

**Identity Crises. A Diachronic Survey of Gender Identity through
Romanian Cookbooks and Culinary Shows.
From *housewife* to *chef* and *lady chef***

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Abstract

The progress of any society, be it modern or traditional, entails and depends on mentalities, derived from stereotypes and prejudices formed over time and transmitted from one generation to another. Of these, the most commonly used are those about the role and place of women and men in society. For Romanians, the nineteenth century was a century of "lights" because, beyond their liberation from foreign rule (Phanariot, then Ottoman), it was the time when an extensive process of "enlightenment" of the people began, including the gastronomic field.

Supported by the theoretical framework on gender provided by Kelly, Bayes et al. (2004) and Gordon (1993), our paper aims at illustrating the factors that contributed to the resistance of traditional perceptions on the gender-based division of domestic labour. The survey conducted in this study highlights the major changes that have taken place in Romanian society, from the 19th century to the present, in order to account for the evolution of the *housewife* to the *lady chef* or *chef*. The sociolinguistic perspective will be based on a corpus of texts, namely prefaces of some cookbooks as "useful books" for Romanian domestic economy, published in the 19th and 20th centuries, and on information extracted from online and contemporary media, to the purpose of highlighting the major changes that have taken place in Romanian society, from the *housewife* to the *lady chef* or *chef*.

Keywords: *chef; culinary; housewife; gastronomy; gender identity; relationships.*

1. Introduction

The printing of cookbooks in our country, starting with the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, resulted not only in reducing the differences between Romanian and Western societies, but also gave rise to a trend of mass education by printing books meant to contribute to solving household problems. Considered as “the humble literature of society”, cookbooks propose for “tasting” unusual cultural histories, combining a double functionality: the virtues of textbooks with the pleasures of sensitive literature (cf. Arjun Appadurai 1988, apud Marinescu 2014: 3). Beyond the recipes that it transmits and the eating habits of Romanians that it exposes, the Romanian culinary literature, written in most cases by women (Maria Maurer, Anna Căpitan Constantinescu, Sanda Marin, Elisa Costeanu, Silvia Jurcovan) is a direct source and an underexplored means of understanding and completing the Romanian social puzzle, starting from the past centuries with typically female roles and avatars of the target audience (*good housewife, good housekeeper, Romanian housewife, pillar of the communist family*), until today, when the gastronomic field is dominated by male cooks who proudly entitle themselves *chefs* and when very few women reach this kind of recognition of their skill in the culinary art.

2. *Predoslovie*, preface, word to the reader, introduction

The late usage of writing in Romanian language (compared to other cultures) had dire consequences in terms of the development of literature because the first texts were eminently religious, and the models created by their interpreters were perpetuated until the late nineteenth, early twentieth century and in other literary genres. In their works, Romanian bishops (Simeon Ștefan, Varlaam, Dosoftei) followed the tradition of the time and established a connection with the potential reader, through introductory texts known under different names, depending on model and erudition: introduction, *predoslovie* (Romanian obsolete term for *preface*), preface, word to the reader. This type of text constantly occurred in the world of ancient writings, regardless of their genre, being a meeting place, par excellence, between author and

reader, a revealing space for shaping the horizon of reading, carrying countless stereotypes, formulas taken with a relative autonomy from the text of the book. Here, the author assuming concrete identity tried to persuade his "beloved reader" to identify with his editorial project.

The Romanian cookbooks from the 19th century, starting with Maria Maurer's book (*Carte de bucate*, 1849) perpetuate this model of preface. The authors, mostly women, genuine "taste shapers", continuing the work of their predecessors, try to facilitate access to and reception of their work by the reading public through the prefaces, given that this "threshold" of the text, not only plays an important role in text reception, but also gives it some specific identity, providing the tools necessary to understand the circumstances that led to its creation, the sociocultural evolution of the time of writing and, last but not least, the prestige of a savoir-faire attested by that creation, as long as the legitimacy of the preface comes both from objective and subjective conditions, from the notoriety and authority of the writer.

2.1. The preface in Romanian cookbooks

The beginnings of Romanian culinary literature are due to men (C. Negruzzi, M. Kogălniceanu), but, once the first step was taken, women took the lead in "gastronomic dictatorship" in the "mioritic space", from different episodes that legitimized this position at the time through mentality. The first authors, pension directors, housekeeping teachers or women from the middle strata of the Romanian society (spouses of generals and colonels) trained in boarding houses and housekeeping schools in the West or self-taught, legitimized through these writings the educational, guidance aspects of their work, and their works were a great success. Simona Lazăr (2019: 7) establishes that, in the fifth decade of the 19th century, the Romanian culinary editorial production counted three important titles that totalled seven editions, without taking into account the sporadic articles that appeared in the "press" of the time (Kogălniceanu, Negruzzi). Angelica Marinescu (2014) identifies, between 1806 and 1893, twelve such editions, some with multiple

reprints (Ecaterina Comșa, Maria Dobrescu), which demonstrates the “hunger” of the general public for such information.

The culinary texts exist in a tradition and have precursors to which they refer through their functional and structural organisation. Thus, the cookbooks that appeared in the 19th century are tributary to the models of the previous centuries both through the presence of long and explanatory titles in which specific elements can be identified, often fused with the preface through common wording and through the ideas expressed: e.g. *Carte de bucate. Cuprinde 190 rețete de bucate, prăjituri, creme, spume, jaluține, înghețate, și cum se păstrează lucruri pentru iarnă. Toate alese și încercate de o prietenă a tuturor femeilor casnice* by Maria Maurer [Cookbook. It includes 190 food recipes, cakes, creams, foams, jellies, ice creams, and how to store things for the winter. All chosen and tried by a female friend of all housewives]. The authors expose here the motivation of the work, most often caused by the desire to guide, to share from their own experience with those who want to run their household, but do not know how: “Seeing the need that is felt, to give direction to a household, to people who would like to take care and do not have enough experience.”¹ The justification provided is, in most cases, dictated by the personal perspective on their contemporary socio-economic situation “when the means are more limited and the tastes more varied” (Ibidem).

Another idea that runs like a thread through the prefaces of cookbooks is the lack of information, of complete works on household and household issues: “the lack of books of this kind in Romanian, especially of the original books and, therefore, more suited to our needs”² or “We do not yet have a complete work in this sense that is felt in great need”³. In the same note appears the invocation of one's

¹ „Văzând necesitatea ce este simțită, de a da o direcție unui menagiu, persoanelor cari ar dori de a se ocupa și nu au destulă experiență” (Constantinescu 1899, *Prefața*).

² „lipsa cărților de acest fel în limba română, mai ales a cărților originale și, prin urmare, mai potrivite trebuințelor noastre (Comșa, 1902).

³ „Noi până acum nu avem o lucrare completă în sensul acesta de care se simte mare necesitate” (Constantinescu 1899, *Prefață*).

experience, the best means of persuading the reader: "I have often encountered certain events in my household, which I did not know how to deal with"⁴, hence the precarious situation of the culinary art in some households. Like the ancient authors who honestly disclosed the sources which inspired their works, the authors of the "useful books" indicate their sources: "I began to research various works from which I transcribed the passages that interested me"⁵. At other times, the position, the role of the family and of the woman in the society are also invoked by the author.

Approached as an art by the Moldavian boyar scholars, with the passage of Milcov River, our gastronomy becomes „plebeian" not only in terms of the social status of those who print such writings, but also in terms of target audience (Lazăr 2019: 10). The prefaces include exclusively texts addressed directly to the target audience: women, in their capacity as mothers, wives, "good housewives" to whom they address with nicknames, some closer to the models of their predecessors (*iubite cititorule, iubitele mele eleve* = dear reader, my beloved students – Maurer (1849), *Doamnele din societatea română* [*Ladies from the Romanian society*] – Constantinescu (1899), *Dragi cititoare* [*Dear female readers*] – Brebu (1958) or vocative structures with an almost revolutionary touch: *Romanian Women* (Comşa, 1902).

A peculiarity of this type of literature is given by the fact that the included recipes, supplemented with household advice, are no longer addressed to connoisseurs, but are a means of education, first of young women from bourgeois families and then, expanding their area of reference, of women at large; therefore, the target audience is eminently feminine: good housewives, ladies in Romanian society, "Romanian women", an audience that, very often, did not even practice cooking, because, according to fashion, the young ladies, future "matrons", pillars of the household, needed these housekeeping books "either to

⁴ „M-am lovit adeseori în gospodăria mea de anumite întâmplări, cărora nu am știut cum să le fac față” (Costeanu 1946, *Prefață*).

⁵ „Am început să cercetez diferite lucrări din care am transcris pasagiile care mă interesau” (Costeanu 1946, *Prefață*).

prepare meals themselves if needed, or to lead and exercise serious control" (Comșa 1902). Thus, an ample trend of mass education through gastronomic writings is initiated in the Romanian space, and the woman becomes the central pillar of this educational and educational exercise.

The preface corpus that we have submitted to analysis included cookbooks printed between 1849 and 1958: Maria Maurer (1849), *Carte de bucate. Cuprinde 190 rețete de bucate, prăjituri, creme, spume, jălatine, înghețate, și cum se păstrează lucruri pentru iarnă. Toate alese și încercate de o prietenă a tuturor femeilor casnice*, Crist Jnnin (1865), *Bucătăria română. Carte coprinzătoare de mai multe rețete de bucate și bufet* [Romanian Cuisine. Comprehensive book of several food and buffet recipes], Anna Căpitan Constantinescu (1899) *Higiene, administrația casnică coprindend orticultura și avicultura precum și bucătăria practică și modernă lucrate conform necesității simțite în menaj* [Hygiene, household administration covering horticulture and poultry farming as well as practical and modern cuisine worked according to the need felt in the household], Constantin Bacalbașa (1936) *Dictatura gastronomică. 1501 feluri de mâncări* [Gastronomic Dictatorship 1501 dishes], Elisa Costeanu (1946) *Cartea gospodinei* (The housewife's book), Mădălina Brebu (1958) *Sfaturi pentru gospodine* [Advice for housewives].

2.2. Masculine vs. feminine in Romanian cookbooks

The prefaces of the analysed cookbooks open several perspectives for receiving the message, by reference to the historical or intertextual context. It is extremely seductive to investigate the difference of mentality based on gender opposition, between female authors and male authors, not only in terms of structuring the material, but especially at the ideational level.

Despite their pioneering role, the gastronomic writings that have male authors (Miklós Mészáros Kis, Constantin Negruzzi, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Christ Jönnin, Constantin Bacalbașa), are not subordinated to the predominant conception of the time, according to which a daughter's education had to pursue first of all the prospects of the correct mastery and administration of a "household", following the

entry into a marriage and the social prestige that these habits of good “housewife” could bring to their whole family (cf. Net 2017: 49). The staff, usually female, responsible for the proper conduct of domestic life, through direct involvement or simple supervision, was, therefore, the real (direct or indirect) target of the introductory chapters of these works: „Această carte așa de trebuincioasă pentru căsnicie” (Maurer 2019: 25) [This book so necessary for marriage]”; „gândindu-vă că o carte mai mult în familia d-voastră, lucrată în acest scop, aduce un folos eminent tinerelor copile, cari mâine vor fi chemate a face menagiul familiei lor” (Constantinescu 1899) [thinking that one more book in your family, made for this purpose, brings an eminent benefit to young children, who tomorrow will be called to take care of their family]; „mumele de familie care doresc a iniția pe copilele lor în arta de a direge un menagiu” [Mothers who want to initiate their children in the art of running a household] (Jönnin); „Prima datorie a unei *bune gospodine* este știința și îndemânarea de a pregăti hrana trebuitoare, fie ca să o poată pregăti ea singură, la nevoie, fie ca să poată conduce și exercita un control serios” (Comșa 1902, *Prefață*) [The first duty of a good housewife is the science and skill of preparing the necessary food, so that she can prepare it herself, if necessary, either so that they can lead and exercise serious control]. This happens irrespective of the authors’ being different in terms of level of education, rank, position and social class (Mother Raluca, Ecaterina Colonel Steriady, Anna Chapter and Constantinescu, Maria General Dobrescu).

By contrast, male-authored cookbooks have a different orientation, their authors being concerned with the philosophy of food, the process of refining tastes and their role in the progress of society. The cookbook of Christ Jnnin, the one who put the phrase „bucătăria română” [Romanian cuisine] on the cover of a book (Lazăr 2018: 8) does not welcome us with a preface, but with a short Introduction, signed by the Editor, in which we find a review of some philosophies of life about the culinary art: eating to live or living to eat, the need and pleasure of eating, “eating is also enjoying” (Jönnin 2018: 17), the importance of the profession of chef in society “To be a good cook is to be a useful man”

(Idem, 18) and about how his book could help others to be useful to society, about the “taste of the social man” who motivates the chef to discover new recipes to surprise and please. From all these, we deduce that the volume is addressed primarily to those who are part of the “guild” or intend to join it. Only in the last lines of the Introduction, the publisher, alias the author, addresses an important segment of society, the main recipient of the book at that time, the woman, in various social roles: pension directors and “mothers” concerned with initiating young women in “the art of directing a household” (Jónnin 2018: 18).

Along the same line of innovation, we can mention the cookbook written by Constantin Bacalbașa, a well-known journalist at the time, entitled *Dictatura gastronomică. 1501 feluri de mâncări* [Gastronomic Dictatorship. 1501 dishes]. In this work, the place of the classic preface is taken by the chapter entitled *Două vorbe* [A couple of words], about which the author indirectly acknowledges that it represents a *preface*, but not like the previous ones. We find true pages of erudition and intertextuality, a praise brought to the culinary art and gastronomy because, for the author, the cookbook is “a physiological gospel” whose main teaching is “How to eat” (Bacalbașa 2018: 11). Bacalbașa no longer addresses the “beloved reader”, being aware of the benefits of the press that allowed the book to be popularised more easily, but uses rhetorical interrogations and the play of personal pronouns of the first and second person in the plural and a call for clemency (“Don't laugh by me”), as well as other rhetorical and discursive means (*excusatio propter infirmitatem*): “I am being asked to make a preface for a new cookbook?! ... I am the one asked!? I, a persistent dietitian, refrained from the most ... excellent culinary preparations !?”⁶

⁶ „Mie se cere mie să fac o prefață pentru o nouă carte de bucătărie?!...Mi se cere mie!? Mie un stăruitor al alimentării cu regim, un oprit de la cele mai...excelente pregătiri culinare!”

3. Gendered roles in the Romanian family

In the Romanian society from the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the division of labour clearly specified the roles according to natural gender. The man had the task of ensuring the material well-being of the family: "The man ensures the bare necessities of life, and their good use and the whole internal economy of the house is the competence and attribution of the woman", while the woman fulfills the role of administrator of family assets: the woman, like a hard-working bee, governs, processes and divides, as needed, the family goods" (Comşa 1902, *Prefață*).

3.1. The housewife as queen of her home⁷

The role of the housewife in Romanian domestic universe has been a well-established one. This is the reason why the target audience of cookbooks consisted of "good housewives", "Ladies in Romanian society", "mothers", pension directors and teachers. With the passage of time and changing social order, they will become part of an ideology, spread by through cookbooks: "Housewife, the treasure of the house", because "There can be no happy marriage if the woman is not a housewife" (Costeanu 1946).

While the first prints of this type promoted the typology of the "good housekeeper" (Colonel Steriady Ecaterina, *Buna menajeră. Carte de bucate* 1871, Ecaterina Doctor S. Comşa, *Buna menajeră sau Carte de bucate*, 1902), later on, the housekeeper's place is usurped even linguistically by the noun *gospodină* (housewife), which is found in many of the titles: *Cartea gospodinei* [The Housewife's Book] (1946), *Sfaturi pentru gospodine* [Tips for Housewives] (1958), *Bucătăria gospodinei de la sate. Sfaturi și rețete de mâncări* [The Housewife's Kitchen in the Villages. Food Tips and Recipes] (1928), *Îndrumări practice pentru gospodine* [Practical Guidelines for Housewives] (1978). The subsequent semantic evolution of the neological term closely reflects the way in which the Romanian social realities of the last two centuries have changed. The

⁷ Romanians have a saying with a rhyming pattern that highlights the dignified status of a housewife in her household: *Femeia gospodină, în casă e regină!*

initial etymological content of the noun *menajeră* [housekeeper] described an almost complete synonymous relationship with *gospodină* [housewife], but, over the course of several decades, it developed a secondary, restrictive meaning, designating “the woman employed to take care of someone’s household (especially to an unmarried man)”, being the meaning with which we find it in a series of dictionaries elaborated in the first half of the 20th century and with which it still appears today in Romanian (cf. Neț 2007: 53).

Be they housekeepers or housewives, young women are instilled with the idea that their value in society is closely dependent on how they must perform successfully in their household: “Young housewives, the most important and natural pride of a woman is the way she manages housekeeping.”⁸

Practical advice books for the good housewife are not limited to the domestic or culinary space, but, sometimes, advance a whole philosophy on a recurring theme, that of the family, and the importance of keeping the man in a marriage thanks to the excellent talent of being a housewife, as we find in Elisa Costeanu’s *Cartea gospodinei* [Housewife’s Book]:

No matter how much a man loves a woman, after a certain time, he begins to temper his feelings and the critical sense that opens his eyes awakens and begins to look for and find his wife’s faults. And ... since I don’t think there is a flawless woman, it’s good to prepare in advance to be able to conquer the man we’ve tied our lives to for the second time, showing him other qualities that nature has endowed us with. [...] How can we keep our man to stay tied to the house when love begins to thin its threads? [...] The thing is very simple if we make him love the house where we will plant our domestic soul. A good housewife is an invaluable treasure that can make a man happy even when love

⁸ „Tinere gospodine, mândria cea mai de seamă și mai firească a unei femei este chipul cum își ține menajul.” (Steriady 1871, *Către bunele menajere*).

has been consumed on the altar of time. [...] Be sure that a man does not easily leave a housewife⁹.

Almost 80 years after the printing of this book, the same message is transmitted today to the public, through the modern variants of the so-called mass education, media and advertising. One of the adverts for a sausage brand warns us that, when love disappears, all we have left is the taste of the food prepared by the spouse.

The culinary discourse of cookbooks changes and acquires, in the second half of the twentieth century, an official note, embracing self-conscious, rational and scientific modernisation, because the social role of the cookbook was to educate the people. Therefore, in order to keep the message focused, Romanian cookbooks will embrace an authoritarian discourse¹⁰, which establishes the image of the Romanian woman, the good housewife, who will be promoted, in a few decades, by the communist party, in the role of "housekeeper of the revolution", the woman who worked not only with the spoon, but also with the tractor and became the much-trumpeted symbol of gender equality. Thus, the ideal woman had to be a competent housewife who, benefiting from the modern education of the state, was able to run her household and ensure that her family was adequately fed: "how to prepare a tasty meal, rich in calories and beautifully presented" (Brebu: 1958), in order to build the new society because the cookbooks that

⁹ „Un bărbat oricât ar iubi o femeie, după trecerea unui anumit timp începe să-și domolească sentimentele și în el se deșteaptă simțul critic care îi deschide ochii și începe să caute și să găsească defectele soției. Și...cum femeie fără defecte nu cred să existe, este bine să ne pregătim din vreme să putem cuceri a doua oară pe bărbatul de care ne-am legat viața, arătându-i celelalte calități cu care ne-a înzestrat natura. [...] Cum ne putem păstra bărbatul ca să rămână legat de casă când dragostea începe să-și rărească firele? [...] Lucrul e foarte simplu dacă îl vom face să iubească casa în care vom sădi sufletul nostru gospodăresc. O bună gospodină este o comoară neprețuită care poate ferici pe un bărbat chiar și atunci când dragostea s-a consumat pe altarul vremii. [...] Fiți sigure că un bărbat nu pleacă ușor de lângă o femeie gospodină” (Costeanu 1946: 7-8).

¹⁰<https://www.iscoada.com/home/cercetari/apetitul-socialist-ce-citim-in-cartile-romanesti-de-bucate-beyond-recipes>, accessed on 07.08.2021.

addressed “women from towns and villages” (Ibidem) had the role to teach them how to do it.

3.2. Male presence is in fashion in the kitchen

The international movement of capital, goods and labour has influenced the relations between the sexes and gender regimes, i.e. the practices and institutionalised forms of domination according to gendered systems that are constituted as principles of social order.

According to the theory of Robert Connell (1987: apud. Kelly, Bayes et al. 2004: 14), gender should be seen as an active process that creates divisions of work, power and feelings between women and men, grafted on the idea that sex is not a natural assignment of roles and responsibilities for men and women. For Linda Gordon (1993, apud. Kelly, Bayes et al. 2004: 61) gender represents a series of socially constructed systems of meaning, hence that gender actually refers to hierarchically regulated social relations, ordered according to a line of social division that places women on one side and men on the other. The concept of gender therefore emphasizes a social construct of masculinity and femininity and not necessarily a biological definition of gender. Nowadays, globalisation has changed the division of labour by sex, in various contexts and fields, and gastronomy is one of them, being marked by the change of established gender roles. Therefore, social norms, rules, regulations, and principles are not gender-neutral entities, but include specific rules for the roles that men and women must play (Kelly, Bayes et al. 2004: 61).

As demonstrated by referring to the prefaces of several Romanian cookbooks, in the Romanian society of the 19th and 20th centuries, in the gastronomic field, the roles were clearly established: the woman had to take care of the family meals and the household, and the man to procure the financial means necessary for living (bring home the bacon”, as the English say), but the progress of society and globalisation have created gender disruptions in various fields. The existing gender divides in Romanian society changed as paid labour became feminised, and women left the position of housewife or

agricultural worker to enter the paid economy and, hence, there appeared gender intrusions in the nomenclature of occupations. Today, the gastronomic field, not the kitchen, is no longer the favourite place of women, being “usurped” by men. The phenomenon manifests itself globally. In Western society, there is a lot of discussion about the idea of equal opportunities and remuneration for women, but to all this is added the fact that kitchens have gained momentum through the appearance of public dining spaces on various occasions.

Related to this context, if we paraphrased Glligor Gruită (2007: 70) and asked a certain Maria Popescu to choose, today, between two parallel formulations: *Maria Popescu este cea mai bună bucătăreasă din generația ei și Maria Popescu este cel mai bun chef din generația ei* [Maria Popescu is the best *female cook* of her generation and Maria Popescu is the best *chef* of her generation], she would certainly choose, without any hesitation, the second formulation. The explanation does not necessarily lie in the desire to align with the current linguistic fashion, as long as the choice of masculine over feminine in indicating the profession or the title is something common in spoken Romanian, too. The choice could be based on a more complex analysis of the phenomenon which has an important semantic justification. In Romanian, the masculine has a generic, incorporating character in opposition to the limiting and exclusive semantics of the feminine. The *chef* variant would bring the holder absolute recognition among specialists in the field, while the term *bucătăreasă* [female cook] would restrict her to the circle of women who practice this profession. The last word happens to be a derivative in the field of the Romanian language with the feminine suffix *-eas(ă)* which has ironic connotations: *ministreasă*, *generăleasă*, *coloneleasă*, *căpităneasă* [minister's wife, general's wife, colonel's wife, captain's wife, i.e. the gentleman's wife with the mentioned degrees]. The proof that the masculine is habitual as a guarantee of quality and of good reputation is also indicated by the way in which some female authors signed the books useful for domestic economy in the 19th century: Maria General Dobrescu, Anna Căpitan Constantinescu, Ecaterina Colonel Steriad (y).

Considered something obsolete, specifically feminine, creating nostalgia, the memory of one's mother or grandmother, cooking "suffered" an unprecedented revival. The modern world seems to have become obsessed with cooking, with home-made food. The economic crisis, the increased interest in healthy, traditional, "organic" food, the epidemiological context (isolation at home, self-isolation, fear of getting sick) have led to returning to the kitchen and giving up meals in the city. The phenomenon is extremely well promoted by the very large number of shows with culinary topics, blogs that promote cooking at home and that have usurped gastronomic literature, because now, what we will cook today, can be a click away.

The term "chef" was brought to the public's attention, from the French name for *chef* – *chef de cuisine*, taken over by the English and brought to a level where every cook is considered a *chef*. Thus, *chef*, pronounced in Romanian [șef], tends to replace the Romanian *bucătar*. It is possible that, in English, the term *chef* was needed with the restricted meaning of "(any) cook" - for a greater variety and expressiveness, since the classic *cook* (rarely also *cooker* - with the same root as Rom. *a coace* = to bake from lat. *coquere*) was paralleled only by *culinarian* (formed from *culinary* after 1650 and very rarely used). The Romanian *bucătar*, on the other hand, was a bit "more fortunate". Over time, it enjoyed a rich series of synonyms: *cuhar*, *socaci*, with the feminine *socăciță*, a kind of village cook who prepared food for important events in community life (baptism, wedding, funeral). There were also alternative terms for the notion of „bucătar-șef”: *stolnic* (from Slavik) or *becer* (from *beci* of unknown etymology), meaning princely/boyar cook; the head cook of the court".

This *chef* (pl. *chefi*), the "supreme cook", as can be deduced from its intense media coverage, is not yet registered by the specialized dictionaries in Romanian. But as "usage often beats the norm" and due to the well-recognized Romanian hospitality and linguistic infatuation, inherent in most socio-professional categories (manager, baby-sitter, hair stylist), we could live to see "chef" accepted in language, just to

tickle the pride of some cooks, who no longer feel represented by the classic *bucătar*.

Beyond the linguistic aspect, of little importance for the aspirants to the title, men and women put to the test all their culinary skills and imagination to become *chefs*. Even if some of them already practice the occupation of cook, obtaining the title of *chef* would bring them absolute recognition in the tagma of cooks and would propel them into the social hierarchy, not only socio-professionally; this is definitely to the detriment of the term *bucătar*, which, apart from the strict field of public food, has always enjoyed positive connotations by referring to "a person who prepares tasty food." Moreover, it carries the traces of a whole tradition of taste and flavour in the derived term for the practice and art of cooking itself: *bucătărie ca la mama acasă*, *bucătărie românească*, *bucătărie tradițională* [home-like/mother-like cuisine, Romanian cuisine, traditional cuisine], syntagms that represent Romanian identity markers which could hardly be associated with the neological *chef*.

Nevertheless, the masculine in cuisine is clearly on fashion. Most and best reputed specialists in culinary art are men, both internationally (Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver, etc.) and nationally (Cătălin Scărlătescu, Sorin Bontea, Florin Dumitrescu, etc.), even if some of them do not call themselves *chefs*. Women are also trying to make a place of their own; hence, slowly but surely, more and more women aspire to the title of *chef*, dressed femininely as *lady-chef*.

Our days, and especially our evenings, are busy watching cooking competitions such as *Master Chef*, *Hell's Kitchen* or *Chefi la cuțite* [literally meaning "chefs at daggers drawn"], all extremely popular and which, like the useful books from the 19th century, have the role of educating public taste, as a form of anti-fast food/junk food propaganda. Despite the fact that most of these competitions in Romania were won by men, the prize of the latest edition of *Chefi la cuțite* cooking show was won by a housewife, appreciated, among other things, for the mere fact that "her food tastes good". The event is not unique in the global gastronomic landscape, because women chefs had moments when they dominated the James Beard Awards, ie awards for

excellence in everything related to cuisine (Oscars for food)¹¹. Although there is talk of "the rise of women chefs", as far as the Michelin stars are concerned, there is still work to be done: only 6 women with 3 stars compared to 100 male chefs with as many.

The Romanian space, imbued with the welcoming smell of home-made food, gave the first woman Lady-Chef from Southeast Europe, a title awarded by the World Association of Chefs and Confectioners. Romanian Cornelia Ghișoi, the holder of the title, could work in any restaurant in the world, from London to Paris and from New York to Tokyo, but we have found her, for over 30 years, among the trays and pans in the kitchen of a five-star hotel from Brasov. Because, our Lady Chef thinks that "there is no place like home"¹².

In spite of some examples that come to subvert male supremacy in the field, the most important question remains: why are most of the world's master chefs men? Statistics show that in the top 50 best restaurants in the world, not even one is run by a woman, even if two representatives of the field appear in this ranking: the legendary Elena Arzak, who, together with her father, Juan Mari Arzak, have brought the magic of Michelin stars to the *Arzak* restaurant in San Sebastian, and Helena Rizo, who, together with Daniel Redondo, turned local Brazilian ingredients into global delicacies at the *Mani* restaurant in Sao Paulo¹³. The question was answered by both women chefs and especially men chefs, and both sexes agreed on some issues. First of all, the supremacy of men in the kitchen is inextricably linked to gender relations established in human society over time: women have always been responsible for feeding the family, being forced to do so every day, while the man has cooked for pleasure, occasionally and this allowed him to bring the kitchen to the rank of art. Then, the physiological, biological data were to the man's advantage. Working in the kitchen does not only consist in the pleasure of combining tastes, but often

¹¹ <https://adelicii.ro/femei-chef-ale-momentului/>, accessed on 30.08.2021.

¹² <https://www.digi24.ro/magazin/timp-liber/divertisment/o-romanca-prima-lady-chef-din-sud-estul-europei-368160>, accessed on 29.08.2021.

¹³ <https://adelicii.ro/femei-chef-ale-momentului/>, accessed on 30.08.2021.

involves physical strength and prolonged physical exertion. To the woman, the Divinity gave her motherhood, the care of the children who cannot make a good home with the lack of free days, with the weekends dedicated to the events and with the long hours spent daily in the kitchen. All these physiological and social shortcomings were compensated. From an anatomical point of view, even men admit, women are endowed with “the best taste buds” (Alex Petriceanu).¹⁴

Conclusions

Food is a communication system, a body of images, situations and behaviours that become a protocol of uses, a code that defines an individual's place in society and keeps the social order active. The Romanian model of the “housewife”, whose place is in the kitchen, has been transmitted, over time, and despite the progress made and the replacement of cookbooks by shows and culinary blogs, with the same purpose, of educating the masses by other means. Knowing how to cook is no longer a marker of social status or a *sine-qua-non* condition of contracting a marriage and, implicitly, prestige, remaining, for many representatives of the fair sex at hobby level. Women are recognized for their culinary skills and talent through phrases that have remained in the collective popular mind, at the level of cellular memory. When we want something good to eat, it comes to mind and we salivate at the memory of home-made/mother-made meals (Ro. *mâncare ca la mama acasă*). The biological and social data reserved for the woman the title of *master chef* only in the family type kitchen or, a little bigger, of a canteen or culinary blog. Their access to the dignity of *chef*, with the female version *Lady Chef* is still obstructed by men who take the kitchen and the passion for cooking to the level of art. Therefore, most titles of *chef* and *Master Chef* (even if renowned chefs with a lot of experience in the field do not assume this title, preferring that of *maestru bucătar* = *master cook*) are still men's, despite the fact that there are plenty of women who have

¹⁴ <https://da.zf.ro/dupa-afaceri/gastronomie/cea-mai-importanta-intrebare-din-gastronomie-de-ce-sunt-barbatii-cei-mai-buni-chef-i-raspund-patru-bucatari-celeabri-15176381>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

made a career in the field (*Lady chefs*). However, the woman is and will remain the real housewife, she is the creator of that ancestral "umami" due to which, even the most famous chefs in the world recognize that the best food is *ca la mama acasă* [like at mom's place].

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