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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 mediatised 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 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>

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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