant subgenre is the activist food documentary, like *Food Inc.* (2008), criticizing industrial food production and food systems (Lindenfield 2011). Our present case seems to belong to another genre, namely the chef portraits which also seems to be in vogue, notably with the “celebrification” of food personalities (Johnston & Goodman 2015), and the wave of “rechefisation” where the chef identity is reclaimed with an emphasis on individualism and strong, self-made male personalities (Leer 2016). The Netflix series *Chef’s Table* taps into this trend. The first season was aired in 2015. Each season presents a series of episodes lasting approximately fifty minutes, each focusing on one chef. The first four seasons focused on fine dining and involved chefs from the World’s 50 Best Restaurant list, established as an alternative list of trendy food places relative to the more the more traditional and Francophile Michelin Guide (Beaugé 2013). As such, it demonstrated a more global approach to fine dining in line with the trends in international foodie taste (Johnston and Bauman 2010). *Chef’s Table* was criticized for a lack of diversity and particularly the first season had very few female chefs¹. In the following season, focus was more diversified in terms of types of food and gender balance.
- 16 The series is conceptualized by David Gelb, who became famous for his food documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (2011) about the Japanese sushi chef Jiro Ono (b.1925) and his quest to perfect sushi-making. The movie is a detailed portrait of the chef, his restaurant, his food philosophy, and his life, notably the relations with his sons and the future of the family restaurant. Gelb sees the Netflix series as a kind of continuation of his approach to the food documentary genre, with emphasis on one chef, his personality, and his struggles. Also, the elaborate aesthetic style from *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* is continued in this series, which underscores the artistic character of the food and the chefs portrayed. This is further supported by the use of classical music. Gelb has directed some episodes and produced many, but the episodes have a similar sophisticated aesthetic expression, which has provoked critical reactions, ridicule, and accusations of pretentiousness².
- 17 Not only does the *Chef’s Table* series have a recognizable sophisticated visual style, but it also seems to follow a similar narrative structure, focusing on the relationship between the portrayed chef’s food and her/his philosophy of life. This is usually captured by focusing on a defining revelation or event. This is most often dramatized as a point of no return (a life crisis or lack of recognition) that the chef overcomes due to a strong belief in her/his culinary philosophy and self. This dramaturgy favours a chef-centred approach which underlines the almost superhuman nature of the chefs in terms working ethics, creativity, and life philosophy. The philosophy is often phrased in interviews or in voice-overs to highly aestheticized imagery of their food, the restaurant, and the surroundings.
- 18 In my reading strategy, I was very much aware of this structure and incorporated it in the strategy. I formulated a series of questions before watching the shows. These were based on my viewing of the previous seasons and on my interest in understanding the gendered perspective of barbecuing. In my readings, therefore, I focused on the following questions: 1) How is barbecuing described as a particular kind of food and which values does it convey? 2) How does the food convey narratives of tradition/

innovation and belonging/rupture? 3) Which spaces are associated with this type of food and which kind of social spheres are built up around it? 4) How does the chef see her/himself in relation to other chefs (barbecue and fine dining or something else?) 5) Which gendered narratives and gender hierarchies are unfolded? 6) What are the main differences between the male and female barbecue chefs? 7) How does the aesthetic style underscore or challenge the chefs' ideas?

- 19 As I am quite aware of the highly conceptual and aestheticized aspects of the series, I do not pretend that this series is a correct version of the reality of these chefs, nor the "truth" about their lives. So, although the series has a somewhat anthropological perspective and *modus operandi*, I think we should be very cautious about mistaking it for objective or fully exhaustive narratives of real lives of the persons portrayed. As with many other food media texts, the texts should be considered windows to contemporary ideals of what constitutes food and how it relates to identity and ideology (Leer 2016).

Presentation of the Chefs in Chef's Table: BBQ

- 20 This season of *Chef's Table* seems to reflect an ambition to go beyond fine dining and to open up a broader range of culinary repertoires. This ambition seems to be in line with a broader strategy in the Netflix food content with series like *Street Food*. This series explores the world of street food and its overlooked culinary masters. Another example is *Ugly Delicious* where the chef David Chang and friends explore everyday food and fast food like pizzas and tacos in a global perspective. This programme is also very engaged in cultural differences, food history, and food hierarchies. Both series are in line with the more omnivorous taste of many contemporary foodies (Johnston & Bauman 2010). This means that foodies are not just interested in *haute cuisine*, but also in food previously considered low status such as street food. However, new hierarchies are drawn according to Johnston and Bauman (2010) via the concepts of authenticity and exoticism. This is interesting in relation to barbecuing, which has experienced a renewed interest from the foodie segment, but not all kinds of barbecues are embraced indiscriminately. The standardized BBQ chains have little status contrary to those which are unique, bound to a local tradition, and have a history of using old techniques (authenticity) or related to undiscovered, foreign cuisine (exoticism). All four protagonists fall into these categories of exoticism and authenticity, albeit in different ways. A short introduction follows.
- 21 Tootsie Tomanetz is the protagonist in the first episode. She is a white woman aged around 85 at the time of shooting of the series. During the week, she works as a janitor at the local school and she only works as a barbecue chef on Saturdays. She is renowned for her traditional Texan barbecue foods like brisket, half grilled chickens, pork spare ribs, and pork shoulder steak. In the series, she is portrayed as one of the few still doing hill country barbecuing. This entails a laborious process where she lights the wood and burns it to coal. Subsequently, the meat is cooked directly, but slowly, over the coals. Tootsie Tomanetz learned to barbecue when she began to help out in her husband's meat market and they worked together for decades before Edward "White" Tomanetz had to quit due to health problems. After some years taking care of her husband and working at the local school, Tootsie was asked to work as a barbecue chef at a new barbecue place called *Snow's*. This place is only open on Saturdays (the traditional day

for barbecues in Texas) and is open from 8 a.m. until they run out of meat around noon³. In 2008, *Snow's* was elected the best barbecue place by *Texas Monthly*. After that, it became a culinary attraction for locals and tourists. Often, several hundred line up before the opening every Saturday morning.

- 22 Lennox Hastie is a trained chef with a mixed British and Australian background. He started working in a Sussex restaurant at the age of fifteen. Later, he trained in European fine dining restaurants but ended up being disenchanted by Michelin food. He then worked at the Basque restaurant Asador Etxebarri under the innovative chef Victor Arguinzoniz, who used grilling as a central part of his cooking. In 2011, he returned to Sydney and spent four years developing his restaurant *Firedoor* where everything is cooked over fire. His ambition was to change what a grill restaurant should be and push the limit for the use of the grill in fine dining. So, Hastie cooked soups, vegetables, caviar, and even desserts over fire. This uncompromising cooking style generated a creative culinary fusion of local Australian ingredients and inspiration from Asador Etxebarri. The ambition being to demonstrate that barbecuing is much more than meat and that it belongs in fine dining.
- 23 Rodney Scott is a barbecue chef from South Carolina specializing in barbecuing whole hogs, a tradition closely associated with the Afro-American culture of the region. He grew up in an Afro-American family in an isolated rural community. His parents had a grocery and barbecue shop. Although Rodney Scott longed to go abroad from a young age, his father expected him to carry on the family business. After his father suffered a stroke, Scott took charge of the business and successfully innovated it. Various media, notably *The New York Times*, wrote about him and the tradition of the whole hog. This generated increased attention. Subsequently, he opened a barbecue restaurant in his own name in Charleston. Here, the whole hog was supplemented by other dishes like ribs, fish, and desserts.
- 24 Rosalia Chay Chuc is a barbecue chef from Mexico and profoundly attached to Mayan culture and food traditions, notably the ancient tradition of the *cochinita pibil* where marinated pork is cooked in a pit. Also, Chuc is very dedicated to the laborious tradition of cooking tortillas with freshly grounded corn flour over an open fire. Chuc regrets the fact that many people lack interest in the Mayan culture and that the younger Mayans prioritize education and integration in urban life over the traditional culture, which demands hard labour and knowledge of the old crafts. Through her cooking, she defends the endangered traditional lifestyle, culture, and values of the Mayans. These are deeply rooted in local nature. Having demonstrated her cooking at a food festival and following various encounters with celebrity chefs interested in her cooking, she started serving Mayan food in her house for tourists from around the world.
- 25 The rest of the analysis is in three parts. The first deals with the apparent novel approach to gender and barbecuing in the series. The next two sections analyse the ways traditional gender discourses appear in more subtle ways in the four episodes, notably in relation to the gendering of space, innovation, and culinary authority.

Challenging the gendered stereotype of barbecuing

- 26 *Chef's Table: BBQ* clearly challenges some of the gendered stereotypes of barbecuing. Notably the cultural image of barbecuing as an unsophisticated cooking style

performed sloppily by beer-drinking groups of men in a homosocial sexist atmosphere. In the series, barbecuing is described as a craft demanding a high level of skills and experience possessed by all the chefs regardless of gender. Central to their mastery of this craft is hard work. This theme returns in the portrayals of all the chefs. For instance, Scott describes how he spent his teenage years doing nothing but work related to barbecuing. He has continued this work ethic and describes how he gets up early every morning to go for a walk, contemplating how he might better his barbecue technique. Similarly, Tomanetz is described by Clay Cowgill, a colleague at *Snow's*, as “one of the hardest-working people I’ve ever met”. Daniel Vaughn, barbecue editor at *Texas Monthly*, also stresses with great admiration that the hard work of barbecuing is no obstacle for the eighty-five-year-old Tootsie: “At eighty-five, standing next to a giant fire, scooping those coals with a shovel, sweating like crazy. It’s a process that is just painful for a thirty-five-year-old to do, let alone an eighty-five-year-old. This is a woman at the top of the craft”. While we hear these words in the voice-over, we see a slow-motion sequence of Tomanetz carrying a shovel of very hot coals from the oven where they are made, to the barbecue and distributing the coals underneath the meat. The sequence ends with a close-up of Tomanetz’s face as she is wiping sweat off her brow with a towel like tennis players during their breaks. Similarly, we see various shots of Hastie’s sweaty face as he is barbecuing and drinking a giant jar of water to stay hydrated. Also, we see Chuc always busy cooking for her family and, notably, we repeatedly see images of her shaping and cooking tortillas over the fire.

- 27 The barbecue chefs are all characterized by an ethos of manual labour that is perfected via repetition. This is a shared ethos regardless of gender. There are only very few examples of the female physique standing in the way of performing certain tasks of barbecuing. One explicit example is in the episode featuring Chuc where the Mayan tradition prescribes that the women prepare the meat while the men prepare the fire and heat the stone. We also note that it is the men who place the very heavy pot with the meat in the fire and remove it again. However, this is closely supervised by Chuc and she seems to be in charge of the situation, only using male strength as a tool for her cooking. In various other instances, Chuc herself cooks meat and tortillas over the fire.
- 28 The four chefs have accumulated a feeling for barbecuing via repetitive manual labour. None of them use recipes and all have learned barbecuing by practicing it. Chuc and Scott have learned barbecuing from their parents as part of their upbringing. Tomanetz and Hastie learned it in their twenties. Tomanetz learned it as she started working in her husband’s meat market and slowly assumed more and more responsibility for the barbecuing. Hastie learned it when, intrigued by the chef Victor Arguinzoniz, he started working for him, but as Hastie only spoke English and Victor Arguinzoniz only spoke Spanish, Hastie’s barbecuing formation was not theoretical or discursive, but a kind of material and physical apprenticeship where he slowly learned to imitate the skills of the master. This also means that all four describe their barbecuing skills as embodied skills based on intuition, patience, and feeling. Maybe most explicitly described by Tomanetz: “At *Snow's* we have no secrets, I mean, our seasoning is salt and pepper. I can’t tell you how hot my pits are, because I feel ’em with my hands.” This is borne out by a close-up of her wrinkled hand on the rusty top of the pit. This shot of her “touch” returns as a final framing of the episode. It is a shared ideal of all the four

chefs that barbecuing is an embodied and internalized expertise that, above all, demands intuition and practical engagement with the material world.

- 29 All four chefs also seem to attach a certain deeper meaning to barbecuing. There is a reason for going through all this manual work without using the shortcuts provided by modern technology. All embrace a certain anti-modern attitude and find in the pre-modern practice of barbecuing an alternative to modernity. Here, it is noticeable that all the chefs use wood and very primitive equipment. All refuse the gear and gadgets of present-day barbecuing or the use of industrially produced coal or gas. Chuc is most explicit in her disdain for modern life. She regrets the advent of asphalted roads and the Internet to her village. The consequence has been that many people lost interest in the Mayan culture and cooking and left the village to pursue another life in the cities. Rosalia affirms that she does not want her life to change.
- 30 After this section outlining how the similarities between the barbecue chefs of across gender and the series itself challenge the gendered stereotypes of barbecuing, the next sections will focus on gendered differences and hierarchies in the series.

The spatial gendering of Chef's Table: BBQ

- 31 One of the major differences between the male and female chefs in *Chef's Table: BBQ* is their relation to space. Both women are rooted in their communities and unfold their cooking and their life in a very restricted area. Particularly in the case of Chuc whom we mostly see in her house, a nearby cornfield, and at an old Mayan monument. Also, we see her a few times walking about in her village to get some freshly-made corn flour at the local communal mill. Her local rootedness is highlighted in her encounter with the chef Ricardo Muñoz who tastes her *cochinita pibil* and describes it as one of the greatest moments of his life. He asks Chuc to come and cook this at the upcoming Chocolate Festival in Tabasco, a major Mexican food event. Chuc is hesitant because she has never left the village before, but her family persuades her to go. She describes this first journey away from home as a very peculiar experience. In the city, she feels estranged. People are looking at her and her traditional colourful *huipil* dress. Chuc sees unfamiliar food and frozen foods in the city. However, she notes that they have “no handmade tortillas”. To her, this is clearly a sign of cultural corruption. Nonetheless, it ends quite well as many people show interest in Chuc and her cultural heritage after the presentation. Despite the success, it seems quite clear that the city and its modern, fast lifestyle where nobody takes the time to make fresh tortillas is not a place for Rosalia. She prefers her more primitive lifestyle in the Mayan tradition. However, this example also underlines the social constructedness of the understanding of tradition and the simplified use of the term in the series. Muñoz describes the Mayan cuisine as an unaltered tradition dating back thousands of years, however, the pigs used in the *cochinita pibil* are not native to the Americas, but introduced by European settlers in the 16th century.
- 32 Tomanetz is also deeply rooted in her community. We see her at the school, the meat market (run by a new team), in church, at the meat auction, and driving to see the sunset, but we never see her leave her local area. Like Chuc, she feels that modernity is threatening the local community. She describes how she was raised on a farm at the end of the Great Depression. They were poor, but they learned to take care of themselves and each other by means of hard work. She also nostalgically recalls the

annual community barbecue as a highlight of the year. Such events are no longer possible, it seems. Presently, she feels that people have moved too far away from each other. This nostalgic feeling is underlined by slow folklore string music combined with close-ups of Tomanetz standing alone observing the landscape. Tomanetz and Chuc stay with their roots and fight to preserve their community which in both cases are both a spatial community, but also a cultural one based on religion, rootedness and a distance to high-paced lifestyles, individual career ambitions, mixtures of cultural practices and identities. Like Yaxunah, Chuc's village, Tomanetz's rural community seems endangered by modernity and about to perish. Interestingly, the fact that the two female barbecue chefs are so attached to their local environment – and refuse to leave it and its tradition – seems to give them a certain authenticity which attracts foodie tourists. The tourists – we are told – seem to belong to a distinct social stratum and include a lot of young urbanites in search of authentic experiences (Johnston & Bauman 2010) which the two ladies incarnated precisely because of their staying put.

- 33 Rodney Scott's account of his rural upbringing and barbecuing experience is far less romantic than the picture painted by Tomanetz. Scott describes how he was forced to work all hours under his father's strict surveillance. He used to look enviously at the airplanes passing overhead and dreamt of getting away. Scott's frustrations culminate at his high school graduation where a young lady says to him: "I don't know why you're celebrating; the only place you're going is right down the street to cook hogs!" This is confirmed by his father who expects him to carry on working in the family business. After his father's stroke, Rodney Scott tried to develop the family restaurant by repainting the façade, making the barbecue aromas more central to the experience, as well as other innovative details. These changes made the business more successful. With the increased attention, new opportunities opened up for Rodney. First, as a pop-up chef and, later, he had the opportunity to open his own place in Charleston independently of the family business. He remained engaged in the family business, but, in the series, he seems more attached to his own place where he has continued to renew the barbecuing repertoire and advance his special sauces. Scott's story is – contrary to Tomanetz's and Chuc's stories – a narrative of moving away from the place where he was born and making his own way in the world. This also entails a problematic break with his father, who was not happy about his ambitions to innovate and expand.
- 34 Hastie is even more rebellious than Scott. He is the most cosmopolitan of the four chefs. He was brought up in Britain and worked across Europe before settling in Australia. His story is also about breaking free, not from the place where he was born, like Rodney, but from the Michelin-style of cooking in which he was trained. After a period of disenchantment with the machine of *haute cuisine*, he rediscovers a passion for cooking when meeting Victor Arguinoniz and his untraditional style of cooking high-end food exclusively over fire. This style is not rooted in a tradition or a place. Rather, it is a radical and innovative style developed through Arguinoniz's personal vision of cooking. Hastie adopts this style. Later, he feels that he has to break free from his master and set up his own restaurant. A restaurant that reflects his personal character. So, he travels across the world to Sydney to fulfil his dream and open *Firedoor*. In the series, we also see Hastie exploring the various landscapes of Australia. He explores these with hunters, fishermen, and vegetable growers. Contrary to the female barbecue chefs' ambition to preserve their local territory and traditions by barbecuing, Hastie is exploring new territories to find a truer expression of himself. He is not attached to a

specific tradition of barbecue like the other three. He speaks more philosophically about a universal bond between fire and humanity that he is exploring. This is an abstract understanding of tradition with no specific spatial or cultural reference point, but understood as a universal human drive.

- 35 The differences between the rootedness of the female barbecue chefs and the male chefs' desire to break away from stasis and discover new territories reflect a long-standing gendered dichotomy in food media (Leer 2017). Women's cooking tends to be defined by the home. Men's cooking is based on the exploration of foreign cuisines. For instance, in relation to cooking shows, women tend to work in domestic surroundings while men more often host travelogue shows (Leer 2017). This outlines an unequal space of opportunities for men and women.

Traditional Grandma barbecue and innovative, individualized masculine barbecue

- 36 There seems to be a close connection between mobility and culinary innovation in *Chefs Table: BBQ*. Among the four chefs, Hastie is the one who has travelled most extensively and he is presented as the most sophisticated and innovative of the four. He is the only one with a formal culinary training where it is common, as part of the formation process, to travel and gather experience to develop your own style. However, before getting a job at Victor Arguinzoniz, Hastie had become fed up with the Michelin world, whose machine-like *modus operandi* left no room for individuality, spontaneity, or intuition. With Arguinzoniz, he rediscovers this creativity because the dogma of only cooking over fire forces them to be creative. Hastie describes how he gets closer to Arguinzoniz and helps him develop new dishes. He describes these processes as being extremely experimental. The first step is always to put a new ingredient on the grill and "see what happens". Hastie and Arguinzoniz then observed and discussed the experiments. The ambition is to grill everything. Even some very unusual ingredients never associated with barbecuing such as their experiments with grilling caviar. This was considered an obscene idea by many critics. Hastie and Arguinzoniz developed a technique where the caviar was placed on seaweed before being placed over the fire. The seaweed protected the caviar from the heat while at the same time using the smoke to change the flavour profile. The development of this dish lasted over a year and involved many experiments.
- 37 Hastie did, however, feel that he had to break with his Spanish master and open his own restaurant in a very different place, namely Sydney. He describes it as a natural step in his creative development. In Sydney, he had a different variety of ingredients to experiment with and he would be his own master. He talks about how this move also gives him a freedom allowing him to take his culinary creativity even further:
- "One question was always asked of me in Spain: "Is there anything you don't grill?" And the only thing we didn't grill in Spain was salad. It was almost like it was sacred. I'm not at Etxebarri anymore. I'm forging my own path. I'm going my own direction. So I thought why the hell not? Suddenly it opened my mind. What I love about cooking over fire is the freedom. So I chose to do things I hadn't done before. There's a lot of rules that need to be broken."*
- 38 Hastie's barbecuing consists of multiple levels which he describes as a form of food transgression (Goodman & Sage 2013). Firstly, the idea of grilling vegetables and even delicate salad vegetables. Hastie evolves his barbecuing practice from traditional meat-

based barbecues and gives it a more sophisticated expression. Secondly, to base a fine dining restaurant so radically on barbecuing amounts to transgression in relation to the norms of fine dining. It could be seen as a form of scale-bending where the norms of a scale (such as fine dining) are bent like the New Nordic Cuisine ‘bent’ the understanding of fine dining by exclusively using ingredients from the Nordic region (Müller & Leer 2018). Thirdly, Hastie takes the transgressive action of his master a step further by grilling the salad.

- 39 Although much closer to the barbecue tradition he was born into, we find some of the same trends in the portrait of Rodney Scott. He, too, is a rule breaker and has broken with his master (his father) to find his own path. Scott does not travel around the world, but takes a two-hour ride to Charleston to open his own place. He seems relatively faithful to the basic principles of the whole-hog tradition although he does develop his own sauces and a new dish to expand the repertoire. Also, his restaurant in Charleston has a classier look than his parents’ place. So, Rodney is not as radical as Hastie, but we do see some of the same basic ambitions to cut ties with tradition and develop a personal cuisine.
- 40 Contrary to the two male barbecue chefs of the series, the females are not associated with innovation or creativity. Rather they are praised for not changing things and for remaining faithful to tradition. This most extreme in this regard is Chuc, who holds on to a thousand-year-old culture and cooking style. As mentioned, she is very critical of modernity and change. Her authenticity is precisely related to her distancing herself from modern life in terms of cooking techniques, clothing, general lifestyle, etc. In the case of Tomanetz, the cooking tradition she represents is not as ancient, but we find a similar scepticism of urbanization, modernity, and a sense of lost community in the modern world.
- 41 They are both highlighted as masters within their barbecue traditions, but they stand out because of their dedicated work to continue this tradition rather than innovate it. Tomanetz is celebrated for taking the time to making the coals herself, which few find the time to do nowadays. It is, however, not clear why her barbecues stand out. As mentioned, the seasoning is just salt and pepper. No magic or secret ingredient. Unlike Rodney, her sauce-making is not mentioned as particular or unique. In the series’ portrait of Tomanetz, it is her “care” for each piece of meat that is highlighted as her primary quality.
- 42 So, whereas the men’s cooking style in *Chef’s Table: BBQ* is characterized by innovation, audacity, transgression, and individualism, the women’s cooking is characterized by traditionalism and care. This also seems to associate the women with the figure of the grandmother who represents stability and love amid an ever-changing world. While this is a mark of authenticity, it is also a type of cooking which is hierarchically inferior to the general foodscape and notably to the male-dominated fine-dining part of this landscape where values like creativity and originality are vital (Beaugé 2013).
- 43 In this regard, it is also interesting that those who define “good taste” in *Chef’s Table: BBQ* and ascribe culinary capital in the culinary field are all – with one exception – men. In each episode, a few food specialists, chefs, or journalists explain the uniqueness of the chef being portrayed. For instance, in the episode with Chuc, the chef Ricardo Muñoz takes much pride in discovering her and bringing her to the Chocolate Fair to do a food demonstration in front of the Mexican food intelligentsia. Muñoz is evidently interested in the old Mayan food traditions and in making these more widely

recognized. However, the gesture also demonstrates Muñoz' authority in the Mexican foodscape as he can decide who will go on stage and be celebrated as authentic. Chuc would probably never have entered the scene without him. So, male chefs are the gateway to achieve cultural status and legitimacy. Later, Muñoz also introduces her to the Danish chef René Redzepi who did a pop-up restaurant in Mexico. Rosalia is invited to do the tortillas for this pop-up restaurant. In this way, her status and legitimacy become international, again via intervention by male chefs.

Concluding remarks

- 44 As demonstrated by the above analysis, the Netflix series *Chef's Table: BBQ* apparently contests the traditional gendering of barbecuing. In the previous literature, barbecuing is almost exclusively described as a masculine practice. In the Netflix series, this image is challenged as the series portrays highly skilled barbecue chefs of both genders. Also, the four chefs share common ideals of the importance of embodied and intuitive cooking skills and the importance of hard, manual work. In this way, the series also characterizes barbecuing as a noble practice, linking man to nature and social communities.
- 45 Nonetheless, the series also reproduces gendered distinctions. These were particularly related to mobility and innovation. While the female barbecue chefs seemed to be rooted in their local community into which they were born, the male chefs were defined by mobility and a desire to make their own place in the world unshackled from traditions. This gendered difference in mobility also reflects differences in the series' portrayal of their creativity and ability to innovate. The female barbecue chefs incarnate tradition and the preservation of the local community via barbecuing. The male chefs are – albeit in various degrees – portrayed as creative souls with a longing to break free from traditions and transgress the restrictions and rules set by others. The men want to stand out and be recognized for their personal approach to barbecuing.
- 46 In this perspective, it is evident that both individualism and authenticity/tradition are desirable values in the contemporary food culture, but that these might also be gendered values with distinct status. It seems evident that, in the more prestigious end of fine dining, individualism and culinary audacity are core values that overrule authenticity and tradition (Beaugé 2013). In the series, we also see both male chefs being celebrated as chef of the year in their geographical areas at fancy award shows, applauded by the food intelligentsia. In contrast, when Toosie is acknowledged for her work, the restaurant *Snow's* is celebrated and Tootsie and the owner of *Snow's*, Kerry Baxley, talk about a collective “we” behind the acknowledgement, and the ceremony is conspicuously absent.
- 47 So, as many others have pointed out, gendered distinctions in the kitchen should not just analyse *if* certain practices are performed by men and women alike, but also more importantly *how* they are performed, and *how* these gendered practices confer – or fail to confer – status on those performing them. Gender contamination – or lack of same – is not just a straightforward process but involve a series of negotiations and strategies of distinction. In the series' portraits, the men's barbecues give them greater recognition and their individual creativity has paved their success.
- 48 It could be argued that these gendered patterns found in the series reflect two more general co-existing, but opposed, culinary ideals and figures in contemporary food

media and food culture. First, the innovative young male chef who challenges the norms of cooking and taste incarnated here by Scott and Hastie. This figure is dominant in food media and at culinary award shows around the world. Second, we see an increased fascination with grandmothers cooking food in the traditional manner and, as such, embodying pre-modern cultural practices on the verge of extinction. A popular example in contemporary digital food culture is the YouTube channel “Pasta Grannies” where the journalist Vicky Bennison travels around Italy and films elderly Italian housewives cooking pasta in the old ways, manually and with ancient tools. Like Chuc and Tomanetz, these are humble, hard-working and locally-oriented ladies of a certain age who embody old culinary crafts and manual skills. The grannies are defined by the culinary tradition and the locality they represent and are antagonistic to the figure of the creative, cosmopolitan, and individualistic young male chef. Both figures enchant modern consumers and reflect two apparently opposing, but co-existing trends in contemporary food consumption (notably among middle-class consumers): 1) the urge to be innovative, cosmopolitan, and hip and 2) a nostalgia for a more rooted, traditional, and locavore approach to food. It might be worth considering more generally how these trends are gendered in different contexts.

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NOTES

1. Cf. for instance this blog from Bitch Media: "A Seat at the Table – The Need for Better Race and Gender Diversity in Netflix' 'Chef's Table'". <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/docu-series-chefs-table-representation-diversity-netflix-gender-race>
 2. Cf. this YouTube parody from College Humor: "If Cooking Shows Were even More Pretentious". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czgaYCUr0-4>
 3. <https://web.archive.org/web/20080828120334/http://texasmonthly.com/2008-06-01/feature5.php>
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ABSTRACTS

Barbecuing is often highlighted as one of the most masculine forms of cooking. In this paper, I will analyse a recent Netflix documentary series, *Chef's Table: BBQ*, with portraits of four different barbecue chefs, including two women. The barbecue chefs are from Australia, Mexico, and the US. The goal of the paper is to discuss how this documentary reframes our understanding of gender and barbecuing by including these highly acclaimed female barbecue chefs. The main argument of the paper is that despite the series' celebration of female barbecue chefs, more subtle forms of gender distinctions are nonetheless apparent, notably in relation to mobility and how the male chefs are described as innovative and as individuals who go beyond their culinary roots, unlike the female barbecue chefs who are defined by immobility and tradition. In the discussion, it is argued that the series reflects two oppositional, but co-existing trends in contemporary food consumption: 1) the urge to be innovative, cosmopolitan, and hip and 2) a nostalgia for a more rooted, traditional, and locavore approach to food. It might be worth considering more generally how these trends are gendered in different contexts.

La pratique du barbecue est souvent soulignée comme l'une des pratiques culinaires la plus masculine. Dans cet article, je vais analyser un récent documentaire de Netflix, *Chef's Table: BBQ*, avec quatre portraits de divers cuisiniers de barbecue, dont deux femmes. Les chefs viennent d'Australie, du Mexique, et des États-Unis. Le but de l'article est de discuter comment ce documentaire retravaille notre compréhension du barbecue en incluant deux cheffes de barbecue très reconnues. L'argument central de l'article est qu'indépendamment de la célébration par la série des cheffes barbecues femmes, des formes plus subtiles de distinctions genrées sont néanmoins apparentes, notamment en ce qui concerne la mobilité et la manière dont les chefs masculins sont décrits comme des novateurs, et comme des individus qui transgressent leurs racines culinaires, contrairement aux femmes qui sont définies par leur immobilité et la tradition. Dans la discussion, on soutient que la série reflète deux tendances oppositionnelles, mais co-existantes dans la culture culinaire contemporaine : 1) l'exigence d'être innovant, cosmopolite et « hip » ; et 2) la nostalgie pour une relation plus enracinée, traditionnelle et locavore à la nourriture. Il serait important de considérer plus généralement comment ces deux tendances sont genrées dans des contextes différents.

INDEX

Keywords: gender, masculinity, femininity, barbecue, status, tradition, innovation, culinary roots

Mots-clés: genre, masculinité, féminité, barbecue, statut, tradition, innovation, racines culinaires

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The sovereign meal of the male leader

Matteo Salvini's food porn aesthetics

Le repas souverain du leader masculin : l'esthétique du food porn de Matteo Salvini

Luisa Stagi, Sebastiano Benasso and Luca Guzzetti

Introduction

- 1 This article deals with the ways in which the Italian politician Matteo Salvini uses gastro-posts (Niola 2019) to spread nationalist and sovereignist messages, and how – thanks to this specific form of meta-discourse – he is able to produce a model of masculinity in accordance with the contemporary rhetoric of sovereignist and nationalist discourse.
- 2 The gastro-posts are posts representing food on social media which try to capture the attention of the audience to send messages on various subjects, and for this reason they are often used by politicians (Terracciano 2019). In the age of food porn media (Lupton & Feldman 2020; Vagni 2017) through food representations it is possible to express one's own subjectivity, or identity and political positioning, in addition to show cooking skills and taste. Although it is certainly true that the discourse about food has very deep cultural roots and that communication through food has always existed, it is clear that the present global diffusion of the food porn communication depends on the specificities of the digital media: without smartphones, for taking pictures and making videos, and the social media for circulating those representations, the construction of this meta-discourse would be impossible. This system of digital communication about and through food is known as “food porn media” and it has a specific grammar.
- 3 One of the consequences of the growing spectacularization of food is the introduction of a masculine presence in the discourse on food. Some traditional models of masculinity – like the lad and emphasized masculinities (Boni 2020) – are particularly important because they are part of an adaptive strategy for gender trespassing, called

“gender manoeuvring” (Laurendeau & Sharara 2008; Schippers 2002). These models of emphasized masculinity get particular relevance when framed in a nostalgic and reactionary discourse, where the rhetoric of the crisis of masculinity is used to foster the return to identities and family models of a traditional type (Cicccone 2019). In the article, we explore two different articulations of the (re)construction of such models through food. On the one hand, we shed light on the masculinity performed by professional chefs at a mainstream media level to set a clear boundary from the supposed feminine duties of domestic food preparation. On the other hand, we reflect on the representations of the hunger and consumption style of the “glutton” male as significant traits of his “proper” masculinity.

- 4 We tackle the relation between food and the construction of the Italian national identity through the perspective of gastro-nationalism (DeSoucey 2010). It helps in exploring how the discourses emphasising food as a crucial element of tradition and national heritage can be applied to reinforce the idea of national borders, and stress distinctions (Bourdieu, 1979). Indeed, the gastro-nationalist discourse intertwines with the expression of sovereignist political stances (Appadurai 1988; 1996), and this gets particularly evident within the Italian context, where even in common sense the local food heritage is often framed as a major discursive component of the “everyday nationalism” (Billig 1995; Ichijo & Ranta 2016). Indeed, as argued by Karrebæk *et al.*, the circulation of images of the nation that depict the national cuisine, “can be a potent site of nation-building, at times in response to the globalizing conditions of circulating food and people” (2018 : 25).
- 5 The central part of this article frames the Italian sovereignist discourse, showing how elements like tradition, gender hierarchy and national myth are crucial for its creation and reproduction. The last part of the article analyses how Salvini’s gastro-posts incorporate these discourses and determine a specific grammar. The gastro-posts analysed in this article were selected among the pics posted by Salvini on his Instagram and Twitter official profiles in the period 2017-2020. We have contextualised our content analysis (Arcostanzo & Pansardi 2017; Caliandro 2018) on such social media on the basis of the frequency of their use by Matteo Salvini (who has posted almost one pic per day in the period of observation) and the high share of gastro-posts among them (about 10% of the whole amount of the posted pics).

Food and masculinity in the media

- 6 The hyper-mediatisation of food has also produced a new centrality for masculinity in the food media. In Italy, a few very famous chefs have become, in the course of a decade, among the most sought-after and prestigious spokesmen and advisors for all manner of products on TV. From being judges in cooking competitions, chefs have become judges in talent shows, TV hosts, influencers, and opinion leaders. Regarded as sex symbols, they are continuously in the spotlight of media, which celebrate them emphasising the reasons for their success and framing their public image as a role-model for men.
- 7 Starting from the 2000s, research focused on the connections between food and gender has been growing (Avakian and Haber 2005). One of the first important works that connected the history of food and nutrition to the relationship between genders was *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* by Laura Shapiro (1986). The

encounter of these first reflections with the intersectional and post-colonial approaches produced the development of a new analytical perspective (Avakian 2005). Some of the studies on media representations of the link between gender and food, for example, have often started from the kitchen as a symbolic place of gender role divisions. The work of Cindy Dorfman (1992) – a historical excursus on bourgeois American cuisine as a feminine place – tried to analyse change in the media representation of the kitchen as a symbolic territory of emotions and intimacy. Ten years later, Sherrie Innes (2001) followed a similar path, deconstructing the discourses and representations conveyed by popular media about women who cook. According to these analyses, cookbooks, advertisements and magazine articles help reproduce the idea that cooking for the family is “naturally” rewarding for women, both emotionally and aesthetically.

- 8 Yet, when food starts to be mediatized and spectacularized, masculinity comes into play and its relation to food becomes the object of studies and reflections (cf. Fidolini & Stagi 2020). The construction of the relationship between masculinity and food has a long and articulated history in Italy, where two men were chosen to talk about food for the first time on television. The writer Mario Soldati, who in the TV programme *Viaggio lungo la valle del Po* (Voyage along the Po valley) travelled to discover traditions and food of the peasant culture, and the gourmet Luigi Veronelli, who since the 1970s aimed to bring “good taste” in the Italian kitchens with the programme *A tavola alle 7* (At the table at 7pm). Among the chefs that currently appear on the Italian TV, those who became celebrities tend to be men who perform an exaggerated masculinity, whose prototype is the TV chef Gordon Ramsey. Scholars such as Schippers (2002) link the performance of particular models of masculinity to the need to distance from a terrain traditionally considered as feminine; men must go beyond the boundaries of the kitchen to distance themselves as much as possible from the feminine models, otherwise they run the risk of “demasculinizing” themselves. For this reason, they perform almost a caricature of masculinity¹, appearing in locations that are far removed from domestic settings, using the symbolic power available to their gender to bypass or subvert the traditional hierarchies in the field of domestic cooking, and adopting a strategy called gender manoeuvring.
- 9 The authors who have analysed the division of gender roles in kitchen broadcasts identified a binary classification to position the culinary scenarios in which men and women move: foodwork/ food leisure. This dichotomy is further expressed in the private/public axis: if the women who cook are always anchored in the reproduction of a home-maker dimension, men often cross it, to set off in search of exotic or “disgusting” flavours, to find and challenge those who cook ancient popular dishes or to compete in endurance competitions in the quantity of food swallowed. The declination of the public/private axis is also found in the type of occasion or reason for cooking: men can cook when it is a job with a high profile and recognition, for pleasure, as a challenge, or on special occasions.
- 10 In the perspective of the staging of masculinity, the representation of the man who cooks at the grill appears particularly interesting. In the mainstream imaginary, often built on American films and TV series, the barbecue is a practice usually carried out by men on every occasion of festivity. Lately the barbecue has been the subject of some TV formats, and on the web, we can find conversations and blogs where constantly growing groups of men discuss this practice. As Lorenzo Domaneschi (2020) points out,

even more interesting it is the relation between the man and his BBQ: if the meat and the fireplace are elements almost ancestrally framed as part of the repertoires of masculinity, the barbecue is a practice that is placed in times and spaces outside the house, it is a leisure form of cuisine, managed thanks to the competent use of a specific technology.

- 11 In Italy, the most successful TV format in this field is *I re della griglia* (The kings of BBQ), hosted by Chef Rubio, one of the most famous personalities in the Italian food television. Given his notoriety in the Italian context, it is interesting to analyse how masculinity is performed by Rubio on TV through the interpretative framework created by Jonatan Leer (2016) to describe the gastro-television path of Jamie Oliver, a famous figure in British food TV.
- 12 In *The Naked Chef* (1999-2001), Jamie Oliver inaugurated his television career proposing what Leer has defined a “de-chefisation”, that is a sort of de-professionalisation, a distancing from the authority usually asserted by the chef on television and from their gastro-cultural capital exhibited during the TV programmes, in favour of a democratisation of the television experience of food.
- 13 As argued by Boni (2020), one of the main aims of the programme is being essentially obscene, namely showing on television what normally remains in the backstage, as framed by Baudrillard (1987)². The specificity of this strand of television programmes is exactly to make the private public, to show what in everyday life should not be “staged”. Such an unveiling of the backstage clearly regards the life of men and the very masculine corporeality. The chef is thus “naked” in several senses: in the first episode of *The Naked Chef*, after unclothing from his traditional chef uniform of a French restaurant, Oliver goes to his apartment where he lives as a single. Dressed in a typical Brit-pop outfit, consistently with the new lad style³, he cooks a “naked” dish - an Italian recipe, “simple”, “traditional”, “democratic” (Boni 2020) -, that is a dish without all the sophisticated ornaments of the French cuisine.
- 14 According to Leer, this de-chefisation of the male in the kitchen on television - inaugurated by Jamie Oliver, but then interpreted by several other food television personalities - would represent a “a reconstruction of a traditional gendered order” (2016 : 86), restoring a more assertive masculinity.
- 15 Leer claims that this return to order is expressed in four new tendencies of the food television in its masculine version: beside the de-chefisation, the second would show the chef in the new role of moral entrepreneur, the third would stage him as the central character of a revitalisation of the national myth, while the last would be characterised by the idea of cooking as a model of masculine escapism. In the career of Chef Rubio on the Italian food television, we can find all the tendencies of the restoration suggested by Leer. In particular, in the format called *Unti e bisunti* (Greasy and very greasy), Chef Rubio challenges street food cooks, he eats with his hands, he visits food markets, he talks about the different cuts in meat butchering, and about local cuisine. Adopting a very confidential tone, he assumes the role of moral entrepreneur, talking about local food traditions. Following the typical forms of masculine escapism, Chef Rubio plunges in competitions in homosocial situations, far from any everyday life context or any female presence. And he teaches to recover the national myth through what Francesco Buscemi (2014) calls “gastro-diplomacy”: the myth of national identity is reconquered thanks to an “everyday nationalism” (Billig 1995; Ichijo & Ranta 2016) made of typical recipes of the tradition.

- 16 Chef Rubio is the main character also in another format called *Camionisti in trattoria* (Truckers at the tavern), where we find the same kind of setting - very informal, homosocial -, the presence of traditional cuisine and, most important, the masculine escapism. This latter is crucial for another sub-format of the food TV: the travelogue (Boni 2020). Some of the tendencies pointed out by Leer can be applied to the narratives produced by the Italian politician Matteo Salvini in his gastro-posts. As we will see, this type of narrative takes form thanks to the unveiling of the backstage, the blurring of the division between private and public spheres - an obscenity which was already specific of the television as a medium, but has been amplified and modified by the features of the food porn media.

Doing and redoing masculinity

- 17 The analytical perspective of the performed masculinity in the food context is based on the concept of “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman 1987), where the idea is that gender is a practice constantly enacted through specific social relations (Connell 2005; West & Fenstermaker 1995). According to this perspective, gender is not a stable ontological property of individuals, but on the contrary is “a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (West & Zimmerman 1987: 125). This means that the study of gender must be directed towards the practices producing it, that is towards “interactional work involved in being a gendered person in society” (West & Zimmerman 1987: 127). Many of the scholars who have studied the relation between gender and food have adopted the theoretical perspective proposed by West and Zimmerman (1987), considering gender as a continuous practical realisation (Connell 2005).
- 18 This perspective is particularly useful in the study of the relation of men with food, because it claims that behaviours develop thanks to social performances, cultural scripts (Danzinger 1997) and discursive repertoires.
- 19 The gendering of food is thus one of the mechanisms implemented to declare or strengthen the belonging to what is called the hegemonic masculinity. Food practices help men to confirm and adhere to the traditional manly taste, thus allowing the construction of strong masculine identities and relations (Newcombe *et al.* 2012). In several cultures, for instance, the consumption of alcoholic drinks is a marker of masculinity (Roos *et al.* 2001). And in general men are supposed to be less likely than women to avoid the consumption of fat foods, to eat dietary fibres and fruits or to follow a diet (Wardle *et al.* 2004). On the contrary, “real men” are pushed to consume more proteins (Levi *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, it is commonly believed that red meat - with its high content in proteins and its bloody appearance - should be for men a totem of virility and strength (Rozin *et al.* 2012). It should not surprise then that in a narrative about the crisis of masculinity, the food porn media would adopt these discourse repertoires to activate the staging of a certain type of masculinity for restoring a traditional gender order. At the end of his article, Leer writes:

“with the shaping of TV chefs as “moral entrepreneurs”, food activism closely relates to a reconstruction of a traditional gendered order. With the revitalisation of gastro-national myths, bonding with old-fashioned white masculinity is an important component in the host’s masculinity performance. In the masculine cooking-as-escapism tendency, masculinity is constructed around a counter-cuisine space, where cooking offers men a playful break from the demands of a gender-

equal society. (...) The four tendencies that subsequently emerge appear to emphasise that cooking can be a way to get in touch with various forms of solid masculinity – in other words, a way to formulate counter discourses to the official gender-equal discourses” (2016 : 87).

- 20 For Leer, therefore, the food media has increasingly become “a platform for the revitalisation of traditional masculinity discourses and for a backlash against feminist discourses” (Leer 2016 : 86). For Susan Faludi (1992), a gender backlash⁴ is the backwash that cyclically pulls back women’s progress: the questioning of gender hierarchies in fact is not a linear process, but rather a path where steps forward are followed by stops, steps back, leaps forward or setbacks taking to the starting point. As suggested by Chiara Volpato (2013), for restoring the gender order it is often necessary to activate a process of “reparation of masculinity”. Such a symbolic reparation may be enacted thanks to the use of various repertoires and media. Susan Jeffords (1989) has written about it explaining the process of “re-masculinization” of the American public discourse at the end of the Vietnam war, analysing the symbolic reparation of masculinity in war novels and movies⁵. The return of traditional models of masculinity in food porn media is part of this process of reparation. The restoration of the gender order taking place in the food porn media is actually part of a much larger process, which in the course of several years, has produced the narratives of the crisis of masculinity (Ciccone 2019), of the risk of a “fatherless society”, and of the feminization of society (Petti & Stagi 2015). Over time, the supposed crisis of masculinity - framed as a result of the success of feminism (Badinter 1993) - has brought the birth of several male revanchist movements. At first, we had the mythopoeic movements, whose main goal was to restore the ancient power and the naturalness of a “true masculinity”. During the last decade, we can find the phenomenon of the “manosphere”: a virtual community made up of forums, websites and blogs where almost only men meet to discuss gender relations in general, and the meaning of masculinity in particular. The most well-known groups – Pick Up Artist, Red Pill or Incels (Ging 2019) – adopt the rhetoric of the “crisis of masculinity” to free men from the supposed “female domination”.
- 21 Susan Faludi, who introduced the term of backlash to talk about the birth of such male movements, has been writing about that public “reparation” already proposed by Jeffords. In *The Terror Dream* (2008), she analyses the male chauvinist reactions that emerged in the American culture after the attacks of 9/11: the obsession with terrorism would have made re-emerge a misogynist and puritan patriotism, based exactly on the “reparation” of the traditional sex-gender system (see also Volpato 2013). Salzman et al. (2006) have proposed a similar thesis about how a model of masculinity of a traditional type may re-emerge in critical times; they refer to the “Resurgent Angry Macho Men”. And very angry are also the men who Michael Kimmel has interviewed for his book *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (2013): neo-Nazis, activists for fathers’ rights, members of militias, hooligans, homophobes, ultra-conservative Christians – all men who feel menaced by the changes in the socio-economic status quo and by the questioning of the “natural” and limitless male rights. These “angry men” feel rancour against women, migrants, blacks, gays, and urban elites. The web is where they meet, they fraternise, and they organise. In this context, the discourse of the fatherless society emerges - reflexively reinforcing other similar discourses – in which the narrative takes the tone of a nostalgic - or even plainly reactionary – rhetoric about the forced exemption of the fatherly authority, as one of

the main causes of contemporary social problems (Petti & Stagi 2015). The discourse about the fatherless society is constructed thanks to the reference to ancestral and cultural categories: the use of psycho-analytical, religious or mythological concepts permits to reactivate all the cultural devices incorporated by the individuals in the course of the educational and socialization processes (Petti & Stagi 2015).

- 22 In the times of food porn media, a discourse on national identity, known as gastro-nationalism, is produced in addition to the staging of a traditional masculinity. The gastro-nationalist perspective investigates the political relation between food and the construction of national identities. The focus on food as a national heritage reinforces the geographical and cultural borders, stressing the distinctions (Bourdieu, 1979). Therefore, gastro-nationalism reflects and interacts with the political links connecting the nationalist projects to the food cultures at local level, translating the symbolic and material menaces to the traditional food practices of a country in an assault to its cultural heritage (DeSoucey 2010).

God, Country, Family

- 23 The anthropologist Marino Niola recently wrote – mentioning Nietzsche – that Matteo Salvini is creating for himself a public image of a “common superman” (2019). In this context it would probably be more relevant to refer to popular culture and its heroes rather than to philosophy. Salvini presents himself in the everyday life posts on Facebook or Instagram as Clark Kent, ready to suddenly become Superman (or “the Captain”, as his supporters call him) whenever there is a new menace to “our Western” values and interests: legal and illegal immigration, gay rights, abortion, secularism, the European Union. In a few years, Salvini has been able to transform the regionalist and independentist movement of the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) in a national party (*Lega per Salvini Premier*), obtaining 34,3% of the votes at the last European elections in 2019 and thus becoming the first Italian party. This has been possible thanks also to an international context dominated by Trump and to Salvini’s ties with nationalist or sovereignist movements, parties and governments all over Europe, and especially with Putin’s Russia. The new *Lega* is a populist party based on the direct relationship between the leader and his supporters, with little contribution by the other politicians or a classical party-machine – a direct link made possible by “the Beast”, Salvini’s algorithmic software managed by his spin-doctors. With the help of hundreds of militants and supporters, the algorithm is able to make the leader visible to millions of Italians every day, on the most popular subject of that day, through a very efficient and refined system of rebounds of images and contents from the territory and TV programmes to the web.
- 24 In the last years, especially during the electoral tours for the local elections from northern to southern Italy, Salvini has constantly invoked the protection of the Holy Virgin and Saints, he has displayed and kissed religious symbols like crosses and rosaries⁶ in front of his political supporters, and he has stressed the importance of the protection of Christianity against the invasion of non-Christians, and especially of Muslims. The historical Fascist motto, “*God, Country, Family*”, has lately become popular among international Pro-family movements in Europe, Italy included. These movements have found their great enemy in what they call the “gender theory”. The first movement of this kind was born in France in the early 2010s, in traditionalist

Catholic circles, and then expanded all over Europe to fight in favour of the “natural” family – formed by a male father, a female mother and as many children as possible – against the menaces of the “gender” culture propagated by the LGBT+ movements. These pro-family movements have progressively absorbed the older pro-life, anti-abortion groups, and in the less favourable context represented by pope Francis pontificate, they have abandoned a strategy of direct pressure on the Italian Catholic church, assuming instead a more anthropological and pre-political stance (Prearo 2020) that has allowed them to open up to traditionalist groups in other Christian confessions⁷. In March 2019 at the *World Congress of Families* in Verona (Italy), the major event of the new “populist religion” which had the support of several European right-wing governments, the then-Italian Minister for Interior Salvini said: “as a minister, as a man, as a daddy, I am fighting and I will fight to be sure that Italy and Europe will return to put at the centre the woman, the man, the child, so that this continent may have a future” (Prearo 2020 : 263).

Matteo Salvini’s food porn aesthetics

- 25 To reinforce his reactionary message, Salvini emphasises traits that are usually ascribed to the Italian traditional masculinity. The overarching aim is to show his ability to embody the national tradition, proving to be a suitable leader for its “guardians”. Indeed, the very notion of tradition is a compelling symbolic tool to stimulate sovereignist feelings and claims. A series of cultural practices (such as for instance religious rites or food preparations and recipes) can be framed as traditional, and through this “invention” (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), they are naturalised as crucial components of specific identities and belongings. As historians Capatti & Montanari (2005) argue, the enhancement of food tradition has played a crucial role in the construction of the Italian national identity. After the unification in the second half of the 19th Century, the idea of “Italy as a unity” was prompted with particular effectiveness by the references to national gastronomic heritage.
- 26 Consistently, the political communication in Italy has often integrated references to food and conviviality, aiming to become more popular, to appeal to as many electors as possible. In the collective imaginary, being “Italian” still means being aware of the national food heritage. Food is thus considered as a central component of the cultural construction on “Italianicity” (Barthes 1957; Sassatelli 2019). Consequently, a traditional Italian male is hardly representable without including food elements in his depiction. Through food porn, thus Salvini finds a powerful means of representation for his political stance. Salvini’s gastro-posts confirm his ability to embody the Italian traditional masculinity, and symbolically fill the gap between the political realm and the supposed everyday experience of the common man. Used as a rhetorical device to enable a deep identification with the political leader’s attitudes, lifestyle, and taste, Salvini’s food porn is a powerful tool for populist propaganda. Through the constant exposition of his public and private life, as well as of the materiality of his body, the pics posted by Salvini on social networks overlap the public and private spheres, fostering a sense of proximity to the audience who gets the illusion to participate in his life.
- 27 To pursue the double-faced representation of the political leader committed to the safeguard of the nation on the one hand, and of the authentic everyman in touch with

the problems faced by common people on the other, Salvini's food porn style reproduces a specific aesthetics, focusing on some core topics. In terms of visual style, the food porn pics posted by Salvini strongly differ from the most established patterns of visual representation of food on social networks. Especially at the early stages of the diffusion of food porn practices, the images of food circulating online often reproduced a spectacularised and glamour representation of the recipes. As "evidence" of the individual competence needed to participate in the mainstream discourse about food, the food porn pics usually emphasised the aesthetic components of a dish, such as its *mise-en-place*, to show the educated taste of the producer. Against the background of the democratisation of the access to the hegemonic narrative on food through the new media, this kind of food porn aims to celebrate – or attempts to emulate – the professional style in representing food, enhancing immaterial dimensions like colours, shapes and composition of the dish at the detriment of the attention for its materiality and taste. Even at a first glance, Salvini's food porn pics counter these dominant food representations, clearly rejecting their sophistication. His gastro-posts look hardly "instagrammable", as they are characterised by over-dressed meals dripping out of the plate, greasy dishes and cutlery, half-eaten food - in addition to shots that are not on focus and recurrent close-ups of his mouth while biting. Nevertheless, it is precisely through this non-conventional style that the food porn production by Salvini amplifies his populist message. It works as a demonstration of his authenticity, and of the affinity with his electors, with whom he fights against the left-wing élites, and their sophisticated approach to culture, lifestyle and taste. Also, it resonates with the process of de-chefisation described by Leer (2016) as a "restoration of the order" that re-establishes the traditional masculinity, failed by too fancy and less manly superstar chefs.

- 28 Through his everyday life food representations, Salvini becomes no longer a politician who communicates with common people from a higher position, but rather a common man who shares everybody's hunger, and pragmatically rejects the "intellectual" and "classy" taste for sophisticated or healthy food. The focus on his everyday life and related kinds of food (as, for instance, the dishes he puts on the table for his children, as a perfect "family-guy"), together with the amateur quality of the posted images, frames Salvini's food porn as an expression of "lo-fi politics" (Barile & Vagni 2019) which is meant to stimulate the illusion of participation by its audience. This is consistent with "a strategy for the survival of the political brand in a changed media ecosystem, in which it is not enough to massively promote one's own image, but it is necessary to re-create spaces of 'disintermediated' confrontation, requiring the active participation of the public" (Barile & Vagni 2019 : 81).

FIGURE 1-4: Examples of Salvin's lo-fi gastro-posts.



1-Chicken and melted cheese for my children. The lunch is served!



2. Enjoy pappa al pomodoro! [typical recipe from Tuscany]



3. Snack!



4. It's 10:30 pm, on the hills over Cesena [small Northern town] finally homemade tagliatelle with granny ragù!

- 29 The lo-fi aesthetics shapes the whole production of Salvini's food porn, which focuses on two main topics. A consistent share of his gastro-posts aims to represent his hunger as a core trait of the model of traditional masculinity embodied by Salvini. The

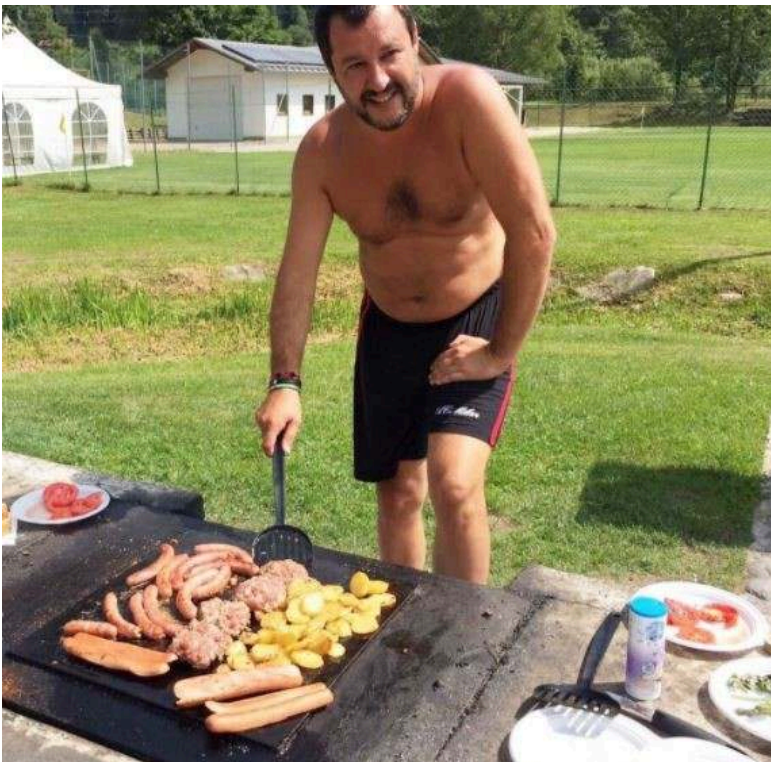
expression of his crave for high-caloric food is here understood as a confirmation of the assumed “right” appetites of the straight male. The subjects usually chosen by Salvini to build such representation are particularly nourishing Italian recipes (e.g., fried calzone) presented in abundant (and often greasy) portions. To reinforce the symbolical adherence to traditional masculinity, these food representations are often paired by Salvini with textual comments such as *“Will you still love me even if I get fat?”*, through which he makes fun of the health fanatics, stressing a clear distinction between his manly hunger and the obsessive – and again intellectual, classy and “feminine” – attention for diet ascribed as a typical trait of subordinate masculinities (Connell 2005), such as the so-called “new men” and “metrosexual” ones. The resistance against the tyranny of diet regimes is here framed also as a form of nostalgic remembrance of a supposed past when, especially for men, “eating was straightforward [...] and without anxiety or uncertainty” (Gough 2007). The kind of masculinity performed by Salvini aims to diverge from these stereotypical masculinities spread by mainstream media, where the “new men are slightly feminized men who take care of their families, and are more focused on the expressive/emotive sphere rather than the rational one” (Boni 2020 : 67), and the metrosexuals “are males particularly concerned with their look and their beauty care, narcissist and accustomed to a metropolitan consumption style” (Boni 2020 : 67).

- 30 As a further enhancement of this message, Salvini often shares images where he is committed to allegedly “virile” cooking activities such as grills and barbecues. As argued by Domaneschi (2020), grills and barbecues are elements of material culture which can frame a context where a certain masculinity “is done” and reinforced. In addition, in these pics Salvini is often shirtless, emphasising in this way the informal and private character of the photos, and implicitly proving through the exposition of his pudgy body, his will to resist to the cultural pressure towards the healthy, sophisticated fit body of metrosexuals or health fanatics “new men”. What is meant to show is thus the authenticity and spontaneity of the common man, whose appetites are stronger than the processes of feminization who are represented by right-wing and populist discourses as a pervasive force threatening the “right to be a man”.

Figure 5-8: Examples of Salvini's gastro-post focused on resistance to diet, on manly hunger, and on BBQ.



5. But if they send me a cannolo [Sicilian treat] from Palermo, how can I manage to be on a diet?



6. Looking forward to grilling Renzi [his main competitor in national elections and former Prime Minister from Democratic Party]



7. A dietary and light snack at midnight: fried tomatoes, onions and ham, goodnight.



8. A light lunch from Sardinia: gnocchi with mushrooms, sausage, saffron and I have added pecorino cheese. Will you still love me even if I get fat?

- 31 Another recurrent topic in Salvini's gastro-posts is the celebration of Italian localities through the exhibition of typical food products. The high number of pics displaying

fruits and vegetables from specialised cultivations of different areas, as well as traditional recipes consumed on site accompanied by comments emphasising the excellence of different Italian foods, responds to a specific rhetoric purpose. Indeed, as the leader of the former secessionist party Lega Nord, after his victory in the national elections with Lega in 2018, Salvini needed to re-frame his image as the leader of the whole nation. Consequently, he made several official visits in Southern Italy, to “revise” his former image of Northern secessionist and reinforce the consent towards his party. To build a new and positive relation with the Southern electorate, the enhancement of local food products is thus used as a rhetorical device that celebrates traditions, communities and local knowledge, which until then, had been blamed by Salvini and *Lega Nord*⁸. Again, Leer’s reading about the process of de-chefisation (2016) fits Salvini’s food porn production too in its role as instrument of revitalisation of the national myth.

- 32 The symbolic function of this kind of posts does not only fit political purposes at the national level. It also works as a tool for rebranding Italian sovereignty and potential autarchy against the supposed interference of EU regulations. Indeed, as for many other populist and right-wing parties across Europe, the anti-EU discourse represents a core topic for the Lega party. The reference to food issues is thus taken as an opportunity to put emphasis on the supposed struggle of national identities and peculiarities against the homogenizing effect of EU regulation, since the political negotiations on the acknowledgment of protected foods and recipes (e.g., DOP, DOC products) resonates with the gastro-nationalist discourse (DeSoucey, 2010).
- 33 Figure 9-12: Examples of Salvini’s gastro-posts about Italian food and local food specialities.



9. What a smell! You must ALWAYS eat and drink Italian, we do not have anything to envy to anybody!



10. Here in Calabria [Southern region] tastes are real!



11. Strawberries from Maletto in Sicily, let's buy and eat Italian food only!



12. Good morning with figs from Campania [Southern region]

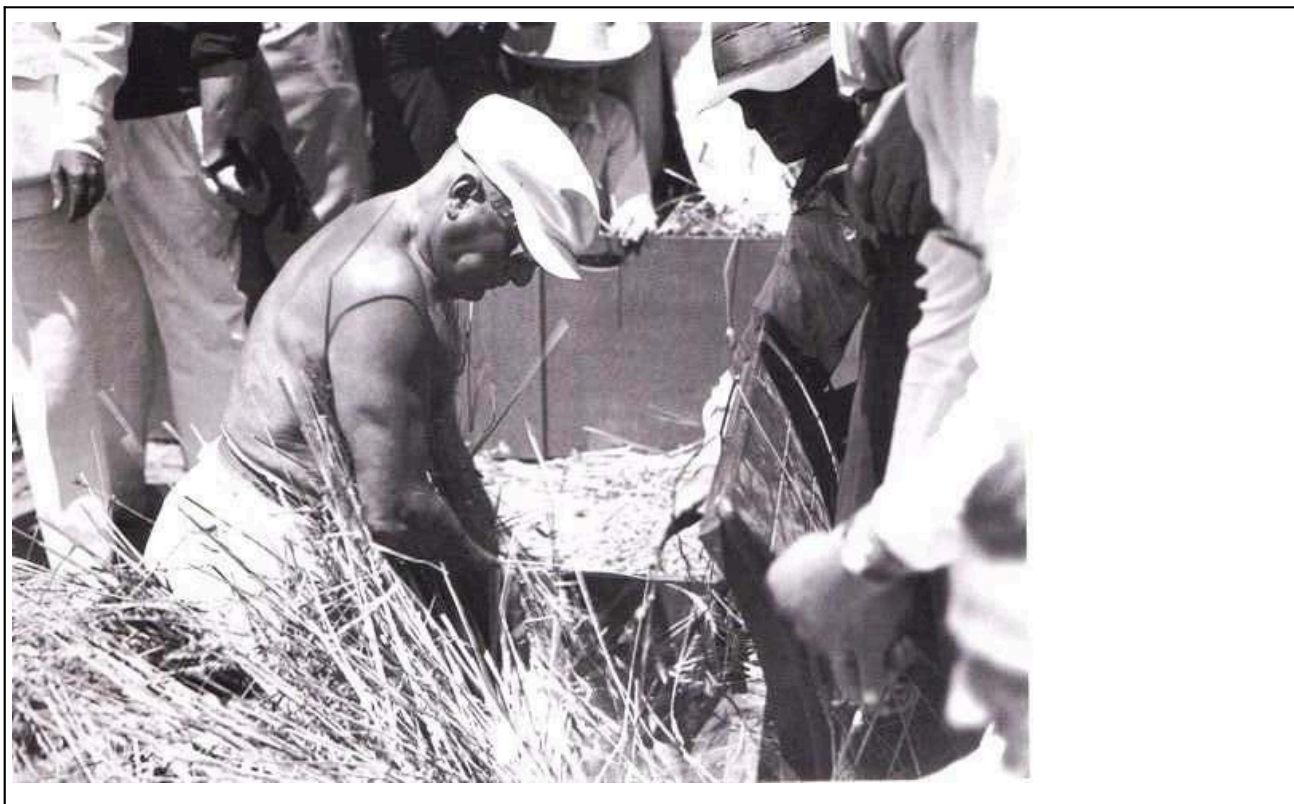
Conclusions

- 34 In Italy, the relationship between food and politics has a long and complex history. In politics, food has been used for forging and strengthening ideals, for obtaining popular consensus, for giving shape to the national identity, and for many other goals. Television channels have often collaborated in these symbolic enterprises: at first with the TV programmes about food and the restoration of traditions, useful for the creation of a national identity; then with the lifestyle formats to educate on a “correct” food consumption; and finally with 'makeover television' about diets, interpreted as technologies of the self to promote a “good citizenship”. The media driven hyper-production of narratives about food has induced aestheticizing tendencies and a progressive domestication of the audiences to food porn. And now, in the age of food porn media, the food images are used as a grammar to talk about one’s taste, to show one’s positioning as consumer, to certify specific cultural and political memberships.
- 35 Despite all the changes intervened in the course of time, food is still one of the most significant frameworks for the reproduction of gender roles and confinements. In the “doing gender” perspective, food practices represented on media are an effective instrument to stage various repertoires of masculinity and femininity. With the recent spectacularization of food, some chefs have become true icons, performing roles characterized by a super-emphasized - and sometimes even almost grotesque - masculinity. Next to these superstar elitist chefs, other male characters have appeared in the food porn media, producing counter-narratives as well. The emergence of these different media personalities may be interpreted as a symbolic reparation of a masculinity that, for years, has been said to be in deep crisis. The narrative about the

crisis of masculinity feeds a need for a backlash; it is part of a larger narrative about the urgency of the restoration of the traditional gender order, to return to a larger social order. This kind of rhetoric is adopted by some populist movements – in Italy those invoking the centrality of “God, Country and Family” – to legitimise sovereignist and nationalist claims.

- 36 In Italy, the Lega political party, once regionalist and Northern independentist, has now assumed populist, sovereignist and nationalist positions. Subsequently, its leader, Matteo Salvini, became interested in gaining the consensus of the people of Southern Italy as well – people who in the past were represented as enemies and inferiors by the propaganda of his party, the Lega Nord (Northern League). To gain the support of electors in Centre and Southern Italy, Salvini often creates gastro-posts celebrating the cuisine and food typical of those areas of the country. Generally speaking, the food porn used by Salvini is based on gastro-nationalism: to enhance the nationalist sentiments, the gastro-nationalist rhetoric uses food as a metaphor of national belonging, transforming the food tradition and the authenticity of products and recipes in issues of political identity. From this point of view, the choice to eat in an Italian style and to consume “made in Italy” products becomes significant in the support of sovereignist and nationalist positions. By his gastro-posts, Salvini wants to appear as a man coming from the common folk, but most importantly he wants to play a role characterised by a traditional masculinity. The analysis of Salvini’s gastro-posts has shown that some tendencies - identified by Jonatan Leer (2016) - about the models of masculinity present in food TV, may be found in other programmes of the food porn media: as for instance the de-chefisation, the reconstruction of national myths, and escapism.
- 37 Furthermore, the emphasis on Salvini’s overweight body helps to speak about a laddish masculinity, very far from the refined aesthetics of the metrosexual masculine repertoires. The show of Salvini’s body, often naked, working at the barbecue or eating in open spaces, reminds of the macho aesthetics of Benito Mussolini, who liked to be photographed and filmed shirtless while working hard in the fields, to represent and embody the ideal of the “Father of the Country”. Both constitute the repurposing of hegemonic masculinities: the first for a society of production, the second for a society of consumption.

Figure 13



Fascist propaganda pic of Mussolini at work in the fields

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NOTES

1. With the notions of “exaggerated masculinity” and “caricature of masculinity” we refer to models of staged masculinity that emphasise its authoritarian and smug traits (Ciccone 2019) to adhere to the features ascribed to hegemon masculinity (Connell 2005).
2. According to Baudrillard (1987), under the “spotlights” of information there are no more staging, no more dramaturgy and illusion, thus everything ends to be immediately visible and, consequently, “obscene”.
3. For “new lad” we mean a repurposing of the traditional hegemonic male model, characterized by behaviours considered virile: informal clothing, everyday life language and a general lack of seriousness (Boni 2020).
4. In the 1950s and 1960s the term backlash was used in the United States to describe the political reaction against the integration of blacks in American society.
5. The most famous example is Rambo, a Vietnam war veteran – very macho and hyper-muscular – who rights the wrongs and gets justice done.
6. According to Nicola Morra, President of the parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission, kissing the rosary means also recognising the power of the ‘ndrangheta, the most powerful Italian criminal organisation, especially if this is done in Calabria, the region where the organisation was born, or in Lombardy where it manages most of its business (Ilgiornale.it – 20.08.2019).
7. For an overview of the anti-gender movements at European level, see Kuhar & Paternotte (2017).
8. About this topic, a few years ago, a video where Salvini sang a kind of hooligan refrain “*Can you smell how they stink? Even dogs run away... Neapolitans are coming*” got viral. See <https://video.repubblica.it/politica/quando-salvini-cantava-senti-che-puzza-arrivano-i-napoletani/291156/291766>.

ABSTRACTS

As a crucial component of « Italianicity », food is a common topic in the political discourse in Italy. The diffusion of the grammars and practices of food porn media offer new possibilities for political communication: in Italy, it's especially the sovereignist and populist parties who use such a language. In this article we will focus on the application of food porn as a gastro-nationalist device by Matteo Salvini, leader of the right-wing party Lega. In Salvini's specific aesthetics of food porn, we can detect a « lo-fi » strategy - based on the counter-position with « high cuisine » -, which resonates with the rejection of the intellectual elites' attitudes and know-how. Furthermore, with his food porn production, Salvini aims to celebrate the material and pragmatic elements typically associated with the traditional masculinity supported by the « anti-gender » movements in Italy and elsewhere. Thanks to the representation of food and meals, Salvini thus proposes an image of himself as a typical Italian male, ready to defend the borders of nation, tradition and gender.

En tant que composante essentielle de l'« italianité », la nourriture est un argument commun dans les discours politiques en Italie. La diffusion de grammaires et pratiques du *food porn* dans les médias offrent de nouvelles possibilités à la communication politique : en Italie ce sont surtout les partis souverainistes et populistes qui utilisent ce langage. Dans cet article nous allons focaliser l'attention sur les applications du *food porn* en tant que dispositif *gastro-nationaliste* de la part de Matteo Salvini, leader du parti de droite Lega. Dans l'esthétique spécifique du *food porn* de Salvini nous retrouvons une stratégie « lo-fi » – basée sur une contre-proposition avec la haute cuisine – qui fait écho au refus des attitudes et savoir-faire des élites intellectuelles. Avec sa production de *food porn*, Salvini veut, entre autres, célébrer des éléments matériels et pragmatiques qui sont normalement associés à la masculinité traditionnelle, soutenu par les mouvements « anti-genre » en Italie et ailleurs. Grâce à la représentation de nourriture et de repas, Salvini propose ainsi une image de lui-même comme homme italien typique, prêt à défendre les frontières de la nation, de la tradition et du genre.

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Mots-clés: food porn, gastro-nationalisme, masculinité traditionnelle, Salvini

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Too spicy for the French

Medical descriptions of sexuality, masculinity and spices in the colonial Maghreb

Trop pimenté pour les français ; Descriptions médicales de la sexualité, de la masculinité et des épices au Maghreb colonial

Nina S. Studer

Introduction

- 1 Descriptions of local food form an integral part of settler memoirs and French accounts of travels through the colonial Maghreb, and introduced the notion of a novel, “exotic” cuisine to 19th and early 20th century readers in the *Métropole*. North African dishes were usually described as either lacking something or including something that somehow “spoiled” it for French tastes. The journalist and historian François Bournand, for example, described a feast in Tunisia that he had been invited to: “[...] the spicy dishes and the lack of cleanliness of the culinary preparations among the natives have always, despite the habit [i.e., his familiarity with life in Tunisia], inspired an invincible repugnance in me, which has never allowed me to eat much either among the Muslims or among the Israelites [...]” (Bournand 1893: 325f.).¹ Besides the lack of cleanliness, it was, as indicated by Bournand, primarily spiciness that ruined Maghrebi cuisine for the French in this time period.
- 2 For the French, most spices were historically associated with a specific kind of foreignness: As the food historian Andrew Dalby set forth in his book “Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices”, spices were traditionally associated with hot and arid regions (Dalby 2000: 123). In the hot and arid Maghreb, many of the spices that French authors of the 19th and early 20th centuries encountered had once been readily used by French cooks, as, between the 12th and the 17th centuries, Europe’s consumption of spices had been significant. In the 17th century, however, spices fell out of fashion in France. By the time of the military conquest of Algeria in the mid-19th century, these spices had become less common in most of Europe.² Consequently, the popular landscape of spices in the Maghreb seemed very foreign to French observers. In a travel

account, for example, Victor Cambon described a typical Maghrebi market by stating that the colonised North Africans tried to interest Europeans in “the food that they are trying to sell”, which, according to Cambon consisted of animals and “implausible spices and condiments” (Cambon 1885: 61f.). While Maghrebi food was seasoned with a variety of spices that had once been popular in France, spiciness came, according to most of the colonial sources, from chillis (Boutineau & Fray 1890: 44).³

- 3 Dishes prepared with chilli and Cambon’s “implausible spices and condiments” were not usually agreeable to the French, as they were seen to distort the “natural” taste of food and were often pronounced as unappetising. In an undated travel report on the Maghreb, published around the late 1890s, Marius Bernard described a feast that he was offered in Morocco, which consisted of “the inevitable couscous”, and “the parade of all the culinary abominations that are prepared in Morocco: fish from Sebou, poisoned with pharmaceutical seasonings”, as well as poultry cooked with sugar, lamb with white honey and almonds, saffron pigeon, spicy mutton sausages, and, finally, various desserts (Bernard [n.d.]: 339f.). None of which agreed with Bernard.
- 4 This distaste for these traditional Maghrebi “culinary abominations” expressed in many of the colonial publications was explained through the unwelcome addition of spices. French authors believed that North Africans consumed unreasonable amounts of spices and that this had consequences on their bodies. This was based on contemporary theories claiming that an abuse of spices could lead to specific forms of intoxication and even to physical dependency (Celle 1848: 234f.; Marit, 1862: 332). The *Bulletin de l’Académie Nationale de Médecine*, for example, listed in a 1907 discussion on alcoholism various other addictions, among them “aromatism, coffeeism, teaism, [and] the abuse of condiments” (Anonymous 1907: 141). This notion of spice abuse can be found in a variety of French publications specifically discussing the consumption of the colonised, for instance a book on plants in Algeria by the French botanist Jules-Aimé Battandier included an entry on “chilli”, in which he stated: “The natives make great abuse of it” (Battandier 1900: 42).
- 5 Spices were not only believed to create dependencies but also to augment the sexuality of Maghrebi men, something that many colonial authors feared as, to them, the sexuality of colonised men already seemed immoderate. “The only inconvenience that one could blame these condiments for, pepper in particular, is perhaps that they stimulate the reproductive apparatus, already so excitable in the Arab, too much”, claimed the French physician Joseph-Marie-Fernand Lafitte in a description of spices in Tunisia (Lafitte 1892: 95).
- 6 This article analyses the role that spices played in colonial accounts of everyday life in the Maghreb and contextualises the links that French authors like Lafitte made between spices, masculinity, and sexuality. This article will first give an overview of French reports on the overall frugal and sober lifestyle of the colonised Muslims in the Maghreb, followed by an analysis of descriptions of widespread excessive consumption of spices among the colonised, as well as a reference to French colonial voices that diverged from this common narrative. This idea of an excessive use of spices in Maghrebi cuisine will be contrasted with the spice consumption of French people in the same time period. In the next section, the belief that “civilised” European stomachs were unsuited to spicy Maghrebi food will be contextualised. In a final section, the supposed links between the excessive consumption of spices and an exaggerated libido among the colonised will be examined.

Narratives of scarcity and excess

- 7 North Africans were believed by the French to have simple clothes, follow simple daily routines and be content with small amounts of simple food: water, *laban* (i.e. fermented milk), tea or coffee, dates and dried fruit, bread, rice and mostly vegetarian couscous were described as making up the vast majority of their diets (Montezon 1851: 22; Vignon 1893: 58; Brault 1905: 175f.). According to Salvatore Furnari's article on the medical situation in Algeria, for example, couscous and *laban* were "the imperishable symbol of the customs of these peoples; the most characteristic emblem of their simple tastes and excessive sobriety" (Furnari 1845: 10).
- 8 While there were, of course, vast differences in the eating habits of the different classes of the colonised Muslims of the Maghreb, as well as clear regional variances in the preparation of dishes, some colonial reports nevertheless painted a very homogenous picture. Food in the Algerian South was "absolutely uniform; all classes of society consume an almost identical menu, at all meals, for life" according to Jean-Claude Pouget's medical dissertation. This uniform menu consisted of a soup "that is complemented among the more affluent with occasional pieces of meat and even poultry", "the inevitable couscous", bread and dates (Pouget 1956: 20). While some of the French authors differentiated between the limited access of the working classes to food and the opulent cuisine of the elites among the colonised (Montezon 1851: 22f.), others did not seem to understand that the frugal, mostly vegetarian lifestyle that so many of the colonised led, was due to poverty not choice.
- 9 Most of the French authors writing on everyday life in the colonial Maghreb believed that this hard, simple life was interrupted by moments of gluttony (Vignon 1893: 365).⁴ Both the frugality and sobriety of the colonised and these moments of excess – on religious holidays – were framed as being disproportionate, and Muslims, framed as immoderate by nature, were capable only of alternating between these two extremes.⁵ Yet there were authors who suggested that while the food that North Africans consumed every day was simple, they liked eating large amounts of it. Gaston Bonnefont, for example, claimed in an account of his travels through Algeria that "A few bites [of couscous] are enough of a meal for a European. The Arab, despite his habits of sobriety, swallows several pounds of it without batting an eyelid" (Bonnefont 1888: 139). This ability to consume large amounts of food in a short period of time – allegedly more than a European could have consumed⁶ – seems to have confused some colonial authors. Reporting in 1889 about a geography conference on Tunisia, geographer Jules Desfontaines described his surprise at the sheer quantity of food his Tunisian travelling companions had consumed during a feast: "Now is the time to wonder how these Arabs, of unprecedented sobriety, who usually know how to be content with the most basic ration, can, on occasion, swallow prodigious quantities of food without discomfort. Their stomachs, under the influence of a prolonged frugal diet, should have retracted and [should be] unable to relax enough to receive and properly digest masses of food." Desfontaines suggested that only a biological difference in the make-up of stomachs could explain what he and others had observed: "These stomachs, which are essentially rubber, obviously form a special variety [of stomachs]" (Desfontaines 1889: 27f.).

“Spiced to excess”

- 10 In the 14th and 15th centuries, French aristocratic kitchens had used a wide variety of spices in large quantities (Birlouez 2012: 76). Historian Paul Freedman suggested that the taste of many European medieval dishes differed strongly from contemporary European food and that it might have been close to upper class cuisine in the Middle East and North Africa in the 20th and 21st centuries (Freedman 2015: 48). In France, this fondness for spices was reframed reproachfully as cuisines evolved in the 17th century, when more “natural” flavours became popular (Wright 2007: 42). By the 18th century, the copious use of spices had mostly disappeared from French menus.
- 11 The 19th century French travel authors and medical experts describing the landscape of spices in the colonial Maghreb had consequently grown up believing a lack of spices to be natural, modern and elegant.⁷ Contact with Maghrebi eating habits consequently came as somewhat of a culture shock, in which the spice consumption of the Maghrebi colonised was framed as excessive. This assessment was almost uniform among the French colonial authors, with few exceptions. The physician Amédée Maurin was one, explaining in a travel account that the food in Algeria was spicy but not more so than dishes prepared by “certain peoples of southern Europe” (Maurin 1873: 101f.).⁸
- 12 However, the overall impression of French authors in the 19th and early 20th centuries was that Maghrebi cuisine was unreasonably spiced. A doctor Bernard, for example, described Algerian *marga*,⁹ the traditional sauce poured over a couscous, as “spiced to excess” (Bernard 1887 : 142)¹⁰ and Charles Lallemand exclaimed that, while a Tunisian soup with vermicelli was “very decent”, it was also “spicy according to the formula of the Arab culinary art, that is to say with an abundance of spices to revive a dead person” (Lallemand 1892: 107).
- 13 French travel literature and medical handbooks consistently described Algerian and Tunisian food as excessively spicy (Charmetant 1875: 29; Boutineau & Fray 1890: 44; Brault 1905: 60), while Moroccan food was sometimes described as somewhat less fiery in comparison (Martinière 1919: 229f.).¹¹ Others, however, like the Algerian Mohammed Soualah, who wrote a study on the “Native Society of North Africa”, did not differentiate between the cuisines of the three Maghrebi countries or between the levels of spiciness in them. Soualah’s simple overall assessment of Maghrebi food was that “The native cuisine is strongly spiced” (Soualah 1937: Vol. 2, 215).
- 14 This perceived overconsumption of spices was believed to have consequences for the bodies of the consumers. This can be seen in the book on “Medicine and Hygiene” by the French physician Adolphe Armand, in which he warned doctors that they should be “remembering that their [the North Africans’] organs are less sensitive to stimulants than those of the latter [Europeans], because of the great use they make of aromatics and spices, and that it is therefore necessary to increase the dose of tonics and stimulants” (Armand 1859: 329). While Armand believed this insensitivity to be caused by the “great use” of “aromatics and spices”, his statement about North Africans’ organs being “less sensitive to stimulants” is also part of a wider medical narrative present in the 19th century, which framed the colonised, as “noble, healthy savage[s]”, to use a term proposed by the medical historian Michael Worboys in 1976 (Worboys 1976: 84). 19th century medical experts in the colonies often believed that the colonised were simpler and more primitive, but also physically tougher and more robust than Europeans.¹²

Unsuited for European stomachs

- 15 This presumed excess of spices spoiled Maghrebi cuisine for most of the French authors in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Colonial accounts of encounters with spicy North African food often followed the same order: descriptions of the environment, followed by a report on the menu and on the spiciness of the individual dishes, culminating in the assessment that this spicy food was unsuited to Europeans. Charles Carteron, for example, suggested in a travel account about Algeria that *marga* was “sometimes so spicy with red pepper and chilli that we seem to swallow pins” (Carteron 1866: 74). His second encounter with *marga* was no more successful: “No sooner had I tasted it, out of curiosity, when I thought I had swallowed alkali”. He left the sauce to his Algerian companion, who “devoured it by himself. Out of charity I gave him the bottle of fresh water in order to put out the fire he must have in his stomach; but he seems to have neither fire nor pain, judging by the good appetite he still shows [...]”. He went on to state: “These Arabs are a curious race of men!” For him, they were “indolent and fiery” and men “who live on nothing, are sober or excessively insatiable; real iron bodies, they resist everything” (Carteron 1866: 330f.).
- 16 Many French authors vividly described how their stomachs “rebelled” against the spicy food they were offered (Veyre 1905: 199), that the food was “indigestible for a roumi [Roman, i.e. European] stomach” (Astruc 1912: 36), and that consumers would need “a blind palate to swallow without contortions” (Bourquelot 1881: 167). Others described spicy Maghrebi sauces as “inaccessible to European palates” (Lenfant 1877: 87) and as something that “irritates delicate palates and burns the bowels of those who do not distrust it” (Reuss 1884: 96). The travel writer Paul Bourde further pushed this image in a report on an Algerian feast that he was invited to: “The meal, however, was of a terrible local flavour”, he wrote, disappointedly. According to him, all the different dishes had “only one taste: that of red chilli”. Bourde suggested that “One needs to have a triple-armoured palate in order to swallow this fire; otherwise, at the fourth bite, one admits defeat” (Bourde 1880: 222).
- 17 Sometimes, these more delicate European body parts were directly compared to those of North Africans, with the conclusion that there must have been vast biological differences between them. This can be seen in a 1901 book by E. Josset, who quoted from a letter by someone called Léon Martin. While travelling through Algeria, Martin had been invited to a feast where they were served a roast lamb, hot buttered bread, and a “mutton stew with dried fruit and a sauce seasoned with chillies. What a horrible mix! My palate rebelled against such food! But we had to put on a good countenance and swallow the spiciest foods with a calm as profound as that of the Arabs who observed us.” The finale of the feast was a couscous, which Josset could not bring himself to eat: “It is probable that my stomach bears no resemblance to that of an Arab or a Kabyle, for I have never been able to swallow this pasty flour, steamed from a kind of pot-au-feu containing water, meat, vegetables and the inevitable chilli that seasons all native dishes” (Josset 1901: 113f.).
- 18 Theoretically speaking, these colonial descriptions of North Africans being able to consume spicy food unsuited to European stomachs, did not carry any judgement on the bodies of the colonised. Yet the French understanding of Maghrebi bodies as being inherently different from European bodies – shown in their ability to eat food that was

inedible for European stomachs – was part of a broader discourse around a supposed “primitivity”, shared by all North Africans, that determined aspects of their behaviour, their characters and their bodies. While widespread throughout the colonisation of the Maghreb, the pinnacle of this can be seen, in the 1930s, in the formulation of the influential theory of a “primitive mentality”, proposed by psychiatrists of the *École d’Alger* (Porot & Sutter 1939: 226). Within this very popular framework, primitive – even if understood as stronger, more robust and, sometimes, even more virile – was usually framed as inferior, as primitivity was seen as a deviation from the medically defined “norm”, i.e. male, European bodies.

Diverging opinions

- 19 Medical handbooks for French settlers in the Maghreb usually recommended abstention from spices (Gélineau 1893: 66), as spices were believed to damage the stomach and cause intestinal issues (Postel 1883: 41f.). While describing the eating habits in Morocco the physician Maurice Gaud felt that “I must say a word about the various seasonings, of which the Moroccan native is fond and which he abuses, even [though it is] of great damage to his stomach” (Gaud 1933: 16). Yet there was also a small group of colonial authors who suggested that a controlled, moderate consumption of spices could have positive effects and help with acclimatisation. These authors believed that the colonised in the Maghreb had good reasons to eat spicy food, as spices were understood to help with digestion (Marit 1862: 331) and to stimulate the appetite, which was believed to be generally lacking in hot climates (Furnari 1848: 10; Marit 1862: 332). The majority of medical voices, however, advised caution to French travellers and settlers.
- 20 There was also a group of authors who suggested that Maghrebi food was agreeable to Europeans – not despite its spiciness, but very often because of it (Lallemand 1892: 107; La Forge 1894: 137; Daubeil 1897: 22; Martinière 1919: 229f.). Others explained that they had been able to overcome an initial distaste and had grown to like it. The French teacher Eugène Vayssettes admitted being astonished in 1859 at the food he was offered by a *caïd*¹³ in Algeria. He had enjoyed the whole meal and admitted that he not “suspected” such a “choice in the dishes, a delicacy in the preparation” among “the Arabs”: “From that day on I took a liking to this cuisine, both honeyed and spicy, which at first glance makes our delicate palates wince so much [...]” (Vayssettes 1859: 25).
- 21 Reports on French settlers and travellers becoming accustomed to spicy Maghrebi food were sometimes directly linked to theories of assimilation or to fears about French settlers in North Africa losing their French identity. In 1847, i.e. in the first phase of the colonisation of the region, Paul Dieudonné Fabar described Europeans that “went native” in Algeria. While the “most ardent converted to Islam”, “others contented themselves” with adapting Algerian clothes and of making a “considerable absorption of chilli and couscoussou [sic]” (Fabar 1847: 27). The majority of the French publications suggested, however, that French stomachs could never get used to spicy Maghrebi food,¹⁴ based on ideas of a clear biological difference between colonisers and colonised.

“There is nothing worse for an old man...”

- 22 French authors in the 19th and early 20th centuries believed both male and female North Africans to be, by nature, excessively sensual. The French physician Étienne-Paul Laurens, for example, believed there to be an exceptional frequency of sexual intercourse and masturbation among the Algerian colonised, whom he defined as people “who are particularly inclined to this” (Laurens 1919: 45). Colonial sources described male Maghrebi sexuality as being strong and omnipresent,¹⁵ as well as threatening to both local and settler women (Stoler 2002: 59; Keller 2007: 208).¹⁶ Historian Julia Clancy-Smith stated that male Muslim sexuality was “symbolized by polygamy and the harem” in colonial accounts. The mere existence of polygamy and the relative simplicity of divorce in Islam, which allowed men to have multiple sexual partners in parallel or at least throughout their lives, were, in the eyes of many colonial authors, proof of the excessive sexuality of Muslim men, who had, after all, consciously codified them into existence. Clancy-Smith further added that Algerian Muslim men were typically described as “over-sexed” by French observers (Clancy-Smith 1998: 162).
17
- 23 Many French authors also believed in the “precocious nubility” (Armand 1854: 446) of Arab women, who were believed to become “nubile” at “eight, nine or ten years” (Villot 1875: 60). Even though these colonial accounts framed these girls as victims and regretted their early loss of innocence, French authors also ascribed an innate sexual insatiability to Maghrebi women, which weakened – through overuse – the sexual drive of their husbands, who in turn had to turn to all kinds of medical and magical assistance. The French physician Lucien Leclerc referred to this female insatiability when writing about the prevalence of polygamy in Kabylia, by which he meant both a man having several wives and “consecutive” polygamy, i.e. remarriage after divorce. While polygamy was, for him, proof of the excessive sexuality of Muslim men, he believed that the equally active sexuality of Muslim women exhausted and prematurely aged Maghrebi men, whom he described as regularly inquiring about aphrodisiacs when they came into contact with European men (Leclerc 1864: 97f.).¹⁸ In Leclerc’s view, it was not the sexual needs of men that made them eager for aphrodisiacs, but the insatiable nature of Muslim women: “About forty subjects, often old men, came to us for aphrodisiacs. If we objected to their age, they would tell us that it was less for them than [in order to] to satisfy the wishes of their spouses” (Leclerc 1864: 97f.). This idea of willing or unwilling overuse having prematurely weakened the sexual drive of Muslim men can be found in many publications;¹⁹ indeed, impotence – often at an early age (Furnari 1845: 29) – was framed by some as a typically “Oriental” disorder (Henricy & Lacroix 1847: 35).
- 24 The French worried about European underpopulation in the North African settler colonies, as the clear decline in French fertility rates, which had started in France in the late 18th century, could also be observed in the colonial Maghreb from the 1880s onwards (Prochaska 1990: 147ff.; Cook Andersen 2015: 9; 22; 90). These fears of a dominant minority population about being overwhelmed by the oppressed majority made them anxiously observe the sexuality of the colonised, which they perceived as being excessive – and as excessively producing non-French children!
- 25 The sexuality of the colonised was often connected by French medical experts to their consumption of spices, as seen in the aforementioned quote by Lafitte of spices

stimulating “the reproductive apparatus, already so excitable in the Arab, too much” (Lafitte 1892: 95). In descriptions of eating habits of the colonised in the colonial Maghreb, French sources often returned to the wisdom of an “Arab saying”: “There is nothing worse for an old man than a good cook and a young wife.”²⁰ This interlinking of overeating with sexuality was not something new or, indeed, particularly “Arab” or North African. Early Christian authors had long recommended asceticism, based on the assumption that the consumption of food could cause sexual urges (Walker Bynum 1985: 11; Frayne 2016: 193).

- 26 Many French reports did not explicitly mention spices when referring to this saying, yet, as most French authors in the 19th and 20th centuries believed Maghrebi food to be defined by, on the one hand, a deep frugality and, on the other hand, this excessive spiciness, it is not unreasonable to suppose that, in their eyes, a good North African cook was somebody who used large amounts of spices. French authors attributed this saying to various notable Muslim scholars, such as Averroes (the Andalusian 12th century philosopher and doctor Ibn Rušd) and Avicenna (Ībn Sīnā, the famous 11th century Persian philosopher and doctor) (Villot 1875: 467, FN 1; Claretie 1893: 214). Most often the French sources attributed the saying to Thābit ibn Qurrah, a 9th century Arabic physician (Leclerc 1876: 170; Bertherand 1883: 15). Thābit ibn Qurrah was indeed recorded as saying: “There is nothing more harmful for the older man than to have a skilful cook and a beautiful young servant girl since he will take an excess of food and become ill, and will engage in sexual intercourse to excess and become senile.”²¹ The original Arabic version of this saying made no references to the effects of spices and was simply a warning about the dangers of overeating for those over a certain age. French authors who directly connected it to the consumption of spices of the North African colonised thus consciously or subconsciously contorted the initial meaning of the saying, in accordance with their assumptions about spiciness being the one defining characteristic of Maghrebi food.
- 27 Gabriel Perrin referred to this saying in his medical dissertation, while suggesting that old Algerian men hoped to reignite their sexuality with the help of the spiciness of their food: “The most salient characteristic [of Algerian cuisine] is the strong taste of their cooking, strongly raised by spices of all kinds; especially elderly [men], for whom the time of frigidity has come before that of resignation, seek [in spicy food] for remedies for their failures, caring little for the precepts of Trabet Ben Corra [sic] (9th century): ‘There is nothing worse for an old man than a good cook and a young wife’” (Perrin 1895: 47). Other French authors framed spices as being used as an aphrodisiac outside of the specific context of Thābit ibn Qurrah’s saying. The physician Jean-Joseph Marit believed certain fish dishes in Algeria to have stimulating effects. He quoted the 15th century scholar Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūti (Sidi-Siouti 1856) as saying: “with spices it [fish] excites to copulation”. Marit added, however, that “this action is mainly due to the condiments” (Marit 1862: 309f.). Perrin and Marit thus belonged to a group of French colonial authors, who framed the spice consumption of North African men not only as increasing the (sexual) appetite of these men, but also as a traditional North African way of counteracting impotence. This explicit linking of sexuality with spices might have been familiar to French authors, as medieval and early modern European medicine had attributed aphrodisiac properties to many spices (Evans 2011: 4; Downham Moore & Pithavadian 2021: 31).

- 28 According to Captain Jules Erckmann, Moroccans generally consumed only “exciting” food: “for them, there are only two kinds of food; those that *heat up* and those that *cool down*” (Erckmann 1885: 171, emphasis in the original). Spices were interpreted as “heating” substances and in the Muslim world, heat had long been associated with passion and sexuality (Aubaile-Sallenave 1997: 104; Turner 2004: 223-225; Ze’evi 2006: 26, 35).²² Some French observers believed that this heating up was not only a welcome side-effect of the consumption of spices for the colonised, but sometimes one of the motivations behind their consumption. The French physician Édouard-Adolphe Duchesne, for example, set out how both male and female Algerian Muslims were excessively sexual, which explained, from his point of view, the commonness of sex work in Algiers (Duchesne 1853: 17ff). According to him, “The commerce of women is perhaps the only enjoyment they [male Muslim Algerians] abuse”, yet he also detailed that the men turned to aphrodisiacs to increase their sexual prowess. He stated that customers consumed, among other things, “certain aromatic and diffusible preparations” in order to “awaken their desires and to make themselves able to satisfy them”. Duchesne then added: “Pepper, and especially chilli, of which they make such a great use, must contribute to venereal arousal” (Duchesne, 1853: 96f.). Yet apparently, not all North African men took these “preparations” willingly or even consciously. According to the Algerian religious leader Si Kaddour ben Ghabrit, Muslim women prepared these preparations and gave them to their polygamous husbands in secret. He believed that, due to the stark rivalry among wives for the love of their shared husband, wives prepared traditional love potions – of an aphrodisiac quality²³ – and used green ginger, nutmeg and pepper in them, in order “to force men to fall madly in love”. Ben Ghabrit attributed this to an author named Abder-Rerraz,²⁴ who had allegedly stated: “*Eating it [this potion, ...] has a wonderful effect on the body!*” (Ben Ghabrit 1917: 129; emphasis in the original).
- 29 According to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, European authors sexualised and feminised “the Orient”, with the European powers taking the male active role and the “Orient” the feminine, passive, degenerate one.²⁵ This also led to a de-masculinisation of “Oriental” men. In the context of the colonial descriptions of the spice consumption of the colonised, this mechanism seems almost to have been inverted. North African men were, by way of their ability to consume large quantities of fiery foods, seen as having stronger constitutions than French men. Additionally, spices were believed to augment the sex drive of North African men or to help them rekindle it once lost. In a worldview that often viewed strength as a sign of virility, this suggested that North Africans were somewhat more “virile” than European men, shown by their ability to consume quantities of spices that the allegedly more civilised – practically always male – European observers were physically unable to stomach. At the same time, however, this voracious predilection for spices was also seen as weakening male Maghrebi bodies, as it stimulated their already “oversexed” natures, which led to exhaustion, impotence, and their early demise. Yet while North African men were described as losing their virility, due to sexual overexertion, and trying to recover it with the help of spices, they were still framed as more sexually active than the Europeans writing about them.

Conclusions

- 30 The overall French assessment of Maghrebi eating habits in the 19th and 20th centuries asserted that North Africans were inherently simple and sober, but that their frugal lifestyle was punctuated by excesses. Additionally, the spice consumption of the colonised North Africans was believed to lead to an excessive, uncontrollable sexual stimulation. This was part and parcel of the wider theory of an all-encompassing immoderation among the colonised, one of the main propositions of the *École d'Alger's* theory of a “primitive mentality” shared by all North Africans. Thus, positioning North Africans as “other” allowed the French to frame themselves – in their consumption of spices as in their sexual appetites – as models of moderation, deemed a thoroughly French characteristic.
- 31 Travel writers usually used descriptions of food in North Africa to “spice up” their accounts; readers of travel accounts and settler memoirs felt themselves transported into a mysterious world through descriptions of spices. Descriptions of the unusual, foreign and spicy food was a means of exoticising the French tourist experiences of daily life in the Maghreb. The exaggerated vocabulary of their accounts – spices as raising the dead, as pins, etc. – slots into the context of authors trying to keep their readership interested. Descriptions of exotic spices were a trope of the travel literature in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the linking of spicy food with sexuality played into Orientalist fantasies related to polygamy and the harem. While the sexuality of Muslim women was something that French authors disproportionately wrote and fantasised about, their consumption of food and their reaction to spices cannot be found in either the travel accounts or medical reports; both the subtle and the crude comparisons between palates, stomachs, and sex drives in the French source material are consequently comparisons among men.
- 32 Additionally, many doctors wrote about the culinary qualities of Maghrebi food – not as mere consumers (which they undoubtedly also were), but in their capacity as transmitters of medical warnings to Europeans. The mere fact that it was often doctors writing about Maghrebi food – using medical vocabulary and medico-psychiatric theories – pathologised Maghrebi food. Many French doctors and psychiatrists in the colonial Maghreb supposed that spices, sexuality and the dangers of a “primitive” masculinity were intrinsically linked. They regularly described Maghrebi food as unbearably spicy and, consequently, local cuisine was deemed inappropriate for the European palates of “civilised” masculinity. In summary, descriptions of spices in Maghrebi cuisine by French writers, and especially French doctors, reflected colonial attitudes towards the colonised of the region, particularly in terms of race and gender.
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NOTES

1. All translations into English are by the author.
2. On this development, see subchapter "Spiced to Excess".
3. On the history of the introduction of chilli into the Maghreb, see: Wright, 2007: 42.
4. Ramadan was seen by some French authors as a prime example of this behaviour. In his medical study of hygiene in Algeria, Jules Brault regretted the excessive consumption of food after the religious fasting, saying: "So there would be nothing to say against Ramadan, if it was not sometimes followed by actual excesses, during the celebrations of Beïram that close Lent." (Brault 1905: 177).
5. This can also be seen in the discussion of the alcohol consumption of the colonised, where they were believed to either never taste a drop of alcohol in their lives or, if they chose to drink, French doctors and psychiatrists believed them to necessarily become alcoholics (Studer 2020).
6. Paul Lemoine, for example, described the food that he was offered as a guest in Morocco – tea, a tajin and a couscous for lunch, and a similar menu again for dinner – as "too much for a European stomach" (Lemoine 1905: 26).
7. On the framing of this new cuisine as modern and elegant, see, for example: Freedman 2020: 86.
8. For a very similar comment, see also: La Forge 1894: 138.
9. From the Arabic word *maraqqa*, broth.
10. The same formulation can also be found in Daubeil's report on Tunisia (Daubeil 1897: 22).
11. There were, however, also authors who described Moroccan food as very spicy (Gaud 1933: 16; Lemoine 1905: 39).

12. This expression of the colonised being “healthy, noble savages” was used by Worboys in the specific context of European doctors trying to explain the perceived higher vulnerability of Europeans towards various diseases in hot climates (see also: Anderson, 1996: 99). Similar sentiments – of North Africans being less vulnerable towards outside influences – can, however, also be observed in the descriptions of the spice consumption of the North African colonised. One example of this is Charles Cameron describing the “real iron bodies” of the Algerians (Carteron, 1866: 331); see below.

13. The French word *caïd* comes from the Arabic *qā'id*, i.e. notable.

14. Blanche Duplenne, for example, wrote in her medical dissertation that in Tunisia, couscous “will always be eaten with a sauce so spicy that our European palates cannot get used to it” (Duplenne 1927: 73).

15. 19th and 20th century medical sources are full of warnings about the sexuality of Maghrebi men. “In questions relating to the sexual instinct, one must take into account the strong genital temperament of the Arab, conditioned by his customs and the climate of the country,” warned Sextius Arène in his 1913 medical dissertation (Arène 1913: 171f.).

16. Arguably, the excessive male North African sexuality could also sometimes be perceived as a potential danger to European men, as many of the doctors working with Maghrebi patients believed homosexuality to be a particular “vice” in the colonies. For the psychiatrist Adolphe Kocher, for example, the situation in Algeria was clear: “Like all peoples of the Orient, the Arab is a *sodomist*.” Kocher, 1883: 161. Emphasis in the original.

17. There were, however, also French authors who believed Muslim North African men to be “under-sexed”, so to speak. The physician Edmond Astruc, for example, jokingly stated: “The pepper that the Arab forgets to put into his love, comes up all too heavily in his soups: this is at least the impression that my civilised organs have retained from their first contact with local products”. In this context, Astruc interpreted the spiciness of Maghrebi food not as a form of sexual stimulation, but as some kind of *ersatz* for a perceived lack of passion in Muslim relationships. (Astruc 1912: 36f.)

18. See also: Trumelet 1885: 297.

19. Théodore Pein, for example, claimed that “Arab” men were “Very prone [to impotence], due to the excessive use they make of them [i.e. their reproductive organs], to the weakening of the reproductive organs [...]” (Pein 1871: 206).

20. The French versions of this saying sometimes slightly differ in their structure. For the sake of simplicity, this version of the saying is used throughout the article.

21. Thābit ibn Qurrah as quoted in: Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah 2020: 127.

22. According to the Australian historian Jack Turner, this same idea was also widespread in medieval Europe, where “a loss of erotic interest or capacity was the result of excessive coldness” (Turner 2004: 219).

23. Ben Ghabrit stated: “Abder-Rerraz offers us, for his part, some aphrodisiacs, which ‘*excite*, he says, *passions of old men, even when their age does not allow it anymore.*” Ben Ghabrit 1917: 129. Emphasis in the original.

24. Abder Rerraz seems to be a misspelling of an Arabic name, probably of Abd al Razzāq. It could not be reconstructed whom Ben Ghabrit referred to in this instance.

25. For a discussion of this, see, for example: McClintock 1995: 14; Jacob, 2011: 3f.

ABSTRACTS

Many French doctors and psychiatrists in the colonial Maghreb supposed that spices, sexuality and the dangers of “primitive” masculinity were intrinsically linked. They regularly described Maghrebi food as unbearably spicy and, consequently, local cuisine was often deemed inappropriate for European palates. These doctors and psychiatrists often suspected that the spiciness of their food affected the sexuality of North African men, causing an increase in libido, which was something that colonial authors feared as, to them, the sexuality of colonised men seemed immoderate, threatening and dangerous even before the added effect of spices. In his medical dissertation, for example, Gabriel Perrin described how older Algerian men used spicy food as a form of aphrodisiac, unwilling to accept that for them the “time of frigidity” had come (Perrin, 1895: 47).

De nombreux médecins et psychiatres français ont supposé que les épices, la sexualité et les dangers de la masculinité “primitive” étaient intrinsèquement liés dans le Maghreb colonial. Ils rapportaient régulièrement que la nourriture maghrébine était insupportablement épicée et, par conséquent, la cuisine locale était souvent jugée inappropriée aux palais européens. Les médecins et psychiatres soupçonnaient souvent que le piquant de leur nourriture affectait et augmentait la sexualité des hommes nord-africains, ou que ceux-ci croyaient au moins que les épices provoquaient une augmentation de la libido, ce que les auteurs coloniaux redoutaient comme, pour eux, la sexualité des hommes colonisés semblait immodérée, menaçante et dangereuse avant même l’effet supplémentaire des épices. Dans sa thèse de médecine, par exemple, Gabriel Perrin décrit comment des hommes algériens âgés utilisaient la nourriture épicée comme une forme d’aphrodisiaque, ne voulant pas accepter que pour eux, “l’heure de la frigidité” fût venue (Perrin, 1895 : 47).

INDEX

Mots-clés: épices, sexualité, masculinité, colonialisme, genre, médecine, psychiatrie, nourriture

Keywords: spices, sexuality, masculinity, colonialism, gender, medicine, psychiatry, food

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Engendering European alternative food networks through countertopographies

Perspectives from Latvia

Engendrer des systèmes alimentaires européens alternatifs par le biais de contre-topographies : perspectives de Lettonie

Renata Blumberg

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Introduction

- 1 In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic brought disruptions in conventional and globalized food supply chains, which heightened the significance of more localized, Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) (Hilchey 2021).¹ From farmers' markets to community supported agriculture, AFNs function as direct-to-consumer marketing channels that directly bring together consumers and farmers in a manner that is differentiated from conventional food marketing and retail channels (Goodman, Dupuis & Goodman 2011). AFNs gain support from strong consumer interest in locally sourced food, but they also provide livelihood opportunities for farmers. Emerging research has begun to more explicitly consider the relationship between gender and AFNs. Focusing on women farmers in the US and Western Europe, scholars have found that alternative methods of food production and distribution are empowering (Blum 2011; Jarosz 2011; Trauger 2004; Trauger et al. 2010). However, these findings are based on a historical trajectory of food production and consumption in which women farmers were marginalized from agricultural spaces, particularly since the late nineteenth century. The growing popularity of sustainable agriculture and AFNs has provided women with an

opportunity to pursue farming as a livelihood activity. In Soviet and post-Soviet space, in contrast, women were not marginalized from agricultural spaces, even if agricultural labor was gendered. Therefore, possibilities for women's empowerment as farmers have to be understood as emerging within specific historical and gendered trajectories of agricultural production and distribution. Even in proximate places, which are now governed by similar agricultural and rural policies (like many parts of Western and Eastern Europe), different possibilities exist for women farmers.

- 2 Drawing upon interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with women farmers who participate in AFNs in Latvia, I examine their gendered livelihoods, I analyze whether women farmers have faced obstacles in taking up farming as a livelihood activity, and I describe the specific challenges they have faced. I argue that women have not faced obstacles in taking up farming as a livelihood activity; rather, women farmers face challenges related to the gendered labor corresponding to women's responsibility in managing both social reproduction and production for profit. I define social reproduction as the "fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" (Katz 2001b : 711), involving both the everyday and the long-term reproduction of labor power. AFNs have provided a source of livelihood for women farmers, but uneven development throughout the countryside, outmigration, and competition limit the capacity of women farmers to ensure social reproduction of their households and to make a sustainable livelihood, especially in difficult economic times.
- 3 To explain the differences between my findings and existing research, I base my analysis on the understanding that space is constituted by multiple trajectories of sociospatial change (Hart 2002). Different historical trajectories have informed agricultural gender regimes in Eastern European nation-states, such as Latvia, and those in Western Europe. Western European historical trajectories have played a significant role shaping scholarship on gender and agriculture in European rural sociology and geography. Therefore, it is necessary to bring these different trajectories to light, but it is equally important to reveal connections (see Katz 2004). To do this, I use Katz's concept of countertopographies (Katz 2001a) to connect regions across Europe and trace how these places experienced the same processes (see also Pratt & Yeoh 2003). This concept builds upon the symbolism of contour lines found on topographic maps that connect points of the same elevation, but in Katz's (2001a) usage the contour lines connect different places analytically that are experiencing common processes (see also Caretta & Cheptum 2019; Mullaney 2012). Specifically, I provide a broad overview of how processes of industrialization in agriculture, globalization, as well as its contestation through alternative forms of production and distribution, produced different gendered outcomes for women farmers across Europe.
- 4 In order to trace the contour lines across places, I first analyze the scholarly literature on gender and agriculture related to Western Europe by paying attention to broader patterns related to the industrialization of agriculture, globalization and the growth of alternative forms of production and distribution, including AFNs. Second, I address these three processes as they materialized across Soviet/ post-Soviet space, and Latvia specifically, by drawing upon the scholarly literature on gender and agriculture from the region. Rather than providing a comprehensive review of the literatures on gender and agriculture across Europe, the project undertaken in this article is to provide the starting point for broader countertopographies to forge a more inclusive and sustainable food system in Europe by appreciating how similar processes produce

differentiated landscapes. To that end, I focus on women farmers working within AFNs in Latvia and identify the challenges they face by analyzing materials from ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted over several months from 2009 to 2013. During those years, I followed the course that these women's livelihoods took as Latvia endured and slowly recovered from the financial crisis of 2008-2010 (see also Blumberg 2014; Blumberg 2018; Blumberg & Mincyte 2019; Blumberg & Mincyte 2020; Blumberg 2021). I conclude by highlighting how AFNs have provided opportunities but that these are limited by the sociospatial context.

From farmwives to farmers in Western Europe

- 5 In the 20th century US, Canada, the UK, and other parts of Western Europe, women faced significant challenges in their efforts to take up farming as an occupation (Brandth 2002; Sachs 1996). While established practices of inheritance limited women's access to farms, occupational discrimination prohibited them from becoming educated and working as farmers. Instead, they were relegated to the status of "farmwives" or "helpers" (Brandth 2002). On the farm, the (male) farmer was the farm's public face and its private authority, even though a *family* farm often relied on the labor of all family members. In her review of gender relations on Western European family farms, Brandth argues that women's responsibility for household work and care was "regarded as a 'natural' distribution of work on the basis of certain gender specific attributes" (2002 : 184). Women's labor took place in the privacy of the farm household, a spatial seclusion that enabled the invisibility of women's farm labor.
- 6 Despite impressions of the entrenched and traditional nature of the family farm, along with its attendant subordinated position for women farm workers, the masculinization of agriculture is a recent development (Brandth 2002). Indeed, the industrialization of agriculture, which is also referred to as the modernization paradigm in agriculture, brought the masculinization of farming professions. Before the 19th century, when the commodification of agriculture and tendencies toward greater mechanization and specialization revolutionized agricultural production, women's labor on subsistence peasant farms was both visible and sometimes even autonomous (Brandth 2002). In Norway, for instance, men only started to take more control over farming when it became profitable in the late 19th century (Haugen 1990), a process that was legitimized and enforced through the mechanization (and masculinization) of production. With this transformation, women were marginalized from the agricultural spaces they had controlled. Similarly, in 20th century Germany, women farmers lost access to the personal incomes they generated through direct marketing (Prugl 2004).
- 7 In other sectors, the advance of capitalism also relied on the marginalization of women and the reworking of gendered labor (see Federici 2004). However, this process was not an isolated historical incident; the geographies of capital are constantly reworking "the basis of labor's value to capital, a process of reproducing and recombining interlocking social differences into novel combinations of exploitable workers" (Werner 2012 : 403). The production of gender relations thus has constituted and enabled capitalist restructuring.
- 8 With the modernization of agriculture in Western Europe, women continued to play important but unrecognized roles on farms. This led researchers to focus more specifically on the dynamics at work within the family farm. The concept of "gender

regime” is often used to capture how gender relations become solidified within institutions like the family farm (see Whatmore 1991). On family farms, gender regimes enforce a gender-based division of labor, which was imbued with power relations (Evans & Ilbery 1996). The gender regime on family farms relied upon women’s labor to maintain the general economy of the farm. Within these gender regimes, it was the women’s responsibility to do work that was both subordinated and unremunerated. Writing about mid-twentieth century France, for instance, Delphy described how women were delegated to do the “subordinate, dirty, difficult, nonmechanized tasks” (1980 : 27), especially those concerning animal care.

- 9 The analytic necessity to study both household economic relations and relations within the broader agrarian economy motivated Whatmore’s (1991) research on British family farms. By unpacking the household, and the relations through which it is constituted, she argued that the family farm should not be treated as a sealed black box. Accounting for power relations, as well as situating the household economy within the broader political economy, Whatmore’s (1991) notion of the “domestic political economy” intermingled an analysis of social reproduction and production for profit. Although their agency within these economies was limited, O’Hara’s (1998) analysis of 20th century Ireland demonstrated that women exhibited widespread and nuanced forms of resistance to marrying farmers and becoming farmwives or “farm women.”
- 10 Feminist analysis of 20th century family farming in Western Europe has produced insights on the consequences of industrialization in agriculture, in addition to honing theoretical tools to understand the relationship between the household and capitalist economies. Feminist scholars highlighted how the modernization of agriculture was enabled by the reworking of gender regimes on the farm and gender orders at the scale of the nation-state. Men took control of farming sectors that had been overseen by women, and although in most cases women’s farm labor was still significant and integral to the success of the farm, it became subordinated and unrecognized politically and economically. These developments reveal how capitalist and household economic practices are intimately intermingled; while capitalist logic is clearly limited, that does not mean that non-capitalist household economic practices are insulated from capital’s circuits. On the other hand, the transformed gender regimes that maintained household economies also underpinned the success of the modernization paradigm, contributing eventually to a crisis.
- 11 Starting in the 1980s, the modernization paradigm in agriculture began to experience a crisis in Western Europe brought on in part by globalization. Up until then, the industrialization of agriculture had continued as long as the long-term decline in real producer prices and the simultaneous increasing costs associated with the capitalization of farming were both offset by a growing demand that could absorb an increasing food supply (IMPACT 2014). What eventually resulted was that farmers in the developed world were increasingly competing with each other for global markets. The concomitant rising influence of neoliberal globalization after the fall of the Soviet Union encouraged national governments and a strengthened EU to foster an ideology of rural entrepreneurship and global competitiveness by exploiting comparative advantages and niche markets (Prugl 2004). Because fewer farmers could compete on such terms, this generated a crisis for agrarian livelihoods and for the patriarchal agricultural welfare state (Brandth 2002). Shifting gender orders in agriculture played a central role in facilitating these changes. In fact, challenges to the patriarchal

agricultural welfare state generated a crisis of masculinity in rural areas in Europe (Brandth 2002).

- 12 The modernization paradigm and the globalization of agricultural supply chains also generated a surge of criticism from environmental and consumer movements. As a result of continuous pressure, new policies to support organic farming were implemented by the EU. The new support had a geopolitical dimension, too: the EU was facing pressure at the global scale and the introduction of organic subsidies allowed it to maintain less controversial support for its farmers. Nevertheless, the crisis in rural masculinity and industrialized agriculture, coupled with new state support, brought about an opening for women farmers to engage in more sustainable forms of multifunctional agriculture, including AFNs.
- 13 Although women farmers in West European countries still confront difficulties in asserting their identities as farmers or challenging their subordinate status (Pedersen & Kjaergard 2004; Prugl 2004), there is a growing presence of women who are recognized and recognize themselves as farmers. There is also evidence that supports that organic farming and the movement towards food localization, especially through AFNs, are providing opportunities for women farmers (see Annes & Wright 2016; Annes, Wright & Larkins 2021; Pedersen & Kjaergard 2004; Prugl 2004; Stenbacka 2017).
- 14 While these developments are remarkable, they must also be seen as rooted in specific agricultural histories. Feminist scholars of agrarian change have demonstrated that the commodification of agriculture produced diverse outcomes in different places in part because of how capital articulated with existing markers of social difference, state policies, nationalism, imperialism, and women's practices (see Ramamurthy 2000). With this in mind, in the following section, I map gender orders and regimes in the agricultural sector in Latvia, a Baltic state, which despite being a part of the EU since 2004, has seen different outcomes than those documented in the aforementioned literature. I pay particular attention to the processes of agricultural industrialization, globalization, as well as its contestation through alternative forms of production and distribution, including AFNs.

From kolkhoz milkmaids to peasant farmers in Soviet and post-Soviet Latvia

- 15 The industrialization of agriculture in the Soviet Union was largely achieved through a violent process of forced collectivization, which involved making peasant farmers, including women, into farm workers. While the Soviet state claimed to emancipate women by employing them in the labor force, the participation of women in Soviet development was an economic necessity, especially during and after World War II. Most women in the USSR were expected to work full-time jobs, as they made up the majority of the labor force up until the 1970s. The stay-at-home mother was an anomaly and the extent of women's employment in the Soviet Union was comparatively impressive (Buckley 1992). However, closer inspection of employment figures reveals that women made up the majority of unskilled manual laborers, and were disproportionately employed in heavy, dangerous work and night shifts. Despite their dominance in certain sectors of the economy, such as medicine, women held fewer leadership or administrative positions with higher salaries (Lapidus 1978). Therefore, the official

discourses that proclaimed gender equality masked a system that channeled women into positions that reinforced their subordination.

- 16 In addition to working full-time, they were also responsible for most household and caring labor, a “double burden” that prevailed throughout much of the Soviet era. This double burden involved not only cooking, cleaning, washing clothes (with or without very basic washing machines) and caring for children, but also dealing with food shortages and rationing, waiting in multiple lines at shops for food, and growing and preserving vegetables for the winter. The double burden for working women was not something that went unrecognized, but society blamed the state for inadequately socializing household services rather than working to challenge and change gender relations at home. Indeed, gender was a focus of the “Cold War shadow boxing” that animated the “kitchen debates” (Gal & Kligman 2000 : 9). Women’s employment in the public sphere was seen as an achievement over the West (which needed “bourgeois feminism”), and the quest for labor-saving devices for household work was an index of the Soviet regime’s success, as well as of the overall achievements of a socialist society. Underpinning the public discourses of women’s emancipation was a naturalized understanding of “women’s work,” which was seen to be an outgrowth of women’s biological propensity as caregivers. Therefore, the debate focused not on “how to restructure social values and society to make it less patriarchal or sexist, but rather as how to accommodate women’s innate differences to the ideal of the New Soviet Man” (Johnson & Robinson 2007 : 7). Women in rural areas faced even greater challenges managing social reproduction. Rural areas experienced more frequent shortages, and depending upon the distance to towns or cities, women faced challenges trying to obtain necessary items for the household. Rural women were also expected to provide for the bulk of their family’s food needs by growing food on subsidiary plots.
- 17 In many ways the processes of modernization and industrialization in Soviet agriculture produced gender relations that differed from the patriarchal agricultural welfare gender order in Western Europe. For example, in the Soviet Union, women were recognized as farm workers, and they were even recruited to work on farms. In other respects, however, rural gender relations in both regions were similar. For example, on the collective farm, the bulk of women’s agricultural labor was unskilled, time-consuming, physically demanding and poorly paid. Women were largely responsible for manual labor, like milking cows, a task still done largely by hand (Bridger 1987). Although mechanization eased the workload, it often signaled men’s entrance into and domination of a sub-sector, such as dairying. Finally, while overrepresented as manual laborers, women were underrepresented in the positions of power and control on the collective farm. It appears that although women were recognized and paid as workers in the Soviet Union, they often did the same kind of agricultural work delegated to “farm wives” in other parts of Europe, including household and caring labor.
- 18 In both cases, the scholarly literature has demonstrated that women were not passive victims (Bridger 1987; O’Hara 1998). In the Soviet Union, young women fled to cities at higher rates than men, mothers urged their daughters to further their education, and women collective farm workers managed to creatively negotiate the double burden of working on the collective farm and managing the social reproduction of the household by syphoning off collective farm resources for their own personal use.

- 19 Also, in both the Soviet Union and Western Europe, the agricultural modernization paradigm experienced crises in the 1980s. At the time, Western European countries were dealing with agricultural surpluses and an anxious public started to draw attention to the negative effects of industrialized agriculture. In the Soviet Union, the state-controlled food system was plagued by inefficiencies. As part of his package of economic reforms, Gorbachev introduced policies to support the creation of family farms (or peasant farms), a shift which signaled the failure of collectivized agriculture and a turn to the West. In the late 1980s, Western Europe increasingly became a model to be emulated politically, economically, also in the agricultural sector. For changing Soviet agricultural gender relations, it entailed pursuing the creation of private family farms as model farming enterprises.
- 20 This move back to the land by setting up family farms upheld a particular gender regime, which was led by “male activity” that involved a subordinate but essential family unit (Bridger 1997 : 40). In Soviet Latvia specifically, the imagined recovery of a pre-Soviet past, symbolized by individual farmsteads, implied a restoration of pre-Soviet gender norms and roles (Eglitis 2002). Widespread condemnation of the Soviet disregard for gender difference led to the cultivation of essentialist understandings of gender, in which a certain categorization of gender roles and norms was considered “natural.” It was widely imagined that women were supposed to take back their natural roles as mothers of the nation and return to a feminized private sphere, which contrasted with the masculinizing public sphere (Eglitis 2002). In Latvia, where ethnic Latvians made up a bare majority of the population, the countryside was a privileged place for such national revival, with its higher average fertility rates and its close association with Latvian national culture (Eglitis 2002).
- 21 The chance for the national elite to realize its own vision of development came when Latvia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. At that moment, there was a widespread sentiment about ‘re-joining’ the West. Reactions against the Soviet imposition of ‘utopia’ and ‘experiments’ was combined with a yearning for ‘normality.’ In the Baltic States, the pursuit of ‘normality’ involved progress towards the West, in practical terms, a “rush into the arms of European institutions” (Eglitis 2002 : 16) and a willingness to follow the expert advice from Western Europe and the United States. Ironically, this led to the implementation of another experiment: shock therapy through massive privatization and cuts in state spending. In the agricultural sector, privatization and decollectivization in the 1990s led to a sector dominated by a large number of small-scale subsistence-oriented family farms, which possessed few assets and received little state support (Holzner 2008). Faced with competition from the influx of products from globalized food supply chains, many farmers continued to grow food on a subsistence basis and market surpluses through AFNs.
- 22 Neoliberal transition policies and globalization produced an increasingly differentiated landscape. Although still expected to work a double shift, women’s representation in positions of power decreased. Novikova has argued that “the ‘happy marriage’ of the neo-liberal economic framework and the neoconservative gender ideology is in reality a restatement of women’s political, social, and economic disempowerment through the politics of exclusion and marginalization” (2004 : 7). While women were disadvantaged as a group (Eglitis 2002), transition policies produced a crisis of masculinity for working class men (see also Tereškinas 2010). In Latvia, between 1988 and 1995 life expectancy dropped from 66.26 to 60.76 for men, and from 75.14 to 73.10 for women (Demogrāfijas

Centrs n.d.). The life expectancy of men in rural areas was lower than the average (Demogrāfijas Centrs n.d.). Working class men were increasingly unable to succeed as breadwinners, which defined their identities as men.

- 23 The spatial dimensions of marginalization interacted with ethnicity, gender and class in complex ways. As Latvia transitioned from an industrial economy towards a post-industrial, service-oriented economy, the decline of the agricultural sector led to the growing recognition that farmers and rural space were the “losers” of transition. This label was applied to certain regions like Latgale, the eastern part of Latvia, which is ethnically mixed and has the highest rates of poverty in Latvia. The losers of transition were blamed for their inability to adjust to the new circumstances and for being unable or unwilling to emerge from the Soviet past. The catching up narrative based on a linear notion of transition marked certain bodies and places as behind in time (Eglitis 2002).
- 24 In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the possibility for accession to the EU offered opportunities for the agricultural sector, but they were also limited. Before joining the EU, the new member states of Eastern Europe had to accept lower subsidies, even though they were competing in the same market. EU subsidies in Latvia were designed to continue the process of restructuring so that the farming sector would be globally competitive, an opportunity that some farms utilized to their advantage. EU accession also offered a place for some small-scale farmers through support for organic farming and agro-tourism as well as retirement schemes. Significantly, these development pathways were highly gendered. Even though women make up about half of farm managers in Latvia (compared to less than 10% for Germany, Netherlands, and Denmark) (European Commission 2021), they tend to farm smaller farms (European Commission 2012).
- 25 Faced with the globalization of food supply chains since the 1990s, these smaller farms have relied on diverse marketing strategies, including AFNs, which have been built on strong historical traditions of self-provisioning and local food procurement (Grivins & Tisenkopfs 2015) and existing infrastructures (see Blumberg & Mincyte 2019). Despite these strong historical linkages, marketing through AFNs has not been without challenges (Grivins et al. 2017; Melece & Krievina 2015), especially during and after the financial crisis of 2008-2010, which had a particularly devastating impact in Latvia (Aidukaite 2019). Given this context, in the following section, I analyze the challenges faced by women in AFNs in Latvia. I have chosen to focus in on these women farmers specifically because of their diverse livelihood trajectories, and because they represent the country’s regional diversity.

Rural gender relations in Latvian alternative food networks

- 26 In this section I analyze the livelihoods of four women farmers of diverse ages and who live in different regions of Latvia (all names are pseudonyms). Daina is a farmer in her 50s growing certified organic vegetables about one hour from Latvia’s major capital city, Riga. Velta, in her 40s, is also a certified organic vegetable farmer, but her farm is situated in a hilly region in central Latvia, 100 kilometers from Riga and far from an asphalted highway. Sarma, a dairy and vegetable farmer, and Lilita, a grain and pig

farmer, are both in their 50s and reside in the eastern region of Latgale, about 300 kilometers from Riga.

- 27 These women farmers are similar in some ways. They all started to work in agriculture to some extent when Latvia was part of the Soviet Union, and the transition to independent farming was facilitated by their educational and experiential qualifications. They all had work experience in agriculture and even specialized education at the secondary or university level before they started their own farms.
- 28 While Western European women farmers face obstacles in being recognized as farmers, none of these women had barriers asserting their identities as farmers. This contrast was especially evident when I witnessed a conversation between Daina and a visiting French woman farmer during an international exchange field trip. The French farmer was particularly interested in relaying her experiences of discrimination and exclusion as a woman during her agricultural education. She recounted with great detail the obstacles she had faced in establishing herself as a farmer. She went on to inquire about the discrimination Daina had faced. Although Daina showed interest in the discussion, and even disbelief at the way Marie had been treated, she had not shared these experiences and consequently had little to say. Daina had a secondary specialized education in vegetable production, which she gained in the 1980s, while Latvia was still part of the Soviet Union. Daina did not report problems in assuming the identity of a farmer. In addition, she did not identify as a farmwife or helper on their farm. Although this might be different for the few existing large farms that sell through conventional channels (and are therefore not a part of this study), the concept of a farmwife does not exist in Latvia (although there is a word for the female head of household).
- 29 All of these women farmers work on family farms, the dominant social structure of agriculture in Latvia. Although they farm for subsistence purposes, they also farm to make a livelihood from selling fresh or processed agricultural products. In farming and marketing work, the gendered segregation largely resembles the Soviet legacy: men are mostly responsible for heavy lifting, transportation, construction, mechanized work, and women generally do manual work in the field, any processing, and most administrative and community-oriented activities. In addition, women are primarily responsible for housework, such as cooking and cleaning. Children contribute mostly by helping with housework and manual labor, such as weeding, harvesting or picking pests from plants. For example, on Lilita's farm, she is responsible for animal care, while her husband oversees the grain fields. But this gendered division of labor is not strictly adhered to: every household member is expected to contribute with necessary tasks, and these vary tremendously depending on the farm's specialization. For example, on Daina's farm, her husband and grown sons largely take care of all machine work, but they also help her in the greenhouses with flowers. Similarly, Velta's daughter and son-in-law live on her farm, and both are expected to contribute by gathering wild and cultivated herbs for the teas that Velta makes.
- 30 Sarma's situation differs because her husband has passed away. Although she maintains a productive vegetable and dairy farm, she states that she farms: "just for survival, nothing more. I sit and count the little coins (*kapeiciņas*). It is still good if you have some kind of man in the house, but my husband, he died..." Because of the differences in life expectancy between men and women, many women farmers find themselves in Sarma's situation as they grow older. They manage to farm alone by scaling down production, hiring someone with a tractor to plough their fields, or relying on relatives

to help with particular tasks. As a result, for many women farmers, the normative family farm is both a desirable but absent arrangement. Other organizational structures for agriculture that could potentially help alleviate the position of woman farmers, such as service or marketing cooperatives, are uncommon in rural Latvia. The domestication of women that constituted the post-Soviet transition in Latvia (Eglitis 2002) can be interpreted in the rural and agricultural context as confining possible farming arrangements to the realm of the family. The problem is not that women cannot do what is categorized as men's work, but that women farmers already face challenges managing social reproduction and production for profit.

- 31 Although many women sole-holders may live and work in isolated farmsteads, their gendered labor in the farmstead is intimately linked with economies of care that span across space through formal and informal, monetized and un-monetized AFNs. Many rural farmsteads function as a meeting point for both extended family and close friends. Often, women are responsible for maintaining these reciprocal relationships through economies of care that are centered around social reproduction. For example, children and grandchildren may return to the farm to help, and in exchange, receive a small share of the harvest in return. Sarma explained that she could not farm without the support of her grown son. He comes to do any work that involves the tractor, but he also gets food in return. Rural farmsteads also offer a fallback for family members in need; although farm work may be poorly compensated or even uncompensated, farms are a safety net providing food and shelter to close and distant relatives and friends. For example, Daina employed a family member on the farm when she needed a job in the middle of the financial crisis. This family member was saving money so that she could eventually afford to leave Latvia and look for work in Western Europe.
- 32 Velta's son has also migrated to work abroad, but due to the seasonality of his work in agricultural and natural resource sectors, he often returns home to work on Velta's farm for extended periods. Her daughter, on the other hand, has decided to follow in Velta's footsteps and help her develop the family's farm business. Although Velta has always been farming and gardening on a subsistence basis to feed her family and friends, she started to explore ways to make a living from farming when her husband lost his job in the construction sector during the financial crisis. She also started selling value-added products she made herself, such as jams and dried herbal teas. Through AFNs, she gained regular consumer clients and now she also markets her products to small specialty shops in Riga.
- 33 For Velta, the skills she developed growing and processing her home-grown fruits and vegetables provided her with a foundation to establish a business. Similarly, Daina's education in horticulture prepared her to take a leading role in her family farm's business. Daina's farm has been instrumental in launching Latvia's nascent community supported agriculture system, which grew after the financial crisis when consumers started looking for ways to procure fresh and local produce without the surcharges added by stores and resellers. Because most Latvian consumers cannot afford to pay a lump sum to farmers for a season's worth of produce, most Latvian CSAs function more like direct marketing consumer groups, with consumers organizing themselves in groups and then ordering produce and other food from farmers on a regular basis. These AFNs are providing women farmers with a source of livelihood, but this livelihood is still precarious. Both farmers Velta and Daina would like more customers, but they also face competition from all the other farmers in AFNs who market similar

products. Nevertheless, both Velta and Daina still benefit because of their relative proximity to Riga, the main consumer market for AFNs in Latvia.

- 34 Place and space shape livelihood possibilities for all farmers in AFNs, but they are not static attributes. Places are produced in a relational manner through trajectories that span space and are always in motion (Massey 2005). Proximity to wealthy urban centers enables AFNs to exist and thrive, but proximity is not only a feature of physical closeness. Proximity is also produced through strong infrastructural connections across space and social ties that traverse the rural-urban interface. The processes that shape places are not random; they may reinforce power-geometries that privilege certain places of others (Massey 2005). For example, rural places have been forged through globally-integrated trajectories, linking diverse places of food production and consumption and putting distant farmers in competition with each other. In the EU, farmers in Eastern Europe have faced a competitive disadvantage with farmers in Western Europe, due in part because they compete in the same common market but receive lower agricultural subsidies. But even before Latvia joined the EU, certain rural regions were already facing economic decline, a process that may become cyclical; regions that lose economic activity face declining populations, and as the number of residents decreases, communities risk losing vital public services. This in turn makes the community less attractive for economic investment.
- 35 Lilita and Sarma are both farmers in Latgale, the eastern-most region in Latvia, which is also farthest from the capital, Riga. Latgale is one of the poorest regions not only in Latvia, but also in the EU. Latgale has experienced economic decline since the 1990s, and along with that, the region has been steadily losing population. This decline is evident in Lilita's attempt at making a business from pig farming in eastern Latvia. When she tried to approach the large-scale slaughterhouse about purchasing her pigs, they did not even offer her a price because they had so much meat. However, she was able to make a living by taking her animals to the local slaughterhouse and selling the meat directly to consumers through AFNs. Unfortunately, that slaughterhouse closed. As a result, her family has resorted to slaughtering her pigs themselves and distributing the meat directly to friends and family. With EU accession, many small-scale slaughterhouses were forced to close because they could not meet new food safety regulations, but slaughterhouses may have closed due to declining demand as well. Because women tend to have responsibility for food processing in rural farmsteads, access to a slaughterhouse has been important for women farmers, both to ensure social reproduction and production for profit through AFNs.
- 36 AFNs help women farmers secure livelihoods in the dairy industry as well, but these opportunities are also shaped by place and space. In conventional dairy networks, farmers are usually price-takers and they may only have access to one processor. In AFNs, farmers can set their own prices, but not all farmers can afford to travel to and market to wealthier urban areas, such as Riga. As such, the most disadvantaged farmers in more remote regions usually market to disadvantaged, local consumers and set prices that are affordable.
- 37 For women farmers who have not yet reached retirement age, the travails of farming in uncertain economic conditions are particularly difficult. Farmers and other rural residents with pensions are guaranteed minimal financial resources, and are often seen as "better off," even though their pensions are quite meager and barely cover the cost of living. Sarma recounted that she relies on her mother's pension at times when she

does not have enough financial resources to cover emergency costs, such as repairs to machinery. In rural counties with small urban centers, the customer base is also dominated by pensioners. Sarma conveyed that her milk, which she sells directly to customers at a public market, is in high demand. However, because most of her customers are poor pensioners, they only come early in the month after their pensions have been distributed. While the labor of food provisioning remains gendered (see Hormel 2017), Sarma's example also touches upon the significance of state-based social safety nets in enabling both consumer and producer participation in AFNs (see also Mincyte, Bartkiene & Bikauskaite 2020).

Conclusion

- 38 The high representation of women farmers in Latvia in the present and the recent past provides a contrast to the historical trajectories of Western European agriculture. In this article I have discussed this difference underscoring how historical trajectories inform contemporary gender relations. In many Western European nation-states, modernization and industrialization were associated with women's exclusion from farming as an independent livelihood activity. Now women still encounter resistance when they try to farm or identify as farmers. However, recent support for organic and sustainable agriculture and the growth of AFNs has opened up empowering spaces for women to become farmers and create livelihoods. In contrast, I argue that women farmers in Latvia have not faced obstacles in taking up farming as a livelihood activity or identifying as farmers. Rather, they face challenges managing social reproduction and production for profit in a context in which small-scale farmers are increasingly marginalized. Although alternative methods of food production and procurement, such as AFNs, have provided them with livelihood possibilities, they are precarious and tend to provide more significant benefits for farmers with resources and easy transportation options to Latvia's main metropolis, Riga. The benefits of participating in AFNs are therefore uneven (Jarosz 2008).
- 39 In analyzing the diverse historical trajectories of gender in agriculture across Europe, I have argued that it is important to understand the development of gender relations across space. One commonality between the women farmers whose livelihoods I analyzed here, as well as those whose perspectives are already examined in existing scholarly literature (see also Adesugba, Oughton & Shortall 2020), is the importance placed on social reproduction and the persistence of gendered care work. Supporting social reproduction does not entail relegating women to the domestic sphere (see also Dengler & Lang 2021). Rather, supporting social reproduction would allow women to continue engaging in the activities they value, while fostering an understanding that the devaluation of practices of social reproduction is a systemic feature of capitalist society. A systemic approach acknowledges that there are multiple logics at work in livelihood practices but that capitalism enforces a sort of structured coherence. Small-scale growers are competing with large-scale growers, who are able to offer lower prices that serve as a reference point for farmers and consumers. These conditions foster a situation in which social reproduction for small-scale farmers is devalued, regardless of its importance in sustaining the livelihoods of farming households and consumers.

- 40 This systemic approach has potential political importance for women farmers because it has the capacity to discern commonalities and differences across space so that a common political project could be formulated. It is then possible to draw countertopographies to connect the processes that impact social reproduction across the multiple trajectories that make space (see also Bolokan 2021). Social reproduction in Latvia has been a challenge for most residents, requiring creative strategies to secure food, given the lack of functioning systems of procurement in the Soviet era and the impoverishment of the population after the financial crisis. However, social reproduction is a necessity for the continuation of capitalism, even as capitalist development threatens to destroy the basis for social reproduction. So, as Katz notes, even with the withdrawal of the state, capital, and civil society, social reproduction will be accomplished despite the costs to families and households (2001b). But it also can form the basis for oppositional politics, entailing a struggle to redistribute “responsibility for social reproduction back to capitalists and the state, transnationally and at all scales,” which would “begin to recalibrate the costs and benefits of globalization in ways that would pinpoint its widely distributed costs and promulgate increased social justice and equality across classes, nations, localities and gender” (Katz 2001b : 719).
- 41 Organizing around AFNs and social reproduction could take many forms. Agriculture in the EU is highly subsidized and also heavily governed at the supranational scale, but agricultural policies are also made at the national scale and mediated by local gender regimes (Prügl 2011). Thus far, movements that have tried to transform EU agricultural policies have not focused on social reproduction, preferring instead to address other issues, such as environmental problems. Despite the growing importance of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the EU, multiple barriers hinder or prevent their implementation in rural development policies (Oedl-Wieser 2014). Feminist scholars have long raised concerns about the marginalization of gender equality, citizenship and social justice in EU policy (Einhorn 2005), but now the coronavirus pandemic has only heightened the significance of gender inequality, especially in the provision of care work (Bahn, Cohen & van der Meulen Rodgers 2020). New food and agricultural policies could recognize social reproduction and care work by centering their significance and contributions to broader well-being (Bahn, Cohen & van der Meulen Rodgers 2020), but any new policies would also have to understand how multiple trajectories have shaped livelihood possibilities for women farmers across regions.

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NOTES

1. This article includes material from my PhD dissertation (Blumberg 2014).

ABSTRACTS

Recent interventions in scholarly literature have revealed how alternative methods of food production and provision are empowering for women farmers. This literature has been largely based on the historical trajectory of agriculture in the US and Western Europe, where women have been marginalized and excluded as farmers. In contrast, in post-Soviet space in Eastern Europe, women have not encountered the same forms of exclusion, but they face different challenges maintaining agricultural livelihoods. Drawing upon research with women farmers engaged in sustainable forms of agriculture and alternative food networks in Latvia, I demonstrate that although women are not marginalized in agricultural spaces, farm and marketing work remains gendered. Using the concept of countertopographies, I draw connections between the evidence from scholarly literature and my case study sites in order to identify how similar processes have shaped gender relations and produced diverging outcomes, but also to provide a framework for organizing and bridging differences across space.

Des interventions récentes dans la littérature académique démontrent comment les méthodes alternatives de production agricole et d'approvisionnement alimentaire contribuent à l'émancipation des agricultrices. Cette littérature est basée sur le parcours historique de l'agriculture aux Etats Unis et en Europe occidentale, où les femmes ont été marginalisées et exclues en tant qu'agricultrices. En revanche, les femmes de pays post-soviétiques en Europe de

l'Est n'ont pas connu les mêmes types d'exclusions, mais elles sont confrontées à d'autres difficultés quant au maintien de leurs moyens de subsistance agricole. En m'appuyant sur la recherche portant sur les agricultrices lettones qui sont spécialisées dans les formes d'agriculture durable et de systèmes alimentaires alternatifs, je démontre que bien que les femmes ne soient pas marginalisées dans les espaces agricoles, le travail agricole et de marketing reste sexospécifique. En utilisant le concept de contre-topographies, j'établis les liens entre les études provenant de la littérature scientifique et ma propre étude de cas afin d'identifier non-seulement la manière dont des processus similaires ont façonné les relations hommes-femmes et ont produit des résultats divergents, mais aussi afin de fournir un cadre pour organiser et combler les différences à travers les espaces.

INDEX

Mots-clés: reproduction sociale, systèmes alimentaires alternatifs, genre et espace, contre-topographies

Keywords: social reproduction, alternative food networks, gender and space, countertopographies

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The daily struggle

Everyday resistance in the feeding and agricultural labor of Mexican migrant farmworker mothers in North Carolina

La Lutte Quotidienne : résistance quotidienne dans l'alimentation et le travail agricole des mères migrantes mexicaines travaillant dans l'agriculture en Caroline du Nord

Emilia Cordero Oceguera

Introduction

- 1 At home, migrant farmworker women who are mothers are responsible for feeding their children. At work, their labor in agricultural fields, nurseries, and greenhouses contributes to feeding society. However, despite their vital role in our food system, the majority live and work in substandard conditions and the general public rarely recognizes the significance of their labor. Migrant women make 28% of the agricultural workforce in the US (NCFH 2018) and 55% of migrant farmworkers are parents (NAWS 2015-2016). Thus, most migrant farmworker women are mothers. Their food labor, both at home and in the fields, represents the historical experience of mothers of color in the US (Caballero *et al.* (ed.) 2019, Hill Collins 1994, Segura 1994) by challenging the binary conception that home and work are two separate spheres of life. Like many women of color, migrant farmworker mothers resist oppression through food practices—such as growing food in home gardens or cooking recipes from their hometowns—that uphold their human dignity in their everyday lives (Abarca 2006, Mares 2019, Williams-Forsen 2006). Yet, research on how farmworker mothers resist oppression is not present in the literature (with the exception of Seif 2008 who addresses collective political resistance). And few studies focus on how their particular mothering experience shapes their food practices (for exceptions see Mares 2019 and Meierotto and Som Castellano 2019). To address this gap in the literature, I show how Mexican migrant farmworker mothers—who live at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and class oppression—enact everyday resistance via their food labor in both their agricultural work and at home feeding their children.

- 2 My research responds to the questions: Do Mexican migrant farmworker mothers resist oppression? If so, how does their experience as mothers of color who do food labor inside and outside the home shape their resistance? To address these questions, I use interview data from Mexican migrant farmworker mothers that live in Hartnett County, North Carolina. I find that farmworker mothers resist every day in ways that are at times unconscious, unplanned, and unnoticed but give them agency and empower them as undocumented migrant women, allow them to self-define, self-express, and self-value their cultural identity, and provide them with feelings of joy that give meaning and dignity to their lives.
- 3 In this paper, I first review the literature on how everyday resistance, food labor, women of color mothering, and intersectional oppression contextualize the experience of Mexican migrant farmworker mothers. Next, I describe my research methods, and present the case studies. I argue that Mexican farmworker women in the US express resistance through their food labor in three distinct ways: 1) by highlighting the impact of their labor as mothers and farmworkers; 2) by reproducing food practices that are culturally and ethnically significant; and 3) by feeling contentment and joy when they work in the fields. I conclude that an action-oriented intersectional lens (Hill Collins 2000) describes the agency of Mexican migrant farmworker mothers and their food labor with nuance and complexity to further visibilize their struggle with systemic oppression in the US and support the need for social and institutional change.

Literature on everyday acts of resistance, foodwork, and mothers of color who resist intersectional oppression

- 4 Women are rarely central in the prominent studies on migrant farmworkers in the US (Estabrook 2011, Gray 2013, Holmes 2013), and neither are the ways they resist gender, ethnicity, citizenship and class oppression, or their experience as mothers (Nakano Glenn 1994). There is a need for research on how farmworker mothers' resist intersectional oppression through their everyday feeding and agricultural labor by enacting "small but significant acts of defiance" (Mares 2019:88). And for a perspective on mothering and food labor that centers mothers of color who work within the food industry and decentralizes the normalized experience of middle-class white women in the US.
- 5 Studies by feminist scholars of color focus on the ways Black, Indigenous and People of Color resist the intersections of everyday oppressions (Hill Collins 2000)—like speaking Spanish to signal their cultural identity (Ochoa 1999), talking back after a xenophobic comment (Hooks 2014), or enjoying cooking within a racist environment (Avakian 2005, Blend 2001, Williams-Forsen 2001). Everyday resistance can be unplanned and go unnoticed (Evans and Moore 2015) and it is not overt, collective or organized (el-Khoury 2012), but it is always significant, meaningful, and effective (Hooks 2014, el-Khoury 2012). It allows enactors to express freedom (Counihan 2009: 114), empowerment, and agency (Avakian 2005), and help them maintain and value their human dignity and sense of self and celebrate their self-value and self-definition (Beoku-Betts 1995, Williams-Forsen 2001). Caballero *et al.* (ed. 2019: 10) also stress that

working class women of color navigate motherhood while resisting systemic and institutional oppression through “everyday tactics or acts”.

- 6 At home, the food practices—or foodwork—of migrant farmworker mothers are a gendered form of care work. Cairns and Johnston (2015) define foodwork as the labor of procuring and preparing food for yourself and others –like shopping, cooking, and cleaning-up— and the mental and emotional labor needed to carry it out. Although foodwork can be “burdensome and oppressive” for women (DeVault 1991: 232), it is simultaneously meaningful and rewarding and a “source of [...] power and identity” (Cairns and Johnston 2015: 20). Scholars associate the foodwork of women of color to burden, oppression, inequality, and subordination (Avakian 2005, Beoku-Betts 1995, Counihan 2009), but also to agency, empowerment, authority, control, and resistance (Abarca 2006, Avakian 2005, Beoku-Betts 1995, Counihan 2009, Williams-Forson 2001). Moreover, Beoku-Betts (1995) and Abarca (2006) discuss foodwork within communities of color as a necessary and transformative form of family and community care.
- 7 Foodwork research, largely based on the experience of middle-class white women, finds that mothers disproportionately perform food labor and experience pressures to nourish their families (DeVault 1991, Cairns and Johnston 2015, MacKendrick 2014). Some studies find that poor mothers of color have more difficulty living up to these expectations because they cannot access basic resources and society stereotypes them as uncaring or uninformed (Elliot and Bowen 2018, Fielding-Singh 2017). But research shows that they do invest in nourishing food for their families and make choices based on health expectations (Bowen *et al.* 2019, Cairns *et al.* 2013). Although these studies include low-income women of color, they do not center on the particularities of their mothering experience and how these shape their food labor.
- 8 Some studies tangentially address the feeding practices of migrant farmworker mothers in the US. Mares (2019) discusses how Latina dairy farmworker mothers and their male partners in Vermont cope with food insecurity by growing food in gardens and cooking dishes from home. Meierotto and Som Castellano (2019) examine Latina women farmworkers’ food provisioning strategies in Idaho. And Williams (1984) explores the cultural significance of Mexican women’s food practices in migrant worker camps in Texas. These studies overlook how the food and mothering practices of women of color shape each other. The particularities of these practices, that differ from that of middle-class, white women in the US, define the food labor of mothers of color. Thus, I propose the term “food labor” instead of “foodwork” to refer to the feeding work women of color who are low-wage workers within the food industry do at home and at work.

Research Methods

- 9 This case study centers on four Mexican farmworker mothers in rural North Carolina. In March 2019, I contacted two participants through a farmworker support organization in Harnett County and, using snowball sampling, also reached out to two of their acquaintances. Esperanza (36 years old) grew up helping her grandfather grow corn and squash in their family plot in Morelos. She is a mother of two toddlers and has been in the US for 18 years. Arminda (55), mother of a teenage daughter, left the coast of Guerrero where she worked in the melon fields since she was a child, 24 years ago. Lorena (34), who had never done agricultural work until she came to the US 18 years

ago, is also from Guerrero and is mother to a newborn and a teenager. Isidra (30) is mother to three young kids, she is from the Chiapas highlands, where she tended to her family's coffee field along with her sisters until she came to the US 12 years ago. All the women had long time male partners who they referred to as husbands, but not all of them were officially married. To learn about participants' citizenship status –being aware that it is sensitive information among migrant communities in the US-- I asked if they were able to go back to Mexico and they all said no. Thus, they all let me know they were undocumented. The four women had worked in agricultural fields, nurseries, and greenhouses growing tobacco, sweet potato, and other vegetables. I conducted one non-structured, in-depth interview with each participant and provided a \$25 compensation to each as an act of appreciation and acknowledgement for the value of their time and labor. Although monetary compensation is contested by some social researchers (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014), in this case, it represented an intentional contribution to participant's precarious household economy. All interviews were in Spanish, lasted 1-2hrs and were voice recorded. I transcribed them, used pseudonyms to protect participant's identities, and applied grounded theory to analyze the data (Charmaz 2006) allowing themes to emerge. I color-coded the transcripts line by line and then for broader themes, including “gendered practices”, “eating in the fields”, “enjoyment”, “cooking”, “perception of gendered work”. Finally, I selected representative quotes of the participant's collective experience. I use intersectionality as a methodological tool to understand participant's experiences through the tenants of oppression, relationality, and complexity (Misra *et al.* 2021).

Case study: Mexican farmworker mothers in North Carolina who enact everyday resistance through their food labor

- 10 Mexican migrant farmworker mothers in this case study confronted intersectional oppression through acts of everyday resistance expressed in their food labor. Living at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression – cisheteropatriarchal, white supremacist, and capitalist—created specific limiting circumstances for these women (Misra *et al.* 2021 Hill Collins 2000). They faced gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and class oppression doing feeding labor for society and their families, being undocumented migrants within a racist society, and working for low wages in the US food system. They expressed everyday resistance to these forms of oppression in three distinct ways: First, participants highlighted the impact of their food labor as working women providing a service for their families and society simultaneously. Yet, they struggle with childcare, with the sole responsibility of care work, and with exhaustion after doing hard physical labor. By making these affirming statements women showed agency and empowerment in their mothering experience yet expressed lack of resources and support. Second, they reproduced food practices that were culturally and ethnically significant. Participants said they cooked dishes from their hometowns, grew specific ingredients at home, and sporadically sourced food from the fields where they work. These practices allowed them to self-define, self-express, and self-value their cultural identity in a society that discriminates against them, based on their ethnicity and citizenship status, and denies the significance of their labor. Third, they talked about feeling contentment and joy when they worked in the fields. Participants

discussed sharing food with others during their lunch breaks, chatting among workmates, and a general feeling of distress and distraction from their daily home routine when they went to work. These instances of celebration fostered dignity and provided meaning to their existence as they navigated gender, ethnic, citizenship, and class oppression.

“Nuestro trabajo es importante”. Mothers who do work at home and in the fields

- 11 Isidra’s daily routine begins by caring for her kids. Like Isidra, participants described daily routines centered on care and feeding tasks that piled up when they went to work. They emphasized that even when their food labor –at home and in the fields– extended to a 24-hour routine, they found ways to make it happen. Thus, they struggled through the “double-burden” (Ontiveros 2002) of being both providers and caregivers, while doing hard physical labor in a male-dominated work environment. These aspects of their daily life represented gender oppression, but they also challenged the binary male-as provider-female-as-caregiver gender dynamic representative of middle-class white women experience in the US (Hill Collins 1994). Consequently, Mexican migrant farmworker mothers who are caregiving providers expressed that their work in the agricultural fields, nurseries, and greenhouses, affected their performance at home while their child-care responsibilities shaped their work experience. They spoke about struggling with childcare support, with solely assuming care responsibilities that affected their work performance, and with exhaustion after a straining workday that impacted their caregiving. Participants discussed these instances as a burdening struggle, but they resisted by highlighting the significance of their food labor for their families and society and expressing agency and empowerment in their self-perception (Abarca 2006, Avakian 2005, Counihan 2009) within a society that denies their value as caregiving mothers who work.
- 12 Immigrant farmworker mothers struggle finding reliable childcare (SPLC 2010). Like most, Esperanza found it hard to secure adequate care for her two young daughters every time she went back to work. Sometimes she did not go to work because finding someone to take care of her daughters was difficult. But if she organized her schedule, she found time, “*es lo que batallo, pero si yo me acoplo a mis horarios sí me voy*” (*that’s what I struggle with, but if I organize my schedule, I do go*¹). Missing work also meant she lost income for the day: taking care of children and going to work is a hard compromise. Their role as mothers, many times, forces them to prioritize performing care-tasks for their children over gaining an income to provide for them. This is a compromise that their male counterparts do not have to make, because childcare is not regarded as a male responsibility.
- 13 Most mothers said they were solely responsible for childcare responsibilities, affecting how they performed as farmworkers. Like Isidra’s and Esperanza’s daily routines, Arminda’s day began by dropping her children off at day-care. “*Me levanto para alistar las cosas para llevarlos a ellos [los hijos] a donde los cuidan*” (*I wake up to get the things ready to take them [the kids] to where they take care of them*), Arminda said. She recalled times she had to take the kids to the doctor and risked the day’s pay by asking to get off work early. She affirmed, “*Ya ve que es duro, y siempre es uno como mujer, por que el marido no*” (*You know it’s hard, and it’s always the woman, because the husband doesn’t*). Arminda

struggled with the responsibilities of being a mother who worked. For her, this meant doing care tasks that her husband did not. In the fields, men and women are expected to perform the same physical tasks-- crouching up and down for hours at a time to clean tobacco plants or carrying 5-gallon buckets of harvested sweet potatoes-- and are paid the same meager wages, yet women are burdened by the added responsibility and expenses of childcare. Her role as a working mother, who was both a provider and a caregiver, inevitably shaped her food labor in the fields making it harder for her to perform like her male coworkers.

- 14 The women worked in a physically demanding job where needs and limitations overlooked by employers led to extreme exhaustion, making caring and feeding tasks at home difficult. Reflecting back on the physical burden she endured for four years working in the sweet potato fields, Arminda said, “*no sé cómo los aguanté por que llegaba exhausta a mi casa, mis hijos me decían, mami vamos a caminar, lo que yo no quiero es caminar, por que caminamos todo el día*” (I don’t know how I endured it because I came home exhausted, my kids would tell me mami lets go for a walk, and, the last thing I want to do is walk, because we walk all day). The physical strain participants endured at work affected their mental and physical condition when they were at home performing care tasks for their families. This experience differs from that of farmworker men who face similar physical exhaustion but generally do not perform care tasks at home. The food labor women did in the fields shaped the caregiving they could barely do at home burdened by physical exhaustion.
- 15 Participants recognized that the strenuous food labor performed in the fields and at home, was important for their families and society in general. As she reflected on her double-burden, Lorena highlighted the difference she perceived between her role as a mother and worker versus her husband’s: *una como mujer tiene uno sus hijos[...] por que el hombre, nada que ver con uno, [...] el hombre trabaja y llega a su casa, en mi caso, de mi esposo, el llega, no más come, a ver televisión, en cambio uno de mujer, va trabaja, que cocinar, que limpiar, que lavar, [...] que ver los niños, [...] entonces digo yo, no es para menos la responsabilidad de una mujer*” (as a woman, I have my kids, because the man, has nothing to do with that, the man works and gets home, and in my case, with my husband, he arrives, just eats, and then watches tv, on the other hand, as a woman, I go and work, cook, clean, wash, watch the kids, so I say, it is not [to be taken] for granted the responsibility of a woman).
- 16 She firmly stated that her work as a mother included working in the fields and doing care work at home for her family. Lorena did not talk about changing the gendered dynamic she observed at home, but she resisted a submissive role by highlighting that her work mattered and sometimes even more than her husband’s. For Arminda, her work as mother and farmworker was doubly important. On one hand, it provided a service to society, “*al trabajar uno contribuye a que se llegue a los productos que uno trabaja*” (one’s work contributes for others to have access to the products). On the other, it served her family at home, “*el trabajo en la casa, es importante por que es cuando uno hace de comer, a mis hijos*” (the work at home, is important, because that is when one makes food for the kids). Arminda highlighted her food labor was significant and valuable in her own life and for society. By affirming this she resisted the normalized notion that migrant farmworkers are unskilled and replaceable and that women’s foodwork at home is inherent to their gender.
- 17 Participants struggled with gender oppression when they confronted the double-burden of being mothers who were providers and caregivers. Procuring childcare for

their kids when they were at work, taking sole responsibility of caring tasks that interfered with their workday, and dealing with physically demanding tasks at work that produced exhaustion at home, were a few examples of this oppression. Although migrant farmworker men face oppression as underpaid workers, they generally do not face the double burden that is carried by women farmworkers marking a significant difference in their gendered experience. Participants resisted by highlighting and affirming the value of the everyday work of being mothers and farmworkers. Even if they did not have the agency and power to change the gendered dynamics they experienced at home, being aware of their condition and valuing their food labor was a first step towards change.

"Echar tortillas". Mexican women who grow and cook food from back home

- 18 Cooking for her family was a priority for Armida, even when working in the fields. She made sure to share her culinary heritage with her daughter by teaching her to make staple dishes—like tortillas, rice, and salsa. As a Mexican undocumented woman living in the US, Arminda felt the oppression of a racially hostile society. Two-thirds of the 3 million migrant farmworkers in the US were born in Mexico, and over half of them are undocumented (Legal Aid NC 2017). They are targets of immigration policies (Brown and Getz 2011) that make their essential work invisible (Mares *et al.* 2017). One way Arminda defended her dignity was by upholding her cultural food practices (Williams 1984, Blend 2001). She found agency in practicing her culinary knowledge, as have many Mexican women living in the US (Abarca 2006, Blend 2001, Counihan 2009, Williams 1984). Arminda resisted by finding joy and connection in her cooking practices, and passing on her culinary knowledge, in a context that denied her value as a mother (Elliot and Bowen 2018, Fielding-Singh 2017, Hill Collins 1994), a farmworker (Entralago 2021, Sbicca *et al.* 2020), and a migrant (Mares 2019). The women resisted by cooking dishes from their hometowns, growing specific ingredients at home, and sourcing food from the fields where they work. These everyday acts of resistance allowed them to self-value and self-express their cultural identity (Beoku-Betts 1995, Blend 2001, Williams-Forson 2001, Williams 1984) in a country that devalues their existence. These acts were not necessarily conscious (Williams-Forson 2001), but they reproduced the notion of *la lucha* (struggle) and the need to live fully and with hope regardless of suffering, moving *pa'lante* (forward), that is present in the daily lives of many Latina women in the US (Isasi-Diaz 1996).
- 19 Isidra was aware that as an undocumented Mexican immigrant, she was not welcomed in US society. She heard how "*Donald Trump crítica mucho a los Hispanos, que son matones, violadores*" (Donald Trump criticizes Hispanics, saying they are killers, rapists). But she added, "*no se dan cuenta que por uno hay frutas y verduras, por que uno es la que lo cosecha, nosotros somos hispanos los que andamos pizcando*" (they don't realize that because of us they have fruits and vegetables, because we are the ones who harvest them, it's us the Hispanics, the ones picking [the food]). Isidra understands her role in US society and its complexity. On one hand, she heard the then-president say undocumented Mexican immigrants were a risk to the United States. On the other, she was certain her work planting and picking fruits and vegetables was essential for the society that discriminated against her. She lives in the tension between the racial hostility she encountered daily and the burden of having a

low-wage, physically straining job while trying to provide for herself and her family. Enacting cultural food practices is a way these women resist this tension.

- 20 All participants shared that their food labor involved cooking recipes from their hometowns. When Esperanza talked about the food she ate for lunch at the tobacco fields, she made sure to highlight that, “*las tortillas de mano me gusta hacerlas frescas para que tengan mejor sabor*” (*handmade tortillas I like to make them fresh so that they have a better flavor*). Tortillas, a Mexican staple, are a symbol of resiliency for migrant women in the US that reproduce their cultural identity (Blend 2001). By making hand-made tortillas, Esperanza self-valued and self-expressed her cultural food identity (Williams-Forson 2001) and established that as a migrant in a new country food is a source of resistance (Espiritu 2001).
- 21 Arminda made “*aporreado*”, a dry meat dish from her hometown in Guerrero, on special occasions. She hanged the meat on a hook to dry, fried it, added an egg coating, and served it with red or green salsa. Back home, she never ate this dish because her mother could not afford to buy meat. For these women, food insecurity was a constant threat in Mexico (Carney 2015), and now in the US they enjoyed dishes that they could not access before. Cooking food from home did not represent an idyllic reproduction of cultural heritage, but a complex connection to the life they left behind and a symbolic value representation of the life they lead in the present. For Esperanza and Arminda, cooking a dish from a place they hold close to their hearts, and they might never see again is a way to resist the dehumanization they experience everyday as undocumented migrants.
- 22 Making traditional food –like hand-made tortillas and *aporreado*–is very labor intensive (Pilcher 1998, Rodríguez-Alegría 2012). Surveys show Mexican women spend more time cooking than women in other countries and the gender gap in domestic labor is larger in Mexico than in other countries (OECD 2020). However, feminist migration scholars find that moving to the US often alters gendered expectations and divisions of labor among Mexican migrant families (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Schmalzbauer 2014). Importantly, scholars like Abarca (2006), Williams (1984), and Counihan (2009) show cooking and other forms of food labor are not just a form of oppression, but also provide agency and power, allow creativity, portrait dignity and reaffirm cultural identity. Mescoli (2020: 50) even argues that food practices help migrant women define their selves and the interactions they have with others helping to shape their identity. When Arminda described how she cooked *aporreado*, her eyes lit up, and she sounded pleased to say it was original from her hometown in Guerrero, but she has made it with the ingredients she found in North Carolina, thus expressing creativity, and affirming her cultural heritage. Similarly, Esperanza was proud to say she makes hand-made tortillas, a culinary staple and delicacy, for her own lunch –not for her husband or her kids, but for herself–, which showed agency in her cooking practices and portrayed power and dignity in her food choice. For both women, these food practices also help define their identity in the US.
- 23 Most participants grew their own ingredients to make dishes from their home countries. Some dishes required ingredients that were not easily found in grocery stores or were more affordable to grow at home (Mares *et al.* 2017). One season, Isidra grew strawberries and had enough to share with her neighbors. She was also successful growing chili, cucumber, melon and tomato. Esperanza was very practical and threw rotting tomatoes on a patch of soil, to grow tomatoes and make salsa. Saving seed from

the previous harvest helped Arminda improve her chili selection, “*si nos gustó un chilito del año pasado dejamos unos y los amarramos y los alzamos y echamos la semillita y la sembramos*” (if we like a chili plant from the year before, we leave it there and tie them and hang them, then we open them and throw the seed and plant it). By growing their own ingredients these farmworker women were assuring their access to culturally appropriate foods (Mares *et al.* 2017, Mares 2019). And they were putting their agricultural knowledge into practice (Peña and Mares 2011) within their household. Shaping their own cultural food practices with the means available to them is a way they resist an anti-immigrant narrative that does not acknowledge their food labor as workers and mothers.

- 24 Sometimes, women found the ingredients they needed in the fields where they did farmwork. Esperanza talked specifically about “*flores de calabaza*” (squash flowers), a delicacy for several regional Mexican cuisines. Her friends working the squash fields asked growers for permission to harvest them, “*los americanos no las comen y cuando hay un field lleno de flores las amigas que trabajan ahí piden permiso para cortar*” (the Americans don’t eat them so there are fields full of them and the friends that work there ask permission to cut them). Sweet potato, squash, and cucumber were other foods the women could access for free or at a reduced fee if they asked their employers. Although the women were not directly defying authority by asking permission to harvest food from the fields for their own consumption, —like the Mexican and Jamaican migrant farmworkers in British Columbia who reappropriated farm produce as an act of resistance (Cohen and Hjalmarson 2020)—it was a way they connected back to the product of their work and accessed the cultural foods they value most. Accessing culturally appropriate foods through alternative means is a direct way to resist a food system (Peña and Mares 2011) that does not cater to their needs.
- 25 Participant’s descriptions of their food labor at home —cooking specific recipes from their hometowns, growing certain ingredients at home, and sourcing food from the fields—were examples of everyday resistance against ethnic and racial oppression. These daily practices were ways in which the women connected back to their cultural heritage (García *et al.* ed. 2017). They allowed participants to uphold their existence in a US society that consistently dismisses their human worth, as undocumented immigrants and farmworkers. As working mothers of color, participants resisted systemic racial discrimination by reaffirming their cultural identity, self-defining, and self-valuing it, and regaining their human dignity while finding hope within struggle. Cooking, growing, and acquiring food that reaffirms their cultural identity is an explicit act of resistance in a society that condemns their existence.

“A mi me encanta trabajar”. Farmworker women who find joy in their work

- 26 Esperanza struggled to describe a time she enjoyed farmwork. Backbreaking work is not generally a pleasant task. As low-wage workers within the food industry, migrant farmworker women face social class oppression. The annual income for a farmworker family in North Carolina is \$14,000, 35% less than the national average (Legal Aid NC 2017). Women earn substantially less money than their male counterparts—the gender wage gap is \$5,000 (Entralago 2021)—while facing sexual harassment (Morales Waugh 2010) and reproductive health risks (Golichenko and Sarang 2013). Yet, participants

discussed sharing food with others during their lunch breaks, chatting among workmates, and feeling distressed and distracted from their daily home routine when they went to work, as moments of joy and contentment at their workplace. These moments were acts of everyday resistance because they allowed women to celebrate daily interactions and to create meaning and foster dignity in their lives (Blend 2001, Counihan 2009, Williams 1984, Williams-Forson 2001).

- 27 Participant's workdays were marked by burdens they encountered routinely. Esperanza thought that getting paid \$8.50 an hour was not enough for the physically backbreaking work she was asked to perform, "*tiene que estar uno agachado todo el día cargar los botes hasta un carro [...]el bote está muy pesado y [...]se cansa uno mucho*" (you are crouching down all day long and have to carry the containers to a truck, and it's very heavy, one gets very tired). She also complained about chronic waist pain from crouching to cut the squash. Arminda was concerned about the heat strokes, "*se siente uno mal, te mareas, sientes como que quieres devolver, te duele tu cabeza*" (you feel unwell, dizzy, you want to vomit, your head hurts). Her workday was hard because the overseer's did not provide breaks during the day or drinking water for the crew. Lorena found it very difficult to have no access to suitable bathrooms during the workday, especially "*uno que es mujer, y quiere ir al baño, y ya ve no hay baños, y cuando andamos en nuestros días pues es muy difícil*" (as a woman, when we want to use the bathroom and you can't go, and when you're having your period, that's very hard). She also observed how pesticides affected her health when the fields were getting sprayed and she was working, sometimes she felt like she would not make it through the day. Together, these circumstances show the oppression women farmworkers face as undervalued low-wage workers within the US food system.
- 28 Yet, participants created moments of celebration throughout their workdays. Eating and sharing food during their lunch break was an activity the women described as joyful. With no access to tables and chairs where to sit and eat, or a microwave to heat up their food, they were forced to find shade and sit on the ground. Esperanza always brought tacos for lunch because she could eat them cold. Isidra did the same thing. She preferred to bring tortillas and taco fillings like scrambled eggs with green beans, Mexican beef stew, rice, or beans. Echoing the experience of all participants, for Esperanza, lunchtime was the most joyful part of the workday. She described how the women shared food with each other, "*nos juntamos todas y hacemos una rueda y cada quien llevamos lo suficiente como para convivir con los demás [...] Y es bonito*" (We all get together and we make a circle and each one brings enough to "share" with others [...] And its nice). Participants thought the conditions in which they ate lunch were not adequate, but they perceived the act of eating together as pleasant. Moreover, by sharing food with each other they experienced joy, while simultaneously, creating community and bonds of conviviality (Williams 1984, De la Peña 1981).
- 29 Chatting as they sat on the tractor planting sweet potato or while they ate lunch together was another instance participants enjoyed about their workday. The general themes of Esperanza's chats during lunch revolved around work activities and family, "*si la planta está bonita, si está feo, o que la silla se mueve, [...], me preguntan cómo están mis hijos, o cómo van en la escuela*" (whether the plant is looking nice or ugly, or if the chair [on the tractor] is wobbly [...], they ask me how my kids are, how they are doing at school). The women also talked to each other while sitting on the tractor. There, Arminda specially liked to chat with coworkers she had known for some time. They talked about their kids and the upcoming birthdays, "*a veces [hablamos] de los niños, de la escuela, te acuerdas que va a*

ser el cumpleaños de fulana” (sometimes we talk about the kids, school, there are times you remember it’s someone’s birthday). Chatting during their workday allowed participants to engage with one another pleasantly as they learned about each other’s families and daily lives outside of work. This interaction provided their work with meaning and significance beyond the burden of strenuous tasks (Hooks 2014, el-Khoury 2012).

- 30 Participants expressed enjoying their work also meant feeling distracted, distressed, and relaxed from their daily household routine. Lorena explained that at work she got distracted from being at home, “*por lo menos se distrae uno, estoy ganando y me estoy distraiendo, en la casa está encerrado, no más pensando en su familia*” (at least I get distracted, I’m earning [a wage] and I’m getting distracted, at the house I’m shut in, only thinking about the family). Participants shared a general feeling of being entrapped at home in a daily routine and overwhelmed by household concerns. Like Isidra who felt that at work she could “*respir[ar] un poquito más*” (breathe a little more). Or Arminda who admitted that being at home all day stressed her out and that was why “*me encanta trabajar*” ([she] loves to work). Participants pointed to a complex meaning construction when they described their work as joyful and physically burdensome. Although their farmwork involved strenuous tasks, it also provided them with an escape route from the daily worries of their home life. Thus, they acknowledged its positive significance and the human dignity it provided.
- 31 The women in this case study were low wage workers in a male-dominated environment doing physically straining work that was made invisible by the US food system. They discussed the circumstances that made them feel like undervalued workers. Yet, by engaging in moments of pleasure and joy—when sharing food with workmates, chatting during the workday, and feeling distressed from everyday routines at home— they were resisting oppression. They were also doing it by practicing agency to disrupt their overwhelming home routines and disengaging from their daily worries by working, and by constructing meaning, building community, and valuing their human dignity.

Conclusion

- 32 In this study, I look at three ways in which migrant farmworker mothers enact everyday resistance through their food labor at home and in the fields. Acts of everyday resistance –like highlighting the significance of their work as mothers and farmworkers, enacting food practices that connect them to their cultural background and sense of identity and having moments of joy throughout their workday—provide Mexican migrant farmworker mothers with agency, feelings of empowerment, a way to self-express and value their cultural identity, and with feelings of joy and celebration that foster their human dignity and give meaning to their existence. And they allow these women to confront the intersectional oppression they experience as working-class, mothers of color who are immigrants in the US.
- 33 These findings suggest that the Mexican migrant farmworker mothers in this case study enact everyday resistance to confront intersectional oppression. Their lived experience moves away from the generalized depiction of men’s experience in the farmworker struggle. And it adds nuance to the portrayal of migrant farmworkers in the US. The intersectional analysis I presented highlights the existing relationality between resistance and oppression in these women’s experience as food laborers.

Moreover, it points to the complexity that exists in their description of their lives as women who are mothers, migrants, and farmworkers. Their life is not miserable or joyful, it is a complex combination of both. Finally, these findings point to the particularities of women of color mothering in conjunction with their food labor, at home and work, and the ways these practices shape each other. This analysis suggests that Mexican migrant farmworker mothers enact intersectional resistance to gain agency in their everyday lives over the conjunction of oppressions that shape their lived experience in the US. As an action-oriented framework, intersectionality shows how these women can transform their reality in everyday ways as they continue to feed their children and a mostly oblivious US society through their food labor.

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NOTES

1. All interview quote translations are done by the author of the paper.

ABSTRACTS

Previous research on migrant farmworkers’ resistance efforts in the US focuses on collective organizing but often fails to adopt an intersectional lens that considers farmworker women’s everyday acts of resistance. This study looks at Mexican farmworker women’s resistance in response to the call by scholars for more nuanced portrayals of migrant farmworker’s struggle. Immigrant women of color and low-wage workers have mothering experiences marked by intersectional oppression that shape their food labor. I argue that farmworker mothers engage in everyday acts of resistance via their food labor in their agricultural work and at home feeding their families. An intersectional lens provides an essential perspective on the systemic transformations needed to improve farmworker’s lives in the US.

Les recherches antérieures sur les efforts de résistance des travailleurs agricoles migrants aux États-Unis se concentrent sur l'organisation collective, mais omettent souvent d'adopter une perspective intersectionnelle qui tienne compte des actes de résistance quotidiens des travailleuses agricoles. Cette étude se penche sur les expressions de résistance des travailleuses agricoles mexicaines en réponse à l'appel lancé par les universitaires en faveur d'une représentation plus nuancée de la lutte des travailleuses agricoles migrantes. Les femmes de couleur, qui sont des immigrantes et des travailleuses à bas salaire, ont des expériences de maternage marquées par une oppression intersectionnelle qui façonne leur travail alimentaire. Je soutiens que les mères travailleuses agricoles s'engagent dans des actes quotidiens de résistance par le biais de leur travail alimentaire dans leur travail agricole et à la maison pour nourrir leur famille. Une optique intersectionnelle fournit une perspective essentielle sur les transformations systémiques nécessaires pour améliorer la vie des travailleurs agricoles aux États-Unis.

INDEX

Mots-clés: travailleurs agricoles migrants, femmes de couleur, maternité, travail alimentaire, actes quotidiens de résistance, intersectionnalité

Keywords: migrant farmworkers, women of color, motherhood, food work, everyday acts of resistance, intersectionality

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The power of the aromatic herbs of the Azoteas

Stories of Empowerment from the Afro-Colombian Women of Guapi (Cauca, Colombia)

Le pouvoir des herbes aromatiques des Azoteas : histoires d'autonomisation des femmes afro-colombiennes de Guapi (Cauca, Colombie)

Flavia G. Cuturi

“En la cocina se construye, se comparte y se comadrea”

Teófila Betancurt (Guapi, 29 July 2020)

Introduction: Approaching Guapi and Afro-Colombian women

- 1 In certain geopolitical contexts, the use that women make of herbs and spices to give character and flavor to cuisine may become, instead of a creative act or a routine, a powerful tool for asserting gender and reclaiming personal and collective identity, while at the same time being an economic resource in the maintenance of the autonomy of women and their households, as well as a way to safeguard biodiversity and fight peacefully against violence. Such is the case of the women of Guapi (Cauca)¹ in Colombia, and in particular the women of African descent. The circumstances that have favored demands for socio-economic autonomy, valorization of gender and political-communitarian reclamation, are linked to the so-called Ley 70 of 1993 (a law that was further refined legally over subsequent years), and specifically the section concerning Legislación Étnica, issued in support of the Afro-Colombian population, which was recognized as an “ethnic group” to protect its basic rights. This law activated funds – both from public bodies and elements of national and international civil society – in support of cultural and socio-economic projects organized by communities of African descent, in order to promote their “visibility” and end their marginalization and “abandonment” by the state (Oslender 1998, p. 253). The impetus for the local people to

retrace their own identity trajectory, brought about by Ley 70, should be identified with the context of the Pacific coast around Guapi, an area “under pressure” due to the forced migrations of indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations fleeing the *violencia* generated by armed conflict², and characterized by violence in everyday life, in particular male violence against women. Everything is connected: after 1993, Ley 70 became a reified subject (as we will shortly see), and a part of the narrative (in a literal sense), leading to reactive and agentic effects for empowerment among Afro-Colombian communities. In the meantime, the social fabric and forest environment were being destroyed at a growing rate, with the latter put at risk by monocropping and mining activities, often illegal, as well as the resurgence of armed conflict. At the same time Ley 70 generated a form of consciousness that was “reparative” with respect to the violence of the previous few decades, as well as a past characterized by stories of slavery and descent from slaves who had either fled the *cuadrillas* (*cimarronaje*)³ or bought their freedom with the strength of their own labor before the abolition of slavery itself (1851). New narrations of the collective memory of the past are currently directed outside Afro-Colombian communities to break the long silence that has enveloped them, but also to make the voices heard of Afro-Colombians who oppose the “right to indifference” of those who have tried to “integrate” through *blanqueamiento* (whitening) (Mosquera and Barcelos 2007).

- 2 The guiding thread of the story I would like to tell⁴ starts with *azoteas*, a kind of plant nursery filled with fertile earth and a sustainable cultivation technique that had fallen into disuse in spite of its forward-looking and equitable socio-ecological principles (more details in the next paragraph) , and finishes with the Fundación Chiyangua and its founder, Teofila Betancurt, as well as many of her travel companions, protagonists of a collective and wide-ranging process of reclamation that is still underway. I will focus on the centrality of the *azoteas* as they are emblematic of life practices of the Afro-Colombian communities on the Pacific coast of Colombia, and in particular of the women of these communities. The women have guided the construction of the identity project encouraged by Ley 70, privileging the links with the area in socio-ecological terms, so that the *azotea* is seen as a source of food but also, and above all, a place for the regeneration of social relations, beginning with those among women; with it comes the promotion of knowledge and the creative force that is “communicated” through culinary preparations as well as through the power of words, above all those expressed in verse, *coplas* or *décimas*, as we will see further below.
- 3 One of the main points of this article is how women of Guapi have participated vigorously in the opportunities offered by Ley 70, both in terms of reflecting on their rights and taking stock of gender and Afro identity, and of presenting projects with significant socio-economic impact, after discussing these in groups, cooperatives, and community organizations (cfr. Agudelo 2004). Teofila Betancurt Caicedo and a group of women, her allies and “*comadres*”⁵, have organized one of these high-impact projects: in 1994 they established an organization that promotes the cultivation and commercialization of culinary and medical herbs, which, “after meetings and joint decisions, [was given] the name Fundación Chiyangua. [It is] an organization that was founded to help the communities to sustain themselves while remaining on the land, maintaining the ancestral heritage that links them to life” (Fundación Chiyangua. 2018, p. 12 [all translations are the author’s own]). To accomplish the organization’s aims, one of the central tenets of the project was the need to reclaim the production of

culinary and medical herbs, based on the restoration of: the *azotea*. I consider it important to dwell on certain descriptive aspects of the *azotea*, with the idea that drawing certain fundamental elements of a food system “out of the shadows” (Koenler 2019, p. 97) makes explicit, in this case, the long process of reflection undertaken by the Afro-Colombian women of the Foundation, which began with them gaining consciousness of themselves and of the condition of “invisibility” of Afro-descendant women. The planning effort made by the Foundation around the *azotea* has highlighted the union that links representations of gender to social relations, to the modes of production of food and medicine, to specific relational politics between human subjects and between human and non-human subjects, as well as to a collection of actions that involve the transformation of environmental resources, and certain responsibilities borne towards these. In the particular case of the *azoteas*, given their centrality on the path towards these women’s liberation and the construction of Afro-Colombian identity, the practices and techniques of production go hand in hand with their process of symbolization and capitalization. A brief description will clarify what I am suggesting.

The *azoteas*

- 4 The *azotea* is a kind of plant nursery, formed of a rectangular wooden platform with planks lining the entire perimeter; it is raised off the ground to ensure the cultivated soil within it is not reached by high water from the rivers. The platform’s supporting columns are tall enough to keep the plants it contains safe from animals and excessive damp from the rain. The height of the *azoteas* enables women of all ages to work easily, since whoever tends the plants can do so while standing straight. The reclamation of the *azotea* system of cultivation has restored conditions of cooperative work both among women and among women and men, and this restoration has been accomplished without exposing women to too great an increase in chores to undertake during the day. *Azoteas* are usually built in residential zones (in rural areas) or on land on the outskirts of town centers (as in the case of Guapi). Consequently, the *azoteas* do not involve travelling onerous distances from one’s home, and while they do require daily attention, this can be accomplished according to one’s own schedule, often between chats or during the pauses between other activities. Furthermore, the drizzly climate means it is unnecessary to resort to irrigation systems or laborious carrying of water. Indeed, the macro region along the Pacific coast where Guapi is located, is in the Intertropical Convergence Zone: it has high levels of precipitation and humidity and is crossed by a dense network of rivers that run from the Western Cordillera down to the Pacific Ocean. Botanical expertise is another very important aspect that characterizes the *azoteas*, given that over 150 species of plant destined for culinary and medical use (the two often coincide) are cultivated within them, following organic principles and using locally sourced seeds (Camacho 2001). In Guapi the botanical skills related to the *azoteas* fall under women’s sphere of competence and are often concentrated in a wise and knowledgeable woman and then transmitted matrilineally, with the older woman choosing a younger woman within the household as a receptor for her intellectual and experiential heritage. The matrilineal transmission of botanical knowledge and techniques strengthens cohesion between women of different generations within the same residential group, which is often matrifocal, although not to the extent that households remain closed off from one another. Indeed, it is common practice to

exchange seeds and seedlings and share knowledge within one's extended family, whether its members live nearby or are dispersed along the rivers. The women who are responsible for conserving and increasing the botanical knowledge of the entire family group are often also midwives and medicine women, and thus play a central role in the whole community. *Azoteas* are a living part of a family.

- 5 The recovery of the *azotea* system has become again a practice that is nowadays central in the construction of Afro-Colombian gender identity and culture, a source of reference for women empowerment, a tool of social and familial cohesion, a curb on the loss of knowledge, and, not least, a symbol of biodiversity. What is more, the *azotea* mode of production has been a lifeline for those without access to land, such as women forced to migrate because of violence (whether domestic or due to armed conflict). Its structure, which is light and adaptable, can easily be built near residences even when there is little available space, and supplies a number of basic foods for personal consumption or sale, such as herbs and other vegetables, thus serving as an economic resource even in conditions of food crisis. As Camacho claims *azoteas* are “*jardines de cocina y semillero de vida*” (gardens for cooking and seedbed of life) (2001, p. 53). So far as its practical aspects are concerned, as well as the complex socio-cultural process that it sets in motion, the *azotea* is a collective productive space that is prevalently feminine, and yet one that is able to restore balance between genders, given that it in no way excludes male contribution; on the contrary, this is required in certain phases of the construction and maintenance of the structures.

Photo n°1



Doña Teofila Betancourt (in the middle) making *azoteas* together with some family members and close collaborators (2012; Guapi, Dpt. of Cauca, Colombia).

Photo by Flavia G. Cuturi

- 6 In sum, *azoteas* represent an efficient form of social and ecological coexistence in a tropical environment that can often be problematic for horticultural activities, with land that is flooded by the ocean tides that can rise up river courses as far as twenty

kilometers inland. The *azoteas* also stand for matrifocality, botanical expertise, management of biodiversity, cooperation and solidarity, culinary styles, and gustatory preferences. The reasons behind this “localized” identity trajectory, as Oslender defines it (1998, p. 272), which privileges bio-social relations with the territory in a setting that incorporates aquatic and jungle life, is linked to complex issues of collective and private violence, forced mobility, and environmental depletion. All of these have been fought resolutely by women who favor instead a creative vision that looks towards a future founded on peace and an updated and radically redefined pact with the territory, in which this is seen as a source of life and human and non-human relationality, rather than as a place of fear and destruction. Given all the things that *azoteas* represent, they are increasingly the subject of attention in schools, where they accompany the objective of educating young people about the biological sciences and increasing awareness of botany, in particular its use for food production. This is causing reflection about the consumption of foods that are healthy and the outcome of sustainable production using old methods that are at risk of disappearing (Fundación Chiyangua 2017; Beltrán and Aguirre 2019).

Women and herbs

- 7 The story of the empowerment of these women as Afro-Colombian has in many cases relied on the language of the flavors that are planted and grown in the *azoteas* as a way to give character to culinary dishes and “substance” to community life, becoming representative of an entire process of promoting the culture and identity of the Afro-Colombian community along the country’s Pacific coast. The constitutional reform was also an encouragement to recover forms of community solidarity in times of crisis, with cooperative work, between women in particular, necessary as a reaction to private violence and armed conflict, with its devastating effects on land, resources, and the social fabric. The conflict led to continuous migrations of indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations fleeing massacres. These had an impact in particular on the lives of women who were left alone with their children and the elderly, without any land, and forced to move to ever more urbanized places like Guapi, enlarging these towns with effects that were far from positive. The restoration of the *azotea* system has been accompanied by a series of economic opportunities for matrifocal households, damaged or whole, but above all it has created a chance for people to bring to light organizational capacities founded on women’s solidarity, along with entrepreneurial ability and political initiative in defense of the environment. This complex movement of stories of empowerment, all linked together, is anchored in a set of elements considered central for Afro-Colombian women, namely the relation between culinary, alimentary and gustatory elements, together with those regarding cooperation, identity, and gender, as well as socio-economic, environmental, and territorial factors, as mentioned above.
- 8 This intersection of elements has been experienced in other geopolitical contexts around the world, above all in places that are besieged by the rhetoric of “modernity” (Debevec 2014) and portrayed as inferior so that they take no part in it. Part of the seizure of women’s autonomy and the achievement of their demands is taking place, as in the case of Guapi, through the “reconquest” of control over all parts of food production, and also through cuisine that has been “liberated” from dependence

(economic and sensorial) on industrial products (in brief, liberated from *mague/maggi* stock cubes, from canned food, from junk food, and so on), along with the homogenizing, deculturizing and alienating effects these have in eco-territorial terms. This freedom is a legacy that is consciously given to newer generations, and an opportunity for all women who are responsible for households, regardless of whether they have suffered violence or undergone forced migration. Growing attention on “traditional cuisines”, which have entered the processes of cultural heritage capitalization as intangible goods, has actively involved Colombia since 2006.⁶ This has given further support to identity constructions and promotion of the work and culinary knowledge of women, which have become an important subject of public cultural policies aimed at the support and safekeeping of traditional Colombian cooking,⁷ where the importance accorded to Afro-Colombian specialties is increasingly significant (cfr. Ministerio de Cultura 2015).

- 9 Given the favorable climate created by *Ley 70*, cultural public policy, and Colombian civil society, and after a long process of accumulating women’s experiences, in Guapi we find an intricate process underway that involves liberation, conquest, capitalization on heritage, memory, pride, reclamation, and claims of gender and ethnicity, “concentrated” in a handful of herbs used in a number of dishes served both daily and for big occasions. This bunch of herbs has been entrusted with the role of giving a distinctive flavor to the Afro-Colombian cuisine of the Pacific coast, quite different from other Colombian cuisines. This is not intended to be a simplification or a manner of speaking through symbols. Aromatic herbs lie at the core of Afro-Colombian cuisine’s identity: known as *yerbas de azotea* (“*azotea* herbs”), these are “called to the front line” to win the fight against the culture of *mague* stock cubes and the dependence on monetization to feed oneself, and also to contribute re-establishing the food self-sufficiency of even the poorest family groups. Aromatic herbs, with their distinctive flavor, are what legitimize the “right to difference” and territorial rootedness. The principal *azotea* herbs, cultivated along with many others to season dishes and for medical use, are: *poleo* (*Satureia brownei*), oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), guaripeña onions (*Allium fistulosum*), various types of basil, including white (*Ocimum basilicum*) and black, or *chirará* (*Ocimum* sp.) varieties, but above all *chiyangua* or *chillangua* (*Eryngium foetidum*), which is also called *cilantro cimarron*.
- 10 Teofila Betancurt’s foundation takes its very name from one of the *azotea* herbs, *chiyangua*, which, setting aside its somewhat repellent scientific name, is representative of the entire movement of action and gender empowerment. In a recent publication that traces the history of the foundation (Fundación Chiyangua, 2017), *chiyangua* is explained poetically in *coplas*, with the title: *¿Que es la Chiyangua?* Along with the humorous and ironic tone of the names given in contrast to the scientific denomination, the verses proudly demonstrate the ontological identification of the plant with the region’s cuisine, with its aromatic and medicinal qualities, and with the recent processes of identity construction: [...] IV - Pa’ nosotros es Chiyangua / desde Chamón hasta Caimito / y sirve para el tapao / el sudao y el caldito. V- Tiene un olor agradable / que dan ganas de comer / y hasta pa’ curar el cuerpo / tiene un bendito poder. VI - Se cultiva en azoteas / aunque ella es persistente / se sostiene en todas partes / es amiga de la gente. VII - Chiyangua también se llama / un proceso de hermandad / que entre ríos y veredas / hoy construye vencidad. VIII - Chiyangua lleva el nombre / Fundació por apellido / con mujeres muy valientes. (2017, p. 10)

Photo n° 2



Doña Luisa Cuero in her *azoteas* garden, holds a bunch of freshly picked chiyangua (2012, Sabana locality, Guapi Municipality, Dpt. of Cauca, Colombia).

Photo by Flavia G. Cuturi

- 11 Since the Chiyangua Foundation is an organization created and sustained to unite, just like a bunch of *azotea* herbs, numerous components of private and public experience, I will attempt to explain the history of the Foundation, starting with its route towards the rights claims and the socio-cultural weight it has acquired with the support of *Ley 70*.

Ley 70 as an agentive subject

- 12 According to data from the most recent census (2018), 9.34% of Colombia's total population is recognized as being Afro-Colombian: in other words, a little more than four and a half million people (DANE, 2019). Within these numbers there is a significant difference in the censuses of 2005 and 2018 between estimates and self-identification, due to the difficulty people have in claiming the problematic denomination of Afro-descendent.⁸ This is a sign of the legacy left by the many centuries in which the population of African descent has been discriminated against and hidden, isolated at the margins of the country's political life, and treated as inferior because of racist ideologies. In spite of the efforts of *Ley 70*, the number of people that identified as being Afro-descendent decreased between the 2005 and 2018 censuses. Therefore, if we abide by the self-identification figures reported in the 2018 census, the total Afro-Colombian population is apparently in decline from 2005, with a total of less than three million people. In the most recent exercise, the census-takers themselves acknowledged the

obvious: that the gathered data had to be held up against historically rooted discrimination impeding explicit and conscious ascription, and that the census necessarily had a subjective, relational and situational character that makes identity ascription reliant on dynamic and often contingent factors.

- 13 I begin with these considerations, which form a backdrop to the numerous processes underway in the construction of Afro-Colombian identity, bearing in mind that the largest concentrations of the population of African descent are found in almost inaccessible regions of tropical rainforest with minimal infrastructure, in the Pacific coast departments of Chocó, Cauca, and Nariño, and the northern department of Bolívar. In departments along the Pacific coast as much as 95% of the population is Afro-Colombian. In the municipality of Guapi, 84% of inhabitants self-identify as being of African descent (Ministerio del Interior 2017, p. 13 It should be noted that around 60% of the population here live in the urban area, while the remaining 40% are in rural zones (*ibid.*, p. 36).
- 14 The Pacific coast region has one of the world's highest rates of biodiversity, threatened over the course of history by activities that are often illegal, such as gold mining, deforestation for the sale of exotic woods, and since the 1990s monocropping of the African oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) (FAO 2020; cfr. Lizcano 2018)⁹ and coca. The spread of these crops along the Pacific coast of Colombia has had harmful effects connected to networks of capital of obscure provenance that are linked to paramilitaries, and thus an integral part of the armed conflict. The deforestation and the marginalization of native crops (such as cacao, bananas, and the *chontaduro* palm [*bactris gasipaes*], etc.), caused the expropriation of land that has led to the forced migration (*desplazamiento*) of the Afro-descendant population. Forcible migration from violence in these rural areas has involved a quite substantial influx of vulnerable and impoverished women and households into urban areas like Guapi, and they now account for about 10% of the social structure.
- 15 In 1991, Colombia ratified a new Constitution that redefined the country as a participative, multiethnic and multicultural democracy. With the temporary Article 55 – AT55 – which became *Ley 70* in 1993, the Constitution recognized the Afro-descendant communities of the Pacific basin as an ethnic group, with territorial rights, having occupied unpopulated lands in recent decades, and protected their traditional customs of production and culture (see Fundación ACUA, 2014). In particular, *Ley 70* established, among other things, that in the areas dominated by Afro-descendant communities any use of natural resources would have to be subject to prior consultation.¹⁰ *Ley 70* was brought about to rectify inequality, marginalization, and the sidelining of Afro-Colombians from the social, political and economic life of the nation. In effect, it created a political space in which people might reclaim forms of historic “reparation” with regard to the damage of colonialism, slavery, and past and present instances of violence. Also, however, *Ley 70* created the conditions for an “integration” that would take place not through *blanqueamiento*, or some “tri-ethnic” hybridization of culture (white, indigenous, and black), but by reclaiming the right to difference.
- 16 The effects of *Ley 70* constitute an enormous subject, and I am unable to explore them fully here. I propose instead to offer some reflections on the perception of the importance given to *Ley 70* as seen in some of the discourses of reclamation of Afro-Colombian culture demonstrated through the perspective of the Chiyangua Foundation. Particularly in communications aimed at children of school age (although

this happens with adults too), *Ley 70* is put forward as an agentive subject, a political element that historicizes present reality (dividing history into before and after the law), which is identified in everyday life with the “reparative” element that Afro-Colombian intellectuals hope for.

Communicating in verses

- 17 First, though, I must introduce a factor that has hitherto gone untreated, namely communicative genres. Among both women and men of African descent on the coast between Colombia and Ecuador, a distinctive trait of oral communication of important content (whether this be serious or humorous), or exploration of personal or collective experience, in moments of conviviality or sharing, consists in the presentation of verses, *coplas* or *décimas* (texts in verses of four or ten stanzas), which are generally rhymed. These verses are recited or sung, and in the latter case are accompanied by a rhythmic beat performed by listeners with whatever they have at their disposition. Communication in verse can be used to mark a discontinuity from speech that is perceived as being too formal, or contrarily can be used to make speech more formal. As argued by Pedrosa and Vanin, communication in verse allows one “to exceed ordinary possibilities and access a kind of semantics of incantation” (1994, p. 70). I can only confirm this description: in my personal experience, improvised verses provoke empathy (and not just of the emphatic sort) and magical co-participation, creating the conditions for a kind of joint sharing of the contents of the communication. I have noticed that speaking in verse with one’s own terminology ruptures territorial boundaries and is intended as a distinctive oratorical practice with which the Afro-Colombians present their own self-recognition. The three *lideresas*, Teofila Betancurt (from Guapi), Carmen Julia Palacio (from Tumaco), and Daysi Rodríguez (from Esmeralda, Ecuador), who I invited to Naples or a conference on the life of Afro-descendants on the Pacific coast,¹¹ began and ended their talks using rhyming *coplas* as a tool of identity and gender, enabling the audience to have immediate access to the speakers’ intimate Afro Colombian perspective on the subjects they were talking about (see Lozano 2019). This device is used today in written materials intended for pedagogical, informational, celebrative and documentary usage regarding the women’s activities, their knowledge, and their consciousness. I have not been surprised, therefore, that many of the experiences of the Chiyangua Foundation, its founder and her “*comadres*” have been subject of recent publications, accompanied by very appealing images and drawings, which document the story of their successes, struggles, reflections, experiences, and lessons, and make use of prose that alternates with *coplas* and *décimas*. The subjects treated in verse have no thematic restrictions, and for this reason, in an ethno-educational book intended for teaching natural sciences to children in elementary school (Fundación Chiyangua 2017), we find not only a subject with the dense existential and identitarian power of the *azoteas*, but also reference to *Ley 70*, presented as an agentive subject through texts in verse.

“I - Aquí donde vivo yo / una ley lo va a enmarcar / el Consejo Comunitario / con título de propiedad.

II - La Ley 70 llegó / a nuestras comunidades / reafirmando nuestra lucha / pa’ poder empoderarnos / trajo cambios que consisten / en la reorganización / vereda y corregimiento / Esta ley constituyó / los Consejos Comunitarios / que es donde vivo yo /

III - Se unieron ríos y pueblos; / manglares, playas y suelos / todos los ecosistemas / sus seres vivos e inertes / que debíamos cuidarlos / con toda dedicación / como lo cuidó mi abuelo / pa' preservar aquel mar / que reafirma el derecho / una ley va enmarcar

IV - Reunión tras reunión / se unieron líderes fuertes / indígenas y negros juntos / por la lucha de la gente / primero fue el transitorio / luego fue la Ley 70 / 8 capítulos tiene / el esfuerzo voluntario / que reorganiza el territorio / en Consejos Comunitarios

V - Y se dieron los procesos / de todo cuanto habitaban / los negros de mi región / fueron días, noches largas / hasta sin amanecer / de batallas incansables / todo en coletividad / para obtener el derecho / era nuestro el territorio / con título de propiedad" (*ibid.*, p. 10).

- 18 Children in elementary school are thus given an historical, political and legal vision of their territory from a very young age and made participants in the struggle to acquire power and decision-making autonomy over it. These struggles are recognized by a law that "came", one day, to these lands, "bringing with it" organizational changes that promoted on one hand a union between living and non-living things in order to preserve the environment handed down by their ancestors, and on the other a union among marginalized peoples, that is, between indigenous and Afro Colombian. These verses propose an ontological perspective so broad and active that it is able to incorporate a law into the basic aspects that make life possible. In a sort of mutual exchange, law and Afro ontology are allied to obtain those rights that are always denied to Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples.
- 19 The book's literary compositions bear the signature of Teofila Betancurt, and draw on her personal experiences as a woman who has assumed the role of a *sabedora* (wise woman, expert) on local botany, as well as the experiences she has acquired on the trips she has unstintingly undertaken along the region's rivers to reconnect communities, one meeting after another. The objectives of the book are indeed unique, with materials designed to teach students about natural sciences focusing on the *azoteas*, defining them as an "*embrujo natural*" ("natural magic"). In other words, the book takes a route that is highly "political" and "activist" in an identitarian sense, turning the *azoteas* into a socio-ontological synthesis capable of uniting the environment, sustainable food production, biodiversity conservation, knowledge, culinary practices, and local flavors. We have underlined right from the beginning how enclosed in the bunch of *azotea* herbs is an entire program of reclamation directed against the "loss of cultural practices such as the use of local products, the use of traditional recipes, [which puts] at risk food independence/sovereignty and ancestral inheritance" - the inheritance destined for young children (*ibid.*, p. 5).

La Fundación Chiyangua: from silence to action

- 20 Teofila Betancurt makes no attempt to hide the physical and mental male violence she experienced in a domestic setting, along with the pressures of a racist and chauvinist society, are the dramatic starting point she went through outside Guapi. She tells of the violence suffered because it is by sharing them in a public setting that she becomes conscious of herself as an Afro-Colombian woman; and it was from the occasions in which she spoke about her experiences that her ever-widening activity as a unifier and organizer began, along with her work on expanding women's rights.

- 21 Teofila successfully won her independence through her abilities as an entrepreneur, selling vegetables in the market in Guapi. In her autobiography (written in the third person; ib. 2018, pp. 30-37), and in the stories she has told me, the world of the market was a fundamental place for her to gather observations: the women seemed to her to be crushed by their lack of economic independence, by the need to look after their children on their own at home, by the lack of money to buy food, by their dependence on whatever the market had to offer, and by the absence of resources and land for those who had fled armed conflict. Guapi, too, was severely impacted by the armed conflict,¹² which came on top of the problems with domestic violence: “III - [Guapi] fue un pueblo muy azotado / por la oleada de violencia / la gente se desplazaba / buscando coexistencia / se perdió la tradición / desplazando lo vivido / hasta entró el bendito mague / como diría Paulino / lo contó quien lo vivió / y en Guapi fue que nació / ...” (ibid. 2018, p. 8).
- 22 Thinking of her youth, and of her parents’ wealth of knowledge, Teofila wondered how to prevent people from leaving a region that was rich in resources and knowledge. How was it possible in such a setting that women often struggled to feed their families, and were forced to rely in part on industrial foods, using up all their meager funds for these, “captured” by the infamous (and symbolic) stock cube broth, *mague*? “Mague: Esto no es más que otra cosa / el mismo maggi o el knorr / quel llegó un día bien vestido / parecía el gran señor. / Se metió a nuestra cocina / y llegó y nos invadió / y don Paulino decía / bendito mague señor / Que lo saquen ya de aquí / yo quiero es al natural / con mis hierbas de azotea / ahí vamos a habla” (from the Glosario in Betancurt et al. 2018, p. 45).
- 23 Together with other allies, Teofila founded a community center where women could leave their children while they were busy with other things. Before her, however, lay a challenge that was much broader and more ambitious. The story of the journey that led to the creation of the Chiyangua Foundation passes through the alliance with her “*comadres*”, each of whom contributed courage, creativity, and specific experience. There was a need to conceive of a type of organization that managed to bring everything together: self-recognition, self-esteem, independence, food security, recovery of lost botanical expertise and forgotten techniques of sustainable production, gender rights, and restoration of male collaboration. In that period it seemed as if everything had been lost – but not women’s courage and willpower: “[...] IV - El pancoger se perdió / y los cultivos de azoteas / los derechos vulnerados / los azota y los golpea / las mujeres analizan / el meollo del problema / y surge la resistencia / y la unión de grandes seres / entonces se consolida / un proceso de mujeres. / V - Y fue en ese Municipio / donde inició su proceso / consolidó sus acciones / y toditos sus aciertos / también tuvo sus errores / fue cayendo y levantó / reivindicand derechos / una red aconteció / nació FUNDACIÓN CHIYANGUA / que el Pacífico inviadió” (ivi. 2018, p. 9).
- 24 The solution was plain to see, and concerned the life experience many women had acquired as children at a time when families were generally self-sufficient; they had the botanical expertise that ensured they could produce more than enough basic food, and were able to cope with births and the care of mild illnesses. The route they had in mind was aimed at the reclamation of past ways of living and producing, as well as respect for their ancestors’ knowledge. Reclamation of the *azotea* and the wealth of life encapsulated by its herbs was their principal goal, and everything else would follow that.

- 25 Among those herbs, *chiyangua* in itself contained many of the characteristics of the Afro-Colombian women. Indeed, in *El Cuento de la Chiyangua* (Fundación Chiyangua, 2018), a book celebrating the history of the Foundation, “[Chiyangua] is a beautiful woman of African descent [...] She has a sweet aromatic character, and her smile resembles the fragrance of the ripe flavors of the Colombian Pacific. She has thick and shiny hair that is woven so that it takes on the hue of medicinal herbs; her scent, her charisma, her activism, and her struggle make her a truly special woman” (2018, p. 18).
- 26 Teofila is the mother who brought Chiyangua into the world in difficult times; the gestation period was long and complex because she wanted her to be a beautiful woman, “filled with principles of ethnic assertion, of equality, of liberty, of conservation, of opportunity, filled with respect, a woman able to manage development. This is what the mother of Chiyangua wanted: to conceive a woman who was totally free” (2018, p. 19).
- 27 The intentions and final ends were clear, but the difficult thing was to generate a woman/Chiyangua who resembled all these objectives, knew how to dedicate herself to the preservation of the environment, and valued the ecosystem and the expertise of the Afro-descendent people. After having cut across rivers, undertaken many trips, and met with the remotest communities, after thinking, speaking, exchanging ideas, “There came a glorious day that finally announced the conception of Chiyangua. The wise women of the communities announced that she was a woman, and that she would be born in an azotea along with fine medicinal and aromatic herbs, to provide flavor; and, as a symbol of identity in each community, there would be a copy of an azotea to safeguard what they considered to be ‘cultural heritage’” (2018, p. 20).
- 28 This part of the tale finishes with her birth in 1994, and since then “Chiyangua’s cradle”, the *azotea*, has become a fashionable thing to have on one’s patio, just as everyone has wanted its herbs for their cooking. The *azotea* is a bearer of culture and identity, and a bastion in the preservation of culture and the assertion of ethnic and gender rights. To date, around four hundred families have participated in the initiative of reclamation associated with the *azoteas*; these families form part of an even wider regional network around the Caucaño Pacific, *Red Matamba y Guasá*, which has more than 1,600 members. The importance of these numbers should be contextualized with the fact that more than 50% of women are heads of their families, and are often single. Older female members on average have a very high number of children (as many as 16), while younger women seem to be more inclined to control their number of pregnancies. Families (bearing in mind that it is difficult to make a distinction among domestic groups present in a single residential space that is subdivided into various rooms) are in many cases formed of between 5-7 and 11-12 people, belonging to at least three generations. The male component of these households is greatly dispersed.
- 29 There is not space here to outline in detail the further history of the Chiyangua Foundation and the widening system of alliances it has developed with regional networks, first of which is the *Red de Mujeres Negras del Pacífico* (of which the Foundation is co-coordinator), as well as with various national and international organizations (UNHCR-ACNUR; IFAD; CUSO) within the ambiguous world of “development projects”. A key alliance has been that with *Activos Culturales Afro* (ACUA, of Bogotá), an organization involved in programs aimed at rural women of African descent. According to texts prepared by Teofila and her group, in 2005 it was “love at first sight” between the Foundation and ACUA (2018, p. 28), the latter of which, as well as supporting dozens of

rural women from the project, has given greater visibility to the culinary contribution of the *azotea* herbs as part of the promotion of cooking as a messenger of culture, and reminder of the problems faced by Afro-descendants from the Pacific coast (in spite of *Ley 70*) in both national (cfr. Ministerio de Cultura, 2015) and international contexts.

- 30 Among the objectives to reach there was the rebalance of gender relationships, possible only after the conquer of the self-esteem and the knowledge of women's rights. The consciousness acquired by the women has ensured that in many cases men have become more attentive and respectful; in Teofila's words, women are increasingly perceived as "an important partner" in resolving family and community issues (Marques 2015, p. 62). "When we began, many of these women would go back home from training courses and they'd be abused. Now men have begun to take part in the organizational process, and other men who didn't abuse their wives [...] they stay together today with the greatest enthusiasm. Many former abusers are today supporting their wives and allowing them to get training. In the process of the *azotea* this is very common, and the men help the women to prepare the soil and construct the wooden nurseries" (Teofila Betancurt in Marques, p. 62).

Some concluding contextual aspects

- 31 The Colombian Pacific was the subject of intense development policies in the 1980s, under the pretext of reconfiguring the region according to plans of "modern" capitalism, through exploitation of local natural resources and the intervention of big capital (Flórez López and Millán Echeverría 2007, p. 99). These plans lacked social and gender perspectives, not to mention attention on the relationship between humans and non-humans (Motta 1995, p. 29), and ignored any possibility of perspectives that diverged from the development mindset. Nonetheless, women had to be integrated into development policies (Lamus 2008a). The prevailing idea was unsustainable neoliberal resource exploitation, following the low-cost principles with which it was possible to consider the Pacific coast as a place suitable for "development" (Escobar and Pedrosa 1996). In 1992, in keeping with the new constitution of 1991, progress was made in inverting this tendency: the *Departamento Nacional de Planeación* launched the *Plan Pacífico*, reserving the coast for a new development strategy that would favor sustainability and involve local communities as "interlocution agents". Terms like "traditional culture", "biological diversity", "ancestral knowledge", and recognition of the existence of the Afro-descendant community as an ethnic group that was custodian of expertise that was "useful" for sustainability – all of these things became part of institutional discourse, with *Ley 70* as their cornerstone. A process was put in motion, into which "irrupted" an interest in "biology", as Escobar has argued (1997, p. 175), which saw the promotion of the "tropical rainforest as a central social fact, and subject of global policies, and, certainly, of representations" (Álvarez 1999, p. 93).
- 32 In the context of the opportunities and reflections offered by *Ley 70*, as we have seen, paths have opened for female leadership, and questions of gender have become central in the rhetoric of development projects, which have found women to be highly "appropriate" representatives, given that they are considered the principal victims of the colonial powers, of armed conflict, and of men in general (irrespective of whether they are white or black). The women of the Pacific coast are not passive victims but reactive subjects in relation to the safeguarding of the environment, too, since

knowledge and management of botanical wealth is a feminine skill that is transmitted matrilineally. In Colombia, the country with the fifth highest rate of biodiversity in the world, it has therefore been entrusting the women with reconfigured role as the “guardians” of Afro ontological legacy against illegal depletion of the land that has now become community territory. My experience with the Afro-Colombian women of the Pacific coast has led me to agree with the scholar Asher, who has underlined how feminist postcolonial criticism, as well as using language that is not very usable by the women it claims to defend, makes the women themselves invisible, along with their discourses of resistance (2004, p. 40). According to Lozano “black of afro-Colombian women belonging to ethnic communities elaborate a new type of feminism which is constructed in relation to the community’s collective actions in demanding their rights” (2010, p. 7).

- 33 Leaders in the Pacific coast, activist or otherwise, have autonomously incorporated a language that goes beyond postcolonial criticism and is now in the midst of the flowering of decolonial feminism (Lozano 2010, 2016b; Castillo 2019). The discursive “tradition” that employs words in verse is in itself a “counter-language” as a “space of resistance” (Oslender 2008, p. 153) or, in my opinion, a counter-hegemonic tool that uses its own language, and a shared semantics and aesthetic, to spread reflections on these problems in a way that is accessible, empathic, and shaped by cultural identity. By speaking in verse women (and men) express their independence and self-esteem. The real problem is that in spite of the many efforts that have been made, women continue to occupy a position that is discriminated.
- 34 In this contradictory context of “development projects”, women like Teofila Betancurt received support, but also political visibility, finding space for common planning to resolve problems and sustain Afro-Colombian ontological visions that not only concerned sustenance but also the re-establishment of their lives along with those of their relatives.
- 35 The context of public confrontations between Afro-Colombian organizations and the new constitution forced Afro-descendants to self-define (rightly or wrongly) in the name of a “strategic essentialism”, as Spivak would say (1996). Women *lideresas* like Teofila began to ask themselves who they were, what they wanted, and where they wanted to go. For many this involved reflections about their own family history, the legacy of previous generations, the conditions of women, and the role they ought to take (see Lamus 2008b). At the same time, it encouraged them to work through experiences of domestic violence and conflict “as a neo conquest and neo colonization of territories, bodies and imaginaries of its inhabitants” (Lozano, 2016a, p. 7). Almost all the stories I listened to in Guapi, during many hours of meetings with women who belonged to cooperatives, organizations, and foundations, were, to say the least, terrifying accounts of physical and mental violence and early pregnancies inflicted by husbands and boyfriends, to which we must add violence (either suffered or witnessed) resulting from armed conflict, which led to forcible *desplazamiento*, and consequently the loss of everything.
- 36 We cannot ignore the role played by the historical, social, and economic context of the Pacific coast, and with this matrifocality, which from a condition of apparent disadvantage may have “equipped” women for their current *liderazgo*¹³, its organizational leadership, and representation of women who had been suffering and silenced. The responsibilities experienced as head of the family, or *sabedora* and healer,

smoothened by various forms of solidarity with family-members and neighbors, may have served as a platform for the exercise of feminine *liderazgo* expressed in an organizational mode that is associative, equitable, respectful of “ancestral” knowledge and care of plants, and aimed at the attainment of collective wellbeing. A lynchpin has been reflection about the advantages of the past when the forms of solidarity between women, now in decline, served as a social shock absorber, as a social safety net for matrifocal families dealing with the mobility of men and their meager economic contributions, male violence, and the state of armed conflict. The decline in the forms of solidarity between women and in the practices of *azoteas* left them alone to face a society that was urbanizing and monetizing, and above all the challenge of “ethnic” recognition of the Afro-Colombian community. The social crisis demonstrates the centrality of the ontological continuity between female solidarity and care for *azoteas* as a care for one's body and the social body (Camacho 2001). The recovery of *azoteas* is helping to rebuild the health of the community's body, through strategies that today turn out to be decolonizing and anticolonial (Rodriguez Castro, 2020).

- 37 These intimately experienced reflections led Teofila, a woman who is simultaneously imposing and delicate and sensitive, to take the responsibility of becoming a *lideresa*, but in a way that is wholly cooperative, putting herself at the service of activities that raise awareness of the community's problems and aim at the collective wellbeing, starting with that of women. She is a *lideresa* who is above all a *mujer rural* (‘rural lady’), as she likes to present herself, and who has taken up what she has been handed down from her relatives as part of an Afro community and historical memory: knowledge about the environment, about food, about health, and what women are able to achieve and create. I really agree with Lozano's point of view on women who, being marginalized and considered passive victims, are now seen (and appreciate) as subjects who have historically deployed an “ontology that claims life” (2019).
- 38 In the last few years, the practices linked to the *azoteas* have been able to “confront” the current phase of the so-called post-conflict era. The substance of life and nutrition that the *azoteas* embody, and what is necessary for this to live – collectivity, links to the land, knowledge, sharing – has been able to offer fundamental elements for a culture of peace as a “culture of life”. In a recent interview, Teofila explained the goals of the Foundation as rotating around the promotion of a sustainable culture of peace, accomplished with justice according to a vision of gender that guarantees women political participation, access to rights, and protective spaces that suit their lives. A culture of peace, however, can be followed only if there is personal and familial wellbeing. Because of this, the principal activity of Teofila and the Foundation today is concentrated on the exchange of knowledge between women and men and its diffusion in schools, taking as its basis “traditional cooking”. The subject links together all the other skills and elements of knowledge from which wellbeing and the peace of the collectivity descend: “Our food and Chiyangua mean a lot to me. They are the utensils and tools that help me to stitch together [shirts]. They are the routes on which I want to leave tracks. They are the invisible allies my family has left to me, which give me strength, and which help me to continue onwards, not as Teofila, but as a woman ”.¹⁴

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NOTES

1. The municipality of Guapi has a total population of 29,722, of whom 119 people are indigenous, while Afro-descendants are 28,920 (in 2015). The municipality is composed of 25 *corregimientos* and 30 *veredas* (political-administrative figures), which are located along the banks of the major rivers. Each of these rivers has a *Consejo Comunitario de Comunidades Negras* (juridic figures that administer collective territories, elected by the community assembly), with their collective title used as a protective mechanism for the territory, as established by *Ley 70* in 1993 (Ministerio del Interior, 2017, p. 12).

2. Colombia's history has been crossed by a violent armed conflict that lasted about 52 years and ended with a peace agreement in 2016, after having caused the death of more than 220,000 people and displaced 5 million people. Data published by the *Red Nacional de Información de la Unidad para las Víctimas* report that in the Department of Cauca between 1985 and 1 July 2017 there were a total of 503,645 victims (Ministerio del Interior 2017, p. 61) <http://gapv.mininterior.gov.co/> - <http://dacn.mininterior.gov.co/>.

3. *Cuadrilla* was a rotating work system that was part of the slave economy. *Cimarronaje* is the phenomenon that indicates all the events that allowed the slaves to escape from the *cuadrillas*.

4. I visited Guapi, Pacific Coast and Palenque in three different periods, between 2010 and 2012 in the role of evaluator for IFAD (UN), of the Fundación ACUA (Activos Culturales Afro, Bogotá) "Programa regional de apoyo a las poblaciones rurales de ascendencia africana de América Latina", directed by Dr. David Soto. While in Guapi I followed various ongoing projects meeting their outstanding leaders to whom I owe most of the teachings that appear in these pages. But beyond that I owe to Teofila Betancurt, Silveria Rodríguez, Carmen Julia Palacio, Daysi Rodríguez and their associates much more in terms of friendship and essential life lessons. Here I wish to thank Dr. David Soto and Ms. Emperatriz Arango who introduced me to the reality of Guapi and several Afro-Colombian women, who have been engaged in other projects in more recent years, so that we are strongly connected still today.

5. *Comadres* here refers to a general spiritual kinship, friendship, partnership, and also to midwives.

6. Following UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage (2003), which Colombia ratified in 2006, the *Ministerio de Cultura* recognized the country’s traditional cuisine as intangible cultural heritage in 2009, and from 2012 adopted specific public policies to support traditional cooking and the spread of its knowledge.

7. See “Política para el Conocimiento, la Salvaguardia y el Fomento de la Alimentación y las Cocinas Tradicionales de Colombia”, a document from Colombia’s Ministry of Culture that outlines the strategy of the country’s cultural policies, and which places great emphasis on “traditional cuisine” (Ministerio de Cultura, 2018, p. 162).

8. According to the *Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística* (DANE), the population of African descent that the law refers to is recognized under various denominations: “the Black [*Negra*], Afro-Colombian, *Raizal*, and *Palenquera* population includes three ethnic groups in the country: the *Raizales* of the San Andrés y Providencia Archipelago; the *Palenqueros* of San Basilio; and Blacks [*Negros(as)*], people of mixed race [*mulato(as)*], Afro-descendants, Afro-Colombians” (DANE 2019, p. 10).

9. In Colombia, the greatest concentration of the crop is found in the regions to the north and south of Guapi, in Tumaco (Nariño) and Chocó (see Lizcano, 2018).

10. In Colombia, *Ley N° 70* of 1993, also known as the “*Ley de comunidades negras*”, is considered “the principal and most important tool for the protection of the rights of Afro-descendants in the country [...]”. (Rangel, 2016, p. 19; my own translation).

11. On 31 October 2012, I organized the symposium “*Donne afrodiscendenti di fronte alle sfide politiche e ambientali della Costa Pacifica, Colombia ed Ecuador*”, supported with funds from DISUS, in collaboration with Slow Food – Terra Madre and the Fundación ACUA of Bogotá.

12. Data published by the *Red Nacional de Información de la Unidad para las Víctimas* report that in the Department of Cauca between 1985 and 1 July 2017 there were a total of 503,645 victims (Ministerio del Interior 2017, p. 61) <http://gapv.mininterior.gov.co/> - <http://dacn.mininterior.gov.co/>.

13. On the link between matrifocality and female leadership there is a vast anthropological, sociological, historical, feminist literatures (see Lozano 2010, 2016a, 2016b; Rodriguez Castro 2020).

14. “Interview with Teofila Betancurt by Medina Abad A., 3/11/2020) <https://semanarural.com/web/articulo/la-mujer-que-rescata-el-oficio-ancestral-de-sembrar-en-las-azoteas/1650>

ABSTRACTS

In certain geopolitical contexts, women’s creative act of using aromas and spices to characterize and give flavour to dishes can become a powerful tool for gender claim and identity affirmation, and an economic resource to support women’s autonomy. Like in the case of the Afro-descendant women in Guapi, Colombia. What made it possible was the Law 70 of 1993 issued in favor of the fundamental rights of the Afro-Colombians. This law implemented the claims for autonomy and gender enhancement and for the empowerment of women. It also set in motion a large amount of national and international public funds to promote the visibility of the Afro-descendant world. The Guapi women presented impressive projects, as the one on the “return” of the production of aromatic herbs for cooking based on the forgotten sustainable horticultural technique, *azotea*. “Recovery” projects like this created economic chances for matrifocal families and opportunities for the visibility of the Afro-Colombian culture, also allowing the valorisation of organizational skills based on solidarity between women and on the safeguard of the knowledge of the environmental resources.

Dans certains contextes géopolitiques, l'acte créatif des femmes d'utiliser des arômes et des épices pour caractériser et donner du goût aux plats peut devenir un puissant outil de revendication de genre et d'affirmation identitaire, et une ressource économique pour soutenir l'autonomie des femmes. Comme dans le cas des femmes d'ascendance africaine à Guapi, en Colombie. Ce qui l'a rendu possible, c'est la loi 70 de 1993 promulguée en faveur des droits fondamentaux des Afro-Colombiens. Cette loi a mis en place les revendications pour l'autonomie et l'amélioration du genre et pour l'autonomisation des femmes. Elle a également mis en branle un grand nombre de fonds publics nationaux et internationaux pour promouvoir la visibilité du monde afro-descendant. Les femmes Guapi ont présenté des projets impressionnants, comme

celui sur le « retour » de la production d'herbes aromatiques pour la cuisine basée sur la technique oubliée de l'horticulture durable, *azotea*. Des projets de « récupération » comme celui-ci ont créé des occasions économiques pour les familles matrifocales et des chances de visibilité de la culture afro-colombienne, permettant également la valorisation des compétences organisationnelles basées sur la solidarité entre femmes et la sauvegarde de la connaissance des ressources environnementales.

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Mots-clés: Femmes afro-colombiennes, Guapi, alimentation et autonomisation des femmes, techniques horticoles soutenable, identité culturelle, Lois constitutionnelles en faveur des droits des Afro-Colombiens, histoire de vie

Keywords: Afro-Colombian women, Guapi, food and women's empowerment, sustainable horticultural techniques, cultural identity, Constitutional laws in favor of Afro-Colombian's rights, life stories

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Food sovereignty and popular feminism in Brazil

Souveraineté alimentaire et féminisme populaire au Brésil

Renata Motta and Marco Antonio Teixeira

Introduction

- 1 The relationship between gender and food is, according to the literature, matters of hierarchies and inequalities (Mauriello and Cottino, call for papers/introduction to the special issue-INFRA). Gender inequalities can be found in access to food production resources, working conditions in the food sector, the division of domestic work in food preparation, and food consumption (Beardsworth *et al.* 1996). Food insecurity and hunger systematically affect girls and women (Patel 2012). Allen and Sachs (2007) have observed that women are very active in mobilizations for alternative food systems, engaging with the state, the market, and local food initiatives. Nonetheless, the authors note “a curious absence of feminism per se in women’s efforts to create change in the agrifood system, with the exception of corporeal politics” (Allen *et al.* 2007: 13-14), referring to the politics of the body, for instance, debates about body shape. Women, the authors argue, do not always consciously challenge gender inequalities but often reinscribe them in social movements (for instance, by assuming more invisible tasks and not leadership positions); therefore, women within food movements do not mobilize as well for their empowerment. Some engagements in food movements even run counter to a feminist agenda or increase women’s workload, among other repercussions.
- 2 However, a growing alliance between feminist and food sovereignty movements challenges this apparent absence of feminist engagement in the transformation of agrifood systems. A feminist food agenda can be identified in many agrarian movements in Latin America and, at the transnational level in the World March of Women, a popular feminist movement that has actively pursued a politics of alliance with non-feminist others (Conway 2018; Masson *et al.* 2017; Nobre 2011). Such a strategy

has brought food issues to their agenda and contributed to an anti-patriarchal critique within food sovereignty movements. Scholars have traced some of the roots of this transnational cross-fertilization to the trajectories of women's organization within agrarian movements in Brazil (Conway 2018; Masson *et al.* 2017; Nobre 2011). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), rural women are responsible for 45% of food production in Brazil.¹ However, households headed by women are more affected by food insecurity than ones headed by men; food insecurity in rural areas is higher than in urban areas (Galindo *et al.* 2021);² and the rates of violence against women are very high in Brazil, where patriarchal culture runs deep. As a result, women's struggle against inequalities in the food system in Brazil have been fought within these patriarchal structures, hand in hand with the demands for gender equality on the part of social movements — and, indeed society as a whole. Indeed, in Brazil, women's organizing within agrarian movements has achieved some important policy changes such as joint land titles for couples and labor rights for women, including pension rights and maternity leave. Women have not only fought against gender inequalities in the food system; they have also fought for women's empowerment within social movements, clearly informed by feminist ideas.

- 3 These working-class women's movements have not always self-identified as feminist, or been recognized as such, as their membership and agendas differ from what is considered historical feminism in the region. The emergence of feminist movements in Brazil has been traced to white middle-class activists, many coming from political exile in Europe and concentrated on issues like sexual and reproductive rights, and deeply engaged with the political left in struggles for democratization in the region. They have strongly contributed to consolidating democracy and strengthening civil society and party organizations, with increased professionalization and access to political spaces (Alvarez 1990). Working-class women's mobilizations for communal survival against neoliberal economic reforms and dictatorships in the 1980s and 1990s have been conceptualized as popular feminism (Schild 1994). These articulated a class-conscious agenda of socioeconomic demands for the working class, as well as gendered-classed demands and those against the subordination of women. While alliances with historical feminism have given women's movements more emancipatory possibilities, popular feminism helps build new agendas and diversifies feminist struggles (Conway *et al.* 2021).
- 4 In the first decades of this century, while Brazilian mainstream and historical feminism occupied spaces of participative democracy, constituting what scholars called "state feminism" (Matos *et al.* 2018), new expressions of popular feminism flourished. Within rural unions under the organization of the *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na Agricultura* (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers, CONTAG), rules on gender parity began to be implemented in the 1990s (Aguiar 2015; Pimenta 2019). Other movements like *La Via Campesina*, the *Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores* (Small Farmers Movement, MPA) and the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Workers' Movement, MST) have since incorporated gender equality to their political agenda. In 2003, the MPA organized the First National Conference on Gender Relations, Power and Class (Carvalho 2020) and later published a book on peasant women in collaboration with scholars (Neves *et al.* 2013). In 2000, the MST formed a gender committee; in 2005, it approved parity rules for its national offices, and in 2018, it created an LGBT working group. In March 2020, the MST organized the First National Meeting of Landless Women. The Movement of Peasant Women, part of *La Via*

Campeſina, emerged in 2004 as an autonomous movement, that is, as an alternative to advancing gender equality agendas within mixed gender movements. Since March 2006, when women activists from *La Via Campeſina* uprooted genetically modified eucalyptus trees in a protest coinciding with international negotiations of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention of Biodiversity, important protests have taken place on International Women’s Day across Brazil (Menegat *et al.* 2019; Siliprandi 2015). Thus, an important date on the feminist calendar is now linked with demands for transformation in the food system. Feminism is also a mobilizing force within the *Articulaão Nacional de Agroecologia* (National Network of Agroecology, ANA), founded in 2002, which groups rural and urban movements and supports alternative food initiatives. Within ANA, the slogan “without feminism there is no agroecology” gained strength to underscore the transitions to ecological farming that agroecology entails, but also the associated social shift in gender relations.

- 5 Perhaps the most sustained and broadest collective action in joint feminist and food sovereignty struggles in Brazil has been the *Marcha das Margaridas*,³ a national protest march that has brought between 20,000 and 100,000 women to Brasilia six times since 2000. The roots of the *Marcha* have to be understood in the context of the political organization of women rural workers inside the broader union movement between the 1970s and 1990s (Aguiar 2015; Pimenta 2019). The *Marcha* emerged as a show of strength among women rural workers, both externally (to society and the state) and internally (to the trade union movement of rural workers). In order to be seen as a powerful force, the women leaders from the union movement knew that they needed collaborations and partnerships with other movements. Feminist organizations — in particular, the NGO *Sempreviva Organizaão Feminista* (SOF) — were extremely important to building alliances between the *Marcha das Margaridas* and the transnational World March of Women.⁴ Thus, since its first edition, a politics of alliance is a constitutive feature of the *Marcha* (Motta *et al.* 2021; Teixeira *et al.* 2020).
- 6 We approach the *Marcha das Margaridas* not as a unified political subject or as specific group of women, but as a coalitional identity (Motta 2021). In our view, its main strength lies in the myriad, diversely situated perspectives among rural working women in Brazil, and transforming its agenda to include them (Aguiar 2015). The foundational political category “rural working women” evolved into “women from the field and the forest” in 2011, and then again to “women from the field, the forest, and the waters” in 2015. The expansion of the category hints at an underlying process of negotiating identities that correspond to diverse social realities across Brazil, including family farmers, fisherwomen from different regions, forest dwellers in the Amazon region, *quilombolas*, and indigenous women.
- 7 In this article, we analyze the contribution of the *Marcha das Margaridas* to a feminist food sovereignty agenda. How did food sovereignty make its way onto the agenda? What does food sovereignty mean in the context of their mobilization? How can food sovereignty be understood from the situated perspective of rural and popular feminism? The meaning of food sovereignty within the political agenda cannot be understood without taking into account the historical evolution of their demands; therefore, the first part of this article describes how the topic of food emerged prior to the concept of food sovereignty. In the second section, we search for the ways in which the topic of food sovereignty resonates with the unionist and feminist political agenda of the *Marcha* in order to avoid the assumption that food sovereignty is a foreign

concept to the *Marcha* members, one imported a-critically to their mobilization. Therefore, here we identify five main themes in the discourse of the *Marcha das Margaridas* on food sovereignty: 1) food as a right and a commons; 2) state support for women's food production; 3) the value of uncommodified food work; 4) environmental recovery through agroecology; 5) violence-free food, produced through respectful social relations. We conclude that by elaborating on a critique of gender inequalities inherent to food at various scales and dimensions, while simultaneously advocating for their own agenda to overcome such inequalities, the *Marcha das Margaridas* builds a feminist food sovereignty agenda that is popular and rural.

- 8 In terms of data and methods, we draw on different types of data that are part of a broader research project. We combine documental analysis of archival material produced by the *Marcha*, ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with activists that represent different social movements and NGOs in the coalition. Regarding archival sources, a myriad of documents are typically produced during their process of mobilization, which can be classified in two phases. A document for discussion (*Caderno de Texto* and *Texto-base*) is written by the national organizing committee and distributed among all organizations in a number of activities in preparation for the march, which is itself understood as a permanent process of mobilization and political formation. This process involves around one million rural women according to the organizers. After discussions at the local, regional and national levels, the rapporteurs develop a text with demands. This article is mainly based on a qualitative analysis of documents, in particular the texts *Caderno de Textos* and *Texto-base*, which are both used by the group as part of political training and preparation for the march and other types of mobilizations.
- 9 The analysis is dynamic, not systemic, allowing for a strong cross-fertilization between theory and empirical material, and open to further development. This is aligned with an epistemological position that acknowledges the processes of knowledge production and political negotiation associated with the texts used for the analysis. Although we rely mostly on archival data, our analysis draws on a broad body of knowledge that we have been accumulating for some years. Two months of fieldwork preceded the fifth march (Marco Antonio Teixeira) and sixth march (both authors). Additionally, we conducted twenty-one formal interviews in Brasilia, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte with leaders of organizations and movements that are part of the coalition. Field observations were also done at other events of the *Marcha das Margaridas* and the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers we were invited to attend over the past four years.
- 10 Last but not least, we understand that the process of building knowledge involves learning from the knowledge produced by activists themselves, in a process of exchange. However, we situate ourselves in the academic field and not in the militant field, and take responsibility for our writing. We are committed to a feminist epistemology of science, which challenges the idea that science is neutral, and rather invites scholars to disclose their social location and positionality vis-à-vis their research object. Our positionality is that of a cis-female and a cis-male (non-subaltern) migrants scholars situated geopolitically in Northern Europe and doing research predominantly, but not exclusively, in Latin America. We position ourselves in solidarity with the struggle of the *Marcha das Margaridas* and many other progressive social movements that have been struggling for socioenvironmental justice.

Food sovereignty on the political agenda of *Marcha das Margaridas*

- 11 Tracing the discussion of food in the documents used for the political training and mobilization activities for the *Marcha*, we have classified four different periods in the evolution of the topic, when: 1) hunger and food insecurity dominated the agenda, 2) the concept of “food sovereignty” is incorporated, 3) food sovereignty comes to the forefront among other issues dear to the *Marcha*, and 4) food sovereignty becomes more deeply articulated with the idea of people’s self-determination.
- 12 During the first phase (*Marcha* 2000 and 2003), the slogans used by the *Marcha* prominently include the struggle against hunger and food insecurity. The documents identify global capitalist dynamics and state development policies, which disproportionately affects rural workers as a class (CONTAG 2000: para. 15), as the roots of hunger. The issue was particularly relevant at the beginning of the century: in 2004, 34.9% of Brazilian households suffered from food insecurity according to the Brazilian Food Insecurity Scale, which was introduced that same year (IBGE 2020). In terms of severe food insecurity, which means going hungry, 6.9% of Brazilians were affected. The question of addressing hunger, then, was one of the core socioeconomic and political topics at that time. After figuring prominently in public debate for years, the need to address hunger became a priority for Lula da Silva, who was elected president for the first time in 2002.
- 13 At the dawn of 21st century, the documents of the *Margaridas* presented the Alternative Project for Sustainable Rural Development, the CONTAG’s political project, paying special attention to the needs and rights of rural working women. The project defends family farming as alternative model that generates income, employment, food, environmental protection, and socioeconomic growth (CONTAG 2000). The dominant agrarian model, it is argued, disproportionally affects women and conversely, demand: women’s access to land, credit, and documentation (as many women do not have the legal documentation required to access the benefits of public policies). The *Margaridas* demand recognition of the value of women’s farm work and labor rights as working women. In short, their anti-capitalist stance intersects with an anti-patriarchal stance.
- 14 The introduction of the concept of food sovereignty in 2007 marks the commencement of the second phase. Here the emphasis was on “the autonomy and the right of the peoples and countries to defend their food culture and to establish development policies that protect and ensure food production, distribution, and consumption” (CONTAG 2007) and is presented together with the concept of food security and nutrition. New concepts are incorporated in a didactic manner, with explanations as to the associated meanings, history, and institutions in Brazil. The text states: “Food and nutritional security is a topic that demands understanding, debate, involvement, and organized action on the part of rural working women” (CONTAG 2007). The *Margaridas* must explicitly engage with food and nutritional security, and participate in building food sovereignty (CONTAG 2007), highlighting the importance of women on this agenda. However, the text notes that this is not a completely new issue for the *Margaridas*, as their daily lives “are directly associated with food and nutritional security, which, for its part, is related to the slogan of the *Marcha das Margaridas*: “2007

reasons to march against poverty, hunger, and sexist violence” (CONTAG 2007), the same one used in the previous mobilizations.

- 15 The third phase in the trajectory of food sovereignty in the *Marcha* documents is 2011-2015. During this period, the concept grows more central and displaces previous references to food and nutritional security. In 2011, food sovereignty becomes a mobilizing topic in and of itself, as it is “part of the daily life and essential to life, with strategic importance for overcoming hunger and poverty and accomplishing sustainable development” (CONTAG 2011). The *Marcha*’s documents use the definition of food sovereignty laid out in the Nyélény Declaration of 2007.⁵ At the same time, many other social movements, like the ones that are part of the *La Via Campesina*, co-participated in elaborating this concept. The *Margaridas* call for alliances between urban and rural movements, as “the strengthening of family farming is not a struggle limited to people from the countryside and forests (and their organizations): it must be recognized as strategic to guaranteeing healthy food for the urban population” (CONTAG 2011).
- 16 In 2015, “food sovereignty” substitutes the full expression that previously included “food and nutritional security.” The text from this year provides insight into disputes over the term “food security,” which has different meanings according to the political subjects who bring the concept to the table and their interests, but which is still relevant in the Brazilian context. Food sovereignty, by contrast, is counter-hegemonic, as it serves to “question the pillars of the current hegemonic food system based on increasing land concentration, the expansion of monocropping and mining over diverse biomes, and a dependence on transnationals that control everything from production to retail” (CONTAG 2015: 17). The socio-environmental impacts of this system are poverty, food insecurity, worker exploitation, and the expropriation of land and water resources. Through this model, people from the field, the forest, and the waters are prevented from producing healthy and diverse food. It is a model that relies on “the exploitation and subordination of women’s work, devaluing and erasing their leading role in food production and in assuring food sovereignty” (CONTAG 2015: 18).
- 17 According to the same text, food and nutritional sovereignty converges with the struggles of agrarian social movements and women’s movements on issues such as land reform, territorial rights, access to clean water for consumption and production, and a sustainable, solidary, and fair production and consumption model based on agroecology and family farming. It is also related to public policies to strengthen this model, local markets and public procurement to ensure supply, access to adequate and healthy food free from contamination of all sorts, access to health and nutritional services, employment and income policies, and international trade policies, where food sovereignty is prioritized over the economic interests associated with free trade (CONTAG 2015: 17). Food thus becomes a vehicle to transform relations, with food sovereignty guiding the change. Namely, any reductionist conception of food is challenged here through an understanding that food is embedded into society, politics, economy, culture, and ecology. The elaboration and expansion of the meanings of food sovereignty correlates with progress in wellbeing and in public policies for food and nutritional security in the country, which have advanced significantly since 2003. Brazil achieved its lowest rate of food insecurity in 2013: 22.6%, with severe food insecurity at 3.2%. This progress can be attributed to a combination of policies for poverty reduction and food access. Civil society and social movements, including the

activists of the *Marcha*, were all key advocates behind these policies. As the years passed, the issue of hunger gradually disappeared from the public debate, paving the way for broader political projects related to food.

- 18 In 2016, however, a political and economic crisis erupted. Following a congressional coup against President Dilma Roussef, an interim administration introduced austerity measures and began taking action to dismantle public food and nutritional security policy. The setbacks in this area were indeed severe: food insecurity spiraled to 59.4% in 2020 (Galindo et al. 2021). The concept of food sovereignty thus takes on new connotations in what we classified as a fourth phase in its development, which starts in the documents of the *Marcha das Margaridas* 2019. In that year, it appears as one of the 10 political premises of the *Marcha*, together with the defense of energy sovereignty: “For the self-determination of peoples, with energy and food sovereignty.” These three goals are articulated in a new political context, in which the ultraconservative right-wing politician Jair Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil. Since 2000, the *Margaridas* had engaged with the president, negotiating their political agenda with the national executive. In 2019, they decided to break with this tradition, as there was little hope of reaching an agreement with an administration clearly unreceptive to their demands, one that criminalized agrarian and feminist movements. Instead, the *Margaridas* focused on denouncing the abuse of rights and spreading their message to other state branches, international organizations, and society at large. In this context, food sovereignty has assumed a new meaning, emphasizing questions of democracy and power associated with the word sovereignty. When referring to the issue of self-determination, food sovereignty means people can make decisions related to their food systems, respecting the food culture of the territories. In other words, as noted in the *Margaridas* text, this was about “the right of peoples and nations to defend their food culture and to decide on the transformation of food cultivation, distribution, consumption, and preparation” (CONTAG 2019: 9). In terms of their feminist agenda, they demand the recognition of women from the land, the forest, and the water as political subjects of their communities who breathe life into the territories. Through their work women promote food and nutritional sovereignty and security through self-consumption, exchange, donations, taking to market, and reproduction.

***Marcha das Margaridas*: A feminist political food sovereignty project both rural and popular**

- 19 According to Sachs and Patel-Campillo (2014), feminist food justice involves at least three agendas: supporting food production at multiple scales, revaluing food work that feeds families, and providing good food to all. The first of these agendas requires access to land on the part of women and dispossessed groups as well as state policies to promote food production by these groups. The second involves redefining gender roles, challenging the heteronormative household model and the sexual division of labor and shifting food preparation to community kitchens, improving farm workers’ rights, promoting the value of good food, and educating consumers about it. The third and final agenda relates to the state’s commitment to guarantee food for all, taking into account food inequalities related to class, gender, race, and citizenship status. We believe that the *Marcha das Margaridas* contributes to a feminist food justice agenda, within the tradition of Latin American popular feminism and as part of food

sovereignty movements. From the situated perspective of the *Margaridas* as women from the field, the forest, and the waters, five of the themes they develop made critical contributions to building a feminist food sovereignty agenda both rural and popular in Brazil: 1) food as a right and a commons; 2) state support for food production by women from the field, the forest, and the waters; 3) the value of uncommodified food work; 4) environmental recovery through agroecology; 5) violence-free food, produced through respectful social relations.

From a critique of the agrifood system to a perspective of food as a right and a commons

- 20 In line with Latin American popular feminism, the *Margaridas* demand a rights-based and decommodified approach and understanding of food as a commons. In their view, the state must protect, foster, and guarantee food access, and take a stance against free market forces that transforms food into a commodity (CONTAG 2007). The causes for food insecurity, the activists note, can be traced to a macroeconomic model that begets social exclusion, non-living wages, unemployment, land concentration, the commodification of water, the debilitation of public services and welfare policies, and hardships for family farming. In this way, the *Margaridas*' analysis goes beyond a critique of agrarian capitalism to include its cultural dimensions. Free trade transforms food into a product and impacts negatively on food cultures: by relying on heavy marketing investments, the expansion of industrial and imported foods influence food habits and contribute to poor nutrition and health (CONTAG 2007). In opposition to this model, the text defends food as a right and a commons, on par with land, water, genetic resources, and biodiversity. These are the people's "heritage," and go against the interests of big agrifood corporations (CONTAG 2007).
- 21 Once food is established as a right and a commons, the state becomes responsible for having a hand in markets and procurement, policies that run afoul with free market ideologies. In this regard, some important achievements of the early years included the passage of a law on public school food establishing that a percentage of products must be purchased from family farms (2009), a constitutional amendment to include the human right to food (2010), and the strengthening of public policies and programs for family farming, food, and nutritional security, and agroecological and organic farming. Civil society organizations have been an active lobby, monitoring and pushing for progress at institutions like the National Council of Food and Nutritional Security. The *Marcha's* text from 2011 refers to the state's Food Acquisition Programme (PAA, its Portuguese acronym), which aims to address food production, distribution, and consumption at local levels. The National School Meals Program (PNAE, its Portuguese acronym) connects family and local agroecological production to schools, community kitchens and restaurants, food banks, and local markets. In 2015, when assessing Brazilian achievements related to food and nutritional sovereignty and security, the text describes how poverty, food insecurity, and infant mortality have all decreased due to a steady rise in wages amongst the poorest Brazilians, increased access (including for women) to food and nutritional security policies, investments in family farming, and programs to address vulnerability of communities living in semi-arid regions. However, as the text notes, some segments remain excluded from these processes and there is a need to tackle structural cases: traditional communities, the

Black population, and the many rural poor. In addition, Brazil is experiencing an epidemic of obesity that can be attributed to the rise in processed industrial foods (CONTAG 2015: 20).

- 22 In short, food is never framed in individual terms such as food choice or food behavior in these documents: it is always as a social and political problem, a collective topic that requires public policies. In addition, the documents from the *Marcha* refer to myriad ways of organizing food relations: agroecology, agroforestry, farmers' markets, fair trade, solidarity economy, the promotion of food cultures. These challenges dominate understandings of food relations as market relations, embedding food production, distribution, and consumption in society's values and cultures of care in order to dispute neoliberal conceptions that measure society in market values.

Public policies to support diversity in food production by women from the field, the forest, and the waters

- 23 Demands for gendered public policies in food production and distribution are central in all the *Marcha* documents. One particular focus is the need for greater women's participation in policies like land access, lines of credits specific to women, technical assistance, and agroecological production policies. The text argues that public policies strengthen women and should be aligned with their wishes, demands, forms of production, and lives. Women within CONTAG unions have always fought against a gendered state that treats male farmers as their model citizens. Women generally do not participate in decision-making bodies and are unable to influence public policies more conducive to reaching food and nutritional sovereignty and security.
- 24 The struggle for land rights during the first years of the *Marcha* is a clear example of addressing women's perpetually subordinate position to the man of the family, be the husband, father, or brother. Land rights is thus a core dimension of a feminist food sovereignty agenda, even before the term was used, as it implies women's autonomy in food production and distribution. Without such rights, women cannot access loans without a man's signature and they are excluded from decision-making on issues such as production planning. One of the main goals in the 2000 and 2003 mobilizations of the *Margaridas* was the demand for women's effective participation in agrarian reform, which they achieved in 2003. Until that year, land possession or ownership under agrarian reform tended to be assigned automatically to the man in the case of heterosexual couples. Since then, there has been an increase in joint titles and land concession for men or women, or both, regardless of marital status, in keeping with the provisions of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution (Borghoff Maia *et al.* 2021).
- 25 The focus on land rights began expanding in 2007 to include other issues, when the first mobilizing topic of the *Marcha*'s political agenda became Land, Water, and Agroecology; this has been at the forefront of the *Marcha* since then. The *Margaridas* establish democratic access to land and water as a prerequisite to any other demand and to food sovereignty, the exercise of citizenship, and life itself. It is worth noting that the demands for food sovereignty account for gender, racial, and ethnic difference and for diverse food production methods. It "also means respecting the cultures and diversities of peasant, fishermen, and Indigenous means of agrarian and pastoral production, taking to market, and the management of rural spaces, in which women play a fundamental role" (CONTAG 2015: 17). Therefore, a feminist food sovereignty agenda

both rural and popular accounts for the diversity of subjects, identities, and ways of living.

Recognizing Uncommodified Food Work

- 26 Drawing on feminist economy and feminist socialism, the *Marcha* calls attention to the way in which capitalism and patriarchy articulate in the sexual division of labor and the value hierarchies for different activities. By fostering values like nutritious and quality food, and culturally appropriate food, food sovereignty recognizes the value of work traditionally done by women. The 2011 text invites women to reflect on their contribution to food and nutritional security. After all, although rural women produce more nutritious and diverse foods for domestic consumption that enhances family nutrition, such work is not recognized or valued in food production, because it is not intended for foreign markets. In the sexual division of labor associated with food preparation, women are mainly or even solely responsible for the family meals. In food consumption, there are nutritional inequalities within the family, as men and children are prioritized when food is scarce, leaving women more vulnerable to food insecurity (CONTAG 2011). Similar to the contradictions between women's role in food production and their vulnerability to food insecurity, the text calls attention to the paradoxical concentration of food insecurity among rural populations (CONTAG 2011).⁶
- 27 The text of 2015 explains that women's work in food production is not appreciated for various reasons: when women work in cash crop fields, this is considered "help," not work. Women cannot or do not dedicate all their time to producing cash crops for market; they also spend time cultivating various food crops for self-consumption and thus contribute to protecting agrobiodiversity and family nutrition. Often these are produced in the areas closer to home, or in the household gardens, making this food production part of domestic work, and thus invisible. Women alone are responsible for food preparation, as with many other domestic chores, but their efforts in these areas are neither recognized nor valued as work. By counterposing monocrops destined to distant markets, on the one hand, and fostering fresh and diverse foods for direct consumption, on the other hand, food sovereignty casts women's work in a new light. "Self-consumption is one of the main strategies to guarantee food sovereignty, by assuring an improvement in the quality of food, reducing the expenses associated with food, and increasing the autonomy of the family vis-à-vis the market" (CONTAG 2015: 21).
- 28 If the goal is food sovereignty and not just market profits, all production activities for self-consumption and care work must be valued. Because they carry out most of these activities, and in some cases are even solely responsible for them, women thus become protagonists in this model, instead of being seen as just the male farmer's "helpers." When these activities receive the recognition they deserve, there is more room to redefine and share responsibilities between family members, overcoming the traditional roles in the sexual division of labor. Instead of feminizing the work associated with food production for self-consumption and food preparation, this could be a chance for a new gender order. Food sovereignty would thus become a vehicle for transforming not only the environment relations inherent to food production, but also gender relations.

- 29 In this regard, the *Marcha* documents insist on the need to deconstruct the patriarchal vision that blames women and their entry to the labor market for the changes in the eating habits of the Brazilian population and the obesity epidemic: “The sexual division of domestic work is fundamental, where food-related responsibilities are shared by all members” (CONTAG 2015: 21). In this way, the *Marcha das Margaridas* elaborated on gender inequalities in the food system that also affect urban women. The goal of valuing uncommodified food work is constructed so as to avoid establishing that women are naturally better at these activities, or that they constitute inherently female work, and instead extend an invitation for a shared responsibility that does not reinforce traditional gender roles.

Environmental recovery in food production: promoting agroecology

- 30 In 2000 and 2003, environmental dimensions of food production are mentioned in a critique of the technological fixes aimed at achieving food security, a model widely supported during the agrarian “modernization” associated with Brazil’s Green Revolution. The text lists the multi-dimensional impacts of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics, and hormones: health impacts on food consumers and rural workers, environmental contamination, pest resistance, soil degradation, and the economic impacts caused by a dependency on agricultural inputs (CONTAG 2000).
- 31 Over time, the environmental issue becomes increasingly important on the political agenda. In 2003, the presence of the word “environment” starts increasing in their visual materials, and is treated as a priority issue in their documents. Agroecology is the point where the environmentalist agenda is articulated with the food sovereignty agenda. This can partially be attributed to the National Agroecology Conference (*Encontro Nacional de Agroecologia*) held in Rio de Janeiro in 2002, and the *Marcha*’s partnerships with organizations members from ANA, an alliance that continued to grow over the years (since its foundation, ANA has been involved in the *Marcha*’s activities, and vice-versa). The *Marcha* considers agroecology to be a key element of the Alternative Project for Sustainable Rural Development from CONTAG, which strives for environmental protection and socioeconomic stability for family farmers. The *Margaridas*, however, claim that the biggest challenge is to awaken an agroecological consciousness and transform the newly awakened into a political force that draws on various scattered experiences; by thus mobilizing, public policies on family farming may become possible (CONTAG 2003: 19). Agroecology combines both environmental sustainability and social equity; it respects the diversity of each ecosystem in Brazil and values the knowledge, experience, and culture of those who farm the land, including women. Agroecology enters the *Marcha* agenda not as something unfamiliar to its grassroots supporters, but as part of the practices and cumulative knowledge of many rural workers, women and men alike. Rural working women play a key role in agrobiodiversity and seed conservation, plant knowledge, and the preservation of food cultures.
- 32 Starting in 2007, the connections between agricultural production, environmental recovery, and food quality grew more profound. Agroecology is depicted as both a production method and a certain relationship between human beings and the environment within this production. It goes beyond the process and includes the product, e.g., healthy and quality food (CONTAG 2007). An emblematic example of the

Margaridas' contribution to a feminist food sovereignty agenda was the struggle for a public policy to promote agroecological yards. These are spaces adjacent to rural households for agrobiodiverse, agroecological production where women grow medicinal plants, raise small animals, and take care of the environment, helping Earth recover its ability to host and reproduce life. The policy was implemented in 2015. Agroecology “respects and promotes social, biological, and cultural diversity, benefiting all society and the planet, guaranteeing access to these foods for future generations” (CONTAG 2015: 20). The ANA slogan embraced by the *Marcha*, “without feminism there is no agroecology,” summarizes how agroecology transitions to ecological farming and social change in gender relations are interrelated. It describes the kind of food sovereignty this feminist mobilization aims to achieve.

Against sexist and other forms of violence in the countryside: building new, respectful social relations

- 33 Since the *Margaridas* formed, their concern about sexist violence was second only to hunger. At the first march, in 2000, the *Margaridas* adopted the slogan from the World March of Women: “against poverty, hunger, and sexist violence.” This remained the slogan for the next two marches (2003 and 2007). This slogan is clearly a tribute to the popular feminism from the mid-1990s that combined demands from working classes hard hit by neoliberal economics in Latin America and the increase in poverty and hunger. Now, however, it was being combined with an awareness of women’s domination and a consensus with historic feminist demands against sexist violence.
- 34 The *Marcha* articulates an anti-capitalist critique of the agrifood system with an analysis of patriarchal relations, revealing how the intersection of class and gender affects rural working women in particular ways, as seen in sexist violence (CONTAG 2007). The dominant agrarian model that generates poverty, combined with a lack of welfare state policies, necessarily impacts women more than men because of the asymmetrical division in care work. Additionally, the lack of women’s economic autonomy—given that her farm work is not recognized as such—also makes women more vulnerable to domestic violence. The persistence of patriarchy “reproduces gender inequalities in the countryside, discriminates against women, and contributes to persistently high poverty levels and sexist violence” (CONTAG 2007).
- 35 However, the political agenda of the *Marcha* goes beyond sexist violence and calls attention to the high rate of violence in rural areas due to conflicts over land, water, and infrastructure projects. Land and environmental activists in Brazil are exposed to threats from private security forces and militias, which are given free rein to kill in a highly selective court system where crimes often go unpunished. The *Marcha*’s political project is for a life free from all forms of violence in the countryside. This demand also coincides with the political banner of food sovereignty. According to the documents of the *Marcha*, the core element defining food sovereignty are new types of social relations free from oppression and based on respect and equality across class, gender, and race (CONTAG 2011).

Food and gender: from hierarchical relations to feminist mobilizations

- 36 Since its beginning, the *Marcha* has elaborated an anti-capitalist critique of the global agrifood system that identifies various types of inequalities—material, cultural, embodied, and environmental—and processes of destitution in all nodes of the food chain, from production to consumption. The discussion of food insecurity is embedded in the debate of structural inequalities: it affects people in different ways and there are differentiated responsibilities for its cause and solutions. From the situated perspective of the rural working class, the documents of the *Margaridas* thus emphasize how food insecurity intersects with class and urban-rural inequalities. This anti-capitalist critique includes symbolic aspects and alternative meanings of food relations. Food cultures, after all, are also about community and solidarity-building across rural and urban peoples, while the commodification of food is about dissolving bonds.
- 37 Their resistance and oppositional agency question the very concepts used in the agrifood system: the *Margaridas* speak of food as a human right and a commons, not a product or commodity. By embedding their historical demands against hunger and the guarantee of food and nutritional security into discourse of agrarian movements, namely, “food sovereignty,” they opt not to discuss hunger in terms of income or food access and instead speak of power asymmetries and a democratic politics of food. This evolved as a counter-discourse to food security that questioned the latter’s focus on the aggregate tons of agricultural production and the world population; food sovereignty instead draws attention to the structural dimension of hunger and the social, economic, and political inequalities involved in food production, distribution, and consumption. According to this view, the fight against hunger cannot be disassociated from various dimensions of inequalities, because hunger is understood in its structural dimension.
- 38 What would represent a feminist contribution to such a project? The *Marcha das Margaridas* articulates capitalist critique and class analysis from a gendered lens of the structural inequalities (class, gender, and rural-urban inequalities) rural working women face. They analyze the inequalities that permeate these women’s experience in multiple domains: the household, agrarian production, access to public policies, their political participation within the union movement. Women’s key role in food production that involves diverse, nutritious, healthy food is not recognized as productive work; care work such as food preparation is not valued; and food as a social good is distributed unequally between genders, with men receiving the best portions. In a stance against gender inequalities, the *Marcha* proposes to value women’s contribution to food sovereignty while staying alert to the risk of women being bound to these roles and reproductive work. Rather, as feminists, the goal is to change the values assigned to the activities that promote food sovereignty, so that men, women, states, and markets all share the responsibility. The *Marcha* highlights that food sovereignty must be defined by new types of social relations that are free from oppression and based on respect and equality across class, gender, and race, while also respecting the environment. In this sense, the *Marcha das Margaridas* has been developing their own feminist understanding of food sovereignty as a banner, a vehicle, that brings together many of their historic demands.
- 39 Using a broad agenda, the *Margaridas* challenge the gender hierarchies that structure society, politics, economy, and culture and struggle for transformations that ensure

gender equity in the agrifood system and society as a whole. Bearing in mind the importance of advancing the knowledge of women's and feminist food sovereignty activism (Masson *et al.* 2017), this paper set out to analyze the contribution the *Marcha das Margaridas* to the food sovereignty agenda. The situated perspective of women from the field, the forest, and the waters, a perspective the *Marcha das Margaridas* has adopted as its own, contributes to building a feminist food justice and food sovereignty that is both rural and popular. Their contribution is anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, decolonial, and ecological.

- 40 First, popular feminism advocates for an understanding of food as a commons and a rights, thus including food in its tradition of defending a rights-based approach to common goods such as health, education, transport, and housing. Second, for decades, rural feminists have been struggling for land reform, land entitlements, and territorial rights for Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Brazil, and for women's access to labor rights and public policies. These groups have also defended food production by women through access to credits, technical assistance, state-led institutional markets, and political participation in decision making. Third, popular feminism advocates for the recognition and value of uncommodified food work as part of a tradition of valuing social reproductive work, the state provision of childcare, and social welfare for families. The *Marcha das Margaridas* also challenges gender roles in food preparation, calling for a redistribution of household responsibilities. Fourth, rural popular feminism challenges reductionist conceptions of land, water, and forests as natural resources to instead defend a view of nature as a common good, one that should be protected by promoting livelihoods that recover nature and allow for the reproduction of life. This feminism takes up the agroecological agenda, the defense of ecologies, and good quality and nutritional food as its core values. Finally, sexist violence has been a constant issue in the agenda of popular feminist movements. The rural popular feminists of the *Marcha das Margaridas* also defend a life free from all types of violence in the countryside, a space within Brazil characterized by colonial relations and high rates of murder and violence. These women advocate for respectful social relations, and challenge the patriarchy, sexism, and racism that structure social relations in the country.
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NOTES

1. Available at: [<http://www.fao.org/brasil/noticias/detail-events/pt/c/1157560/>], accessed October 1, 2020.

2. Food insecurity was an issue for 55.7% of urban households and 75.2% of rural households (the national average is 59.4%). Food insecurity is more common in households with only one breadwinner (66.3%) and is even more accentuated when the head of the household is a woman (73.8%) or a person racialized as brown [Pardo] (67.8%) or Black [Preto] (66.8%) (Galindo et al 2021).

3. The name is a tribute to Margarida Maria Alves, a union leader from Paraíba, a state in the northeast of Brazil. In retaliation for her long-term struggle for the labor rights of rural workers, Margarida was murdered in 1983. The first national mobilization in 2000 was organized in August to demand punishment for her murderers, who were on trial at that time.
 4. Interview with Nalu Faria by Marco Antonio Teixeira on September 9, 2019.
 5. “Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to decide their own food and production system, based on healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced in a sustainable and ecological way, which places those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies, above the demands of the markets and companies, while also defending the interests and assuring the inclusion of future generations. This declaration also affirms the need to prioritize local production and consumption circuits that strengthen family agriculture, peasant farming, and artisanal fishermen” (CONTAG 2011).
 6. Recent survey data from a national representative public opinion survey confirms this urban-rural inequality, as noted earlier.
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ABSTRACTS

The Marcha das Margaridas is a coalition of women and feminism movements, agrarian movements, trade unions, and international organizations that emerged in 2000. Women’s organizations that are part of a rural trade federation lead the process. While its initial agenda included gendered class-based demands for the recognition of women’s work in food production, access to land titles and labour rights, the *Marcha das Margaridas* progressively incorporated other topics, such as agroecology and food sovereignty. The article addresses three questions: How did food sovereignty enter their agenda? What is the meaning of food sovereignty for them? How can food sovereignty be understood from a (popular) feminist perspective? Our research is based on participant observation in the last two *Marchas* (2015 and 2019), interviews with activists, and document analysis.

La Marcha das Margaridas est une coalition de mouvements de femmes et de féministes, de mouvements agraires, de syndicats et d’organisations internationales qui a vu le jour en 2000. Les organisations de femmes, au sein d’un syndicat rural, dirigent le processus. En commençant par des revendications - fondées sur le genre et la classe sociale, pour la reconnaissance du travail des femmes dans la production alimentaire, l’accès aux titres fonciers et les droits du travail - *la Marcha das Margaridas* a progressivement intégré d’autres sujets dans son programme, tels que l’agroécologie et la souveraineté alimentaire. L’article aborde trois questions : Comment la souveraineté alimentaire est-elle entrée dans leur programme ? Quelle est la signification de la souveraineté alimentaire pour leur mobilisation ? Comment comprendre la souveraineté alimentaire dans une perspective féministe (populaire) ? Notre recherche est basée sur l’observation participante des deux dernières éditions de la manifestation (en 2015 et en 2019), les entretiens avec des activistes et l’analyse de documents.

INDEX

Keywords: food sovereignty, feminism, women's movements, agrarian movements, rural women, gender, food, Marcha das Margaridas, Brazil

Mots-clés: souveraineté alimentaire, féminisme, mouvements de femmes, mouvements agraires, femmes rurales, genre, alimentation, Marcha das Margaridas, Brésil

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Cooking more than food

The social and cultural products of women's alimentary agency in rural Mali

Cuisiner plus que de la nourriture : les produits sociaux et culturels de l'agentivité alimentaire des femmes du Mali rural

Stephen Wooten

My work in Mali has been supported by the Fulbright Program and the University of Oregon. I have benefited from collegial feedback in a variety of formal and informal settings from international symposia to hallway conversations on campus. My friend, brother, and collaborator Sekou Berte has played a key role in this project, from helping to collect data and to translation and interpretation. Ellen Ziesenhene and Emily Capdeville, alumni of the University of Oregon's Global Studies Program, provided timely and insightful editorial guidance along the way. My family has always recognized the importance and value of my "work" and for that I am grateful. Thanks also go to the anonymous peer reviewers of my manuscript. Their comments, challenging and compelling, helped me bring forward a stronger paper in the end. The editors of this special issue deserve my gratitude. Their vision for the project was keen and their management of the publication process was skilful and compassionate. The deepest debt of gratitude I have is to the people of the Mande Plateau who have allowed me to learn about their lives. In particular, thanks are due to the women who shared their experiences and spaces for the current project. Tobilimusow, aw ni ce! Aw ni baara.

Introduction

- 1 In conversations with women in rural Mali about local foodways, I have often heard a simple and passionate declaration: "Our men don't cook! We are tobilimusow (cooking women), we make food." Men and boys eagerly affirm their wives' or mothers' observations. "Cooking is women's work." It all seems so "natural" to them and, for a long time, it did to me as well. Indeed, over the course of more than 25 years of research in rural farming communities in this region of West Africa I have never seen a man prepare a meal for his family. Men certainly do other productive and important things, but they do not – as rule – make meals. An enduring interest in this dominant and

“naturalized” dynamic has led me to look more closely at the highly gendered and gendering nature of food preparation and to seek a fuller understanding of the things that *tobilimusow* produce through their labours of the hearth. They certainly cook food consumed by their family members, but I argue that they produce more through the preparation of meals. They are also creators of key cultural values and elemental connections, of alimentary ethics and the related social ties that bind.

- 2 In this paper I present an ethnographically detailed and nuanced examination of cooking and meals in rural Mali and position women’s agency in this space as influential and consequential. My analysis of food and gender is informed and inspired by a growing body of scholarship that engages the intersection of these parts of life in new and productive ways. Recent studies have helped clarify the significance and power of cooking and the common meal in a wide variety of cultural and ethnographic contexts (e.g., Albala 2016; Carsten 1997; Davidson 2016; Holtzman 2009; Huhn 2020; Weismantel 1989). These studies reveal how an analysis of commensality and food dynamics can fruitfully engage the actors and processes that bring the common meal into being: the actions and contributions of the cooks. Geographer Maria Christie’s concept of “kitchenspace” (2008) offers an ethnographic pathway toward a substantive and theoretically valuable engagement with such dynamics. Kitchenspace is “a privileged and gendered site of social and cultural reproduction, where society’s relationship with nature is inscribed in the patterns of everyday life and ritual celebrations” (p. 1). It “is created and maintained by the food preparation activity carried out by gendered subjects” and these spaces “are women’s domains,” sites of women’s power, agency and creativity (p. 2). Building on these studies, in what follows I show how the labour the *tobilimusow* I have come to know in rural Mali nourishes their families, and I focus attention on what their labour produces beyond the food itself.

Ethnographic setting and methods

- 3 My analysis stems from more than 25 years of engagement with rural farmers in the savanna region of Mali. While I have conducted research in various locations in the country, my principal engagement has been in one particular community. Niamakoroni is a settlement on the Mande Plateau in south central Mali, approximately 35 kilometres from Bamako, the capital city. According to community elders, the village was founded at the close of the nineteenth century when a lineage segment from a nearby community settled there in order to gain access to new farmland. Contemporary residents of Niamakoroni, like their ancestors before them, assert a Bamana (Bambara) ethnic identity.
- 4 The people of Niamakoroni live in a small, tightly knit settlement that bears a close social, cultural and economic resemblance to other rural Bamana communities across the region (Becker 1989, 1990, 2000; Grigsby 1986; Lewis 1979, 1981; Grosz-Ngate 1988, 1989; and Toulmin 1992, 2020). Its population has ranged in size from about 250 in 1992 to approximately 450 in 2018. Descent in Niamakoroni is traced patrilineally and control over productive resources is generally corporate in nature. Age and sex are important characteristics in social, political and economic contexts, with elders dominating juniors and men typically holding more power than women. Becker (1990: 315) refers to this as “a patrilineal gerontocracy.” The dominant residence pattern is patrilocal, and marriages are frequently polygynous. In the community, the primary

domestic group (residential and food production and consumption unit) is called a *du* (*duw*, plural). Niamakoroni's *duw* are multi-generational, joint families in which junior males and their spouses and families typically live and work under the authority of the group's eldest male, the *dutigi* or household head. As senior members of their lineage groups, *dutigiw* have access to arable uplands and the authority to direct the labour of those who live with them in the subsistence realm. The members of each *du* live close to one another and share meals throughout the year. Women in the community are responsible for food processing and cooking, as well as for all household maintenance tasks. Men typically have few domestic obligations aside from building and maintaining houses.

- 5 I began my research in Niamakoroni in June 1993 with a two-month field study focusing on household and individual agricultural activities. From June 1994 to July 1995 I lived full time in village. Over the course of 13 months, I was a participant observer in the day-to-day life of the community. Specifically, I undertook an intensive study of the relationship between farming “for life” (*ka balo*) and “for money” (*ka wari nyini*). I have returned to the community numerous times for periods of field research (in June 1998, April-May 2002, June-July 2008, and June-July 2015). I spent eight months in Mali from August 2011 to March 2012. During that time, I continued my research on farming and added a new focus on cooking dynamics. Throughout the years I have used Bamana as my primary mode of communication and research.
- 6 Over the years, I have eaten literally thousands of meals with people in Niamakoroni and across the wider Mande region. For more than a year in early 1990s, I lived with and ate almost all my daily meals with one particular family. Nene Jara, the leader of the community at that time welcomed me, as the resident ethnographer, into his large household in a time-honored fashion: by integrating me into a group meal. At the time, Nene's family consisted of 59 people, his *dumògòw*, or house-people.
- 7 This group had one central hearth or *gwa*, and the nine married women living the household took turns cooking for this “family.” Each day one *tobilimuso* gathered grain from the central granary, assembled ingredients for an accompanying vegetable sauce, and prepared a meal for the group. When family members like those in Nene's household lower themselves to crouch around bowls of porridge and sauce, they eat and they forge bonds that all depend on for survival and community spirit. As I will show, in addition to nourishing the individual physical body, food consumed with others in these settings provides essential enculturation in the art of being a good person and constitutes and nourishes key social groups among the proud farmers I have come to know.
- 8 By eating so many meals in common I have gained an intimate understanding how food helps foster connections, the spirit of family and community—what local people call *badenya* or motherchildness. As one woman explained it to me, “A united family eats together; they eat *baden* (motherchild) porridge” (see Wooten 2009:35-61 for a fuller treatment of this concept and its counterpart *fadenya* or fatherchildness). As we will see, household meals embody and promote key values and kinship connections, and these ethics and bonds are reinforced every day when residents partake of the food that nourishes them. And the women who cook these meals are thus instrumental actors in the social and cultural landscape.

Producing for life: the household economy

- 9 In *The Art of Livelihood: Creating Expressive Agri-Culture in Rural Mali* (2009), I provide a detailed analysis of the contemporary, local farming system. I have also examined the deep roots of this agrarian economy, a foodway that has sustained generations of farmers on the West African savannah (Wooten 2020). A brief overview of this system provides context for my examination for food preparation and consumption. Very clear gender relations of production and domains of experience and knowledge mark the food production process, and likely have been, for a long period of time.
- 10 During each rainy season (roughly June-September), the vast majority of working age community members (roughly 12-45 years of age) focus their productive energies on the cultivation of food crops, a process community members refer to as producing “for life.” Working under the direction of their *dutigiw*, members of each group labour to ensure that food coffers will be full at harvest time. The men in each household work collectively in their group’s main field to produce staple crops including sorghum, millet, corn/maize, cowpeas, peanuts, and Bambara groundnuts. Married women in each group work individually in fields assigned to them by the *dutigiw* to produce *nafenw* or sauce things. In most cases, women inter-crop peanuts, cowpeas, kenaf, roselle, and okra. These crops complement the grain to comprise the daily meals. Aside from assisting their mothers or sisters-in-law, unmarried girls are rarely involved in agricultural activities. Instead, they devote their time to household tasks such as hauling water, child care, and sweeping domestic areas. Likewise, senior men and women do not participate in the household economy. They are retired from productive roles in domestic labour. Those men and women who are active in their household economies spend the vast majority of daylight hours during the rainy season tending to the food crops.
- 11 In October, a village-wide work team comprised of all the active men in the community harvest in rotation each *du*’s main cereal field. Each group’s harvest is stored in its own granary for use throughout the year. For the most part, each woman harvests her own sauce crops. Sometimes individual women recruit assistance from the other women in their *du*. Women’s crops are typically bagged and stored in their respective houses for use when they prepared meals in their household. Throughout the year, consumption is strictly a *du*-level activity with meals prepared in turn by the married women in each household and composed of products resulting from men’s and women’s distinct production processes. The *dutigiw* oversee and manage the “for life” component of the farm economy. This general pattern of distinct gender contributions to the food economy, with men providing grains and women providing sauces, is widespread among the Bamana (Becker 1996; Thiam 1986; Toulmin 1992, 2020).
- 12 The production and consumption pattern in Niamakoroni and surrounding communities on the Mande Plateau focuses on the “for life” economy. Unlike farming communities in the “peanut belt” of western Mali (Koenig 1998) or “cotton belt” of southern Mali (Laris *et al* 2015; Moseley 2005), producers in the study region devote the bulk of their land and labour during the farming season to producing food crops for their own consumption. Households do not grow peanuts for sale nor do they farm cotton for the market. Even if they wanted to do so, the environmental setting is not conducive to those crops. The crops they do grow end up in the bowls and bellies of the community members.

- 13 In addition to labouring within the context of their respective *duw* for domestic consumption, individuals of all ages in Niamakoroni have the option to engage in independent commodity production activities that will earn them personal incomes. People typically classify income-generating activities as *ka wari nyini* (for money) activities. Due to the seasonal nature of labour demands in the rain-fed farming cycle, most people do not devote time to such personal activities until the close of the year's farming season. However, once their obligations to the food economy are met, most people – young and old, male and female – devote at least some amount of time to producing or collecting products that are sold in nearby markets. For example, some people produce charcoal, while others craft mats and brooms. However, despite considerable diversity, people are quite uniform in viewing market gardening as the premier avenue available for income generation and potential accumulation. As I describe elsewhere, these commercial activities are gendered and men generally derive more benefit from them than do women (Wooten 2003, 2004).

Cooking women, women's things, and the common meal

- 14 Marriage plays a key role in shaping women's food preparation activity in Niamakoroni and other Bamana communities. Generally speaking, only married women cook meals for their families. And once a woman's son marries and a daughter-in-law joins the household, the mother-in-law "retires" from cooking, replaced by the household's new wife. Cooks learn from their mothers and aunts before marriage and from senior sister wives after joining their husbands' families. In both cases, learning happens by helping, watching and through direct instruction. Unmarried daughters aid their mothers or aunts.
- 15 A household analysis from 1993 offers a sense of these dynamics and reveals an enduring *tobilimusow* pattern. Of the adult (non-elder) married women in Niamakoroni, 76 percent (32/42) cooked food in their respective households. Recently arrived new wives (*musokuraw*) accounted for the 14 percent (10/42) of adult (non-elder) married women who had not yet assumed their roles as *tobilimusow* in their respective *duw*. After a year or two new wives begin to cook for their new families. In Nene's *du*, 9 women were *tobilimusow*. In Dugukolo's *du*, there were 8 and in Mpe's *du*, 3 women cooked. There were four cooking women in Bogoli Kulibali's *du* and 8 in Dosege's household. Following the farming pattern described above, all of these women cultivated women's fields and used their sauce crops when they took their turns at the household hearth. For females, the age at marriage is usually around 16. With the prevailing pattern of polygamy, husbands are typically older, around 25 at first marriage and often in their forties or fifties by their second or third marriage. Subsequent research in the community confirms that this cooking pattern continues into the present day.

"Women's things"

- 16 In performing the essential labour of meal preparation, the women of Niamakoroni make use of a fairly standard and relatively simple tool kit. Men and women alike refer to these items as *musofenw* or "women's things". The standard "*batterie de cuisine*"

includes: several clay pots for cooking grain, several clay pots for cooking sauce, a clay steamer, metal versions of most clay cooking pots, large and a small wooden mortar and pestle sets, serving spoons for sauce or gruel, serving spoons for porridge or rice, several storage and serving calabashes, several wooden vessels for serving and storage, several water jars, a water bucket, a hanging basket for utensils, a stiff hand brush, fiber sponge, a container for pungent spices, a stool, a knife for cutting sauce leaves, a pan for holding coals, and a fiber fan for stoking the fire. The sizes and numbers of items like cooking pots and serving bowls varies according to how much food is being prepared and the numbers of people being served.

- 17 As noted above, a woman's cooking is related to marriage and so is their toolkit. As part of a bride's preparation for her transition into her husband's family she receives items to support her in her new life, especially for her coming role as a cook. A bride's female kin typically provide her with gifts for her hearthwork. When she arrives in her husband's household her cooking kit and general trousseau is laid out for all to see. This is a very public accounting and offers people a way to "see" what the new wife brings to the household. Some of the items in the cooking toolkit are more like "common property" while others are more "personal property." Some items are kept in the *gwabugu*, others in the individual woman's home. Most large items stay at the central hearth or nearby work area.

Cooking the common meals

- 18 A day or two in advance of their cooking turn, *tobilimusow* make their way to their household's central granaries, which are typically located in the remote bush fields where the crops are grown. Cooks walk to their granary to retrieve the amounts needed for their cooking cycle. The grain is stored on the panicle and women load baskets woven from sorghum stalk strips. They carry these baskets back to the village for processing. The first step is to remove grains from the panicle. This is done by light pounding using a large wooden mortar and pestle. Once the grains are free, they are washed and then pounded into coarse flour. The flour is safe guarded for use on the day the women take their turn at the household hearth.
- 19 Before the sun appears, a cook in each one of the community's compounds rises in order to prepare the morning meal (*daraka*) for the people of her compound, her fellow *dumògòw* or house-people. Establishing the cooking fire is a starting point. Fires are tended in the space between three large stones or *gwakuluw*. The rocks provide a space for the fire and a foundation to hold the cooking pot. Women will have collected a store of wood from the bush to fuel their cooking fires. With the fire ready, the cook moves on to another key element in the process: gathering water from the village well. Using a rubber bucket and rope, she will draw enough water for all her cooking activities.
- 20 For *daraka* the cook typically prepares a thin porridge or gruel called *siri*. The cook uses the pre-ground sorghum or millet flour for this meal. She boils the flour in water and carefully stirs to avoid lumping. She keeps a close eye on the cooking grain and watches to see how it thickens. The goal is to produce a uniform gruel that can be sipped. When *siri* is ready she pours it into a series of bowls for household distribution. *Seri* served to household members in large enamel or plastic bowls, most of which were produced in China. The fare is consumed by individuals using gourd spoons or *galamaw*. Small

groups of family members organized along lines of gender and age, crouch around and dip their gourds into a common bowl.

- 21 After the morning meal, all members of the *du* disperse to pursue their day's activities; some head off alone, and others depart in groups. During the rainy season, the adult men typically depart *en masse* for work in the *du*'s main grain field. Except for the *tobilimuso*, who is responsible for the day's cooking, the *du*'s adult women typically head off in the company of their young children to work their own women's fields.
- 22 After her early morning activities, the *tobilimuso* turns her attention directly to the task of readying the midday meal or *tilelafana*. The cook has two main elements to produce for the mid-day and *surofana* (nighttime-meal) alike. These meals are usually the same: a stiff, thick sorghum or millet paste or *to*, accompanied by a green leaf sauce or *na*. The cooking process for these items is similar to that used for the morning *seri*. It is worth noting that the word for cooking is based on the porridge: *tobili*, to make the porridge. And that is the base for the term for cooking women, *tobilimusow*. Clearly, making porridge is a central part of all cooking and for the women who do it too.
- 23 To make the *to*, women take the pounded flour and add it to boiling water. They stir it frequently to keep it from sticking to the pot and to keep it from burning in the later stages. The pot is typically cast iron or aluminum, usually made in the nearby capital city of Bamako. The size of the pot varies according to the size of the household. Typical sizes are 20 kg and 30 kg. The pots are modelled on clay pots of old. The current metal versions have small tripod style feet while their clay predecessors did not. Unlike the thinness of *seri*, the target consistency for the porridge is a stiff but not completely hard texture. To reach the right consistency the cook must vigorously turn and turn the steadily thickening mix. As it progresses the mixture becomes quite heavy, requiring considerable arm strength.
- 24 Making the sauce or *na* follows a similar process. The most common sauce is comprised of some type of green leaf. Cooks will gather wild plants in the bush and/or collect leaves from plants in their fields (*musoforow*) or gardens, which tellingly are called *nakow* or sauce-streambeds. The leaves typically come from okra, cowpea or sorrel plants. They will fill a basin with an amount they know will produce a sufficient quantity of cooked sauce. They then slice bunches into a plastic or enamel bowl. The cut leaves are then processed in a small mortar to create a finer ingredient. Cooks will then add cooking oil (often peanut oil), the pounded leaves, salt and perhaps some *soumbala* (a condiment made from the seeds of the *néré* [*Parkia biglobosa*] tree) or *datu* (a spice made from roselle seeds [*Hibiscus sabdariffa*]). Some Maggi Cube, a mass-produced bouillon cube that has become widely available over the last few decades, might be added. This mixture will simmer for an hour or so.
- 25 With the *to* and *na* prepared, the cook will then assemble the *tilelafana* or *surofana* meal. Using a metal ladle, she will place dollop after dollop of porridge around the inside of a plastic or enamel basin. This process is artistic in that the additions converge to compose what to my eye always looks like a collage. When completed the basin may have about 30-40 dollops of *to*, some across the bottom of the vessel and more up and around the sides. The result is a clean and organized matrix with an open well in the centre. The cook then adds the sauce to the vacant space, filling the well. While the food is fairly simple, the presentation is striking in its elegance. The midday meal is distributed first to those who typically remain in the village—the young children, the elders, and the sick or injured—and to the women who return to the compound from

their nearby fields. Young women and girls usually bring bowls of *to* and *na* to the men working in the distant *foroba*.

- 26 At approximately 6:00 p.m., all *du* members reunite for *suròfana*, served in the *du*'s common area like the morning meal. Usually, the fare is identical to the midday meal: *to* and *na*. On some special occasions, rice (a purchased staple) is the grain of choice. Again, separate eating groups form within each *du*, divided first by gender and then within gender by age. However, the oldest man in the group, the *cèkòròba* and *dutigi*, typically eats with several young boys (between four and seven years old) and the oldest woman (*musokòròba*) typically eats with several young girls. Toddlers eat with their mothers.
- 27 The *tobilimuso* brings the cooked food out from the *gwabugu* and begins by placing a bowl on the ground in front of the *dutigi*, then places one in front of the next group of men, and then continues through all the assembled men and women. With their right hands, people take a bit of the *to* and dip it into the *na*, which has been placed in the hollowed area in the center of the *to*. The process continues until each individual is satisfied or the food runs out. If the food in a particular bowl does run out before someone is full, he or she is free to move on a neighbouring group that is still eating. When they are full people say, "A *barika*" or "thanks be," to which the others assembled respond by passing the thanks to Allah, "A *barika Allah ye*." (Even the many non-Muslims in the community use these phrases.) They then pull back from the intimate eating circle, licking their hands before washing them off in the same bowl of water they used at the start of the meal. When everyone has finished eating, the *tobilimuso* collects the bowls. Sometimes she gives the remains to the compound's dogs, or, if food is scarce, they are kept for breakfast the following day. She then proceeds to wash the bowls and cooking pots so that they will be ready for the next meal.
- 28 Interestingly, while all *tobilimuso*w produce basically the same meals of porridge and sauce, they can do so with individual flair. Regular consumers of household meals can distinguish one woman's sauce from another's. It is not uncommon to hear someone, typically a man, praise a particular *tobilimuso*'s sauce publicly by saying, "I *ni gwa, I ni na*" or "You and your hearth. You and your sauce." This statement is a commentary on the woman's distinctive culinary style. In a social world where women typically have few public opportunities to secure status, those who receive such praise seem to take pride in being acknowledged.
- 29 While the core of the fare and toolkit have remained quite stable over time, some cooks have experimented with and adopted new ingredients and technologies. As mentioned, consumer market items like Maggi Cubes have become more commonly used by local women. And cast iron and aluminium pots and enamel and plastic containers are being used more regularly with a parallel decline in clay and calabash items. Barbara Frank (1998) discusses this dynamic in terms of a shift away from pottery and toward iron and aluminium vessels, and Jeremy Cunningham (2009) explores the expansion of enamel serving bowls in the region. Cooks in Niamakoroni and across rural Mali are definitely not averse to change. However, they navigate changes in terms of cost and availability and convenience.
- 30 By and large these shifts have been fairly limited in scope and magnitude. For example, while Twagira (2020) documents the increasing use of machines for milling in the *Office du Niger*, this occurs in a unique and highly specialized, official development zone. Another study shows that some rural cooks, when working closely with and guided

closely by non-governmental organizations, integrated improved cookstove technology into their kitchens, at least some of the time (Johnson and Bryden 2012). A recent 30 year, systematic study reveals that even in Bamako, Mali's bustling capital city, where use of liquid propane gas (LPG) stoves for cooking has become an option, they have remained relatively uncommon. In 2015 LPG comprised only 7% of fuel use in the metropolis, with the traditional fuel sources wood and charcoal predominated (Gazull *et al* 2019). When labour-saving and/or natural resource conservation innovations in cooking do occur, they are often well appreciated by the women involved.

Cooking more than food

- 31 As I have shown above, cooks produce the meals that fuel and nourish their family members, every day and several times a day, year in and year out. Generation to generation. This is not a small thing. However, I argue that their alimentary activities produce more than food.

Producing the ties and values that bind

- 32 "Commensality has been a perennial interest among anthropologists as both a source and expression of group identity" (Tierney and Ohnuki-Tierney 2012: 119). Pioneers like Malinowski, Mauss, and Radcliffe-Brown all recognized the social value of food. Richards (1939) developed the idea of a "clanship of porridge," the kinship created through the sharing of a meal. As discussed in the preceding section, the very material process of food consumption is paramount in this regard. The portrait of the daily round of meals shows that the people of each household are united by their consumption of food prepared from a common hearth.
- 33 One of the most common phrases heard in discussions of food and family dynamics, *du kelen, gwa kelen*, or "one household, one hearth," is typically rendered with conviction, as if it communicated a prized social value. The upshot is that the character of meal preparation and the nature of its consumption define households; if you have two hearths and two eating groups, you have two households. Each and every day, *dumògòw* come together to gather around bowls on food prepared in a common kitchen. Instead of a series of discrete eating groups, the households of the village are unified consumption units. Even if the people could eat alone, they choose not to. Instead, they choose to share their meals. Interestingly, on occasions when I was sick or simply overwhelmed with the social intimacy of day-to-day life and chose to prepare meals alone in my house-people often came by to check on me, to see if I had a problem – they meant a social problem, not a physical one.
- 34 However, there is complexity within this framework and within the "unity." All people do not technically eat together within the community, and even within households, there are some dividing lines. As families grow over time, distinct groups tend to emerge, groups that over time constitute their own residential units, farming units, and ultimately, eating units. Naturally, when issues of scale become significant, transformation needs to occur, new eating groups need to be constituted through the construction of new dwellings and, most importantly, new hearths at which women can cook common meals to feed the house-people. This is a normal process, a process that replicates rather than replaces the basic ideology.

- 35 Another distinction within the realm of eating together occurs between age groups and genders within the household. At all meals, men and women eat separately. The women eat on one side of the public space, and the men eat on the other. Within each gender group, people are further differentiated by age with rough age-mates eating together from a common bowl, the only exception being the aforementioned: when favoured boys eat with their grandfather. So, in a sense, the unified eating group is actually composed of a set of sub-groups.
- 36 While there are ways in which the meal is not fully shared, there are also ways in which it is extended beyond the household. On countless occasions, people called out to me as I passed by their households, "Come eat with us!" This call was clearly an act of hospitality, but it went further than that; a call to eat is a call to connect. As mentioned earlier, the extension and acceptance of an offer is viewed as one of the best means to build unity or *badenya*. "By inviting someone to join you, you are opening up the possibility for connection, for empathy. If your invitation is taken up, this shows that we are and can be one, which is *badenya*," explained Sunje Jara, a quiet but insightful male elder. By accepting such invitations to "come and eat," I learned a lot about who eats together and why.
- 37 Through the habitus of the shared meal, eaters learn what their communities uphold. The common meal prepared by *tobilimusow* teaches and fosters the all-important *badenya* value. The mother-child unity that is so important to people in Niamakoroni and Mande people at large. Elsewhere I describe "daily acts of *badenya*," actions that kin undertake to create belonging or motherchildness. These include the ubiquitous daily greetings and periodic housebuilding activities (see Wooten 2009, p. 51-57). However, while there are other ways they teach and foster unity, I suggest that there is nothing more *badenya* focused than the shared meal: the *foroba to*. Indeed, when people want to call attention to a family's unity they say, "*U be to dun nyogonfe!*" or "They eat porridge together!" From the earliest exposure to the shared meal children are learning what's important. As they gather around the bowl with a set of relatives or friends and use their hands to gather a portion of the porridge and sauce, they perform and embody the principle and substance of *badenya*. And they do so for the whole lives, as they progress to elderhood.

(Re)Producing gender

- 38 Perhaps the most significant thing cooking helps to create is gender in the cultural and social senses Henrietta Moore has explicated (1988). Activities that are strongly differentiated, like cooking, help to construct and reinforce gender identities: the meaning of woman and man and the doings of women and men. "We are *tobilimusow*. We cook. We make meals that feed our people. Our men do not." In these declarations and associated actions, gender identity is strong and visible. As discussed above, women move into their husbands' families and through their cooking they "feed" and sustain their new families. With each meal they become more fully "insiders" in their new social settings. It is interesting to see cooking as a way of becoming less and less of an "outsider." Cooking helps new wives to transition, to change status. Becoming a good cook or a praised cook adds another dimension to this dynamic. A cook who receives praise is publicly celebrated or called out. She rises into a different status in this way too.

- 39 In her analysis of the processes relating to the “gendering food,” Carole Counihan (2012) calls attention to the “power” of cooking and feeding (p. 104). She points out that these activities present an opportunity for women to develop a “food voice” and a space for power that, while not necessarily “celebrated” by men, is nonetheless significant and potentially influential. In the discussion above I have called attention to the ways women in Niamakoroni, through their roles as cooks and mothers, develop and tend a space of power. A site from which to negotiate relations with men. Through their daily work in gender coded processes and locations, they establish and maintain culturally defined and accepted space, literally and figuratively. Cooking or not cooking contributes to identity formation – women cook; cooking helps to make women. Men don’t cook; not cooking helps to make men. In this sense, gender is practiced and performed. Experienced directly and seen by young people, girls and boys. Due to the patrilineal orientation of the society, men, especially household heads, have power over household produced raw grains. However, women take some of that power into their hands when they pound it and grind it and cook it. They gain some degree of control and agency within a strongly patriarchal system. The realm of cooking offers women a relatively autonomous space for creating identity and social status.
- 40 In Niamakoroni and the wider Mande world mothers are viewed in a respectful and in fact celebratory way (Hoffman 2002). As a common proverb suggests, “we are all in our mother’s hands.” The meaning here is that the lives and destinies of children stem from their mothers. Good mothers, mothers who care for and nourish the offspring successfully and with a sweet heart (*sonkadi*), will create good children. It is not by chance that the principal value of unity or *badenya* is derived from the term for mother and child. It conveys a sense of the quality that emerges from good mothering. Mothers are the *baw* of the *badenw* and the source of *badenya*. Mothers feed you and care for you. It is important to note that this relationship is based on one’s biological mother, but is applicable to mother’s cowives as well, to *baniciniw* in Bamana, minor mothers. So, cooking and feeding creates mothers and mothering as well. The conceptual or cultural space women create through their feeding and nurturing is one aspect. In a way it is facilitated by the occupation of physical space.
- 41 Christie’s notion of “kitchenspace” (2008) calls attention to the spatial aspect of gender identity: the sites of cooking and consumption. For the *tobilimusow* of Niamakoroni, these are the *gwabuguw*, literally the hearthgrounds. In Niamakoroni and across the Mande region, the hearth is comprised of three simple stones or *gwakuluw*. Open-hearth cooking and the three-rock arrangement are of course ancient and widespread. In some Bamana communities *gwa* is used to refer to the family (see Lewis 1979, Toulmin 1992, 2020), signaling the centrality of the cooking space. Of course, the hearth is the place of the fire.
- 42 As Wrangham (2009) has argued fire is perhaps one of the most important elements of humanity’s consequential discoveries. In the hands of humans, it facilitates the all-important development of cooking. It is perhaps not surprising then for fire and fireplaces or hearths to be celebrated. Noted French ethnologist Dominique Zahan (1979) calls attention to the special status of these places of fire. “‘Temples’ related to fire are more numerous than one might think, since any hearth where an African woman prepares food can be properly considered a sacred place of worship. This is not so much because of the holiness of food but because of the ‘sanctity’ of fire” (p. 29). He goes on to say, “As the ‘soul’ of the household, the hearth turns the house itself into a

humble ‘sanctuary’ of prayer, of the silent invocation addressed by man (*sic*) to the divinity or to the family’s ancestral souls. When an offering is made of food cooked in the fireplace before it is taken into the body to be transformed into blood and life, this is not only a way of ‘nourishing’ the ancestors but also a way of thanking the Invisible for the gift of fire, the symbol of life” (p. 97).

- 43 As a rule, men do not enter *gwabuguw* or cooking spaces, the temples of fire. I cannot recall seeing any man in there in more than two and a half decades of field research. Sometimes a man might come to the doorway and greet the women inside but even then, it’s usually in passing, not an extended visit. I have probably spent more time in the cooking spaces of Niamakoroni than any other resident male. There is a degree of fear of this space for men. Fear of what power women might have in this realm, be it material (poison) or ritual (spells). In a rich article on ‘the gender of beer’ Walter Van Beek remarks on the fear dynamic among the Dogon people of northern Mali, albeit in this case with millet beer not porridge. “Dogon beer is a female force. Men, the main drinkers, depend on women for the production of their beer, and they fear that aspect.” (2011: 157). Likewise, David Conrad (1999) has observed fear of women in the oral traditions of the Mande. He recounts several situations where food and cooking reveal the power of the cook, for good (as in medicine) and danger (as in poison). Legendary leader Fakoli’s wife Keleya Konkon’s feat of producing vast amounts of food from a simple pot and the cooks that produced poison meat to help defeat enemies in the Mani/Mande battles.
- 44 So, through cooking, a steady and ever-present activity, women create a space for themselves, physically and socio-culturally speaking. In fact, groups of *tobilimusow* do this, not one woman. This is a collective effort within a household and even more so across the community and indeed society. Mande women through their culinary actions produce a literal and figurative space for themselves and for women in general and those to come. The *gwabugu* is women’s space and being in that space creates women, in the cultural sense as well as the social sense. When daughters or junior sisters help out in the cooking process, they are learning about being a woman and being in and of a woman’s space. It is a site of enculturation and socialization, of gendering. And it is a women’s place of power. Indeed, women sometimes refer to the cooking space as “*musow ka bureau*” or “women’s office” in parallel to ritual houses or offices where elder male *dutigiw* hold power.

Conclusion

- 45 It is important to return to the “naturalized” aspect of the gendered nature of cooking that I presented in the opening of this paper. As Counihan has noted (2012: 105), until recently, relatively little appreciation has been given to women cooks and their cooking, especially in non-professional, daily contexts. Indeed, cooking and meals are often taken for granted or seen as naturally occurring; especially by men – be they insiders or outsiders. And this is particularly true in contexts where the cuisine is seen as relatively “simple,” without a lot of ingredients or technological complexity. In the analysis above, we see the women behind “simple” meals in rural Mali. And we see their labours more clearly. We see the products of their work more completely. In doing so, we gain a deeper sense of and appreciation for their alimentary agency and power. We see them not simply as food makers or providers of sustenance, but as

creators of culture and community as well. We see cooking as a creative process, thereby expanding our appreciation for the kinds of processes we might consider as socially and culturally productive.

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ABSTRACTS

In contemporary rural Mali, when it comes to cooking, there is a strict division of labour. Women always make the meals. Each and every day, they transform raw ingredients into cooked fare for themselves and their families. Through their quotidian, alimentary activities they produce essential physical nourishment. However, their labour at the hearth helps to create more than food. In this paper I highlight the important role women in the region play in the life-giving realm of food preparation and by extension in the creation of key threads of the fabric of social and cultural life. Using insights from extensive, longitudinal ethnographic research on the Mande Plateau in central Mali, I show how women's culinary activities have supported the creation and maintenance of long-lasting, socio-cultural dynamics. Their cooking and meals help foster fundamental values and dispositions, facilitate elemental family and community dynamics, and perhaps most importantly (re)produce gender identities and gender relations. I use this case study to draw attention to the cultural significance of cooking and women's alimentary agency more broadly.

Dans le Mali rural contemporain, lorsqu'il s'agit de cuisiner, il existe une stricte division du travail. Les femmes préparent toujours les repas. Chaque jour, elles transforment des ingrédients crus en plats cuisinés pour elles-mêmes et leurs familles. Par leurs activités alimentaires quotidiennes, elles produisent une nourriture de subsistance essentielle. Cependant, leur travail au foyer aide à créer plus que de la nourriture. Dans cet article, je souligne le rôle important que jouent les femmes de la région dans le domaine vital de la préparation des aliments et, par extension, dans la création de fils conducteurs du tissu de la vie sociale et culturelle. À l'aide des informations tirées d'une recherche ethnographique longitudinale approfondie sur le plateau du Mandé au centre du Mali, je montre comment les activités culinaires des femmes ont soutenu la création et le maintien de dynamiques socioculturelles durables. Leur cuisine et leurs repas contribuent à favoriser les valeurs et les dispositions fondamentales, facilitent la dynamique familiale et communautaire élémentaire et, peut-être plus important encore, (re)produisent des identités de genre et des relations de genre. J'utilise cette étude de cas pour attirer l'attention sur la signification culturelle de la cuisine et plus largement sur l'agency alimentaire des femmes.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Mali, Bamana, commensalité, cuisine, genre, Mandé, division du travail

Keywords: Bamana, commensality, cuisine, ethnography, labour, gender, hearth, Mande, meals

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