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Monocultural and Multicultural Gastronationalism: National Narratives in European Food Shows

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Abstract:

This article argues that we are witnessing a wave of gastronationalism in European food television. In televised rediscoveries of national cuisines, narratives of the national identity are unfolded, and in these narratives various boundaries are defined and various subjects are included, excluded, and ranked in the national narrative. Based on analysis of Le Chef en France (2011-2012) with the leading celebrity chef in France Cyril Lignac and Jamie’s Great Britain (2012) with Jamie Oliver, the article proposes to distinguish between a monocultural gastronationalism and a multicultural gastronationalism. Finally, the article also suggests that the wave of TV-shows with a gastronationalist discourse could be seen as a form of normalization of gastronationalism.

Key words:

Food, taste, nationalism, food media, celebrity chefs, France, Cyril Lignac, Jamie Oliver.
“O France! My beautiful homeland. You alone unite in your breasts, the delight of gastronomy.”

(Antonin Carême quoted in Ferguson 2004, 71)

In June 2010 an invitation for a public aperitif circulated in the Parisian neighborhood La Goutte d’Or in the 18th arrondissement. The event was scheduled to take place the 18th of that month. The event was one of the so-called “apéro pinard-saucisson” [aperitif: wine and sausage], which were arranged across France in that period by persons identifying with the extreme right. In theory, the event was open to all, but as only pork sausages and wine were served, the menu clearly signaled who was intended a seat at the table and who was not. By serving exclusively alcohol and pork, minorities such as Jews and Muslims were excluded from the public event, and the aperitif worked to designate who should and should not be able to partake in the national community in the public sphere.

The arrangement appeared particularly provocative as it was held in a quarter with many inhabitants with Muslim background and even on a Friday, the Muslim day of prayer. Also, the date, June 18th, has great symbolic value. June 18, 1940 was the day General Charles de Gaulle, in exile in London, held his first radio speech, known as The Appeal of June 18th, in which De Gaulle encouraged the French people to resist the German occupation. Seventy years later, the organizers of the aperitif encouraged the (white) French people to resist what they considered a “Muslim occupation” of France, and at this occurrence, the arms to resist the “invaders” were pork sausages and French red wine.¹
This anti-multicultural aperitif could be considered a way of using food to promote nationalism. Over the last years, several studies have explored how food has been a vehicle for nationalism through the concept gastronationalism. The term was coined by American sociologist Michaela DeSoucey and covers a range of material and symbolical practices related to food and products that promote nationalism on micro and macro-level of societies (DeSoucey 2010). Gastronationalism can both work to demarcate national boundaries to outside nations and to define belongingness internally. It can work as an economical instrument in the international political scene and in everyday food practices and communication normalizing a myth of national cohesion (Barthes 2002, 730-731).

With the globalization of food cultures (Inglis and Gimlin 2009) and the increased migration in Europe, renewed attention is given to the relationship between food and nationalism. It is particularly evident in the rising movement across Europe of political parties critical towards immigration and Islam who often use food to institutionalize and protect their ideas of national identity (Vandsø 2016). In both France and Denmark, we find local policies trying to shield national identity through food by obliging public education institutions to include pork in their menus and excepting no alternatives for Muslim or other non-pork eating minority children. But food projects with no explicit political connections could also be said to contain elements of gastronationalist discourse and mindset such as the New Nordic Cuisine (Andreassen
In this movement’s search for a pure Nordic cuisine by returning to the Nordic culinary traditions and using exclusively Nordic ingredients, the New Nordic Cuisine also expresses a longing for a mono-cultural and mono-racial past and a desire to protect Scandinavian and its white citizens from the dangers of globalization (Andreassen 2015).

In this article, I argue that we also have witnessed a wave of gastronationalist narratives in European food television, notably in the subgenre called the travelogue food show (Strange 1998). This genre was popularized with the legendary television chef Keith Floyd (Rousseau 2012). His shows used to involve the discovery of “exotic” cuisine (Heldke 2003, Leer and Kjær 2015). However, lately we find examples in Denmark, France, and Great Britain of leading chefs doing travelogue food shows on their own country in search for a supposed lost national cuisine. In these televised rediscoveries of national cuisines, narratives of the national identity are unfolded, and in these narratives various boundaries are defined and various subjects are included, excluded, and ranked according to their place in the national narrative.

The empirical examples I will use to present my argument is Le Chef en France (2011-2012) with the leading celebrity chef in France Cyril Lignac and Jamie’s Great Britain (2012) with Jamie Oliver in search of the British culinary heritage. My readings are driven by a poststructuralist perspective and focus on how practices, people, and places related to food are found worthy of inclusion or exclusion in the national narrative and, if
included, which position they are given. This perspective is also inspired by recent discussion rearticulating sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s idea on taste and status (Bourdieu 1979) in contemporary societies’ food culture (Johnston and Baumann 2010, Naccarato and Lebesco 2012, Leer and Povlsen 2016, Leer 2016). In my presentation, the main focus will be on *Le Chef en France*.* Jamie’s Great Britain* will be used to nuance the reading and accentuate the diversity of gastronationalist narratives in food television. Based on these readings, I argue that despite the fact that the shows both express gastronationalist discourses, which place white (male) citizens in a particular bond to the national territory, they also differ as they express distinct views on multiculturalism. The article uses these differences to distinguish between a monocultural gastronationalism and a multicultural gastronationalism which could be understood as two examples of different poles within gastronationalist discourse.

Finally, the article also suggests that the wave of TV-shows with a gastronationalist discourse could be seen as a form of normalization of gastronationalism. By normalization, I understand a process in these ideas are no longer just found in extreme political rhetoric (as in the Goutte d’or example), romanticized and softer articulations of gastronationalism have become acceptable in mainstream media.

The contribution of the article is thus two-folded. On an empirical level, the article wishes to demonstrate how gastronationalism is articulated and normalized in
European TV-shows with high-profiled celebrity chefs. On a theoretical level, the article wants to propose a distinction between monocultural and multicultural gastronationalism.

The article starts with a presentation of the concept of gastronationalism and how it will be used in the article. Hereafter follows an introduction to the travelogue food show with some considerations on how the genre has worked to establish hierarchies between different ethnicities. Then I unfold the article’s methodological approach. After this, I present my analysis of the two shows, and the article ends on some reflections on 1) the distinction between monocultural gastronationalism and a multicultural gastronationalism and how that can be used for further studies of gastronationalism and 2) the normalization of gastronationalist discourse that could be read into these food shows.

Gastronationalism

Many studies have touch upon the bond between nationalism and food: “by socializing appetite and taste, cuisine turns the individual relationship with food into a collective bond.” (Ferguson 2004, 18). Such culinary bonds work to define “us” and “them”, and they are often closely associated with territory and nations as Ferguson also points out. Several other studies have shown that food is used to demarcate the boundaries of the nation state and to define who “belongs” to the national community. This appears to be
a global and timeless phenomenon. Müller (2015) highlights the importance of beef meat and cattle production to nationalism and agro-politics in contemporary South Korea. Mincyte (2011) demonstrates how the Lithuanian potato dumpling, Zeppelin, has been used to negotiate national identity and globalization in different periods of the country’s history. Hirsch and Tene (2013) critically examine how the originally Arab dish hummus has been assimilated into Israeli national identity. This latter example is a case where a global dish, hummus, has been nationalized which further complicates the relationship between and negotiations of local, national and global which often seems to be at play simultaneously in these narratives (Grosglík 2011).

Discussion of nationalism and food is not a new theme (Appadurai 1981, 1988, Barthes 2002, Mennel 1985), but it is relatively new to use the term “gastronationalism” (DeSoucey 2010) to frame the relationship between nationalism and food. Gastronationalism is defined as “a form of claims-making and a project of collective identity, [gastronationalism] is responsive to and reflective of the political ramifications of connecting nationalist projects with food cultures at local levels. It presumes that attacks (symbolic or otherwise) against a nation’s food practices are assaults on heritage and culture, not just the food itself” (DeSoucey 2010, 433). DeSoucey uses the French specialty foie gras [The liver of force fed goose and ducks] in the conceptualization of the term and particularly how France has worked hard within the market of the European Union to protect the production of this controversial food item. Beyond these macro-level
negotiations of market politics, DeSoucey also highlights how at a micro-level among the individuals engaged in production, vending, and consumption of foie gras, gastronationalism is used as a “protectionist mechanism”. An example of this is during DeSoucey’s interview with a French chef who initially only reluctantly and dubiously answers the American’s questions. Only after seeing her eat foie gras and other French specialties is he opening up to her. This meal is described as “boundary work” where national politics are negotiated through cultural scripts and embodied consumption (DeSoucey 2016, 68).

This example also invite us to think about the relationship between food and nationalism as a form of “banal nationalism” (Billing 1995) which is described as acts of the habits of social life which work to uphold notions of nationhood and national identity in everyday practices. Contrary to more explicit forms of nationalism the “banal nationalism” is almost invisible as it is maintained through mundane everyday practices; and in these practices the nation is naturalized, reproduced and legitimized on a daily basis (p.6). One could see the penetration of global food cultures in national cuisine as a way of destabilizing the banal nationalism of food, and the gastronationalist initiatives as a way of reimposing and relegitimizing the banal nationalism in food habits. Also, as both Billing and DeSoucey argue, the everyday practices of nationalism at a micro-level should be understood in connection to the macro-level of the legitimacy and the power of nations.
DeSoucey’s term places the national state as a central actor to gastronationalism and ties the acts of gastronationalism closely to the market: “action in the market and patriotism become one and the same” (DeSoucey quoted in Müller 2015, 50). Müller (2015) argues that it might be necessary to understand the concept beyond economic protectionism (Ibid., 50). One could for instance argue that the right wing aperitif I described in the beginning of the article did not have much to do with economic protectionism, but food was used to push a nationalist anti-Muslim agenda. Müller also underlines that DeSoucey might overdo the role of the state in relation to gastronationalism. Many other studies of gastronationalist activities are characterized by the “variety in locating the center of power behind the rise of gastronationalism” (p. 51) such as industry, consumers, food activists, etc.

While acknowledging the innovative work of DeSoucey, I will use the concept of gastronationalism in a more flexible and open version than the one used by DeSoucey, being more flexible concerning the understanding of the channels through which gastronationalism can be circulated and more open to the motives and expressions of it. I argue that we see gastronationalism in food television, and this article’s perspective is inspired by Wright and Annes 2013, which also draws on DeSoucey’s concept of gastronationalism, but uses it to analyze the media coverage of halal fast food in France. Their argument is that the media can also be a powerful medium of gastronationalism. For instance when presenting halal food and those who eat it as unFrench, the media
defines “who gets to claim French citizenship” (p. 389). Here gastronationalism is used at a sub-national level rather than at a supra-national level. In my analysis of the travelogue cooking shows, I will continue this perspective and analyze how in this genre food practices define citizenship and how these definitions establish hierarchies between different kinds of citizens.

The Travelogue Cooking Show

Keith Floyd is commonly seen as one of the major figures in the development of what has been defined as the travelogue cooking show (Strange 1998) as he took the cameras out of the studio and cooked on location (Rousseau 2012, xvi). In his shows, Floyd explores exotic regions of the world and their culinary traditions from Hong Kong to Greenland. Wearing his iconic bow tie, Floyd’s cooking sketches are always set at spectacular locations and he narrates – wine or beer in hand – colorful anecdotes and jokes on the local food culture. Floyd’s persona clearly resonates the colonial figure of the “male adventurer” (Strange 1998, 305), who explores the corners of the British Empire and beyond.

Floyd is not just incarnating civilization, he is also civilizing the “foreign” food culture he is exploring by refining it through his French cooking techniques which he uses across the globe. Hereby, he also establishes a clear hierarchy between Western (French-inspired) food and the food of “others”: “For Floyd, the food of the other remains
exotic, its exoticism often standing as evidence not of the fascination of other cultures, but of their inferiority” (Heldke 2003, 159). A similar othering is found in more recent takes on the genre such as the British chef Gordon Ramsay’s travel to India in the 2010 show *Gordon’s Great Escape*. Although, Gordon Ramsay assures the viewer of his fascination with the Indian cuisine, he upholds a clear hierarchy between the Indian food and the European gourmet food culture he represents (Leer and Kjær 2015).

The shows I will examine in this article are also travelogue food shows in which a chef explores a local cuisine with various cooking sketches on location and encounters with local peoples, but they differ in that the celebrity chef host and the local people share nationality. The shows seem to build on the assumption that there is something exotic and unfamiliar in “our” proximity, which needs to be explored. The exotic is in the countryside where traditional ways of eating and living still persist. These food and life habits have been lost in modern high-paced life, and this appears to be a loss of national identity. So, as is often the case, exoticism and authenticity occur together (Johnston and Baumann 2010, 98). Hereby, the shows establish a classic distinction between the modern city and the traditional countryside (Williams 1973), and the perspective of the shows is clearly that of the city represented by the dynamic, young chefs who host the shows and who have left their ordinary, busy life in the metropoles to immerse themselves in the traditional life. The countryside represents a break and even an escape from the stressful and complex modern life (Ibid. 85). The viewer is thus also
constructed as a “modern” subject out of touch with the traditional way of living in the countryside, and the show helps the viewer to reestablish the bond to this tradition.

The travelogue genre has previously had examples of shows with a focus on the traditional, national cuisine for instance in the 1980’s in France where a politic of decentralization was established along with a renewed interest in rediscovering the national heritage, and the cuisine was generally included in this national heritage. One of the results was a series of cooking shows on the regional cuisine on the new channel France 3 (Cohen 2015, 171). I argue that, despite the fact that there have been nation-centered cooking shows before, it is new to see a transnational wave of cooking shows across Europe centered on the rediscovery of national cuisines. While the travelogue cooking shows with and after Floyd primarily focused on exotic nations and cultures, the genre seems to have become more interested in the host’s own nationality.iii

The shows in the new wave of nation-centered food shows have one thing in common: the host is male. In this way, the shows follow the traditional gendering of the cooking show genre where female hosts are operating primarily within the domestic sphere while men, more often adventurous, satisfy their “manly appetite” in escapades outside the home (Swenson 2009, 49).iv
Reading TV-cooking shows through a gastronationalist gaze

Methodologically, the article focuses on close readings of a relatively limited corpus of texts, *Le Chef en France* (2011-2012) with Cyril Lignac and *Jamie’s Great Britain* (2012) with Jamie Oliver. These two shows are selected because they are similar in terms of time of production and in terms of the scope of the show: to rediscover national culinary heritage. Also, the shows are hosted by the leading celebrity chef of the two countries and the shows are shown primetime on popular, national channels. As mentioned, *Le Chef en France* will be the main focus in the analysis and *Jamie’s Great Britain* is included because it developed a different gastronationalist narrative. As such it offers an opportunity to further discuss the French example and nuances differences and similarities in gastronationalist discourses in food television. In the analytical process, this comparative perspective proved to be a very fruitful method as it also helped to develop new concepts to the theoretical discussions on gastronationalism, namely the concepts of monocultural and multicultural gastronationalism. These should be understood as two positions of a variety of positions in gastronationalist discourses, and they should also be understood as repertoires that can be negotiated in different ways in different contexts.

The analyses were informed and guided by the theoretical framework on gastronationalism. More specifically, the focus points of the readings were 1) TASTE how are specific tastes experiences deemed good/bad/ authentic/inauthentic and how do
taste relate to and shape ideas of national identity 2) PEOPLE – how are the relationship between the host and the people they encounter? Who are considered inspiring, national, authentic and who are considered inauthentic, strange and outsiders? Who are in between? 3) PLACES – around which spaces is the national narratives unfolded and how are these national narratives spatialized? 4) NARRATION – which visual, audio, verbal techniques are utilized to underline the logic of the show? 5) ABSENCES – what/who (tastes, people, places…) is absent from the narratives?

Following these questions, the analyses were executed through repeated viewings of the two series and selected parts of the text with high relevance for the analytical questions were analyzed in depth. In the writing process, I have tried to link my findings to other gastronationalist discourses, particularly Chevrier 2011, and the scientific literature on gastronationalism, particularly Wright and Annes 2013, with the ambition to demonstrate how the TV-shows analyzed should be understood within a larger cultural context.

The Chef’s Tour de (white) France

Since his debut as a cooking show host in 2004, Cyril Lignac (born 1977) has been one of France’s leading celebrity chefs. He has hosted a series of shows on M6, the number three ranked television channel in France according to viewing, and he has been a jury member
in the French versions of Masterchef and the Great British Bake-off. Also, he has authored almost 40 cookbooks during his career. Lignac has successfully used his media branding to build a small empire in Paris of restaurants, cooking schools, bakeries, etc. Contrary to other male celebrity chefs like Gordon Ramsay playing on a tough traditional masculinity (Nilsson 2012), Lignac has a very friendly approach to the viewer and appears as likable, dynamic modern man with a charming smile, a slim body, and always perfectly styled hair.

The Metropolis and the Margins: Distance and Connection

In the show Le Chef en France, Cyril Lignac sets out to rediscover the practices of French culinary culture no longer practiced in the metropoles. The series consists of two seasons with five episodes in each season. In each episode, Lignac visits a new region in search of authentic local recipes and food producers adhering to traditional principles of food production and preparation. In each episode we are offered a portrait of a specific region, and Lignac highlight its particularities. Hereby the series provides us both with a narrative of a series of unique spaces in France, as well as a narrative of a France uniting these heterogeneous territories by a bigger, shared idea of national identity and belongingness. The portrait of the authentic France focuses primarily on the rural France, the urban France is in the background and the metropolis, Paris, is completely absent. The local people Cyril Lignac encounters are presented as subjects upholding traditional
ways of eating and living antithetical to Paris and the high-paced life of modernity, as such these ways of being in the world mark a distance to modern life. Despite the absence of the metropoles, the traditional rural Frenchmen are presented through the lens of modernity as the viewer is invited to identify with Cyril Lignac, who represents the modern man, and to share his fascination of the traditional ways of living and eating and of the subjects who perform these acts. So although Paris and urban life is visually absent, it defines the norm in relation to which the subjects of the periphery are constructed. In this sense, the series reproduces a traditional, centralistic discourse vital to the national myth of France, namely that the metropolis is the uniting force for France (Agulhon 1992). It is the metropolis’ ability to unite and civilize the heterogeneous corpus of regions and territories that has made France a great nation. From the French revolution, the regional diversity of France “incarnated a new way of framing identity and expressing nationalism” (Parker 2015, 149). In this myth the regions produced excellent products, but the art of cooking was exercised in Paris. The capital and rural France had different tasks and hierarchical positions in this mythology (Ibid., 152).

In the first season, Cyril is visiting Bretagne, Corse, Auvergne, Marocco, and Languedoc-Roussillon. Here it might appear a little curious that the North African country and former colony Morocco takes place among the other French regions as if it still was a part of the French republic. In the second season, Lignac explores five other regions: Provence Alpes, Côte d’Azur, Île de la Réunion, Pays de la Loire, and Midi-
Pyrénées. Here, Lignac is also leaving the hexagon as he journeys to the department Île de la Réunion, an island close to Madagascar, which contrary to Morocco still is a part of the French Republic. Although all of these territories are connected by their bond to the republic, the series operates with various levels of distancing and othering in relation to the different regions which depend on the region’s geographic nearness to Paris. Morocco and L’île de la Réunion are described as radically different in the series perspective. Lignac appears more out of his comfort zone among these “darker” people. On several occasions, the series accentuates the “strangeness” of the food and the everyday practices in these regions; the portraits accentuate the “uncivilized” character of the spaces. For instance, the show highlights that in Morocco, it is common to eat with your fingers and only a few persons speak French. Also, in the episode from L’Île de la Réunion, Lignac appears very uncomfortable as he participates in a religious feast in which hordes of animals are slaughtered in the public space. Lignac accentuates in the voice-over that he just came to cook, but now he is engaged in a “surrealist ceremony”. As a contrast, the region of Loire, a region a few hundred kilometres from Paris named the garden of France, appears as highly civilized. Here, everyone is white and speaks accent-free French, they eat with knife and fork and savor their local wines in huge designer wineglasses. Here Lignac is back in his comfort zone.
Terroir and Pastoral Nostalgia

In *Le Chef en France* traditional ways of eating and living are closely associated with geographic microcosms. It has become a general trend to use the term *terroir* in describing such place specific foods or products in contemporary food culture to mark a distance from industrialized food production. Terroir has traditionally been used exclusively in relation to wine and wine production, but the notion has been attributed to a series of other food items over the last decades to describe and brand products as unique and authentic due to their origin in and close relation to a specific place (Trubek 2008). This is also the case in *Le Chef en France*. In an episode, Lignac helps to make a local puff pastry cake, the Kouign Amann in the village Dournenez in Brittany. It is underlined that the cake is not just a Breton specialty, it can be traced back to the village of Dournenez where the association of local bakers hold on to the traditional way of making the cake, and we witness how Lignac helps making a gigantic version to celebrate the cake’s anniversary at a feast on the village’s central square. It appears that practically all habitants of Dournenez participate at this celebration. In this setting, the cake becomes - in the discourse of the show - a symbol of how the “lost”, terroir-specific French cuisine is uphold in rural France. The history of the cake and its connection to the village fascinates Cyril Lignac more than its gustatory quality and originality. The cake is “just” a puff pastry cake which can be found in hundreds of versions across France. Hereby, the taste
of place and of terroir is in Le Chef en France about holding on to tradition - and narratives of tradition - and not so much about original ways of cooking.

In many such explorations of terroir-specific taste, the show underlines how the local people have an exceptional understanding of and bond to “their” terroir, a bond that outsiders are excluded from having. This local relationship to nature is often expressed by underlining the local peoples understanding of time. There is an anti-modern understanding of time in all the regions Lignac visits, which distinguish their mode of living from modern life governed by abstract and technologized relation to time. According to the series, in the countryside, time is always concrete and understood in relation to the changes in seasons and landscapes. This rural time feeling also reflects a pastoral nostalgia as the series constantly depicts the way of living in the countryside as more natural and truer to human nature, contrary to modern urban lifestyles with packed calendars and people constantly on the move.

We find the most explicit articulation of time, terroir, and pastoral nostalgia in a sequence in which Lignac is visiting the isolated island L’Île d’Ouessant in Celtic Sea, 20 kilometers from the French shores. Here, Lignac is curious to learn about the local specialty, Ragout sous la motte. The particularity of this dish is that it is a mutton stew cooked by being buried in burning turf. Marie-Jo is an elderly, local woman and a specialist of this dish. She demonstrates how to cook the dish, and this starts with an
excursion to the island’s banks to collect the turf. Here, Marie-Jo explains to Lignac that the turf is aromatized by the salty winds of the sea which are passed on to the dish in the cooking process. This process involves various steps that reflect the rural time feeling. Firstly, *Ragout sous la Motte* is to the letter slow cooking: the turf must be collected and subsequently dried in the sun for several days before they can be used for the five hour long cooking. This demands a lot of time and would be difficult to unite with a busy, urban lifestyle. Secondly, the use of the turf represents a way of literally integrating the ‘terroir’ and the natural elements of the island into the dish, and Lignac is fascinated by this mode of “terroir flavoring”. Marie-Jo stresses that “you can’t you use your Parisian lawn to do the dish”. This adds to the uniqueness and the fascination of the dish and of Marie-Jo. While local terroirs induce fascination, the French obsession with locality, terroirs, and appellations of these dishes also reflects “the ongoing construction of a collective representation of the past through food” uniting the nation (Barham 2003, 136). Despite enjoying these moments of rural slowness and rootedness, Lignac is soon on the move to the next destination transported by boat or on his retro motorcycle with a side car. Through his constant mobility, Cyril incarnates the modern subject relentlessly on the move, while the traditional subject (the bakers and Marie-Jo) are fixated in their specific local environment with the mission to carry tradition on to the next generation as their ancestors did before them.

*Scaling Up Tradition*
In the end of each episode, Lignac invites the people he has encountered and who have taught him about local food traditions to a dinner in which he cooks gourmet versions of the local cuisine. This could be seen as a kind of “gourmetification” of types of food, which used to be peasant or working class foods, so they become legitimate middle/upper class food (Stamer 2012). Through Cyril’s reworking, the traditional French food is transformed, so it could pass as a plate served in one of Lignac’s fancy Parisian restaurant. This usually involves a process in which the typically heavy, substantial dishes are made lighter and more sophisticated often by adding untraditional elements. In one episode, Cyril accompanies a poached bass with a sauce of coconut milk, soya, and coffee, which is rather far from the traditional butter and lemon based sauces of the traditional French cuisine. From a Bourdieusian class perspective, this is also evidently a scaling up of the traditional foods, so they go from belonging to the working class culinary logic focusing on substance to pleasing the middle-and upper class taste, which focuses on form often expressed through values on lightness, diversity, and sophistication (Bourdieu 1979).

We find another example of this practice of scaling up in Lignac’s take on the Kouign Amann in his concluding dinner for the episode on Brittany. Lignac wants to do a deconstructed Kouign Amann. He used a small, neatly cut piece of an original Kouign Amann cake, decorated it with raspberries filled with raspberry coulis, topped it with peanuts, and finished it with an oval shaped ball of ice cream dusted with icing sugar. The idea is to make the dessert look like a bouquet of roses, and this reworking of the
traditional cake elevates it in Lignac’s terminology to a “grand dessert”. So whereas the show praises the members of the local baker association for upholding tradition, Lignac’s competencies are in the refinement (and the upscaling) of these traditions, giving them an individual and modern expression. In this, it appears analogous to the description made by Parker (2015) on the post-revolutionary construction of the nation of France through food where regions produced great food products, but they were transformed to refined culture by the élite chefs in Paris. The provinces produce, and the metropoles refine. As such they are connected, but in an asymmetrical manner.

This distinction resonates the traditional hierarchy in the travelogue cooking show when Keith Floyd or Gordon Ramsay “civilized” foreign cuisine by reinterpreting them through French inspired cooking techniques. However, there seems to be a greater respect and admiration in Lignac’s reworking of his countrymen’s food traditions as he recognizes the importance of their legacy for the modern Frenchman and for the future of the nation. The values of the traditional food culture just need a more modern and more “classy” expression.

*The Paradoxical, but Affirmative Encounter with Lost National Identity*

The series is negotiating and highlighting some of paradoxes of the modern food consumer incarnated by Lignac. On the one hand, he desires to leave modern urban life and go back to nature, but on the other hand, Lignac is restless in the premodern world
and constantly on the move the next nostalgic attraction. Also, the show idealizes the “authentic” and “lost” French food culture, but Lignac also feels the need – even the obligation - to modernize this tradition so it follows the food norms of the urban middle class. Despite the paradoxes, the series stages a successful and affirmative meeting between the rural tradition and the urban modernity from the perspective of the latter.

The series also provides an image of the margins contrary to the dominating discourses in the media, which show these marginal areas across modern Europe as morally and intellectually backward and filled with social problems; and popular culture offers many portraits of the subnational distance between urban and rural areas and subjects (Béliard and Quemener 2012). *Le Chef en France* tries to accentuate the value in the countryside and the traditional way of living. Several times Lignac expresses very explicitly his admiration for the traditional people and their way of living. The peoples of the margins have a stronger connection to the national terroir than many urban Frenchmen; they exercise this bond everyday by upholding the traditional ways of living and eating. Also, despite the regional differences, the traditional subjects are united by a shared, premodern understanding of the world that values family, attachment to the territory of their ancestor, and a defiance of change. Hereby, they are all framed as local variants of a deeper national belongingness and as such these rural everyday practices invoke more clearly than in the city a “banal nationalism” (Billing 1995). Although, the series does not call for a strict return to the traditional way of living, it underlines that the modern, urban,
and globalized citizen has much to learn from the traditional way of life rooted in territory attachment, and Liganc incarnates the modern subject who is inspired by the traditional and understands how to bond with it and use it as a source of inspiration as in the example of the Kouign Amann-cake. However, as this example also illustrates, Liganac maintains a traditional hierarchy between the regions and the metropoles in which the latter remains a space of creativity and individualism.

The Revitalization of the National Myth of Monoculturalism

In 2010 *Le repas gastronomique des Français* [The gastronomic meal of the French] was inscribed, as one of the first, in UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. At that occasion historian Francis Chevirer wrote the book *Notre gastronomie est une culture* [Our Gastronomy is a culture]. Chevrier was one of the architects behind the campaign for the canonization of the French cuisine. Although affirming elsewhere that the ambition of the campaign is not to say “the French cuisine is better than others”, the subtext for Chevrier’s book seems to be that the French cuisine, contrary to other cuisines, “is” a culture. Also, the book expresses discontentment with the Frenchmen’s negligence of this central part of their national identity. A point of critique concerns the French travelogue cooking shows which are always about other countries, while neglecting to transmit the culinary traditions of France, and Chevrier calls for travelogue food shows that explore the French territory (Chevrier 2011, 141). One
should think that *Le Chef en France* from 2012 is an answer to this call. With this in mind, it is also difficult not to see the show and the book of Chevrier in relation to a broader discussion of national identity in a globalized world, which has been ongoing in France with the debate on national identity launched under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (Wagener 2010).

Chevrier insists that the practice of eating is what holds France together in a globalized world, for instance that the French have a certain gift for commensality shared by all French, but found nowhere else in the world. The dinner table is what unites the French across territorial and social divides and distinguishes them from other nationalities (Ibid. 21). This view is contradictory to much sociological food studies inspired by Bourdieu (1979). Bourdieu argues that the dinner table is a site where social differences are very visible, notably in France, which is his empirical focus point. The argument made by Bourdieu is that food practices reflect and reproduce social hierarchies, notably between the cuisine of the bourgeoisie and the working class, and each class inscribes a certain morality into their foodways and disregards other classes’ values and practices of food as “social identity is defined and affirmed in difference” (Ibid. 191). This central idea of class, taste, and distinction is widely accepted in the sociological literature, although the expression of class might differ over time and context (Paddock 2015a, 2015b, Naccarato and Lebesco 2012, Stamer 2016). But this dimension is absent in the idealized national narratives of Chevrier and *Le Chef en France*. Here food
culture is exclusively a uniting factor in France; all the frictions and divisions in society are overcome at the table. In *Le Chef en France*, food is presented as a way to revitalize a specific myth of the national identity as the show romanticizes a pre-industrialized, pre-globalized France with a common national identity – which also should matter for the urban, modern Frenchmen, although it might demand some reinterpretation. This France is also a very white France; the series does not offer any images of the many millions of Muslims or other ethnic minorities living in France. It is not their France, the show is interested in, and hereby the show establishes a solid link between whiteness, the French territory, the French food culture, and French identity. The only exception is Lignac’s excursion to Morocco, but this only works to underline how darker, Muslim Moroccan people *belong* in Morocco just as the white Frenchmen *belong* in France. Also, in this episode Lignac appears to have a different role. Whereas he, in the rest of the show, goes to great lengths to function as intermediary between the modern and the traditional parts of France, Lignac is more concerned with explaining and hereby underscoring the strangeness of the food (and the people) in Morocco. For instance, Lignac highlights how cooking is a woman’s job in Morocco. This is not an issue in the episodes from rural France where we find similar gendering of food practices. It is always the women who cook and the men who hunt and fish. Also, Lignac does not make a final diner for the people he has met, offering his version of Moroccan cuisine. This also demarcates a distance between the host and Morocco’s people and food culture. So the series defines a
distinction between a “white” traditionalism in France, which is described with nostalgia, affection, and as a source to revitalize the national rootedness for the urban middle class, and a “non-white” traditionalism, which is described as strange and difficult to approach.

**Jamie Oliver’s Multicultural Britain**

Jamie Oliver has been a dominating celebrity chef in the British mediascape since his debut show *The Naked Chef* where he made domestic cooking cool and legitimate for young men (Hollows 2003). Since then he has hosted various cooking shows and several travelogue cooking shows. In 2011, he featured in the show *Jamie’s Great Britain* in which he goes on a culinary roundtrip to England, Wales, and Scotland. In the intro, Oliver confesses that he has been so fascinated by other food cultures that he has neglected to explore the British food culture – and adds: “whatever that is?”. While *Le Chef en France* argued that there existed a true French food culture in the rural areas of France, the premise for Jamie’s Great Britain is that there is not a stable and original British food culture. To prove this point, Jamie Oliver deconstructs the myth of the emblematic apple pie as the essence of British food. Oliver points out that the pie concept was invented by the Egyptians, the apples originate from China, and the central spice cinnamon is native to South Asia. There is nothing authentically British about this iconic dish, and yet it expresses, according to Oliver, the distinctiveness of British cuisine. The Britons are open
to other cuisines and have a gift for making new foods their own. The introduction ends with Jamie cutting a huge piece of apple pie while underlining in the voice-over: “You know what it’s so damn tasty and it’s ours now!” Then the piece of pie is covered by thick, white custard. In the following title sequence, we see a union Jack which is transformed into a collage of flags from around the world while keeping the cross frame of the Union Jack flag. This collage illustrates what, according to Oliver, is the quintessence of British food culture: to be susceptible to other cultures’ food while inflicting a manifest British touch on them. Hereby, Great Britain is constructed as a globalized and dynamic nation constantly in motion. This picture is in stark contrast to the image Oliver presents of Italy in his show *Jamie’s Italian Escape* (2005) where the Italians were present as essential conservative and uninterested in other food cultures or in rethinking their own food culture. This made Oliver recognize the open mindedness of the Britons who gladly shopped around various culinary repertoires, and he could return with a renewed sense of national pride (Leer and Kjær 2015).

We find another example of this unique British way of approaching food when Jamie Oliver tastes an innovative version of the legendary Scottish dish haggis, a pudding of sheep’s pluck. The recipe can, according to Oliver, be traced back to the Vikings, but has since been in constant evolution. In modern versions it is spiced with old spice from the Caribbean, so the dish is a result of exchanges between cultures. In contrast
to the conservative Italians, Oliver argues that the main virtue of the British is to take pride in evolution.

The deconstruction of the myth of one true and unchangeable British food culture is replaced by another British gastronational myth, that the British way of being in the world is based on curiosity, innovativeness, and openness to other cultures. Jamie Oliver incarnates this ideal to perfection as he is offering several new and daring interpretations of “British classics”.

Inclusion and Exclusion in the Culinary Nation

The connection between food culture, ethnicity, and nation differs in Jamie’s Great Britain and in Le Chef en France. In the latter Lignac is solely interested in the “white France”, except when in Morocco. Hereby, the show naturalizes a bond between whiteness, the French territory, and French food, and despite all the local specialties and costumes, all the traditional, white French subjects appear connected by a belongingness to a shared national identity expressed through their relation to food. The French food culture is constructed as a bond between white people. The millions of immigrants living in France for generations and their contribution to the French culinary culture and identity are absent. This is particularly remarkable as the three most consumed dishes in France are 1) the North African dish couscous 2) the Italian pizza 3) the Spanish paella. This paradox also highlights that the gastronationalist discourse is an ideological vision with
little relation to reality and a vision of protecting the nation against these top three intruders, threatening the national identity.

In *Jamie’s Great Britain* the bond created through the British food culture is much more inclusive and open to acknowledge the importance of globalization and multiculturalism. Even the apple tree is imported to the British islands. Thus the British cuisine is not something directly connected to the national terroir as in Lignac’s portrait of France, and its bond to whiteness is also more diffuse. However, the series seems to uphold distinctions in all its inclusion. In the fourth episode, Oliver visits the city of Bristol and finds the Caribbean community. Oliver underlines that they also reflect a somber history of slavery of which the Britons should not be proud, but “it’s a part of history” and now the Caribbean community offers “a sunny, spicy contribution to the British food landscape”. The non-white cuisines are recognized in Oliver’s portrayal of British food culture; however, *Jamie’s Great Britain* is still presenting multiculturalism from a distinctly white perspective, which also works to position whiteness as the norm and the white citizens in privileged position. This is manifest by several things, notably, the vehicle Oliver has chosen for his journey: a military truck, which Oliver has turned into a rolling pub bearing the name *The cock in cider*. Hereby pub culture is given a central role in the search of Britishness which is a culture dominated by white, homogenous society. The national community described is essentially white and the grandeur of Britain appears to be white people’s ability to embrace and develop foreign cultures and
cuisines. The deconstruction of the myth of a stable, white British national food culture creates the way for another gastronational myth of Great Britain, namely the portrayal of Great Britain as a successful multicultural nation thanks to the white majority’s open-mindedness and their dynamic approach to social change. The minorities are not open-minded, rather they are stuck to and defined by their “otherness” and “different” traditions like in Jamie Oliver’s portrayal of the Italians or the authentic Frenchmen in *Le Chef en France*. The white majority has the capacity to adopt, mix, and domesticate the world’s cuisine. So Oliver’s gastronational narrative is essentially no more progressive or inclusive than Lignac’s. Rather Oliver upholds a mode of distinction in the narrative of inclusion which echoes Sara Ahmed’s analysis of multicultural nation-branding: “the ‘we’ itself emerges through the very gesture of claiming difference. Those who appear as different are incorporated as difference – a process that allows the nation to imagine itself as heterogeneous (to claim their differences as ‘our difference’). This process of incorporation also involves acts of differentiation” (Ahmed 2000, 113). Similarly, in *Jamie’s Great Britain* the ethnic minorities appear to be included in the national myth as different, as a “sunny, spicy contribution” mercifully embraced by the white majority.

**Monocultural and Multicultural Gastronationalism**

The argument of the article is that *Jamie’s Great Britain* and *Le Chef en France* could be understood as examples of gastronationalism where narratives of national pride and
identity are revitalized through food practices. In both examples celebrity chefs are trying to reinforce narratives of national grandeur by rediscovering the practices of cooking and eating in the nation, and both also try to show how food can unite citizens across social divides. In *Le Chef en France*, Lignac tried to demonstrate the virtues of the traditional life and foodways in the countryside and how these could inspire the modern, urban, white Frenchman to reconnect with a national identity and with the white monocultural community threatened by globalization. The scaling up of the traditional food worked as a tool to revitalize the “original” traditional food culture for the urban middle classes and underscore the privileged bond between whiteness, territory, and food in France. It could also be argued that through this mixture of nostalgia and upscaling, the gastronationalist narrative is rendered “edible” for a broader audience than right wing extremists from La Goutte d’Or.

Oliver took a quite different position on globalization and framed change and migration as the DNA of the British food culture and national identity. Here, food functioned as a bond between various ethnic groups while affirming the hegemony of the white majority. Although both shows share the narrative of the nation’s food culture as a source to national grandeur and cohesion, the two gastronational narratives also differ in their approach to globalization. These two approaches could be described as two poles within gastronationalist narratives, the monocultural and multicultural narrative. The monocultural gastronationalism is skeptical of modernity and globalization and
expresses a longing for a past dominated by monoculturalism and the supremacy of the white majority; this narrative highlights the values of this national past and hopes to reinstate the natural bond between the national territory and the white citizens, normalizing the privileged position of both. Both the aperitif at La Goutte d’Or and Le Chef en France could be categorized as examples of the monocultural gastronationalism, but expressed in different ways and with different levels of radicalism. The aperitif is using food aggressively to clearly demarcate the “true” and “false” Frenchmen. The monocultural gastronationalism of Le Chef en France is much more subtle and ambivalent as it works by 1) idealizing rural France through pastoral nostalgia and narratives of a deeper Frenchness shared by –and connecting - all white French persons at the table, 2) demonstrating how the traditional white food and the norms of rootedness associated with it can be reworked to urban middle class taste and also give them a renewed sense of national pride, while 3) making all non-white minorities invisible, thereby naturalizing the bond between whiteness and the French territory.

The multicultural gastronationalism, on the other hand, is acknowledging the dynamism of food culture and national identity and does not see globalization as solely an enemy; globalization can also work as an ally in the evolution of the national identity. However, in the multicultural narratives, various boundaries are still clearly defined and white subjects and migrants subjects are given distinct position in the national narrative as we saw in the analysis of Jamie’s Great Britain. Despite these differences, both forms of
gastronationalism can work to the same end and work to assert the privileged position of the white majority.

With this distinction of these variants of gastronationalism, this article aspires to add new terminology to the study of gastronationalism and to help nuance and make apparent the various repertoires of gastronationalist discourse where the two positions described here are just two of many possible positions. Also, the article contributes to the growing body of literature, with Wright and Annes 2013 as the most compelling example, which demonstrates that gastronationalism is not only of relevance in relation to economic protectionism, nor is it solely a discourse of extreme right milieus; gastronationalist discourse is increasingly normalized in mainstream media.
References:


http://www.kommunikationsforum.dk/artikler/analyse-af-gourmetburgere-luksusfloedeboller-og-noma-oellebroed


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i This example is taken from the French historian Pierre Birnbaum’s book Le porc et la République [The pork and the Republic] (Birnbaum 2013).

iii Scandinavian Cooking (2003-2009) is a Nordic example popularizing the ideology of the New Nordic Cuisine (Bjyrkeflot et al. 2013).

iv Due to space limitations, I will not go deeply into the constructions of masculinity here, but I refer to my article on masculinity in European food television (Leer 2016).

Visited (24_02_2017)

vi https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/apr/02/france.jasonburke
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